



Tara's Pre-Pesach Report April 18, 2008

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I often speak in poetic terms about the beauty of living in Jewish time, where one is not in the minority but instead embraced in the rhythm and flow of Shabbat and the holidays. As I write, the exquisite and indescribable peace of Shabbat is descending over Jerusalem. The noise of construction and traffic has faded away and bird-song emerges, clear and sweet. But there is another something in the air... Yup, it's Pesach. You can feel it. As of this afternoon, the grocery stores are wearing their Passover garb, aisles of hametz draped in canvas and garbage bags, cordoned off. Soon, not a bread crumb will be accessible in the entire metropolitan area. Kids are off from school. The whole country is in a cleaning frenzy, mops and bedspreads airing out over balcony railings. Even nature is in on the game, with roses in bloom and the days growing hot.

But perhaps there are some benefits to being in the minority. It ain't easy stocking up on matza when everyone else is too.

So, this past week, I am standing at the supermarket—one of those cavernous, basement-of-the-mall monstrosities and I am trying to stock up. It's Wednesday, half a week of shopping days left, before the holiday hits. I'll beat the crowds...

Or so I thought.

The place is jammed. Shopping for Passover is a family affair. Everyone and their grandmother is here, pushing up against each other, reading their lists, shouting, searching, rushing. When I have had enough and am dizzy from ingredients-labels in Hebrew, I head to the checkout lines. Wow. In the shortest line I can find, there are already six bulging carts and no trashy magazines displayed to keep me busy. I didn't even bring any Hebrew flash cards... I wonder- Is it worth it? Should I just cut bait and leave?

No, I tell myself. It's only going to get worse. Besides, it wasn't easy for our ancestors getting out of Egypt. Just deal.

The man at the head of the line (we all eye him longingly) is bald, broad-bellied and swarthy, with credit cards and cash spilling out of his back pocket. He is talking on his cell with the seriousness of a military commander. The woman in front of me is heavily pregnant probably still with all the cleaning and cooking to do, poor thing. Behind me, a couple is speaking in high-pitched tones while the husband gesticulates wildly. It seems the debate is about gefilte fish. It's a tense moment for them. Which store will have it? Should one of them head off now on foot before it's gone?!

What a motley crew we are. "Erev ray," a mixed multitude indeed. (Exodus 12:38) How did we ever get out of Egypt anyway? Now that's Divine grace.



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Then my eye falls on the cashier. Oh dear, I have met this one before. Unsmiling, methodical and heavy-set, her name must be Olga. Soviet history has taught her not to get in a tizzy about lines, and she doesn't. Quite to the contrary, the woman actually disappears, yes disappears, for fifteen minutes (I am not exaggerating.) to check on the price of a particular item. I call Meir twice from my cell in order to keep from popping a gasket.

But then, another cashier opens-- Jubilation like the parting of the Red Sea! But the Almighty has not met the likes of Olga. She has stopped scanning items now in order to consult with the pregnant woman in front of me about the way she boils turnips.

I'm getting giddy. Is this a sitcom?

The frustration has engendered a kind of camaraderie among us Line-Standers. We're all in this together. I have let the man behind me move to the newly-opened cashier (his wife has abandoned him in pursuit of jellied fish). Since I'm still with Olga, he finishes checking out long before I do and turns around, waving to me before he heads out the door, "We should only meet at simchas!" He shouts and smiles.

Finally, I am at the car—victory!

Or not. Someone has parked his car smack dab in the center of the parking lot such that I am completely stuck. It is physically impossible for me to leave without inflicting major damage on his car or on mine. Hey, maybe the hutzpa of this country is rubbing off on me. I actually try to back up. Soon, as might have easily been predicted by someone in a more rational state of mind, I am completely immobilized, stuck diagonally between two cars. Passersby give me critical glances. "MA LA'ASOT?!" I ask. "What do you want me to do?!"

I gotta get out of here.

Then some young guy who just happens to know the dude who has imprisoned me in the parking lot (no anonymity in this country), shows up and tries to call the offender on his cell multiple times. No luck. So gently, calmly, he shows me how--- if I just inch forward and then back up-- there IS a way I can squeeeeeze my way out. He directs me (again, more hand gestures and yelling, just as in the supermarket checkout line) and then suddenly, miraculously, I am free.

Min ha metzar karatee Ya. Anani vamerchav Ya. (From out of the narrow place I called to God and God answered me in abundant love. Psalm 118)

I feel sudden and overflowing tenderness towards this Stranger-Friend-of-the-Jerk who appeared from nowhere. I try to express my gratitude with a parting glance, but he is already distracted,



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talking on his cell...

This country has a strange way of shoving itself into your face, making you squirm and then suddenly, unexpectedly, redeeming you.

Last week an older man brought me to tears when he slammed his fist onto the hood of my car. (He felt my car was too far into the crosswalk.) People bump up against you on the street and don't even apologize. They honk at you from behind when the light has been green for less than half a nanosecond. They skip in front of you when you are waiting in line and don't even look back. We are all pushed up against each other in this narrow little country.

But then, suddenly, the Outstretched Hand. (Deuteronomy 26:8)

A stranger reaches out in the street and caresses Adina's hair. "/Eizeh booba/!" he exclaims, unable to contain himself. My pride in my children is his too. We are all in each other's business, like family. Yesterday, I approached a little market on a crowded street with Gavi, and Adina in the stroller. The aisles were way too narrow for all three of us and the kids were getting cranky. "Ugh, too crowded," I mutter under my breath. A woman standing next to me offered, "Can I watch them for you?" Without a second's hesitation, I thanked her and dashed into the store, leaving my children on the sidewalk with someone I never met. Never, in a thousand years would I do that in the States. But I trust these people. We are all in this together, as we struggle to clear the hametz away. It's a family affair.

Tomorrow afternoon we'll head to Tel Aviv for the seder and even though it's Shabbat in Jerusalem, we'll leave early. I don't want to get caught in traffic.

Received 4/18/08.