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Passover feature



Doing the Passover shuffle: Matzah versus wine, via iPod

By RABBI JOSHUA HAMMERMAN

STAMFORD, Conn. (JTA) -

As Passover approaches this year, I find myself particularly conflicted. I am usually a big fan of matzah, that perfect embodiment of stability and steadfastness, that essence of uniformity and flatness.

Matzah never changes. Put a box of Manischewitz in a time capsule, and in 1,000 years it will taste as fresh as the day it was made. Matzah is indeleble. Wherever it goes, it stays; whether that be on the dining room rug, the school cafeteria or the human digestive system. That's why it is such a powerful visual aid in retelling the story of the Exodus. You can't avoid it. Its crumbs are everywhere! Matzah is the symbol of planned perfection.

If the operative word for Passover is "order" - seder in Hebrew - matzah is quintessentially controlled; scrutinized closely from its formative stages through the baking process. And on the seder table it is handled delicately, uncovered ceremoniously and raised and broken with ritualistic precision. When it is discovered that the middle matzah has been hidden, that is the one moment of the seder when all heck breaks loose.

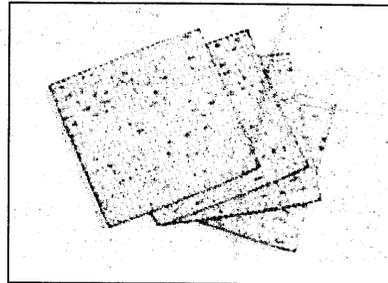
Jews aren't the only ones with an obsessive need for order. Life is chaotic, after all. Or, as the latest iPod ad campaign puts it, "life is random." Therein lies my dilemma. As much as I like matzah, I must admit it - I'm beginning to love my iPod even more. I've stored more than 1,000 selections on it, a veritable musical autobiography; songs from the pacifist anthems of my college days to the ones that pacified my kids on their high chairs.

In my iPod, David Broza lies with "The Lion King." Cat Stevens makes way for the Palmach anthem and Kol Nidre shares some disk space with Gregorian chants. I've even downloaded the audio broadcast of the Super Bowl. And when I put it all in "shuffle" mode, these memories flow past me indiscriminately, the boundaries separating decades and continents dissolve and my whole life flashes before my ears.

There are those who claim that the "shuffle" is not so random after all. I must admit, it does seem strange that certain songs are repeated more often than others. My iPod seems to have a special affinity for Broadway. "It's part of the magic of shuffle," Greg Joswiak, Apple's vice president for iPod products, told Newsweek, assuring us that the algorithm that does the shuffling has been thoroughly tested. "Random is random."

Technology writer David Bennahum said, "Life is random is a really great way of shrugging your shoulders in a Buddhist way of non-attachment." And Roger McNamee, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist, was quoted in The New York Times as calling the iPod ad campaign "existential marketing with maybe even a touch of nihilism."

Doesn't sound so Pesachdik to me. Ah, but it



Matzah never changes, but people and pop culture do.

is. Right across from the matzah on your seder table is the wine. The wine is the counterpoint to that unleavened cracker, the yin to matzah's yang.

Ever changing, ever flowing, entropy in a bottle, it embodies randomness. That line from the movie "Sideways" comes to mind, where Maya speaks sensuously of how a bottle of wine is

actually alive, constantly evolving and gaining complexity.

The wine is there to teach us that Judaism, like life, is infinitely too complicated for human beings to be able to impose total order on it. Judaism breathes through us. Watch how the wine and matzah vie for attention in the seder's drama. When one is raised, broken or poured, the other is covered, ignored or left empty. This epic battle between constancy and chance is like a blast of warm weather from the Gulf meeting a cold Canadian high over New England in early spring.

And in the end, look which one triumphs. No sooner are we finished with the bread of affliction, finishing the last morsel of the afikoman; then the third cup of wine is poured. Serendipity gets the last word. The wine wins.

Maybe the message here is that what's most constant, even in this world of extreme, super-imposed order, is change itself. No matter how much we try to hermetically seal our lives from yeastiness, chametz happens. The perfection of matzah turns out to be the ultimate illusion - but that doesn't prevent us from striving for it all the more.

My iPod's song list is quirky, but there is an internal logic to my tunes. The only way to decode the randomness is to run each song through the prism of my life. When you do that, it all makes perfect sense. Similarly, the uniformity of the Passover rituals masks the internal effervescence that is bubbling up within each participant, at every seder table, every year. So, while I won't bring it to the table, the iPod is definitely kosher. I've already downloaded "Dayeinu."

Rabbi Joshua Hammerman is spiritual leader of Temple Beth El in Stamford, Conn., and author of "thelordismyshepherd.com: Seeking God in Cyberspace."

Winemakers in South America

(Cont. from page B29.)

Jewish market, as well as for export to Panama. As a Catholic, Barberis cannot serve Valero to Orthodox Jews because it is not mevushal, or flash-pasteurized. Tekiah, on the other hand, is mevushal. But doesn't heating the wine even for a fraction of a second destroy the flavor? "Theoretically, yes," Barberis replied. "But it must be good, because the Wine Enthusiast magazine has given Tekiah Syrah a score of 84 points."

Passover travel feature



Scandinavia: Clean and cool
24,000 Jews living in four countries



Often-photographed "Little Mermaid" sits in the water in Copenhagen's harbor.

By LEWIS ERIC LACHTER

Scandinavia is a most popular tourist destination. And deservedly so. You'll find cold winters, but warm people. The tourist season is short, but the five countries are long in terms of exciting sights to see and things to do. And of course there is a wonderful (but small) Jewish community.

Latest figures show that 14,000 Jews live in Sweden, 8,000 in Denmark, 1,000 in Finland and 1,000 in Norway. Iceland reports no Jewish population.

During the dark days of World War II, the Jews of Denmark were supposed to be rounded up by the Nazis, and sent to concentration camps. The target date was October 1, 1943, the second day of Rosh Hashanah.

When the Germans came looking for the 8,000 Jews, they had disappeared. Or more accurately, the entire Jewish population had been miraculously transported by an improvised fleet of Danish fishing vessels and rowboats to safe haven in nearby, neutral Sweden.

Going back much earlier in the history of Denmark, it was the first Scandinavian country to allow Jewish settlements. The first arrivals, in 1622, were a small group of Sephardic Jews from Amsterdam and Hamburg.

Today, Danish Jewish life is centered in Copenhagen, the capital city, where there are two synagogues, a day school, three kosher butchers, a large community center and library. The community center supports an active Zionist Federation, WIZO, B'nai B'rith, ORT and HIAS.

Be sure to visit the Museum of the Resistance on the Esplanaden in Copenhagen (pronounced with a long "A" as in "face"). The museum features an excellent exhibit of maps and pho-

tographs depicting the rescue of the Danish Jews from the Nazis. A famous story you will hear is about King Christian's terse message to Hitler: "We have no Jewish problem. We have only Danes in our country."

Check out the Royal Danish Library, which has one of the largest Jewish book collections in the world. Walk around the Israelplads (Israel Square) in the center of the clean, lovely city. A wonderful, larger-than-life statue of Moses on Norregade is the work of a Danish sculptor. Jewish great Danes include pianist/entertainer Victor Borge and scientist Niels Bohr.

The headquarters of the Danish Jewish community (Mosaik Troessamfund) is at Ny Kongegade 6, and contains a small museum, a library and a mikvah.

Sweden's Jewish community of 14,000 started in 1774 with a small group from Germany. Other Jews followed over the years from Hungary, Poland and other Central European countries.

In fascinating Stockholm, you will find Judaica House at Nybrogatan 19-21. This is the large and busy Jewish Community Center. The building houses the Hillel School, Mendelsohn Library (Yiddish and Swedish books), a kosher dairy cafeteria and a gym.

Also in the building are the Jewish Students Club, Habonim, Keren Hayesod, Keren Kayemet, WIZO and the Zionist Federation.

(Cont. on page B32. See "Scandinavia".)



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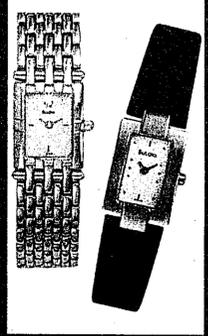


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