



## FREEDOM and LETTING GO of CONTROL

What does Freedom look like? When does a transforming process of freedom involve the pursuit of more control in our lives, and the tightening of the reins of our grasp on our existence? And when does the pursuit of real freedom depend on seeking less control?

Seven insights from the Hagada and meaningful questions to ponder for seder night mirror the movement from slavery to freedom in our individual and international lives today.

### 1. Rav Soloveitchik - Festival of Freedom - p. 58 - Sudden Redemption

In the Hagada ( based on **Mishna Pesachim 10:5**) R' Gamliel interprets the meaning of matza as follows:

This matza – why do we eat it? Because our ancestors' dough did not have time to become leavened before the King of kings, the Holy One blessed be He, **appeared and redeemed** them [**suddenly**]...because they were thrust out of Egypt [**suddenly**]...and could not tarry nor had they prepared for themselves food for the way...(Shemot 12:39).

In my opinion R' Gamliel wanted to say that genuine *ge'ula*, genuine redemption, always comes suddenly, unexpectedly, at a time when people are ready to give up hope.

Sometimes historical situations continue to deteriorate; people pray and cry, begins for mercy – but there is no answer to their prayer, only silence. At that moment, when the crisis reaches its maximum and threatens the very existence of the community, when people begin to give up, the *ge'ula* suddenly comes and takes them out of the land of affliction. It comes in the middle of the night and knocks on the door when no one expects it, when everybody is skeptical about it, when everybody laughs off the possibility of redemption. ...

The redemption from Egypt consisted not only of the fact that our ancestors went from slavery to freedom, but more important, that this redemption and the revelation of the Almighty were a **surprise** to them.

p. 62 Matza symbolizes not only *g'eula*, liberty at a political and personal level, but also confrontation with God, or revelation. This connection is made explicitly in the hagada...that the Holy One **appeared** and redeemed them.

The **transition** from slavery to freedom, synonymous with **the meeting of God by [humans]**, is represented by the **matza**.

### 2. Is my fear a paralyzing fear, or a catalyzing fear?

**Rabbi Dov Zinger** is an Israeli educator, spiritual thinker, writer and author of a brief and beautiful new book all about preparing for prayer. He was the first person I knew who was very very sick in the hospital with Covid last year. He did a very brave thing. He made a short video of himself that was shown on national news about dealing with fear.



### אל תקרי היסטריה אלא אסתריה

Fear is a good thing. One of the constant mitzvot is 'to fear always'. R' Nachman: There are many types of fear. There is fear that protects us from tigers, and helps us to move away from danger, and there is fear that debilitates us.

R' Nachman said: **Raise the fear to its source.**

Rabbi Dov Zinger invited his listeners to do a writing exercise, and to ask themselves: What do I fear during this time? This was the beginning of the Covid 19 outbreak when people were feeling shaky with fear.

Rabbi Zinger was apparently afraid of his health deteriorating. Bravely he made the following suggestions to ponder:

If I am afraid of not being any longer, what is it about my life that I want to be here for?

What we fear shows us what is precious to us, what we love.

Maybe I'm not finished with my work in the world, I have more to give to the world. I want to identify what that is so I can get to work on it.

Maybe I haven't yet found life to be as meaningful. My fear shows me how much I want to find meaning in my life.

Maybe I haven't spent enough time with people I love. What in my life are distractions, and what do I want to do and who do I want to spend time with, who is truly precious to me?

### 3. Rav Soloveitchik – Festival of Freedom p. 63

#### Heroic childhood and heroic adulthood

A two-phase way leads to God... *katnut hamohin*, denoting naivete and absolute trust, **heroic childhood**, and the second one... *gadlut hamohin*, **heroic adulthood**, the awakening to the illuminative experience of the God-man encounter.

In the first stage, *katnut hamohin*, matza is called 'food of faith'. This term is endowed with both historical and metaphysical symbolism. One of the greatest wonders of the exodus is the indomitable faith that the Israelites... exhibited by departing from a civilized land, where their physical sustenance was assured, even though they were enslaved, into an arid desert. The prophet, centuries later, exclaimed, "I remember in your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, when you walked after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Jeremiah 2:2)

**Matza symbolizes this trust, boundless and unqualified, which the Jews placed in God on that night in Egypt. Matza represents an act of surrender and unconditional commitment to God**, blind obedience to Him and compliance with his word. This faith, which expressed itself in their decision to follow Moses, defied all rational standards. The act of believing bordered on the paradoxical, since it was in outright opposition to all practical considerations. **To believe means**



**to know something with understanding, to be convinced about something which is not subject to proof and substantiation. It is the naïve approach of the child, a commitment based not on a rationally explicable reason, but on an inner, intuitive, emotional, inexpressible experience.**

Without any critical thinking or meditating, the child feels at one with the parents; they are a triple being. This feeling can be explained in neither utilitarian nor abstract terms, since the child does not think in such categories. It is a basic reality which reveals itself to him in spite of his tender age and mind.

Yet this knowledge dominates not only the child, incapable of critical scrutiny and skeptical analysis, but even the grown up person, who may view the relationship in a detached manner and try to rationalize his experience. Yet the adult, who, in his pride and haughtiness as an intellectual being, disowns a relationship inherited from his childhood days, which is simply felt rather than clearly understood, and substitutes for this naive commitment an intelligent relationship based on gratitude, charity, and other clearly defined rational values, knocks the bottom out of the whole parent-child union. Only in the primordial unity awareness may one find the strength of the relationship.

CONT>...

#### 4. Matza Meditation

This is original and open to new adaptations every year. Inspired by Michael Kagan's Holistic Haggadah p. 62-64 and by observing my own children and grandchildren. I do this meditation with each bite, while silently eating the first piece of matza at the Seder. I identify a part of myself in all of the four children - ascending developmentally and then descending with depth - intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. What transpires through identifying with each of the four children?

1. **אינו יודע לשאול – The silent child:** Hand a toddler a piece of matzah at the seder. They will bite it, poke it, crumble it, and scatter it all over the table and floor. They won't have questions about it. They may not end up eating it, but they will definitely **experience it with all their senses**. With this bite of matza, I imagine little me when I was a toddler.

2. **תם – The simple child:** Years later, this young child is excited to be eating matzah. Why? Simple - because we were saved from Egypt and didn't have time for our bread to rise! With this bite of matza, I slip into **imagining** myself as a child on that journey. The sounds and sights and smells of masses of people around me, leaving slavery for a promised land. Because we were slaves and now we are free. I recall myself, and **how accepting I was of what my elders told me**, when I was in elementary school.

3. **רשע – The sassy child:** During their rebellious or cynical phase, the child says, Why do we have to eat this whole matzah with nothing on it? They were slaves in Egypt, but I'm a free person. **No one is going to tell me what to think**, what to say, what to wear or what to eat. I'll eat the matza because there's nothing better on the table, but it feels more like child play than something cool teenagers honestly care much about. That was also me, in high school.



4. **חכם – The sophisticated child:** Gaining maturity and perspective, the same child now takes the task with seriousness, asking for details: How much do we need to eat? How do R' Kook, R' Soloveitchik, and R' Nachman relate to eating the matza as a symbolic gesture on this night? How do they differ and disagree about the symbol of Matza? With whose ideas do I identify? The matza is so simple, but the ideas are complex. That was also me, in college. Stuck in my head. Wanting to hear perspectives I could relate to. And **a bit caught up in the competitive ego centered desire to be seen by others as an intellectual, sophisticated and learned person.**

**Having attained the status of the ‘wise child’, we begin our “descent”, as it were, revisiting our own adult “inner voice” of each child.**

4. **חכם - Inspired to transmit tradition:** With this bite of matza, I ask myself – to what extent do I seek knowledge for the purpose of intellectual show, and to what extent do I seek knowledge in order to grow my commitment to our tradition and to the values it champions? I eat this bite of Matza with the **passion of one who wants to understand our evolving traditions more deeply**, with more nuance, in order to make connections, in order to give texture and detail to my beliefs and values, because I want to be among those who are dedicated to the job of **transmitting and preserving this knowledge forever.**

3. **רשע – Compassionate toward contrary feelings:** With this bite of matza I admit that even though I participate in Jewish life, **I don't find meaning automatically, year after year, in our traditions unless I seek out new relevant connections to them.** With this bite of matza, I admit to myself that I still have questions about the transmission of our tradition and why we do – and don't - do what we do, for which **I have not yet discovered compelling answers.** I discover empathy for others who are struggling, because a part of me is also authentically struggling.

2. **תם –Affirming the historicity of our unbroken tradition -** With this bite of matza, I am excited, like a child, to be experiencing in this moment of eating matza. I identify with our story - that we truly were saved from the miserable experiences of bondage by the very same God of infinite power and love Who created the world. I eat this bite with a sense of wholeness, without tumbling into a quagmire of narratives and complexities.

With this bite, I recall that this pitiful bread of affliction became for us, in one brilliant night, the bread of our long awaited redemption! With this bite, **I am sharing an ecstatic memory with our entire people worldwide. I am bearing witness, with my people,** more than 3,330 years later, to the Divine revealing of Self to every person who said "count me in".

1. **אינו יודע לשאול – Alive in the moment,** like an infant: With this bite, no words or questions surface. In a moment of kinesthetic mindfulness, I observe the color and shape, I feel the texture, I hear the crunch, I smell the scent and taste the flavor of this bite of matza. **My commitment to our tradition is based not on a rationally explicable reason, but on an inner, intuitive, emotional, inexpressible experience.** I draw my thought to the Giver of this gift, in this miraculous moment, here and now. **In this bite, I am heroic child.** (see Rav Soloveitchik, above).