

A Word of Torah for *Parashat Bo*, by Rabbi Dan Liben, January 2014

As the drama of the ten plagues reaches its climax, the text takes a “time out,” in order to teach the Israelites, and us, how the experience of leaving Egypt will be ritualized and re-enacted through a sacred meal:

This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly: it is a passover offering to the Lord.

To this day, many communities have the custom of walking around the Seder table with matzah wrapped in a napkin, role-playing our ancestors’ hectic experience.

The truth is, many of us eat that way all time. We grab lunch standing up, or eat distractedly at our desk, “multi-tasking” our way through a meal. We buy “fast food,” with the intention of dispatching it as quickly as it is prepared.

The actual Seder meal, however, is quite different. We discuss the symbolism of designated items, tasting the sting of slavery in the maror, and sensing spring in our insides as we eat salty greens. Then of course, comes an array of lovingly prepared foods, tasty expressions of family recipes and traditions. Imagine if every meal that we ate could be this sensory, and delightful.

One of the core practices on a meditation retreat is to treat even the simplest of meals in this way. Carefully chewing each bite fully, before beginning the process of refilling the fork, noticing how it tastes on different parts of the tongue, paying attention to the decision to swallow; food tastes infinitely more satisfying. One may become more aware of the miracle of food itself, grateful to all the forces of sun and rain and sky that brought it forth from the earth; grateful for the equally amazing technological infrastructure that brought this food from a far-away field to your table. A brachah before and after eating that may have become perfunctory becomes a fresh, and necessary expression of gratitude. Eating becomes a revelation.

This is eating like “a free person.” May this aspect of the Seder be available to us throughout the year, at any meal. All we need to do is pay attention!
Shabbat Shalom