

FROM CHABAD TO CONSERVATIVE!

In the early days of Internet, I [**Yehuda Grossberger of Flatbush**] subscribed to an online forum dedicated to halachic discussions. The members of this forum came from a wide spectrum of Judaism, and debates often raged over different halachic and Torah issues.

One contributor to this exchange was a Conservative cantor from Nevada who quickly became known for his outspokenness and opinionated liberal views. On one occasion, he posted an article he had written about Jewish marriage, which was not exactly according to *halacha* (Torah law).

I felt compelled to reply and set the record straight. The cantor responded to my rebuttal, sparking a candid and heated debate. Eventually, this led to a general discussion of other topics concerning Torah and Judaism, as well as personal conversations about our families.

Around Pesach time, the conversation turned to matza, and I asked my new friend how had he conducted his Passover Seder. He replied, "Well, since the point is to remember the story of the Exodus, I actually eat whatever I can get a hold of to symbolize the matza."

He did not seem concerned that the matza be kosher for Pesach. Despite his objections, I sent him a box of *shmura* ("guarded" – i.e. (super-strict) matza for the seder. After Pesach, I got an e-mail from my friend who, in typical fashion, complained that all the matzos had come broken and were also pretty tasteless.

Nevertheless, the following year he contacted me and requested that I again send him matza. This began an unlikely tradition that continued for many years. Notwithstanding all of his rejections and criticism of Orthodox values, he used the matza every year and came to look forward to it. He even showed his appreciation by sending me flowers.

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This man had a daughter who had rebelled against the family values she had been brought up with, and, as a student of the University of California at Berkeley, became deeply immersed in the anti-establishment culture that was popular at the time [*and still is!* – *y.t.*]. She had also rejected even the limited Jewish values she had seen at home.

Her parents were very worried about her, as she had not been home for a number of years, not even for the holidays. Eventually, this girl's

restlessness and searching spirit drew her to Israel where somehow she ended up in a young women's seminary for *baalot teshuva* (female returnees to *halachic* Judaism) in Jerusalem.

After a few months of study, she felt it was time for her to make a final decision: she could either stay in the seminary adopting a *frum* (Torah observant) lifestyle, or she could leave it behind and return home and continue soul searching. She decided she needed a break to think things over. She was comfortable with what she had been taught but was not sure she had the conviction and personal strength to make such a drastic lifestyle change.

It was now shortly before Pesach. Her *madricha* (dorm counselor) in Israel, although unhappy to see her go, asked her to at least take home the basic necessities for Pesach that she might not have at home, primarily matza. She declined and said, "Why should I bother? If G-d wants me to have matza, He will send me matza."

Apprehensively, she departed and flew home to her parents planning to spend time reflecting on her options at this critical junction of her life. She hoped that somehow she would be guided into making the right choice.

To her utter bewilderment, the first thing she noticed as she walked into her home was a box of shmura matza sitting on the dining room table. She could not believe her eyes. Her own ultimatum, "If G-d wants me to have matza, He will send me matza," had been fulfilled: lo and behold, there it was!

Having not been home for Pesach in a number of years, she was absolutely astounded that her family had a box of authentic shmura matza waiting for her! The *hashgacha protis* (Divine Providence [even] over individuals), was undeniable, and she strongly felt that the Master of the Universe was answering her challenge and showing that He cared about her intimately.

She had no idea how the matza got to her home, and at that point, she really didn't care; all she could think about was the sign that G-d had sent her.



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After Pesach, she immediately returned to Jerusalem to complete her studies and to fully embrace *Yiddishkeit* (Orthodox Judaism) with all her heart and soul. Today, this girl is the mother of a beautiful family and works with her husband, a rabbi, in *kiruv* (teaching other Jews about Yiddishkeit).

Many people had told me that I was wasting my time and money sending these matzos to a Conservative cantor. For my part, I simply felt that a Jew should have matza for the seder, not a *chometzdik* (not-kosher-for Passover) substitute. What I did not know was that I was not only sending matza for this cantor; I was sending it for his daughter and eventually grandchildren, as well.

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by **Mr. Yehuda Grossberger**, as posted in "Shabbos Stories for the Parsha" -- 23 Adar 5772/March 17, 2012 *keren18@juno.com* -- which first appeared in the Adar 5772 edition of *Thinking Chassidus*, a publication of *Mayan Yisroel*, a Flatbush shul under the guidance of *Rabbi Yosef Vigler*.

***Yehuda Grossberger's conclusion:***

The lesson I learned from this is that we just have to do our small part and not give up. Hashem will take care of the rest. You never know the effect of your actions. Our mission is to do, and Hashem will accomplish!!

*Connection:* PASSOVER