

Maror

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Source: The Journey Continues: The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah

This is the way to experience bitterness: take a big chunk of raw horseradish, let the burning turn your face all red.

This is the way to experience bitterness: dig back to a time of raw wounds, remember how it felt before the healing began, years or months or days ago.

This is the way to experience bitterness: hold the hand of a friend in pain, listen to her story, remember Naomi who renamed herself Mara, bitterness, because she "went away full but God brought [her] back empty" (Ruth 1:21).

This is the way to experience bitterness: recall the pain and exclusion that is part of the legacy of Jewish women. Listen to the words of Bertha Pappenheim, founder of the German Jewish feminist movement, who said, "No continuing education can repair how the souls of Jewish women - and thus Judaism in its entirety - have been sinned against..."

Or the words of Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah, who wrote, "But do not speak to me of the progressiveness of Judaism! Why isn't there one prayer in all the books to fit my modern case - not one to raise up the spirit of the so-called emancipated woman?"

How big a piece of *maror* must we eat to re-experience this bitterness?

And what if I've known enough pain this year already? And what if exclusion is not just a memory for me?

And what if I eat the whole root and my tongue catches on fire and my ears burn? Then will I know slavery?

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ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו על אכילת מרור:

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al achilat maror.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who made us holy through obligations, commanding us to eat bitter herbs.