



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בא תש"ע פסחים ב' 5770

RECIPE FOR REDEMPTION

The notion of a Pesach Seder emerges from the *mitzvos* delineated in this week's *parshah*: the bringing and consumption of the Pesach offering; *matzah*; *marror*; and the mitzvah of retelling the events surrounding the Exodus.

Although not necessarily Biblically mandated, there is a specific element of the Seder that encapsulates a particularly dramatic chapter of this saga (as will be detailed below). This is the institution known as *charoses*.

The thick, dark delicacy is introduced in the Mishnah in Pesachim (10:3), where the Tannaim dispute its status: **הביאו לפניו מצה וחרסת וישיגי תבשילין, אף על פי שאין חרסת מצנה. רבי אליעזר ברבי צדוק אומר, מצנה.**

“The following items are brought before the Seder participants: *matzah*, *maror* (bitter herbs), *charoses*, and two cooked dishes. (*Charoses* is included) even though it is not a mitzvah. R' Eliezer son of R' Tzadok says that it *is* a mitzvah.”

The Gemara (*Pesachim 116a*) explains each side of the dispute. According to the first opinion, *charoses* does not possess a mitzvah facet but is included for practical reasons (health reasons, actually). Apparently, the *charoses* concoction contains certain medicinal properties that ward off the potentially toxic effects of the *marror*.

According to R' Eliezer, though, the *charoses* does have a ritualistic component to it. Amongst the reasons given by the Gemara for its observance is the fact that *charoses* commemorates a particular, fundamental aspect of our forefathers' experience in Mitzrayim

(Egypt). Specifically, one of the key ingredients of this seasonal brew is the apple (*see Rema, Orach Chaim, 473:5 and Mishnah Berurah 473:49*), which recalls the heart-wrenching yet wondrous events that took place under the apple tree.

PROPAGATION IN THE SHADOW OF EXTERMINATION

What occurred there, exactly? Illustrating the heroic deeds of the women of that time, *Chazal* supply the details. The story takes place amidst the backdrop of Pharaoh's vicious decree, whereby his Egyptian minions sought out all male Jewish newborns, with orders to exterminate them. The Gemara in Sotah (11b) states:

“R' Avira expounded: The Jewish people were redeemed from Mitzrayim in the merit of the righteous women of that generation... When it came time for their babies to be born, the mothers would venture into the fields and give birth under the apple tree, as it says, ‘It was under the apple tree that I awoke you. There, your mother did bear you,’ (*Shir Hashirim 8:5*).”

Needless to say, this endeavor was fraught with danger, but the courageous women felt it was their duty to at least do their part to ensure the continuation of the Jewish people. Having done all they could, they entreated Hashem to safeguard their precious fruits. As the Medrash relates:

“Having just given birth, they had no choice but to leave their newborns in the fields. Transferring them to the care of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the women declared, ‘Master of the Universe! I have done my part. Now, may You do Yours.’

“Immediately, Hashem Himself – in all of His Glory – descended and cut the umbilical cord. He would wash and anoint each child... and supplied them with two

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“Who took care of you all of this time?” their parents queried. When the Jewish people eventually crossed through the splitting sea, these children pointed toward Hashem’s revealed Presence. “That is the One Who supplied us with all of our needs,” they explained. “This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him (*Shemos 15:2*),” they declared.

COOKED IN HIS OWN POT

In addition to serving as a fascinating account, the above narrative demonstrates an important principle. A key element employed by Hashem throughout the Exodus saga was the notion of *middah k’negged middah* (measure for measure), whereby the punishments meted out to the Egyptians took the form of the very crimes they had perpetrated against Yisrael. “For they received retribution through the designs intended for their victims,” (*Ibid. 18:11, with Targum*).

This notion was on vivid display in the episode detailed above. In the parshas Shemos issue, we discussed Pharaoh’s crafty and nefarious plan. Pharaoh, like his predecessor Lavan, aimed for the extinction of the Jewish people. Lavan’s attempts were doomed to failure, though, because his approach to direct and total extermination was opposed by Hashem’s promise that the Jewish nation would never cease.

Pharaoh reasoned that by specifically keeping the Jewish women alive – thereby not directly contradicting Hashem’s guarantee – his efforts could succeed. In the absence of Jewish males, the women would have to settle for Egyptian mates. Their children would be born Jewish, of course, but what sort of Jews would they grow up to be, with the evil and depraved Mitzrim as role models?! Assimilation would accomplish what direct extermination could not.

Alas, his plot backfired – big time. For, as depicted earlier, the Jews survived specifically through the efforts of these heroic matrons. Pharaoh thought that by keeping the women alive, his goal would be accomplished, and the Jewish people would disappear in Mitzrayim. Instead, however, “The Jewish people were redeemed... in the merit of the righteous women.”

special rocks: one of which would dispense oil, the other, honey...” (*Shemos Rabbah 23:8*).

However, the babies were not yet out of the woods. Chazal relate that the Egyptians would scour the countryside in search of their prey. Eventually, the children were spotted.

Yet the story has a happy ending. As the menacing Egyptians approached, a great miracle occurred: the children were swallowed up into the ground, to protect them from the advancing henchmen. Not to be outdone, the Egyptians then brought oxen with which to plow the ground, hoping to dispose of the sheltered babies in this gruesome fashion. Their efforts, however, did not bear fruit, and the young charges remained untouched, hidden safely underground, where they continued to flourish under the care of the Ultimate Caregiver.

When the children matured, they literally “grew up,” emerging from the ground in the manner of a young shoot bursting forth through the soil. At this point, they would simply return to their houses, where they were reunited with their grateful parents.

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