



THE CORONA HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

Insights & Questions for
Your Novel Pesach Seder

Part 2!



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INTRODUCTION



About one and a half years ago the world was thrown into shock and disarray as the Coronavirus began sweeping through communities worldwide. So much of Jewish life is surrounded by community and interactions with others, which made it quite difficult for people to truly experience Jewish life together.

We have lost many lives due to the pandemic and have suffered great blows, with many of our Gedolei Yisrael (holy Jewish leaders) succumbing to the virus. Even if one were blessed to not know of anyone who lost their life to this disease, one should certainly be shaken by the loss of the giants that we lost during this time.

In Judaism we recognize the power of our words, and as such we understand that our words have the ability to create and destroy. The Hebrew word for speech is דִּבּוּר, DiBbuR, which has the same root as the word דָּבָר, DaVaR, which means thing or object. Our dibbur creates a davar; the power of our speech creates objects of good and of not so good. It is for this reason that we avoid mentioning the names of diseases so that our words do not give strength and reignite the power of that disease. So too with the Covid-19 or SARS-CoV-2 virus, we will reference it as Corona, instead of it's regular title.

The name Corona is also synonymous with a Mexican beer that carries the same name. It is interesting to note that though the beer had the unfortunate providence of sharing a name with a deadly disease, their beer sales were up almost 50% for the year. Many wondered how that was possible given the terrible association with our current situation.



Marketing experts explain that confident brands such as Corona use shape, color, and imagery to instill an emotion into their products with the goal of connecting consumers to the evoked emotion, more than simply to a name by itself.

This analogy plays a major role in our seder and Pesach journey. One of our goals over the seder is to create an emotion that connects deeply to every one of us, that will allow us to walk away from our seders as changed individuals with a devotion to G-D in ways that we've never had before. The Pesach seder is much more than a name or a brand, it is an emotional experience that firmly roots our faith in G-D and our commitment to Judaism.

This haggadah supplement is intended to give each of us more insights into this year's unique Pesach experience. Each step or stage of the seder has its own deep messages, aside from the overarching theme of slavery to redemption that we are to experience when telling over our thousand year story.

With blessings of healing, health, safety and Geulah.

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KADESH קִדְּשׁ



Kadesh

The Haggadah begins with Kadesh, sanctification. The ability to sanctify, to make kiddush, has been imbued within Jews from time immemorial. Kadesh is the perspective we take prior to any act or event. It is the ability for us to take the mundane, the simple and to make it holy. Drinking a cup of wine is a basic act, an act that can lead to drunkenness, but we understand that if you are mekadesh, if you take the act and sanctify it, it can elevate your experience and your existence to a different level. We are no longer dealing with a simple meal with drinks, we are now becoming holier individuals who will be embarking on a spiritual journey, connecting ourselves to Hashem and everything in the spiritual universe.

We are also connecting ourselves to generations past and we are creating the link to the generations in the future. We may look back at previous sedarim (seders) as a nice memory, but in fact, each seder that we live through is a seder that strengthens the bond between our souls and the souls that are no longer here. And it opens the next link to the chain of the generations that are soon to come.

Kadesh is about sanctifying time as well as an event. It's sensing the inherent spirituality in time. Time is not a simple linear line of past, present and future, rather we see it as a guide or boundary to experiences in life. Like time, life can flow through us without finding a purpose, or it can be sanctified with focus on how we spend our time, and how we plan our daily life.



Most of us felt that this virus would come and go and life would just go back to normal. Lockdowns are still in effect in many areas with some cities, states and countries opening up, and others in a constant state of open-close flux. At this time last year people were frightened, worried and confused. This year more people are fed up than frightened, frustrated than worried, and bothered than confused.

Much of our energies have been focused on finding wrong with those who don't subscribe to our views. Anger at government officials that either put our lives at risk or shackle our ability to live freely. We have become a judgmental society at the core, with doubt in what is true and fear of the other.

There is so much outside noise of what is true and what is false, what is fake and what is real. Who should I trust and who should I fear. The noise is deafening to all of us. We need to stop and make kiddush. Remove ourselves from the outside world and connect to our inner sanctum, the place inside ourselves where we can connect to our personal holiness.

Questions to Ponder:

- What decisions in your life are you making without trusting your inner gut?
- To those you may disagree with, in what ways can you respect their views?
- What can you do over the next week to filter out the noise and focus on your personal sanctity?
- Whatever you are going through, aside from making kiddush, what's one way you can sanctify the moment you are in?





URCHATZ וּרְחִיצָה



Washing prior to a meal signifies our preparation of purity. Whereas Kadesh represents holiness, Urchatz represents the ability to purify ourselves. Kedusha (Kadesh) means to elevate, to separate, and to be lofty. Taharah (the results of Urchatz washing) means to take the physical steps to remove impurity from ourselves. In the Torah, many items or experiences are deemed pure (certain kosher animals, utensils immersed in a mikvah) and impure (non-kosher animals, deceased people). Those that are impure have a spiritual deficiency based on their current makeup. Some things can become pure, such as a person who purifies themselves, while other things cannot change their state (non-kosher animals, a deceased person). The recognition that each of us has the opportunity to become pure through our actions, brings us to a place of strength.



The events over the past year almost seemed like multi-year experiences packed into one 12 month period. In the US we may have already forgotten about the riots from many months ago, or the many Jews who suffered so greatly at the onset of the pandemic. And then there is the financial impact that has left so many people numb. The amount of crowd-funding campaigns for those that passed has grown exponentially.

But the world still goes on, and life's missions must still be fulfilled by every one of us. Our adaptability during times of adversity or rapid change is a necessary component to living a life with greater meaning and purpose.

The world of purity exists in objects as well as thought. Purification is not determined by what we believe to be pure, but what is inherently pure based on G-D's predetermined standards. Purity lives beyond basic human comprehension. In Judaism we often have to be able to accept that which is beyond our comprehension; things that our ever expanding minds find hard to grasp. Similar to this pandemic and the many events surrounding it, as much as we try to discover and understand, many things are hidden from us. It is our place to be able to investigate, yet at the same time accept the fact that we may not understand.

It is a humbling experience that can actually lead to purity of thought. Judgments and conspiracy theories can be put aside in order to live under G-D's control of the situations we experience. While we look for answers we can enter a mikvah of thought, a place to let go of all impure ideas and ideals and simply bring ourselves to the mindset that Hashem is the one in charge of it all.

Questions to ponder:

- Given the thoughts and emotions that I've focused on throughout this year, which of them would I like to be cleansed from when entering my spiritual mikvah?
- Now that a year has passed since this began, do I have greater clarity on my life's purpose or less clarity? What do I need to create a greater clarity for myself?





KARPAS כַּרְפָּס

Our first morsel of food has arrived. We've gone through our first process of purification with Urchatz. In Urchatz, no blessing was recited, as we are at the initial stages of purity. Now we recite the first blessing on food. The blessing we recite on the small potato/parsley/radish will also cover the Marror that we'll be eating later on during the seder. The blessing on the food that we're yearning for (because we haven't eaten in a while), will also cover the food that represents bitterness. We have the ability to make a blessing on the good, as well as the bad. At this point, we are looking forward to the good (potato) yet we have in mind for the bitter that will come. It's our ability to bless good and bad that makes us realize that everything has meaning and it is all from Hashem.

We also recognize the power of salt. Salt by itself it's not really edible and in fact can be corrosive. But salt also has a magical ability to bring out the flavors of other foods. That power which lies dormant inside is brought to the forefront through something which by itself is just not flavorful.



The potato (or other vegetable) represents a glimmer of hope, it's the produce of the effort done to the ground. This Karpas requires toil through planting, seeding, sowing, etc... many things that the average person no longer takes part in. Our toil consisted of getting in the car, parking, rolling the cart to the produce market, and putting the vegetable in our cart. And in the future, the toil may require hitting a button and watching a drone drop off a vegetable on our porch, or better yet, hitting a button and printing the vegetable. But toil will not change, it will only shift to something else. That's because we recognize that G-D told man that we will toil and must struggle to reach a higher purpose in life.

When we take our Karpas, we recognize toil that exists in all of our lives. There are micro daily struggles and macro life struggles that each of us go through. We can stop and say, "I recognize this struggle is part of G-D's will, and I accept it as something for me to grow with". Then we can take the produce of our struggle, and dip it into the salt water to bring out a better taste and make our toil even more flavorful.

Everyone struggled this past year. Take a moment to reflect on the events that we went through, but hold that vegetable and see that being at this seder now, is itself the beginning of hope in our continued journey of life.

Questions to Ponder:

- Can you remember and articulate 5 major struggles you experienced over this last year?
- Can you see some positive *produce* that was borne out from those struggles?
- Can you find something negative that you can also imagine praising or thanking Hashem for?





YACHATZ יָחַץ!

At this point we are introducing the matzah to our seder, The middle matzah is picked up and broken in two. The smaller part of it will be used for Hamotzie. The larger part will be hidden/stolen as the afikomen. Matzah which represents the duality of the seder, the experiences of slavery and affliction (lechem oni, poor man's bread) and the experiences of freedom (Onenim alav devarim Harbeh, bread on which we speak in freedom about our many experiences). Yet the part of true freedom, will only be eaten at the end. For now, it is hidden or stolen. Either we hide it and deprive it from others, or others steal it and deprive it from us.

There is a strong message at this point in the seder. That which is truly good for you, you may have to wait for. The ultimate goodness will be there, it will come. We must always have the yearning for good things, even if we can't attain them at this point in our lives. It is the knowledge that Hashem wants us to experience the ultimate goodness, Olam Haba, the world to come, which is hidden from us now, but we will get it in the future.

The word Yachatz is used in the Torah when discussing Yaakov's preparation for his fateful meeting with his brother Esav. At that moment, prior to his encounter, Yaakov splits his camp in half, Vayachatz es HaYiladim, and he split the encampment. This was done in case tragedy would befall one camp, the other camp would remain intact. It was a tenuous moment for our forefather and his family. As we take the next step further into the seder, a stage that leads us into the exile of the Jews, we recognize the fragility of dispersion and the pains of separation.



A year of Corona has passed, a year that seemed broken to us. Divisiveness has permeated our culture. Respect for other people's opposing views has unfortunately seen new lows, and understandably, everyone has someone else to blame for that. When comparing the generation of Noach's flood to the generation of the Dispersion (Tower of Babel), we are reminded of the comments by many commentators. The people of the flood were totally destroyed because of their total selfish nature that showed no care for one another. The people of the Dispersion were not destroyed, they were dispersed throughout the world, and that was because although they had negative intentions, they still worked together in a state of unity.

No matter how we've gotten through the current year, it's important for us to remember to work together, to find the ability to treat others with respect, even if we are being disrespected. Sometimes the high-road is a lonely road to be on, but when one takes it, they will realize that they are in a place of leadership, and they will have the ability to guide others. We must reawaken our focus on middos (proper character traits).

Even if we're here to be able to celebrate another Pesach together, we must also recognize that a piece of each of us has been broken in some way over this past year. There were many changes that we had to encounter, each taking us out of our comfort zone, without fully being repaired or healed. At this point it is ok to be more forgiving of ourselves for the things we haven't been able to get done or for the judgements we may have on ourselves.

Questions to ponder:

- Think about someone who you used to be friends with, but are no longer due to their different viewpoints on life, politics, business, sports, etc...What can you do to bring that friendship back?
- What particular middah (character trait) can you see yourself working on to become a better person?
- For whichever accomplishments you planned on achieving but didn't, which one can you be most forgiving of yourself?





MAGGID מגיד

Maggid is the primary purpose of the seder. The seder consists of many rituals and traditions, most of which deal with food. Once we reach Maggid, we now deal primarily with speech as we tell over the story of our becoming a nation.

As we retell the story of our slavery-freedom experience, the more we develop, the more we become enriched as individuals and as a people. As Jews we don't relive history, we are history. Everything that we do makes an impact on the world, in every moment in time. The seder that we sit through is not something that will be put in a history book somewhere, rather it will be re-experienced for generations. At the same time our seder experience will connect us to thousands of seders past.

Before you delve into the richness of Maggid, it would help to realize that we are all in need of a salvation of some sort. As we recall what our forefathers went through and the struggles they experienced, we should also realize that they cried out to Hashem (VaNitzak el Hashem Elokei...). When we get to that point of the hagaddah, we should feel our personal pain, and call out to Hashem with fervor.



Why is this year different from all other years? In all other years we looked forward to school, learning, shopping, and friends. But this year we all looked on Zoom screens, waiting in lines outside to shop, and closed ourselves indoors for inordinate amounts of time.

We focus our seder on showing how many things are different in order so the children should ask. Sometimes we are child who needs to ask. This year we can all ask, “What is going on here?!” Aside from pandemic, which brought death and sickness, it also brought economic uncertainty, and then riots, and more riots, political instability good old fashioned anti-semitism.

Much is transforming around us especially in areas that go against true Torah ideals. How does a galus (exile) oriented Jew deal with the changes that infiltrate our holy society and permeate into our communal life?

Maggid is the answer to the progressive, avant-garde changes that surround us. Maggid is the telling over of the story of our exile. It is the re-experiencing of the past, not as a story, but as a foundation that we build our lives upon. As the Haggadah states, “Whoever continues to expand on the story of Exodus is enriched”. The one that expounds more about our history, and recognizes it as a blueprint for the lives we live today, will be a changed person. That person will not be swayed by the ever flowing winds of change, because the foundation of their life is a bedrock of faith that has been built for the last 3000 years.

Questions to Ponder:

- In ten years from now, if someone were to ask you what kept your faith strong during these times, What would you answer them?
- Which part of Maggid can you focus on to give you strength during these tumultuous times?
- What meaningful story or stories would you like to tell over to the next generation who didn't experience this pandemic?





RACHTZAH

רחצה



The law of washing our hands before bread has its roots based on the vision of a better future. During Temple times, a portion of our food (challah) is separated and set aside to be given over to a Kohen. The kohen must remain in a state of spiritual purity in order to consume that food. As a preparation for the future times when the third Temple will be built, King Solomon established the law to wash our hands prior to eating bread, to ensure that we will all be accustomed to the laws of purity when that moment arrives. To have a mitzvah that was instituted thousands of years ago (according to most interpretations) for something that will only happen millenia later, is what reminds us constantly to be forward thinking and envisioning ourselves as part of a greater future, one that we can't fully fathom at the present time.

After the washing, we remain silent, until the hamotzie blessing is recited and a portion of the food is swallowed. In that moment of silence, we recognize that the act of eating that we are about to commence is not simply something done to fulfill our desires; the moment of silence distinguishes us from mere animals who eat for sustenance and pleasure. We view it as a physical act with spiritual associations, elevating our meal as if we are dining with Hashem at our table.

It is interesting to note, that the moments of deep conversation, and verbal discussions of our plight and deliverance are immediately followed by a sudden silence, a silence that enables us to process all of that which was spoken.



Face Masks in bulk can be gotten at bargain basement prices. If there's something we missed during our quarantining it's the ability to connect fully to someone else. Even when we were in person a mask shielded our face, the part that expresses our communication so vividly.

Now as many are able to see each other in person, a smile is one of the most necessary components of rebuilding our relationships. During that moment of rachtzah, as you wait to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah, think about your genuine smile. Whether you are with someone else or alone, make that big smile shine across your face, smile at others and smile at life.

We can also take a moment to recognize that we are alive, that we have survived. We have more opportunities to fulfill G-D's word and to become sanctified with mitzvah observance. Amidst all that is happening G-D has willed it for us to be here at this time and to carry the legacy of the Jewish people.

Questions to Ponder:

- Where can you add more meaningful silence to your life?
- Think about a moment when someone's smile livened up your life, how can you thank them for that moment?
- Aside from anticipating a life without Corona, what else can you yearn for a better tomorrow?





MOTZIE MATZAH מוציא מצה



The food is finally arriving, which is great, because we want to be yearning for matzah at this point. There are two mitzvos associated with this stage, the mitzvah of the reciting of Hamotize on bread (מוציא) and the unique mitzvah of Matzah specific to seder night.

Yet there is another meaning to the title, that motzie matzah is to ‘bring out the matzah’, not simply to eat the matzah, rather to bring out the raw essence of who we are. It is quoted in the name of the Vilna Gaon, that if a person does not work hard to work on their middos (character development), there is no purpose to his life. Matzah is the basis, the foundation of simplicity, with nothing added, it represents the raw middos of a person.

The matzah we eat is called in kabbalah as “Michlah DHeimnusa”, food of faith. It is with this matzah that our faith in G-D is developed further. Rav Avraham Pam zt”l points out that when a person has faith in G-D they are called a maamin, a believer. But the tense of the word actually shows that it means one who instills faith in others. When a person believes in G-D, they are instilling that faith in others around them.



Emotions have been running high over this past year. People have been getting frustrated much more easily. Many marriages have struggled, sometimes the reason being that people are spending too much time together. As much as we value relationships, we also recognize the need to grow on our own. To grow within ourselves and to bring out the best of ourselves is a hallmark of mussar (self improvement) and chassidus. This growth is the raw essence of who we are.

It is a healing experience to be connected to ourselves through being alone, albeit in small increments. Being together all the time will often make it difficult for a person to connect inward to their soul. It's a struggle for many, as the moment they are alone they turn to their phones and screens or even to newspapers and books. They escape to nowhere, running away from the prison they call themselves. With short moments of deep breathing and personal appreciation, one can transform their prison into their own paradise.

Keep in mind, if you work on your character, even for a mere moment a day, that effort will build long term results. And more than the results for yourself, it will have a lasting effect on people around you as well.

Questions to Ponder:

- Which character trait is the easiest one for me to work on?
- What lessons can I learn from the forced solitude and separation that so many must experience during this time?
- Are there scenarios or incidents in my life where I used societal connectedness for improper purposes?





MAROR מרור



Unlike matzah, the requirement to eat maror has taste as a necessity. If someone can't taste matzah, they can still fulfill their obligation, not so with maror. Maror requires us to taste some element of bitterness, in order to connect to the bitterness of our ancestors' plight. Much of the seder is an experiential event, and the experiences create impressions in our minds that last and help reinforce the messages that we bring forth. Messages of faith during difficult times, that the hardships in life are the iron crucible which transform us into people of resilience and commitment.

Maror is not eaten while leaning, because there is no freedom in maror. The freedom will be experienced when we eat it in the korech wrap/sandwich. Only when we eat the maror with the matzah (and korban Pesach) together, do we appreciate the hardships that we went through. Maror alone is just bitter. It can only be uplifted through faith.

When comparing maror to Matzah and the korban Pesach (paschal lamb), all three being Biblical requirements to eat during Temple times, we note a distinction. The korban Pesach and matzah were actual foods that were eaten in Egypt, but the maror is symbolic of bitterness as it wasn't eaten in Egypt. Bitterness can not be recreated, we can attempt to commemorate it but we can't recreate it.



In Judaism, when a Torah giant is taken from this world, the Jewish people lose an element of Divine protection, similar to when the Jewish people lost the well, the clouds of glory and the manna when Miriam, Aharon and Moshe died. Though we may not detect it, we too have lost a measure of Divine protection with the loss of so many Torah giants during this pandemic.

What can we do to get back that Divine protection? What is within our power is the ability to respect and appreciate the Torah leaders that we have. To show Kavod Hatorah (honor and reverence to the Torah) means to be in awe of our Torah leaders no matter how great or small they may be.

Though we've become scattered in tents and backyard minyanim, we can now start coming back and show honor to our communal rabbis and help rebuild our shuls again by attendance alone. And while we are there, we can work to forge a stronger bond with our local Rabbi and Rebbetzin who will help lead us to a higher spiritual life.

Questions to Ponder:

- Think about the bitterness that past generations went through, and the bitterness you are going through right now. What of your experiences can you compare to theirs?
- What can you do to mourn or recognize the loss of great spiritual giants in our time?
- Can you remember a time when you felt Divine Protection?





KORECH כורֶךְ



The word Korech means to wrap, to encircle. The sandwich term was given when we couldn't figure out how to wrap the hard flatbread matzah. Soft matzah that is found in many Sefardic communities surely makes the korech word much more applicable.

Korech is the combination of matzah and maror, and when the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt, the paschal offering as well, in fulfillment of the verse **עַל מַצּוֹת וּמְרֹרִים יֹאכְלוּהוּ**, “you shall it eat (the sacrifice) with the matzah and maror together”. When we combine all of life's experiences together, the hardships and salvations, we are able to create a different, more valued meaning for our lives. Every wrap or sandwich combines tastes from different items with different flavors to create a new taste creation. If there's too much of one item, it may dominate and overpower the flavors of the other foods. The life sandwich is the same. If focus is put on one type of experience, it will overpower all the others. We need to decide what type of experiences we want to focus on in order to taste that flavor regularly.

When we eat our Korech wrap we mention the zecheir L'Mikdash K'Hillel - the way Hillel ate it, commemorating the way it was eaten during Temple times. It would be helpful to imagine, and even close our eyes, while we are leaning and chewing, that we are sitting near the Beis Hamikdash eating our meal exactly the way it was prescribed to us, with a smile on our faces.



Quarantining for long periods of time was like the Korech sandwich for many of us, but without the relish. We learned to live with MO (of FOMO significance) especially if you were locked down while others were out together. We also found out how flexible or inflexible we were during this experience. How malleable we were during sudden changes in school, work, shopping and the like, determined whether we were like the bendable sefardic matzah or flat and breakable like the standard matzah. It's important to know our temperament going forward for other areas of life. And like the matzah, both of which are kosher to use at the seder, each of our flexibility temperaments are acceptable as well.

We have heard many phrases throughout this year, some resonated with us and others very much did not. "We're in this together", "We'll get through this", "In an abundance of caution", "You're on Mute", Can everyone please mute themselves". These phrases, along with the harrowing experiences are going to be part of a larger memory block for us. As time passes, we hope that they can just be something that we add to our life's journey to find ways to see G-D's hand in everything and to be thankful to tell it over. Make it a sandwich, put the bitter in with the sweet, let it be part of one full memory where all we see is G-D's Divine providence.

Questions to Ponder:

- Knowing my flexibility temperament, how can I use it to my advantage in future situations?
- Take a negative memory from a past experience. What positive memory can I add to make it a more palpable memory?
- Is there someone I know who is struggling and needs help in adding a positive reframe to help them deal with a negative past experience?





SHULCHAN ORECH שלחן עור



Though we might have expected the meal to be an accompaniment to the rest of the seder, it is actually one of the stages itself. It is at this point when we can truly display our freedom, because the word חירות, the word that we loosely translate into freedom, is actually described as royalty. The finest foods with the finest dining ware display our royal status as lofty individuals. The meal must solidify the actions of our previous nine stages, and develop a fullness of gratitude that will carry us through the next four stages of our royal experience.

Our tables are considered a mizbeiach, an alter, because of the poor that we invite over to our homes. Having opportunities to invite the less fortunate to our meals surely enhances our overall purpose and spiritual bank accounts. On the other hand, having people we don't know well, even if they're fortunate, promotes good will and meaningful connections.



Some Seders are coming back to normal. Others are still sparse or totally lonely. But what makes a seder a meal of royalty? It is the fact that we recognize our purpose at the seder, celebrating our becoming a holy nation and living a life of loftiness above all.

The Vilna Gaon counted 64 mitzvos at the seder, signifying that our royalty status is predicated on our fulfillment of G-D's will. A wedding meal or meal at a circumcision is a mitzvah, but it isn't called a meal of royalty. For the next mitzvah that we are about to do, we can add another layer of intent. Not only am I fulfilling G-D's will, I'm also upholding the glory of the position that I represent, a member of the kingdom of Kohanim and the royal holy nation.

We try to follow our traditions, keeping within the confines of halacha, while trying to make every experience meaningful. Our status as being part of the Royal Family requires us to look to our leaders for halachic guidance in all aspects of life. They are our guiding light and our model citizens to help us elevate our status as the kingdom of Kohanim. While we may look at these great leaders and assume their piety and loftiness is solely for giants, on a night like tonight we can certainly strive to reach our own personal greatness.

Questions to Ponder:

- Now that we can start having guests, our tables must become a mizbeiach, once again. When I come out of this experience, who is it that is needy of means or spirit, that I can invite to my table?
- Who are rabbinic leaders that I can try to reach out to more to develop a relationship with?
- What can I do to add more Jewish Royalty to my life?





TZAFUN

צפון

The eating of the afikoman, which like the korban Pesach, is to be eaten at satiety (נֹאכֵל עַל הַשׁוֹבֵעַ) , saving this food for last. Our Afkioman tastes the same as our matzah, because we don't have a korban Pesach. Eating it, requires a hopeful sentiment and a mind with a good imagination. After eating so much matzah, we have a lavish meal and then again, we are brought more matzah. This matzah, though it has a familiar taste, is symbolically different. It is now eaten to keep the flavor of matzah on our taste buds, associating a physical experience with an emotional event.

According to those commentaries that this matzah represents the missing korban Pesach (others say its the fulfillment of matzah), we may wonder why use matzah to fulfill this requirement, when matzah already has a place at the seder. One answer given is that our tzafun is still somewhat hidden. We are still in exile, and our freedom as a holy nation with our mission fulfilled, is not fully actualized. True freedom will be realized when we are able to serve G-D with our rebuilt Beis HaMikdash in our holy land. Therefore the matzah, as a sign of freedom is still reminiscent as a sign of slavery.

The hidden matzah has now been revealed, as if to tell us that we have been granted a right to look beyond our present and look with visionary eyes towards a better future. A future of greater clarity of Hashem, and greater commitment to our faith.



When will this end? Each time an end is in sight, there's another ruling that's laden with abundance of caution. 14 day quarantines, 10 day quarantines, double masks, masking indoors and outdoors, mask without a vaccine, mask with a vaccine. We are all required to anticipate Geulah (redemption) on a daily basis, so we are used to being hopeful. As Jews we have had our share of failed redemptions but that doesn't stop us from yearning. Whenever the end of this experience does happen, we will certainly look back to ask the why question. Why was this brought upon the world, and why did the Jews need to suffer so much. It's the exile question that comes back again.

There's so much hidden from our lives that we don't understand, and we all would like to experience personal redemptions for all of our needs. If there's one thing this pandemic taught us, it's that we collectively want this pandemic to end, and we collectively want to get back to our normal lives. That is an enlightening thought. In past experiences when Jews suffered, they suffered in the lands they were guests in. But Jews in other lands who were not suffering and didn't know of the Jews experiencing troubles, did not have thoughts of a collective redemption. True, we say the prayers for ultimate redemption multiple times a day, but to have it in the forefront of our mind, it's not always there, especially when exile is so good.

But now, with the struggles the entire world is going through, we as Jews have gotten a taste of an 'exile' that we would all like to be saved from. This should bring us to the next steps of all Jews collectively yearning for the ultimate geulah (redemption).

Questions to Ponder:

- When thinking about a future time, what type of Geulah can I wish for?
- Can I list out my ideal day, one where every hour is fully accounted for?





BARECH



The third cup is over *Bentching*, aka *Birkas HaMazon* (Grace after Meals). In Talmudic times, it was normal for an individual to close *Birkas Hamazon* with a blessing on a cup of wine. Since *Birkas HaMazon* is a biblical mitzvah, reciting a blessing over the wine following, made the cup a *kos shel bracha*, a cup in which a mitzvah is recited over it. Though using a cup of wine to close *bentching* is only done nowadays when there is a group of three or more men (some use it only when there are ten), the seder is a time when we can enter back to Talmudic and Mishnaic times.

Bentching is a wonderful catchall for thanks. We start by thanking Hashem for the food that we have eaten, then we are thankful for the land of Israel, followed by Yerushalayim and finally we thank Hashem for the hidden daily miracles, which are included in the blessing of *HaTov V'HaMeitiv*. *Bentching* is unfortunately looked at as a burden for many, because the natural tendency is to move on to other things once eating has finished. It is at the conclusion of a meal where pausing to be thankful for all of the gifts in life is apropos. When we're full and our needs are met, we must take stock of the kindness and goodness that Hashem has given us.



The message of simplicity was brought back into our lives during the pandemic. Going for walks became the latest craze, and walking with family members became the thing to do. Restaurants and theaters were closed, going to the grocery was no longer a few minute trip as waiting on line took longer than shopping. We found ourselves going back in time to a simpler way of life. It was almost as if our lives of technology and advancement were put on a brief hold so we could realign with what is truly important to us.

Snowballs of thanks should be rolling off our lips. Similar to bentsching, we should be saying thanks for one thing, and letting that thanks snowball into a litany of thanks for the many things that are going well for us right now.

Questions to Ponder:

- How can I bring the holiness of Israel into the forefront of my mind?
- What area of simplicity would I like to incorporate back into my life?
- Would I be willing to try a Thankful game with others by going around the room and having each person mention something they are thankful for, and repeating and repeating again?





HALLEL

הלל



הלל Hallel

The prayer of Hallel was specifically split into two parts in the haggadah. The first part, describing our salvation from Egypt (which is why it is called Hallel HaMitzri), is said before our meal. The second half, full of general praise, is recited after our meal. Some suggest that it is done this way in order to have the hallel recited over the Pesach offering (before and after eating it).

Over each of these stages of the seder we have built a reliance on Hashem and a recognition that He is in charge of every aspect of our lives. The praises we recite are there for us to increase the value of Hashem in our eyes, and to imbue within ourselves the ultimate devotion we need to have for Him. In the Hallel we mention that all the good we have comes from Hashem, and that we are still a broken people who can only survive on Hashem's word (אֲנַחְנוּ ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא).

The Vilna Gaon explains that the Hallel before the meal is the Hallel that relates to the Egyptian salvation that brought us to nationhood. But the Hallel that is after the meal is about requests for our own personal salvation. According to the Vilna Gaon, that is why we begin Hallel with the paragraph of "Shefoch Chamascha", Pour your wrath on our enemies. Because now it's personal, now we want salvation from our personal troubles.



As we get to the end of the seder, with one last cup to go, we must strengthen ourselves to envision a time when we will be praising G-D over and over for the salvation from this experience. What we do see is that things are happening in stages, which sometimes causes us to forget how bad our struggles were, and sometimes leads to us not being grateful enough.

Sometimes it's also hard to be grateful to G-D when we feel that it's not G-D that's doing things to us, but the government or other people that are causing hardships to us. "Those people" are the spreaders, or "those people" are the ones causing unnecessary economic hardships. We expect G-D to be the one who causes the 'real problems' and gives 'miraculous salvations'. But in fact it is G-D who enables and causes "those people" to 'create' those hardships and it is G-D who will bring the salvations from "those people".

It's time for us to realize that Hashem controls all, and we need to be in "2nd half of Hallel" mode. Let us focus on what subtle positive changes have already happened; quarantine ending, less masking, stores opening, dining available, vaccine availability, etc... The lessening of restrictions is truly a reason to praise G-D for the kindnesses that He is bestowing upon us this season.

There's still more to pray for. Let us focus on Hashem as the giver of all, and focus on our needs during heartfelt prayer.

Questions to Ponder:

- Over this Pandemic, what specific thing or experience has led you to have greater praise to G-D?
- You have major needs, both personal & communal. What five things do you need salvation from this year?
- Can you come up with ten things to be thankful for as the pandemic reaches year two?





NIRTZAH נִרְצָה



Everything has been completed, We've gone through all the stages of the seder, followed the rituals and expanded on our slavery and salvation. We've eaten, we've created the memory to last, and we've praised Hashem and recognized that He's in charge of it all. What more is needed?

Nirtzah is the culmination, it's when everyone else has left the party, and we stay just a little bit longer to show our love. Now is when we feel a true bond with Hashem, not out of obligation, but the desire to stay in His presence a little bit longer. Nirtzah is the afikoman of praise. The eating of the Afikoman keeps the flavor of matzah in our mouths, and the singing of the songs at Nirtzah, keeps the 'flavor' of our relationship with Hashem on our minds and in our hearts.

Nirtzah comes from the word נִרְצָה, to be desirous of us. It is not only our will that we get close to Hashem, it is His will to be close to us during this time. A relationship is built when both parties feel the connection to one another. It is a time when we take this opportunity to feel Hashem's true love for His people.



Early on during the Pandemic many felt that ‘this was it, Mashiach has to come’. As time went on, and things began to settle down, the yearnings for Mashiach were no longer on the chats and social networks. Like the end of the seder, let’s bring the feelings of closeness back. Only this time, let’s not do it from a place of fear, let’s do it from a place of love and yearning.

Perhaps with our commitment and showing of love, Hashem will share with us the innermost secrets of our world and purpose. We can work on our sense of pride as Jews, and feel special to be in Hashem’s inner circle.

We pray that the end of the pandemic and all bad that came with it, will be a great salvation for all of the Jewish people. We pray that this connection we have with Hashem will open up the Heavenly gates and bring our ultimate redemption.

לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה

Questions to Ponder:

- If I look at my religious observances and actions, what part of my spiritual life can be enhanced if I choose to just stay a little bit longer?
- If Mashiach were to come tomorrow, what would be the first thing I would do to celebrate?
- What experiences of life have led me to feel closer to G-D?

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