

[Hag Kasher veSameah? or Moadim leSimha?...a blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel](#)

Submitted by mdangel1 on Sun, 04/01/2018 - 00:00



Many years ago, when I was still a young boy growing up in Seattle, a fund-raiser from Israel visited our home shortly before the Pessah festival. After receiving his donation, he wished us a “hag kasher ve-sameah”—a happy and kosher Pessah. My mother was deeply offended!

“How dare he imply that we don’t keep kosher!” she fumed.

We later learned that the fund-raiser was simply using a phrase common in the Ashkenazic world. It is not meant as an insult, but as a blessing. Since it is so difficult to observe the hametz laws on Pessah, the phrase offers encouragement: I hope you’ll succeed in having a fully happy Pessah, free of any hametz.

Yet, after all these years, I still rankle when someone wishes me a “hag kasher ve-sameah.” I carry on my mother’s displeasure with the phrase. I know that the phrase is not meant to be insulting or rude. I know that people say it with good intentions. But it still bothers me!

Why?

People wish each other a Shabbat Shalom, a peaceful Sabbath. They don’t say: we wish you a peaceful and kosher Sabbath, or a peaceful Sabbath free of transgressions. People wish each other “hag sameah” or “moadim lesimha”—have a happy festival. They don’t say: we wish you a happy festival free of sin. It seems that only relating to Pessah do people go out of their way to insert kosher—a happy and kosher Pessah. Yes, it is challenging to observe all the rules of the Passover festival; but it’s also challenging to fulfill all the details of Sabbath or festival observance. By singling out Pessah, there seems to be a subtle (not so subtle!) implication that many people will fail even if they try. The phrase—meant to be an encouragement—can be understood to be a hint at mistrust: we’re not sure you’ll manage to keep a kosher Pessah, but we hope you do!

Why not simply wish people: moadim lesimha, or hag sameah? Why not let them worry about their hametz rather than insert ourselves into the process? Why not just work on our own happy and kosher Passover, and not imply anything about how other people will manage their Pessah observance?

Okay, I admit this may sound a bit too touchy and overstated. Fine. If you want to wish each other a “hag kasher ve-sameah” that’s your prerogative. But as for me, please just say: moadim lesimha...and I’ll gladly reciprocate: hagim uzmanim lesasson.

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