

“ALL WHO ARE HUNGRY, COME AND EAT...”

by Rabbi Moshe Thomas Heyn, April 2014

Have you ever forgotten to eat?

Maybe you were working on the computer or engrossed in some other activity and didn't notice you were hungry until you smelled or tasted something which caused you to suddenly realize that you were ravenous.

Something like this happens at least once a year, especially during this season in which we celebrate *Pesach*. Just before we take the first bite of *matzah* at a Passover *seder*, we read, “*Ha lachma anya...This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, come and eat...*”

Why do we read this phrase when we are already seated at our *seder* table? Isn't it a little late to be extending an invitation for others to join us?

The answer is that the invitation is not only meant for others. It is really meant for those who are **already** present. It is like asking the question, “Is there anyone **here** who is hungry – not just for a good meal but for something else?”

This invitation, and the first taste of *matzah*, is meant to stimulate the appetite, reminding us that we might be more hungry than we realized. It reminds us that, even though we may live comfortable lives now, there is a certain freedom we have yet to achieve. When we were slaves, we knew what it was like to yearn for freedom with every fiber of our being. Is it possible that we've since forgotten the intensity of that yearning?



If you believe you've reached the end of our journey from bondage to liberation, or if you've been too busy to realize that we're still on that journey, then you may not recognize the hunger I'm describing. You might be content to read the four questions and drink the four cups of wine and feel satisfied until next year. But there is another set of “four” in our tradition – the Four Worlds – which reminds us that we are not just physical beings with physical appetites. We live, breathe, eat and sleep in the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual “worlds” that constitute our existence.

When Moses spoke to the Israelites after they had left Egypt, he told them “a person does not live by bread alone (Deut 8:3).” By this he meant to say that we hunger for more than just food. We need nourishment not only for our physical selves but for our emotional, intellectual and spiritual selves, as well.

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)

We all know it's possible to neglect our hunger, on any of these levels, until we've forgotten that we were *ever* hungry. Sometimes all it takes is a taste or an invitation to reawaken in us the intense yearning that has always been at the core of our identity as Jews. It is not complacency and self-satisfaction that has caused us to excel in so many fields. Instead, it has been dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, a "hunger" for something better that has driven us to transform ourselves and the world in which we live.

We all need physical nourishment to survive. But we also need nourishment for our emotional selves – friendship, love, a sense of belonging, community. I call this level of being the "relational self" because it has everything to do with the quality of our relationships, which is harder to find and maintain in our busy and increasingly-fragmented world.

We all need nourishment for our intellectual selves, as well. We stop growing unless we make time to study and learn, to be stimulated and challenged. It's too easy to settle into the comfort of routine and recreation, allowing the appetite for intellectual engagement to become attenuated, if not altogether neglected. The Jewish community has always placed a very high value on this form of engagement, but like the physical self, it needs to be sustained on a daily basis.

Lastly, we all need nourishment for our spiritual selves. This is likely to the hunger we've forgotten about completely. The

Israelites had manna to sustain them in the wilderness. The generations after them found their spiritual sustenance in pilgrimages, sacrifices, and in other forms of worship that evolved down through the ages. But what are the forms of nourishment that feed our souls today? Without availing ourselves of them on a daily basis, it's likely we've forgotten what it's like to be hungry, to eat and to be satisfied on that level.

Temple Israel of Greater Miami is a place where such concepts of "the Four Worlds" are familiar. It is a place where we consciously seek and find nourishment for our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual selves. Of course, you can find such nourishment in different degrees and combinations in other places. But here we recognize that a "balanced diet" which is most conducive to optimal health and fitness requires a skillful combination of ingredients that is thoroughly satisfying.

I hope that you will be celebrating Passover at your *seder* table with family and friends on the first night of Passover (April 14th). I also hope you will join me, at our Temple's *seder* table, on the second night (April 15th). We'll serve a great meal, as we do on a regular basis, to nourish your physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual self.

When you taste the *matzah* this *Pesach*, or any of these offerings we provide at Temple Israel, it is likely that your appetite will be stimulated and you will crave more. You may even realize that you were hungrier than you thought.

Our doors are open and our table is set...All who are hungry, come and eat.