

# Passover --- When Jews Eat History

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Consider the phenomenon of eating and drinking history at the Seder. No transubstantiation of matzah or wine takes place. The matzah remains unleavened bread, the wine the fermented juice of the grape. But bread and wine are transformed into symbols which recall the agony of slavery and the joy of promised liberation. The parsley remains parsley and so too the salt water. But the former is elevated as a symbol of spring, the freedom of natural growth which breaks out of the bondage of winter, nature complementing history.

But history is not as cyclical as nature. Freedom does not follow slavery automatically. Liberation calls for human struggle. The parsley is immersed in salt water, as freedom emerges from tears. Maror is bitter and only the simplest son of man does not taste the frustration and disappointment of living. Taste the bitter herbs for it is part of becoming free. But man cannot live by bitterness alone. There is charoses, the sweet mixture which we must savour and which urges us not to surrender to melancholia. An egg, a shankbone, four cups of wine, an unfilled cup-- simple items which only man can hallow, informing the ordinary with the extraordinary insights of a tradition.

It is a drama not only of an event which took place over 30 centuries ago, but one which we encounter daily: to break the fetters which chain us to dependency, to mindless conformity, to the enslavement of the human spirit. To become a more autonomous being, to love and help and heal not out of external constraint but out of an inner freedom is the Passover of every day. The Passover confronts us daily and defines our aspirations: from darkness to light, from bondage to liberation, from slavery to the emancipation of others and autoemancipation.

There is more to the Passover meal than food and drink and words and melody. There is a wisdom which our people has accumulated out of deep living from the days of Moses unto this day