



ANSWERING THE KNOCK  
April 17, 2020 | 23 Nissan 5780

The Jews of Georgia, Russia start their seder with a very interesting custom\* – A child would go outside of the house and knock on the door. The father would ask: “Who is there?”

The child answers “a Jew.”

The father asks, “from where do you come?”

The child answers, “from Egypt!”

The Father asks, “what is the proof that you are Jewish?”

The child answers, “the Tzitzis that I am wearing, and my Bris Milah.”

The father proceeds to ask a few more questions, and then the seder would begin.

What really struck me was the answer to the question asking for proof Jewishness... “the Tzitzis that I am wearing and my Bris Milah.”

To me the responses reflects on two ways that we experience our Jewish identity: privately, and publicly. The Bris Milah represents the core of our Jewish identity that can never be changed or altered. It is our very essence and who we are. But it is private. (Jewish tradition teaches that girls are considered to have been born with a spiritual Bris Milah).

Tzitzis represents our behaviors and action that demonstrate to the public that we are Jewish. This begs the question: Certainly in our hearts, in our core, in our most private moments we are proud Jews... but what can we do publicly that affirms our identity and commitment to our Jewishness?

The Torah teaches that one of the ways that a Jew can express their unique Jewish identity is through observing the laws of Kosher (much of which are detailed in this week’s Torah portion). When a Jew is invited out to a restaurant for a business meeting or for a social dinner, and declines or gets different food because the food served at the event is not kosher, it is such a powerful expression of Jewish identity. I am a Jew and Jews eat differently.

The dietary restrictions of kosher reach an even greater height on Pesach, which millions of Jews all over the world have just celebrated. Despite this extremely “restrictive” diet, millions of Jews sit proudly at the Seder answering the call of “what is the proof that you are Jewish?” When friends and business associates ask you out to dinner, Jews proudly declare that this week will not work as it is Pesach! (Or now, in Safer-At-Home times, the Facebook and Instagram posts of homemade bread and pizza proudly switch to kosher-for-Passover like matzah brei and homemade macaroons!)

With social distancing and the Stay at Home order it has never been easier to give it a try and to upgrade our level of kosher observance. Whatever the level of Kashrus you currently practice there is always more that we can do.

Is your home not kosher yet? Resolve not to bring pork or shellfish products into the house. Are you already there? Resolve to only bring Kosher certified products in the house. Are you already there? Resolve to have two sets of dishes. Are you already there? Resolve to wash them separately. Are you already there? Resolve to study the laws of kosher in depth.

May our public expression of our Jewish identity match the pride of our private Jewish identity. May our public Jewish persona be so obvious that Hashem can clearly see our devotion and identity as His people, and bring the redemption with the coming of Moshiach, a time of world peace and worldwide health, may it be speedily in our days!

\* Over Pesach I spent some time studying from a book authored by my great grandfather Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Zuber. He was an emissary of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Lubavitcher Rebbes. He led communities in Sachkhera, Georgia, Stockholm, Sweden, and Boston, MA. He was brilliant Torah Scholar, with a photographic memory, and he corresponded with the leading rabbis of the day.

This custom was among the listed in one of the sections of the book that outlines the unique traditions and customs of the Jews of Georgia, Russia.