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This Matza We Eat -- What Is It For?
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I had always wondered why we use matza to symbolize two opposite ideas. It is the *lechem oni*, the “poor man’s bread” -- the symbol of our slavery in Egypt. But it is also the symbol of our redemption, which happened so fast that there was no time for the dough to rise to make bread.

For years I was taught that these two aspects of the matza reflect opposite ends of the timeline of our history -- back then (at the beginning of the seder) we were poor slaves, but now (at the conclusion of magid) we have been redeemed and are free! So this one symbol encapsulates the journey of redemption that we retell at the seder each year.

But there is another way to look at the dual symbolism of the matza.

The Kedushat Levi, an 18th century chassidic master, makes an astonishing claim. He says that *yetziyat mitzrayim* was not the complete and full redemption that we read about in the haggadah. At best, it was only a partial redemption -- not only from today’s vantage point (where nearly half the world’s Jews live in galut, many with active fear of anti-semitism, and even the State of Israel, miracle that it is, faces insecurity and conflict in both religious and political spheres), but even at the moment of the Exodus itself.

Just think about it. Immediately after the frenzied departure from Egypt and the miracle of the splitting of the Sea the people were at an absolute spiritual high. But that moment was so fleeting. Almost immediately thereafter the people were in the wilderness complaining about food and water and asking “Why did you bring us out of Egypt?” and even worse, “Is God in our midst or not?”

So the Kedushat Levi was right. *Yetziat mitzrayim* was only a partial redemption. But, nevertheless, he continues, it is worth celebrating -- not for the physical, historical fact of the redemption, but for the moment of national recognition of God’s presence in the world. According to the Kedushat Levi the point of the seder is to recapture and internalize that intense moment of personal experience of God’s presence in the world.

So this year when I eat the matza at the seder, I will see it as reflecting not a journey from slavery to freedom, but rather that we are living simultaneously in both states (or maybe neither). We are partially redeemed. And while we can hope and pray for the full redemption and the coming of *Moshiach*, our current task is to learn to live in a partially redeemed world and to tap into our national memory of that moment of intense personal experience of God’s presence in the world.



Rabbanit Gloria Nusbacher came to Maharat after a career in corporate law, including almost 20 years as a partner at one of the 100 largest U.S. law firms. She interned at Congregation Ohev Sholom - The National Synagogue in Washington, DC, the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, and New York Presbyterian - Allen Hospital, and co-founded and ran her community’s women’s tefilla group. Rabbanit Gloria earned an AB from Barnard College and a JD from Columbia Law School, and has studied at Drisha. She lives in Riverdale and West Hempstead, NY with her husband, Burt, and is a proud mother and grandmother.