



THE SPRING OF JEWISH FAITH

The Month of Nisan and the Holiday of Pesach

in Light of Jewish Law and Thought

Rabbi Eliezer Chaim Shenvald

Meir Harel Hesder Yeshiva, Modi'in

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**Rosh Yeshiva, Meir Harel Hesder Yeshiva,
Modi'in**

Colonel (res.)



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Published by: Meir Harel Hesder Yeshiva, Modi'in

Modi'in, Nisan 5772 – March/April 2012

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Pesach
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Dear readers,

As the Holiday of Pesach draws near, it is our pleasure to share with you Divrei Torah from the Beit Midrash of the "Meir Harel" Hesder Yeshiva in Modiin, the Beit Midrash that continues the spirit of the Hasmoneans.

We hope you will enjoy reading the following articles, and that they will enrich the Pesach experience for you and your family.

Wishing you a happy and kosher P e s a c h ,

Rabbi Eliezer Chaim Shenvald

Rosh Yeshiva of the Meir Harel Hesder Yeshiva, Modiin
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Springtime for Israel — and the World¹

The Exodus from Egypt stands as the foundational event of Jewish history, and its timing has undeniable significance. The Torah stresses, in a number of places, that the Israelites leave Egypt in “*chodesh ha-aviv*,” “the month of spring.” In fact, Moshe mentions this as the nation’s journey begins:²

Today you are going out, in the month of spring.

This is how the command to observe this holiday in later generations is formulated:³

Keep the Festival of Matzot; for seven days you shall eat matzot as I commanded you, in the season of the month of spring, for in it you went out of Egypt.

This is particularly remarkable because in other contexts, both in terms of the Passover holiday (Pesach) and the paschal offering (*pesach*), the verse describes what we call the month of Nisan as “the first month”⁴ — not

¹ This article originally appeared in *Kol Be-rama — Likrat Ha-giyus 5741*, as a preface to the collection; it appears here with a number of changes.

² *Shemot* 13:4.

³ *Shemot* 23:15, 34:18 reads:

Keep the Festival of Matzot; for seven days you shall eat matzot as I commanded you, **in the season of the month of spring**, for in the month of spring you went out of Egypt.

Devarim 16:1-2 reads:

Keep the month of spring, and make a *pesach* for the Lord your God, for in the month of spring, the Lord your God took you out from Egypt at night. And you shall sacrifice a *pesach* for Lord your God, sheep and cattle, in the place which Lord shall choose for His name to reside there.

⁴ Concerning the holiday and the offering, the Torah states (*Vayikra* 23:4-5):

These are Lord’s seasons, holy convocations, which you shall convoke in their seasons. In the first month, on the fourteenth of the month, towards evening, is Pesach for the Lord

Bamidbar 9:1-2 states:

“the month of spring”. Note the phrasing of the command to observe Pesach as a pilgrimage festival:⁵

Keep the Festival of Matzot; for seven days you shall eat matzot as I commanded you, **in the season of the month of spring**, for in it you went out of Egypt, and do not appear before Me empty-handed.

We must ask the following question: what is the unique significance of the timing of the Exodus in the month of Nisan, *chodesh ha-aviv*?

Indeed, it is clear that this is no coincidence! “There is a time for everything, and a period for every desire under the heavens”⁶ — everything has its appropriate, fitting time; it fits in a specific chronological setting and no other. In Kabbalistic terms, every *tikkun*, every act which improves, betters, and sets right this imperfect world,

The Lord spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, in the second month of their going out of Egypt, in the first month, saying, “The Israelites shall make the *pesach* in its season.”

Bamidbar 28:16 reads:

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, is Pesach for Lord.

Similarly, concerning the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), Nisan is called “the first month” (*Shemot* 40:2):

On the day of the first month, on the first of the month, you shall raise up the Tabernacle of the tent of meeting.

On the other hand, in the one place in which the actual departure from Egypt is mentioned — in the context of the forty-two stations of Israel’s journey from Egypt to Transjordan — “the first month” is referenced rather than “the month of spring” (*Bamidbar* 33:3):

And they travelled from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of first month, the day after the *pesach*, the Israelites went out with a high hand, before the eyes of all Egypt.

⁵ *Shemot* 23:15. We also find this in two additional verses. In *Shemot* 34:18, the Torah states:

Keep the Festival of Matzot; for seven days you shall eat matzot as I commanded you, **in the season of the month or spring**, for in the month of spring you went out of Egypt.

Devarim 16:1 reads:

Keep the month of spring, and make a *pesach* to the Lord your God, for in the month of spring, the Lord your God took you out from Egypt at night.

⁶ *Kohelet* 3:1.

appears in its proper time. HaRav Avraham Yitzchak Kook mentions⁷ it in another context:

For every time illuminates through its own properties.

This principle is formulated in a particular way by Rav Moshe Chayim Luzzatto (Ramchal):⁸

The root of all of them is the order which the Divine Wisdom prescribed: **whenever a *tikkun* is accomplished, a great light illuminates that given time, and when that time of the year returns, it shines a light akin to the first light, and the product of that *tikkun* will be renewed in one who receives it.** According to this, **we are bound on this holiday to engage in all manner of activities in order to recall the Exodus from Egypt,** for that *tikkun* was a very powerful *tikkun* to accomplish, as we have said. Therefore, it was determined that when that time of year returns, it will shine upon us some of the light which then shone, thereby renewing the product of that *tikkun*. For this reason, we are obligated to engage in all of those activities.

Indeed, the root of the matter seems to be described at length in the words of Rabbi Tzadok Ha-kohen of Lublin:⁹

All things are distinct in the realms of time, place, and spirit, as is known from *Sefer Yetzira*. **When it comes to the spirit, it is well-known that no one is like another,** as the Sages said (*Berakhot* 58a) that their minds are all dissimilar. Naturally, **the same applies to the world, that no place is like another,** as they said (*Makkot* 9b-10a) that in Gilad and Shekhem, murderers are common; [they have also said that] the air of the Land of Israel makes one wiser (*Bava Batra* 158b), etc. **The same is true of the**

⁷ *Iggerot Ha-Re'aya*, vol. II, no. 378.

⁸ *Derekh Hashem*, vol. IV, ch. 7.

⁹ *Resisei Laila*, ch. 39; *Sanhedrin* 102a, s.v. “*Et hi*”, etc.

year: no moment is like another, as they said (*Sanhedrin* 102a) that there is a time of favor, and conversely there is a time prepared for...

Now, this is true generally speaking, **but it is also true in particular: there is no moment equivalent to another, just as with the spirit**. At every moment, **a particular aspect suffuses the world**, and depending on his will he may use every moment for good or for...

“So God made the man straight” – in terms of the ability to receive His illumination – “but they sought many reckonings” (*Kohelet* 7:29). **This means that their souls differ just as the times of the year differ and change**, that is, change is on the part of the recipients [of the illumination]. **“There is no man who does not have his hour,” meaning, the differentiation of times corresponds to the differentiation of souls**; thus, presumably, **every known hour parallels a known soul**. And because the world in its entirety is like one man, therefore everyone may feel the strength of every soul as well. **This occurs by the changing of the times, that at every moment, a different strength of a different soul prevails.**

This principle of R. Tzadok has many ramifications for using the spiritual opportunities presented by time (*loc. cit.*):

At his time, when his trait prevails in the world, if he is able to detect the hour, so as to be occupied and exerting effort then in acquiring His illumination, he will be able to ascend and to succeed then, for the hour exists for him. This applies to the spiritual success of His light and His truth in that he apprehends Him; it also applies to physical success in worldly matters, leadership and the like. For at that moment he is at

the pinnacle of God's direction of the world; this applies in a particular way at every moment.

R. Tzadok (*loc. cit.*) refers to the unique characteristics of the month of Nisan, *Chodesh Ha-aviv*, relating it to the fundamental kabbalistic dichotomy between *itaruta di-le'eila* (initiation from Above) and *itaruta di-letata* (initiation from below) — does the initiative for spiritual development, in a given situation, come from God Above, or from the creations below?

Nisan derives its name from the miracles (*nissim*) in it. Every miracle, by definition, is beyond nature, for [nature] is directed by set laws and rules. [Miracles] all come from the righteousness and will of God, *itaruta di-le'eila* alone, without the exertion of those below. This is the consistent view of Rabbi Yehoshua in *Sanhedrin*, who believes that in Nisan they are destined to be redeemed...¹⁰

The month of Nisan, *chodesh ha-aviv*, is appropriate in its character to be a month of creation and miraculous redemption, in contrast to the month

¹⁰ See there that he expands on this theme, explaining the matter according to the Ari's teaching:

Apprehension from perspective of God alone is the order of the letters in the name, for the order of the verse is the order that God determines for His world; His bounty corresponds to His apprehension, for this is the order of the proper process for everything, from the beginning in thought until the action at the end, as is known. Thus, by the order of the twelve simple elements in *Sefer Yetzira* is the creation of twelve months, so that Nisan is the letter *heh*, and it is a receptacle, as is known, and a vessel for blessings, all types of miracles and wonders.

There he also equates Nisan and Tishrei, referring to Virgo, the astrological sign of Elul, and a verse in *Zekharya* (9:17) which notes that "New wine (*tirosh*) makes the virgins fruitful":

And I have heard or seen in some composition, that *tirosh* has the same letters as Tishrei, so that we may say that it makes the virgins blossom and flower, and the virgin is Elul. These things refer to what I have written: that Tishrei is effort, *itaruta di-letata*, the feeling of the heart and its preparation; Elul, on the other hand, is thought, without feeling. Therefore, in Elul we also blow the shofar, which arouses *itaruta di-letata*.

of Tishrei. Thus, he explains (*loc. cit.*) the Tannaitic dispute (*Rosh Hashana* 10b-11a) as to whether the universe was created in Nisan (Rabbi Yehoshua) or Tishrei (Rabbi Eliezer):

Thus, the universe could only have been created either in Nisan or in Tishrei; the direction of the world could only have been set in order during one of these [months]: either by the help of God, represented by the sons of Levi, who accompany God in the camp of the divine Presence; or by the bestirring of man, namely, the sons of Yissakhar, those who know understanding, i.e., the feelings of the heart — “its heart shall understand and return” (*Yeshayahu* 6:10). These two months prepare the food for every winter and summer as they said in *Berakhot* (35b), and presumably, the same applies to food for the soul, for the direction of the whole year is received from these two months. “And Zevulun in your going out” (*Devarim* 33:18) is enough for Yissakhar; indeed, “Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter” (*Kohelet* 7:12). The relationship of Elul and Tishrei is analogous: the heart’s feeling in Tishrei depends on mental, intellectual, and thoughtful preparation during Elul. This asset is necessary only for one who has a heart able to understand. The heart expands via the expansion of knowledge and intellect. In this way, the intellect blossoms and flowers when one feels in his heart, as we know; by this, the potential is born as the actual, like the emergence of the flower.

HaRav Kook formulates a famous dictum for the month of Nisan:

Israel’s exodus from Egypt remains forever the springtime of the entire world.¹¹

¹¹ HaRav Kook in *Meged Yerachim*; in *Kovetz Ha-Raya*, this is explained in “*Be’er Meged Yerachim*.” Rav Efrati writes about this beautifully in *She’arim el Ha-Yahadut: Pesach*.

What is the meaning of the Exodus being particularly in the spring? It appears that the event must be dependent on the season's character! As the Talmud explains:¹²

And it is written, “**Keep the month of *aviv*.**” Which month has *aviv* in it? I would say that this is Nisan.

Rashi explains the link between *aviv* and Nisan:¹³

Nisan is called *aviv* only because of the ripening of the grain, which yields its first fruits then.

Therefore, Pesach must fall during *aviv*, when the nature and flora of the land of Israel are found in their *aviv*; indeed, if there is a lag, the court must intercalate an extra month into year.¹⁴

¹² *Rosh Hashana* 7b, and *Midrash Tanchuma Bo*, ch. 11:

“*Chodesh Ha-aviv*” — this is a month which is ready (*kasher*) for you – there is neither sun nor rain. From whence do we know that it is ready? Here it states “*Chodesh Ha-aviv*,” and there it states (*Tehillim* 68:7) “God settles the solitary in a home; He takes the prisoners out at the most opportune time (*kosharot*)” — *kosharot* means in **the month when it is most ready, with neither sun nor rain.**

¹³ Rashi *ad loc.*, *Sanhedrin* 53b; he states in his commentary on *Shemot* 23:15: “*Aviv* is an expression akin to *av* (father), the firstborn and the earliest time for the ripening of produce.”

¹⁴ *Mekhilta*; *Sanhedrin* 11b:

Our Rabbis taught: “A year may be declared a leap year [with an extra month] on three grounds: for the *aviv*, for the fruit-trees, or for the solstice. Any two of these reasons may justify intercalation, but not one alone. **However, everyone rejoices when the *aviv* one of them.**”

Rashi explains that this relates to the prohibition of harvesting new grain before Pesach:

“For the *aviv*” — if the grain does not ripen, we intercalate, for Scripture states (*Shemot* 13:4), “In the month of spring.” Now, there are those who explain that this is because they do not have a place to take the omer-offering from...

“When the *aviv* is one” — of the two reasons that they intercalate the year, everyone is happy. They are not concerned about pushing Pesach off, because the grain is not ready in any case, so the prohibition of new grain is not lengthened for them. However, when the *aviv* is fit to be harvested and the year is intercalated for the fruit and the solstice, they are sad, because the prohibition of new grain is extended.

“In the season of the month of spring” — Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira says: “We intercalate [months into] the years, so that we celebrate only in *chodesh ha-aviv*.”

What does this mean?

Aviv is more than an annual season; it is a state of existence, of reborn reality coming to life. In *aviv*, the trees start to flower, the plants in nature come to life after the torpor of winter; children once again run in the streets, to play in the gentle rays of the sun. The world awakens from the slumber of the lengthy winter. This awakening reveals that which has developed on a hidden level, below the ground, at the time of slumber. All of these constitute tangible evidence of the process of renewal and blossoming which is happening all over the whole world, in all of its systems. As Rav Kook writes:¹⁵

Now, after the lengthy slumber, we have reached the time to reveal life. The snow and the frost, which cover the seeds of its resuscitation, have melted, for the sun of the divine light shines, sending forth its rays... **The *aviv* is about to come.**

Israel's Exodus from Egypt and its receiving of the Torah are, respectively, the national and spiritual blossoming of the Jewish people. Along with them, the whole world blossoms, since as long as the Israelites were in Egypt, enslaved, they had no chance for a normal national life - due to a lack of political independence and a concomitantly unsuitable spiritual life!¹⁶ The people were in the slumber of winter.¹⁷ With the Exodus, the continuous process of their redemption began - in

¹⁵ *Iggerot Ha-Re'aya* vol. I, no. 216.

¹⁶ *Berakhot* 17a employs an idea which we will expand upon below, that of spiritual leaven:

R. Alexandri used to conclude his prayer with the following: “Sovereign of the Universe, You know full well that our will is to perform Your will, but what prevents us? The yeast in the dough and the subjection to foreign powers...”

¹⁷ They descended through forty-nine levels of impurity in Egypt. See *Or Ha-chayim* on *Shemot* 3:7 and *Devarim* 32:10.

stages - towards the ideal condition of the Jewish people, the full redemption. This process has spanned generations and eras; there are constantly small contributions and advancements, additions of some element of perfection.

It is not only the Jewish people who advance through this process; the world in its entirety advances with them. The nation of Israel leads and is central in the process, but the yearning of the Jewish people for redemption is a universal yearning¹⁸ - for the redemption of all nations, all people, and all existence.

Thus, Rav Kook writes:¹⁹

“Today you are going out, in the month of spring.” **Your act of Exodus is an act which permeates the entire universe**, an act which permeates the natural, an act which permeates the supernatural. **Today has its unique spiritual character, prepared for your Exodus, and it is in *Chodesh Ha-aviv*, a time in which blossoming and the renewal of life are realized throughout nature.** This occupies a unifying position through the quintessence of creation: everything participates in your wondrous Exodus.

There is a process of advancement in the world as a whole,²⁰ and the Jewish people have a central position in it. Once the Jewish people left Egypt and entered the stage of history, they began to influence world culture and its progress. The Jewish people are the redeemers and emancipators of the world — from the stupidity of pagan belief and from

¹⁸ In *Chokhmat Ha-kodesh*, p. 591, he writes:

Everything, the entire world, all of its creatures, all of the souls we want to rise up — we are capable of raising and refining the root of everything. We aspire to ascend, to connect in the place of the light of life... We seek to fill all of the nations with the divine glow, to raise up, to refine, and to glorify...

¹⁹ *Olat Reiya*, vol. I, p. 37.

²⁰ These are the things through which one may see the opening of the gates of wisdom; see *Zohar, Vayikra 107; Kol Ha-tor 5:2*.

the taint of savage “self-actualization”. The nation of Israel gave to the world the values of morality and holiness, the sanctity of human life; the stability of family life; the value of repose, the Shabbat, etc.²¹

Thus, the change which occurred at the time of the Exodus from Egypt is not the legacy of Israel alone; the entire human race is nourished by its results and products.

But this is not enough. The entirety of existence, in all of its manifestations, advanced a stage; perhaps the change that took place inside is the one that was expressed on the outside — the wondrous miracles. Violating all of the systems of the earth, changing the laws of nature, proclaims a thorough change of the natural order.²² It signifies taking a step on the journey of improvement and progress, towards the absolute perfection of the future redemption.²³

²¹ Some attribute to Sigmund Freud the dictum, “The greatest gift which Judaism gave to modern culture is Jewish family life...” We do not have the space here to illustrate the various disciplines in which the Jewish people have influenced the progress of the world, helping it abandon all of the vanities to which it clung.

²² *Sefat Emet* mentions, in a number of places, an idea which he received from his grandfather, R. Yitzchak Meir Alter (*Parashat Bo*, Year 5632). This idea links the ten utterances by which God created the world in the first chapter of *Bereishit* with the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai (literally, Ten Declarations); he expands on the difference between an utterance (*ma’amar*) and a declaration (*dibbur*).

My master and grandfather would say that after the redemption from Egypt, the ten utterances were transformed into the ten declarations by way of the ten plagues. This is the difference between *ma’amar* and *dibbur*. *Dibbur* is a language of royalty and leadership, leading one to recognize and disclose that the inner power and life of everything emanates from the ten utterances; nature cannot mask His strength, and thus Pharaoh cannot claim “Mine is the Nile...” (*Yechezkel* 29:3).

Elsewhere (*Parashat Vaera*, Year 5636), he writes:

“And God spoke... and he said to him, ‘I am the Lord...’ (*Shemot* 6:2).” Midrashic sources tells us that He started with the attribute of justice, but then He saw that because of Israel’s pain, [Moshe] spoke [defiantly], so He switched to the attribute of mercy. Now, the Sages tell us, and we have heard from our Rabbis, that the Exodus from Egypt was the *tikkun* of the act of Creation in its entirety. In sum: by way of the ten plagues, the ten utterances were repaired, so that they could afterwards become the ten declarations.

²³ This may be the explanation of *Iggerot Ha-Re’aya*, vol. I, p. 175: “Until it was also recognized in the cosmological process of the world order.”

Generally, we do not ask the question: “What if...?” Responses to these questions are mere speculation; we cannot know anything clearly unless it actually happens. Nevertheless, in the Haggada, the Sages do engage in such speculation, so we may repeat it: “Had He not taken us out, we and our children’s children would be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt!” Concerning this, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook quotes his father, Rav Kook:²⁴

For had the Holy One, Blessed be He, not taken our ancestors out of Egypt to permanent freedom, to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, all of the world in its entirety, and every order of human life, would have remained in place without changing; thus, we would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.²⁵

In each and every generation, we must act in a practical way to advance the redemption. The time which is most opportune for this is the glorious season of our departure — *aviv*. Indeed, in order to ensure that Pesach falls at a time most conducive to its special glow, every generation must coordinate the holiday with the springtime renewal!!! From our actions, from the auspicious time — and from the surrounding *aviv* — the light of redemption and liberty will shine into our souls.

Renewal is the central element of full redemption. *Chodesh Ha-aviv*, the time of renewal, is the time in which the redemption will culminate — “In Nisan they were redeemed; in Nisan, they will be redeemed in the future.”²⁶ In it, all are destined to be delivered: Israel and the world as a whole. The process of renewal and redemption of the world and the Jewish people starts with the Exodus from Egypt during *Chodesh Ha-aviv*. From that point, it becomes stronger from generation to generation and from year to year. Indeed, the Exodus from Egypt is “the *aviv* of the entire world...”

²⁴ *Olat Re'iya*, vol. II, p. 268.

²⁵ See Rav Uzi Kalchheim, “*Be'er Meged Yerachim*,” *Kovetz Ha-Re'aya*, pp. 180-182.

²⁶ On *Rosh Hashana* 11b, this is the view of Rabbi Yehoshua.

The Blessing of the Trees during *Chodesh Ha-aviv*

As the month of Nisan, *Chodesh Ha-aviv*, begins, we are presented with a unique and beloved mitzva: the blessing on the trees (*birkat ha-ilatnot*). Let us examine the characteristics of this mitzva and its connection specifically to *Chodesh Ha-aviv*. The Talmud²⁷ mentions this blessing:

R. Yehuda says: **“If one goes out during Nisan and sees the trees blossoming, he should say, 'Blessed be He Who has not left His world lacking in anything, Who has created in it good creations and good trees for the enjoyment of mankind.'”**

Rambam²⁸ copies the Talmud’s words, with some minor changes:

A person who goes out to the fields or gardens in the month of Nisan and sees flowering trees sprouting branches should recite the blessing: “Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, Who has not left His world lacking in anything, Who has created in it good creations and good and fine trees for the enjoyment of mankind.”

This blessing expresses our gratitude to God for the universe which He created for us, in order to sustain us.²⁹ Based on these sources, halakhic authorities have inferred that the blessing on the blossoming is specifically on fruit-trees, not on non-fruit-bearing trees, because we make the blessing over the benefit we receive from the fruits. Similarly, one may see this as a source for the halakhic dispute as to the question of

²⁷ *Berakhot* 43b.

²⁸ *Hilkhot Berakhot* 10:13.

²⁹ See *Penei Moshe*, end of *Yerushalmi Kiddushin*.

whether one may make the blessing over blossoming hybrid trees, which result from sin and are contrary to God's will; therefore most halakhic authorities rule that one should not make a blessing over a crossbred tree.

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In light of the words of the Talmud and Rambam, we may ask: should we conclude that we make this blessing specifically in the month of Nisan? Alternatively, perhaps one can make it also before Nisan if one sees blossoming trees (for example, if one sees a blossoming almond tree in Shevat or Adar), and so too, if one happens not to have made the blessing in Nisan, one may do so in Iyar.

From the words of some *Rishonim*, we may infer that one may also make the blessing at another time, as R. Avraham bar Yitzchak writes:³¹

It is not specifically in the days of Nisan, but at the time that one sees blossoming trees for the first time that year.

Similarly, Ritva writes:³²

The days of Nisan are not specific, but in each and every place, whenever the trees blossom.

This is also how *Roke'ach*³³ rules, as do other halakhic authorities. This indicates that the essence of the blessing is the encounter with the initial bloom, not the season of the year. This has practical halakhic ramification, because in the southern hemisphere, trees blossom in Elul and Tishrei. There, one should make this blessing at the time that the local trees bloom, even though it is not the month of Nisan.

However, Chida writes that, according to the kabbalists, one should make the blessing specifically in Nisan (*Birkei Yosef* 226:2):

³⁰ See *Responsa Minchat Yitzchak* vol. III, 25:3 and *Responsa Yabbia Omer OC*, ch. 20.

³¹ In *Sefer Ha-eshkol*, p. 68.

³² *Chiddushim, Rosh Hashana* 11a.

³³ Ch. 342.

But I have heard **that, truth be told, this blessing is not applicable except during the days of Nisan.** Therefore, even on almond blossoms, one must make the blessing in the month of Nisan. Indeed, we have observed that the senior rabbis made the blessing on almond blossoms in the days of Nisan. Thus, this is the essence of the law.

According to the kabbalists, even upon almond trees, which bloom before Nisan, the blessing can only be made in the month of Nisan. This indicates that according to Kabbala, the blessing is not only for the fact of blooming, but the timing of the blooming in Nisan, **during the land of Israel's *Chodesh Ha-aviv*.**

It is well-established that the Jerusalemites and the members of the Old Yishuv throughout Israel would go out in the month of Nisan to fields, gardens, and orchards to recite the blessing in a large group; specifically, they require a quorum of ten. In this assembly, they add to the blessing the recital of a chapter of *Tehillim* and Kaddish as well.³⁴

In fact, the halakhic authorities determine that it is best to make the blessing in Nisan, in order to fulfill all views.³⁵ However, one may make the blessing also after Nisan on the condition that one does not wait “until after the fruits grow, for then he may no longer make the blessing.”³⁶

Similarly, the authorities emphasize that we are talking about seeing blooming flowers, not leaves; and that one must recite the blessing over the blossoming of fruit-trees specifically, not non-fruit-bearing trees:³⁷

It is specifically flowers, because leaves alone are not enough, and even the flowers must be on a tree which provides food — because

³⁴ *Tehillim* 148 was chosen for this. We should note that one should not be overly punctilious about this if one may miss his opportunity; one should be meticulous and take the first opportunity to recite the blessing, even if it means reciting it alone.

³⁵ See *Responsa Yechaveh Daat*, vol. I, ch. 1.

³⁶ *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 226:1, *Mishna Berura* 1 *ad loc.*

³⁷ *Mishna Berura* 226:2.

from this blossom a fruit will grow — but not a non-fruit-bearing tree.

What can we learn from the fact that this blessing should be made on the blossoming of flowering fruit-trees — not mature fruits and not crossbred trees (which were made in defiance of the biblical prohibition)? What can we learn from the kabbalists' view that one should make it in Nisan specifically? It appears that we may answer this in the light of Rav Kook's point, which we mentioned above:³⁸

“Today you are going out, in the month of spring”... **Today has its unique spiritual character, prepared for your Exodus, and it is in *Chodesh Ha-aviv*, a time in which blossoming and the renewal of life are realized throughout nature.** This occupies a unifying position through the quintessence of creation: everything participates in your wondrous Exodus.

In other words, there is a link between the Exodus from Egypt, which initiates the redemption of the entire world in which reality starts to bloom, and the season of the year in which the Exodus takes place, *aviv*.

This is intimately connected to the land of Israel. In this context, we have mentioned the famous dictum of HaRav Kook about the month of Nisan:

Israel's exodus from Egypt remains forever the springtime of the entire world.

There is a certain correspondence between spiritual processes and natural processes which happen in this season in the land of Israel (*op. cit.* below):

[The Torah states:] “And when Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites... which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land

³⁸ *Olat Reiya* vol. I, pp. 37-38.

flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month” (*Shemot* 13:1-5).

Specific incidents in the land of Israel are connected to great events, to the appearance of the sanctity of the light of God from which they came. **Thus, this mark is etched upon the spring season, in its perfection in the land of holiness, like a focusing lens** that shows us the light and the glow, the renewal of life and liberty which has been wrought for us in the days of our great spring, at the season of our departure from Egypt by the strong hand of the Master of all actions, blessed be He. This principle is expressed in the unique land, which is flowing with milk and honey, the land of the five nations which are specified here, **whose produce and yield emerge from its land and relate to the specific and wondrous attributes of its atmosphere. The bounty of *aviv* shines in it, in all of its light and the splendor of its glory**, and from it the glory of its bounty branches out over all of the land, because *aviv* is the mark of resurrection, paralleling and reflecting the words “You shall keep this service in this month.”

The blossoming of the fruit-trees marks a transition from a period of defoliation and dormancy to a period of growing and renewal. Therefore, we recite this blessing focusing on the blossom, not that which has already passed over the threshold to become a fruit. Similarly, we do not make a blessing on a crossbred tree, because it does not represent the blossoming of God’s act. In this transition, there is a certain renewed resuscitation, from a wintry state, in which it appears that reality has shriveled and that there is no chance, to a state of renewal, with the sprouting of new fruits and new sustenance, the future and its hope.

In the land of Israel, there is a certain correspondence between the time of blossoming of fruit-trees and the time which is fitting for

redemption, in which there is a certain blooming of spiritual and physical reality. Therefore, despite the fact that in terms of the specific phenomenon of a fruit-tree blooming, one may still make this blessing at another time, in terms of the general phenomenon and all it implies, it is better to recite the blessing specifically at this time — in Nisan, when we were redeemed; in Nisan, when we will be redeemed.

Thus, there is no better setting for this blessing than a great assembly, many people gathering to recognize the divine phenomenon of blossoming and renewal in nature, in the month of springtime. To this, we add also the verses of praise and redemption from *Tehillim* (148:13-14):

Let them praise the name of Lord,
For His name alone is exalted;
His majesty is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
Praise for all his saints,
For the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the Lord!

Shabbat Ha-gadol **The Privilege of Our Freedom Paying the Price**

True freedom cannot be given to a people on a silver platter.

While a great and expansive historical process does not end with one action, at times a grand process does depend on one act. This insight is commemorated in our traditions for *Shabbat Ha-gadol* (the Great Sabbath), which precedes Pesach, the festival of freedom. As to the nature of this Shabbat, the Tur³⁹ writes:

The Shabbat before Pesach is called Shabbat Ha-gadol.

The reason for this is that a great miracle was done before the *pesach* offering in Egypt — taking it on the tenth, as it says (*Shemot* 12:3), “On the tenth of this month, they will take for themselves a lamb for each patriarchal house, a lamb for each house.”

Now, the Pesach on which Israel left Egypt was on Thursday, as stated in *Seder Olam* (ch. 5), so it turns out that the tenth of the month was Shabbat. Each took a lamb as his *pesach* and tied it to the bedpost, and the Egyptians asked them: “Why are you doing this?”

And they responded, “We will slaughter it as a passover, as God has commanded us.”

[The Egyptians] gnashed their teeth that [the Israelites] were slaughtering their gods, but they were not allowed to say anything to them.

On account of this miracle, they call it *Shabbat Ha-gadol*.

³⁹ *Tur OC*, ch. 430.

The “great” process starts with the Israelites’ command to take a lamb as an offering, even though Egypt regarded it as a god. Thus, a “great miracle” happens to the Jewish people: despite the fury of the Egyptians about the insult to their gods, they do not have the ability to do anything. Concerning this description, R. Levi Yitzchak of Berdychiv⁴⁰ asks:

Why do they refer to this miracle as “great” more so than other miracles? Were there not greater miracles than this miracle? The miracle of splitting the Red Sea and other miracles which Blessed God did to his people Israel were not greater than this miracle?

Let us add another question: would it not be more appropriate to give the term “great” to the process as a whole, not to one discrete stage in the process?

R. Levi Yitzchak responds (*loc. cit.*) that the great miracle is this very change, the turning point in the Jews’ consciousness!

They call this a great miracle because it was done by the greatness of the intellect, which felt no fear or trepidation towards the Egyptians, even though they wanted to slaughter their gods.

Reaching this turning point in the Israelites’ consciousness allows the process to begin, and this “great” process, in its entirety, hinges on it. What is essential in preparing the ground for salvation and freedom? Something else which is great, “the greatness of the intellect,” comes and fills their hearts with courage, banishing their fear, giving them spiritual fortitude and uncompromising determination, until they are ready to put themselves in danger and to confront the Egyptians, in order to merit their desired freedom and independence. In terms of this, **“The privilege of our freedom is the willingness to pay the price.”**

⁴⁰ *Kedushat Levi, Parashat Yitro.*

Perhaps there is also a third viewpoint which is the root of the two preceding aspects: “the greatness of the intellect” affords the Jewish people a deep understanding of who they are and what their aims are as a unique nation. **Now we mark this great miracle not only as historical memory, but as an object lesson for the present, for our days.** The Exodus from Egypt, from slavery to freedom, indicates for us that the process of going out to true freedom exists in all of generations. **Particularly, we must understand that in order** to reach true and complete freedom, one act or event does not suffice, nor even an act or event in each generation. We are talking about a demanding, continuous process. **A nation which craves life, which desires true freedom, must reveal the willingness to fight on its own for an extended period of time, and to bear its price: true freedom cannot be given to a people on a silver platter.**

However, here as well, we need to remember the root of everything which requires “the greatness of the intellect.” In order to merit true and complete freedom, we need first to clarify its elements and its goals and to understand the greatness of the unique identity we aspire to in seeking freedom. In this spirit, Rav Kook⁴¹ writes:

It is not so simple to grasp the concept of servitude in the fullness of its magnitude, to understand how to get rid of its chains and to assert the unfettered space of freedom, to escape from the cursed category of slave and to arrive into the blessed category of freeman. It is no simple task to recognize the full magnitude of the concept of freedom. One must see clearly in order to embrace true liberty and not stumble in false freedom — for the latter is much poorer and lower than any servitude.

⁴¹ Rav Kook, *Ma'amarei Ha-Re'aaya*, p. 163.

It is simple to err in the illusion of freedom when in one fact one is sunk in slavery and subjugation. True freedom, as he⁴² writes, includes two essential physical and spiritual stages:

- a) Personal freedom entails freedom of the body from any foreign subjugation, etc.
- b) This freedom is not acquired except by the freedom of the soul, freedom of the spirit from everything which makes it veer from its straight, steadfast path, forged from its inner essence.

The first stage is physical freedom — freedom from the chains of foreign domination, which happens on Pesach; the second stage is spiritual freedom, the design and formulation of identity and culture which begins on Shavuot with the giving of the Torah. The counting of the *omer*-offering connects these two stages and creates the formula for complete freedom. However, in all of this, one must remember that without the willingness “to pay the price” and to withstand difficulties, one cannot grasp them.

A nation may be free in terms of politics and authority and exercise democracy yet still be a nation under the hegemony of other spiritual and cultural influences, dominated by passing fashions, by interests, and by the aims of others, as Rav Kook⁴³ writes:

The difference between the slave and the freeman is not only a distinction of status, the fact that one is subservient to another and the other is not subservient. We may find an intelligent slave whose spirit is filled with freedom; conversely, a freeman may bear the spirit of a slave. Freedom is characterized by being raised by one’s spirit; the person and the people as a whole ascend through it, faithful to their inner essence... This is not true if one has the spirit

⁴² *Olat Re’iya*, vol. II, 244.

⁴³ *Ma’amarei Ha-Re’aya*, p. 157.

of subservience, for the content of his life and his emotions are not defined by his spiritual character and identity, but rather in what is good and pleasant for the other, who has some control over him, whether it is legal or moral; it is that which the other finds to be good and pleasant.

In a case such as this, the freedom of the nation is an illusion. The way to true spiritual freedom includes a number of stages. At the first stage, it is clear what define its independent character: the Torah, “the greatness of the intellect.” The second stage is the formulation of principles, according to which its society and its state are constructed, not as an imitation of others. The third stage is to act with alacrity, in order to actualize this potential in all of the systems of authority and all spheres of life. In order to ensure progress in the process, there is a need for cyclical analysis: the national soul must be subject to a search for *chametz* (leaven) spiritually and psychologically, in order to analyze whether it clings to its independent aim and will or it is still subservient to the aims and wills of others, as Rav Kook (*loc. cit.*) writes:

“When we search for *chametz* by the light of the candle, we also search the chambers of the heart, to remove the leaven of servitude which clings to our souls,” so that we can clean ourselves “of every stain of servitude, whether that of revealed servitude... or that of latent servitude, which is false colors on the surface, shallow freedom which misleads the blind masses.”

This long journey is rife with obstacles which must be eliminated, just like the elimination of *chametz*.⁴⁴

These two types of liberty do not come — neither for a person in an individual way, nor for a people, a collective with a unique spirit — unless one eliminates from his domain all that prevents his freedom,

⁴⁴ Rav Kook, *Olat Re'iya*, vol. II, 244.

which is his leaven, the leaven in the dough, which is far more hazardous in a time that the light of redemption shines upon it.

What is the meaning of *Shabbat Ha-gadol* nowadays? In this past generation, we have acquired three new days which delineate the process by which the Jewish people achieved true independence. On *Yom Ha-atzmaut*, we mark the end of the foreign dominion and the political freedom. On *Yom Shichrur Yerushalayim*, we note the renewed connection to Jerusalem and the site of the Temple, which is the source of our spiritual freedom. On *Yom Ha-zikkaron*, we come together to remember the fallen of Israel's security forces, without whose sacrifice we could not merit all of these. Indeed, on *Yom Ha-atzmaut*, we commemorate a miracle on the order of that of *Shabbat Ha-gadol*, a critical turning point. As our master Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook used to say, the great miracle of the fifth of Iyar was that God filled the hearts of Israel's leaders with strength and fortitude, to declare the state despite the voices that discouraged this, despite the fact it was clear that such a declaration would lead to war with the five surrounding Arab armies.

However, there is an additional relevant viewpoint of *Shabbat Ha-gadol* for our generation. Sometimes, it appears that true freedom is a distant vision and the danger of despair is knocking at our door. However, on *Shabbat Ha-gadol* we remind ourselves that at the beginning of journey toward redemption, on *Shabbat Ha-gadol* in Egypt, we knew that the way was long and required patience, and there would be many difficulties on the way, that we would need to deal with them.

The eternal nation is not afraid of difficult, long paths. It climbs upwards knowing that the magnitude of the difficulty is reflected in the magnitude of the result. It embraces "the greatness of the intellect" and refreshes its strength, knowing that it must continue its journey through many generations, along the paths of redemption towards true freedom and complete salvation.

Kimcha De-Pischa **The Attribute of Kindness and the Taste of True Jewish Freedom**

The “*kimcha de-Pischa*” (literally, “flour for Passover”) collections for the needy is an ancient custom and decree which is mentioned in the Talmud (*Yerushalmi, Bava Batra*, ch. 1; *Mishna Berura*, 429:3). This custom is an inseparable part of the Pesach holiday and the preparations for it.

There are those who ask: “Why is this holiday different from all other holidays?” Why was this custom instituted for Pesach specifically? After all, they note, the commandment of charity applies each and every day, and particularly when there is a great need for the holiday (Rambam, *Hilkhos Yom Tov* 6:18).

Why is there a need for a special decree?

Similarly, there are those who ask: why does the Haggada open with “*Ha Lachma Anya*”, calling to the hungry and needy to join the holiday feast and eat matza: “Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is needy, let him come and make the *pesach*.” What connection is there between this and the Haggada?

Simply, one must explain the connection between *oni* (poverty) and the Exodus. The Torah itself calls matza “*lechem oni*” (*lachma anya* in Aramaic), bread of poverty (*Devarim* 16:3):

For seven days shall you eat upon it matzot, **bread of poverty**, for in haste you went out of the land of Egypt, **so that you shall remember the day of your going out from the land of Egypt all the days of your life.**”

There is a very deep link between servitude and poverty, and therefore on the Pesach holiday, we express unique concern about the poor in our

time. According to the Talmud (*Pesachim* 115b), this is also **the reason that when we eat matza to fulfill the mitzva, we eat the broken matza**, because matza is “the bread of poverty,” and “the way of the pauper is with a half.”

The Chafetz Chayim writes in *Shaar Ha-tziyun* (429:7), that the *kimcha de-Pischa* custom is not to be confused with regular charity:

In my view, one may say that by the letter of the law one would fulfill the mitzva of charity if he would give to the poor money in order that they may buy for themselves grain or flour for matza; therefore, it says that the custom is to divide grain, that its benefit should be proximate.

In other words, there is a unique custom to distribute staples, such as flour, in order to make things easier for those who need assistance in their preparations for the holiday.

The Chafetz Chayim goes on (*op. cit.* 10) to ask why this holiday is different from all other holidays, so that this custom was instituted at this time; it is not merely the same mitzva of charity which we are obligated to fulfill throughout the year, for two reasons:

It is possible that our predecessors instituted this for Pesach more so than for other holidays, because it is the time of freedom. As we sit reclining, each one with his household in great joy, it is not to God's glory that the paupers will be then hungry and thirsty. Therefore, we give him flour for all the days of Pesach, so that he is able to relate the Exodus from Egypt in happiness.

Another simple reason is that one cannot eat leaven, and matza is not so easy to acquire and to buy, and if we do not prepare him something for all the days of Pesach, he may end up hungry, or he may be ruined. I have found this reason in *Matteh Yehuda*.

Rav Kook explains that true Jewish freedom allows the attribute of kindness, which is inherent in the Jewish character, to be expressed. Why? Because the attribute of kindness is implanted deep within the character of the Jewish people (*Midrash Tehillim*, ch. 1): “Three good attributes the Holy One, Blessed be He, granted to Israel: they are compassionate, bashful, and kindly” (cf. *Yevamot* 79a).

When Israel was in exile, foreigners controlled its body and its freedom, and they also attacked its spiritual and moral world. When the Jewish people go from servitude to freedom, they return to the nature which is unique to them, the attribute of kindness implanted in them.

Therefore, the Haggada opens with kindness, calling the needy to come join the Seder: “Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is needy, let him come and make passover.”

Thus Rav Kook writes (*Olat Re'iya*, vol. II):

The basic line which separates between Israel and the nations is the light of the kindness, the first light of Avraham Avinu... The unique Hebrew characteristic and style is influenced by the light of the living Torah and loving-kindness. The world of paganism and heresy knows nothing but material, coarse pleasure, and even the spiritual benefits are only self-serving, which is lower and uglier. This world is solely focused on the narrowest part of the private self; it is more basic to them, but such is not the part of Yaakov. The love of good springs for us not from any side issue, but rather the actual nature of our existence and identity, the desire for the divine good, which is good for everyone.

Thus, once the compulsion which prevents one from being free and going toward the divine light is removed, one immediately feels a drive to eliminate pain and privation: “Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat.” This invitation cannot be issued grudgingly, with

any hint of disdain or resentment, for then the host exhibits a prideful face when he showers kindness upon the guest. All of these tendencies are the result of a mindset which goes against the nature of Israel's holiness, which cuts off the possibility for self-improvement and self-empowerment. Rather, "Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat" with all of the company, together in its happiness and glory. (See also *Meorot Ha-Re'aya, Haggada shel Pesach, Maggid - Kos Sheini*, page 54.)

We pray for holidays in which we will not know poverty or deficiency, but rather there will be fulfilled, for all of us, the verse, "Indeed, there will be no pauper among you" (*Devarim* 15:4). Until then, we will return and open the night of the Seder by reciting "*Ha Lachma Anya*" and calling the hungry and the needy to come to the holiday meal and to eat matza with us: "Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is needy, let him come and make the *pesach*." Then we may enjoy the taste of true Jewish freedom.

The Secret of Redemptive Memory

Remembering the Exodus from Egypt stands at the center of the Seder night⁴⁵:

“Remember this day that you left Egypt, from the house of slavery...and you shall tell your children on that day, saying ‘because of this that God did for me when he took me out of Egypt’” .

The essence of this *mitzvah* of ‘*ve-higadeta le-vincha*’, as the verse makes clear, is the actual mentioning of the events. Thus, even if a person has no children, he must mention the Exodus to others and to himself.

The *Mekhilta* of R’ Shimon b. Yochai (ch. 13) put it as follows:

“‘And when your son asks you tomorrow’ – so if your son asks, tell him, and if he doesn’t ask, don’t tell him. Thus, it says ‘and you shall tell your child’ – even if he doesn’t ask. This is all for one who has a child; what if one has no children? It says ‘And Moshe said to the people: Remember this day...’”

Indeed, we are commanded to remember the Exodus every day, as it says⁴⁶:

“So that you remember the day you left Egypt every day of your life”.

The Exodus is also the reason for many other *mitzvot* in the Torah (sanctity of the firstborn, Shabbat, other festivals, laws governing treatment of slaves, etc.). Nevertheless, on the Seder night we amplify this commemoration in a unique way: by telling an unlimited story. “Even if we were all wise and knew the whole

⁴⁵ Shemot 13:3

⁴⁶ Devarim 16:3

Torah, we have a *mitzvah* to tell the story of the Exodus. The more one tells, the more praiseworthy it is.”

The Exodus was one of the founding events of Israelite existence, an event which formed our national and spiritual consciousness. Thus, we must remember it and bequeath it to our children so that it is not forgotten. Nevertheless, remembering the Exodus from Egypt must also serve as a paradigm for the importance of remembering other events which impacted our history and spiritual existence.

In many communities, it is customary to mention other ‘remembrances’ mentioned in the Torah every day. In Ashkenazic communities, they recite the ‘Six Remembrances’: The Exodus, the events at Mt. Sinai, the acts of Amalek and the duty to blot them out, our rebellion against God in the desert, the actions of Miriam and her punishment, and Shabbat. Sephardic communities add another four: The miracle of the manna, Bilaam’s plan, that God gives us the strength to produce, and Jerusalem. Some preface the recitation of these ten remembrances with a short prayer, invoking the obligation to recite these ten things every day.

My teacher, R’ Zvi Yehuda Kook, זי”ל, constantly reminded us that memory is a characteristic trait of the Jewish people⁴⁷:

“Memory is health; the nations are ‘forgetful of God’ (Tehillim 9). How does one forget? We do not forget the Master of the Universe, the Exodus, Shabbat, or Jerusalem; we don’t forget our anemesis, Amalek. Remembering is a healthy state, a normal state of being in touch with things. Memory is organic and vibrant. In contrast, forgetting is weakness, uprootedness, disconnectedness. Memory is coherence...”

⁴⁷ *Sichot HRZY”H, Vayakhel 381*

All nations recognize the importance of remembering the history of the events which formed their national existence. They celebrate these events with holidays, ceremonies, and special commemorative events. Most of the time, however, it is a passive commemoration, preserved in the archives of collective memory like silent monuments. In contrast, Israel's memory ought to be a living source which influences our lives in the here and now – as though the events are recurring and happening again. We experience and allow ourselves to be affected by these events, physically and spiritually⁴⁸:

“And the basis for all of this is the order which the Most Sublime Wisdom arranged, that any enlightenment which shone or repair that was made at a particular time shines again and is renewed whenever that time passes again”. This also explains the law that “in every generation one must see himself as though he left Egypt.”

We draw spiritual nourishment from these past events which still live with us. The *mitzvot* which were established to memorialize them form the pattern of our lives. Thus, Israel's memory is an active, creative memory which dictates the present and guides our future.

“Certainly, holiness and the light which will be revealed in the future, may it arrive speedily in our days, will also shine on that same day which has already been prepared for it”⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Ramcha”l *Derech Hashem* 4:7

⁴⁹ R' Tzadok Ha-Kohen *Machshevet Harutz* ch. 8

The Matza of Haste and Faith -based Activism Avoiding *Hachmatza* (Leavening)

At the end of *Maggid*, before we say the first half of *Hallel*, we recite the words of Rabban Gamliel, concerning the paschal offering, matza, and bitter herbs, as cited in the *mishna* in *Pesachim*:⁵⁰

Rabban Gamliel used to say: “**Whoever does not mention these three things on Pesach does not fulfill his obligation**, and these are they: *pesach*, matza and *maror*. The *pesach* is because God passed over (*pasach*) the houses of our fathers in Egypt, as it is said (*Shemot* 12:27), ‘Then you shall say: “It is the offering of Lord’s passover, for that He passed over the house of the Israelites in Egypt when he plagued Egypt and saved our houses,” and the people prostrated and bowed.’ The **matza** is because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt, as it is said (*ibid.* v. 39), ‘**And they baked the dough which they took out of Egypt as cakes of matzot, rather than leaven, for they were banished from Egypt, and they could not tarry, and they also had made no provisions for themselves.**’ The *maror* is because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt, as it says: ‘And they made their lives bitter (*va-yemareru*) with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves’ (*ibid.* 1:14).”

Immediately afterwards, we mention what is written at the end of the *mishna*:

In each and every generation a person must regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt, as it is said...

⁵⁰ 10:5, Talmud 116a; this is mentioned in the Haggada with some minor variations.

This indicates that **every year we must clarify what the significance of the Exodus from Egypt is for us.** We will try to illustrate this in the light of the words of the *Rishonim* as they explain the passage there and in their commentaries on the Haggada.

The *Rishonim* argue about the words of Rabban Gamliel, asking: exactly what obligation is not fulfilled by one who fails to mention these three things?

The implication of the words of *Tosafot*,⁵¹ the *Ritva* and *Ran*,⁵² and the *Kol Bo*,⁵³ et al. is that **one does not fulfill his obligation of a biblical positive commandment of eating the paschal offering, matza and bitter herbs if one does not explain why he is eating each of these.**

Concerning this view, the question is asked: what is the aim of this statement? If this is in order to inspire greater intentionality in the performance of the mitzva, where have we found that a lack of intent means that one does not fulfill his obligation? (*Mitzvot* do not require special intent solely in order to fulfill the obligation of the commandment) Moreover, concerning what other *mitzvot* must one say what they are for, that the blessing on the mitzva is insufficient?

*Tzitz Eliezer*⁵⁴ infers that for *pesach*, matza and *maror*, we are talking about a special mitzva unlike others, and therefore there is a special command of verbalization: “Then you shall say: ‘It is the offering of the Lord’s *pesach*.’”⁵⁵

However, *Ritva* and *Ran* explain that the intent is not that one does not fulfill his obligation at all, but that one does not fulfill his

⁵¹ *Pesachim loc. cit.*

⁵² *Sukka* 28a; this is how *Tosafot Yom Tov* explains the *mishna*, *Pesachim* 10:5.

⁵³ In his commentary on the Haggada.

⁵⁴ Vol. V, ch. 11.

⁵⁵ See *Maharsha*, *Chiddushei Aggadot*, *Pesachim ad loc.*, who answers according to internal reasons.

obligation as he should.⁵⁶ Preferably, one should mention these things, but if one fails to, he still fulfills his obligation!

On the other hand, Rambam⁵⁷ and Me'iri⁵⁸ et al. imply that Rabban Gamliel maintains that if one does not say these three things, he does not fulfill **the obligation of the positive biblical commandment of telling the story of the Exodus.**

One may derive this from the order of the *mishna* there, because in the previous *mishna*, it is explained that the son asks, “Why is this night different?” This *mishna* seems to have the answer to the son’s question. **According to this view, we may conclude** two things: on the one hand, if one has mentioned these three things alone, he has already fulfilled his obligation; on the other hand even if he has recited the entire Haggada, but he has not mentioned these things, he has not fulfilled his obligation.⁵⁹ However, this leads to another question: why does one not fulfill his obligation by relating the other things (as is cited there in the Talmud)?

Perhaps we may say that there is a third, integrative view here, which speaks of one unique mitzva: the eating is not just eating, for we eat things which illustrate the Exodus narrative. The mitzva of the story is not just to tell it verbally, but to eat things which express the meaning of the narrative.⁶⁰ This argument among the *Rishonim* has halakhic ramifications, because according to those *Rishonim* who support the first view, if one does not say these things, he would apparently be required to go back and eat his *pesach*, matza, and *maror* a second time, and it would not be enough to go back and mention these things. However, according to the

⁵⁶ This is how *Arukh La-ner* on *Pesachim* understands this point; the same is found in *Responsa Binyan Tziyon*, ch. 30, and the abovementioned comment of *Tosafot Yom Tov*.

⁵⁷ *Hilkhos Chametz U-matza* 7:5.

⁵⁸ *Pesachim ad loc.*

⁵⁹ This is also the approach found in *Responsa Binyan Tziyon*, ch. 30.

⁶⁰ One may use this to understand what Abarbanel writes in his *Zevach Pesach* commentary on the Haggada.

second view, it is enough if he mentions *pesach*, matza, and *maror* later.

R. Jacob Ettlinger (the teacher of R. Samson R. Hirsch and R. Azriel Hildesheimer), writes⁶¹ that there is an additional distinction between the two views, for if mentioning *pesach*, matza, and *maror* is part of the mitzva of eating, one would be obligated in it on Pesach Sheini as well. However, if the recitation is part of the mitzva of relating the Exodus, there is no need to say it on Pesach Sheini, for indeed there is no obligation to fulfill “And you shall tell your son on that day” (*Shemot* 13:8). There is good reason also to consider the theological and spiritual ramifications of each view. The view that the obligation of reciting *pesach*, matza, and *maror* at the time of performing this mitzva is an integral part of fulfilling the mitzva of eating may be explained by the words of Rabbeinu Manoach⁶²:

This teaches us that one must state and explain the reason [of each mitzva], for all of the *mitzvot* have reasons, and knowing the reason of the mitzva is of great significance upon accomplishing it. However, knowing the reason without doing it does not help; rather, it hurts. This has been amply proven by Shlomo. [If knowing the reason of other *mitzvot* is good, all the more so one should expound the reason for the *matzot* of Pesach, because recalling it inspires a person] to believe in God with a perfect, complete faith — for through this redemption, He was revealed to all Israel; all the nations of the world came to know that His alone is the dominion over heaven and earth. This is why they instituted to say afterwards, “In each and every generation a person must regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt.” By recalling this, the fear of God will always be upon him. When one sees the providence

⁶¹ *Responsa Binyan Tziyon loc. cit.*

⁶² This is brought on *Hilkhos Chametz U-mazta* 7:5, despite the fact that Rambam does not state this.

of God, which He displayed on Israel's behalf, one's heart will remain irrevocably attached to Him forever. If one finds himself in a time of great distress, he must trust in God, the Hope of Israel, its Savior in a time of distress. The distress of the Egyptian exile had a purpose, to benefit them in the end; so too all of the troubles of Israel in exile have a purpose, to save and deliver them eternally."

On the other hand, according to the view that mentioning *pesach*, matza, and *maror* is part of the mitzva of relating the story of the Exodus, we should ask why this is the essence of the story, so that if one does not mention these three things, he does not fulfill his obligation at all. Abarbanel (*loc. cit.*) explains that these three things are the fundamentals of the telling the story of the Exodus. The *maror* parallels the exile, the matza parallels the redemption, and the *pesach* parallels the Plague of the Firstborn and the salvation of Israel. However, according to his commentary, a problem remains: are not both the *pesach* and the matza expressing the fundamental idea of the redemption and salvation of Israel?

We should understand this according to the analysis of the verses which Rabban Gamliel mentions in his words. The *maror* is the expression of the distress of enslavement, from which the Israelites were redeemed. The *pesach* is an expression of the act of the redemption, which comes from the side of the Holy One, who redeemed us, "that he passed over the house of the Israelites in Egypt when he plagued Egypt and saved our houses." However, there is an additional significant element of redemption, namely the part of the Jewish people in the action of redemption which is expressed by the matza: **"And they baked the dough which they took out of Egypt as cakes of matzot, rather than leaven, for they were banished from Egypt, and they could not tarry, and they also had made no provisions for themselves."** Baking matza expressed the act required of the Jewish people at the time of the Exodus. At this point, the

Israelites must become a partner with God, acting with determination and alacrity and without hesitation. The matza is a unique food, made of dough which is baked with purposefulness and alacrity. Whoever is present at the time of baking *matzot* will undoubtedly note that the most prominent element is the enthusiastic activity of those who are involved in the labor. Procrastination causes the matza to become *chametz*. Indeed, the term for dough becoming leaven, *hachmatza*, has become the universal term for losing one's chance, for squandering an opportunity.

There is something important to learn from this for our days. From the Vilna Gaon's studies to the redemptive Torah of Rav Kook, we have learnt the need to **integrate the *itaruta di-le'eila* with the *itaruta di-letata*. We must integrate the force of the *pesach* with that of the matza**, our theological obligation to recognize the divine processes and to act with God. In order to understand, it is incumbent upon us to learn from Israel's action at the moment of redemption and the recipe of the matza. When we take action, we must be zealous and determined, not lazy and idle. Indeed, before taking the initiative, it is imperative for us to examine soberly what we have to do, and how we can serve the redemptive, divine aim in the best way. At this stage, it is forbidden to be hasty, so that we will not stumble and impede the process. However, once the aim is understood, and it is clear what we must do, we must act with alacrity and determination so that we not miss the opportunity — so that we do not become guilty of *hachmatza*.

The Forge of *Maror*

Together with the festive expressions of redemption on the Seder night, there is an expression of bitterness, a memorial to the bitter exile and the great troubles which were our lot in Egypt. The redemption is reflected in our partaking of the *pesach* and the matza, and the commemoration of the awful troubles, on the other hand, is achieved by eating the *maror*.

We can also understand in this way the *korekh* sandwich, which is Hillel's custom of wrapping the *pesach*, matza, and *maror* together and eating them. This is because these elements are intertwined: the happiness of redemption together with the painful recollection of our distress.

Now we may understand the words Rabban Gamliel:

Whoever does not mention these three things on Pesach does not fulfill his obligation, and these are they: *pesach*, matza, and *maror*.

Rabbeinu Manoach (as mentioned above) explains these elements thusly:

This teaches us that one must state and explain the reason [of each mitzva], **for all of the *mitzvot* have reasons**, and knowing the reason of the mitzva is of great significance upon accomplishing it... By recalling this, the fear of God will always be upon him. **When one sees the providence of God**, which He displayed on Israel's behalf, one's heart will remain irrevocably attached to Him, may He be Blessed, forever. **If one finds himself in a time of great distress, he must trust in God, the Hope of Israel, its Savior in a time of distress. The distress of the Egyptian exile had a purpose, to benefit them in the end; so too all of the troubles of Israel in exile have a purpose, to save and deliver them eternally.**

According to Rabbeinu Manoach, there are a number of complementary ingredients; they are integral and indispensable. The obligation of mentioning *pesach*, matza, and *maror* strengthens one's faith and belief in God. It teaches us **how the Jewish people dealt with the difficulties and troubles which they underwent in Egypt. The nation of Israel may draw from this the powers of faith and spiritual strength in order to face later challenges.**

The enslavement of Egypt entailed rigorous labor, but the greater difficulty was the emotional difficulty, because this was a time when God hid His face, as it were, from His nation, a phenomenon known as "*hester panim*". It appeared, as it were, that there was no providence in the world and that the Egyptians could do to the Jewish people whatever they pleased. This was a *nissayon*, a trial or test, as Ramchal explains.⁶³

The essential *nissayon* of *hester panim* is the following. God certainly says, through all of His prophets, that He is the One Who asserts providence over all of His creations, and His eyes are upon all the ways of man, to give to each man according to his ways and the fruits of his actions... Behold, after we have heard all of this, **we know that He makes the world go round with deep twisting schemes and distant plans, which appear, God forbid, to suggest the opposite of this,** for at one time it may appear as if it all comes by chance... and all other issues **which God gave to test by them the hearts of human beings...** For this is the test, to see whether people will maintain their faith, and this fundamental will never vanish from their hearts: He is certainly a faithful, incorruptible God, even though we do not understand his ways. And of this it is says (*Chavakkuk* 2:4), "And the righteous will live by his faith," as we have already explained above. This is a very

⁶³ *Daat Tevunot*, ch. 124.

great space made by the absence of the Upper Perfection, and a place has been left for evil.

In another place, the Ramchal explains that it is the *nissayon* specifically which advances a person and raises him up a degree. **Trials are not designed to make man stumble, but to make him stronger.** (Indeed, we say that “*Nissayon* makes one wise,” in the modern sense of “experience,” but of course *nissayon* means “trial” in its original sense, and we may say that this sort of *nissayon* also makes one wise; however, this is not the occasion to elaborate on this.)

Nevertheless, we must ask, since our Rabbis have taught us that in a time of *hester panim*, this is strictly a *nissayon* for humanity, and there is no absence of Providence, does this not undermine the very trial? We know that this is merely an illusion, that God is still on the scene!

We may respond that the nature of *nissayon* is not logical, but rather psychological; it is not rational but emotional. In other words, when a man finds himself in great distress, which appears to indicate the opposite of providence, then even if from a theological and logical point of view, he is able to understand that we are talking about a *nissayon*, from an emotional and psychological point of view, this is a difficult trauma, in an emotional, personal test which challenges one’s faith. Many times, when a person is put in a situation of emotional breakdown and post-traumatic stress, the logical difficulties and the theological questions arise retroactively, not as a factor in precipitating the crisis in the first place.

How can a person be helped to withstand the emotional difficulty of a *nissayon*? The more one builds his world of faith and fortifies his soul, the easier it will be to deal with any *nissayon*.

The theological issue which we must comprehensively deal with now is the idea that the birth of redemption must be accompanied by birth pangs. As a result of this, we must coordinate our expectations with the

processes of redemption. We must make ourselves accustomed ahead of time, to understand that the lights of redemption come with a considerable amount of darkness; our joy is often mixed with despair, and the taste of matza is laced with the taste of *maror*.

On the Seder night and on the Shabbat of Pesach, we read *Shir Hashirim*. There is an intimate link between the meaning of this book and the redemption of the Pesach holiday. The Sages⁶⁴ expound the verse (*Shir Hashirim* 2:9) “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart” in the following way:

“My beloved is like a gazelle” — just as a gazelle is seen, then hidden, then seen again, **so too the first redeemer is seen, then hidden, then seen.** How long is he hidden? R. Tanchuma said: “Three months, as it says, ‘And they encountered Moshe and Aharon’ (*Shemot* 5:20).”

Maharal⁶⁵ explains this *midrash* as follows:

For this very reason, the Holy One did not command them to perform the signs immediately, **for the Holy One wanted the redeemer to be hidden from them for a certain amount of time, and afterwards he could return to be revealed. This is all a wondrous matter.** According to my view, it parallels the two accountings, for He said (*Shemot* 3:16), “Taking account, I have taken account” and therefore there were two accountings: once now, and in the future as well, when they will be redeemed... There are to be two occasions of flourishing. **All of this is to promote the redemption, for it is impossible for the redemption, which is the highest degree, to come all at once.**

Redemption is compared to the movements of the gazelle: sometimes

⁶⁴ *Shir Hashirim Rabba*, ch. 2.

⁶⁵ *Gevurot Hashem*, ch. 30.

it is seen, but sometimes it disappears. However, even when it disappears from view, it is still moving forward. This relates to the various stages of redemption in which we see the progress of redemption, despite periods of *hester panim*, during which it appears that the redemption is in retreat. We must know that even at a time of *hester panim*, the redemption advances: so it was during the redemption from Egypt, and the same applies to the future redemption. Similar things were written by Rav Kook⁶⁶ after the massacres of 5689 (1929):

This holy principle, which is the issue of all of this great vision, has in it a certain latent spark of the messianic light: the redeemer who is seen, then hidden, then seen. Indeed, we are witnessing the process of a nation being resuscitated and the settlement of the land of Israel being expanded, **in which there are many turns, ascents and descents and ascents. Every descent in the progress of this endeavor is a manifestation of the concealment of the redeemer, and every ascent which comes afterward is a manifestation of his revelation.** Anyone who follows the progress of the Yishuv, from its first steps until now, may see clearly with his own eyes **that for every descent which we have borne, we have afterwards seen a greater flourishing and development; from every crisis, we leap forward, to our benefit.** In the progress of the settlement, there are many examples of this. What can we say about the great descent and the great crisis of the period of the war... that every heart trembles with the thought of our settlement sinking and utterly collapsing. Behold, we have seen with our own eyes that out of the darkness, we have come out to great light, and we have widened the borders of what was a limited settlement, and the land of Israel is now settled to the

⁶⁶ “*Shuvu Le-vitzaron*,” *Ma’amarei Ha-Re’aya*, vol. II, p. 360.

degree which we witness today. So we have seen, in a small measure, the redeemer who is hidden, then seen once again. From this, we may learn and derive an important lesson: we shall not let our spirits fail even beneath the terrifying shadow of a great downfall, which has befallen our settlement.

Indeed, from the eating of the *maror*, we may derive a new principle. There is emotional and psychological significance to knowing that the Jewish people have already undergone trials too difficult to consider; the Egyptian exile stands first and foremost among these, but despite the great difficulties, the Jewish people withstood them with pride. On the contrary, “the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad” (*Shemot* 1:12) — the trials only strengthened and advanced them. This knowledge is a source of strength and spiritual fortitude, powers to marshal in the face of all future challenges, which allow us to withstand all difficulties and trials. As we are accustomed to say, “We survived Pharaoh, we can survive this.”

On the night of the Seder, we recline at the table and wrap matza and *maror* together; united with the entire house of Israel, we draw spiritual powers and strengths from the wellsprings of faith and redemption to face the great challenges which stand before us, to merit the taste of liberty in matza and to be willing also to suffer the bitterness of the *maror*.



לזכרון עולם בבית מדרשו

"וכבוד עשו לו במותו" – מלמד שהושיבו ישיבה על קברו

[בבא קמא דף טז/ב]

סמ"ר מאיר שנוולד הי"ד

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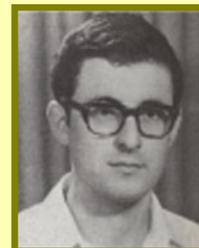
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