

Sparks

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Wonder Bread

(excerpt from Inviting G-d In)

During the seven days of Passover we are required to eat only *matza*—unleavened bread that looks somewhat like a cracker and is made of just water and flour.

The *matza* reminds us that our ancestors were slaves to the Egyptians who treated them as if they were subhuman and fed them brittle and tasteless bread. The *matza* is, therefore, referred to as the “bread of affliction.” However, *matza* also reminds us of how our ancestors left Egypt in an astounding record time, faster than it takes dough to rise. How can *matza* be both a sign of painful affliction and joyous freedom?

The *Zohar* refers to *matza* as the “bread of faith.” In other words, when we eat *matza*, we are internalizing the message of faith that it embodies. That message is: Know that even if you hit rock bottom and feel far and alienated from G-d, G-d is right there to help you and free you from your enslavements, addictions and obsessions. Even when you’ve been trapped in your personal Egypt for years, and it seems that it will take years to get out, know that, as the Psalmist put it, “the salvation of G-d is within the blink of an eye.”

Although *matza* is the bread of affliction and exile, in a blink of an eye, it can become the bread of freedom and redemption. Revolutionary transformation is available to us all, as long as we believe it can happen. The paradoxical symbolism of the *matza* teaches us that G-d Himself, at any moment, can create a miracle. Even if we reach the bottom, we should never despair or give up. *Matza*, the “bread of faith,” is an antidote to despair and nurtures within in us faith and hope.

The Exodus from Egypt assures us that if the Israelites could get out of Egypt, then we, too, can get out of any situation. Certainly, G-d could have orchestrated the Israelites’ liberation differently—He could have arranged for them to earn their freedom through some worthy deed. However, He did precisely the opposite. He brought them out without merit so as to instill forever within us the confidence that His love is unconditional. Therefore, no matter how low any of us may fall, we should never despair.

The paradoxical symbolism of the *matza* also teaches us that, in the very bitterness of affliction and exile, lies the sweetness of freedom and redemption. The great Hassidic Master, **Rabbi Nachman of Breslav**, taught, “*Being far from G-d itself is for the purpose of coming close...the downfall can be transformed into a great ascent.*”

It all depends on the way you look at it. The *matza* is basically tasteless. But, if you want, you can taste the freedom and redemption that lies at the core of affliction and exile.

Perhaps this is the meaning of G-d’s response to Abraham when he requested a sign that the land of Israel would be an eternal inheritance for him and his descendents. G-d

showed him the future history of exile. At that moment, Abraham experienced a great fear. But G-d comforted him saying, “Know that your offspring will be strangers in a strange land. There, they will be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years. [But] also the nation that will afflict them I will judge, and your children will leave with great wealth.” In other words, although your offspring will endure much suffering, they will survive and even profit from it.

So don't worry, don't lose faith. Even the darkest hours are the very seeds of growth, transformation, renewal and redemption.

Rav Nachman of Breslav also taught, *“Sometimes when you want to come close to G-d, you encounter new and even greater obstacles than before. However, don't let that discourage you. G-d is only challenging you, so you will try even harder and thereby come even closer. It's really all for the best.”*

The **Sfat Emes**, another great Hassidic Master, taught that on Passover we can achieve a huge leap forward in our spiritual evolution. In other words, although in general, great feats take much time, on Passover, we can move at a pace that transcends the limitations of time.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzraim*, which also translates as “narrowness.” Indeed, Egypt represented the deification of the narrow confines and limitations of nature, time and space. To leave Egypt also meant to leave this narrow and confining attitude. It meant leaving the world of nature, governed by physical laws and subject to logic based on what only the physical senses can perceive, in order to cross-over into a new spiritual worldview—the world without limitations, the world of unconditional love.

Happy Birthday

Passover is the birthday of the nation of Israel. It is a time to remember that we are children of G-d, born with an innate G-dliness. Indeed, our relationship to G-d is similar to that of a child to a parent.

The Torah refers to the people of Israel as the “firstborn child” of G-d. This is because they were the first nation in history to believe that G-d is like a loving parent and they are His beloved children. And that His love is unconditional and forever.

May everyone in the world realize that they, too, are the beloved children of G-d.

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