



**Beyond Linens ‘N Things**  
***Passover Day 1 5779***  
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I have a confession to make. I am a hopeless romantic. Starting when I was a little girl, I devoted endless hours to dreaming about what it would be like to meet my partner and fall in love and live happily ever after. I have journals from when I was 12 peppered with lists of what my ideal partner would be like because I was convinced that if I could imagine him clearly, he would appear. The lists are kind of funny. At age twelve, let’s just say my priorities were a little skewed... I would read the wedding section of the New York Times and the Washington Post and the Denver Post religiously looking for clues. I was sure that if I just did what these people did, I would find my partner. Every year I updated my lists. I saw a tv show which claimed that if you could write 100 qualities about your person you would find them. So, for years I struggled to write out 100 qualities for the man I hadn’t met yet. (Maybe the tv show was right—I could never get past 86). I dated like it was my job. Some weekends, I would go on 3 or 4 dates. And when I wasn’t dating, I was imagining what it would be like to meet my person.

After a solid 18 years of dreaming, I was pleasantly surprised to bump into the love of my life in the Gann Chapel. Surprisingly, he didn’t fit all the characteristics I laid out in my 12-year-old journals. He doesn’t have hair that goes past his shoulders. He isn’t a tenor and doesn’t sing opera. He doesn’t have an affinity for English Mastiffs and multiple rescue cats. And he didn’t appear in my life because of anything I did or didn’t do. But meeting him, I felt all the love I had been dreaming about for all those years. And I was over-the-moon when he asked me to marry him in November.

Before we got engaged, many of you were kind enough to indulge me. You would ask if I had a special someone, or if the person you saw me with at yoga was a friend or a “friend” or a ‘very special friend.’ I had so many opportunities to gush. I loved hearing your stories of how you met your beloved, and how you knew you had found the one. I loved sharing our story too. I dreamed about getting engaged and building our life together. I couldn’t wait for our wedding.

But then something strange happened. We got engaged and suddenly the conversations shifted. Instead of talking about how we met or what we’re dreaming about, suddenly there is *the question*. It comes up every time I talk with my family, with friends, and at kiddush.

“So... how’s wedding planning?”

I find myself talking ad nauseum about clothing and colors and dates and venues. Before I met Solomon, I used to laugh with couples, joking that if you can make it through linen rentals and floral arrangements, then you can make it through life. But now, I see that’s not so far off. There is this weird phenomenon in our culture where getting engaged means that you stop focusing on that partnership that brought you to this moment and start focusing on all of the minutia that are super-relevant when it comes to your wedding day, and completely irrelevant in the course of life.

This isn’t just true for wedding planning. We do this all the time.

We focus on finding a successful career and working hard to achieve worldly recognition, without thinking as much about our happiness or the balance between work and life.

We focus on getting our children “bar and bat mitzvah’ed,” we argue with them about learning the trope and plan the party, but don’t think as much about the Jewish life they will lead and what that will entail.

We focus on getting to inbox zero every day, but don't think as much about the people we want to reach out to, the childhood friends and family who aren't regular email correspondents.

We focus on getting in and out of the grocery store with all our produce and dry goods, but don't see the friends walking around us or the stories unfolding in our midst.

Ironically, Passover, the holiday of ritualized questions, is plagued by these challenges too. We are taught that this is the festival of liberation, the time when God brought us out of Egypt with an outstretched arm. And yet, many of us spend so much time focusing on washing and scouring, selling chametz and buying kosher for Passover foods, finding the perfect recipes and arranging the tables just so that we forget that Passover invites a larger process.

*Bchol dor vador chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilo hu yatza bmitzrayin.* In every generation we are required to see ourselves as if we had come out from Egypt. This doesn't just mean that we become slaves to Passover cleaning and cooking and stressing and then emerge into a beautiful world of returned chametz after the holiday. It means that we must ask deeper questions, we have to see the places where we are stuck, we have to see ourselves as if we had the capacity to change and grow and overcome.

In my home growing up, because we kept a gluten-free household, we didn't have bread or pasta or flours to get rid of. It was difficult to find chametz in our pantry, believe it or not. But my parents insisted that we each had metaphysical chametz that we needed to clean. They would invite us to think about the four worlds of our lives—about the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, and the spiritual. They would ask—what keeps you small? Where do you feel trapped? Maybe in a relationship? A job? A pattern of behavior? Maybe fighting with your

sister? That one my parents would regularly prompt. While others burned literal chametz, we would burn lists of our spiritual chametz.

That lesson has stuck with me for my entire life. Yes, there is cooking and cleaning and prep. Yes, we have so much to do. Yes, it is easy to get lost in Passover planning. But can we focus in on what is going on inside? Can we ask the questions that will get us out of Egypt? Or at least get us on the road?

Last week, I had the privilege to visit with a couple who have chosen to give generously to our Legacy Campaign. Sixty-something years ago, they met on a lawn in Nantasket. He was planning to crash the house party from which she had been asked to leave. When they met on the stairs, it was love at first sight. They started dating right away. Everything just clicked. But a few weeks later, when he asked if he could come visit her in New York, she said, “I’m not sure…” Long awkward silence. He was crestfallen. For a moment, he did not know what to do next. Finally, he turned to her, looked her in the eyes, and asked, “Will you marry me?” “Yes, of course” she said. “So,” he asked, “can I come visit you in New York?” “I’m not sure…” she replied. Turns out she had already accepted a date with someone else that weekend—imagine his surprise when she arrived with her new fiancée in tow.

As this man shared, you have to know when to ask the right questions. It’s so easy to let things go, to change the subject, to come up with elaborate schemes to get together. But in that moment, he asked the question that went beyond all the details and availabilities. He asked his deepest most real question. And he learned then that when you can ask the questions that matter most, the answer you get will resound with blessing.

Passover is here, the time for questions is now. Let's not lose ourselves in the details. We're not just party planners or holiday chefs. No more linens 'n things. We are soul-seekers on a mission to ask the questions that will open us up to a better life.