



OPENINGS

Young People To Plan & Lead Seder on Thursday, April 12

On Thursday, April 12, beginning at 5:00 p.m., Kehillat Kharakim young people will be leading a Passover Seder at the home of Rabbi Moshe & Khulda (630 Hauser Blvd., #205, L.A. 90036).

The final planning and rehearsal session will be on Monday, April 9, from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the same location.

Parents and all other

adults are cordially invited to attend both the Seder and the planning and rehearsal session. (R.S. V.P. to 323-934-2925.)

In addition to leading the Seder, the young people will select many of the readings and present their own

original poem on the meaning of Passover.

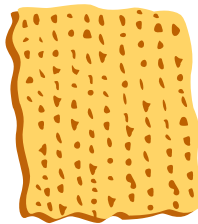
The Maggid or telling of the Passover story—the experience of our slavery in Egypt and the Exodus—will be presented by the young people in the form of a readers’



theatre.

A Few of My Favorite Pesach Things

Sung to the tune "These are a Few of my Favorite Things" from The Sound of Music.



Cleaning and cooking and so many dishes
Out with the hametz, no pasta, no knishes

Fish that's gefillted, horse-radish that stings
These are a few of our Pass-over things.

Matza and karpas and chopped up charoset
Shankbones and Kiddish and Yiddish neuroses
Tante who kvetches and uncle who sings
These are a few of our Pass-over things.

Motzi and maror and trouble with Pharaohs

Famines and locusts and slaves with wheelbarrows
Matzah balls floating and eggshells that cling
These are a few of our Pass-over things.

When the plagues strike
When the lice bite
When we're feeling sad
We simply remember our Passover things
And then we don't feel so bad.

—by JoLene

Mark Your Calendar: April 20/28 Nisan—Friday Evening Services & Torah-Drama

Kehillat Kharakim will offer Friday night Shabbat services at the Westside Jewish Community Center on April 20/28 Nisan.

Services begin at 6:30 with a children's service that includes a regular costumed skit called "Here Comes Moses," followed by

Chayat Hashavua, the "Animal of the Week" devar Torah.

The Congregation's minhag of having young people present the devar Torah in the form of a readers' theatre will continue with their presentation of a Torah drama.

After services there will be a blessing of the children, a vegetarian-dairy potluck dinner, and zemirot.

Parking is available in the WJCC parking structure. Call (323) 934-2925 for more information.

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Otzar—Treasure

We shall accomplish nothing at all if we divide our world and our life into two domains: one in which God's command is paramount, the other governed by the laws of economics, politics, and the 'simple self-assertion' of the group. . . . Stopping one's ears so as not to hear the voice from above is breaking the connection between existence and the meaning of existence.

—Martin Buber

Yom Hashoah—April 19: Paying the Price

Yom Hashoah, which commemorates the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust, brings into the mind's eye what has been described as "the greatest outpouring of evil in the history of the planet."

As with funerals and other instances of extraordinary pain and grief, we sometimes find ourselves both emotionally and intellectually confused by the shocking character of the events. Our thoughts and feelings roil—we struggle, often without success, for clarity and certainty—unable to direct our own reactions purposively and usefully.

As that day of remembrance looms closer, the images of the Holocaust intrude into our consciousness more often. We recall the pictures we've seen of survivors and those who didn't survive, taken when the concentration camps were liberated

more than a half-century ago—memories of memories.

So what are we to do now to *commemorate* the awful trial that our fellow Jews experienced?

To commemorate means "to honor the memory" and "to serve as a memorial."

Our first instinct, then, may be to convene to ceremonially remember and honor our murdered Jewish brethren.

We ask ourselves, however, how might those who died at the hands of the Nazis *want* us to honor their memory?

We suppose that they would want us to raise and reinforce our own consciousness of the pain caused by the evils of hatred and intolerance. But we also imagine that they would have each one of us do everything within our power to raise the consciousness

and sensitize the consciences of the larger non-Jewish communities in which we live. The goal, of course, would be to make it impossible for any people to ever again be the victim of genocide.

If we're correct, and we contemplate doing something about it, we should be prepared to assume a burden of vulnerability to rejection and ridicule. In effect, if we dedicate ourselves to raise the consciousness and consciences of our non-Jewish friends, neighbors, and co-workers, we may well find ourselves paying a price for our active membership in the Jewish people.

Paying that price is how we honor the memory of those who in their time paid such a high price for their membership in the Jewish people.

Pesach Primer

Passover comes in the springtime, during the month of Nisan, the time of new beginnings, and it was certainly a new beginning for the Hebrews who rose up against Pharaoh.

It's a seven-day festival, one of the three Pilgrimage Festivals—called *shalosh regalim*, literally "three feet," because in the days of the Temple one "power walked" to the central sanctuary for these three festivals.

Under the leadership of Moses and with ten plagues brought by God, the people were given leave to go—albeit somewhat reluctantly. Only the Israelites escaped the tenth plague, the death of the first-born, because they had smeared the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their homes. The people fled Egypt in such a great hurry, their bread didn't have time to rise—so we've been eating matzah every year ever since.

The exodus from Egypt and the revelation of the law at Mount Sinai gave birth to a new people, the Israelites—not to mention, a new professional class, Jewish lawyers.

Prior to that time covenantal relationships existed only between God and individuals; but with the Exodus, a covenant was established between God and a whole people. The liberation and establishment of the Hebrews as the

Israelite people in a covenant with God, the one in which God would redeem the people from slavery and the people would redeem God from obscurity, dramatically altered the prevailing view of the ancient world. On the face of it, God redeemed us from slavery (notwithstanding the latest theories about the Hebrew Bible); for our part, however, God seems to have remained in relative obscurity.

No longer was every individual life and the life of every nation fated in an unchanging orbit, but they were instead now understood to be governed by a living God who was influenced by the moral conduct of human beings—when that occasionally took place.

We are required—okay, we're *requested*, if that makes you feel better—to do three things for Passover: tell the story, eat matzah, and refrain from eating chametz (i.e., leavened products).

In time (probably late in the Second Temple period) the Passover feast became a carefully structured Seder; and later, probably around the ninth century of the Common Era, the Haggadah (lit., telling) as we know it was developed. The "Haggadah as we know it," however, is likely to be different from how anyone else knows it, since everyone over the age of five seems to be desktop publishing their own Haggadah nowadays.

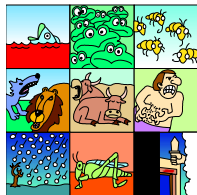
The heart of the Seder is the tell-

ing of the story, beginning with the crucial question, "Why is this night different from all other nights?"—often answered in our private thoughts by noting the presence of Jews whom we haven't seen for a year. The key teaching of the Haggadah, from our point of view, is that "In every generation we are obliged to understand that we personally have been liberated from *Mitzrayim*" (Egypt) and for what purpose (doing God's will)—which typically stimulates a lot of squirming.

The primary preparation for Passover is to remove the leaven in one's possession, whether in the home, workplace, car, etc., and at the same time to remove the remnants of spiritual idolatry through prayer and Torah study.

The mystical view of removing leaven: it is that which allows us to work harder, search deeper, love more—it is the *yetzer ha-tov*, the good inclination within us (by which we are known to our mother); but when allowed to grow without limits, it becomes the *yetzer ha-ra*, the evil impulse (by which we are known to our friends and family).

So once a year we clean out that which, through its removal, enables us to uplift ourselves anew—and we continue on with hope that we'll remain in the heightened place for at least a couple of weeks.



A Palpable Connection to the Ineffable

In the Torah portion Shemini there are a number of verses that deal with kashrut—keeping kosher.

We read: “And Adonai spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them: Speak to the children of Israel, saying: These are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are living on the earth.” (Leviticus 11:1-2)

The Scripture then goes on to list all the permitted and forbidden animals.

In general, we know that permitted animals must have a split hoof and chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales. Elsewhere in the Torah we learn that we must not boil a kid in its mother’s milk, which the rabbi’s interpreted to mean that we must not mix meat and dairy products.

(Deuteronomy 14:21) And, we know, of course, that rabbinic law set stringent standards for the slaughtering of animals.

There is a rather strange, surreal quality to these commandments, since probably more than 90 percent of American Jews ignore them. We often hear their criticisms: This is an outdated tradition. It’s another irrational commandment that I see no need to subject myself to. It would put unreasonable limits on my lifestyle. It would create distance between my family and friends and myself. What’s the point?!

It’s that last reaction that’s probably the most revealing, because the overwhelming majority of Jews who don’t keep kosher don’t understand the point of keeping kosher—literally.

The most common misunderstanding is that the laws of kashrut are to foster health and hygiene—so of course they’re no longer needed.

Apart from misunderstandings about kashrut that explain its disfavor among modern Jews, we also need to acknowledge that it’s problematic as a *ritual commandment*.

Those two words—“ritual” and “commandment”—have an extraordinary amount of baggage in the modern world. The last 40 years, especially, have witnessed a sharp decline in the understanding and acceptance of ritual. Likewise, there has been an increasing resistance to the idea of “commandment”—what we call the “you-can’t-tell-me-what-I-have-to-do” mindset that values personal autonomy above *all* else.

It reminds Moshe of a conversation he had 15 years ago on an airplane while waiting for his flight to take off. He was sitting next to a couple, in their late 30s, with two teenage children. Several minutes into the conversation they asked him what he did for

a living, and he answered that he was a rabbinical student. They were obviously incredulous, with expressions that said, “Funny, you don’t look like a religious fanatic.” That led to talk in which they revealed their impatience and irritation with “commanded ritual.”

It prompted Moshe to tell a hypothetical story about a group of employees flying to Europe on a company tour. Their plane crashed in the Atlantic and, as it turned out, it took five days before they were rescued. A few died, but most survived. After they were rescued and everyone had recovered, the company held a special ceremony, which was led by clergy from several faiths. There was an outpouring of thanks to God in song and prayer by and for the survivors. Those who died were remembered and memorialized. Those who acted selflessly and courageously were honored. And every year thereafter a special memorial ceremony was held.

Not surprisingly, Moshe’s traveling companions said that none of what he related was offensive to them.

Certainly it was a story about ritual, but they and probably we too find it acceptable—possibly even uplifting—because we understand its connection to our lives.

It uplifts us by allowing us to confront and express our feelings and thoughts about the ineffable, that which we ordinarily cannot describe or express. We accept that we are, in a sense, *commanded* to participate, not because we can’t refuse—that option is obviously available to us—but because on some level we understand the consequences of ignoring the ineffable.

What does this have to do with kashrut?

Most of us, however we regard our tradition, still want to have a “spiritual dimension” in our lives, a palpable connection to the ineffable. Many of us now attempt to satisfy this desire by shifting the pathway to spirituality from the synagogue to the inner self. Our notion of religious freedom is no longer to practice our faith as a *people*, but to regularly reinvent it according to our *individual* inclinations.

This has produced a “low-maintenance spirituality,” one that demands little and replaces moral guidance with feelings of emotional well-being. It results in a shattering of commitment to congregational community. The goal is self-acceptance rather than self-transformation.

What, then, does kashrut have to do with the *Jewish* idea of spirituality?

Further along in

Leviticus (11:44-45), we read: “I am Adonai your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy. . . .”

Judaism’s goal here is to transform another of the basic human drives—hunger in this case—as it does with the need for shelter or sex, from narrowly private purposes to the service of God. Ordinarily we see a sharp boundary between the one holy day in the week and the other six non-religious days. But Judaism seeks to integrate those two worlds, to hallow and sanctify what is ordinarily only our *everyday* life. We sanctify the everyday activity by doing it in a way that consciously and actively serves God.

And nothing is more “everyday”—yet more essential—than eating. We become holy by hallowing that which is ordinary, for which the mitzvot are our guides—and that is the purpose of kashrut.

How exactly does kashrut sanctify our eating?

When we take the trouble to eat kosher meat we confront the reality of killing animals—and we reaffirm by our *actions* the need to put the animal to death as painlessly as possible. The kosher requirement for the removal of blood, which is the most potent symbol of life, teaches us to have an active, conscious reverence for life seven days a week. When we separate meat and dairy, day in and day out, we are reminded of the importance of showing consideration and kindness to all living creatures.

When we “keep kosher” we *separate* ourselves out from the other nations and *into* the Jewish people. The meaning of the Hebrew word *kadosh* (“holy”) is separation or withdrawal. We thus remind ourselves everyday that by keeping kosher we choose holiness not as individuals but to join the historic mission of the Jewish people to be a nation of priests and a light to the other nations.

What is the ultimate purpose of keeping kosher? In the words of Samuel Dresner, “Kashrut is a systematic means of educating and refining the conscience. . . .” But the Midrash asks: “Of what concern is it to the Holy One . . . whether one ritually slaughters an animal and eats it, or he stabs the animal and eats it? Or, of what concern is it to God whether one eats of permitted animals or one eats of forbidden animals?”

The tradition answers: “Understand . . . that the mitzvot have been given only to refine and purify mankind. . . .” (Tanhuma Shemini 8) That is to say, the goal of kashrut is to teach us unceasing reverence for life—and thereby to *fulfill us* by bringing us closer to God.



OPENINGS Published by Kehillat Kharakim

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Location of Services
Westside Jewish Community Center
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Rabbi Team
Rabbi Moshe ben Asher & Khulda bat Sarah

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About KEHILLAT KHARAKIM—קהלת חרקים

- Kehillat Kharakim—a congregational community of *openings*—is a family-centered congregation that meets for Shabbat services at the Westside Jewish Community Center.
 - Kehillat Kharakim Friday-evening services regularly include a devar Torah (“sermon”) in the form of a Torah-drama presented by young people of the congregation.
 - Kehillat Kharakim offers a free six-month trial membership that includes bar and bat mitzvah preparation.
 - Kehillat Kharakim’s formation is being sponsored by Gather the People (GTP), a nonprofit organization founded by a Sponsor Committee of rabbis from virtually all the major branches and movements of Judaism.
 - Kehillat Kharakim’s rabbinic leadership is provided by Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Khulda bat Sarah, formerly the “Rabbi Team” for Congregation Beth Israel of Chico, California.
- The Kehillat Kharakim vision is to create a community of *openings*, or “kharakim,” through which family members of all ages can draw upon Judaism and congregational life to increase meaning and fulfillment in their own lives.
 - The goal is a congregation that, regardless of where one begins or ends in Jewish knowledge or commitment, encourages greater exploration, acquisition, and expression of Judaism—and regardless of where one fits religiously, treats each person with kindness and respect.
 - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is that, apart from our capacity as individuals, we also have a role as a *kehilla*, a congregational *community*. Following the example of Nehemiah, who gathered the people to rebuild the wall and gates of Jerusalem, we assume that we too can reduce the pressures and realize the hopes that will uplift our families. By doing mitzvot *collectively*, we can bring about change for the good in our day to day lives.
 - Kehillat Kharakim is an independent congregation, not affiliated with any of the movements or branches of Judaism.
 - Kehillat Kharakim will adhere to the Kashrut Policy of the Westside Jewish Community Center—specifically: all food served must be dairy or parve, packaged goods must be certified as kosher, fresh baked goods must be purchased from kosher bakeries, and home-baked goods must contain only vegetable shortening. Non-kosher food shall not be served.

Kehillat Kharakim is a project of
Gather the People
An Education & Training Resource
for Congregational Community Development
<http://www.gatherthepeople.org>

PASTORAL COUNSELING AVAILABLE

Rabbi Moshe offers pastoral counseling without charge to any Kehillat Kharakim individual, couple, or family member. Pastoral counseling addresses religious and spiritual as well as psychological and emotional needs. Moshe has a Ph.D. in Social Work, was a staff member of the Adirondack Samaritan Counseling Center of Glens Falls, NY, and was trained at the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Los Angeles. Call (323) 934-2925 for more information or an appointment.

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