



PESACH

– a time of breakthrough

The appreciative journey

BY LEONARD CARR

THE JEWISH NARRATIVE IS PUNCTUATED BY A succession of journeys. Pesach is simultaneously a national journey from slavery to redemption and the birth of a national identity, as well as an extemporaneous personal one. The personal journey is represented by the matzah, which is held up at the beginning of the Seder, and on which the entire Seder is recited. The Maharal of Prague says matzah represents simplicity, purity and clear, single-minded purpose.

Matzah and chometz contain identical ingredients. The only real difference between matzah and chometz is time. Time is a defining characteristic of the physical world. Chometz, on the personal level, represents that which has been adulterated by, reduced to and subjugated by material reality. Matzah represents the transcendent and the spiritual; that which exists beyond the material realm. On a personal level, it represents pure faith and paradoxical wholeness.

The simplicity of this broken, humble cracker which is not enhanced by luxurious ingredients that would make it into something more or other than what it essentially is, represents life without the distraction and burden of having to manage complications. A poor man, with only basic possessions and very little to manage other than just staying alive, is far

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more free than a wealthy man, who has to service and protect all his assets and investments, as well as manage the many different demands placed on him by virtue of his station and resources. The less you need, the freer you are. The less you own, the fewer your concerns. The simpler your life, the less that can go wrong and therefore the less there is to worry about. Perfect faith can be described, as the Maharal defines, as fear of Hashem – fear of nothing else. All doubt, worry, regret, complaining and criticising, show lack of faith because they give ultimate power to the physical world. In so doing, criticsers make themselves vulnerable and preoccupied with self-preservation, and not being creative and generative.

All unfinished business keeps parts of you trapped in the past. Concerning yourself exclusively with how to best serve Hashem and nothing else paradoxically

free you to focus on what is truly important in life, namely, being the best person that you can be and actualising your unique gifts and talents. Being fully yourself means living for the future and being free to fulfil your full potential in life. You can only do this if you are not scared of people or anything that is ultimately beyond your control – in short, if you have complete faith and trust in Hashem.

The opposite of this freedom is the slavery of being submerged in the material that distracts you from your own essence, and from what truly matters to you in your quest for the serenity of spirit that culminates in a life devoted to growing gracefully and ‘sageing’ rather than merely aging. You mature by living your authentic self and investing in service of the greater good, ultimately making the world a better place for you having been here. Taking yourself seriously includes treating time as

life and managing your time in the most meaningful and effective way.

In the realm of physical desire, this includes being focused on investment in what is necessary and meaningful, rather than material acquisition for its own sake. It means not sacrificing your financial peace of mind and security for the short-term ephemeral thrill of buying something you like rather than need. Debt is one of the most soul-destroying spirit-draining forms of slavery.

In the intellectual realm, slavery is represented by concern and obsession with prestige and power, rather than self-respect. There is a world of difference between being worried about how others see you and whether they recognise your value or not, and being someone who draws admiration and respect because of who you are and how, through your deeds and way of being, you inspire and enhance the lives of others. An example would be throwing a tantrum because of where you were seated at a wedding. Humiliating yourself by sinking to the maturity of a spoiled toddler and causing unnecessary stress to the hosts harms your self-respect and undermines your standing in the eyes of others. The paradox of personality is that when you try to manipulate others to give you what you believe you lack – in this example, honour – you drive that quality further away from your life. Not only does your performance in such a situation not serve you, but deprives those around you from the potential good that you could have contributed. Imagine if, instead, you had used the opportunity to give the bride and groom a memorable start to their married life that will serve them beyond the wedding by contributing wholeheartedly to their joy and celebration.

The third category of slavery is emo-

tional. This would include issues like envy, which distracts you from your potential, or bearing grudges, which keeps you trapped in negative feelings.

In life, things have to change in order to stay the same. When you are stuck in one position you stagnate and become dysfunctional. Strategies used in childhood to stay safe or obtain love will retain their earlier effectiveness in adult life or with people who are different from your early caretakers. Strategies that prove effective in one relationship will not work in others. Reactions that are acceptable for a child or teenager are considered dysfunctional in an adult. Growth is about expanding your repertoire of possible responses, your wisdom, your capacity to host discomfort and uncertainty long enough to be expanded and deepened by your experience. The same behaviours or ideas that become repetitive become stale. Consider a joke – it's funny only the first time, and then it starts to lose its appeal, and can, with too much repetition, become annoying.

You need to grow in order to feel that you are making progress, and that your experiences have benefit and purpose. You need to keep working on your growth in order to stay relevant, appropriate, fresh and engaged with life.

The inauguration of the journey is the point at which you realise why you need to go on the journey. You can only fully know why you need to undertake such a demanding and arduous mission if you can clearly define, picture intuitively, and feel the benefits and value not only of the destination. You need to appreciate the intrinsic worth of every step in the journey, regardless of where the steps ultimately lead. The earnest desire to reach your goal in itself will strengthen and expand your capacity for growth.

To become liberated, consider these questions: What would freedom, wholeness and true peace mean to you in your life? How would these attributes look, sound, feel, behave and think? What would these attributes most value, invest in and pay attention to? Answering these questions is important not only to know where you are going, but also to know when you are on track and whether each decision you take about how to respond to your circumstances is taking you closer or further from your desired goal. You need to consider what safeguards you will put in place to help you to stay on track. This might mean, for example, making lifestyle changes or telling people about your aspirations and request that they call you out on any self-betrayals. Deciding who you will recruit to support you in your journey and who you need to leave behind because they undermine or influence you to be someone you do not respect, like or admire might be a crucial decision that affects your progress. The first step in the journey to freedom begins by recognising the areas of life where you are enslaved and the many forms that subjugation takes.

Consider what new places in yourself and in life you need to visit and explore, and what places you need to avoid. For example, diversions and anything that triggers addiction. Addiction in the broadest sense means subjugation to anything that undermines you being the person that you most deeply wish to be. Reflect on what habits you need to cultivate to replace the ones that no longer serve you. This includes changing any attitudes or beliefs that are counter-productive to well-being.

It is important on a growth journey to focus on how far you have got in relation to your starting point, and celebrate and affirm yourself for every victory, however small. Constantly reflect on your lessons along the way. This is important to help you to maintain your commitment as well as support your courage and tenacity. Success in personal growth is cumulative. Like long-term investing, the daily sacrifice over years feels hard, but leads to wealth beyond what you could have ever imagined. ■

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