

Va'era, Rabbi David Mahler

There is a well-known tradition to eat an egg at our annual *Pesach sederim*. I am not referring to the roasted egg that adorns our *Seder* plate, but many, near the beginning of the actual meal, enjoy a hard-boiled egg. The *Mei Shiloach*, the *Ishbitzer Rebbe*, offers a beautiful insight into the symbolism of this *minhag*. He writes that birds have a two-step birthing process. First the egg is laid and then it is hatched. There are two steps from mother to child. The same is true with respect to the birth of *Am Yisrael* as a nation. First, we were freed from the shackles of the Egyptian masters, and then we traveled to *Har Sinai* to gain a new found freedom – the opportunity to receive the *Torah* allowing us unfettered access to the sacred, holy and divine.

Early on in the *parsha*, we find the source for the four cups of wine each adult is obligated to drink on both *Seder* nights. Each cup corresponds to one of the four unique expressions of redemption – והוצאתי והצלתי וגאלתי ולקחתי – I will take you out, I will save you, I will redeem you and I will take you to Me as a people. *Hashem* promises *Moshe* that He will take *Bnei Yisrael* out of *Mitzraim* and that the exodus will take place in distinct stages, highlighted by each word.

There is an interesting halacha that many are unaware of. Though a person is allowed to drink between both of the first two cups, as well as between cups two and three, it is prohibited to drink anything between the third and fourth cups of the evening. There must be a significant break between the final two cups. The *Netziv* (*Shemos* 6:6-7) explains that this comes to teach us an important lesson.

Many view the awaited redemption as no more than a national liberation. One in which we were freed from the oppression suffered under the hands of the Egyptians. The first three cups focus on that aspect of the story. We were removed, rescued and redeemed and now we are no longer under the rule and subjugation of another regime. The first three cups suffice to teach us that lesson.

However, the final cup signifies *Am Yisrael* being taken to *Har Sinai* to receive the *Torah*. *V'lakachti* is the moment we became a holy nation. It must be known that there were, in essence, two redemptions, two liberations. We first became physically free, and seven weeks later, we became religiously free. That is why there must be a clear break between the final two cups.

The two *geulot*, salvations, are (almost) equally necessary. In life, it is not enough to be saved from – rather one must have a direction towards where they are headed.

I recently heard a shiur where the German philosopher, Erich Fromm, was quoted. He writes that there are two types of freedoms in the world. There are freedoms from, and freedoms to. We cannot only focus on where we've come from, but also where we are going. We must not be fixated on the liberation from bondage but more importantly where are we going with the new-found liberation.

Though it does not seem like the vaccine distribution is occurring at the rate many were hoping for, it does seem to be that there is an end to this pandemic that is approaching.

Soon, please G-d, many will soon be out of isolation and quarantine. There will be great feelings of relief and our exacerbated anxiety diminished. However, what will our plans be moving forward? What have I learned about my priorities, what I value, where I should focus my attention? Will my schedule look different than it did before the lockdowns?

What have I learned moving forward about family, friends, shul and community? Some benefited from the graciousness and concern of other. Will you be paying that assistance forward? Many experienced meaning full prayer in the solitude and comfort of their homes. How does that focus and concentration translate to a larger minyan in a *Beit Knesset*?

What opportunities will I embrace after this is behind us? What new goals will I endeavor to achieve when the world opens up again?

Each *Shabbos* morning, we recite the words written by *Dovid HaMelech* (*Tehillim* 34:15), “Turn from evil and do good”. It is not enough to live a life fleeing from that which is wrong but one must commit to do good, to embrace growth and opportunity – to live aspirational lives. Living a life exclusively of “turn from evil” is an empty life. It's a life lived by those who only focus on the first three expressions of freedom. It is the fourth, “And I will take you to be my nation”, where all the fun, excitement and meaning is located.

Good Shabbos