

THE TALE OF THE KIDDUSH CUP

Rabbi Hayim Pinto, the kabbalist, was a master of miracles who liked to invite the poor to his seder. One year, on the eve of Passover, Rabbi Hayim sent his students to every corner of the city to look for poor people, and they found a Jew who seemed very downcast sitting under a tree. They invited him to the rabbi's seder. But he refused to come, saying: "For you it is the holiday of Pesach, but for me it is a time of mourning."

The students went back to Rabbi Hayim Pinto and asked for advice, but all the rabbi would say was, "If you can't convince him to come here, whisper this word in his ear"—and he whispered it to each of his students. They ventured forth and again asked the Jew to come with them. But still he refused, so they whispered the word that the rabbi had told them. And when the man heard it his eyes opened wide, and he agreed to accompany them at once.

When that Jew arrived at the rabbi's house, he asked: "How is it, Rabbi, that you knew the name of the ship that brought about my misfortune?" And Rabbi Pinto replied: "Join our seder and you will understand how it became known to me."

When they were all seated, Rabbi Pinto introduced the guest and asked him to tell the others his story. This he did: "I was born in the city of Marrakesh, and I traveled to Spain and worked until I had become quite wealthy. I wanted to return to my native town, and with all that I had saved I bought precious jewels. So too did I carry the jewels of a widow, to bring to her daughter as a wedding gift. I carried everything in a wooden case. But the case was lost at sea when a storm sank the ship in which I was traveling. Somehow I managed to grab hold of a plank and reached the shores of this city. I know that I am fortunate to be alive. But after all these years, I have nothing. So too do I grieve because I cannot fulfill my mission for the widow."

Rabbi Hayim Pinto said: "Be happy and watch." And the rabbi took the holy kiddush cup and pronounced a holy name that invoked Rahab, the Prince of the Sea, and he called upon Rahab for help in finding what had been lost. All at once the kiddush cup began to grow

larger and larger, and the wine in it was transformed into the waves of the sea. One after another the waves rose and fell, and eventually they cast up a small wooden case that floated on the surface. The guest, who could hardly contain himself, cried out: "Master, that is my case!" And Rabbi Pinto said: "Take it out." So the man reached into the enormous cup and took out the wooden case and set it on the table. At that instant the cup returned to its original shape, and the waters in it became wine once more. Then everyone watched in awe as the man opened the case and saw that nothing was missing. So it was that he celebrated the seder with them in great joy. And soon afterward he returned to his native town. There he delivered the jewels to the widow's daughter and joined in the celebration of her wedding.

□ Syria: Oral Tradition