



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת צו תשס"ט • Parshas Tzav 5769

THIS MATZAH THAT WE EAT...

Every year, our children ask us certain questions at the Seder; presumably, we have the answers. Let's do a quick check (on at least one of them) to make sure that this is indeed the case.

Why do we eat matzah on Pesach?

Seemingly, that's an easy one; the answer is spelled out in the Haggadah:

מִצָּה זוֹ שֶׁאֲנִי אוֹכְלִים, עַל שׁוּם מָה, עַל שׁוּם שְׁלֹא הִסְפִּיק בְּצֶקֶם שֶׁל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְהַחְמִיץ, עַד שֶׁנִּגְלָה עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְנֶאֱמַר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וַיֵּאָפוּ אֶת הַבֶּצֶק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עִגְת מִצּוֹת כִּי לֹא חָמֵץ כִּי גֵרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִתְמַהֵמֵה".

"This matzah that we eat; what is it for? It comes on account of the dough prepared by our forefathers, which did not have time to rise before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed is He, appeared to them and immediately redeemed them. As it states (*Shemos 12:39*): "And they baked the dough – which they brought out of Egypt – into matzah loaves, for it did not rise; for they were chased out of Egypt and could not tarry..."

Bottom line, it appears pretty straightforward that the reason we partake of matzah on this night is to commemorate the sudden, miraculous redemption, at which time our forefathers left the House of Bondage in such haste that they did not even have time to prepare proper bread.

SQUARE MEAL

The problem arises with a curious phrase found in another familiar passage from the Haggadah

(beginning section), which is recited while holding the matzah aloft:

הָא לַחֲמָא עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבֹהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם.
"This is the poor bread that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt."

In the land of Egypt? Didn't we just state that the mitzvah of matzah comes to commemorate the matzah eaten when the Jews left Mitzrayim (Egypt)? Why do we proclaim here that matzah was eaten while still in Mitzrayim?

Setting aside this apparent contradiction for a moment, the very notion of matzah in Mitzrayim seems somewhat perplexing. What sort of matzah was eaten in Mitzrayim, anyway? It couldn't have been bread that had no time to rise; the Jews were there for 210 years.

This issue is dealt with by the Ibn Ezra (quoted in *Orchos Chaim* on the Haggadah). Apparently, the Ibn Ezra "did time" in India at one point (having been captured and held prisoner there by some local ruffians). During his stay there, the meals provided to him by his captors consisted of none other than... matzah!

This was not done because it was Pesach. It seems that matzah – in certain places – was standard prison fare. Apparently, the reason that matzah is the delicacy of choice on the prison menu has more to do with practicality than ethnicity. Since matzah stays entrenched in the digestive apparatus far longer than standard bread, you get a lot more "mileage" per meal. Serving one's prisoners matzah is actually a dramatic cost-saving measure (perhaps an idea for the current economic situation as well?).

In any event, the Ibn Ezra was able to glean at least one benefit from his forced incarceration: he discovered "*pshat*" (proper interpretation) in the

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aforementioned passage from the Haggadah. The matzah referred to in the Haggadah as having been consumed by our forefathers in Egypt was none other than the “prisoners’ meals.” The Ibn Ezra understood that in Egypt as well, the Egyptian lords put their captive slave-nation on a strict matzah-diet.

DOUBLE SIGNIFICANCE

At this point, we are left with a somewhat paradoxical picture of the Pesach matzos. From the beginning of the Haggadah, (“*Ha lachma anya*”) it appears that the matzos we eat commemorate the downtrodden state of our forefathers in Mitzrayim, when they were forced to subsist on what was basically prison rations. From the latter section of the Haggadah, however, the matzah seems to serve as a reminder of the glorious redemption, which took place with astonishing rapidity when it arrived.

It could very well be, however, that it is precisely this dichotomy that the Torah wants us to recognize on this night. The Ramban, in fact, states explicitly (*Devarim 16:2*) that the Pesach matzos signify both aspects: the poor diet in Egypt, as well as the accelerated redemption.

This double nature of matzos can perhaps best be understood in light of the well-known *halachah* recorded in the Mishnah in Pesachim (*10:1*):

אֶפְלוּ עָנִי שְׁבִיטָא לֹא יֵאָכֵל עַד שְׁיָסֵב.

“Even a pauper is required to eat (at the Seder) in a reclining position (a sign of freedom and royalty).”

According to the Medrash, the reclining mentioned in this *halachah* is patterned after the manner of the Exodus, when Hashem actually had the Jews rest and recline as they journeyed through the desert (*Shemos Rabbah 13:18*).

Based on this Medrash, the *Eitz Yosef* (referenced in *Haseder Ha'aruch 117:5*) explains that the pauper’s leaning by the Seder table is perhaps the most classic manifestation of reliving the Pesach



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experience: it signifies precisely what occurred on this momentous occasion. As he states: “Right before the Jews left Egypt, they were eating in the manner of slaves, while standing and even walking (‘on the go’); the next moment, they were free men, eating while reclining.”

The Pesach matzos come to teach us a very valuable and timely lesson, one relevant to both every individual in his private life and to the Jewish people as a whole. No matter how desperate or tenuous a situation might appear, Hashem has the power to reverse everything in a single moment. Such occurred to our fathers in Egypt, when they practically began a meal on prisoner’s rations, while standing, and completed it as free men, eating in the manner of royalty.

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