

The Devil's Arithmetic

Vocabulary

Euphemism: a word or phrase used in place of a term that might be considered too direct, harsh, unpleasant, or offensive

Chapter 1

Passover: a Jewish festival marking the exodus of the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt

Seder: in Judaism, a ceremonial meal eaten on either of the first two nights of Passover, commemorating the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. It is said that the Seder is celebrated especially for the children. It is important for Jewish children to be and feel involved in the celebration of Passover. Much of the ceremony is based on the commandment in the Bible that says, "*And thou shalt tell thy son*"

At the Seder the Haggadah, the Book of Exodus, is read and the history celebrated with its stories, songs and prayers

Yiddish: a language derived from a medieval German dialect and written in Hebrew script, spoken by some Jews in Europe, Israel, and North and South America. It reflects the influence of Hebrew, Aramaic, and other languages, especially Slavonic languages.

Four Questions: Since the goal of the Passover Haggadah is to encourage future generations of Jews to inquire about their history, the four clauses are then recited by the youngest person at the Passover Seder table. They include:

1. "Why is it that on all other nights during the year we eat either bread or matzoh, but on this night we eat only matzoh?"
2. "Why is it that on all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but on this night we eat only bitter herbs?"
3. "Why is it that on all other nights we do not dip our herbs even once, but on this night we dip them twice?" and
4. "Why is it that on all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night we eat in a reclining position?"

The answer for each question describes specific events in the Passover story and the symbolic meaning of each of these events in relation to the Passover holiday. The first two questions and their answers both symbolize and remind us of the burdens of slavery, and the second two questions and their answers both symbolize and remind us of the glory of freedom.

Haggadah: the service for the ritual meal Seder celebrated by Jews at Passover, or the book containing this service. It includes the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

Chapter 2

Bris: the religious circumcision ceremony for a Jewish boy

Guttural: harsh

Malach ha-mavis: Angel of Death

Steerage: cheapest passenger rooms on a ship

Yahrzeit: A memorial candle lit to honor the loved ones that have passed away

Chapter 3

Chanukah: Another spelling of Hanukkah

Yarmulke: a small round cap worn by Jewish men and boys

Dayenu: traditional song sung during Passover

Cloying: sickening

Afikoman: ceremonial matzoh wrapped in fabric and hidden

Droned: spoke with no inflection, boring

Kosher: describes food that has been prepared so that it is fit and suitable under Jewish law

Matzoh: unleavened (flat, without yeast) bread...like a cracker

Guffawed: laughed loudly

Chapter 4

Ornate: fancy

Chelm: A small town in Poland which, according to Jewish folklore, was inhabited by foolish souls

Sabbath: the Jewish holy day (Saturday)

Shadchan: a matchmaker, a marriage broker for Jewish couples

Shtetle: in former times, a small Jewish town or village in Eastern Europe

Lublin: Lublin once served as one the most important centers of Jewish life, commerce, culture and scholarship in Europe.

Conspiratorial: secretive

Torah: the Jewish holy laws

Viosk: a village in Poland

Solemn: serious

Chapter 5

Schnorrer: An offensive term for someone who is regarded as unduly dependent on other people, a lazy beggar

Pilpul: Hebrew loosely meaning "sharp analysis"

Yeshiva bocher: one who studies in a secondary school, college, for Jewish students with a curriculum including religious and cultural, as well as academic, studies

Slovens: An offensive term that insults someone whose standards of personal hygiene and cleanliness are too low

Chapter 6

Bar Mitzvah: the ritual ceremony that marks the 13th birthday of a Jewish boy, after which he takes full responsibility for his moral and spiritual conduct

Cossack: Russian soldier

Schmatte: a rag or worthless thing

Plaits: braids

Shul: synagogue

Rendar: person in charge of a Jewish city

Goy: An offensive term for someone who is not Jewish

Mishigaas: craziness

Yeshiva: a secondary school...college (see ch. 5)

Tante: aunt

Chapter 7

Klezmer: a traditional Jewish mobile band

Badchan: entertainer/fortune teller

Chapter 8

Sherele: a traditional Jewish wedding song

Dour: unfriendly, sullen

Undecipherable: impossible to understand

Chapter 9

Plaintive: expressing sadness or sounding sad

Canopy: a traditional feature in Jewish weddings that symbolizes the couple's first home together.

Adamantly: very determined and not influenced by appeals to reconsider a position or decision

Lilith's Bridegroom : Lilith is a nocturnal female demon originating in Babylonian tradition, said to harm male children. Lilith's bridegroom is Satan.

Resettlement: to provide a group or population with a new place to live and transfer it there

Assent: a formal expression of agreement or acceptance

Billeted: assigned

Desecrate: destroy

Crematoria: building where corpses are burned

Chapter 10

Periphery: boundaries

Protruding: sticking out

Tremulous: showing fear or nervousness about something

Bissell: a little, slightly

Shikse: non-Jewish girl

Shabbos goy: A non-Jew who does work on Sabbath that a Jew cannot do

Impudent: disrespectful

Chapter 11

‘Ruas, ‘Ruas, schneller: Out, Out, Faster

Boruch deyen emes...: Blessed is the True Judge

Embankment: slope

Barracks: military housing

Schnell: Fast

Rucked: gathered

Runnels: small streams

Uninflected: monotone

Zugangi: newcomers

Stark: plain, lack of any ornament

Baffled: confused

Vehemence: force, intensity

Amphitheater: rows of seats around an open space

Mikvah: among Orthodox Jews, a ritual bath for cleansing or purification

Achtung: Attention!

Prominent: noticeable

Shorn: having had something removed or taken away

Discernible: obvious

Chapter 12

Unadorned: plain

Dank: foul

Rummaged: sorted

Crooning: singing

Privies: bathrooms

Affirmation: positive statement of achievement

Rote: memorized

Ingrate: somebody who shows or feels no gratitude

Dissipating: fading away

Chapter 13

Bellowing: loud, deep noise

Arbitrary: random

Fervor: intensity, passion

Elusive: hard to hold

Preamble: words leading up to

Quartet of Swallows: 4 small songbirds

Fatherland: is the nation of one's "fathers", in this case Germany

Drone: low humming sound, or a boring voice

Raucous: wild

Chapter 14

Sonderkommando: were work units of Nazi death camp prisoners who aided with the killing process and burning of the bodies during The Holocaust

Choosing: euphemism for picking those who would be killed

Musselman: those who had given up

Lilith's Cave: the crematorium

Processing: euphemism for cremation and burning of the bodies

Organize: euphemism for to take or steal

Valises: small suitcases

Midden: garbage dump

Sanctuary: safe place

Cholera: an acute and often fatal intestinal disease

Chapter 15

Blokova: prisoner in charge of newcomers

Burnished: polished

Cauldron: large cooking pot

Gaudy: tacky, garish

Luminous: shining brightly

Ominously: threatening, suggesting or indicating that something bad is going to happen or be revealed

Pervasive: spread throughout

Sonorous: rich in sound

Drek: trash

Kaddish: prayer for the dead

Chapter 16

Shucked: removed

Gottenyu: Dear God! (an expression of shock or horror)

Chapters 17

Portents: signs

Staccato (p.148): Abrupt break in sound

Ribino shel-oylam (p.148): the central prayer in the Jewish religion said to announce one's willingness to forgive.

Chapter 18

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheynu... One of the most important prayers in the Jewish religion. It is said twice a day. It is also said when death is imminent.

Volley: rounds of gunfire

Kommandos : A slave laborer in the concentration camp. This particular duty was to carry off the dead bodies. This was Wolfe's job

Parody: mocking

Superimposed: placed on top of

Liebchen: sweetheart

Babushka: kerchief tied under the neck

Chapter 19

L'Chaim: a Yiddish toast, To Life!

Epilogue:

Partisans: civilians who fight the enemy