

Rebbetzin's Corner

Justin Long

April 2017/Nisan-Iyar 5777

Rabbi Arthur Waskow tells a story about Passover dishes. When he was a kid, he grew up in a halakhically observant household and, indeed, neighborhood. Preparations for Pesach were carried out with special rigor and shalom bayit (“peace in the home”) was thrown out the window with the chametz. But as an adult, he learned a secret. His neighbor, Mrs. Horowitz, couldn’t afford a complete set of Passover dishes on top of the milk and meat dishes she already had. So, while their husbands were at work, Mrs. Waskow and Mrs. Horowitz would simply trade their year-round dishes and present them to their families as the requisite special Passover dishes. Waskows ate from Horowitz’s chametz plates, and vice versa. Problem solved!

To some people, this is a story about preserving the dignity of the poor; to others, about the importance of neighborliness; and still others consider this to be a story about secret history.

For me, it’s a story about dishes. Every year when I pack up the chametz stuff and pull the Passover materials from the basement, the process itself is what I find valuable. After all, if there weren’t stresses and yelling and time pressure and literal boiling vats every Spring, how would we test the strength of our marital bond? Entering upon a project that everyone knows from the start will only end in apologies all around is a greater act of confidence in family dynamics than doing trust falls with your inlaws. Just like how the rest of the year we can console ourselves during the hard times that things could be worse—we could be eating matzah—the insanity of kashering a kitchen for Passover helps us put in perspective the smaller little domestic tiffs we might encounter throughout the year, like whose job it was to pay the taxes and why the kids got left at the store. And isn’t that the liberation our ancestors went hiking for?