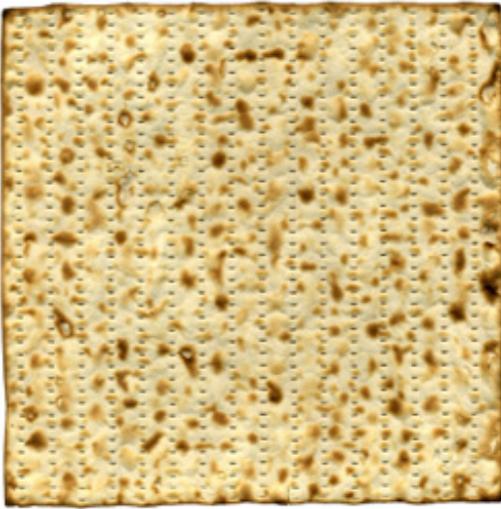


Matza Eating Meditation

Contributed by [Jay Michaelson](#) .

Source: Tel Shemesh



Jewish law requires that a surprisingly large amount of *matza*, *maror*, and *matza/maror* "sandwich" be eaten during the Passover seder. Most observance of this mitzvah falls into one of two categories: ignoring the legal requirements, or wolfing down huge sheets of unleavened bread in a mixture of piety and masochism.

I think that these size requirements, though, are really demanding that we eat enough *matza* and *maror* to notice it. Thus, I recommend turning the practice into an eating meditation, taking a full couple of minutes in silence away from the chatter of the Seder to become more aware of whatever is happening. Let's focus on the *matza*.

You might begin, before eating at all, with a contemplation of the *matzo* itself, using the "four worlds" as a guide. On the level of *asiyah* (action, materiality, body), feel the *matza* itself, its weight, the way it feels in your hand. Notice if any sensations arise in the body: salivation, perhaps. Then move to the level of *yetzirah* (formation, emotion, heart): notice what the large piece of *matza* evokes in your heart. Are you looking forward to eating it? Dreading it? Worrying about your digestion? Maybe you're remembering – perhaps very subtly – seders past, when you sat with your parents and schemed around the *Afikoman*. Maybe you're feeling, at this moment, some of the love, or trepidation, or confusion, of the seder where you are. Try to feel these emotions in the body, as events of the body, and see them for what they are: simultaneously evanescent and essential.

On the level of *briyah* (creation, thought, mind), I invite you to consider all that went into the production of this matza. How many people – the farmers growing the grain, the bakers, the *mashgiach* (supervisor of the kosher status of the food), the truck drivers – were involved in bringing it to your table? Think about the ingredients of the *matza*, along the lines of Thich Nhat Hanh's "Interbeing": the matza depends on wheat which depends on rain which depends on clouds. Without the cloud, there is no *matza*. Or, the *matza depends on a baker whose life depends on a myriad of causes and coincidences*. Let your mind expand the matza beyond the sheet in your hand, to as many causes in the universe as you care to imagine. Know that everything we hold, everything we see, is part of a web of life.

Finally, on the level of *atzilut* (emanation, spirit, soul), allow yourself to ask: if the *matzo* is really just a node on this "web of life," what is it, really? What is "matza" about *matza*? What is "you" about you? Everything we are, and everything we see, is really a cause or condition of something else, fleeting, empty of separateness, and unable to satisfy us on a permanent basis. Consider, too, the context of this *matza* – its symbolism, and how the bread of slaves became the bread of freedom, due only to the context of its creation.

Okay, you can eat.

As you eat, work again through these four worlds. Notice the physical sensation of the *matza* in your mouth. Experiment with not swallowing anything that hasn't been thoroughly mashed up and liquified (this can take awhile with *matza* ..), and see how that feels. As distracting thoughts come in, just come back to the physical sensations of chewing, cleaning, swallowing, etc. This allows the mind a break from discursive chatter, and its calmer state is conducive to insight. Emotionally, do you feel connected? Resentful? Curious? Nostalgic? On this level, try to call the mind back, when it wanders, to this moment, eating this food, as Jews have done for three thousand years. On the intellectual level, consider the *matza* in the light of the four elements, which, while not scientifically descriptive of reality, can describe experience remarkably well. Can you taste the earth-element in the matza? How about fire -- necessary to bake it, perhaps evinced by some burn marks, and also, in some systems of thought, necessary to digest it as well? Notice how your mouth releases water to help chew the dry food. You can observe that, even in unleavened bread, there are small pockets of air.

And on the level of *atzilut*, you might notice how really, our experience of the matza is really an experience of its constituent parts. There is never a moment at which we experience "matza" -- it's always an experience of an ingredient, which is itself actually an experience of particular chemical properties. On our phenomenal level, we experience *matza*. But if there really is Ein Sof, Infinite Being, who is eating and what is being eaten?