



As we prepare for the Seder, a familiar question resurfaces: The Seder night is all about freedom, gratitude, and celebration. We recline like royalty, drink four cups of wine, sing songs of thanks—and then, strangely, we stop to eat maror, the bitter herbs.

It's a striking contradiction. Why would we include something so harsh and unpleasant on a night dedicated to joy? Isn't the entire point of the retelling of the Exodus to move us from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light? Shouldn't we leave the bitterness behind?

Rav Kook offers a profound and deeply meaningful insight. We don't eat maror to dwell on pain. We eat it to affirm that we are free.

A person who has lived in constant bitterness doesn't taste it anymore—it becomes their default. But when we taste the maror and recoil, that reaction is a gift. It means we're not used to pain. We're free enough for bitterness to feel bitter.

This year, that lesson hits differently. Because while we celebrate our own freedom, we do so with the pain of knowing that not all of us are free. We thank G-d for the hostages who have been returned to their families. And we carry in our hearts those who are still suffering in captivity, still waiting to come home.

We taste the maror not just as a symbol of past suffering but as a reflection of present-day pain—pain that sharpens our gratitude and deepens our empathy. It reminds us that if we are free enough to notice bitterness, we must use that freedom to pray, act, and remember.

As we sit at the Seder table this year, may that bite of maror awaken not only our gratitude—but our connection to those still waiting to be free.

Wishing you a Chag Kasher V'Sameach,
Rabbi Shlomo Gabay
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