

PESACH DVAR TORAH

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Holidays and Time

To begin to comprehend the deeper mechanisms of the holiday of Pesach we first need to try to understand what the concept of time represents in Judaism. The common misconception is that in Judaism just like any other religion or culture, we commemorate past events. For example we celebrate Pesach to remember what happened when we left Egypt. However, while remembering how we became free is a part of the Pesach holiday, it is not primary. In Judaism, the timeline is circular. What does this mean? It means that every year at different times of the year we go through the same things. Imagine all the months of the Jewish calendar in a circle now imagine going around the circle every year over and over again. Every year we experience the special energies that are associated with that month or time of year. For example the ninth of Av is a time where Din (judgment) is very severe therefore, it is no wonder that both the first and second Beit Hamikdash were destroyed on that day (not to be outdone by the beginning of WWII which took place on that day and brought about unspeakable destruction to world Jewry and the world at large).

Every month and time of year has a special energy to it. It is for this reason that we are given Mitzvot that are time-related (only to be done at certain times of year; ie. Fast, eat matzah, lulav, etrog etc.). The Mitzvot help us ride the wave and go with the energy of that month. There are times to be cautious (three weeks from 17 Tamuz to 9th of Av), times to be happy (Purim, Adar) and times to reflect and do Teshuva (Elul). Therefore, when we celebrate a holiday we are not just commemorating a past event, in fact in a way we are reliving it and going through its special energy once again.

Incidentally the reason why women are exempt from time related mitzvot is that they naturally perceive these energies and can naturally ride the energies. This is represented by their physical bodies which are also based on a monthly cycle. (It should be noted that scientists have no explanation as to why the woman's body is based on a monthly cycle; all animals are either based on seasons or climates.) The special ability to sense the energies of the different times of the year is why it's always been women who have saved us in times of danger. On Purim it was Ester on Chanukah it was Yehudit and on Pesach it was the Jewish women who made the husbands bring forth kids even though they were in a terrible situation. This was the Jewish women in Mitzraim as it says "the more they afflicted them the more they multiply" (Shemot 1:12). In fact it was Miriam who told her father that separating from her mother after the decree that Jewish boys will be killed was not right because a) he could have a daughter and b) we have to do our part and Hashem will do his. Hence we see that it was because of Miriam that Moshe was even conceived. Also by the Golden Calf the women did not present their Jewelry for the idol, (contrary to the Ten Commandments movie), while they were the first to present their Jewelry for the Mishkan. It also says that the women played their tambourines after crossing the sea because they had such emuna in Egypt that they will be saved by Hashem and that they will have to celebrate later that they brought forth with them the tambourines while the men did not.

Following that reasoning, it is proper to ask what is the special energy of the month of Nissan and the holiday of Pesach? The Gemara in Rosh Hashana says "In *Nissan* our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt and in *Nissan* we will be redeemed" (Tractate *Rosh HaShana* 11a). The special energy of the month of Nissan is being redeemed and coming together as a nation. In our times this would translate into coming out of galut. Now the entire holiday is much more meaningful. It is not just a commemoration of what happened over three thousand years ago, rather it is as relevant today as it has ever been; just like any other holiday that we celebrate.

Pesach takes place on the night of the fifteenth. Why is that? Kabbalistically G-d represents the sun which gives off endless light. We represent the moon which only reflects the light of the sun. On the night of the fifteenth the moon is full and thus reflects more of the sun's light than ever. This is the deep reason why when we say Kiddush levana (the blessing of the moon) we say that "let the day come when the moon is as big as the sun" meaning when we will be able to use all that G-d gives us for the right reason and hence reflect it back to the world.

Purim and Pesach

The holiday of Pesach follows that of Purim. Therefore, it is appropriate to compare the two holidays. On Purim, all the miracles that took place were hidden miracles. As mentioned before in the Purim article the name of G-d is not even mentioned in the Megillah. Furthermore, Purim takes place in the winter where darkness prevails and the beauty of the world is hidden. However, Pesach takes place in the Spring (It is a commandment from the Torah that it be celebrated in spring). Spring, it is a time of growth. A time where the trees blossom and the birds sing it's a time where things are revealed and similarly G-d is revealed. In sharp contrast to Purim where all the miracles are hidden, the miracles of Pesach are not only revealed but they are as extravagant as they can get. Hashem's name is all over the Haggadah and his miracles are stated openly and clearly. Whereas in the Megillah the names of the characters fill the pages and the names of Hashem are not mentioned, in the Haggadah it is the opposite. The names of Hashem fill the pages and the names of the characters are barely seen. In fact Moshe's name is not once mentioned in the Haggadah! In summary, Pesach reveals that which was hidden on Purim.

Chametz and Matzah

Chametz and Matzah Deep Meaning

Perhaps the most important Mitzvot of Pesach are getting rid of the Chametz and eating Matzah. Both of these Mitzvot seem strange at firsthand. The Torah says that the Jewish people had to leave in haste and had no time to wait for the bread to leaven therefore they ate matzah on the night that they left Egypt. However, the question that needs to be addressed here is why did they have to rush? And how exactly does the few minutes it takes for the bread to rise change the mechanism of our leaving Egypt so much that we have to eat Matzah every year at this time?

To answer these questions we need background in a very useful and critical teaching of the deeper sources. The following is based on the writings and speeches of Rabbi Tatz. The sources teach that everything in the world runs on a mechanism of 1)

darkness, 2) inspiration, 3) self-effort, and 4) balance of inspiration and self-effort. Let's look at this more closely. First there is darkness which is nothingness, then there is a level where Hashem is by us and basically does what is needed for us. Following inspiration is self-effort on this level we need to earn and duplicate that which Hashem gave us, on our own. Following self-effort is a balance of perfect harmony of Hashem's inspiration and our self-effort. Everything that happens in life is comprised of these levels and if everything is comprised of these levels then it naturally follows that each of the levels has within it the other levels (in order) as well. An analogy might help us better understand this. Imagine a father who is teaching his son how to walk. At first the son can't walk, this is darkness. Then the father picks up the son holds his hands and walks with him. This is a great feeling for the child. He feels empowered. He is walking and yet he can't fall because his father is holding him. This is inspiration. After a while, just at the moment when the son gains most confidence in his father and the fact that he can't fall, the father lets go. This is the level of self-effort. The son feels betrayed, however it is through the letting go that he learns how to walk. Following this stage is the balance and harmony stage. At this stage the father and son walk together.

Keeping this in mind we can make sense of a lot of things that happen in life. Rabbi Tatz says it is most revealed in marriage where people think the initial level of inspiration will last forever. In fact the level of inspiration is very brief. If couples keep this in mind they will be better able to cope with the self-effort stage and look forward to the balance and harmony stage which is even better than the inspiration stage. For more on this refer to Rabbi Tatz's book "Living Inspired" Chapter 2.

How does this relate to Pesach and our previous question? Well let's try to incorporate the levels into our leaving of Egypt. First we were slaves, this is obviously the level of darkness. Following the darkness we were redeemed from Egypt through amazing miracles namely the ten plagues. This is obviously the inspiration stage where Hashem did all the miracles for us and we basically sat back and watched. Following our leaving Egypt we were in the desert, a place where we were tested with not having food and water, and fighting with Amalek. This is the self-effort stage. Finally on Shavuot we are given the Torah which is the climax of the entire story. This is the balance and harmony stage. It follows that the month of Nissan=inspiration Iyar=self-effort and Sivan=balance and harmony. The deeper sources also point out that the astrological signs of these months hint to the levels as well. Nissan is represented by the Lamb which is passive and is guided by the Shepherd, therefore it is hinting to inspiration where we are passive and Hashem is our Shepherd. Iyar is represented by the ox which works and puts in a lot of effort. This is hinting to the self-effort stage. Finally Sivan is represented by twins (Gemini) which is obviously hinting at the balance and harmony stage.

We can now attempt to answer the previously mentioned question. Why did we have to leave in haste? Well it's because we were at the climax of the stage of inspiration (represented by the month of Nissan and further by the fullness of moon within the month of Nissan). Were we to stay longer, the level of inspiration which itself is comprised of a level of inspiration would move into the level of self effort. Hashem wanted us to leave Egypt on the high note of inspiration so that we can cope with the self-effort stage of the desert. How is this represented by Matzah? Well the only difference between Matzah and Chametz is time. Matzah comes to teach us that we should make the most of the inspiration stage in every part of our life and use it as a light to see through the darkness

in the self-effort stage. In fact in Hebrew the only difference between the letters of matzah and chametz is that matzah has the letter hei while chametz has the letter chet. The only difference between these two letters is a little blot of ink which is represented by the time it takes something to become Chametz.

Now we can also understand the commentaries which say that when Abraham told Sarah to hurry and bake cake (Bereishit 18:6) he was referring to matzot. Even though it was long before the coming out of Egypt, Abraham was able to sense the energy of the month of Nissan and know that it is time to eat Matzah. Eating Matzah is not remembering what happened but it is to help us ride the wave of the month of Nissan which is represented by inspiration and Matzah comes to teach us to not let that inspiration go by and become chametz. Therefore, regardless of the story of Yetsiat Misrayim it was proper to eat Matzah on the month of Nissan.

Chametz and Matzah More Insights

There are other meanings of Matzah and Chametz as well. The Radbaz says that Chametz represents our yester Hara, which is represented by our bad characteristics. On Pesach we use the level of inspiration to clean out the Chametz (bad characteristics) from our lives. In Judaism the worst of these characteristics is the characteristic of pride. There are sources which say that pride is the root of all bad. Why is this so? We believe as Jews that G-d is one (Hashem Echad in shema yisrael) the deeper meaning of this is that the whole world is one. It naturally follows that each and every one of us is a part of G-d. However while we are in this world we can not see this connection. The only way to be close to him is to become like him and get rid of our perception of self. This is why we say berachot. In Hamotzi we say blessed are you Hashem who brings bread from the ground. The obvious question is why do we say *bread* from the ground? After all doesn't Hashem only provide the Wheat? The answer is that by stating the beracha as such we are saying we are a partner to Hashem being that we are a part of him and by leaving our individual work out of the picture we can see ourselves as a part of him. To have pride is exactly the opposite of this idea. In fact this is why Moshe became the leader of the Jewish people. It says in the Torah that Moshe was the humblest of all men. Why was this important? Because by not saying I and not separating himself from G-d Moshe was able to reach a level where he is so close to G-d that he is almost one with him (this is not possible in this world even for someone on Moshe's level however he was as close as anyone to this level). This is why he became Moshe Rabbeinu.

Even the nullifying of the chametz is an act to kill the pride within us because were we to say that we got rid of all of our chametz (bad character traits) that in itself would be the biggest act of pride. It should be noted that selling chametz is only for the purpose of preventing people from losing money therefore it does not have a connection to getting rid of our bad characteristics.

Defeating pride is also a tikkun of Adam harishon. His test was to not eat from the tree. His thinking was that if he eats from the tree and brings evil inside him and still prevails then it is a much bigger accomplishment than to just pass the test of not eating from the tree. However he missed the point that Hashem wanted him to not eat from the tree and not create any challenges for himself so that he will become transparent and only reflect G-d. But by creating a challenge for the purpose of overcoming it Adam further distanced himself from G-d by thinking that HE HIMSELF will be able to over come it;

again demonstrating the importance of the virtue of humbleness. Furthermore the concept of the virtue of being humble is represented by the fact that Hashem first revealed himself in a lowly bush and also by the fact that he chose mount Sinai which according to our sages was the lowest mountain there.

Pride is represented by chametz while humility is represented by Matzah. Chametz tends to rise, this is symbolizing the rising of a person above others (pride). Matzah however is flat and thereby symbolizes humility and unity. The Jewish people were able to leave Egypt only when all of them would eat Matzah. This means everyone was on the same level; no one higher than another. Unity was primary in our leaving of Egypt. This is why in the Dayeinu prayer of the Haggadah we say to Hashem that even if you brought us to the mountain and not given us the Torah it would have been enough. This is because the unity that was within us under the mountain would have been sufficient even if he hadn't given us the Torah. After-all Hashem echad=the entire world is one.

People being on the same level on Pesach was so important that when standing in line to buy the Pesach offering a person was not allowed to give his spot to a person of higher authority such as a king, because on this holiday we were all one and we were all on the same level as is symbolized by the flatness of the Matzah.

Another distinction between Matzah and Chametz is that Matzah is the same on the inside and the outside while chametz is different on the inside and outside. This has many applications. A person with bad character traits does not show who he really is with his actions. Even when he does good it is for a reason that is selfish or full of pride. The outside (action) and inside (reason for action) are not the same. However Matzah is the same on the inside and outside. Another application is that Chametz which is the yester hara tries to lure us in with its outside appearance into luxurious lives void of Torah. However, that kind of life is not the same on the inside as it is on the outside. Depression, divorce and troubled children are far more prevalent in those households than in simple torah abiding households which are represented by the Matzah.

Miracles

The Rambam says that one hasn't fulfilled the mitzvah of having a seder unless he has discussed the miracles that took place in Egypt. Along the same lines the Arizal says the word pesach can be read peh sach (the mouth speaks). It is incumbent on the leader of the seder to discuss the miracles that Hashem performed for us at the seder table. It is also important for the leader of the seder to point out that although at the seder we discuss miracles that are out of the ordinary it is still called a seder which means order. The reason for this is that as Jews we believe nature is only a way Hashem runs the world. Nature is not a force by itself and therefore miracles and natural laws are no different as they are both governed by Hashem. We demonstrate this fact by calling it a seder which shows that the miracles are also in the order of Hashems doings just like nature is.

Lets look at some of the miracles that took place in Egypt and try to get a fuller understanding of how and why they happened.

Ten Plagues

The most famous of the miracles is the ten plagues. The question regarding the ten plagues is why did Hashem choose these specific ten? Obviously everything happens

for a reason so why did Hashem choose these ten plagues to bring upon the Egyptians? The Maharal gives a classic answer and says that the ten plagues mirror reversely the ten sayings of creation. The first of the sayings is in the beginning the last of the plagues is killing of FIRST born, second of the sayings is let there be light and the ninth of the plagues is darkness and so on. The plagues were meant to fix the ten sayings of creation that the Egyptians had perverted.

Splitting of Sea

The splitting of the sea is also a major miracle that Hashem did for the Jewish people. It is important to point out that the sea did not split until Nachshon ben Aminadav of the tribe of Judah walked into the sea and it wasn't until the water reached his neck that the sea split. This teaches us a very important lesson. As long as we do what we have to do (have emunah and put in self effort) then we don't need to worry about the outcome, Hashem will take care of the best. This is a classic example of effort and trust.

Just as before we looked for the deeper meaning of the ten plagues lets try to delve deeper into the meaning of crossing the sea. Water in Judaism represents birth. This is the deeper meaning of going to the mikveh. Mikveh is a rebirth. Just as when a baby is in its mothers stomach it is surrounded by water so too when we go to the mikveh we are being reborn. Water always takes the shape of the object that is put in it and becomes one with it thus the coming out of the water represents birth in which the baby is separated from the mother much the same way we are separated from the water as we go to the mikveh. It is interesting to note that water is the only liquid whose density is higher in the liquid phase than the solid phase. Thereby it closely surrounds us in the mikveh. Incidentally, the birth of the world is also similar to the mikveh concept and the birth of a baby. It says in Bereishit that the waters gathered and the land was revealed. Now we see that something coming through water represents a new birth. What is the connection of this with the splitting of the sea? For the Jewish people the going through the sea represented the new birth of a nation. Before then we were slaves let alone a nation and now we are redeemed and finally been called a nation represented by the going through the sea. It is also noteworthy to point out that according to the midrash the water split into twelve parts, one for each tribe and the waters surrounded us from the sides all the way to the top. The top was not open to the sky contrary to common belief based on the movie of the Ten Commandments. This is critical because as we said before the birth of the world, the birth of the baby, and the going through the mikveh all required that the object or person be surrounded by water from all sides. Crying=bechi maze=mevuchai aqua water maim.

Mann

Another important miracle that took place for us on our journey from Egypt to Israel is the miracle of the mann. The mann was the food which the bnai yisrael ate while in the desert for forty years. The question raised here is why did Hashem have to provide us with this kind of food? Why couldn't he have just provided us with "regular" food? The answer is that food is a very important concept in Judaism. The food that we eat becomes a part of us and for this nation which was going through a purification process it was necessary that the food be on a higher level too. In English we say you are what you eat. This is true in Judaism as well. However in Judaism it is not only true of the physical

aspects of the food that is eaten, it is also true of the spiritual things that the physical food represents. As mentioned before, Matzah represents humility, unity, and freedom and by eating it we hope to make it a part of us both physically and spiritually on Pesach. Incidentally, this is one of the reasons that we eat the different foods on Rosh Hashana as well. So this year when it comes time to eat the matzah we should have in mind all of the non-physical things that matzah represents and try and make that a part of us. Similarly we should try to refrain and stay away from the things that are represented by chametz (pride, wasting time of inspiration, laziness etc.) and burn them out from our physical, spiritual and intellectual entities as well.

Another thing we should keep in mind about the manna that ties it together with the splitting of the sea is the concept of emuna (faith). As mentioned before the sea split only when Nachshon ben Aminadav had the emuna to walk into the sea. Similarly the manna was given everyday and it was commanded not to save any of it for the next day. The Emuna that Hashem will provide the manna was a major lesson of the manna for the Jewish people. Anyone who held onto extra manna for the next day was only disappointed when he saw that it was spoiled already. It should also be noted that on Friday there was double manna for Shabbat (this is why we say Hamotzi on two pieces of Challah). This was also a lesson to teach us that we will not lose anything from keeping Shabbat. In fact working on Shabbat is like holding onto extra manna which represents lack of emuna and even lack of belief in Hashem. It says in the gemara that it is determined on Rosh Hashana how much money a person makes. By working on Shabbat he does not earn more therefore working is a double loss (he is losing rest and disobeying a commandment of the Torah). As a great Rabbi once put it, a person who works extra (working on Shabbat, working beyond that which he needs to live) is like a person who wants to pay extra taxes. Therefore, we must strengthen our emunah and keep only the manna that is ours by keeping the holidays, Shabbat, and give Mitzva (10% of income to tzedaka) so that we will not be holding onto manna which will become spoiled (lose money for hasbeih shalom medical reasons, court cases, accidents etc.).

Staff and Snake

Hashem told Moshe to drop his staff and it turned into a snake. The midrash says that Hashem's name was on the staff of Moshe. Hence when one lets go of Hashem then evil (represented by the snake as in Bereishit) comes into the world. However, as long as we hold onto Hashem the staff remains a staff and there is no room for evil. The snake that Moshe saw was not simply a snake it was all the evil in the world and that's why it says that Moshe became afraid. He thought there was no way to fight so much evil. However, Hashem told him to pick it up and it became a staff again. This also represents the concept of teshuva where one can return the snake (the evil created in the world by his actions) into the staff (G-dliness).

It should also be noted that contrary to common belief the staff of Moshe ate the staffs of the Egyptians. It was not his snake that ate their snakes. In light of the above explanation if it was that his snake ate their snake it would mean that one evil ate another. However, it says in the Torah that his STAFF ate their STAFFS and hence showed that Hashem (Moshe's staff with his name on it) is one and all their gods (represented by their staffs) are superficial. Another example of why the movie Ten Commandments should not be relied upon! As a side note in the movie Moshe is the only one who hears the

voice of G-d whereas it states explicitly in the Torah that everyone heard him. This is the major difference between our religion and every other religion. No other religion can claim that their entire nation witnessed G-d. Also no other religion can claim that they started with the belief of three million people. All the other religions started with the belief of a few people who gradually turned to many. One person's testimony can be false but for three million people's testimony to be false is highly unlikely. Another critical point the movie, Ten Commandments, missed!

Lashon Hara and Tzaraat

Before going to Pharaoh Hashem gave Moshe three signs. One was that he drop his staff and it turns to a snake, the second was that he should put his staff in water and it become blood and the third was that he should put his hand under his bosom and it became tzaraat. The question is why didn't Moshe show the last sign to the Egyptians? The answer is that in the pasuk it Hashem says to Moshe that this shall be a sign for YOU. Right before Hashem gave him these signs Moshe said lashon Hara about the Jewish people and tzaraat as we know comes as a sign upon someone who says lashon hara. It should be noted that the staff also turned into a snake which has been the representative of lashon hara for all time. The snake in its nature shows that a loose tongue (a snake always has its tongue out) is poison. The parshiyot read at the time of Pesach talk about tzaraat. Perhaps a reason for this is that on Pesach we are so careful what goes *into* our mouth and forget to think about what comes out of our mouth. The Rabbis say that speaking is like shooting an arrow once it is shot you can't take it back. Lashon hara has its roots in the depths of the holiday of Pesach as well. As we know the going down to Mitzrayim started with the selling of Yosef and Yosef was sold because he spoke lashon hara about his brothers. Hence we see that the entire time we spent in Mitzrayim was a result of speaking lashon hara. On Pesach we eat matzah which as mentioned before represents humbleness and unity. Unity has never and will never go hand in hand with lashon hara. Therefore it is vital on Pesach to burn also the chametz of lashon hara from our character traits.

Haggadah Insights

Why do we recline?

Because we became free and free people can recline. One might ask how is it that we became free? We went from serving the Egyptians to serving Hashem we are still serving! However the answer is that freedom without laws is meaningless. If two people have complete freedom then either one can infringe on the other's freedom hence neither has real freedom. This is where the saying "only he who is a slave to the truth is free" comes into play. In the Torah this saying can be found in one word. It says in the Torah that Charoot (engraved) was on the tablets. However, the word can be read Cheroot (freedom) was on the tablets meaning that now that there were laws there is real freedom and now that we are slaves to the truth are we really free.

Why do we dip twice?

Because the going down to Mitzrayim started with the dipping of Yosef's cloths in blood and it ended with the Jewish people dipping blood on the door posts.

Why eat Marror?

Marror reminds us of all the bitter work and suffering the Egyptians put us through. It is a custom to use Romaine Lettuce for Marror because just as lettuce is sweet at first but then turns bitter after chewing it, in all of our history every galut we were in, started off sweet but then turned bitter (Egypt, Spain Germany etc.). This is to teach us that if we try to be too comfortable and blend into their society, Hashem will make them remind us that we are different. This idea speaks volumes about the present assimilation situation in America.

Why eat Charoset?

Charoset represents the mortar they used for the bricks.

Why eat korech?

Korech is the sandwich of matzah, marror and charoset. It teaches us that to build bricks of matzah which holiness and G-dliness we need to go through marror (bitter times) held together by charoset (hard work). As long as we keep our eyes on the end point the hard work and the bitter times will become much easier to cope with.

Why eat egg?

Egg is a reminder of the korban Chagiga. An egg was chosen to represent the Jewish people. The Chatam sofer says that the egg is the only food that the more you boil it the harder it gets. This was the Jewish people in Mitzraim as it says “the more they afflicted them the more they multiply” (Shemot 1:12). Another reason we eat the egg is that it is a mourners food and we are mourning the fact that we have no Beit Hamikdash to bring the Sacrifice (Chagiga sacrifice represented by the egg) in.

The Omer

Following the Holiday of Pesach is the Omer. We count 49 days to Shavuot. There are many reasons for this. One is that when a person is looking forward to something he counts down the days to when it is gonna happen. Similarly we count down the days to the anticipated day of receiving the Torah. However, a deeper reason is given by the sages. The word pesach means to leap over. The simple interpretation of this is that on Pesach Hashem skipped over our houses and spared us of the killing of the firstborn. The deeper explanation is that on Pesach one can leap over the levels of spirituality. There are 49 levels of spirituality and on Pesach night one can reach the highest. Why? Because as we mentioned before it is a time of the stage of inspiration. However, the days that follow Pesach are the stages of self-effort where we have to earn through our efforts the levels that we leaped over on Pesach. Hence there are 49 days that are counted corresponding to the 49 levels. One should use these 49 days to further refine the characteristics he found the flaws (chametz) with on Pesach. Incidentally the Torah tells us to count 50 days but we count only 49 because by not counting the 50th we are giving meaning to it. The 50th level can not be reached in this world. In fact the Hebrew word for measure (mida) adds up to 49. The word misrayim can be read metzar yam which means constricting of the 50th. Egypt was the place that didn't allow the Jewish people to reach the 50th level. After we left we leaped over the 49 stages and during the omer we had to earn it. On these days we should try and refine the character traits that were represented by chametz on Pesach.

If you are interested in receiving more devar torahs such as this please email me at ndanesh100@yahoo.com