Thoughts for Pessah

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by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

At the Seder, we ate the “Hillel Sandwich,” Korekh, which includes both matsa and maror. Rabbi Benzion Uziel, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, pointed out that matsa—eaten as the Israelites left Egypt—symbolizes freedom. Maror—bitter herb—symbolizes the bitterness of slavery. We combine these two symbols to remind us that freedom and slavery are intertwined. Even when we are enslaved, we have our inner freedom. Even when we are free, we have to worry about falling back into slavery.

Until Mashiah arrives, we are always experiencing a mixture of matsa and maror, freedom and suffering. Sometimes things are better and sometimes worse…but we are constantly engaged in personal and national struggle.

We are currently living in very challenging times for Israel and the Jewish People. We all feel the taste of maror, the bitterness of war, death, anti-Semitism, ugly anti-Israel hatred. But we also have the taste of matsa…freedom. The State of Israel is strong, vibrant, and courageous. The Jewish People worldwide are standing up for our rights and for the honor of Israel. We are literally eating “korekh”, matsa and maror together, simultaneously.

If the first days of Pessah highlight the mixed feelings symbolized by matsa and maror, the last days of Pessah stress redemption. On the Seventh Day of Pessah, the Torah reading features the song sung by Moses and the Israelites upon crossing the Sea of Reeds and escaping from their Egyptian oppressors. The focus is on the past redemption. On the Eighth Day of Pessah, the Haftara is drawn from the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the future redemption. “Cry aloud and sing for joy, Zion resettled, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

It has been noted that the redemption from Egypt is attributed entirely to the Almighty. The Israelites themselves were relatively passive in the process of gaining their freedom. But the ultimate redemption will require us to participate actively. While Hashem will be the guarantor, we will need to assume personal responsibility.

Along with our prayers, we each must stand with Am Yisrael in every way possible. We need action—communal, political, financial etc.—in support of Medinat Yisrael. We need to stand up

against anti-Semites and anti-Zionists with fortitude…and we must prevail.

Isaiah's words resonate: "Behold, God is my salvation, I trust and am not afraid; For God the Lord is my strength and my song and He is become my salvation…Cry aloud and sing for joy, Zion resettled, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."