

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's
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The Real Passover Blessing

“Ah zissen und ah kasher Pesach” – “a sweet and a kosher Passover” is not how most of us think about the best aspects of this most-observed Jewish holiday. When we think of Passover, we think of salty (albeit comfort) foods, rambunctious family gatherings, and numerous restrictions. We might assume that the Passover blessing that we offer our family and friends might include some of these aspects: “Have a free-feeling Passover,” or “Have a calm and complaint-free seder,” or even “May your Passover meals not raise your blood pressure!” At least, we could offer each other the blessing, “May your Passover cleaning not break your back!”

So what is it with this blessing – a sweet and kosher Passover – what does it really mean if not a hope rather than good wishes? Well, it is all that and much more!

When we wish others that they might have a Passover that is sweet, it is not the food to which we are referring. We are saying to the person we are blessing that we want for them a holiday that has the sweetest elements of life: A sense of completion or a holiday well-made, as well as the connections renewed to those whose presence lights up our lives: close family and friends. We are asking for the real blessings of sweetness in life – the ability to say that we are right with and in our world – when we speak of the sweetness of Passover.

When we speak of a kosher Passover, we are not simply speaking of getting everything from the grocery store with the special Passover *hecksure* (kosher certification symbol) on it or about making sure that no leaven comes into contact with our Passover food. We are speaking of a much more important *kashrut*, or “kosherness” – we are wishing our close family and friends the raised spiritual life of being right with God. When we follow our tradition as best we can, we raise our spirits higher, we become more than who we are normally; this is not unlike keeping kosher and raising that “kosher bar” to a new level during Passover.

Whether it is a “sweet Passover” or a “kosher Passover,” we are wishing our close family and friends a life that is richer than their lives are now and richer than they could even imagine. After all, how do we measure a successful life? Surely, while money and things are truly important, they pale in comparison to family and friends, and those pale in comparison to good health – spiritual and mental health (not to mention physical health, of course).

It is this spiritual health that was being addressed during the recent visit of Rabbi Micah Becker-Klein to our community. While our spiritual health was greatly improved by his visit, this was just a taste of what is possible during Passover. And so, to family, friends, fellow congregants, and Jews everywhere, we offer the blessing of “a sweet and kosher Passover,” that the richness of life and the joy of God's presence be felt in our lives.

I cannot help but mention that this blessing may also act as a reminder to us that as God was with our ancestors in times far more perilous than in which we are living today, so too will God be at our side in these tough times. I cannot think of a better blessing.

May each of us find our spirits raised higher, our minds honed sharper, and our lives all the richer as we experience the best blessing we can offer: A sweet and kosher Passover!

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