



## **“Tonight, Have An Extra Piece of Honey Cake!” or “How is this night different from the night that’s different from all other nights?”**

**Erev Rosh Hashana 5784 - Sept 15, 2023**

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Chag sameach! Shabbat Shalom!

Friends,

Tonight and tomorrow night are among of my favorite occasions of the year. If we are fortunate enough, we are able to commune with friends, family, and others we cherish, to celebrate creation, renewal, another full circle around the sun. Sweetness is the order du jour, from the raisins in our Challah, to the honey we pour over it and over the already sweet apples – an unbridled doubling down on our appreciation of life’s precious gifts. The round Challah conjures the perfect circle of the wedding ring, and the circles taken around each other by the betrothed at a wedding, affirming blessings, commitment, love, creation, magic.

It is telling that during the Pesach meal, our ritualized overtures toward sweetness are accompanied by a countervailing acknowledgment of suffering and pain. No matter how delicious the charoset (and we’ve eaten some pretty darned delicious charoset in our day), its color and texture nonetheless recall the bricks and mortar of our enslavement, the bitterness of which is further reinforced when we combine it with maror to make the Hillel sandwich. This contrasts starkly with the doubling down on sweetness we will observe tonight. No bitterness on this evening. Any added salt is for the soup and brisket (for those who may eat it).

Indeed, tonight commences an affirmation of faith that sees triumphant manifestations in our Torah readings over the next two days - Sarah’s unrestrained laughter at the birth of her son in her old age;

Abraham's uncompromising obedience rewarded by a divine affection that, according to [Rashi](#), was nothing short of love.

And yet, Rosh Hashana is infused by darker undercurrents that expose our human fragility. We bear witness to Hagar as she mourns the ugly, unjust fate she sees for her son. Our tradition teaches us that Sara herself dies from the trauma of the Akeidah, her cries of distress carried forth in the shrill tones of the shofar, and that Isaac's deep trauma ultimately manifests in the blindness and confusion of his old age.

Thus, as much as it is infused with sweetness, Rosh Hashana carries the weight of deep existential pain and generational trauma that yielded subsequently to sinful fraternal treachery, self-perpetuated familial suffering, and ultimately, enslavement.

As we use this narrative to reflect upon our own suffering, our own traumas, our own sins and their local and global consequences for future generations, this is a time for sobriety and deep contemplation: unlike for Pesach, the amount of wine we drink tonight is unprescribed; it is a personal choice, an exercise in mindfulness as we commence the hard work in the coming days toward repair of [our worlds and our souls](#).

I enjoin you therefore to embrace your meals tonight with joy; in fact, linger with the spoon over the challah and apples as the honey drizzles ever so slowly, so tantalizingly, so sweetly, and savor the apple honey cake at dessert – in fact, take a double portion – it's a mitzvah! For it is time now to fill our tanks, recharge our engines, replenish our reserves, and savor the gifts of creation, as we embark on our arduous personal and collective journeys toward redemption.

Shana Tova!