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***A BLAST FROM THE RECENT PAST***

**How Matzah Became a Household Item for**

**Non-Jews in the Netherlands**

**By**[**Cnaan Liphshiz**](https://www.jta.org/author/cnaan-liphshiz/)



**Heijs displays a box of his matzah at his factory, March 19, 2018. (Cnaan Liphshiz)**

ENSCHEDE, Netherlands ([JTA](http://www.jta.org/)) — For most [matzah bakeries](https://www.jta.org/2015/03/23/news-opinion/world/in-eastern-ukraine-a-unique-matzah-factory-puts-food-on-jewish-tables), Passover is their lifeline and only claim to financial viability.

After the weeklong holiday, during which Jews are commanded to consume matzah to commemorate their ancestors’ hurried flight out of Egypt, demand for the famously tasteless cracker drops sharply.

Except, that is, in the Netherlands.

**Matzahs Consumed Year-Round**

**by Millions of Dutch Non-Jews**

A centuries-old and proud Jewish community here has made matzah a household product that is sold in supermarkets and consumed year-round by millions of non-Jews who swear by it as their breakfast bread of choice.

That’s one reason why Pieter Heijs, a co-owner of Hollandia Matzes in this eastern city, is probably the only matzah maker in the world who braces for losses, not earnings, during Passover.

Almost all the profits of his matzah bakery — the only one in Holland — comes from sales to non-Jews of a product that lacks the “kosher for Passover” certification. However, for four weeks ahead of Passover, Hollandia also produces kosher-for-Passover matzah, which “costs more to make than what we get for it,” Heijs said.

The factory, which produces about 40 million matzah crackers annually, also makes small amounts of shmurah matzah — a specialty variant that is even costlier because of its stringent adherence to the kosher rules. To prevent even the hint of leavening, the wheat and flour never come into contact with moisture from the time of the harvesting until the dough is kneaded and the sheets are baked.

Still, Heijs remains committed to making matzah that is kosher for Passover.

“It’s a matter of tradition, and it means a great deal to me,”  said Heijs, who is not Jewish. “Even if it comes at the expense of our profit margins, we will continue to produce Passover kosher matzah for as long as we can.”

**Centuries of Jewish Influence on the General Population**

The losses, however, are dwarfed by the boom in Hollandia’s sales during Easter, which often coincides with Passover. On the Christian holiday, millions of Dutch buy and eat matzah as part of a nationwide tradition that testifies to centuries of Jewish influence on the general population.

A liberal nation that was home to one of Europe’s most illustrious Jewish communities before its near annihilation by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Holocaust, the Netherlands has other examples of interfaith borrowings ([take](https://www.jta.org/2016/12/14/news-opinion/world/how-hanukkah-sufganiyot-became-a-national-treat-in-the-netherlands) the oliebol, a deep-fried winter snack in Holland that many trace back to the Hanukkah doughnut called sufganiyah).

Such carryovers were perhaps possible in the Netherlands partly because many Protestant Christians here emphasize the Hebrew Bible over the New Testament. But Heijs said “it’s because Dutch Jews were so integrated into the fabric of society.”



**A shopper browsing for matzah at the Amsterdam Noord branch of the Jumbo supermarket chain, March 17, 2018. (Cnaan Liphshiz)**

The matzah became a year-round household food in recent decades as supermarkets replaced smaller grocery stores, according to Jonah Freud. He published a book in 2012 about the Dutch Jewish cuisine based on her research for the Jewish Historical Museum of Amsterdam.

“I think it may be connected to how matzah is perceived as healthy,” Freud said.

Heijs concurs.

“Many of our clients want matzah because it’s such a pure product,” he said. “No additives, no conservatives, highly nutritious. What more can you ask of a health food?”

In an overture to the health-food crowd, one of the first moves by Heijs and his business partner, Udo Karsemeijer, who also is not Jewish, after they bought Hollandia in 2004 was to add an organic matzah product to the lineup. It includes matzahs in two sizes, a whole wheat variety and one with spice herbs.

**Company Exports Matzah Products to**

**Scandinavia, Germany and France**

Hollandia now exports products to Scandinavia, Germany and even France, where several matzah bakeries compete for a market with 500,000 Jews.

Heijs and Karsemeijer bought the Hollandia factory from a Jewish family named Woudstra. The founding family built the factory in Enschede because it had a large Jewish community, and because of the arrival to the eastern Netherlands of thousands of Jews who fled the Nazis in nearby Germany.

When the Nazis invaded in 1940, the Woudstras went into hiding and the Nazis closed down Hollandia.

Before the invasion, the Netherlands had several matzah bakeries, [according](https://www.bakkersinbedrijf.nl/artikelen/pasen-matzes-en-paasbrood/) to the Dutch Bakers’ Museum. Among the best known and oldest was the De Haan bakery in the picturesque fishing village of Marken, north of Amsterdam. It operated only ahead of Passover, and after the baking of the last matzah each year, De Haan employees would march to music through the village dressed in white sheets and ceremoniously extinguish the ovens.

One of the production line machines inside Hollandia, a state-of-the-art factory with 18 employees who work year-round inside a three-story building, dates back to 1924. Inside the room where it now operates, the local Jewish community briefly ran a Jewish school for the children who were expelled from the general education system under the Nazis.

**The Factory Reopened After World War II**

The factory reopened after World War II, during which the Germans killed 75 percent of the prewar Dutch Jewish population of 100,000. The community never replenished its numbers.

By then, however, matzahs had developed a non-Jewish following.

The eye-catching and instantly recognizable packaging of Hollandia matzah boxes — an orange-colored octagonal cardboard box with a nifty camera-aperture opening – was a marketing coup cooked up by the Woudstras, Heijs said.

The matzah became even better known to the Dutch immediately after the war because the Hollandia factory received generous subsidies under the Marshall Plan for financial aid to rebuild war-torn Europe, according to Heijs.

He said the funding was meant also as a gesture acknowledging Jewish suffering during the Holocaust.

“But it was also a practical decision: Matzah requires no eggs, no salt, no sugar – all commodities that were in very short supply immediately after the war,” Heijs said. Whatever the reason, he added, the reality was that Hollandia was “one of the first bakeries that were restored” after the war, thus entrenching its status as a household brand.

Heijs, 55, remembers enjoying Hollandia matzah as a boy ahead of and also directly after Easter.

“I understand that matzah is not considered a delicacy exactly among Jews, who substitute bread for matzah for [eight days] each year,” he said. “But for us, who had it in addition to everything else, it was a treat that went very well with chocolate and butter.”

**Some Non-Jews Enjoy Their Matzahs**

**with Butter and Sugar-Coated Anise Seeds**

Karina Ahles-Frijters, who lives in Hilversum, near Amsterdam, [wrote](https://trotsemoeders.nl/2016/03/matzes-traditioneel-voor-een-paasmaaltijd-of-smaakt-het-naar-meer/) in 2016 on her parenting blog Trotsemoeders that her three children like to experiment with matzah toppings (her eldest prefers whole wheat matzah with butter and sugar-coated anise seeds, she wrote). One day a year, the Hollandia factory is open to anyone interested in making their own matzahs.

But not everyone is a fan of the matzah.

“Frankly I couldn’t tell you why so many Dutchmen like matzah — I don’t think it’s tasty at all,” said Roger van Oordt, the director of the Netherlands-based Christians for Israel group, which organizes matzah-baking activities in solidarity with Israel and the Jews. “If I have to think about eating nothing but matzah for two weeks, it makes being Christian look easy.”

**Matzah is Much More than a Commodity**

Although he is not Jewish, Heijs regards matzah as much more than a commodity.

“After 14 years of making matzahs, of course I developed friendships and bonds with many Jewish people,” said Heijs, who on Passover eve this year will attend his first seder dinner with his wife at the invitation of a Dutch Jewish community in northern Holland. “But matzah is part of the Dutch story regardless.”

*Reprinted from the March 20, 2018 website of JTA.ORG (Jewish Telegraphic Agency)*

**The Apter Rav**

**and the Apostate**

Near the town of Apter there was an apostate, a Jew who had completely left his religion. He rose in power and became a high-ranking officer. He hated the Jews and caused them a lot of aggravation. On every occasion, whenever he attended a meeting with the King and other ministers, he always tried somehow to bring up the topic about the Jews and cause the trouble.

**The Blood Libel**

At one such meeting a different minister, also an anti-Semite told the King about the horrific story that took place in his area. A young girl went to draw water from the well but never returned home. It was a few weeks before the Jewish holiday of Pesach. After thorough investigations, they discovered that the Jews were to blame. They had kidnapped the girl, killed her and used her blood for their Matzos.

Everyone was raging with anger and were all ready to take revenge on all the Jews. A document was written out. All the ministers and officers signed. But when it came to the apostate Jew, for some unknown reason, he stood up to speak.

“You all know that I used to be a Jew. Although no friend of theirs, to say it mildly, but one thing I can tell you for sure. This is a blood libel and a complete hoax. One of the biggest sins by Jews and disgusting is drinking blood or eating any food with blood in it.

Everyone immediately accepted his words, knowing he was a Jew hater and wasn’t looking to help his fellow Jews. Thanks to the apostate the decree was annulled. But the fire of regret started burning in him. The great Mitzva of saving so many Jews from death aroused his inner soul. He had a great desire to return home to his religion. But he didn’t know what to do. He had left his original Jewish wife and kids and had married out to a non-Jewish lady and had non-Jewish kids. He was sure he had no hope.

**His Last Chance**

But even so, he decided to try his last chance and traveled to the Apter Rav. The Apter Rav saw the apostate Jew and he was very scared. Who knows what new decree he has up his sleeve against the Jews. The Apter Rav tried to avoid talking to him. He apologized that he was old, it was late at night and he wasn’t up to meeting anyone. But the man wouldn’t give up.

“Rabbi, just hear what I have to say.” But the Apter Rav was adamant not to have any discussion with the man at all. He said, “If grass grows on the stick next to me, then I will talk to you.” To the Apter Rav’s amazement, grass started sprouting out of the stick. Now the Apter Rav understood something was serious here.

He called the man to his house and asked him what he wanted. The man told over his story, how he regretted his behavior and wants to repent. But doesn’t know what to do and how? Especially with his second wife and family. The Apter Rav told him to stay and he would help him.

In addition, he sent a message to the Rabbi of the town where this man lived and asked him to update him with any news about the apostate and his family. The Man repented and followed the instructions of the Apter Rav.

Less than two weeks later the Rabbi sent a message to the Apter Rav that the apostate’s house had gone up in flames and everyone had died in the fire. The Apter Rav called the man and told him that his repentance had been accepted in Heaven and he could now return to his former wife and family.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tazria 5784 email of Inspired by a Story by Rabbi Dovid Caro.*

**Learning from the Mesiras Nefesh of the Kohein in Helping the Impure**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



Passover is not only the first of the three major Jewish festivals, but the foundation and root of all of them. The Exodus from Egypt prepared the Jewish people for receiving the Torah on Shavuot. Sukkot, too, is connected to Passover, in that it commemorates the booths (sukkot) that the Children of Israel inhabited in the wilderness.

The main significance of Passover is that it is "the season of our freedom," the time when the Jewish people went out of slavery and became an independent nation. The Torah describes what happened as follows: "G-d has ventured to go and take or Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and by wonders... according to all that the L-rd your G-d did for you in Egypt before your eyes." The keys words are "a nation from the midst of another nation," which express the true uniqueness of the event.

**A Nation in the Midst of Another Nation**

What does it mean that the Jews were "a nation in the midst of another nation"? On the one hand it implies that the Children of Israel were already a "people," in the sense that they spoke their own language, lived in their own land (Goshen), and were careful to wear distinctive Jewish dress. At the same time, they were subservient and dependent upon the Egyptians.

Our Sages likened this situation to a fetus in its mother's womb. The fetus is a separate entity from the mother, with its own head, hands, legs and other limbs. Yet it is not a truly independent being, as it is forced to go wherever the mother goes, derives its sustenance from whatever she eats, etc. In truth, the fetus is completely dependent on the mother.

This accurately describes the Jews' circumstances in Egypt: While recognizable as a separate people, they were completely dependent on the Egyptians - so much so that it appeared as if they, too, were tainted by the Egyptians' idolatry.

The "umbilical cord" was severed when the Jews were commanded to slaughter and eat the Pascal lamb, an animal that the Egyptians worshipped. The courage and self-sacrifice it took to do this was the first step in the Jewish people's liberation from Egypt and its mentality.

**Connected to an Invisible “Umbilical Cord”**

This contains an eternal lesson: A person may think that he is free and independent because he has his own thoughts and desires. Upon reflection, however, he may discover that he is connected by an invisible "umbilical cord" to his surroundings and that in reality, he is a slave to whatever non-Jewish mores and conventions happen to be in vogue. Worse still is that he thinks that this is the true meaning of "freedom."

The holiday of Passover endows us with the strength to attain true freedom. The first step is to "slaughter" any "idols" that might be worshipped even subconsciously, and rid oneself of dependency on "what the world thinks." For the Jewish people are servants of G-d and no one else!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tzav 5761/2001 edition of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitcher Youth Organization. Adapted from the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Hagada, 5751 edition..*

**Beyond The Letter**

**Of The Law**

**Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon**

The custom is that the kallah presents her chosson with a tallis. When we don the tallis we recite four passages from Tehillim (Psalms) chapter 36, and the final passage is; “Bestow Your kindness upon those who know you, and [bring out] Your righteousness to those with an upright heart.”

**The Difference Between Those Who**

**Know Hashem and Those Who Serve Him**

The commentaries explain that in essence we are requesting from Hashem two different things, kindness is for those who know You, while righteousness is for those who are upright. The question then is; what is the difference between those who know Hashem and those who serve Him with an upright heart.

And the explanation given is there is a world of difference between them. Knowing Hashem is referring to one who fulfills the mitzvos out of love, while the upright is referring to those who fulfill the mitzvos only as prescribed in the Shulchan Aruch (code of Jewish Law).

Let us explain this through an allegory. An associate asks you if you can take him to the airport to catch his flight. Being that you are friendly with him, you reply, “Sure, what time is the flight?”

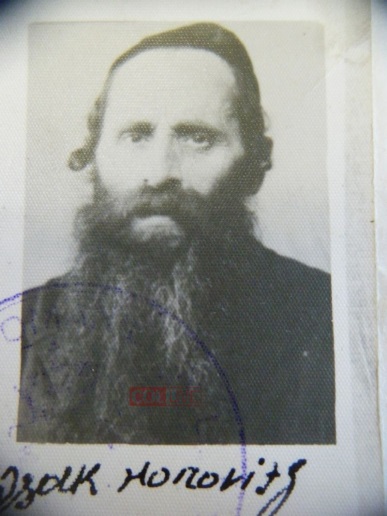
**What About that 5 A.M. Flight**

Now if the flight is between 7 pm and 9 pm, you have no problem, you are happy to assist him. However, if the flight is at 5 am, which means you have to wake up at three in the morning, your happiness and enthusiasm is gone and you may even back out without anyone saying that is wrong of you. After all is it expected of one to give up their night’s sleep for an acquaintance?! Furthermore, you may feel that you were tricked and your associates request is unjust etc.

However, if the one who is requesting this of you is one whom you dearly love, than even though it is at that unheard of hour, you will do it with gusto. After all, this person is extremely dear to you. So not only will you do it gladly, but if someone will mention that you were taken advantage of, or that what you did was really something special, you will look at them with an expression as if to say, what are your talking about?

And that is what we are saying; [Hashem] bestow Your kindness to those who know You and their relationship to You, is as the relationship of dear friends. So then, for such a friend one does favors that they perhaps are not necessarily deserving, but it is done anyways as it is for my friend. However, if your relationship to Hashem is only according to the book, I do what Shulchan Aruch prescribes and if the law says I am exempted from fulfilling the mitzvah because of a difficult situation, so then I don’t do it; the possuk informs us, since you are following the book, Hashem too will follow the book and give you what righteousness demands, but not more.

With this introduction, I will now relate a story that I heard from my father, Reb Meir Avtzon a”h and which he wrote in his sefer *Oros Ba’afeilah, pp. 139–140*.

[](http://www.collive.com/pics/nf_3999_597690.JPG)

***Rare photo of Reb Itche HaMasmid***

In 5689 (1929) Reb Itche HaMasmid, visited Kremenchuk [a large industrial city in the Ukraine] for an extended period of time and he requested of me that I[[1]](#footnote-1) *kasher* an oven for him to bake *matzos*. For the *kashering* process, he wanted the oven’s heat to be raised to a higher temperature and for a longer amount of time than is required by *halachah.*[[2]](#footnote-2) As such, many of the local *baalei batim* did not allow me to use their ovens. They simply were afraid the house might catch fire due to the intensity of the heat.

Finally, I found an individual who let me to use his oven for this purpose. He was not a Lubavitcher, and if I remember correctly his name was Reb Yaakov Silberman.

After the oven was *koshered* as he stipulated*,* Reb Itche said he wanted to smear the oven’s inner walls with a layer of clay a *tefach* (3-4 inches) thick, which will require that the oven be heated again, in order that the new layer sticks it to the walls properly.

“The clay covering will not withstand the heat unless it is mixed with an animal’s excrement,” Reb Yaakov’s wife informed him.

“If that is the case,” Reb Itche replied, “that is what we will do.”

After smearing the new covering onto the oven, we *kashered* it once again by reheating it to an extremely high temperature. When it cooled down the floor of the oven was swept up, and we found in the ashes something that looked like a broken, burnt kernel of wheat. Apparently, it had been eaten by the animal whose excrement we used to mix with the clay.

**No Longer Has the Status of Chometz**

Noticing this, Reb Itche instructed me to *kasher* the oven once again. When Reb Yaakov’s wife heard this, she told us: “Since the kernel was found in the animal’s excrement, it no longer has the din of *chometz*. This is especially so in our case where the kernel is broken, which demonstrates that it had already been eaten and digested.” She was thus implying that there was no need to re-*kasher* the oven a third time.

Reb Itche was extremely bothered by this. Painfully, he said to me, “Oy Meir! A learned person is a big problem.” [In other words, it is problematic if someone follows the written *halachah* but does not appreciate its inner spirit.]

Seeing his pain and aggravation written all over his face, they said, “If you want to *kasher* the oven anyway, we won’t stop you.” He was extremely grateful to them and instructed me to do so.

Now according to the letter of the law, they were correct, being that it was eaten and digested and then burnt to a crisp, these points are sufficient reasons to declare that former kernel non-chometz. But, Reb Itche went beyond the letter of the law, so too him if it smelled of Chometz, it was treated as if it was actual “chometz” and he koshered it again.

So just as each family has its unique hiddurim and chumros (stringencies) when it comes for Pesach that go beyond the letter of the law, so too Hashen should bestow upon His entire nation His everlasting kindness, and grant all of us our heartfelt desires, with the ultimate kindness of redeeming us from this final golus with the coming of Moshiach tzedkeinu, and we will eat this year the korbon Pesach in Yeushalayim, with the building of the Third Beis hamikdash.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra 5778 email of “Our Stories” by Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon. Rabbi Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Rebbeim and their chassidim. He is available to farbreng in your community and can be reached at* [*avtzonbooks@gmail.com*](mailto:avtzonbooks@gmail.com)

**Sipur Yetzias Mitzraim, Women's Obligation**

**QUESTION:** Are women obligated to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Sipur Yetzias Mitzrayim* (relating the story of the Exodus)?

**ANSWER:** While all agree that women are obligated in the *mitzvah* of *sipur yetzias Mitzrayim* there is a dispute as to whether the *mitzvah* is a Torah obligation or a rabbinic obligation.

According to Chayei Adam (130:12), since *sipur yetzias Mitzrayim* is a *mitzvah* which is time-based (*mitzvah shehazman gerama*), on a Torah-level women are exempt.

However, the Chinuch (Mitzvah 21) maintains that the Torah obligation applies to women as well. Rav Elyashiv (Kovetz Teshuvos 1:52) explains why the Chinuch does not exempt women from this *mitzvah* of *sipur* which is time-based: The exemption of time-based *mitzvos* for women was first established with the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

Therefore, the exemption only applies to *mitzvos* that were given at Sinai or later. Since the *mitzvah* of *sipur* was given in *Mitzrayim* before Sinai, women were included at that time, and it remained that way post-Sinai as well.

Rabbi [Menachem] Genack heard a different explanation from Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *zt”l* as to how the Torah obligation of *sipur yetziyas Mitzrayim* can apply to women even though it is a *mitzvas asei shehazman gerama*. The Ramban (Milchamos Berachos 2b) writes that there is an obligation at the seder to explain the *mitzvos* of Pesach, Matzah and Marror and one who fails to do so has not fulfilled these *mitzvos* in the optimal manner. Since women are obligated in the *mitzvah* of matzah, it is incumbent on them to retell *yetziyas Mitzrayim* as a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of matzah.

The Gemara (Pesachim 36a) states that matzah is referred to as *lechem oni*(lit. spoken bread) because there is an obligation to retell the story of *yetziyas Mizrayim* in front of the matzos.

Women are obligated to eat matzah at the seder (even though it too is a *mitzvas asei shehazman gerama*) because the *mitzvah*of matzah is connected to the prohibition of eating *chometz*. Since women are obligated in matzah, they become obligated in *sipur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

*Reprinted from the April 2, 2019 email of the OU’s Halachis Yomis.*

**Reflections on the**

**Pesach Seder**

Rebbe Yechiel Meir of Gustenin zt’l said that he couldn’t fall asleep on the Seder night. He compared it to someone who has just won the lottery. That person obviously can’t fall asleep – he’s too excited. Similarly, we earn so much spirituality at the Seder. One who recognizes this can’t fall asleep due to his excitement.

**A Wealthy Man Bought a**

**Beautiful and Powerful Horse**

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pershischa zy’a related: A wealthy person bought a very expensive, beautiful and powerful horse. He brought it to his stable near his home. But he was afraid that someone may steal his rare horse, so he built a fence around the area where the horse was held.

Still, he feared that thieves might find a way to get through the fence, so he hired someone to stand guard all night. He told the guard, “I don’t want you to fall sleep, so I want you to think about interesting and intriguing ideas throughout the night."

**“What if the Guard Falls Asleep”**

So, the prized horse was enclosed in a fence, and there was someone standing guard, but the wealthy man was still worried. “What if the guard falls asleep?” Because of his worries he couldn’t fall asleep, so he went outside to check up on his horse, and to see whether his watchman was awake. He saw his horse peacefully resting in the stable, and he also saw that the watchman was awake.

“What are you thinking about now?” he asked the guard.

“I was just contemplating,” he said, with a philosophical stance, “when one bores a hole through a wooden fence, where does the wood of the hole go to? There was wood before, and now there’s a hole. Where did the wood go to?”

**Woke Up an Hour Later, Frightened**

The wealthy man was happy with this. “Very good,” he said. “Keep thinking about such weighty matters and you won’t fall asleep.” The wealthy man returned home, satisfied that everything was under control and he fell asleep. But an hour later, he awoke, frightened.

"What if the guard fell asleep? He was up before, but now it’s later at night. I better check up on him." He went outside again and he saw that the watchman was still standing there, guarding the horse. “I am so glad you are still awake. Keep it up. What are you thinking about now?”

The guard appeared philosophical once again and replied, “I was just wondering, when one eats a bagel what happens to the hole in the middle?” “Wonderful question,” the wealthy man told him exuberantly. “Keep thinking along these lines and you won’t fall asleep.”

The wealthy man managed to sleep for another hour, but then he woke up again, and went outside to see what the guard was doing. “What are you thinking about now,” he asked the guard.

**“How Did the Horse Disappear?”**

“I was just wondering,” he said, once again appearing philosophical, “a wealthy person buys a prize horse, constructs a fence to protect it, hires someone to stand guard, and awakens every hour to make sure that everything is o. k. So, I’m wondering, if he’s taking such good care, where did the horse go to? How did the horse disappear?”

What’s the lesson of this story? It’s a reminder that we must grab the opportunities of this night, so we aren't left empty-handed. Otherwise, one can be philosophical and ask, "You bought matzah, maror, and all products for the Seder, you cooked and you prepared for the Seder, so where did the Seder go to? How did you lose it?”

*Reprinted from the Pesach 5778 email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts from Rabbi Elimelech Biderman.*

1. At that time my father served as the *mashgiach* of the underground yeshiva Tomchei Tmimim there. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to the halachah, as soon as the walls of the oven become red, it is considered koshered. However, Reb Itche was insistent that the fire continues burning for a period of time after that. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)