

The Talmud¹ relates the extraordinary patience that R' Pereida showed toward his students in his dissemination of Torah. If after explaining one subject 400 times the student did not yet grasp the issue, he would explain it another 400 times!

When recounting this story Rabbi Chaim Shmuelivitz would remark that while people are often moved by the forbearance of R' Pereida, they should be equally inspired by the perseverance of the student who had the courage to admit again and again that he still did not understand.

To ask the same questions over and over, to examine the same issue time after time until clarity is reached is how we earn the title "The People of The Book".

Pesach is a time of questions. Familiar questions. Some are asked כדי שהשאלו התינוקות while others are asked to awaken the child in us all. They challenge us to look beneath the surface of what has been done year after year and indeed ask- Why? The Talmud tells us that when two scholars are eating the Seder without any children present they must ask each other מה נשתנה. Sometimes, that which is masked in simplicity holds the greatest secrets.

ם חמץ ומצה, הלילה הזה כלו מצה. מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות, מכל הלילות אנו אוכלי

Without doubt this is the most fundamental of the Four Questions. After all, it doesn't just ponder the actions of the Seder, but alludes as well to the thrust of the whole Pesach - Chametz and Matzah. The answer then must be just as elementary, and it indeed seems that way. The Haggadah quoting the Mishnah² says the following:
 על שום שלא הספיק בצקם של אבותינו להחמיץ..... שנאמר שמות יב/לט, -מצה שאנו אוכלים על שום מה
 ויאפו את הבצק.....

We left Egypt in a hurry and our bread did not have time to rise, so we too eat Matzah, next question please.

But was the question really answered? After 210 years of slavery, the rise to power of our greatest leader, ten miraculous plagues consummated by the splitting of the sea and a

¹ Eruvin 54b

² Pesachim 115a,b

Holiday expressing our gratitude for all these it is represented by what? Matzah?! One would think that our rush to leave would be but a footnote in the narrative of the Exodus. Instead it is precisely this event which seems to become the main focus of our freedom. Why?

Let us for a moment feign understanding in this concept of Matzah, *יצאתכי בחפזון*, we will say, *is* a momentous part of this story.

Something though still seems missing.

The initial commandment to eat Matzah on Pesach³ "בערב תאכלו מצות" - was given well before they left Egypt, by the Parsha of Hachodesh Hazeh! Are we back now to square one – Why Matzah? Did the *סימן*- representation of our Exodus- Matzah - have this same significance *before* the act it came to represent⁴? In fact the *אשרידי* (Chelek 2 Siman 53) states the following regarding the well-known Chazal which teaches that Avrohom Avinu kept all the Mitzvos:

מצוות מצה ומרור וכדומה, וקיים רק המצוות שלא ניתנו בתור אות וזכר אברהם אבינו ולדעתי לא קיים למאורעות שאירעו אחרי כן.

A second part to this question on Matzoh is that the the Hagadah seems somewhat duplicitous as to its meaning.

It begins with the proclamation – “This (Matzah) is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt” - *להם עוני*. Later though, as we demonstrated above, it gives an entirely different approach.

This inconsistency does not start with the Hagadah. The Torah itself in Parshas Ra'eh⁵ when reiterating the Holiday of Pesach seems to ascribe to Matzah these *two* reasons. לא *מארץ מצרים*..... *בחפזון יצאת כי לחם עניים תאכל עליו מצות תאכל עליו חמץ שבעת*. This may also have Halachik implications. For if Matzah represents our affliction- why do we lean when we eat it? As we see from the Mitzvah of Maror, which undoubtedly reflects our suffering, we are prohibited from leaning.

And so we ask again- Why Matzah?

³ Smos 12/18. See Rambam Hilchas Chometz Umatza 6/1

⁴ See Marhasha who indeed suggests just that.

⁵ 16/3

All these questions of Matzah, although troubling, are eclipsed by a far greater difficulty.

Why *Chametz*?

It is not so much that Chametz seems inconsequential to the story of Yitzi'as Mitzraim, but that it is totally absent! At most Chametz is a by-product of Matzah- that is to say; *Chametz is what Matzah is not*. But than why would this by- product, this offshoot, eclipse the main event?

Consider; 1) The Mitzvah of Matzah is but for one day, whereas the prohibition of Chometz is for all seven.

2) The eating of Chometz brings with it the punishment of Kares- the most severe sentence- while refraining from the positive commandment by not eating Matzah does not.

In fact after a careful reading of the Mah Nishtana it seems that we are *only* concerned with the Chometz. *מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות, מכל הלילות אנו אוכלים חמץ* , הלילה הזה *נמצא* מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות, מכל הלילות אנו אוכלים חמץ. כלו מצה. As if to ask- “Matazah? Why, we have that every day, but what is the reason for the lack of Chometz”?

The Talmud⁶ relates how Haman, when his lottery came out that Adar was to be the month he would destroy the Jews, rejoiced. “This is the month Moshe died”! He was sure Mazel would be on his side. Yet what he didn't consider, the Talmud tells us, was that this was also the month in which Moshe was born.

Did Haman not know this information as well?

What Haman failed to realize is that when there are two factors up against each other, one positive and one negative, it is the positive that always triumphs. The glass is always half full. *עשה דוחה לא תעשה*.

Indeed it is true that Matzah originally represented our slavery as indicated by the verses mentioned. This too is how the Hagadah starts out *הא לחמא עניא*. But something changed. *מה נשתנה*. – What changed? There was a metamorphosis. This same Matzah, which always reminded us of our harshest years of servitude, now symbolized our freedom as well. When we ate our Matzah on the shore of the sea, no more did we have

⁶ Megillah 13b

flashbacks of harsh bread; rather it came to signify our rush to freedom. We too, Pesach night, after recounting the Exodus, call it להם עני no more.

This gives new meaning to the requirement that when we recount the exodus - התחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח.

This is all well and good, but how does it explain the leading role Matzoh plays in reliving the story of our exodus?

Rashi tells us in many places:

מצותיו ותשמור עבד שתהיה לו (ממצרים) פדאך על מנת כן

What freedom exactly are we celebrating? Did we not just exchange masters?

In fact the Talmud (Megillah 14a) quoting Psalms 113 עבדי ה' הללו - - says that indeed it is this change which obligates us to recite Hallel on Pesach, in that we are now G-d's slaves and not Pharaoh's.

What is freedom? After all, a slave and a free man can do the same job, for one it may be an act of servitude while for the other it is one of independence. What is the *difference*? What *changed*? מה נשתנה?

Only the concept of עבדות *changed*. This can also shed light on how in Pirkei Avos we are called both עבדים (1/3) and בני חורין (6/1) in our service to G-d, by way of this exodus, now represents freedom!

When a Jew repents, what happens? His sins vanish? Far from it. They remain, but are transformed into merit⁷. This action, this sin, which until now stood for failure, now represents growth.

Yes we left the bonds of Egypt – but for the bond of Nisenass HaTorah! Indeed we are no longer עבדים for a physical king but for a spiritual One.

What better example of this concept – the essence of our Exodus - than Matzah; As we have shown it is the perfect model of transformation.

⁷ See Yevumot 86

What about our questions on Chametz?

Perhaps we misrepresented Matzoh by calling *it* the main event. It is conceivable, or maybe likely, that Chometz is what we are remembering.

Let us consider the following.

The MALBIM (Shmos 12/15) points out that nowhere does the Torah tell us what Matzoh is or what it is made from. Indeed the Talmud uses this verse to unlock that mystery: "כי בחפזון יצאת מארץ מצרים לא תאכל עליו חמץ שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצות לחם עני" דברים הבאים לידי - י ר' אליעזר בן יעקב אמר קרא לא תאכל עליו חמץ שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצותחנא דב חימוץ אדם יוצא הן ידי חובתו במצה, יצאו אלו שאין באין לידי חימוץ.

The Talmud is saying that only that which can become Chometz has the potential to be Matzoh.

Similarly, this is also how the Talmud (Pesachim 43b) understands the obligation on women to eat Matzoh:

ואכול מצה בקום... והני נשי נמי, הואיל וישנם בבל תאכל חמץ, ישנם

This is to mean that even though the obligation to eat Matzoh is a גרמאמצות עשה שזמן, its root is in the לא תעשה of Chometz.

In fact R' Tzvi Pesach Frank (Mikroei Kodesh Pesach 1 Siman 83) brings an opinion that takes this one step further: We know that עוסק במצוה פטור מן המצה only works to relieve someone from positive commandments (you can not desecrate the Shabbos because you are caring for a lost object). Matzoh, he says, will be in this same category since its root is in the negative commandment of Chometz!

The Oneg Yom Tov (Siman 42) seems to use this idea to answer a well known question on the Talmud Yerushalmi by saying that there are two separate Mitzvos one fulfills when he eats Matzoh- One, the basic "בערב תאכלו מצות". Secondly, he fulfills "לא תאכל חמץ".

Let us now return to the mystery of Chometz.

The Mechilta⁸ tells us of a disagreement between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmoel as to how the Jews accepted the Mitzvos. According to the view of Rabbi Yishmoel, They answered הן – yes- on the positive and לאו – we will not do - on the negative commandments. Rabbi Akiva disagrees and opines that on both positive and negative Mitzvos we answered הן – yes - .

⁸ On Shmos 20/1. See Rashi .

Perhaps Rabbi Akiva held that it is not enough *not to* do something but one must *actively* demonstrate what he is refraining from.

“You should rest on the seventh”. But how do we show that we are “resting” – through “Six days you *should* work⁹.”?

We pity a poor man not because of what he does have, but rather for what he has not. Chametz, leavened bread, is what we were deprived of in slavery. It is the *lack* of Chametz that we remember on Pesach. But how can we *actively* observe something that we *did not have*?

By eating Matzoh.

Indeed it is Chametz that is the main event channeled through Matzah.

לא תאכל עליו חמץ---How?

....שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצות---

It is not only that *עשה דוחה לא תעשה*, but it is the positive that transforms the negative into a *הן*, a positive.

The Ramban¹⁰ furthers this idea by demonstrating how our refraining from the negative commandments represents our fear of G-d while the doing the positive ones reflects our love for Him. He goes so far as to say that this is the very reason that we say *עשה דוחה לא תעשה*.

One of the great Rebbes of Ger once came to the home of one of his wealthy Chasidim. The Chosid sat his Rebbe down and waited for the Rebbe to begin.

Silence.

After ten minutes the Rebbe got up and left. Later that night this Chosid could not contain his curiosity and approached his Rebbe for an explanation of his actions. The Rebbe explained that there is a Tzedaka that he felt this Chosid should give to but the Rebbe knew that it not being one of the “favored” charities of this Chosid, his appeal will probably fall on deaf ears. As the Rabbis tell us, explained the Rebbe, you cannot make someone aware of a requirement if you know he will not listen. My only trouble was how I can *actively* fulfill this dictum. So I *came* to your house in order *not* to tell you!

⁹ See Ramban on Shmos 20/8 where he explains Zachur and Shomer as the positive verses the negative and why indeed the positive always triumphs. See as well the Meshech Chochma.

¹⁰ See footnote above. See Rashi on 20/8 as well as the comments of Sefer Hazikoron.

It may be easy for us to not steal. --But are we honest.

We may all refrain from causing strife. But are we “Rodeph Shalom”?

We must turn the “Shev V’Al T’a’Ases”, into “Kum V’Aseh’s”

“Sur MeRah “—of course. But we cannot forget “Vaseh Tov”

כי לא בחפזון יצאו
ישעי' נב/יב

In the era of Moshiach, Matzah will metamorphisize one last time; when we will be able to be עבדים with Matzah Ashira, to serve G-d only through dance and no more through tears.