



THINKING JEWISH

Of all the traditions we keep at the Seder, few are as overlooked—and as meaningful—as the simple act of dipping.

Dipping

Tonight, the entire Jewish people will dip the traditional vegetable in the salt water at the Passover Seder again. They'll continue with dipping the marror in charosess, not just once but twice: first plain marror, then in the "Hillel Sandwich."

But the Seder is not the only time Jews have the custom of dipping foods. Anyone remember when else? [Ask your audience.]

Every Rosh Hashanah night, as soon as the holiday meal begins, we have the custom of dipping an apple in honey and saying this short prayer: "May it be G-d's Will that there be renewed for us a good and sweet year."

The truth is, dipping actually goes on all year. Every Shabbos we slice the challah and dip the first slice into salt—and not only on Shabbos, but every time we eat bread.

Not only is dipping done with food, we also dip new utensils in the mikvah before their first use. We also dip our bodies in the mikvah to cleanse them from spiritual impurities. Likewise, when a person wishes to convert to Judaism, he or she is immersed in water.

But what exactly is this "dunking"? What is its purpose?

A New Entity

When a person dips an apple in honey, he brings out a new flavor in the apple, essentially creating something new. It's not the same taste as the apple alone, and not the same taste as the honey alone. When the apple is dipped in honey, it creates a new entity.

The same applies to immersion in a mikvah—when a person immerses in a mikvah, he or she emerges as a new entity. He or she can enter as a goy, a non-Jew, and emerge as a different human being altogether—as a Jew.

Many converts report that the mikvah immersion was the defining moment of their conversion process—that they left everything behind in the water and emerged as new people, that a new entity was born beneath the surface.

Now, the Torah itself is compared to water for a number of reasons: 1) The Tanya explains that just as water flows downward (due to gravity), so too Torah, which is G-d's wisdom, flows down from the heavens so that even man can benefit from it; and 2) Just as water is endless, so too is the Torah endless—the more you learn, the more you discover how little you know.

That's why Torah has the nature of water, which can give birth to a new Jew, a new entity, by simple immersion.

Thinking Jewish

When a person studies the Torah, he or she begins to think in a different way, in an unconventional way. For example, when a person is sick, he or she goes to the doctor. But when a Jew is sick, he or she also goes to the doctor—but also checks the mezuzos.

Now, what's the connection? The mezuzah is a religious commandment between man and his G-d—so if the mezuzah is invalid, why does it need to be changed when it has no connection to his physical status? This type of thinking comes from the shtetl—for a Jew to come along and say that there's a connection between mezuzos and his health and that if he isn't feeling well he needs to check his mezuzos.

Praying makes a little more sense: You're asking G-d to send His blessing and heal you. But mezuzos? What's the connection between health and mezuzos?! Mezuzah is a religious ritual, and disease is a natural problem that must be dealt with in a scientific manner.

But the Jew knows that there's a connection. He doesn't necessarily understand the connection, but he believes that it exists. That's what "thinking like a Jew" means—to believe that one's spiritual state affects one's physical state, and vice versa.

We find the same idea in the Haftarah of Shabbos HaGadol. The

Prophet Malachi turns to the Jewish Nation and motivates them to keep the mitzvah of Maaser, tithing one tenth of one's earnings to the Temple, immediately adding, "...and test Me now therewith," says the Lord of Hosts, "[to see] if I will not open for you the sluices of heaven and pour down for you blessing until there be no room to suffice for it."

Now, tzedakah is a very important mitzvah—one must help the poor; it's his obligation as a citizen and a moral person. But there's no connection between giving charity and business success—at least that's what a rational person thinks.

But someone who has been immersed in the waters of the Torah knows to think otherwise. He understands that the material and the spiritual are interdependent.

The story is told of a Jew who poured out his woes to his friend, saying that his son recently started showing an interest in Judaism and began putting on tefillin, etc. So his friend says, "Listen—I think you need to check your mezuzos."

So when we come to Passover, we don't just need to dunk the potato in salt water—we need to immerse ourselves in the waters of Torah, and only then will we learn to think as Jews.