



*“Breaking Point”: God asks we give 20% of our wealth to charity. As if this is not difficult enough, we wonder its connection to Pesach, as this section on Malachi is read this Shabbos Hagadol...have an idea?*

**WHAT IS THE LESSON AND CONNECTION TO PESACH?  
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## Weekly Parsha

# שבת Hagadol

**RABBI BERNARD FOX**

“You shall not eat leaven with it; for seven days you shall eat with it matzot, the bread of affliction, for in haste you went out of the land of Egypt, so that you shall remember the day when you went out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.” (Devarim 16:3)

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# תְּצַדַּק & CHARITY HAGADOL

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

What is the connection between Shabbos Hagadol’s Torah reading of giving tzedaka, and Pesach? The truth is, I am not sure! But asking never hurts. Let’s review what we said about tzedaka. Maybe by our Pesach issue, some of you might email us with your thoughts.

The Torah saw it necessary to record two accounts of tzedaka. This is because I believe there are two basic concepts regarding tzedaka.

One story is about Avraham, after he defeated the five kings, where Malkitzedek brought out bread and wine to nourish Avraham, and Avraham gave a tenth of his possessions to Malkitzedek. The second account, describes Jacob, upon his flee from his brother Esav, where God, in the famous dream of the ladder, assured Jacob of His Divine providence. Here we find Jacob swore to give a tenth. We learn two ideas about tzedaka



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## Weekly Parsha / Passover

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One of the mitzvot of Pesach is the prohibition against eating leavened bread. In place of leavened bread, we eat matzah. The first night of Pesach we are obligated to eat matzah. The remaining days of the festival, we are not obligated to eat matzah, but we are prohibited from eating chametz – leavened products.

In the above passage, the Torah explains that the matzah recalls the bread eaten during bondage. How does the matzah recall the bread eaten during bondage? Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that the while in bondage, the Jews were forced to constantly labor for their Egyptian masters. The Egyptians would not provide their Jewish slaves with the time required to mix the dough for their bread and then allow it to rise. Instead, once the dough was mixed, the Jews were forced to immediately bake the bread. The dough did not have the opportunity to rise. The resulting loaves had the unleavened form of matzah.[1]

**“And one takes the middle matzah and breaks into two parts ... and he lifts the Seder plate and recites, “This is the bread of affliction,” until “How is this night different.” (Shulchan Aruch 473:6)**

Another fundamental commandment performed on Pesach is sipur yetziat mitzrayim – the recounting of our redemption from Egypt. This mitzvah is fulfilled through the Pesach Seder. One of the early steps in the Seder is YaChatz – breaking the middle matzah. Shulchan Aruch explains this process. The middle matzah is broken and half is returned to the Seder plate. The plate is then lifted and the reader recites: “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in Egypt.” In other words, the reader explains

that the broken matzah recalls the bread that the Jews ate during their bondage in Egypt. The identification of matzah with the affliction in Egypt is based upon our passage in which the Torah refers to the matzah as “bread of affliction.”

**“They baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as unleavened cakes, for it had not leavened, for they were driven out of Egypt, and they could not tarry, and also, they had not made provisions for themselves.” (Shemot 12:39)**

In the above passage, the Torah explains that Bnai Yisrael left Egypt in tremendous haste. They did not have the opportunity to prepare adequately for their journey. They could not allow their dough to mix. Instead, they mixed the dough and immediately baked it. The product was unleavened cakes.

Based on this passage, the Talmud explains the significance of the matzah. Raban Gamliel explains that the matzah recalls our redemption. He explains that at the Seder we are required to explain that the matzah we will eat is intended to remind us of the haste with which our



ancestors left Egypt.[2] His comments are based upon our passage in the Torah. The comments of Raban Gamliel are incorporated into the Seder and read prior to fulfilling the commandment to eat matzah.

In short, the Torah suggests two alternative explanations for matzah. In Sefer Devarim, the Torah explains that matzah recalls our affliction in Egypt. In Sefer Shemot, the Torah suggests that matzah recalls that haste of our redemption from Egypt.

Paradoxically, both of these messages are associated with matzah during the course of

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(Hagadol continued from page 2)

## Weekly Parsha / Passover

the Seder. At the opening of the Seder, we declare that the matzah recalls our bondage. But before eating the matzah, we read Raban Gamliel's interpretation of matzah. In this interpretation, the matzah is associated with the redemption from bondage. In other words, the process of sipur requires that we recall both our bondage and our redemption. Both of these phenomena are symbolized by the matzah.

We can easily understand the importance of recalling our bondage and our redemption. The full meaning and significance of our redemption can be fully appreciated when we remember the bondage from which we were redeemed. However, it is odd and paradoxical that the same object – matzah – is used to symbolize both of these elements of our experience in Egypt. Why did the Torah not create two separate objects – each designed to recall one of the two elements?

Sforno's comments also address this issue. He explains that the Torah intends to communicate a message. During their bondage in Egypt, the Jews were oppressed by their masters. The oppression of Bnai Yisrael was epitomized by the bread they were forced to eat. The Egyptians would not even afford their Jewish slaves the time to bake their bread properly. They pressured the Jews to hurriedly prepare and bake their bread. The result was unleavened matzah. At the moment of redemption, the demoralized Egyptians urged the Jews to hurry. Again, the bread that the Jews baked epitomized the urgency of the Egyptians. But this urgency was not motivated by their desire to oppress the Jews. Instead, their urgency was motivated by panic. They could not endure another moment of suffering![3]

Sforno is explaining that the Egyptians demonstrated urgency in two situations. In both instances, their urgency was expressed in a similar behavior. They hastened Bnai Yisrael to prepare their bread without allowing their dough to rise. But in the first instance – during their oppression of the Jews – this urgency was an expression of oppression. In the second instance – at the moment of redemption – this urgency expressed the complete humiliation and defeat of the Egyptians.

Sforno's comments indicate that the urgency of the Egyptians in these two different situations in some manner communicates a fundamental message regarding the redemption. What is this message?

Apparently, the miracle of the redemption from Egypt is not merely that a nation of slaves was liberated from the oppression of the

most powerful nation in the civilized world. But the miracle can only be fully appreciated if we recognize the total and sudden reversal that Bnai Yisrael and the Egyptians experienced. Bnai Yisrael did not gradually achieve liberation from oppression and freedom as the power and authority of their masters slowly declined. Instead, in a few months, the Jewish people emerged from a condition of abject subjugation and tyranny into a state of total freedom. Their masters – who once would not allow them a few moments to properly prepare their bread – were reduced to trembling petitioners. They begged their former slaves to spare them and to leave posthaste and end their suffering! It is this total and abrupt reversal that captures the gravity and magnitude of the miracle of the redemption.

Still, why is matzah used to symbolize both the severity of the oppression and the totality of the Egyptians' demise? Sforno is answering this question. An illustration will help explain this point. It is difficult to appreciate the speed of a fastball thrown by an accomplished pitcher. We lack a basis for comparison. But if we want to truly appreciate the talent and skills of this pitcher, we must create a contrast. We can do this by placing on a single-viewing screen two pitches. One is the fastball of the professional and the other is the best effort of an accomplished amateur. On the split screen, we can see both pitches

progress through time and over distance towards the batter. Now, we can more fully comprehend the remarkable speed of the professional's pitch.

According to Sforno, the full miracle of the redemption can only be appreciated by recognizing the totality and abruptness of the reversal experienced by Bnai Yisrael and the Egyptians. The reversal only becomes clear when the severity of the oppression is contrasted with the panic of the Egyptians at the moment of redemption. But, like the two pitches in our illustration, the contrast between the oppression and the redemption can only be fully appreciated when they are viewed side-by-side – on a split screen. The matzah provides this "split screen." A single object – the matzah – captures and communicates the degree of oppression and the total demise of the Egyptians. In matzah, the two experiences are communicated side-by-side. This dual symbolism within a single object eloquently communicates to us the totality and suddenness of the redemption and thereby, the extent of the miracle of the redemption. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim, 16:3.

[2] Mesechet Pesachim 116:a.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim, 16:3.

WHY WERE ALL  
10 PLAGUES  
NECESSARY?

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## Passover

from these accounts.

Regarding Avraham, as Malkitzedek greeted him with the bread and wine, it says that Malkitzedek blessed Avraham. However, Avraham did not respond. But in the next passage, Malkitzedek blessed again, only in this blessing, he is blessing God, not Avraham. In this very same sentence, it records that Avraham then gave Malkitzedek a tenth of all that he had. Why did Avraham wait for the second blessing? I believe that the Torah is indicating here that there must be a proper recipient for tzedaka. Once Malkitzedek blessed God, he defined himself as that proper recipient.

In connection with Jacob, there is a different lesson. Here, I believe the focus is not on the recipient, but on the benefactor, namely Jacob. Jacob's tenth displayed 2 objectives: 1) he wanted to demonstrate that all which he received was directly from God. Therefore the concept of returning possessions to God made sense. 2) He had no fear that by being charitable, that he was in any way placing himself in monetary risk. He was certain that God would continually provide.

The gain then that one receives by giving tzedaka is that he is constantly affirming his belief that God provides, and will provide for him. The charitable person has no problem parting with his money. Firstly, this is not his central value system, the pursuit of wisdom is. Secondly, he does not look at this as a loss. We learn in Malachi (3:10) that God tells the Jews that charity is the one area a person is allowed to "test" God, to see if He will return to us financial success. God states, "...and test Me please with this, says the Master of Hosts, (see) if I do not open up the storehouses of heaven, and empty out (for you) a blessing until you have more than enough". God is guaranteeing that by giving tzedaka, we assure for ourselves financial security, and not an average income, but "until we have more than enough".

We learn from Abraham and Jacob that one must give to a worthwhile recipient, and that one affirms his convictions in God's kindness and generosity towards man when we are charitable. We lose nothing in the process, but rather, we secure God's blessings. We also affirm our convictions that the very monies we give, are in fact from God, by giving to those who follow God.

One might listen to these words with a bit of disbelief and ask, "How will God accomplish that? I give tzedaka, and God will give me financial success?"

To this person I would ask, "Did not God create the heavens and earth? The sun and moon? The innumerable number of spheres in space? Is it not then a small thing for Him to give

financial increase? Recognition of those who have less than us is commanded many times in the Torah. There are many reasons for us to adhere to this command. As Maimonides states in the Mishneh Torah, "this commands must be followed more carefully than all other positive commands". One who thinks this through will arrive at the truth, that he should experience no sense of risk when he gives his tzedaka.

Tzedaka is not defined merely as giving money as its own ends. The obligation of tzedaka when giving to the poor is to also restore one's sense of self so he may function inline with Torah. Therefore, as Jewish law states, if one had a high level of living, where, for example he had a servant-pulled horse, and became impoverished, one's obligation is to restore to him a servant and a horse. Even if the one giving doesn't live this high, it is irrelevant, as the goal is to restore one to a state where he feels his self image restored, and can function once again, achieving the lifestyle outlined by the Torah. When we give to the poor, our intent must not be to simply provide finances, but to raise this person's state of mind to a level of self-sufficiency and happiness, that he feels well enough to realign himself with the Torah lifestyle.

The Shulchan Aruch states that the highest level of charity is 20% of ones profit. Not the commonly assumed 10%. 10% is mentioned as an average person's tzedaka. But the highest form is 20%. ■

## 8

**LEVELS OF CHARITY:**

*The source for this law is in the Jewish law book entitled "Shulchan Aruch", Chap. 249, subheadings 6 through 13:*

- 1) Assisting the poor person so he no longer requires charity, i.e., giving him a job
- 2) Where the donor and recipient are both ignorant of each other (this removes ego from the donor, and humility from the recipient)
- 3) The donor alone knows the recipient, but not vice versa
- 4) The poor person knows the donor, but not vice versa
- 5) Both know each other, and the donor gives prior to being asked
- 6) You give the poor person what he asks, only after he asks
- 7) You give the poor person less than what he asks, but with a pleasant countenance
- 8) You give the poor person begrudgingly

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says before this, "and test Me please in this." G-d asks we test Him by giving tzedaka, and He promises a response of a blessing that is "more than enough." Why is THIS the area that causes success? Because it is here alone that man demonstrates his conviction that all is in G-d's hand - he 'risks' his own sustenance. Such conviction is endorsed by G-d, by his subsequent fortune. Only when one makes such a sacrifice, is he truly convinced that G-d can, and will respond. In this area of perfection, G-d responds in kind. This 'response' validates one's act as having been proper in G-d's eyes. This person also values giving to others - he uses his wealth properly. He is then one to whom G-d entrusts with additional wealth.

A Rabbi once mentioned that this "more than enough" is predicated on the recipient having a number in his mind that is "enough". G-d will not give a blessing to one who is never satisfied when his needs are met.

Wealth is a means - not an ends. One must be living properly so that there is the relationship between you and G-d, that G-d will respond to your test. Study for the mere interest in Torah ideas of morality, justice, and truth, fulfill G-d's commands, be honest in business, and adhere to the tenets of Torah. When one lives in accordance with reality, i.e., G-d's Torah, G-d then secures your life's finances so you may continue in His path.

Examine your ways to see where you require improvement. Be honest, and investigate G-d's will through His Torah. It is for our good, and it's ways are pleasant, "Vidarcheha, darchey Noam."

Talmud Betzah teaches, our yearly, monetary allotment is determined between Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur. Use this time before Rosh Hashanna to improve yourself, and do so out of a true, honest quest for recognition of why Torah and the commands are beneficial, and perfect. Only then will you be living as G-d wishes, as one who clearly understands G-d's wish for man's good, performing His commands out of conviction to the truth. Maimonides taught that insofar as one is perfected, (intellectually and in action) in this proportion does G-d relate to him.

How your wealth will be manifested is G-d's knowledge - not that of man.. ■

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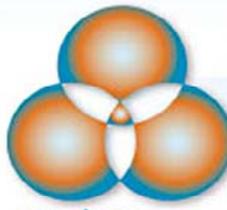
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