

If you ask my children what my father's favorite food was they will say "carrot cake." They will say this with a certainty that is surprising since many of you know that he passed away before any of them were born. I was pregnant with our first child, Ariella, when he died. I remember feeling the challenge - how could my dad, their pop, hold his own space in their lives with three vibrant, live grandparents. Will and I resolved to find ways to bring my dad into their day-to-day life, sharing stories, sayings and general tidbits regularly. We wanted the kids to feel as if they **knew** him, not just about him.

We encounter a similar challenge, on a much more national scale over pesach. In masechet pesachim we are told **בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הוּא יֹצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם** - in every generation, a person must view herself as though **she** left Egypt. It isn't enough to learn **about** our nation's liberation from slavery, we must actually feel as if we knew it. This is a difficult challenge. How do we create memories that didn't actually happen to us? How do we do this for our children?

The Rambam suggests one possible method through a slightly different girsa of the gemara. He adds a "ה" to the word **לִרְאוֹת**, making it **להראות** - each person doesn't have to see themselves as leaving Egypt, but rather each person must **show** himself as having left Egypt. For this reason, some have customs at seder to hit each other with scallions or leeks to feel the sting of the slave driver's whip. Others walk around the room with a knapsack on their back or to even jump over a bucket of water, simulating the splitting of the sea. Role play is one way to explore finding connection, by trying to take our ancestors' point of view, to simulate their experience.

Psychologist Professor Susan Krauss Whitborn suggests another opportunity to create a sense of memory. She writes "Food memories are more sensory than other memories, in that they involve all five senses. So when you are thoroughly engaged with the stimulus, it has a more powerful effect." Perhaps this is why it is so important for us to eat the same matzah our ancestors ate while fleeing Egypt. Why we must eat the maror and dip our karpas into salt water to experience the bitterness of slavery. We are trying to taste the **experience** of redemption. Eating special foods helps transport us back to the memory of leaving Egypt.

Neither strategy of course, will actually give us a memory we don't have. Experience and memory are different, though interrelated. When thinking about keeping a presence of those we have lost, we are creating a memory of that loved one, but we cannot recreate the experience of what is in the memory. When we make a loved one's favorite food, we know we won't be able to create the experience of dining with that loved one. We get to remember the person through food but we don't get to see them enjoy eating the dish. When we tell our children something "grandpa would have said" in an attempt at the Rambam's role play so they could look or feel like they are there having a conversation with him, we are creating a new memory for our children of what grandpa was like, but we are not able to help them share an actual experience **with** grandpa. So too, we cannot be expected to actually have the experience of leaving Egypt, but we can create a memory of what it might have felt like through role play and the food we eat at the seder. Even though this may feel far from what we want, I believe the rabbis are pushing us not to let go of these best attempts, if we can't have the real thing.

The gemara quotes the pasuk - וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ - and you should tell your children - in relation to this mitzvah. One must tell their children about the memory and experience of leaving Egypt. We must be the drivers, the owners, of these memories for our children. I have found that there are times and spaces where it is too emotionally draining to the one responsible for memory. As the owner of the memory you might want to say “wow, your bubbe would have been so proud” but you feel your eyes water or throat tighten. It’s hard to choose to want to enter that space of grief during the happy moment we are experiencing. But, because our loved ones are not here, we know that if we don’t bring their memories into our experience, their persona, their powerful and unique character will fade. It is hard to be the owner of the memories - to have to recreate memories on a national scale or a family one.

Yizkor is a time for us to unpack some of our memories, in the quiet and safe space we create in our community. A time where we can shed a tear, whisper a conversation, take out one more memory. And when the end of yizkor comes, many of us pack them back in. Maybe because those memories feel private. Or maybe because it can be too draining to try to weave them into our everyday life in all of its full vibrancy as the memories fade. But, I think the message of pesach is that we shouldn’t stop there. We are encouraged to pick a memory to leave out, to talk about at lunch, to bring color to those we have lost so our family doesn’t just know about the person, but they feel like they actually know them. In fact, we begin our seder by exhorting everyone to share as much as possible - כָּל הַמִּסְפָּר, הֲרֵי זֶה מִשְׁבַּח - We shouldn’t shy away from these memories, but are praised for taking the time and emotional energy to share them.

I read that the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi would not say the “chasal seder pesach” which formally concludes the seder, because he believed that the mitzvah of seeing yourself as leaving Egypt shouldn’t end that night, but is ongoing throughout our lives. Similarly, yizkor is a time carved out of the calendar to daven for and think about those we have lost, but I am inspired by the alter rebbe to make sure I don’t close the door at the end of Yizkor, but continue to thread those memories throughout the year. Today, whatever memories we choose to revisit this yizkor should help us relieve treasured experiences, create new memories and be comforting to us and our extended families now, and throughout the year.