



Dvar Torah for the Pesach Seder

Two on Maror

I. Based on Likutey Moharan II, Lesson #23

If one swallows the maror [without chewing it] he has not fulfilled the mitzvah, for it is necessary to taste the bitterness. Dip it in the charoset and shake it off (Orach Chaim 475:3).

As we wrote a few years back, the Seder, like Real Life, is a process. And just as in Real Life, experiencing bitter pain is a necessary part of the process. A Seder without maror is not a Seder. A Seder that does not progress beyond maror is also not a Seder.

Pain is an integral part of Real Life. Too often we try to avoid it or deny it. That's no way to live, says Rebbe Nachman. We have to look our pain squarely in the eye and conquer it, so that our triumph over it becomes a source of cheer.

To have a prayer of overcoming your pain, Rebbe Nachman teaches that you have to face it when you are strong enough to do so. You need to be at least a wee bit happy with something, with (almost) anything. (It's gotta be kosher.) If you don't have any immediately available, borrow some from the past or from the future. It doesn't have to be your own personal happiness; it's OK if you borrow some from a friend. If you can't muster up even that teensy bit, then at least hang around with people who are genuinely cheerful. They're bound to schlep you into their happiness.

Once you got the happiness, you're ready to "taste the maror". Experiencing bitterness is a growing experience, a coming-closer-to-God experience. Chew on it. Try to understand its specific purpose, namely which latent strength of yours God is trying to elicit, and how it's meant to be manifested.

We do eat maror at the Seder, but not straight. For most it would be too overwhelming. Dip the bitter maror into the charoset, the sweet mixture of apples, cinnamon and wine. Then shake off the charoset. Let the residue of its pleasantness give you the strength and insight to unlock the lessons of bitter pain as you slowly masticate your maror. Let the resulting awareness accompany you into Shulchan Orakh, the meal, so Real Life can be the delicious spread it's supposed to be.

II. Based on Likutey Halakhot, Pesach 7:9–13

Maror is a reminder of how the Egyptians used to embitter our life. And darn it, they still do. No, not the current residents of Cairo or those little hieroglyphic figures with the whips. The "Egyptians" are those who confuse us with all sorts of distractions and bad advice. Sometimes the number they work on us makes one wonder if we ever really got out of Egypt at all!

We did. We really did. We left and made it all the way to Sinai where we got not merely good advice, but the best advice. As long as we maintained our faith we were able to access the mitzvah-advice the Torah provides. But as we began to lose faith, doubting ever so slightly the eternity of our connection with God, Sinai began to become surrounded by nasty, poisonous "Egyptian" bosses.

Some of them are from the Contention Brigade; others form the Hoard of Doubts and the Legion of Misunderstood. Strife in our community, second thoughts about the Revelation at Sinai (or other basics of Jewish faith), and simple confusion as to the meaning and import of what the Torah is saying, each deepen and perpetuate the exile.

As we all know, each exodus begins with one step. Surprisingly -- and thankfully -- there is an easy first step, the mitzvah of tzitzit. Rebbe Nachman teaches that a person is "married" to anyone from whom he takes advice. If those poisonous "Egyptian" bosses subvert our thinking -- are our advice givers -- we are subservient to them.

To "divorce" ourselves from them we need the higher level of inter-personal morality that tzitzit can provide.

The higher level of morality, an active protest to an "Egyptian" lifestyle, divorces us from "Egyptian" advice and allows us to again "marry" the Torah.

Reb Noson "dissects" the charoset, building on the Arizal's linking of charoset to Ruth, King David's great-grandmother. The sweet charoset can have the same impact as tzitzit, strengthen our inter-personal modesty and helping us to eliminate the bitterness of bad "Egyptian" advice: disaccord, unbelief and muddled thinking.

a kosher und afreilekhen Pesach!

chag kosher v'sameach!

A kosher and festive Passover!

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