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# SEUDAT MOSHIACH IN QUARANTINE

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How To Do a Traditional Seudat Moshiah Feast  
When You're In Quarantine



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# Program for Your Quarantine Moshiach's Meal

With suggested readings for each of the four cups



As the final hours of Passover slip away, Jews in every part of the world celebrate the Feast of Moshiach (Moshiach's Seudah in Yiddish), a custom of the Baal Shem Tov and his students. Just as we enter Passover with a celebration of the liberation from Egypt, so we sign off with a celebration of a much greater liberation yet to come.

Usually, many people gather for the feast, everyone sings, the rabbi talks a little, and everyone imbibes four cups of wine (or grape juice). Since the vast majority of us will be home this year due to Coronavirus, this means that you and I are now taking the place of the rabbis and communal leaders.

## Not sure what to do?

Here's a suggested program, comprising four readings, each of which may be followed by a cup of wine.

### What You Will Need to Prepare in Advance

- Enough wine / grape juice for each participant to drink 4 cups.
- Wine glasses.
- Matzah.

- Kosher for Passover refreshments.
- Reading material (such as this page and the articles listed below) **printed before the onset of the holiday.**
- (Since it is customary to sing the Hopp Cossack melody at this meal, you may want to practice it or even print up the sheet music in advance as well at [www.chabad.org/140756](http://www.chabad.org/140756).)

## The Program

Pray the afternoon service on the final day of Passover earlier than usual, so you have enough time to set the table and wash for matzah well before sunset. The program is flexible, but we suggest you sing your favorite niggunim (Chassidic melodies) and read the following four articles, each one followed by a l'chaim over another (small) glass of wine or grape juice.

After night has fallen, don't forget to include the Passover inserts in Grace After Meals (and give the rabbi some time to repurchase your *chametz* before defrosting those bagels in the freezer).

Next Year In Jerusalem!

## Cup 1: A Teaching of the Rebbe

### A Reflection of Moshiach

The eighth day of Pesach is traditionally associated with our hopes for the coming of Moshiach.

For this reason, the *haftarah* read on that day contains many prophecies which refer to the era of the redemption. Among the best-known of these: "The wolf will dwell with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with a young goat";<sup>1</sup> "He will raise a banner for the nations and gather in the exiles of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

About two hundred and fifty years ago, as the time for Moshiach drew closer, the Baal Shem Tov instituted a custom which underlines the



connection between the redemption and the eighth day of Pesach: on that day he would partake of Moshiach's Seudah, the festive meal of Moshiach.<sup>3</sup>

### **Transforming the Belief in Moshiach into Reality**

Moshiach's Seudah is intended to deepen our awareness of Moshiach and enable us to integrate it into our thinking processes. The twelfth article of Rambam's thirteen principles of faith is<sup>4</sup> "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach. Even if he delays, I will wait every day for him to come." Though all believing Jews accept this principle intellectually, for many the concept of Moshiach remains an abstraction. Partaking of Moshiach's Seudah reinforces our belief in this principle, translating our awareness of Moshiach into a meal, a physical experience which leads us to associate this concept with our flesh and blood.

The Baal Shem Tov's linking of our awareness of Moshiach to the physical is significant, because it prepares us for the revelations of the era of the redemption. In that era, the G-dliness that is en clothed within the physical world will be overtly manifest. As the prophet Isaiah declared, "The glory of G-d will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together."<sup>5</sup> At that time, "the glory of G-d" will permeate even the physical aspects of the world—"all flesh."

Chassidut explains<sup>6</sup> that the preparations for a revelation must foreshadow the revelation itself. Since, in the era of the redemption, the revelation of G-dliness will find expression even in the physical world, it is fitting that our preparation for these revelations be associated with physical activities such as eating and drinking.

### **Transforming the Worldly**

Moshiach's Seudah, as mentioned above, is held on the eighth day of Pesach. The Torah originally commanded us to celebrate Pesach for seven days. When our people were exiled, however, a certain degree of doubt arose regarding the exact date on which the holidays should be celebrated. To solve the problem of determining the Jewish calendar in

exile, our sages added an extra day to each festival. In other words, the eighth day of Pesach had been an ordinary day, but through the power endowed by the Torah, the Jewish people were able to transform it into a holy day.

When Moshiach comes, a similar transformation will occur throughout all of creation. Even the material and mundane aspects of the world will reveal G-dliness. Celebration of Moshiach's Seudah on the eighth day of Pesach—once an ordinary day, now transformed—anticipates the kind of transformation that will characterize the era of the redemption.

### **Why the Baal Shem Tov?**

That the Baal Shem Tov originated the custom of Moshiach's Seudah is particularly fitting. Once, in the course of his ascent to the heavenly realms on Rosh Hashanah,<sup>7</sup> the Baal Shem Tov encountered Moshiach and asked him, "When are you coming?" Moshiach replied, "When the wellsprings of your teachings spread outward."

The goal of the Baal Shem Tov's life was to prepare us for Moshiach, and the institution of Moshiach's Seudah was part of that life's work.

### **The Contribution of Chabad**

Like many other teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the custom of conducting Moshiach's Seudah was explained and widely disseminated by the successive rebbes of Chabad. Moreover, in 5666 (1906) the Rebbe Rashab (the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe) added a new element to Moshiach's Seudah: the drinking of four cups of wine.<sup>8</sup>

During the time of the Baal Shem Tov, the main ingredient of Moshiach's Seudah was matzah. The tasteless flatness of matzah symbolizes selfless humility, a desire to transcend oneself. Wine, by contrast, is flavorful and pleasurable, and thus symbolizes the assertiveness of our individual personalities. Combining matzah and wine in Moshiach's Seudah teaches us that self-transcendence does not require that we erase our personal identities. Self-transcendence may be accomplished within each individual's nature. A person can retain his distinctive character and

identity, yet dedicate his life to spreading G-dliness instead of pursuing personal fulfillment. Once he has fundamentally transformed his will, an individual can proceed to a more complete level of service of G-d in which his essential commitment permeates every aspect of his personality.

This innovation of the Rebbe Rashab exemplifies the comprehensive contribution of Chabad Chassidut to the legacy of the Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov taught each Jew how to reveal his essential G-dly nature and thus rise above his personal identity. Chabad, an acronym for the Hebrew words *chochmah*, *binah* and *daat* (“wisdom, understanding and knowledge”), brings the Baal Shem Tov’s teachings into the realm of the intellect, allowing them to be integrated and applied within each individual’s personal framework.

### **The Mission of Our Generation**

Our generation has been charged with the responsibility of making all Jews aware of Moshiach—and this includes the custom of conducting Moshiach’s Seudah. This mission is particularly relevant in our day, for the Jewish people have completed all the divine service necessary to enable Moshiach to come. As the Previous Rebbe expressed it, “We have already polished the buttons.”<sup>9</sup> Moshiach is waiting: “Here he stands behind our wall, watching through the windows, peering through the crevices.”<sup>10</sup> The walls of exile are already crumbling, and now, in the immediate future, Moshiach will be revealed.

There are those who argue that speaking openly about the coming of Moshiach may alienate some people. The very opposite is true. We are living in the time directly preceding the age of Moshiach. The world is changing, and people are willing, even anxious, to hear about Moshiach. It is thus our duty to reach out and involve as many people as possible in the preparations for his coming.

These endeavors will escalate the fulfillment of the prophecies of the *haftorah* recited on the eighth day of Pesach:<sup>11</sup> “A shoot will come

forth from the stem of Yishai . . . , and the spirit of G-d will rest upon him”—with the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days.

Adapted from *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 7, pp. 272–278, and the Rebbe’s talks of the last day of Pesach 5722 [1962].



## Cup 2: The Baal Shem Tov and the Empty Glass

Every year, in honor of Passover, members of the Baal Shem Tov’s household purchased a large quantity of new cups to be used for the duration of the holiday.



Of course, following Jewish law, the glasses that were to be used would first be immersed in a *mikvah*.

The glasses came in a variety of shapes and sizes. Now, in Jewish literature there is a system for measuring liquids, with specific names for the various amounts. In the Baal Shem Tov’s home, the glasses were referred to by the Jewish name for the amount of liquid they were able to contain. Thus, a glass that contained three ounces or so was called a *revi’it* glass, etc.

Before Passover, the Baal Shem Tov would look through the glasses and instruct which cups could be set upon the table and which should be set aside. He provided no reasons for his directives, but everyone knew that surely his reasoning was sound.

Thus passed the first seven days of Passover.

Now, the final meal on Passover, known as Moshiach’s meal, was special. It was open to the public; everyone who passed through the sage’s door was free to enter and partake of the festivities. Before the meal began,

the Baal Shem Tov instructed that a certain cup be removed from the table because it had not been immersed.

During the meal, a newcomer entered and asked for some wine. "Sorry," he was told, "but there are no more clean cups."

"What do you mean?" he asked with surprise, pointing to the cup that had been set aside, "I see a clean cup right over here that no one is using!"

"Oh," he was told, "that cup has not been immersed in the mikvah and must not be used."

"It doesn't matter," he replied dismissively, reaching for the cup.

At that point, the Baal Shem Tov, who had hitherto been silent during the exchange, spoke with sadness. "He just testified about himself."

The words were mysterious to everyone aside from the man himself. Hearing the rebbe's gentle words of rebuke, he admitted his shortcoming. It was true. He and his wife were not particular about the laws of family purity, which require a previously menstruant woman to immerse in a mikvah before being intimate with her husband.

Inspired, they resolved to mend their ways.

*Translated from Sefer Hasichot, 5702.*



### Cup 3: Why Does Moshiach Have to Be a King?

Dear Rabbi,

*Every time you people talk about the messianic era, and "the Moshiach" (which I assume equates with "messiah"), you insist on talking about him as a king. Well, we started guillotining kings over two hundred years ago, and they haven't really been in fashion since. We have found liberal democracies much more adept at protecting the rights of the individuals, and working for the maximum benefit of the maximum number of people. Kings were notoriously lousy at all that.*

*So how about we just call him (or her) an “enlightened spiritual leader”?  
The “king” title seems such an anachronism.*

*—Looking forward to your response*

Dear Looking Forward,

You raise an excellent point, but I’m not sure whether you really understand how sharp a point it really is.

The prophet Isaiah describes an individual upon whom “the spirit of G-d rests, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and heroism, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.”<sup>12</sup>

What will this individual accomplish? Something quite different than what we are used to kings accomplishing. The prophet continues:

A wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid; and a calf and a lion cub and a fatling shall lie together, and a small child shall lead them. A cow and a bear shall graze, their children shall lie down together; and a lion, like cattle, shall eat straw.

An infant shall play over the hole of a viper snake, and over the eyeball of an adder, a weaned child shall stretch forth his hand. They shall neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mount, for the earth shall be full of the knowing of G-d as water covers the seabed.<sup>13</sup>

Basically, what that means is that the messianic times are not simply times of love, peace and hanging out together. They are times when “the earth shall be full of the knowing of G-d,” so inundated with that knowing, that higher awareness, that state of enlightenment, that even the wild beasts of the field will behave.

If so, in such a state, who needs a king? Who needs any government at all? Let the people, so fully enlightened and aware of their Creator and their responsibility to His creation, self-organize and work things out between one another. I mean, do you really expect enlightened beings to hurt, steal, extort, or otherwise cause bodily or monetary harm to one another? So who needs government in such a world, never mind a king?

Okay, to get to that point, we may well need an outstanding individual, a great leader who could deal with the oppressors and dictators and other powerful *shmendriks* of the world. As Maimonides puts it, someone who will strengthen the Torah and “fight the wars of G-d”<sup>14</sup>—not necessarily military wars, but actions that have very powerful political and social ramifications.

But once that mission is complete and the world is at peace, buzzing with wisdom until even the leopards and wolves are behaving and the very earth itself is full of knowledge, then everything changes. What would be crucial at such a point would be not a king, but a teacher. Yes, the world is enlightened, but it is still a world emerging into enlightenment. The Moshiach, as a teacher, would guide people to see and to understand this new world into which they had entered.

And yet, the very word *moshiach* means “anointed.” Anointed for what? Anointed to be a king. But who will need a king?

What really is a king? Yes, a king governs, but is that really what a king is?

The question was asked by several of the rebbes of Chabad.<sup>15</sup> Here’s how they answered:

A king—an authentic, genuine-to-the-core king—is an individual who stands head and shoulders above the people around him. That’s why a king who must force the people to accept him as king is not a real king. A real king is someone like King Saul, who, when chosen by the prophet Samuel and the people, could not be found, because he had hid himself, hoping that he would not be chosen.

About King Saul, the prophet says that he was “from his shoulders up taller than all the people.”<sup>16</sup> That’s not just a vertical measurement. “Shoulders” refers to emotions. Saul’s emotions were at the level of another person’s intellect. His mind, then, was completely beyond, in a higher realm altogether.

This will also be the character of the Moshiach. Yes, he will be a teacher—because that’s what those times will be all about: learning,

knowing, gaining divine wisdom. But a teacher—a good teacher—limits his lesson to that for which the student is ready and can handle. The Moshiach will be a teacher, but one with a kingly character: as enlightened as they may be, he will see far beyond. And yet, as a teacher-king, he will be capable of transmitting that transcendental knowledge to all of us as well. Perhaps not cognitively, but in some form in which it can be shared.

An interesting idea, because it fits so well into the idea of what the messianic era is all about and how it fulfills the purpose of creation—as Rabbi Schneur Zalman writes, “everything depends on our work throughout the time of exile.”

Meaning that through the toil of our hard work, our struggle and persistence in the most trying times right up until that glorious era, we will draw into the world a deep light, an essence-light, such as could never have been revealed without that labor. It is that essence-light that the Moshiach will have the job of revealing to us. Something entirely transcendental, and yet, something that each of us touches; something from which each of us draws strength every time we defy the confusion and darkness of our present world to do what we know is right and beautiful.

This teacher, then, is the ultimate of teachers. A king teacher. For he will show us the very core essence of our souls, and how they are rooted in the Core Essence of All Being. He will reveal to us how we are all kings.

By Tzvi Freeman



## Cup 4: A Personal Experience

My husband and I had been married for three-and-a-half years, and we desperately wanted children. We were living in Jerusalem at the time. Passover was coming to an end, and although we had had a wonderful holiday, there was a sadness that clouded our joy. It had been another seder without a baby, another week of Chol Hamoed without a

child to take around to parks and festive events. Another year of asking, “When will our personal redemption come?”

On the seventh day of Passover, we ate what I thought was going to be the last holiday meal in the mid-morning, and I settled down to read and enjoy the last hours of Passover. (In Israel, Passover is celebrated for seven days; outside of Israel, an eighth day is observed as well.) All of a sudden, I heard a knock on my door. Two friends had come to visit. One of them was single, the other newly married.

“Elana, come. We’re taking you to my mother in-law’s cousin. She’s married to a great *tzaddik* [righteous man].” Here was an opportunity for me to receive a blessing for children.

We wound our way through the twisted alleyways of a very religious neighborhood in Jerusalem, until we arrived at the *tzaddik*’s home. His wife, the *rebbetzin*, opened the door. She greeted us as though we were old friends, although she didn’t even know who I was or why I was coming to meet her and her husband. She rushed us to the dining-room table, which was laid out with salads and delicacies. Before I knew it, I was sitting at the table, surrounded by this incredible family and being served tons of food.

Now, just as a side note, by this point in the week I had had my full of meat and chicken and potatoes. I definitely was *not* hungry and had no idea that I was going to be eating yet another (mind you,



delicious) Passover meal. I thought that I was done already. But no, the *rebbetzin* informed me that we were taking part in the *Seudat Moshiach* (“Meal of Moshiach”). I had no idea what she was talking about. She then turned to me and said, “I’m not trying to be nosy, but do you want a blessing from my husband for children?”

I nodded yes. I had already received various blessings; undergone many, many treatments; and tried dozens of things to become pregnant. How could one more blessing hurt?

And, a year later to the day, I gave birth to my son. A few months after his birth, my single friend got married; five years later, she gave birth to her second son, also on the last day of Passover.

So, what is the Seudat Moshiach? What is its power?

G-d took the Jewish people out of Egypt, and seven days later, they stood before the Red Sea. The Egyptians were almost upon them; there was nowhere to go. They felt desperation. Should they go back to Egypt? Should they fight? What now? Moses stretched out his arm and raised his staff to the sea. Nothing happened. Then one man, Nachshon the son of Aminadav, stepped into the sea. Nothing happened. He kept walking until the water was up to his chest, then up to his neck, then his nose. And then it happened. The sea split, and the nation of Israel passed through. Once they reached the other side, their enemy came chasing after them, and the wall of water crashed down, drowning the Egyptian soldiers in the stormy sea.

What would have happened if Nachshon hadn't jumped in? What would have happened if he hadn't kept walking into the waters? Would G-d have split the sea open? I don't know. Maybe, maybe not.

What would have happened if you decided you couldn't meet "one more" person? What if you had turned down that opportunity to go on "one more date," the one where you met your husband? Would you be married now? I don't know. Maybe, maybe not.

What would have happened if you decided that you had had enough, and you were done trying to conceive? What if you decided this when you had only one more chance to ovulate? Would you have a baby now? I don't know. Maybe, maybe not.

And what if you were tired of dealing with rejection and sending out resumes? If you hadn't sent out that last one, would you be working now? Maybe, maybe not.

The last day of Passover, when we have the Seudat Moshiach, is about the "one more." The one more meal, one more blessing, one more date, one more try. It's about the one more good deed that will tip the scales and bring the redemption.

And for me, it will always be about the blessing I received on the last day of Passover, and the precious baby I was given on that day—my Avraham Nissim, for *nissim* means "miracles."

By Elana Mizrahi

## FOOTNOTES

1. Isaiah 11:6.

2. Ibid. 11:12.

3. *Ha-Yom Yom*, 22 Nissan.

4. This represents the popular, shortened form of these thirteen principles as printed in many *siddurim*. The original version appears in full in Rambam's commentary on the Mishnah, in the introduction to ch. 10 of Sanhedrin (Perek Chelek).

5. Isaiah 40:5.

6. Cf. *On the Essence of Chassidus*, ch. 4, p. 15.

7. As related in a letter addressed by the Baal Shem Tov to his brother-in-law R. Gershon Kitover, describing his soul's ascent on Rosh Hashanah 5507 [1746]. The letter was first published in *Ben Porat Yosef*, and appears in part in *Keter Shem Tov*, sec. 1.

8. See *Sefer ha-Sichot* 5698, p. 277.

9. Sichot of Simchat Torah 5689 [1928].

10. Song of Songs 2:9; cf. liturgy of Kiddush Levanah (Siddur Tehillat Hashem, p. 239). See also *Sefer ha-Sichot* 5699, p. 316.

11. Isaiah 11:1–2.

12. Isaiah 11:2.

13. Ibid., verses 3–9.

14. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 11:4..

15. See Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (third rebbe of Chabad), *Derech Mitzvotcha*, Mitzvat Minui Melech; Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (sixth rebbe of Chabad), *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5709, Acharon Shel Pesach; Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (seventh rebbe of Chabad), *Maamar Venachah Alav*, 5725.

16. I Samuel 9:2; *ibid.*, 10:23.

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