

## Matzah – Ingesting Freedom

Matzah is the food of freedom. We all know the story; our ancestors left Egypt in such haste that there was no time for their dough to rise. On Seder night we eat the Matzah while reclining in the manner of royalty. It is insufficient to just recall our people's liberation in words; we must experience it, taste it and internalize it.

But would we really serve Matzah to royalty? It is not that appetizing, certainly not a gourmet food. Matzah is the food of slaves. The Egyptians served Matzah to the Jewish people as their staple diet long before the Exodus. It made for a cheap meal because it would stay in their systems for a long time. At the very beginning of our Seder we declare that *this is the bread of affliction* and the Torah refers to it as poor man's bread.

This is the paradox of Matzah, and in the paradox lies the secret of freedom.

I am always amused when I read the back of the Matzah box - *ingredients: water and flour only*. Flour and water are the essence of bread. Yeast and flavouring add dimension, texture and taste – but they are only enhancements. Without them the bread is still bread and will satiate and nourish. But without flour and water you have nothing.

The Matzah we use for our Seder is bread in its most simplistic and essential form; flour and water, not even risen. Even egg Matzos aren't used for the seder, since the added juices taint its simplicity. Chometz (leaven), which is forbidden on Pesach, takes the same flour and water but allows it to rise. This is why Matzah is the food of freedom. The simplicity of Matzah the fact that it can be itself without relying on anything external for self-definition, is what going out of Egypt is all about.

We have a lot to learn from the poor man and his bread. The poor man owes his identity to no one. He is who he is. He is not defined by his title, level of material success or the letters appearing after his name. He doesn't worry about impressions. His clothes, his house, his gadgets, are functional not status symbols. Changing fads, the latest innovations, don't change his decisions.

The Mishna instructs us to experience the Exodus for ourselves. We have to become like the Matzah, to get in touch with our true selves. To base our self-image on our flour and water essence, and not the hot-air paraphernalia in our lives.

Any time that we allow outside perceptions, views and stigmas to hide our true selves, this is slavery. If our values, self-image and behaviour are dependant on what others may think, we are enslaved to the Pharaoh of societal norms, and our personal insecurities.

Taking the Jews out of Egypt took one day but taking Egypt out of the Jew is a lifetime of work. The need for the world's approval exists within each of us as a psychological Pharaoh. Our self esteem is externalized, placing the emphasis on 'additives' and 'flavorings' rather than the essence of our characters. This is the slave mentality that we need to overcome in our struggle to be our true selves.

Inside of us lies a pure soul, a part of G-d. Unlike our complex bodies and its impulses, the essence of the soul is simplicity. Its entire desire is for connection to G-d. This soul, our essence, is pure and good. That is who we are, that is what we should pride ourselves on.

They say you are what you eat. Hopefully after eight days of Matzah we can internalize its message and let it remain in our system.