

Mixing the Bitter and the Sweet

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Source: Rabbi Andrea Steinberger

Korech: Mixing the Bitter and the Sweet

One of my favorite moments of the seder comes just before dinner is served. It is called Korech. It is also known as the Hillel sandwich. It is the moment when we eat maror (the bitter herbs) and the charoset (the sweet apple and nut mixture) on a piece of matzah. What a strange custom to eat something so bitter and something so sweet all in one bite. I can taste it now, just thinking about it, and the anticipation is almost too much to bear. I dread it, and I long for it all at the same time. Why do we do such a thing? We do it to tell our story.

The Jewish people tells our story through our observance of Jewish holidays throughout the year. The holidays of Passover, Chanukah and Purim remind us just how close the Jewish people has come to utter destruction and how we now celebrate our strength and our survival with great joy, remembering God's help and our persistence, and our own determination to survive.

We also tell the story throughout our lifetime of Jewish rituals. The breaking of a glass at a Jewish wedding reminds us that even in times of life's greatest joys we remember the sadness of the destruction of the Temple. When we build a home, some Jews leave a part unfinished to remember that even when building something new, we sense the times of tragedy in the Jewish people. And on Passover we mix the sweet charoset with the bitter maror, mixing bitter and sweet of slavery and freedom all in one bite.

Throughout each year and throughout our lifetimes, we challenge ourselves to remember that even in times of strength, it is better to sense our vulnerability, rather than bask in our success. We all have memories of times in which bitter and sweet were mixed in our lives, all in the same bite. Judaism says, sometimes life is like that. We can celebrate and mourn all at the same time. And somehow, everything will be ok. What is your korech moment?