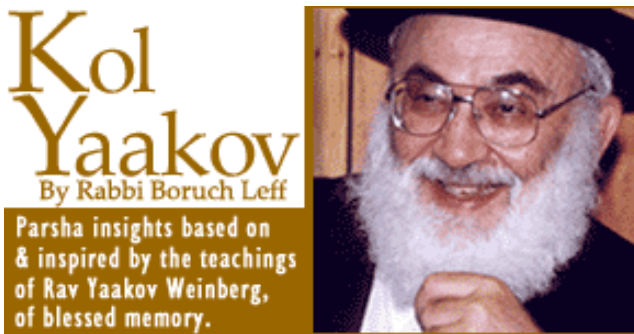


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## Let's Not Let Passover Pass Over

The season always seems to come without warning. The festivities of Purim end and suddenly we are thrust into busy preparations for Passover. With cleaning, shopping, planning, and more cleaning, we hardly have time to stop and reflect upon what it is that we are really doing. Just what is so special about the Passover holiday and how can we grow from it?

When we look at the arrangement of the Passover Haggadah we find a very unique style. The Haggadah does recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt but every so often the story is interrupted with spontaneous praise for God. For example, in the beginning of the Haggadah, just after mentioning, "*We once were slaves in Egypt...*" we recite: "*Blessed is God. Blessed is the One Who gave the Torah to Israel.*"

Shortly after, we continue the narrative with, "*In the beginning, our forefathers were idol worshippers,*" and then again break into tribute for God with "*Blessed is the One who kept His promise with Israel.*" A little further,

we lift our cups and sing a song (*V'hee She'amda*) to God for having always saved us from our enemies and thereafter continue with our story. After some more of the Haggadah tale, we recite and sing the long "Dayeinu" which thanks God in great detail for all He's done for us. After the story section is completed, we offer more praises to God in the official section of praises called Hallel.

All this is clearly not just storytelling. Why the constant sudden shifts from factual story telling to uncontrollable praises?

As Jews often do, we will answer our question with another question. Why are tens of new haggadahs printed every year? Next to the Chumash, the Haggadah has the most editions and commentaries written on it. Why are we so obsessed with new commentaries and new Haggadahs?

The answer lies in a deep understanding of an episode mentioned in the Haggadah.

*"The more one tells about the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy. It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining at the Seder in Bnai Brak. They discussed the story of the Exodus all night until their students came and said, "Masters! It is time for the recitation of the morning Shema!"*

Strange. Do we generally find that the Talmud cites a basic law such as "One must pray" and then feels required to prove that a great rabbi prayed? Why here do we mention the law of spending much time discussing the Exodus and then prove it with the story of the five rabbis who actually did it?

The answer is we are not using the five rabbis' tale to show that they observed the law. Rather, the story instructs us concerning *how*

we should observe the law. The commandment to discuss the Exodus requires you to become so immersed and involved that you lose track of time. You become so lost in the wisdom and insights that you don't realize that morning has dawned. The story must be told with dynamism and electricity, interest and excitement. The commandment is described with the Hebrew word "*sipur*," meaning to tell. You cannot simply re-state the story; you have to really tell it and be involved in it.

The Jewish people understand this fact intuitively and therefore consistently produce tens and tens of new haggadahs. New insights and novellas are necessary to fulfill the commandment properly so that the story is told with freshness and not with tediousness. What surfaces then is that, indeed, it is a biblical commandment to use a new haggadah each year. (Unless one is able to feel extremely enthused over last year's insights.)

This is the explanation for the Haggadah's spontaneous praise style. When we tell over the story on Seder night we are to really feel emotional thanks and gratitude to God. We are to get lost in the story as the Five Rabbis sitting in Bnei Brak did. We are to re-live the experience of the Exodus from Egypt as we mention in the Haggadah that "every person is obligated to see themselves as if they were the ones who left Egypt." We are to make the story real and meaningful to us. We break out into spontaneous praise from time to time because we are trying to tell the story as if we were personally involved. Often, when one tells a story they interrupt with superlatives of how the experience felt. The Seder night must be made real to us as if we were personally involved in the Exodus.

Maimonides implies these ideas as well in his description of the commandment to tell the Exodus story (Sefer HaMitzvos -- Aseh 157):  
**(Loose Translation)**

*"God has commanded us tell the story*

*of the Exodus of Egypt on the 15th of Nissan at the beginning of evening. This should be done in one's own choice of words. The more time and energy spent, the better. We must tell the story and thank God for His performance of miracles for us. How He redeemed us from the bondage of Egypt, fought our battles, and exacted revenge from the Egyptians."*

We glean several insights from Maimonides. First, ideally, the telling of the story should be natural and personal, in one's own words. Second, the story should not remain just a story but an expression of sincere gratitude to Hashem. Finally, Maimonides does something somewhat uncharacteristic of his style and describes for us in dramatic fashion what it is we are to be thankful for. "*How He redeemed us...*"

Maimonides could have done without this description and simply stated that we have to tell the story that appears in Exodus.

Maimonides is teaching us that the Passover Seder must be fresh and new. The discussions should be dynamic and exciting, not simply a re-statement of the insights of previous years. The Seder, to whatever extent possible, should truly make us feel that we personally have indeed left Egypt and that we are excited to tell the story of our escape.

Once we feel this closeness to God on Passover, we will inevitably leave Passover as changed people. We will begin to see God's kindness in all that we experience, even the challenges. We will not have allowed Passover to pass over us without it having deeply affected us.

Even after all of the exhausting preparations for the holiday, we must somehow muster up the strength to conduct our Seders in the way that Maimonides describes.

Always remember the old Jewish maxim: 'If you experience a Jewish holiday and have not changed profoundly as a result, you have missed the point of the holiday!'



## In Search of Chametz

### I. Pesach and Matzah

While the seven day festival commemorated each year in the spring is now known as *Chag haPesach* (Passover),<sup>1</sup> the Torah consistently refers to this holiday as *Chag haMatzot* - the holiday of *matzah*. The biblical name for the evening prior to this seven day holiday, the day on which the Paschal offering was brought- the day commonly referred to in modern parlance as “*erev Pesach*” - is, in fact, referred to in the Torah as *Pesach*. Each of these names, “*Chag haPesach*” and *Chag haMatzot*,” is applied to a distinct holiday, reflecting the major obligations of each of these respective days: Sacrificing the *Korban Pesach*, on the one hand, and eating *matzah*, on the other.

There is, however, one major element that is not expressed in these names; apparently, this third element is the flip side of the coin, as it were: We are commanded to eat *matzah* (unleavened bread), and, at the same time, *chametz* (leavened bread) is prohibited. And although this aspect is not given expression in the name of the holiday, the avoidance of *chametz* may be the real essence of the

holiday, and it is this aspect which occupies our thoughts and energies in the days leading up to Passover.

In Jewish theology, the avoidance of *chametz* is associated with the understanding that *chametz* is a symbol of the evil inclination, and of sin. The earliest source for this association is a brief passage in the Talmud in which *chametz* (or, to be more precise, a leavening agent) is used as a metaphor for man’s weakness in the face of the evil inclination:

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף יז עמוד א**

ורבי אלכסנדר, בטר דמצלי, אמר הכי, רבון העולמים, גלוי וידוע לפגין, שרצוננו לעשות רצונך, ומי מעכב? שאור שבעסה ושעבוד גליות. יהי רצון מלפגין, שמתילנו מידם ומאחרינו, ונשוב לעשות חוקי רצונך בלבב שלם.

R. Alexandri, when he finished praying, would add the following: Sovereign of the Universe, it is known full well to You that our will is to do Your will. What prevents us (from doing so)? The yeast in the dough and our subjugation to foreign powers. May it be Your will to deliver us from their hand, so that we may return to performing the statutes of Your will with a perfect heart! (Talmud Bavli, Brachot 17a)

This passage has nothing to do with Passover or preparation for the holiday; rather, the identification of *chametz* - or *se'or* (yeast) is primarily a metaphor. Nonetheless, this single and singular passage has wielded a great deal of influence, and is the source of the angst experienced by many Jews as the holiday approaches.

The equation this passage creates between *chametz* and sin gives rise to many question, foremost of which is this: If leaven, and specifically bread, are representations of evil, why is it **ever** allowed? Why is bread not relegated to the same category as other forbidden foodstuffs, banished from the Jewish diet along with pork, shellfish and other

proscribed foods? Why is abstaining from *chametz* commanded for only one week a year?

## II. Chametz and Matzah

In order to understand the very particular commandment regarding Pesach, we must have a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between *chametz* and *matzah*, both in terms of the narrative of the Passover story and other areas of the Torah.

On a fundamental level, the terms *chametz* and *matzah* are seen as two sides of the same coin: They appear in tandem, and are presented by the Torah as polar opposites. When the Israelites are first given instructions regarding the holiday they will observe in the future, the Torah instructs them – in the same breath – not only to eat *matzah*, but to search out, destroy, and most certainly not eat leaven:

### שמות פרק יב: טו-כ

הָרִאשׁוֹן תֹּאכְלוּ אֶת־בְּרֵיתֵי הַמַּצֹּת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְנִכְרַתְהֶם חֲמֵץ מִבֵּיתְכֶם כִּי כָל־אֵכֶל שָׂאֵר תִּשְׂבֹּב יִתּוּ הַגֹּפֶשׂ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן עַד־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְבִיאוּם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ וַיְבִיאוּם הַשְּׂבִיעִי מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלֶאכֶה לֹא־יַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל לְכָל־גֹּפֶשׂ הַהוּא לִבְדּוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם כִּי־בַעֲרֹם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֶת־הַמַּצֹּת וּשְׂמֵרְתֶם הוֹצִיאֵתִי אֶת־צְבָאוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּשְׂמֵרְתֶם בְּרִאשׁוֹן אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻק־עוֹלָם: מִצַּת בָּצָר בָּעֵרָה עֲשֶׂה יוֹם לַחֲדָשׁ בְּעָרְב תֹּאכְלוּ עַד יוֹם הָאֶרְבָּע וְעֲשֶׂה יוֹם לַחֲדָשׁ בְּעָרְב: שְׂבַע־יָמִים מִחֲמַת בְּבֵיתְכֶם כִּי כָל־אֵכֶל יִמָּצָא לָאֵשׁ וְנִכְרַתְהֶם הַגֹּפֶשׂ הַהוּא מִעֵדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאֶזְרַח לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכָל־מוֹשְׁבֵיתְכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ כָל־מִחֲמַת הָאֶרֶץ: מִצֹּת:

Eat **matzah** for seven days. By the first day, you must have your homes cleared of all **leaven**, for whoever eats leaven from the first day until the seventh day will have his soul cut off from Israel. The first day shall be a sacred holiday, and the seventh day shall [also] be a

sacred holiday. No work may be done on these [days], except for [work] which is needed so that everyone will be able to eat. Be careful regarding the **matzot**, for on this very day I will have brought your masses out of Egypt. You must carefully keep this day for all generations; it is a law for all times. From the 14th day of the first month in the evening, until the night of the 21st day of the month, you must eat [only] **matzot**. During [these] seven days, no **leaven** may be found in your homes. If someone eats anything **leavened** his soul shall be cut off from the community of Israel. [This is true] whether he is a proselyte or a person born into the nation. You must not eat anything **leavened**. In all the areas where you live, eat **matzot**. (Shmot 12:15-20)

In the same chapter, as the narrative describes the Jews' departure from Egypt, these two opposites are again mentioned:

### שמות פרק יב:לט

כִּי לֹא מִצֹּתֵיאוּפוּ אֶת־הַבֶּצֶק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עִגְתָּ וְלֹא יִכְלוּ לְהִתְמַהֵמֵה וְגַם־צִדְהֵי־כִי־גִרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם חֲמֵץ לֹא־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם:

[The Israelites] baked the dough that they had brought out of Egypt into **unleavened** (*matzah*) cakes, since it had not **risen**. They had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay, and they had not prepared any other provisions. (Shmot 12:39)

Once again, we are told, there is only one or the other: There was no *chametz*, therefore there was *matzah* – or, because there was *matzah*, there was no *chametz* and vice versa.

What is surprising, though, is the account of the very first “seder” held in the Israelites' homes in Egypt on the night prior to the Exodus: They received very detailed instructions about how to prepare for this very special night, how to bring the required offering, how to eat the festive meal: The *Korban Pesach* was to be eaten with *matzah*,

but there is no mention of any prohibition regarding *chametz*:

**שמות פרק יב:**

ואכלו את־הבֶּשֶׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי־אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל־מֵרְרִים יֹאכְלוּהוּ:

Eat the [sacrificial] meat on this night, roasted over fire, with **matzah** and bitter herbs. (Shmot 12:8)

We might posit that leaven was disallowed only **after** the Jews left Egypt in haste and the dough had no time to rise; prior to the Exodus, matzah was commanded – because that is how the Passover offering is eaten – yet it was not yet necessary to prohibit *chametz*.

Alternatively, we may infer from this anomaly that the prohibition of *chametz* is associated with the holiday of *Chag haMatzot* – and not with the festival of Pesach. This may be borne out by an additional instance in which matzot are eaten with the sacrifice of a paschal lamb, but *chametz* is not prohibited: “Pesach Sheni.” As in the first Pesach celebrated in Egypt, Chag haMatzot was not celebrated by those who were unable to bring their sacrifice at the appointed time. As in Egypt, those who could not celebrate Pesach at the proper time celebrated the second, “mini” Chag haPesach, and ate their sacrificial meal with matzot, although there was no prohibition against *chametz*. Eating the Korban with matzah was part of the mitzvah of Pesach, but was distinct from the eating of matzah on Chag haMatzot -- which is always accompanied by the prohibition of *chametz*.<sup>2</sup>

**III. Spring Time**

We have examined the verses that instructed the Israelites regarding Pesach in Egypt. In the chapter that follows these instructions, we find an additional discussion of *chametz* and *matzah*, but in this second presentation, the Torah very subtly introduces a new factor:

**שמות פרק יג:**

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: קַדְשִׁלִּי כְּל־בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל־רֶחֶם בְּבִנְי וְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֲדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה לִי הוּא: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה הֲזֶה אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֶתְּם אֶת־הַיּוֹם אֶל־הָעַם זָכֹר כִּי בְּחֵזֶק יָד הוֹצֵאתָ אֶת־יְשִׁרְיָם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית הַיּוֹם אֲתָם יִצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ חֹמֵץ אֲתָכֶם מִזֶּה וְלֹא יֹאכַל הַבְּנֵי עַמִּי וְהַחֲתָנִים אֲל־אֶרֶץ: וְהָיָה כִּי־יֵבֵאֲךָ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְהָאֲמֵרְי וְהַחֲוִי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֲשֶׁר גִּשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר הִזְאתָ אֶת־הָעַבְדִּים הַלְּךָ אֶרֶץ זָבֹת סֶלֶב יוֹדֵבֶשׁ וְעַבְדָּתָם: וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִמְצֹת הֵזֶה: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל בַּחֹדֶשׁ יֹאכְלֶךָ לֹא אֶת־שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא־יִרְאֶה לְךָ מִצּוֹת חֹג לֵה': בְּכָל־גְּבוּלְךָ שָׂאֵר וְלֹא־יִרְאֶה לְךָ חֹמֵץ

God spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Sanctify to Me every first-born that initiates the womb among the Israelites. Among both man and beast, it is Mine.' Moshe said to the people: 'Remember this **day** as [the time] you left Egypt, the house of slavery, when God brought you out of here with a show of force, and no leaven may be eaten. Today you are leaving [Egypt], in the month of **spring**. There will come a time when God will bring you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Yevusites that he promised your forefathers to give to you, a land flowing with milk and honey; there you will observe this ritual in this **month**. Eat **matzot** for seven days, and make the seventh day a festival to God. **Matzot** must be eaten for [these] seven days, and no **chametz** and no leavening agents may be seen in your possession in all your territories. (Shmot 13:1-7)

We are commanded to remember the day we left Egypt, and (therefore) not to eat *chametz*. Additionally, the Torah speaks of eating *matzah* for seven days and proscribes the possession of *chametz* or leavening agents. However, sandwiched between these laws is an element that had not been mentioned before: We are told of the connection between the Exodus and spring. Passover must be celebrated specifically in the first month, known as Nisan, and Nisan must fall as the spring begins in the Land of Israel. We should recall here that the responsibility for the

sanctification of the new moon, the human determination of the months that comprise the Jewish cycle of festivals, was given to the Israelites as the first stage of the Exodus.<sup>3</sup> However, until this point we could have assumed that an exclusively lunar-based calendar was sufficient. A calendar based exclusively on lunar months, like the Hijri calendar of Islam, is not season-based. Due to the disparity between the average lunar year of 354 days and the average solar year of 365 days, each year the lunar month would be eleven days “earlier” when compared to the solar year – and to the seasons. Hence, an uncorrected lunar calendar would have no “seasonal integrity:” Passover would not necessarily be in the spring; it would be just as likely to fall any other time of the year.

How important is this connection to the seasons, to the natural cycle of the year? Apparently, very important indeed: The next few times Pesach is mentioned, the element of springtime is stressed, and other festivals are added, creating a yearly cycle of three holidays, which leads us to the obvious question: Why is this important? What is the significance of the seasons for the Jewish festivals?

**יד-יז שמות פרק כג:**

תשמרם **המצות** תחג לי בשנה: אתיג **שלוש רגלים** באשר צויתך למועד **ותשמצו** ותשבועת ימים תאכל ל ולא יראו פני ריקם: ונגממצי **יצאת** כיבו **האביב** מעשין אשך תזרע בשדה ונג **בכורי הקציר** בצאת השנה באספך את מעשין מן השדה: **האסף** יראה כל זכורך אל פני האד ושלש פעמים בשנה ה':

Offer a sacrifice to Me **three times each year**. Keep the Festival of Matzot; eat matzot for seven days, as I commanded you, during the prescribed time in the **month** of spring, because this is when you left Egypt, and do not appear before Me empty-handed. [Also keep] the Reaping Festival, [through] the first fruits of your produce that you planted in the

field, and the **Harvest Festival** at the end of the year, when you **gather** your **produce** from the field. **Three times each year**, every male among you must appear before God, Master [of the Universe]. (Shmot 23:14-17)

**שמות פרק לדיח-כו**

**מצות** תשמרם שבועת ימים תאכל ל **המצות** אתיג **האביב** כפי בחדש **האביב** אשר צויתך למועד חדש קציר **בכורי** יצאת ממצרים: ... ונג שבועת תעשה לך ונג האסף תקופת השנה: שלש פעמים בשנה **הטים** יראה כל זכורך את פני האד ו ה' אלהי ישראל: כי אור יש גנים מפג יב והרמתי את גבלך ולא יחמד איש את ארצך בעלתך לראות את פני ה' אלהיך דם זבח על **המזל** שלש פעמים בשנה: לא תשחט **בכורי**: ראשית הפסח ולא ילין לבקר זבח חג אדמתך מב יא בית ה' אלהיך לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו:

Keep the Festival of Matzahs. Eat matzot for seven days as I commanded, in the designated time in the **month** of spring, because it was in the month of spring that you left Egypt. The first-born initiating every womb is Mine. Among all your livestock, you must separate out the males of the first-born cattle and sheep. The first-born of a donkey must be redeemed with a sheep, and if it is not redeemed, you must decapitate it. You must [also] redeem every first-born among your sons. Do not appear before Me empty-handed. You may work during the six weekdays, but on Shabbat, you must stop working, ceasing from all plowing and reaping. Keep the Festival of Shavuot through the first fruits of your **wheat harvest**. Also keep the **Harvest Festival** soon after the year changes. **Three times each year**, all your males shall thus present themselves before God the Master, Lord of Israel. When I expel the other nations before you and extend your boundaries, no one will be envious of your land when you go to be seen in God's presence three times each year. Do not slaughter the Passover sacrifice with leaven in your possession. Do not allow the Passover sacrifice to remain overnight until morning. Bring the first fruits of your Land to

the Temple of God your Lord. Do not [eat] meat cooked in milk [even that of] its own mother.

When we note the reference to harvest, plowing and reaping, the answer to our question becomes obvious: The three yearly festivals have an inherent agricultural aspect. In order for these holidays to be meaningful they must be connected not only to particular calendric months but to the seasons of the Land of Israel. The holiday of the first fruits and the holiday of the harvest must be in celebrated in their respective seasons, just as Passover must be in the spring. And yet, the identity and contours of Passover as an agricultural holiday remain far more elusive than those of the other two festivals – that is, until we read the following passage in the book of Vayikra:

**ויקרא פרק כג: ד-כ**

אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר-תִּקְרָאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם: בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ בֵּינֵהֶם יוֹמֵי מַצּוֹת ה' שִׁבְעַת יָמִים הַמַּצּוֹת הַגָּדוֹל הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל-מִלְאָכְתָּא כְּעַבְדַּת ה' לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: וְהַקֹּרְבָּנִים אֲשֶׁר ה' לֵה' שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ כָּל-מִלְאָכְתָּא כְּעַבְדַּת ה' לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן אֵלֶיךָ רֹץ כִּי-תִבְאוּ אֶמְרַת אֱלֹהִים לָכֶם וּקְצַרְתֶּם אֶת-קִצְיָהּ וְהִבְאֵתֶם אֶת-עֹמֶר וּקְלָיִם וְכֶרֶם לֵאלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִתְקַצְרוּ אֵלֶיכֶם אֶת-קִצְרוֹ וְהִבְאֵתֶם אֶת-עֹמֶר וְעֵד הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת-קִצְרוֹ אֶל-הֵיכָל ה' לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכָל מִשְׁבֹּתֵיכֶם: וְסִפְרֹתֶם לָכֶם מִמִּחְרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שְׁבַע שָׁבָתוֹת תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה: עַד מִמִּחְרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׂבִיעִי תִסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם לֵה': מִמּוֹשֶׁב תִּתִּיךְ מִתְּבִיאֹו **חֲמִשָּׁה מִנֶּחֱסֵי הַקֹּרְבָּנִים חֲמִיץ** תְּנוּפָה שְׁתֵּים שְׁנַי עֶשְׂרֹנָיִם סֹלֶת תִּהְיֶינָה לָחֶם שְׂבִיעֵי תַעֲלֵי הַלָּחֶם לֵה': וְהַקֹּרְבָּנִים בְּכֹרִים תִּאָּפֶינָה כְּבִשְׂמִים תְּמִימִים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה יִפְרָר בֶּן-בָּקָר אֶחָד וְאֵילִם שְׁנַיִם יִהְיוּ עֹלָה לֵה': וּמִגִּתְּכֶם וּגְסִיָּהּ אֲשֶׁר תִּיבְיַחֵם לֵה': וְעֵשִׂיתֶם שְׁעִיר־עִזִּים אֶחָד לְחֹטָאת וּשְׁנַיִם כְּבִשְׂמִים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה לְזִבְחַת שְׁלָמִים: וְהִגִּיף הַכֹּהֵן אֹתָם תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי ה' עַל-שְׁנֵי כְּבִשְׂמֵי הַבְּכֹרִים לָחֶם עֲלֵה

קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיוּ לֵה' לִכְהֵן:...

These are God's festivals that you must celebrate as sacred holidays at their appropriate times: The afternoon of the 14th day of the first month is God's *Pesach*. And on the 15th of that month, it is God's *Chag haMatzot*, for seven days matzah will be eaten. The first day shall be a sacred holiday to you, when you may not do any creative work. You shall then bring sacrifices to God for seven days. The seventh day is a sacred holiday when you may not do any creative work.

God spoke to Moshe, telling him to speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you come to the land that I am going to give you, and you reap its harvest, you must bring an *omer* of your first reaping to the kohen... Until the day that you bring this sacrifice to your God, you may not eat **bread**, roasted grain or fresh grain. This shall be an eternal law for all generations, no matter where you live.

You shall then count seven complete weeks after the day following the holiday when you brought the *omer* as a wave offering, until the day after the seventh week, for [a total of] 50 days. [On that 50th day] you will present new grain as a meal offering to God. From the land upon which you live, you shall bring two loaves of **bread** as a wave offering. They shall be made of two-tenths [of an *ephah*] of wheat meal, and shall be baked as **leavened bread**. They are the first-harvest offering to God. Together with this bread, you shall sacrifice seven unblemished yearling sheep, one young bull, and two rams. These, along with their meal offerings and libations, shall be a burnt offering to God, a fire offering as an appeasing fragrance to God. You shall also prepare one goat as a sin offering, and two yearling sheep as peace sacrifices. The kohen shall make the motions prescribed for a wave offering before God with the **bread** of the first-harvest offering and the two sheep. They belong to the kohen because they are sacred to God. (Vayikra 23:4-20)

Predictably, both *Pesach* and *Chag haMazot* are mentioned; then, a new law is introduced – a law that revolves around bread. The new crop of grain is prohibited until the second day of *Chag haMazot*. “Until the day that you bring this sacrifice to your God, you may not eat **bread**, roasted grain or fresh grain... From the land upon which you live, you shall bring two loaves of **bread** as a wave offering. They shall be made of two-tenths [of an *ephah*] of wheat meal, and shall be baked as **leavened bread**. They are the first-harvest offering to God.”

We may not enjoy the new crop until the *omer* offering is brought, on the day following the first day of the festival (now known as the first day of Hol HaMoed). Once the crop is “redeemed” in this way, the days and weeks are counted, leading up to the Shavuot holiday. Chag HaMazot is thus intrinsically connected to Shavuot, the festival on which leavened bread is part of the Temple service. In a mere fifty days, something that had been completely banned, something that is associated with the evil inclination, is transformed into a central part of the service in the Beit HaMikdash!

#### IV. Chametz in the Beit Hamikdash?

The leavened bread offered on Shavuot seems even more anomalous when seen in the context of the normal grain offering, known as a *korban mincha* or gift offering. The *korban mincha* is comprised exclusively of unleavened ingredients; care must be taken that the offering is never tainted with *chametz*:

**ויקרא פרק ב: יא**

**חֲמֵץ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרַח יִבּוֹחַ לָהֶם כָּל־הַמִּנְחָה**  
כָּמִי כָל־שֶׂאֵרִים, וְכָל־דְּבַשׁ לֹא־תִקְטְנוּ יִרְחוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִשָּׁה לָהּ:

Do not make any meal offering that is sacrificed to God out of **leavened** dough,

because no **leaven** or honey may be sacrificed as a fire offering to God. (Vayikra 2:11)

**ויקרא פרק ו: ז-יא**

הַקֹּרֶבֶת אִתָּהּ בְּגִי־אֶהְרֹן לִפְנֵי ה' הַמִּנְחָה וְזֹאת תֹּרַת  
אֶל־פְּנֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: וְהָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ בְּקִמְצָו מִסֵּלֶת  
הַמִּנְחָה וּמִשְׁמֵנָה, וְאִתָּהּ כָּל־הַלֶּבֶנָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּנְחָה  
וְהַקֵּטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ רִיחַ יִיחִים אֲזַבְּרָתָהּ לָהּ: וְהִנּוּחָת  
תֵּאָכְלֶם בְּמִקוֹם קִדְשֵׁי מִצְרַיִם וְתִמְחַגְּגוּ יַאֲכִלוּ אֶהְרֹן וּבָנָיו  
הַלְוִיִּם לֵאמֹר תִּנְאֻפָה חֲמֵץ בְּחֵצֵי אֶהְלִימוּעַד יַאֲכִלוּהָ:  
כַּחֲטָאתֵי תִי אִתָּהּ מֵאֲשֵׁי קִדְשֵׁי קֹדֶשִׁים הֵוא  
: כָּל־זָבַח בְּבִגְדֵי אֶהְרֹן, יֵאָכְלֶנָה חֵק־עוֹלָם וְכֹאֲשֶׁם  
לְדֹרֹתֶיךָ מֵאֲשֵׁי ה' כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יִגַּע בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ:

This is the law of the gift offering: [One of] Aharon's descendants shall offer it before God, [near the place where one ascends] to the Altar. With his three middle fingers he shall lift up some of the wheat meal and oil of the offering, and all the frankincense on the offering. He shall burn [this] on the altar as an appeasing fragrance – it is the memorial portion to God. Aharon and his descendants shall then eat the rest of [the offering]. It must be eaten as **unleavened bread** in a holy place. They must therefore eat it in the enclosure of the Communion Tent. It shall not be baked as **leavened bread**. I have given this to them as their portion of My fire offerings, and it is holy of holies, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. Every male among Aharon's descendants may eat it. It is an eternal law for all generations [that it be taken] from God's fire offerings. Any [food] coming in contact with it shall become holy. (Vayikra 6:7-11)

There is, however, another type of offering that includes leavened bread, and this other offering may shed light on the matzah/*chametz* conundrum: The *korban todah*, the thanksgiving offering, contains both *chametz* and matzah:

**ויקרא פרק ז: יא-טז**

אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרִיב לָהּ: אִם־הֵשֶׁלֶם יִסּוֹחַ אֶת־תֹּרַת זָבַח

חלות הַתּוֹדָה יִקְרִיבוּ, וְהִקְרִיבוּ עֲלֵי־תּוֹדָה: מִשְׁחִים בְּשֶׁמֶן וְסֵלֶת מִצּוֹת בְּלוּלֹת בְּשֶׁמֶן וְיִרְקִיקֵי מִצּוֹת קִמְצָן לְחֶסֶם מְרֻבָּבֵת חֶלֶת בְּלוּלֹת בְּשֶׁמֶן: עַל־חֶלֶת שְׁלֵמִיו; וְהִקְרִיבוּ מִמֶּנּוּ תּוֹדָתָה עֲלֵי־זֶבַח קֶרְבָּנוֹ יִקְרִיב אֲחֵד מִכָּל־קֶרְבָּן תְּרוּמָה לֵה' לַכֹּהֵן הַיִּזְרֵק אֶת־דָּמָם בְּיָוֶם זֶבַח תּוֹדַת שְׁלֵמִיו וַיִּבְשֶׁרָהּ שְׁלֵמִים לַיהוָה: לֹא־יִנְיֵיחַ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר יֹאכַל קֶרְבָּנוֹ

This is the law of the peace offering that is sacrificed to God. If it is offered as a thanksgiving offering, then it must be presented along with unleavened loaves mixed with oil, flat **matzot** saturated with oil, and loaves made of boiled flour mixed with oil. The sacrifice shall [also] be presented along with loaves of **leavened** bread. [All these] shall be presented with one's thanksgiving peace offering. He shall present some of each [of the above four bread] offerings as an elevated gift to God. This shall belong to the kohen who sprinkles the blood of the peace offering. The flesh of the thanksgiving peace offering must be eaten on the day it is offered. None of it may be left over until morning. [However,] if one's sacrifice offering is meant [merely] to fulfill a general vow or a specific pledge, he shall eat it on the same day that he offers his sacrifice, but what is left over may also be eaten on the next day. (Vayikra 7:11-16)

Despite the fact that it contains leavened bread, the *korban todah* resembles the *Korban Pesach* in ways that are not shared by other peace offerings: While all other peace offerings may be eaten for two days, both the *korban todah* and the *Korban Pesach* may only be eaten on the same night<sup>4</sup> they were brought to the kohen. (In the Beit HaMikdash – as opposed to all other areas of Jewish life – the day begins in the morning, and not on the eve of the previous night; therefore, these two unique offerings must be consumed on the same day they are offered).

The *korban todah* includes a great quantity of both leavened bread and matzah; all of this bread, together with the offering itself, must be consumed in relative haste. The Netz"iv (R'

Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin), explained that the *korban todah* was designed to maximize the number of people invited to take part in the thanksgiving feast: Generally, this sort of offering is brought as an expression of an individual's gratitude to God for some joyous event. This person generally has a story to tell, and this story should be shared with as many people as possible so that they, too, can share in the joy and thanksgiving.<sup>5</sup>

According to the *Chatam Sofer* (R' Moshe Sofer), this may explain the strange question posed at the outset of the Pesach seder: "Why on all nights do we eat *chametz* and matzah, while on this night – only matzah?" In fact, on most nights we do not necessarily consume both "*chametz* and matzah." The *Chatam Sofer* explains that there is one night when we do, in fact, eat both: When the *korban todah* is eaten. The parallel between the *korban todah* and the *Korban Pesach* may have been far more obvious to those who had participated in both offerings than it is to us; hence, when the Beit HaMikdash still functioned, the question was a very fair one: Why is this particular "thanksgiving" offering accompanied by matzah alone, if all other thanksgiving offerings are eaten with a combination of *chametz* and matzah?<sup>6</sup>

This understanding of the nature of the *korban todah* thanksgiving offering, coupled with our appreciation of the agricultural aspects of the holiday, leads to a profound insight: The *Korban Pesach*, with its prohibition of *chametz* – is only a partial thanksgiving offering; it contains only one of the bread components of a normal thanksgiving offering. As noted by Ramban, the counting of the days (*Sefirat haOmer*) between Pesach with Shavuot<sup>7</sup> connects these holidays, and, in a way, makes them one. In this sense, Shavuot is the completion of Passover, forming an eight-day festival comparable to Sukkot, with the Sefirat HaOmer period serving as a sort of Hol HaMoed between the two festivals. The leavened bread that is part of the Shavuot

celebration is the missing bread from the thanksgiving offering of Pesach: It makes the *korban todah* complete,<sup>8</sup> turning the Korban Pesach into a complete *korban todah*.

**V. Two Destinations**

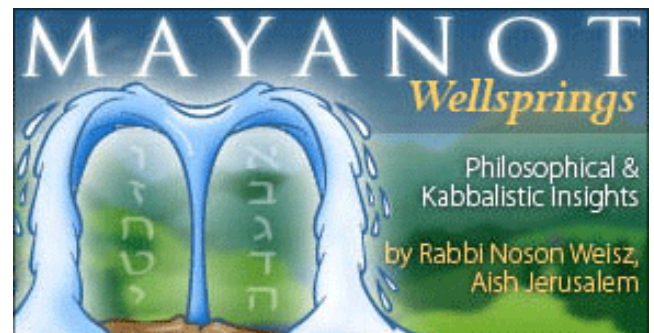
We now understand that Chag haPesach has many facets; it is an agricultural festival, bound inextricably to the season of the new grain, as well as a celebration of an historical event, the Exodus, and a national/political reaffirmation of Jewish peoplehood. And yet, the overlap between these facets is neither coincidental, accidental nor incidental: The agricultural aspect of the holiday is an expression of the historical/geographical aspect: Merely leaving Egypt was never enough. A simple change of address, or even our emancipation from slavery was never the goal. The Jewish People were tasked with a mission that had not yet been completed as we marched out of Egypt. We had a very specific destination charted; in fact, we had two destinations: On the one hand, the culmination of the Exodus is achieved only when we arrived in the Land of Israel. On the other hand, leaving Egypt necessarily takes us to Mount Sinai, to receive the Torah. Both of these elements were communicated by God to Moshe at their very first “meeting” at the Burning Bush – when the plan was laid out:

**שמות פרק ג: ח-יב**

וַאֲרָאֵד לְהַצִּילוֹן מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם; וְלִהְעֲלֹתוֹן מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא  
 אֶל־אֶרֶץ־כַּיִן טוֹבָה; וְרַחֲבָהּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ־כַּיִן זָבֹת חֶלֶב וַיִּדְבֹּשׁ  
 אֶל־מִקְוֵי מַיִם הַבְּעֵנִי, וְהַחֲתִי, וְהָאֲמָרִים, וְהַפְּרָזִי, וְהַתְּחִי  
 וְהַיְבוּסִי: ... וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, וְנָהַלְךָ הָאֵל וְנִתְּנָה  
 אֲנִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן  
 אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַבְּרָר הַזֶּה:

I have come down to rescue them from the grip of Egypt's power. I will bring them out of that land, to a good, spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, the territory of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Yevusites... 'Because I will be with

you,' replied [G



**Festivals of Spring**

Jewish holidays are not a mere celebration of key historic moments in the life of the Jewish people. Jewish holidays are occasions when God offers the spiritual inputs necessary for Jews to survive as spiritual beings.

Each of the Jewish holidays serves as the occasion for a particular input. The holidays mark the first time a particular spiritual input of a holiday was provided by God. But they do much more than commemorate that original historic event. Each time the Jewish calendar rolls around to the time of year when the spiritual input was made available for the first time, the same input is offered once again. Because of the extra closeness to God that the injection of such an input indicates, the occasion is declared a Holy Day.

**SEASON OF FREEDOM**

The social anthropologist regards Passover as the Jewish spring festival. Most human cultures hold some sort of formal celebration to celebrate the end of winter and the arrival of new life in the spring. In the view of the anthropologist, Passover is the Jewish version of this universal human custom, with, of course, the eccentric Jewish twist of eating unleavened bread for seven days.

Jewish tradition teaches that there is some

truth to this point of view. Passover is indeed the Jewish spring festival, but with an important difference. Whereas the spring festivals of other cultures are held to celebrate the renewal of the natural world, Passover celebrates the spiritual counterpart of natural renewal. The apparent eccentricity of Jews is a result of the fact that they generally focus on the spiritual aspects of the phenomena to which other cultures relate physically.

### **SPRING BRINGS PHYSICAL FREEDOM**

Passover is no exception. It is easy to see how spring represents freedom in physical terms. During the winter you huddle indoors to shelter yourself from the cold and rain as much as possible and endure the darkness of long winter nights. Mother Nature withholds her bounty; there is nothing to harvest. You support yourself by consuming the provisions you have had the foresight to store the previous summer and fall, knowing what lies ahead. As they diminish at what appears to you an extremely rapid rate, you also face the anxiety of going hungry.

When spring finally arrives, you are liberated both physically and emotionally. As you emerge from your winter lair into the brightness of the spring sunshine and harvest your winter crop, barley in the case of Passover, and as you watch the vegetation begin to bud, the fear of starvation recedes and you become intoxicated with the joy and excitement of the returning pulse of life. It is natural for you to hold a festival to express your excitement and happiness and share it with others in carefree revelry.

Passover is also a spring festival. We refer to it in our prayers as the season of our freedom, but the freedom it celebrates is the spiritual counterpart of this physical and emotional liberation that the renewal of nature offers each spring. Just as the liberation of nature frees man to express the joy of his release from enforced inactivity and relief from

anxiety, spiritual liberation frees man to express the joy of the awareness of himself as a spiritual being who can leave the world of physicality and immerse himself in the sublime. The spiritual spring of Passover releases the Jew from the cage of physicality, the parallel of spiritual winter.

### **SPIRITUAL WINTER**

Human beings are imprisoned by physicality. Our senses are sharply aware of the body and its needs but the soul is impossible to see and can only be felt. It sits in frustration caged up inside the physical confines of the body and its awareness, searching for a way out. But the feeling of spiritual frustration we experience when the soul is bottled up and unable to express itself does not have the painful intensity of physical hunger or anxiety. It is such a subtle discomfort that it can easily be dismissed as a mild sort of depression.

The domination of our physical senses makes it difficult and even embarrassing for us to publicly express ourselves spiritually, even when we have a powerful sense that there must be more to life than physical reality. The psychological difficulty of putting one's soul on public display can be expressed as the measure of the difference between truth and belief, '*emet*' and '*emuna*' in Hebrew.

The general consensus is to consider anything that can be perceived by the senses or detected scientifically, even if it cannot be directly seen, as part of reality. But anything that does not manifest itself physically, or cannot be demonstrated scientifically, is characterized as existing only in the realm of belief, not truth. It is not '*emet*' -- true, but merely '*emuna*'-- belief. If you can't prove it, then you can only believe it. It isn't necessarily real.

The difference between truth and belief is significant, because we human beings are far more influenced by things we perceive as

'true' than by things that we merely believe. But sometimes '*emuna*' can be so powerful that the subject of a belief can assume the dimensions of truth for the believer. When that happens, our narrow definition of what constitutes reality is able to expand.

We can bring this down to earth by looking at the mitzvah to eat matzah and the events that it commemorates:

*"You shall not eat leavened bread with it, for seven days you shall eat matzahs because of it, bread of affliction, for you departed from the land of Egypt in haste -- so that you will remember the days of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life."* (Deut. 16:3)

The Zohar calls matzah the 'food of faith'; it reminds us that we left Egypt in haste and followed God blindly into the desert without knowing our destination and without provisioning ourselves properly for a desert sojourn. So powerful was our belief in God, that it allowed us to cross the great psychological divide that generally separates inner belief from the perception of outer reality. Although we couldn't see how God could feed and shelter such a great multitude in the desert in the 'real' world with which we were familiar, we followed Him gladly into the world of our beliefs where anything is possible.

The power of the matzah transforms belief into a perception of truth and totally nullifies the distinction between truth, '*emet*', and belief, '*emuna*'. Matzah is indeed 'soul food.'

### **SPIRITUAL SPRING**

Spiritual freedom is attained when the perception of belief reaches this level of intense clarity. The believer is then released from the powerful grip of physical reality and allowed to invest all of his energy in the reality that is visible only through the window of his beliefs without reservation. Without the

spiritual liberation offered by such clarity, it is never possible to invest as much energy in '*emuna*' as in '*emet*'.

The innate skepticism of the rational faculty that lies at the deepest part of human consciousness prevents us from investing a great deal of energy and resources in anything that is only visible through the window of belief in the first place. There is no way to silence the inner voice that asks, "How can you be sure that what you believe is really there?" When you add the ever-present scorn and mockery of the non-believer to your own innate skepticism, it is easy to see how painfully difficult it must be even for the most committed Jew to dedicate his or her life to observing the mitzvot. The difference between '*emet*' and '*emuna*' has to disappear for us Jews to be able to proudly observe our Torah without feeling slightly ridiculous and apologetic.

We now have some insight into what the 'season of our freedom' implies. On Passover, God gives us the spiritual input that enables us to sharpen our perception of '*emuna*' and raise it to the level of '*emet*'. The elimination of the difference between knowing something through belief or through what we commonly call knowledge is the essence of spiritual freedom.

But understanding what spiritual freedom is doesn't help us to explain how we are supposed to come by it. How in fact does God deliver this spiritual input? How does Passover work?

### **PHYSICAL FREEDOM AS A PRODUCT OF SPIRITUAL FREEDOM**

In Jewish tradition, the physical is always merely the surface reflection of the spiritual. According to this approach, the true reason behind the natural physical rebirth and liberation of spring is spiritual. It is because Passover, the Jewish spring festival, is the

'season of freedom' of the spirit, that Mother Nature is able to offer mankind physical liberation. The point of the Divine emanation of spiritual liberation that is offered to all, is to deliver a powerful enough dose of 'emuna' to eliminate the distinction between the things that can be sensed physically and those that can be seen only through the window of belief.

But when the difference between the spiritual and the physical is eliminated, the Divine emanation of spiritual freedom has a physical expression as well; when it reaches the physical world it can be observed there as springtime.

If we take this idea a step deeper, what we call 'emet', truth or scientific reality, is really only the external surface layer of the deeper reality of 'emuna'. From our physical standpoint, it appears to us that the reality we call 'truth' rests on a more solid foundation than something we can only accept as real through the power of belief. But if we look at the world spiritually we are bound to conclude that the opposite is true. The reality of 'emet' is the surface layer of the deeper reality of 'emuna'. It is 'emuna' that is more solid than 'emet'.

## SETS OF TEN

The Zohar finds a connection between an apparently random set of events that occurred in series of tens. The world was created with ten declarations, the Torah was given with Ten Commandments, and God sent ten plagues to force the Egyptians to release the Jewish people. According to the Zohar, these events are related in the following way -- the ten declarations of creation were transformed into the Ten Commandments by the ten plagues.

The Maharal of Prague explains the first part of the connection in his book *Gvurot Hashem* (Ch.57). The way to approach the ten plagues is to look at each plague as turning off one of God's ten declarations of creation. By the culmination of the plagues all of them had

been shut down one by one. Thus His first speech 'let there be light' was shut down by the plague of darkness; His tenth speech 'let us make man' was shut down by the plague of the first born; His creation of vegetation by the plague of locusts that consumed all vegetation; and so on through them all.

## CLASHING REALITIES

The bewildering account of Pharaoh's apparently senseless resistance can be understood as a dispute over the nature of reality. Pharaoh believed in the reality we associate with 'truth.' The things he could detect with his physical senses when he explored the world around him, whose workings he could understand with the aid of his scientists constituted the real world. Miracles were only a temporary phenomenon. They didn't follow the laws of nature and they didn't fit into reality. The power of miracles originated in a reality that could only be actualized through the medium of belief. When the power of belief that fueled the miracles was all spent, reality would still be there. Existence was not a whim of some Deity. Existence was a function of reality.

God was not attacking him with a force that was part of the natural world. God was trying to frighten him by manipulating reality in strange ways. Pharaoh believed in knowledge. His sense of 'truth' was very powerful and he used it to distinguish between what was real and what was not. To Pharaoh, God was playing tricks. Reality was only what was detectable by the senses and understandable through science. Even God couldn't permanently alter it. All he had to do was outlast the tricks. As long as God wasn't applying any natural power against Egypt he was safe. There was no need to be frightened of miracles. In reality he was safe.

## MIRACLES AS REALITY

The plagues were sent to demonstrate that

there was no reality. What we perceive as 'truth' is really all miracles. God's declarations of creation are all that there is to reality. Every time a declaration was withdrawn, a part of so-called reality would collapse.

The plagues demonstrate that what we call 'truth' and define as reality is actually only belief. The evidence of our senses and all the scientific laws that we have deduced have not grounded us in reality; they have only put us in contact with the surface layer of the creation speeches of God. Following the reality of 'truth' is identical to following the reality of belief. They both lead to the conclusion that the declarations of God are all that there is to reality. At the deepest layer of existence there is no difference between 'emet' and 'emunah'. 'Emet' is 'emunah.' The difference between them is an illusion in the mind of Pharaoh, an illusion that has been shattered by the ten plagues for all time.

**CLINGING TO EXISTENCE**

But there is more. If God's declarations of creation are all that there is to reality, we must cling to existence by keeping them operational. The plagues demonstrate that the creation speeches require a human audience. When Pharaoh refused to pay attention to them, God demonstrated His readiness to shut them down, and turned them off one by one in face of his intransigence.

We can only insure the continuance of God's declarations and thereby retain our hold on existence if we pay attention and attempt to understand the message God is doing His utmost to communicate. That is how the continuance of the creation speeches is tied up with the observance of the Ten Commandments. It is only in His commandments that we can discover God's purpose in making the declarations.

**DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN 'EMET' AND 'EMUNA'**

We have reached the crux of the distinction between 'emet' and 'emunah.' If reality is defined by what we commonly understand as 'truth', it needs no purpose. The world we perceive with our senses is there simply because it is there. As long as we can be certain that the physical world we see around us is real, it makes no difference who put it there or why. The 'truth' is self-evident; it requires no explanation. If the world we see through our senses, the scientific world that we can study, constitutes fundamental reality, we can safely ignore anything that can be discovered only through the power of belief. Such things aren't real, so who needs them?

Passover is the season of spiritual liberation, because the Exodus is the demonstration of the fallacy that underlies the world of 'truth'. There is no truth without belief; 'emet' rests on the foundation of 'emunah.'

Every Passover God allows us to see that reality rests on the power of 'emunah'. It cannot be taken for granted and can only endure as long as we focus on its purpose. If we are receptive to the message of Passover we will be knocked out of the false sense of security we derive from the solid physical world around us. We will gladly follow God into the desert and run for our lives to Mount Sinai. We need the Ten Commandments to keep the declarations of creation turned on. The shackles of our physical limitations melt away and we are free to express the joy of our release from the bondage of the false vision of the world.



## Why Is This Exile Different?

One of the most famous elements of the Passover Seder is the "Ma Nishtana" paragraph, more commonly known as "The Four Questions." After asking, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" the paragraph continues by listing four differences:

1. On all other nights we eat bread or matzah, but tonight we eat only matzah.
2. On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, but tonight we eat only marror (bitter herbs).
3. On all other nights we don't dip our food even once, but tonight we dip it twice.
4. On all other nights we sit or recline at the table, but tonight we all recline.

It is generally assumed that the "*Avadim Hayinu*" ("We were slaves") paragraph that follows the Four Questions is an explanation for the puzzling differences that have just been mentioned.

The commentator Ol'lot Ephraim offers a different approach to understanding the Four Questions. He notes that the Torah often uses the words "night" and "day," beyond their literal meanings, to hint to the concepts of exile and redemption. Based on this remark, we can understand the beginning of the Four Questions as actually asking, "Why is this *exile* different from all other *exiles*?"

We already know two elements that distinguish our current Jewish exile (now 2,000 years) from previous ones. First, it is much longer than any other exile we have experienced, and we also don't know when it will end. (Previous generations in exile had prophets who could foresee when redemption would come.) Why is this exile so much longer

than previous exiles, and why were we not informed of its end?

## ELEMENTS OF EXILE

According to the Ol'lot Ephraim, the Four Questions are actually Four Answers to this single question regarding the exile. Each part addresses a different element of the Jewish people's current situation:

1. Matzah, which contains only the simplest of ingredients (flour and water), represents unity. Leavened bread (chametz) contains many more ingredients. This represents many different opinions, which can lead to dissent and fragmentation. In all other exiles, we ate both matza and chametz; sometimes we were more unified, and sometimes we were less. Tonight, in this exile, the situation is different. We have so much fragmentation that we *need* to eat only matzah! We are so filled with chametz that we must eat matzah in order to counteract all the disunity around us.
2. Marror represents the pursuit of money and materialism. In all other exiles, people ate many different kinds of vegetables, meaning that they were able to get by with the bare necessities. Tonight, in this exile, we eat only marror, representing the bitterness of people who spend their lives chasing after material wealth. The Sages in Pirkei Avot say, "Who is rich? The one who is happy with his portion." This exile is especially bitter because we are perpetually dissatisfied with what we have.
3. Dipping represents physical pleasures and passions. Previous generations were not as thoroughly directed by their passions as we are in this exile. In previous exiles, people didn't dip their food even once. Tonight, in this exile, we dip it twice! We are steeped in a

culture that glorifies the pursuit of pleasure.

4. Reclining represents pride and haughtiness. Previous generations either sat or reclined; at times, people were arrogant and other times people were humble. Tonight, in this exile, we all recline. We are so proud of our possessions and accomplishments that we don't even feel we are in exile.

Based on this approach, the "*Avadim Hayinu*" paragraph does not answer the Four Questions. Rather, it simply fulfills the Talmud's requirement that the recounting of the Exodus story "begin by mentioning the Jewish people's lowly state, and end with an outpouring of praise."

May we all be blessed this Passover to climb the spiritual ladder of success that is outlined in the 15 stages of the Seder. May we rid ourselves of disputes, materialism, passions and pride. May we let go of all the spiritual impurity we have picked up during this long exile, and celebrate redemption by purging ourselves of the "Egypt" that has taken root within us.