

The conditions within the Vaihingen Concentration Camp were horrific, especially during that dreadful winter of 1944-1945. The Jews living within this Nazis concentration camp were imported from the Radom Ghetto in Poland in order to engage in slave labor for 12 hour shifts, without a break. They built armaments, dug tunnels for bomb shelters, and performed many other highly physical tasks for the Nazis, who sought shelter from the incessant and intense Allied bombing. The backbreaking labor and insufferable conditions made this camp notorious for having one of the highest mortality rates of all of the Nazis concentration camps. However, despite all of these afflictions or maybe perhaps because of them, the Jews in this camp desperately wanted to observe Passover and specifically the Mitzvah of Matzo for the Pesach Seder.

A camp resident, Moshe Perl, in his Holocaust testimony, asserted: "The people in the camp were already used to their miserable situation. They saw death before their eyes. But they were not willing to eat chametz on Passover." Yet he asked, "Where could we get flour and potatoes and how could we bake matzos?" Perl managed to find an innovative solution, however. Shortly before Passover, one of the SS men in the camp entered his workshop, where he painted signs. He asked Perl to make dummy targets for target practice. Just then, an idea flashed through his mind— he suggested making big targets with wooden frames and covering them with paper bags, which were available in abundance in the camp storehouse. Perl claimed that he would need 5 kilograms of flour to create these dummy targets, although in reality the targets could be created with just 3 kilo. Without even raising an eyebrow the Nazi official approved of his plan and gave him the appropriate referral." With the extra 2 kilo of flour, the Jews of the Vaihingen Concentration went to work baking the matzo in secret, even though they knew that they would die if they were caught. They organized wooden beams, wheels, glass bottles, all to recreate the necessary precision of a kosher Matzo factory. They baked the matzo in the oven in Perl's work room, keeping the door and windows hermetically sealed. After each batch was baked they hid them under the shingles of the workshop roof, to keep them safe until Pesach would arrive."

Perhaps more than any other Mitzvah associated with our Holiday cycle, Jews have been so determined to keep the Mitzvah of Matzo no matter how dire the circumstance, difficult the challenge, or deadly the consequence. But, when you think about the Matzo, it really does not seem to be as awe inspiring as the Shofar, as illuminating as the Menorah or even as majestic as the beautiful Lulav and Esrog. It is simply a mixture of flour and water with not even any height to rise to the full glory of a normal loaf of bread. In addition, of all our Holiday symbols, Matzoh is the most private, in fact, the Halachah is that one may not go from chaburah to chaburah, group to group to eat, the Matzo is eaten only in the privacy of our own group our family seder. It was never brought into the public arena, secluded within the recesses of the seder table. Yet, it is the one symbol that we as Jews have steadfastly insisted that we continue to uphold, even risking our lives to have a clandestine seder with Matzo.

It is not just us who has placed the Matzo at the forefront of our Jewish lives. Those who have tirelessly persecuted us have also consistently targeted Matzo, often times banning the baking the baking of Matzo with the threat of death or worse, viciously accusing us baking our Matzos with the blood of Christian children. Altogether there have been over 150 documented blood libels leveled against us, who knows how many Jews have suffered as a result of these absurd slanderous accusations. Yet, one has to wonder why all of things have they targeted the Matzo to be at the root of their attacks.

Rabbi Moshe Sherrer, as chairmen of Agudas Yisrael of America for almost 40 years, had a unique perspective from which to view the Jewish nation. From his perch at the helm of Jewish leadership, overseeing the amazing growth of Torah observance in America, he asserts that it was our adherence to the very essence of the Matzo that is responsible for our continued existence to this very day.

The Zohar calls Matzo the bread of faith. Its pure unadulterated simplicity is actually its very essence. When we eat the Matzo we are recalling the fact that no matter how bad things were in Egypt and how unlikely it was that we would ever be a free nation, even at the moment of the greatest darkness still we relive the moment that G-D led us out of Egypt. As the verse in Deuteronomy states, "For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread...for in haste did you come forth out of the land of Egypt; so that you may remember the day when thou came forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life." This pure untainted, unadulterated Matzo is the reminder of the pure, simple faith that is at the core of every Jewish person.

Rabbi Sherrer points out that one may not add other any other ingredients like eggs to the Matzo, for this Matzo Ashirah, rich Matzo would be invalidated. Nor may one add any colorings to glorify or beautify the appearance of the Matzo, much the same way that our faith is not in our wealth, beauty or physical stature. We can never trust just our military might, our political allies or even our sometimes tenuous relationship with United States. Ultimately, our continued existence is because we as a nation have never stopped believing that G-D will somehow deliver us from whatever terrible calamity we face.

In the famous Mizmor Ledovid, song to David, that we sing Shabbat afternoon, Hashem roey lo echsor, G-D is my shepherd, I will not lack, we say the following words "Taaroach lifanai shulchan neged tzoriroy, G-D set for me my table against my enemies." The Gerrer Rebbe writes that the set table we are referring to is the seder table. This seder table is the greatest weapon we have to defend ourselves against our enemies in diaspora, because on this table sits the matzo, our powerful reminder to have faith in G-D. It is on this table and over this Matzo that relive the exodus from Egypt and we remember that G-D did not desert us; He heard our suffering and led us out from Egypt.

It is for this reason that throughout our history Jews have sacrificed and risked so much to insure that there be Matzo at the Seder. Our tormentors are not ignorant of this. They recognize that our strength lies in our faith and they certainly try their hardest to prevent us from having any Matzo even resorting to the infamous, treacherous blood libels.

After the Jews in the Vainhigen camp procured this secret stash of Matzo, a fierce debate arose regarding the distribution of the Matzo, who should receive from the limited precious supply. Some maintained the Rabbis, the community leaders should receive them and others maintained that each adult male should be the beneficiaries. After all the arguments were heard it was decided that the children would be the recipients of the matzo. For if the Matzo passes along the message of faith, who are the bearers of that torch, who must carry along that message for posterity, certainly it is the children that must have that matzo, they must understand the importance of this faith, for they will need to insure the continued existence of the Jewish people.

Chag Sameach,

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