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TOURO TORAH

• Lander College for Women • Divrei Torah Newsletter • Pesach •

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What's in a Name?

Shabbos Ha-Gadol: The Intersection of Shabbos and Pesach

By Reena Evans

The *Shabbos* before *Pesach* is called *Shabbos Ha-Gadol*, literally “the great *Shabbos*”. However, this special *Shabbos* that complements *Pesach* often gets lost in all the pandemonium that surrounds *Pesach*. This is not a new problem. Rashi writes in the *Sefer Ha-Pardes*, “People are accustomed to calling the *Shabbos* before *Pesach Shabbos Ha-Gadol*, but they do not know what makes this *Shabbos* greater than any other.”

He states further that there was a special commandment at the time of the first *Pesach* to prepare the lamb four days earlier, on the 10th of *Nissan*, in order to ascertain that it did not have any blemishes and was fit to be given as a *korban*. When the Egyptians saw what the Jews were doing with their god, they were infuriated. *Hashem*, however, performed a great miracle, and they were afflicted with all kinds of horrible plagues so that they could not lift a finger to harm the Jews. *Tosafos* (*Shabbos* 87b) describes the reaction of the Egyptian firstborn when they were told that the Jews had taken these lambs for their sacrifices in

anticipation of G-d killing all the Egyptian firstborn. The doomed men pleaded with Pharaoh to let the Jews go, and, when refused, waged a civil war against their fellow Egyptians to emancipate the slaves. We therefore set aside *Shabbos Ha-Gadol* in commemoration of these great miracles (*Book of Our Heritage*).

On closer inspection, moving the commemoration of these miracles to the nearest *Shabbos*, rather than celebrating them on the actual calendar date they occurred (10th of *Nissan*), seems very strange. We know that *Ma'amad Har Sinai* took place on *Shabbos*, yet *Shavuot* is still celebrated on the 6th of *Sivan* even though it falls on a Wednesday this year. It almost seems like moving the celebration of George Washington's birthday to a Monday close to February 22nd just to ensure a long weekend. Given the unique holiness of specific days on the Jewish calendar, no one would ever think of doing that for a Jewish holiday.

Though there are many reasons for the name and date of *Shabbos Ha-Gadol*, I would like to mine the name itself to understand the essence of the Great *Shabbos*. In Hebrew, the gender of the noun and adjective must match. שבת is a feminine noun, yet גדול is a masculine adjective; the correct form would be “*Shabbos Ha-Gedolah*”. In addition, when using “ה”, “the” to refer to something specific, both the noun and adjective take the prefix “*hey*” as in הנהר—the great river. Therefore, the great *Shabbos* should be *Ha-Shabbos Ha-Gedolah*. In this context, “*Ha-Gadol*” is not an adjective, “great,” modifying a noun, “*Shabbos*,” but the Hebrew grammatical construction of *semichut*, “something of something else”, such as מלך העולם, King of the World. Therefore, we don't have The Great *Shabbos*, but *Shabbos* of the Great One. *Ha-Gadol* is listed as one of *Hashem's* seventy names in *Maseches Shavuot*, and we also use it in davening, as we say in *shemoneh esreh*, הקל הגדול הגבור והנורא. (Dr. Howard Evans, as quoted by Betzael Evans).

On *Shabbos*, we work on our understanding and appreciation of the Great One, and on this *Shabbos* leading up to *Pesach*, we do so even more. In the two times the Torah recounts the Ten Commandments, the



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- Reena Evans

wording of the commandment to keep *Shabbos* differs: "זכור את יום השבת לקדשו...כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת" (Shemos 20:8-11) and "שמור את יום השבת לקדשו...וזכרת כי עבד היית בארץ מצרים" (Devarim 5:12-15). From the beginning of Creation, the predecessors of the Jewish people had kept *Shabbos* because *Hashem* created the world. From this special *Shabbos* onward, when the deliverance of the Jewish people from Egypt became imminent, the Jewish people remember on *Shabbos* that not only did *Hashem* create the world, but He also took us out of Egypt. *Yetziyas Mitzrayim*, with all its miracles, is the ultimate example of G-d stepping in and changing the course of nature and history, which proves His behind-the-scenes involvement for all time.

Rabbi Yonason Sacks (Rosh Yeshivah of Lander College for Men and *Rav of Agudas Yisroel Bircas Yaakov* in Passaic) explains that *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* are repeated in the recent *parshiyos Mishpatim* and *Ki Tisa* to teach us the first *ikar emunah* of the *Rambam*, that *Hashem* is both *borei* and *manhig*, that He both created and runs the world. Prior to the *chet ha-egel*, in *Parshas Mishpatim*, the first thing discussed was *Shabbos*, which is *techilah le-mikra'ei kodesh*, as we say in *kiddush*. Although *Shabbos* represents both aspects of *Hashem's* creation of and involvement in the world, it is most connected to Creation. On the seventh day, *Hashem* rested. The *yamim tovim*, on the other hand, are intensely connected to *Hashem's hashgachah*, *Hashem's* role as a *manhig*; *yetziyas Mitzrayim*, *ma'amad Har Sinai*, and *Hashem's* loving care of us in the wilderness all highlight *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* control over nature and history and His special love for the Jewish people. The *chet ha-egel* demonstrated that the Jews needed extra reinforcement in understanding *Hashem's* role as the *manhig* of the world. Therefore, *Yom Tov*, beginning with *Pesach*, which is first chronologically and most linked to *Hashem's* control over nature, precedes *Shabbos* in *Parshas Ki Tisa*.

Shabbos Ha-Gadol represents the convergence of these two understandings of *Hashem's* Hand in the universe. It is the introduction into *Shabbos*, the day of *Hashem* as the Creator, of the messages of *Hashem's hashgachah* that reverberate through the story of *yetziyas Mitzrayim* that was beginning to unfold. We are meant to use this *Shabbos* to prepare ourselves to imbibe these awarenesses with the *matzah* and *arbah kosos* on *sefer* night. Appropriate to help us achieve these lofty goals, the customs of *Shabbos Ha-Gadol* include learning the *halachos* of *Pesach* and reading parts of the *Haggadah*.

During this past week, turning the house upside down hunting for crumbs, cleaning, *kashering*, shopping, and cooking may have dominated our mental resources. Even the *sefer*, with all its special *mitzvos*, may not be effective without proper preparation. *Shabbos* always gives us time to pause and reconnect, and this *Shabbos* is truly great because we have the special *avodah* of the day to use this time to understand The Great One's involvement in our lives and what He has given us life and freedom to accomplish. May we all have a great *Shabbos Ha-Gadol* that leads to an inspiring and uplifting *Pesach*, and may it lead to celebrating *Pesach* next year in *Yerushalayim*.

“...this *Shabbos* is truly great because we have the special *avodah* of the day to use this time to understand The Great One's involvement in our lives and what He has given us life and freedom to accomplish.”

–Reena Evans

Like Royalty

Este Stollman

Regarding the eating of the *Korban Pesach*, the Torah warns us not to break any bones, as it says “*Ve'etzem lo sishberu*” (Exodus 12:46). The *Sefer Ha-Chinuch* states that the *shoresh* of this *mitzvah* is rooted in the fact that “אחרי” “Our hearts follow our actions.” If we *act* like kings, and do not break bones as do dogs when they eat, then we will *feel* like kings. Similarly, an important principle in psychology states that if we behave a certain way, we will become that kind of person, if only we have the will to do so. As the Hebrew saying goes, “אין דבר העומד בפני הרצון” “Nothing stands in the way of one's will.” In other words, if we act the way we wish to be, then everything else will follow. At the *Seder* table, we pour wine for each other, lean back on pillows, and put



out fancy settings not only for *hiddur mitzvah*, but also to give us the sense that on this night we are *bnei melachim*, we are royalty.

In terms of becoming *melachim*, kings, what is a *melech*? A *melech* isn't just *molech* (ruling) on others, he is *molech* on himself—he conducts himself like royalty. The word *melech* is an acronym for *mo'ach*, the brain (thoughts), *lev*, the heart (emotions), and *kaved*, the liver (actions). In all three aspects, a king rules over himself. He is in control of these components, rather than they of him. In relation to this, the Torah writes, "Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourself" (Deuteronomy 16:17). Although many commentaries take this expression as meaning to appoint *others* (of the judicial system) upon you, one can alternatively interpret it as meaning to appoint *yourself* as your own judge and officer; in other words, be in control of your actions and distinguish between right and wrong. The Torah continues the verse, stating, "...In all of your gates that *Hashem* has given to you," which, according to the last interpretation, would mean that in everything *Hashem* has given you, in all the situations He has put you in, you have to be your own guide and mentor. Become a leader of your thoughts, feelings, and actions!

Besides being in control of himself, a king must also carry around a pocket *Sefer Torah* with him wherever he goes. This is symbolic of the fact that in all his endeavors, he always has the *Torah* and *Hashem* on his mind. In all his interactions and engagements, he behaves like a *Yid*, actualizing all the necessary *halachos* and relevant *hashkafos*. This idea is reminiscent of the six constant *mitzvos*, which include *emunah ba-Hashem*, *yiras Hashem*, and *ahavas Hashem*—keeping *Hashem* in one's head, heart, and *kishkes* at all times. May *Hashem* help us act and feel like kings who are special, poised and regal; May we think of Him wherever we go, and in that merit may we serve the Ultimate King in *Yerushalayim*, *be-meheirah be-yameinu*.

" A melech isn't just molech (ruling) on others, he is molech on himself—he conducts himself like royalty. "

- Este Stollman

Special:
Faculty
Spotlight

Why all the fuss about *Chametz*?

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Miller

If you were to visit an observant Jewish home in the period preceding *Pesach*—say, sometime around *Channukah*—you will likely notice the almost obsessive concern on the part of the women of the house (the ones who do all the work!) to make sure that people aren't dropping crumbs from their bread, cakes, and similar items. "*Chametz* is forbidden even *be-mashehu* (a minute amount)," they will remind you. Indeed, that is the *halakhah* (Talmud *Pesachim* 30a, *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 447:1; see *Be'er ha-Golah* ad loc.). But why is this so? We all know how the Torah describes the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt (*Shemot* 12:39) as having been rather spur-of-the-moment (from the point of view of the *Bnei Yisrael*), with no time to prepare provisions for their journey into the desert, or even to bake leavened bread. Since they were "driven out of Egypt and could not tarry," their dough did not have time to rise.

Okay, so this can perhaps explain why we too eat *matzah* on *Pesach*—they ate it then, and we eat it now to commemorate that fact. (Though this raises the question: do we do *everything* that *Bnei Yisrael* did then? They wore cloaks—so should we do the same? What if their garments were purple—would we wear purple every *Pesach*?) But why must we avoid *all chametz*? And why is the minutest amount of *chametz* treated with such severity? All because they *happened* to have eaten non-leavened bread when they left Egypt?! Some authorities (see *Shu"t ha-Radvaz* No. 977 and *Rabbenu Bachye, Kad ha-Kemach, Pesach*) teach that *chametz* symbolizes the *yetzer hara*, and on the Festival of the founding of our nation, we avoid all semblance of the *yetzer hara*. While this is a very beautiful idea, it is unrelated to the reason given by the Torah, namely, that they left Egypt in a hurry and couldn't bake

" ...do we do everything that Bnei Yisrael did then? They wore cloaks—so should we do the same? What if their garments were purple—would we wear purple every Pesach? "

- R' Miller

bread. While certainly valid as a secondary interpretation, this approach is probably not the simple meaning behind the severity with which the Torah treats *chametz*.

Rabbi S. R. Hirsch (commentary to *Shemot* 12:39 and *Horeb* paragraphs 197-200), following the symbolic method of *ta'amei ha-mitzvot*, writes that *matzah* and *chametz* symbolize contrary ideas related to the nature of the exodus. If one were to conceive of the exodus from Egypt in a purely naturalistic fashion, it would seem that *Moshe Rabbenu* led a slave rebellion of the Israelites against their oppressors. The Children of Israel freed themselves from bondage. Now, had this been the case, then surely they would have prepared provisions for the journey! But this conception of the exodus is patently false. *Bnei Yisrael* were freed from Egyptian servitude *entirely by the Yad Hashem*. They played no role whatsoever in obtaining their freedom. That being the case, they remained in the thralls of slavery until the moment that *Hashem* took them out. They thus had no time to plan ahead, and instead took whatever dough they had, and it did not have time to rise. Thus, *matzah* symbolizes our dependence on *Hashem* for our entire national existence. By contrast, *chametz* symbolizes the contrary (and false) idea, viz., that we did play a role in obtaining our freedom. Thus, for all time, *chametz* must be banished from the home of every Jew on *Pesach*. Even the minutest amount of *chametz* represents *independence from Hashem*, whereas *matzah* symbolizes our dependence on *Hashem*. It is thus understandable why we must not only consume *matzah* on *Pesach* but must also treat the smallest amount of *chametz* with such severity.

“ Thus, *matzah* symbolizes our dependence on Hashem for our entire national existence. ”

- R' Miller

The Torah's punishment for *chametz* consumption on *Pesach* is *karet*, which refers to premature death, R"l.

Literally, *karet* means cut off, as the *passuk* states (*Shemot* 12:15), “That soul [that eats *chametz*] shall be cut off from Israel.” That is, one who consumes *chametz* on *Pesach* negates the very essence of Jewish peoplehood and thus *cuts himself off from the people of Israel*.

As we busy ourselves with removing *chametz* from our homes and preparing the *matzot*, let us take to heart this fundamental principle concerning the essence of Jewish peoplehood—that we are fully indebted, with every fiber of our being, solely to *Hashem*. May we merit to see His redemption of our people this *Nissan* just as we were once redeemed in *Nissan*.



Appreciating the Good

Gila Harris

“האדם הזה הוא כופה טובתו של חברו למחר הוא כופה טובתו של קונו” (משנת רבי אליעזר - פ”ז עמ’ לג)
 “A man who is not appreciative of his friend, tomorrow will not be appreciative of his Maker.”

In order to understand and comprehend the importance of a concept, one must analyze its antithesis. *Hakaras ha-tov*, the attribute of recognizing the good, is a main theme that is woven throughout the *Haggadah*, as we are essentially thanking *Hashem* for taking us out of Egypt. Understanding the antithesis of *hakaras ha-tov* will clarify its importance and the reason why it is such a crucial part of the *Haggadah*.

Pharaoh is the prime example of an ingrate, someone who is *kafai tov*. The *passuk* says in the beginning of *Shemos*, “וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדָע אֶת-יְיָ” “A new king arose who did not know *Yosef*.” The whole land knew of *Yosef* and that he saved them from a famine; Pharaoh, however, was an ingrate and refused to admit how *Yosef* had benefitted the country. His lack of gratitude towards *Yosef* led him to ultimately deny *Hashem*. After *Moshe* and *Aharon* came before Pharaoh to tell him that *Hashem* demanded the release of His children into the desert to serve Him, “שְׁלַח אֶת-עַמִּי וַיִּתְּנוּ לִי בְמִדְבָּר” Pharaoh answered, “לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת-ה’” “I don’t know this G-d - Who is *Hashem* that I should listen to Him?” Pharaoh’s initial lack of credit towards *Yosef* eventually led him to deny *Hashem*’s very existence.

Expressing *hakaras ha-tov* is a prerequisite for accepting the עול מלכות שמים, the

“ Expressing *hakaras ha-tov* is a prerequisite for accepting the עול מלכות שמים, the yoke of Heaven. ”
- Gila Harris

yoke of Heaven. One who does not recognize the good that others do for him will, in like manner, come to disregard the kindness that *Hashem* does for him. The purpose of the miracles of *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* was for the Jewish nation to accept the Torah. *Hashem* says, “אני ה' אלוך אשר הוצאתיך”, “I am *Hashem* Who redeemed you.” Why does *Hashem* state specifically that “I am the G-d who took you out of Egypt”? *Hashem* is warning the Jewish people that in order to accept the Torah and serve *Hashem* properly it is incumbent upon them to recognize all that *Hashem* did for them in Egypt.

The Torah teaches us the importance of *hakaras ha-tov* through many examples. We are told that this attitude not only applies to mankind but also to animals who do not have any intellectual capacity. The Torah obligates us to show appreciation to dogs by throwing them *treif* meat because the dogs let the Jews leave *Mitzrayim* with *nachas* and *kavod* and did not disturb the *kiddush Hashem*. The Torah also shows us that we must show appreciation even to the inanimate objects. Since the sand allowed *Moshe* to hide the dead Egyptian, *Aharon* was the one to hit the sand instead of *Moshe*, who owed it a debt of gratitude.

We have an obligation to intellectually realize the good that *Hashem* does for us. *Hashem* gave us two types of *mitzvos*: those which we can understand and those which we cannot. The *mitzvos* that we are able to comprehend oblige us to thank *Hashem*, as it is much easier to fulfill a command when we are aware of the reason. However, *Hashem* took us out of *Mitzrayim* for the sake of the *mitzvos* that we cannot comprehend. We feel we are indebted to *Hashem* for taking us out of *Mitzrayim* and therefore to show our appreciation we are obligated to keep these *mitzvos*. The *ko'ach* of *hakaras ha-tov* is to make it easier on us to serve *Hashem* and to do *mitzvos* that would otherwise be hard for us. *Hakaras ha-tov* is the conduit for the service of *Hashem*. Even though we do not know the reasons for some of the *mitzvos*, the fact that *Hashem* took us out of *Mitzrayim* is enough to fulfill them. On *Seder* night, when one's son asks “מה העדות והחוקים”, “What are these laws,” we answer “עבדים היינו”, “We were servants to Pharaoh and we recognize the good that *Hashem* did for us by taking us out from the shackles of slavery. Therefore, to show *hakaras ha-tov* to *Hashem*, we fulfill the עדות והחוקים even though we do not understand the reason.

Expressing gratitude to others is more than a nice gesture. It is a means to relating to *Hashem*. “If today man is not appreciative of his friend, tomorrow he will not be appreciative of his Maker” (משנת רבי אליעזר - פ"ז עמ' לג).

שפתי חיים - מועדים הכרת הטוב תכלית יצי"ם. Based on

Freedom of Speech

By Rebecca Melka

The climax of the festival of *Pesach* is the telling over of the Jewish exodus from Egypt on the first night of *Pesach*. This story is dynamic and elaborate, and the author of the *haggadah* repeatedly emphasizes the importance of engrossing the children while recounting the narrative. Children are the center of attention, as expressed in the command on the night of the *seder*, “*ve-higadita le-binkha bayom hahu*,” to tell one's children the story of the redemption from Egypt. It is not only encouraged for parents to include their children, but demanded of them to captivate their attention while telling over the miracles of the Exodus.

The command on *Pesach* night involves speaking about the miracles experienced by the Jews in Egypt. The *Shem Mi-Shmu'el* quotes the *Arizal* who explains that *dibbur*, speech, was also in exile while the Jews were in Egypt. The very name of the holiday, *Pesach*, is a contraction of the words *peh sach*, meaning a mouth that speaks. Part of the redemption from Egypt was a freedom of expression, a redemption from speech that was previously stifled and inhibited. It is therefore appropriate on a night that conveys freedom to use one's speech to recount the emancipation of expression.

Exile is manifested in the form of distance. While the Jews were in exile in Egypt, not only were they physically distant from their homeland, they were emotionally withdrawn as well. Emotional detachment is

revealed when one's words are hollow and empty, technically spoken but lacking any meaning. This was the state of the Jews in Egypt, with their words distanced from themselves. The hard labor they endured forced them to shut down emotionally, as it was impossible to be sensitive to others while experiencing severe oppression. *Rashi* describes this emotional state in his commentary on the beginning of *parshas Vayechi*. He explains that *Vayechi* is a *parsha setumah*, a closed passage, because the eyes and hearts of the Jews were shut due to their suffering in exile. The Jews were forced to close themselves off in order to survive the hardships from the persecution they sustained.

However, it is not possible for a person to permanently remain in this isolated condition. *Hashem* redeemed the Jews from Egypt to enable them to become His servants. A necessary component of serving *Hashem* is emotional presence and investment. The purpose of the exodus was not only to extract the Jewish people from physical slavery, but to revive their hearts in order to make them spiritually free. The heart is a necessary component in the service of *Hashem*, and therefore *Hashem* had to redeem the Jews not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. This enabled the Jews to discharge themselves of their depressed state and create a possibility for spiritual exhilaration.

Thus, the miracles performed in Egypt had an emotionally reviving quality for the Jews. The purpose of the ten plagues was not merely to punish the Egyptians, but to lift the spirits of the Jews as well. It was necessary for the Jews to regain self-confidence, and *Hashem* performed great miracles to demonstrate his allegiance to the Jewish people. These wonders culminated with the splitting of the Red Sea. After witnessing this great wonder that *Hashem* performed on their behalf, the Jews expressed their appreciation by singing *shirah*, song, an expression of gratitude through emotion. This miracle marked the peak of redemption, as the Jews were now free, in both physical and spiritual ways. *Rashi* comments on the verse of *Az Yashir* that the song "welled up in their hearts," signifying the reawakening of their emotion and spirit. At this point, the Jews were truly redeemed, now possessing emotional freedom.

The goal of the *seder* night is not only to tell a story, but rather to rejuvenate and redeem the Jewish heart. Each year, the story is recounted, allowing for the re-expression of awe and appreciation. For this reason, the focus of the night is specifically placed on the children. When the adults are emotionally invested in the story, the children are drawn and their minds are captivated. Children are the barometers of the adult's emotional engagement, as their attention is held only if the adults are truly invested in their story. The purpose of *Pesach* night is to revive the hearts of the Jews, and reinfuse them with love and commitment to serve the Creator.

Based on a shiur by Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein.



חג פסח ושמחה!

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- Rebecca Melka



~Touro Torah~

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