



פסח

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Greatness At The Seder

Contents:

Part I. Goal Of Greatness - 1

Part II. Seeking Greatness - 4

Part III. Discovering Greatness - 7

Part I. Goal Of Greatness

Always Means Always

The fragrance of Pesach is already in the air for a few weeks already but now Shabbos Hagadol is coming and Yom Tov is right around the corner – the fragrance is getting stronger, it's in our nostrils already, and so we'll take the opportunity now to spend a little time preparing for the Seder night and the days that follow.

There is a mitzvah in the Torah, לִמְעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת, יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ – You should remember all the days of your life, that day that you went out from Mitzrayim (Devarim 16:3). Now, when we learn *pshuto shel mikra*, so we understand that it means as long as you're alive you have to remember what happened at Yetzias Mitzrayim.

Always! Morning, mid-morning, afternoon, and evening you have to remember. If you get up in the middle of the night and you're tossing and turning, there's no reason to waste the opportunity

– even then it's good to remind yourself, “Oh, Hashem, I remember that day that You took us out of Mitzrayim.” כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ means always.

For Maximum People

Now along will come the *lamdonim* and they'll put up a protest. “What kind of business is this?” they'll say, “What kind of nonsense are they telling you in that place? The Gemara in Brachos tells us that it means once in the day and once at night, and that's all.”

And they're right; if you want to get away with the bare minimum that's all you need. And of course, we cannot criticize you as a sinner if you did the minimum. You're *yotzei* just by saying אֲנִי וְה' לְאֱלֹקֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם and you give a kiss to your *tzitzis* and that's it. You did the 'minimum she'b'minimum'.

But the minimum is only for the minimum people. If you want to be maximum people, then you have to come back to the *pshuto shel mikra*. The *kavonas hatorah* is that you should remember

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Special section "Eight Days of Matzah" starting on page 11



it all the time. Always, before the eyes of the Am Yisroel is that great spectacle, the unforgettable day, when we marched out of Mitzrayim.

Now there has to be a good reason why there's such a mitzvah – after all **כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּינוּ** is quite extreme; there must be something there. It's more than just a mitzvah of mentioning or remembering – like a person has memories of some good time in his past – he looks at pictures of his *chasunah* from forty years ago and he has fond memories of when he set out into the world. No, it's much more than that.

More Than Mere Memory

The mitzvah of *zecher yetzias Mitzrayim* is **כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּינוּ** because it requires more than merely saying the words and remembering; it's supposed to become part of our mindsets. The remembering of Yetzias Mitzrayim is intended to change our attitude towards life in this world.

לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּינוּ doesn't mean merely that we came out of Mitzrayim – we're remembering *why* we were taken out; we're thinking about what Hakadosh Baruch Hu's intention was when He made the entire spectacle of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

And so we have to pay attention to the first words that Moshe Rabbeinu was sent to say to Pharaoh. And we pay attention very carefully because the first statements are usually the most important; whatever follows are *peirushim*, they're expanding on the subject, but whatever is said first, that's the foundation, the beginning of everything.

Purpose Of The Exodus

When Moshe Rabbeinu came to Pharaoh the first time, he delivered a message from Hakadosh Baruch Hu with the most revolutionary principle the world ever heard and ever will hear: **כֹּה אָמַר ה' בְּנִי בְּכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל** – Hashem says, “The Am Yisroel are My firstborn son!”

These words are so important that if we stopped here and didn't hear anything else, it would be enough for us to study forever. All the rest of Yetzias Mitzrayim is just a commentary on these words. The whole spectacle of Yetzias Mitzrayim, all the *makkos* and everything else, was staged for one purpose, and that purpose was to demonstrate that **בְּנִי בְּכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל**; that the Jew, he's Hashem's Chosen Son.

That's the purpose of Yetzias Mitzrayim, to let the world know – more importantly to let the Bnei Yisroel know – that “You are my firstborn son, the son that I chose from all the nations.” It means “I am interested only in you.”

The Most Objectionable Idea

Now, that's such a difficult thought for us to understand because we know Hashem is interested in *everything* in His world. And yet His *hashgocho protis*, it means, His sole interest in the universe, is only for Am Yisroel.

Now, that is the most objectionable idea that the *umos ha'olam* could ever hear. Even the best of them, who would grant us full equality, but they would certainly be offended to hear that we claim to be chosen of all the nations in the world. But whatever the gentiles think, we have to understand that we go by the statements in the Torah. And in the Chumash it states it as openly as can be. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “You are My son that I chose from all the nations.”

That's what Hoshea said (11:1). **כִּי נַעַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָהַבְתִּי** – *When Yisroel was a youth, I loved them,* **וּמִמִּצְרַיִם קָרָאתִי לְבְנִי** – *and from Mitzrayim I summoned my son; I called out My son.* That's the whole subject of Yetzias Mitzrayim in a capsule. That's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu made all the phenomenon of Yetzias Mitzrayim, all the *makkos* and the wonders, only to demonstrate this one point, that the Melech Malchei Hamelachim, the One Who rules over the universe, is thinking *only* about us! But not only about us in general – about

you and you and you; about each one of us individually.

And therefore, remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim means remembering that we were chosen by the Melech Malchei Hamelachim. And remembering that means that we have to be forever and ever grateful to Him.

Gratitude For Everyone

Now the truth is that *everyone* is obligated to think of Hashem in terms of gratitude. 'הָבוּ לָהּ מְשִׁפּוֹת עַמִּים – All the nations, the families of the nations, have to get together and give thanks to Hashem. In Africa, an old black man has to call together his family. “Kinderlach,” he says, “you're wasting your lives. All day long to be fighting wars with the other tribes and killing each other?!” That's what they did by the way – they were busy all the time killing each other.

I'm not telling you propaganda now. It's well-known that their neighbors were their victims. And it was considered a wisdom and a virtue to be so cunning that you were able to cut down your neighbor and destroy him.

You know it's a pity what people think. If you read such propaganda as Roots – that book Roots – you'll read about how it was a great pity that the blacks were transported from the Congo and brought to America. But they don't realize that it was actually a salvation for them. They were saved from being devoured by people of neighboring tribes. Because that's all they did! They fought incessant wars. They never stopped fighting with each other.

A Higher Foundation

So a good Congonian grandfather has to call together his *einiklach*, his *eidimer* and their families, and say, “Children, take a break from all of your foolishness. You're wasting your time fighting. Hashem created you! Spend some time thinking in gratitude. It's true that Hashem didn't

take us out of Mitzrayim, but He created us. Hashem put us in this world and He gave us our bodies, this wonderful apparatus. He gave us a mind, a miraculous machine. He gave us the sun and the moon. He gave us air and water and food. He gave us clothing – at least something to wear around our loins. He gives us everything. And so let's all thank Him together.” מְשִׁפּוֹת עַמִּים means that everybody is *mechuyav*!

But when we come to ourselves, the Am Yisroel, בְּיַגְבֵּר עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדוֹ; we're especially *mechuyav*! Because above and beyond all of that, we were chosen for greatness! And therefore the Jewish grandfather has to call together his family and tell them, “Kinderlach, our function in life is not only to thank Hashem for everything that the *kushim* have to thank for. We have to remember what Hashem did to us.”

We keep the Torah not merely on the foundation of what the gentile has to do out of gratitude for being alive. We have a higher foundation, a very elevated foundation. He chose us as His children! He took us out of Mitzrayim to be the chosen nation! We could never thank Him enough! To be *banim l'Hashem Elokeichem*!

Chosen For Chores

Now, don't think it's merely a certificate. It's not just a diploma, something you hang on the wall, “You are hereby chosen to be My people, My chosen nation.” It's that too, absolutely it's a tremendous pride, but it's an obligation too. You can tell that to a gentile if he ever bothers you about what it means that we're the chosen nation. It means we were chosen to be servants, to work. And that's the plain truth. We were chosen to be obligated.

And now we come to the subject of Pesach, of why Hakodosh Boruch Hu took us out of Mitzrayim. Every day we say like this: הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים – I took you out of Mitzrayim, לְהִיּוֹת לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים – for one purpose; to be your *Elokim*; it

means that from now on you are dedicated entirely to Me.

That's expected to be the number one result of our remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim. We're not just remembering something that happened in the past for the sake of good memories; no, it's a demand from us. Hashem is insisting on something. "I took you out לְהִיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים, so that I should be your Elokim, that you should serve Me."

That's it! From now on that's your purpose in this world. A Yisroel, a Yehudi, is a person whose profession in life, his entire career, is Hashem. Whatever else he does, it's only because it's necessary to maintain his activity as an *eved Hashem*. Even if he is a professional, if he is a merchant, that's only the means of being an *eved Hashem*, of always working towards *shleimus*, becoming a better and better *eved Hashem*.

Get Ambitious

Yetzias Mitzrayim therefore puts upon us all the days of our lives a requirement: we should never stop being ambitious; that's the word – *ambitious*. We have to be ambitious for greatness.

Now some people, they think that ambitious is *shelo lishmah*, that it's being *rodef achar hakavod*. Oh no, that's a big mistake. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says "I want ambition! I want you to be the best that you can be. That's My chief *ratzon* that I expect of the Bnei Yisroel. That's what I mean when I say 'I took you out of Mitzrayim to be your Elokim.'"

How many things do you have to do? There's no end because there's no end to the demand of the *sheleimus* Hashem wants of us. And more than anything else – more than the *korban Pesach* and *matzah* and *marror* – Pesach is the great opportunity to remind us that our lives are dedicated to making the best that we can out of ourselves. And we're doing it because Hakadosh Baruch Hu is demanding it. He doesn't want us to

be satisfied with halfway measures. He wants you to do all you can. And you can do a lot. You are capable of a tremendous amount of achievement. You are capable of fulfilling that obligation of לְהִיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים in a much greater measure than you imagine.

Part II. Seeking Greatness

Expecting The Unexpected

I'm going to tell you something now that might be a little surprising because the biggest obligation included in this subject of לְהִיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים is not what you imagined. Even when I tell you, I don't think you'll accept it right away.

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "I took you out of Mitzrayim to be Your Elokim," more than anything else it means that He wants from you *perfection of character*. That's number one – it's what He wants most.

And so when we come to the subject of Pesach we're actually coming to the very great subject of *middos*; we are going to express our gratitude to Hashem, our obligation to Hashem, by working to perfect our character, our emotions and our reactions.

Now, that's not me saying so. It's the Rambam. The Rambam says that *tikkun hamiddos* is more important than any other area of our *avodah*, he calls it the most important element in a person's *avodas Hashem*.

The Greatest Peril

I'll explain briefly what the Rambam means, *why* it's most important. All other things, certain wrong acts, can be avoided when you are בּוֹרֵחַ מִן הַעֲבֵרָה. If you train yourself to run away from situations that bring sin, you'll be successful. If you keep your mouth closed, if you don't talk, you're running away from many *aveiros*. All kinds of sins can be avoided when you keep away.

That's the Jewish attitude; to stay far away from temptation. As much as possible לְהִי בֹרֵחַ מִן הָאֵשׁ הָעֹבְרָה כְּבוֹרֵחַ מִן הָאֵשׁ. Just like you flee from fire, you flee from something that smacks of sin. It's a wonderful *eitzah*! A person will save himself from many troubles – troubles in both worlds – if he learns to run away from anything that smacks of sin.

A man called me up long distance, a *frum* man, married, who is working in a certain place. He says there's a young lady there that took a fancy to him. And he's somewhat perturbed. What should he do?

So I said, "Drop that job immediately! Don't report for duty anymore!"

"But it's my job?!"

"It makes no difference! You're in great peril! You can't afford to flirt with something worse than death!"

He listened to me and he saved himself.

Can't Hide From Yourself

And so as perilous as sin is, but at least when it comes to peril you can run away. You can avoid it. But there is one thing that is functioning all the time and you can't escape it, and that's your character. You can't run away from character. If you quit your job and go to the *kollel*, your *middos* go along with you. And your *middos* can cause sins to no end.

Now of course, as soon as I mention this subject everybody knows that it doesn't apply to them; *aveiros*, yes, sometimes it can happen, but *middos*? He knows he has good *middos* and so there is nothing to talk about.

And therefore it requires that one should *think* about his *middos*; it requires self examination. And once he begins looking, he'll discover. Once he begins searching in the nooks and crannies of his mind, his character and behavior, he'll find.

And that brings us to the subject of *bedikas chometz*, of the mitzvah of לֹא יִרְאָה וְלֹא יִמָּצֵא.

Now we know from our Kadmonim that *chometz* means other things too. Our great teachers from the past have told us that *chometz* is a *remez* for the *yetzer hora*. It means that whatever we'll learn about ridding ourselves of *chometz*, besides for all the *halachos*, it means also the subject of ridding ourselves of the *yetzer hora*.

You should not ridicule what you are hearing now. Don't think it's just a *droshah*; it's maybe a poetic way of looking at it. If our *chachomim* told us this, they were being *megaleh* one of the secrets of the Torah: *Chometz* means every form of *Yetzer Hora*.

Many Forms Of Chometz

Now when we follow the *eitzah* of our *kadmonim*, we understand that this mitzvah of *bedikas chometz* is a hint to what *Pesach* is all about. *Pesach* means that we have a job here in this world, to become better servants of Hashem, and so, when we do *bedikah* we are also searching the nooks and crannies of our lives for all types of *yetzer hora*.

Today there's a lot of gentile influence that's hiding in the Jewish homes. Sometimes it's not so much in hiding. A lot of magazines and books and other things can be thrown out. Erev *Pesach*, that's a good opportunity to search out the corners of your home for that too. But the most urgent of all kinds of *chometz* is the *chometz* of character, to search out your mind, your behavior, your attitudes, for the *chometz* of character.

And it's more than *chometz mamesh*. If a person ate *chometz mamesh* on *Pesach beshogeig* – he didn't want to eat – so he has to bring a *korban chatos*. So he brings a *korban* and he does *teshuvah*, he is sorry for what he did and it's forgiven. But *middos* don't go away that way; you can be sorry but it's still in you – you do the same

thing again and again. *Middos* are much more terrible.

Discovering Arrogance

And so a man must have some time for *machshavah*, for *hisbonenus*. שִׁמּוֹ לְבַבְכֶם עַל דְּרֹכֵיכֶם – put your minds on your path in life, “Am I walking in the right way? You’re always saying that, every Monday and Thursday, נַחֲפֵשֶׁה דְּרֹכֵינוּ וְנַחְקֶרָה – “Let us search out our ways; let us make an inventory.” You say it, but do you do it? Did you spend two minutes? It would be a nice inventory if you spend two minutes on your *ruchniyus* business. But not even two minutes are spent.

And if you don’t do a *bedikas yetzer hora* you won’t find. You’ll think that the house is clean. Once a young man came to the Slabodka yeshivah – it was a place where they spoke about these subjects a good deal. After some time, the Rosh Yeshivah asked him if he was making progress in yeshivah.

So this *bochur* said, “Yes. But there is only one drawback. I have become a *baal gaavah* in this yeshivah.”

So the Rosh Yeshivah said to him, ‘No you didn’t become an arrogant fellow; you discovered now that you were arrogant all the time! Because in this place we search; we do *bedikos*.’”

Finding Chometz

And therefore the *baal gaavah* and the *kaasan*, they don’t know about it because they don’t think about it. Very many people have that sickness of conceit and arrogance. You’ll be surprised how many people have it. Many people are very selfish! Many people don’t have a *hergesh* of *chessed* to others. They don’t try to smile at people, to encourage people. They don’t care about others; only about themselves.

Only that it’s concealed within him. He doesn’t realize. If he would search then he might discover that it was there all the time. But you

have to search greatly. You have to go mining within the depths of your character to discover what it is that’s making you think that way.

That’s what *chometz* is. לֹא יֵרָאָה לָךְ שְׂאֵר בֶּכֶל גְּבוּלְךָ. No *chometz* should be found in the Jewish mind at all. You have to get rid of the *chometz*. And the *Chachomim* were *machmir*. Even a *mashehu*, they said. You look for some crumbs too.

It’s not an easy thing. It cannot be superficial; you have to examine every nook and cranny of your mind to find where the *yetzer* is hiding. In the way we behave *bein adam lachaveiro*, in the way we think and react. The *bedikas chometz* requires we should examine ourselves and see what we have within us; to search and search until we find.

Nullifying The Chometz

Now, once we did a *bedikah*, another part of the *mitzvah* is *biur*. We have to destroy whatever we found. What does it help if you find a bagel under the couch if you’re going to leave it there?

Now, it’s a *chiddush* of the Torah that *bittul*, nullifying the *chometz*, helps. Even if it happens that there is some *chometz* left in your possession, the *bittul* accomplishes as if it doesn’t exist.

Bittul chometz means that a person has to nullify in his mind all the ideas and attitudes, all the foolishness and deceptions, that the *yetzer hora* introduced into his character.

That’s what the Rambam says. He asks a question. “What’s the way to do *teshuvah*? If a person has the wrong character, what’s the way to do *teshuvah*?” And he says that the first thing is he has to make clear to himself what a shameful and wrong thing it is to have such a bad *middah*. That’s the beginning of *teshuvah*. The first thing is to know how shameful it is to do wrong things; that’s the *bittul*, learn how wrong, how contemptible, it is to continue in those ways.

It's Disgusting And Stupid

I'll give an example. Let's say a person did a *bedikah*, a good *bedikas yetzer hora*, and he discovered he's a man of *kaas*. Very often when things don't go his way, he gets upset; he's angry. So he says, "Alright, I know, I'm a *kaasan*; I understand it's not right."

But 'it's not right' is not enough; that's not *bittul*. He should know how contemptible it is to be in *kaas*, how disgusting it is to be in angry, how stupid it is. Because if people think, "It's not so terrible to get angry – it doesn't pay to get angry, it's not good for your heart and people will look down on you," that's not enough. That's not a *bittul*.

Suppose a person would relieve himself in his pants, wouldn't he be ashamed? Let's say he was in the presence of the company of people and all of a sudden he fills his pants up; he doesn't know what to do, it's dripping out of his pants legs. Think of that embarrassment. That's what *kaas* looks like! Anger is such a *bizayon*, it's so disgusting and dirty! That's called *bittul*. You did a *bedikah* and you found this or that? No, you have to destroy it.

You Stink

Or to teach a person who is addicted to speaking about people – which many people are. You should know that a person who speaks about other people, he smells bad. *Mammesh* it's a *reiach ra*. Even though he is perfumed, even though he is well dressed and he bathes everyday, the person has a smell that goes to high heavens – that's how we have to look at him, he stinks! You can't stand near him.

And you are the one that we're talking about. If you have a loose tongue, then you are so low, so contemptible, that people can't stand near you. Even if you're not talking about others. Just to talk a lot, to have that *middah* of being a big mouth, it's disgusting.

That's the first thing! *Bittul!* Before you can do *teshuvah*, the Rambam says, you have to learn how wrong these things are, how wicked they are, how silly they are, how harmful they are. Once you get that in your head, you made a *bittul*, then you're ready now for the career of changing your ways.

Of course it's a *moshol*, and I'm not saying that you should forget about *bittul chometz*, but a person who wants to fulfill what it means remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim, is expected to follow the *remez* that our Kadmonim told us, that *chometz* is the *yetzer hora*, and that searching and finding and destroying is the best way to fulfill the great function of "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Mitzrayim to be your Elokim."

Part III. Discovering Greatness

Ready, Set, Seder

And now we come to the Pesach Seder. It's already Pesach and you're sitting down at the beautifully set table with your beautiful family. You did your *bedikas chometz* and your *bittul* already. How good of a job did you do? Were you *mevatel* your *middos ra'os* along with the *chometz*? Hopefully *something* you did. But whatever it is, now it's time for the grand finale; it's time for the Seder. Everything is ready. The matzah is here and the wine. The *kaarah* and the *hagaddahs*. You're ready now for the most important meal of the year.

Now, some people are so busy with the *halachos* of the *seder*, they forget what it's all about. There's so much to think about. Do I lean for this? Do we fill up the *kos* now? You have to be *mekayem tibul* and the four *kashes* and and then you have to be busy saying the *hagaddah*, and the *hallel*, and then matzah and *marror*. You're going through the whole *seder*. Excellent!

But don't forget what it's all about – the purpose is in order to rededicate ourselves to *avodas Hashem*. The Seder is founded on the element of what Hashem told us, “I took you out of Mitzrayim in order to be your Elokim.” And therefore if you're serious about the Seder, so you should think, at least on this one night, “What can I do tonight to begin fulfilling better the *ratzon* Hashem, the reason He took us out of Mitzrayim?”

You're So Tall!

You're a head taller than everybody; they think you're participating in the Seder like they are, *מִצְוֹת אֲנָשִׁים מְלַמְּדָה*. You're doing everything like they are doing; but at the same time you're thinking another thought in addition. You're thinking, “Hashem, You took us out of Mitzrayim. What can I do to express gratitude to You? I have to make myself better.”

Nobody's thinking about that! They're thinking, about the words in the *haggadah*, the *medrashim*, the *divrei Torah*. Very good! Someone else is thinking about the matzah, about measuring the *kezayis*. Excellent! All of that is excellent. It's very important because it's all part of remembering that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim.

But what's the purpose of remembering? The purpose of remembering is in order that it should have an effect on you *בְּלִי יָמֵי חַיֶּיךָ*; it should change your life. *לְהַיְזוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים* means to make something out of yourself! And in case it won't change your life entirely, let it change your life a little bit at least. A *kolshehu* at least.

The Real Seder

Now you should think seriously about that; don't think that is something that was taken from a *boich sevara*, something invented on the spur of the moment. The truth is that this is the basic obligation of Pesach. It's a translation of the ideal of Pesach into deeds that mean something; because to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim really

means to remember the One who took us out of Mitzrayim and what He requires of us.

Imagine somebody would say, “What did you do Pesach night?”

“What do you mean what did it do? I did the whole Seder! I did all my *chiyuvim*.” The Vilna Gaon in one place says that there are sixty four *mitzvos* we fulfill at the Seder. And this man, he says, “I did it all.”

So you say to him, “Did you think about the *chiyuv* of being polite to your wife? Did you think about not being a *leitz*? Did you think about not being lazy? Did you think about making an improvement in this *middah* or that *middah*?”

“How does that come into the seder?”

And the answer is that is all that comes into the Seder. If a man is serious about fulfilling the purpose of Yetzias Mitzrayim; the first thing he thinks about is, “What should I do now that I was taken out of Mitzrayim to be the Am Hashem? What can I pay back to Hashem for what He did for me?”

Expensive Shtreimels And Shalom Bayis

So maybe I'll buy a more expensive *shtreimel*! Very good. I'll buy a more expensive Shabbos *kapote*! Very good. But you need something more than that though. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants something more than that. He wants that too; *lekovod Shabbos*, no question, very good. But He wants more than that.

I'll give you a good idea, something that might be quite neglected; it wouldn't occur to you but it's expected of us. “I'm going to see that my married life should be more perfect.” You think that it's unimportant; oh no it's very important. You're looking at the Seder table and you're thinking, “I'm going to speak to my wife in a different manner now because of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Maybe I should talk to my wife more politely; maybe I should be more patient.”

I'm giving you a good suggestion; between you and your wife; or between you and your husband, the way you behave should from now on be more perfect, more patient, more polite. Why not? This is an area in which most people could make improvement.

The Main Is Middos

Of course there's so much to do. Maybe you'll make a new resolve for learning Torah. "I'm going to spend more time learning Torah. From now on I'm going to go the shul every night - no matter what - and I'll learn five lines of Gemara. Five lines every night no matter what!" Very good, no question about it.

And your wife has to say, "Maybe I shouldn't talk so much on the telephone. I have to be careful what I say on the telephone." Or "Maybe I should put more *kavonah* in *davening* - what I do, is that called a *davening*? Just to say the words?"

There's so to do, so many things that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is waiting for.

But we should never forget that *middos* is the main thing, that there is no dodging the obligation of *tikun hamiddos*. Improvement of character that is the very first of all the obligations that Hashem wants. And once a person understands that, he'll take that great principle and make it into one of the functions of his life. Everybody needs *tikun*; there is no such thing as not needing to make yourself a better person.

Use Your Time Wisely

We're all walking blindly. People, ignorant people, always think that they are just, that they are right. But you should know the time will come and they'll come before the great Judge and He'll tell them to their face how wrong they are.

If only they had used the *sedorim* for what they're intended! Can you imagine a person who every year at the Seder he becomes a better person, a new person? A person who spends time

thinking about Yetzias Mitzrayim; about what it means to be chosen by Hashem, what it means that Hashem said about me בְּנֵי בְּכָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, the pride, the happiness, the self-esteem, the exhilaration; and then the obligation that comes along with that: "I took you out so that you should serve Me!" That's why you came into this world! This is your one opportunity.

What's going to be the result of remembering what Hashem did for us? He is expecting something in return. לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים. He told us that! It's not a secret; He told us, "I took you out to be Your Elokim." What does it mean לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים? To be a *frum* Jew? No question about it; a *frum* Jew, yes, certainly! But once upon a time everybody was a *frum* Jew, nothing's very important about that. So what are you doing to show that you are aware of your *tafkid* having an Elokim?

At Least One Thing

You never thought about that at the Seder? Oh no; you're missing out. You mean to say you'll go through the Seder without one new thing that you'll think about at the Seder?! You won't take off five minutes in the middle of the Seder to think, "I'm going to do one thing at least." You'll stop a certain wrong practice that you do, or you'll start doing a good thing you didn't do.

At least one thing you can't be *michadeish*?! Then the whole Seder was for nothing - you're not serious about it. If there'll be even one thing I'm going to improve; there will be one result of the Pesach Seder, just one result, then you've accomplished something. At least make one *tikkun*. Examine yourself; make a *bedikas chometz* and *bittul chometz* at the Seder. If you made it before, still better, but now's your big chance.

At least one thing you should change! It shouldn't be words; it should be something translated into action. Of course the ideas are important; you should think these ideas: He took

us out of Mitzrayim! He took us out to be His people forever and ever He loves us! Very important. But don't forget the most important thing. On this night we should begin to think, "What does He want of us?"

The More, The Better

That's the great function of remembering that Hakodosh Boruch Hu took us out of Mitzrayim. And this night, more than any other time, is when we're expected to do something about it; to improve ourselves. And the more you do, the better. That's what it means *kol hamarbeh*, the more you think about it and talk about it, *harei zeh meshubach*, you're more improved; you become a better person.

Now, I want to explain that. Because "*harei zeh meshubach*", we are used to translating it as "he's more praiseworthy." But you must know that it's a different type of praise. The word *meshubach* is not like *mehullal*. *Mehullal* means you are praiseworthy. Sometimes you praise somebody; you're excited over him because you're kindhearted and you want to make him feel good. You're grateful to him, whatever it is, and so you'll praise him. He's worthy of being praised.

But *meshubach* is something different; it has a specific meaning, more than *mehullal*. *Meshubach* means that the object or the person that you're praising is valuable. From the word *shevach*. *Shevach* in the language of the Mishnah means improvement. *Meshubach* is a Mishnah word, not a Tanach word. And *shevach* in the Mishnah always means improvement. Everybody who learned a little Gemara knows that.

The Improved You

A man who is better is *meshubach*; he's not just *mehullal*, praiseworthy; he is praiseworthy but it's because he became better. He's different than he was before; he's an improved person. He's more important.

A man who thinks more about Yetzias Mitzrayim, *harei zeh meshubach*. It improves you; it makes you more valuable; more important. And the more you talk about it, the more *meshubach*, the more important you become. By means of those words, those thoughts, you become a better person.

And Hakodosh Baruch Hu gives him recognition. "That man," Hashem says, "is to Me a man of greater dignity because he's an entirely different person. His mind is a different type of mind now."

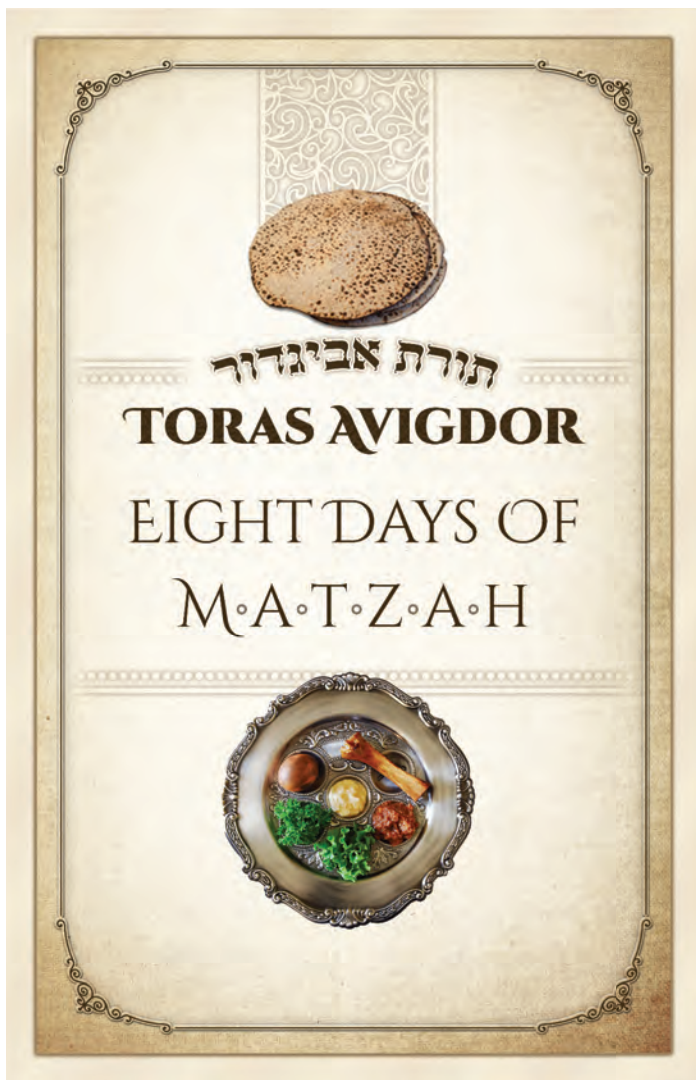
What's different about you? It's because you're thinking about all the things we spoke about tonight; you're remembering not only that Hakodosh Boruch Hu took us out of Mitzrayim but that He took us out for a purpose, לְהִיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים. And that means that on Pesach you'll start being ambitious – ambitious to become great in the service of Hashem.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos and A Chag Kosher VeSameach

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Self Improvement Of The Exodus

Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim "to be our Elokim" – to lord over us. Since He took us out of Mitzrayim, we are obligated, not just in the mitzvos He commanded, but we must dedicate our entire life to His service. All our attitudes must be reshaped in His Service. Throughout this Yom Tov of Pesach I will *bli neder* set aside at least five minutes each day for introspection and self reflection through the study of Mussar.



Contents

Introduction

EIGHT DAYS OF THINKING 11

First Day

HASHEM IS IN CONTROL 12

Second Day

HE CHOSE US 13

Third Day

AFFLICTION AND PRAYER 14

Fourth Day

SUFFERING FOR OUR BELIEFS 15

Fifth Day

AFFLICTION AND PERFECTION 16

Sixth Day

GRATITUDE AND KĀBOLAS HATORAH 17

Seventh Day

FOOD OF PRIESTS 18

Eighth Day

HIS SERVANTS 19

Introduction

EIGHT DAYS OF THINKING

The Yom Tov of Pesach, we have to know, actually refers only to *erev Pesach* – the afternoon of the fourteenth day of Nissan, when they slaughtered the *korban Pesach* – and also the night of the fifteenth when the *korban* was eaten. It's a Yom Tov of about twelve hours or so that commemorates the passing over of the Jewish homes in Mitzrayim. Thenceforth it's Chag Hamatzos. You're finished with Chag Hapesach – you can't eat from the *korban* the next morning anymore; nothing is allowed to remain.

The lessons of the *Korban Pesach*, whatever we achieved at night when we ate from the *Pesach*, or nowadays when we have the *zecher lapesach*, that's finished and now it's a new Yom Tov called Chag Hamatzos. It's not Chag Hapesach anymore.

Now, that's a very important point to consider because Chag Hamatzos means that it's a special time set aside to learn the lessons of the matzah. It's not merely that we have the Seder night and then the rest of the festival is a *tafel* to that; no, it's a new Yom Tov now, the Festival of Matzos. The days of *tes-vuv* Nissan until the last day of Yom Tov are set aside to learn the lessons of the matzah.

Now, what the lesson is; that requires a little introduction. If you recall the Seder night, you'll remember that the *chochom*, when he asks his father about the laws and practices of the Torah, he asked **מָה הָעֵדוּת** – *What are these testimonies*, **וְהַחֲקִים** – *and the statutes* **וְהַמְשָׁפָטִים** – *and the judgments*, that Hashem commanded us?

We see that there are three different categories of *mitzvos*, each one with its own purpose, but we note that **עֵדוּת**, *testimonies*, is the first thing that is enumerated here. **חֲקִים** come next and then **מְשָׁפָטִים** but **עֵדוּת** come first, which means they are very important. Unfortunately most people never heard the definition of *eidos*. It's an important matter and it's largely neglected.

What's meant by *eidos*? *Eidos* means laws but it refers to that category of laws which are to serve as testimonies. Those things that are commanded to us for the purpose of memorializing certain great events or certain great principles are called *eidos*. And you're expected to use that *mitzvah*-testimony, to create for yourself a Torah mind.

I'll give a few examples just so that we should better understand. Shabbos is one of the *mitzvos eiduyos*. Now, very many Jews who are meticulous when it comes to keeping Shabbos but they overlook the intention, the purpose of Shabbos. The purpose of keeping Shabbos is to testify to certain Torah truths and to give you a Shabbos mind.

Shabbos, first of all, testifies that there's nothing in this world except the will of Hashem. He created the world out of nothing and there's nothing in the world except the *ratzon Hashem*. **כִּי הוּא צִוָּה וַיֵּעֲמֵד**, **הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי** – *He spoke and it become*, **הוּא צִוָּה וַיֵּעֲמֵד** – *He commanded and it came into existence*. The Shabbos also testifies to that great principle of **הוּא הוּא הוּא**, **בֵּינֵינוּ בֵּינֵינוּ בֵּינֵינוּ**, the special connection between the Am Yisroel and Hashem, and to the

chochmas Hashem and *chesed Hashem* in the *briyah*.

Shabbos testifies to many important principles and it's a tragedy when people work hard to bring in the Shabbos and they're meticulous, they're careful to keep the Shabbos, and yet when it's all over they haven't thought once about the purpose of Shabbos.

But Shabbos is only one of many *mitzvos eiduyos*. The Torah is full of these things. If you sit in a *sukkah*, of course it's a great thing to fulfill a *mitzvah*. Many people are *moser nefesh*, they get blisters and splinters on their hands building a *sukkah*. It's a beautiful thing but do you ever think about what the *mitzvah* is testifying to?

And so we come now to the guest of honor, the *mitzvah* of *matzah*. Isn't it a pity if people go to bake *matzos* and they spend a lot of money too – good *matzos* are expensive – but they forget to listen to what the *matzah* is trying to tell them?

Avadeh it's a *mitzvah* to eat. There's no question about it! And it should be *matzah shemurah*! It's a big *mitzvah* to be *machmir* in all the *hiddurim* of making *matzah*, all the *chumros* of *matzah*, but *af al pi ken*, nevertheless, it's possible to do it *b'simhon leivov*, to do it with an empty mind.

And so the Jew who wants to suck out all of the honey that's possible from Chag Hamatzos has to become a thinker. And as the *matzah* goes into your intestines, at the same time, all of the *matzah's* lessons, ideals and attitudes, should go into your head.

And the more you could put into the *matzah* – as you eat it and you're chewing you're trying to think of whatever you could apply to this symbol of *matzos*, that's the way to eat *matzos*. *Matzah* is telling us an important message – actually messages, plural.

And that's what Chag Hamatzos is for; it's the Yom Tov of planting all of these great thoughts in our minds, thoughts that will continue to grow all year round. There's a purpose in a matzah and it's a mitzvah to ask that question **מַצָּה זוֹ שְׂאֵנוּ אוֹכְלִים** **עַל שׁוּם מָה** – What does matzah mean? What is it trying to tell me?

Editor's note: Throughout Rav Miller's many Pesach lectures he addressed many different ideas symbolized by the matzah. In reviewing the many tapes we have identified at least twelve different lessons that the Rav gleaned from the mitzvah of eating matzah. In our sefer "Toras Avigdor Moadim vol. 1" we have published a short essay briefly outlining these ideas. In this booklet we have chosen eight of these lessons expounded by the Rav, and we have arranged them as one idea per day for the eight days of Pesach. While the words in the booklet are directly from the tapes, the division of the lessons into days was not made by the Rav. It is an arrangement prepared by the Toras Avigdor team for the purpose of creating a simple and practical system for studying and practicing the matzah lessons.

— First Day —

HASHEM IS IN CONTROL

One of the reasons we eat matzah – we could even say it's the first reason – is what we explained last night at the Seder: **לֹא הִסְפִּיק בְּצֶקֶם שֶׁל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ** **לְהַחֲמִיץ**, that the dough didn't have the opportunity to sour, to turn leavened.

That's what's written in the Torah about the night of Yetzias Mitzrayim. In the Torah it states **וַיֹּאפּוּ** – they baked their dough, **עוֹגוֹת מִצּוֹת** – unleavened bread, **כִּי לֹא הָמֵץ** – it didn't have a chance to become leavened, **כִּי גִרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם**, – they were driven out of Egypt, **וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִתְמַהֵמָה** and they

had no opportunity to wait longer. They couldn't tarry, they weren't able to wait, they were driven out.

Everyone knows that when you make dough, it takes time for the dough to rise – you wait for the dough to rise sufficiently, to leaven, and then you bake it as bread. But on Pesach night something happened that made that impossible. Suddenly they had to leave in a hurry; Pharaoh was pressing them to leave so they took the unleavened dough outside of Mitzrayim and they baked it as it was and they ate unleavened cakes.

And so we have to say that the matzah is a sign of haste. It was a night of haste and the result was that the Am Yisroel had to bake their dough into unleavened matzos.

Now this idea of haste has to be studied. Because after all, it didn't have to be this way. Hashem could have made it happen other ways. Their dough could have finished rising and then they could have been pressed to leave. Or maybe Moshe Rabbeinu could have warned the nation ahead of time to prepare their dough ahead of time. Instead there was this charade, a performance that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was putting on so that it should happen just this way; that Pharaoh is chasing us out, and because of that we had to make matzos. And so, we have to better understand the purpose of that charade.

First of all we have to remember that from the very beginning when they entered Egypt it was already hopeless to think of leaving Egypt. That's how it was, even Yosef couldn't leave without Pharaoh's permission. It was out of the question to leave. Once you came in, you stayed there.

And surely when they became a slave-nation, there was no question that they weren't going anywhere. That's why when Moshe Rabbeinu came to Pharaoh and he proposed, in the name of Hashem, to let them out, Pharaoh said "Nothing

doing!" Again and again Pharaoh refused again and he refused adamantly. It seemed irrevocable, like he would never change his mind.

What happened? All of a sudden in the middle of the night, Pharaoh the king, is running around the streets. Now if you know a little bit about kings, you'll know that he sleeps at night. Pharaoh didn't get up in the middle of the night for anything, for a million dollars he wouldn't get up in the middle of the night. Pharaoh had plenty of money he wouldn't budge at night from his bed.

But this night was different than all other nights. In the middle of the night Pharaoh jumped out of bed and he ran to Moshe Rabbeinu and he was begging him, "קומו צאו מתוך עמי" Hurry up and get out. Leave the land. Take your people and get out of here. And do it on the quick! No procrastinating!"

Pharaoh? At night? What's he doing in the streets at midnight? All of a sudden, on a double quick, in a split second: get out!

It's a remarkable thing. And because of that the Am Yisroel baked their dough into *matzos*. "No time to waste! We have to leave on the double quick!"

Why was this night different than all other nights, that on this night we should see a king in all of his glory running through the streets like a chicken without a head?

Hakadosh Baruch Hu was teaching us something important. He said, "When My time comes then Pharaoh will jump out of bed and order you out of the land. Up till that minute Pharaoh said, 'Nothing doing!' He was firm as concrete, but when My moment that I planned comes, the ruler of this powerful nation who was lying in his bed of purple and gold, he'll leap out of his bed and run through the streets at night."

Oh, they saw that Hashem is the Boss and when He presses the button, that's the time to leave. That's what matzah means.

It's a symbol that Hakadosh Boruch Hu has a timetable of history. He is a קורא הדורות מראש – He proclaims the generations beforehand. Not just the generations. The weeks and the days and the hours and the minutes and when something happens, He is the one who decrees that it has to happen *at that moment*.

Everything in history is done with a timetable of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. And He's teaching us that with the matzah taht we eat on Pesach.



Takeaway:

Matzah is a food prepared in haste, it must adhere to the timetable Hashem set; because everything in the world is under His Control.

Second Day

HE CHOSE US

Now, that symbolism of the matzah is a good reason for the bread that didn't have time to rise; but what about the matzah that the Bnei Yisroel were commanded to eat on Pesach night, even *before* that happened? The matzah that they ate in Mitzrayim at the *seder*, what was that for? They weren't driven out yet. The story didn't happen yet. At that first Seder in history why couldn't they eat the bread that they had in their homes, the leavened bread?

The answer is they were told to eat *matzos* on Pesach night in order that they should realize it's very late, that the nation is very close to leavening. Because what does matzah mean? It means that you can wait a certain amount of time but you can't wait too long; you have to bake it quickly before it leavens.

On Pesach night in Mitzrayim we were commanded to eat matzah in order to let us know that our time was up, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu

was taking us out of Egypt now because we couldn't afford to remain there one more day. ושמרתם את המצות because now is the last moment. When the time comes for the signal, you can't wait another moment. You must get up and get out of Mitzrayim to save yourself – or else you'll perish as a nation.

It's like a man sinking in a quagmire in the swamp. So first his knees go down into the mud. He has no place to hold on to; all around him is only mud. But he's still not in danger yet of destruction. Now he's down to his waist; it's closer to the point of no return. Now he's down to his shoulders. Now he is down to his chin. In mud! One more minute his nose is going to be submerged and he'll be lost forever.

That's what happened to our forefathers in Egypt, they were sinking into the *shaarei tumah*. Egypt was a gentile nation and the Am Yisroel if they're too long among the gentiles, something happens to them. And what happens can be fatal *chalilah*. A Jew could be so long among the nations, that he sinks into the mire until *chas v'shalom* it's too late.

And so the Am Yisroel, their nostrils were beginning to touch the level of the mud, and now Hakadosh Baruch Hu went into action. He had to take drastic and rapid action. It was *b'chipazon* and and it was גורשו כי לא יכלו להתמהמה – because they couldn't wait a second more. They were ejected from Egypt before they would leaven.

That's what it means matzah. Matzah means שהקב"ה חישב את הקץ. He calculated to do as He promised to Avraham in that covenant. What does it mean He calculated? He had told Avraham that the Bnei Yisroel would be in Exile for four hundred years and now He made a calculation that the four hundred years must be changed into two hundred and ten years.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "If I wait any longer the Bnei Yisroel will go lost and so the

pshat is going to be, not four hundred years from their coming into Egypt, but four hundred years from the time when Yitzchak was born." Hakadosh Baruch Hu learned a new *pshat* in His *nevuah* and immediately, presto, they were driven out of Egypt before it was too late.

And so when we eat the matzah today we should keep in mind that we are eternally grateful that we were snatched out of the jaws of oblivion.

It's not *drush* what we're saying now; we're not trying to put any symbolism into it; we're trying to take out the symbolism that's already there. That's why the *matzos* were eaten on that night – one of the reasons. It's in order to symbolize that there's a time – to let us know that the time was up.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu calculated the moment when they must be taken out. And that's why they came out of Mitzrayim in a hurry, "*b'chipazon*." They were in a hurry. You can't waste any time when a man is sinking down to his nostrils. Suddenly Hakadosh Baruch Hu couldn't wait any longer because one more week and they're going to be lost forever – His chosen people. And so we see that Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves His people and that's why He pulled us out of Mitzrayim before we leavened, in order that we should merit to be His eternal nation.



Takeaway:

Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim in haste, to ensure that we do not sink into oblivion. Hashem cares about us and will take whatever steps necessary to ensure our survival as a nation.

AFFLICTION AND PRAYER

When we eat matzah on Chag Hamatzos we have to remember that the Torah calls it **לחם עוני**, the bread of affliction. Now, the word *oni*, we translate in English ‘affliction’ or ‘suffering’. And of course it is connected to the word **עני** which means a poor man - a man ‘afflicted’ by poverty. If you have no money to buy food or to buy clothes, there’s no question it’s an affliction.

But the word *oni*, suffering, is not the original word. Originally it comes from the word **עונה**, to speak up. Like **ויען**, “and he spoke up,” or **עונה**, “he answers.” Fundamentally **עוני** means to speak up, to call out.

And why is the poor man, the sufferer, called an *oni*? Because he speaks up all the time: he cries out. It’s a borrowed word, a cognate; the “poor man” means “the man who is calling out for help.”

Now, if it was one of us, we would have thought of a better, more appropriate word, a word that describes his suffering or his embarrassment. But “the crier”? What’s that about?

And the answer is that the poor man is called “the crier” *because that’s what it’s all about!* The purpose of affliction is to make you call out to Hashem. If you understand that, then you already understand a lot about the purpose of *tzaros* in this world. The primary purposes of trouble is so that people should cry out to help.

When the world falls asleep, even good people fall asleep, they forget about Hashem. He’s in the *siddur*, they think. When they come to the synagogue, they mention Him. Outside, it’s all over. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu stated, **השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' אלקיך** – *beware lest you forget Hashem*. Don’t forget Me! If there’s one thing in the world you have to remember, *this* is the subject. Don’t forget Me! That’s a person’s success! Nothing else!

And therefore, when troubles come and the person utilizes them and he cries out to Hashem, then the trouble is fully justified.

That’s the reason why **הקב"ה אוהב עניים**. It’s a statement in the Gemara. “Hashem loves the poor.” Why does he love the poor? What’s so good about the poor? The answer is because they are always being pressed to cry out to Hashem. And when they cry out, something is accomplished. They are changed. They gain an Awareness of Hashem, Daas and Emunah, by crying out.

In Mitzrayim the bread they ate was the kind of food that caused the eaters to cry out. It wasn’t leavened, it didn’t have the taste of real bread, because they were busy working. They didn’t have the chance to let their dough become leavened like ordinary bread. They were in a hurry. They had to work all the time. And it’s possible they weren’t given enough bread. Why should they be given bread? The Egyptians were not the most loving and kindhearted people. And so, whatever they were eating, it was in the midst of suffering. And the Bnei Yisroel cried out; the bread of affliction became the bread of calling out.

And therefore we eat this *lechem oni* to remind ourselves that because of the **עוני**, the suffering, we were **עונה**, we called out. And because we cried out to Hashem we gained such an Awareness, such a clarity of perception of Hashem, that nobody else in the world could rise to this greatness. The Bnei Yisroel became so clear in their Awareness of Hashem that now they were ready to go out and see Hashem at Har Sinai.

And therefore the affliction in Mitzrayim was an achievement and a very great benefit to us. In Mitzrayim they cried out and they gained such a greatness that they became the most perfect of any generation in history.

It was the bread of affliction that they ate in Mitzrayim, the suffering and troubles that caused

them to cry out to Hashem. They were עונין עליו דברים הרבה many things came out of that crying out. Great results were achieved by their affliction.

And therefore when a person *chalilah* in life has troubles, many people suffer a good deal in life, so they should know Hakodosh Boruch Hu is bestowing on them a very great happiness. And when the time will come, this man is going to be proud of what he endured and how he cried out to Hashem and what he gained.



Takeaway:
The matzah was a bread of affliction, but also a bread of 'crying out'. The purpose of affliction is to cause us to cry out to Hashem and become greater thereby.

Fourth Day

SUFFERING FOR OUR BELIEFS

Now the affliction we suffered in Egypt was not necessarily an especial wickedness of the Egyptians. The fact is that in the ancient days any minority that lived in the midst of a big nation had a choice: either you assimilate or you become enslaved by them.

That was the general practice among nations of antiquity without exception. There was no such thing as living among another nation and maintaining a separate identity. When a nation conquered a smaller people and took them as slaves, in the course of time the slaves merged with their masters. They intermarried with them and became lost among them.

Unless you're willing to suffer, to remain separate and different and suffer all the degradation and affliction that comes along with remaining the outcasts, you'll integrate. And after

a while you became part of the nation that had originally enslaved you.

But not the Bnei Yisroel. The Hebrews refused to change. They didn't change their language. They didn't change their names. Imagine a Jew has to go into a profession, an office in Manhattan, and his name is, let's say, Moshe; so he signs up as Maurice or Murray or something else so he shouldn't be noticed among the gentiles, he shouldn't be conspicuous. But look at the names of that generation – beautiful Hebrew names! They continued to call Hebrew names פדה צור – Hashem, our Rock, will redeem us. Or שלומיאל – Hashem is my peace. Jewish names.

They spoke only Lashon Kodesh. Suppose you're sitting in an Egyptian bus, imagine there was a bus in Egypt, and there are Egyptians all around you and they are blabbering and chattering in Egyptian and you have a friend of yours and you want to talk to him, so you can talk in Egyptian. But no, they insisted on talking Hebrew. You know what that means? To the Egyptian it sounded like gibberish, outlandish. "What's this?"

The people around you are listening, "what's this? What an outlandish language is that! Ivri?" Therefore, when the Jews, when the Bnei Yisroel spoke Hebrew among themselves, they were exposing themselves to ridicule, to harassment. You can be sure the Egyptian boys threw things at them and the adults harassed them as well.

It could be there were some people who reacted by trying to curry favor with the Egyptians – there are always some weaklings, people without backbones who will try to adopt gentile ways in order to avoid embarrassment and suffering. But the loyal Jew said, "I'll suffer. I'll eat the bread of affliction. We're going to demonstrate who we are even if that means a stone in the head."

Don't think it didn't happen. When you walked through the streets at night with your Jewish hat,

whatever it was that identified you, so the Egyptians would throw stones. You young Americans don't know how it was in the past, even here in America. The Italians threw stones at us. I don't know if you people ever suffered harassment. I remember way back when there was more anti-Semitism in this country and we suffered a great deal of harassment. They used to set their dogs on Jews who passed by.

I remember when I was seven years old, a Christian gang in front of the church stopped me. They said "Are you a Jew?" I was a little boy; I was afraid of them and I said "No." I'm still sorry I said no, but they would have beaten me up. I was a little boy, only seven years old. I said no and they let me go. And even today when a person walks in a neighborhood let's say of Italians and his tzitzis are out, and the Italians know these are 'Jew strings'. And they see from his face he has some hair on his face, he has a beard. So he's exposing himself to a certain amount of persecution.

In Mitzrayim, even more so, because the Jews were already hated. They were looked down upon more than in America. But the Jews insisted on dressing like Jews anyhow. And they spoke only the Jewish language. And they called themselves only Jewish names. And they looked down on the persecutors and they were proud. They knew who they were. It was hard, there were some who weren't *matzliach*, but on a whole the Am Yisroel ate this bread of affliction and in the midst of persecution they still held steadfast to all their traditions.

The Bnei Yisroel accomplished a feat for over two hundred years, that's a long time. Imagine that from 1700 till 1910, for two hundred and ten years the Bnei Yisroel maintained their identity and refused to merge with the Egyptians!

And so when we talk about matzah which is **לחם עוני**, we have to know the greatness of our nation that voluntarily accepted the role of

discrimination because they wanted to remain a separate people. And therefore when we eat matzah it's one thing to remember. We adopted, we accepted willingly the **לחם עוני**, the bread of affliction. We willingly accepted that. Don't think that our nation was chosen for nothing. They earned it by years and years of privation that they willingly undertook to suffer. That's a very important lesson that the matzah is testifying to. When we eat matzah and talk to ourselves and to others about the matzah, the **לחם עוני**, we are reminding ourselves about the greatness of our nation that voluntarily accepted the role of discrimination because they wanted to remain a separate people.



Takeaway:

The bread of affliction was a choice our ancestors made. They chose to be afflicted in order to remain true to their ideals.

Fifth Day

AFFLICTION AND PERFECTION

When we're eating the *lechem* of tribulations, we can eat it with pride at what the *oni* did for us – how it transformed us into the great nation we are today, a nation that is adorned with all forms of perfections of character. We have no idea how noble they became in Mitzrayim because of the *lechem oni*.

And it was no accident. Hakadosh Baruch Hu planned it so; He planned it that we should be eating the *lechem oni*, suffering under the Egyptians, for many years in order that we should become great just because of that suffering.

What does that mean? What kind of perfections come from suffering? Well, the truth is it would take a book of its own – I say ‘book’; it would take books! Shelves filled with many volumes, heavy encyclopedias, to enumerate the many qualities our nation gained in Mitzrayim. All the virtues that we acquired as a nation we gained in the affliction of Mitzrayim. So many good *middos* were acquired, we’d have to eat matzah day after day for thousands of years in order to have the time to think about what the *lechem oni* did for us. But most of all the suffering taught us sympathy and mercy. In Mitzrayim we became a nation of *rachmanim*.

You know, a nation that never was in exile and always sat in arrogance and independence on its own land, so when somebody comes from afar to settle among them, they don't have any sympathy with him because they never knew what it meant to be in exile. That's how all the nations were in ancient times; they had a practice of *gaavah*, arrogance. When a stranger came, they looked down on him.

That's why it was unpleasant to travel in foreign countries. You had no rights if you came to a foreign country. They were all relatives; everybody was cousins from the same ancestors and this stranger comes along. Sometimes he didn't talk the language like they talked. His face may have had a different complexion. And so, they did whatever they wanted with him.

But when we were in Mitzrayim we learned the opposite. We learned to be kindhearted to *geirim*. It's like what I always tell a daughter-in-law when they call me on the phone to complain about the mother-in-law. “The first thing,” I say, “is to remember what it feels like. That way when you become a mother-in-law you'll do a better job because you suffered through it.” Being a daughter-in-law is a training school for you because you will learn how to be a mother-in-law. If you pay attention, you can prepare yourself

by learning about what not to do to your own daughter-in-law.

And so, a nation that goes through the mill learns how to have pity – that's one of the great benefits of the *lechem oni* we suffered through. We became a noble nation because of that. I'm not saying *drush* now; I don't know how to say *drush*. I'm telling you what's open in the Chumash, what Hashem says.

ואתם ידעתם את נפש הגר – *You know the feelings of a stranger*, כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים – *because once upon a time you were strangers in the land of Egypt* (Shemos 23:10). And therefore, אהבתם את הגר – *you should love a sojourner; a ger comes, he doesn't speak your language, everything is different. You should love him and care for him. It's not easy but we're expected to live that way, with sympathy for the less fortunate because we were geirim in Mitzrayim. We know how it feels to be on the receiving end.*

When we were in exile, didn't we say, “Why are the Egyptians so cruel to us? Where is their sympathy?” We learned how to sympathize with the plight of *avadim*, we learned to be sympathetic, to commiserate with the downtrodden.

You hear that? We're learning something new now. The experience in Mitzrayim taught us how to have sympathy with those who are suffering. The Jewish nation from then on was always on the side of the downtrodden – because they went through it themselves.

And therefore it was a great *shleimus*, a perfection. We are a nation that's מרחמים על הבריות. Nobody has such pity on the needy, on the poor, as much as the Am Yisroel has. Am Yisroel has more organizations, *hachnosas kallah*, *hachnosas orchim*, *ma'os chitim*. All kinds of funds, *bikkur cholim*. Nobody in the world can even compete with us in the way we the Am Yisroel are dedicated to *chessed*. In all the years of our *golus*, we always

had these organizations of *chessed*. Because we are a nation of *chessed*.

And therefore, when our forefathers endured the bitterness of the *shibud* in Mitzrayim, Hakodosh Boruch Hu was making them into different people. It changed our character forever. It caused our nature to become perfect and sweet. That's what we're thinking today as we eat the "bread of affliction." We remind ourselves that the DNA of the Am Yisroel was changed forever because of the *lechem oni* that we're eating now.



Takeaway:

It's not fun to eat bread of affliction but it has a profound effect on those who must do so. Being afflicted as a nation brought out our greatness, our nation was changed forever by our affliction in Mitzrayim.

Sixth Day

GRATITUDE AND KĀBOLAS HATORAH

We know that matzah is the *lechem oni*, the poor man's bread, it's a poor kind of bread. Bread is more tasty when it's allowed to ferment and leaven; that's the plan of Hakadosh Baruch Hu – it's not an accident. Hakadosh Baruch Hu put certain bacteria into materials and certain chemical reactions and it starts creating gasses; it ferments and it changes the starches into sugars. And so, leavened bread tastes better. It can't be helped; that's the truth.

And therefore matzah is called *lechem oni*, not because in Mitzrayim they didn't eat leavened bread – they ate all types of bread – but whatever they ate was *lechem oni* because they lived in affliction.

So one of the lessons of matzah is to remind us that our forefathers lived for a very long time in affliction. They suffered for a long time and they suffered very much. So as you eat the matzah today you have to try and remind yourself of the suffering that they endured in Mitzrayim. It's very important to think about that. **הא לחמא עניא** – this is the bread of affliction.

Imagine that you were enslaved and that your father was enslaved; for two hundred and ten years you couldn't get out of the country. And the Egyptians worked you with cruelty. It was *avodas perech*, work that broke the person. It was intended to break them. *Mikotzer ruach* – they could hardly breathe from the severity of the labor.

And they beat you mercilessly if you didn't produce the number of bricks. They were hitting and they were whipping and they were maiming. Who knows how many they killed in their cruelty? And in addition, the Egyptians despised them. They looked down on them and harassed them. We have no picture of the difficulty of the *shibud* Mitzrayim, how much they suffered.

Now, the first question that enters our mind is what was the intention of Hakadosh Baruch Hu when He caused them to endure such affliction? It's an important question because included in the answer will be what our thoughts should be when we eat matzah. Whatever Hashem's intention was is what He wants us to think about when we eat the matzah.

And the answer is: in order that we should appreciate the changeover. One of the reasons we suffered so much was so that when they left Mitzrayim they became so intoxicated with happiness and gratitude so they fell in love with Hashem and they were *mekabel* the Torah.

And so we're learning now something new about the *matzos*. We are eating the *matzos* to remind ourselves of our difficult stay in Mitzrayim.

We're chewing and we're thinking "הא לחמא עניא" Oy, this is the bread of affliction we ate in Mitzrayim." We take time on Yom Tov to recall the קושי השיעבוד, the difficulty of our bondage, and to speak about the details of what our fathers suffered in Egypt, *in order to be grateful that Hakodosh Boruch Hu redeemed us from it!*

The tzaros of Mitzrayim were one of the biggest *benefits* that ever happened to our nation in history. It was due to the tzaros of Mitzrayim that our nation accepted the Torah.

How do I know that? When Hakodosh Boruch Hu first spoke to the whole Am Yisroel, what did He say? How did He introduce Himself? "אנכי ה' – אלקיך אשר בראתי שמים וארץ – I am Hashem Your G-d who created the heavens and the earth"? No, He didn't say that. He said "I am Your Hashem אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים who took you out of Mitzrayim." These are My credentials: "I took you out of Mitzrayim." And He adds the words מבית עבריים. What are those added words? בית עבריים means *tzaros*.

It means you were in *gehakte tzaros* until finally suddenly something happened. What happened? Hashem happened! And now we're leaving Mitzrayim loaded down with all their wealth. וינצלו את מצרים, they emptied out Mitzrayim. They marched out of Mitzrayim loaded down with silver and gold, they took all the wealth of the country with them.

You remember that day? Oh was that a day when they walked out of Egypt! Their spirits were soaring! They weren't walking on earth; they were walking in the air. It was the happiest day, not only of their lives; never was there a happy day like that. They never thought they'd get out. Two hundred and ten years?! Even under the Nazis it wasn't as long as that; it was a short period under the Nazis.

And finally they saw the destruction of their oppressors who drowned in the Yam Suf when

they were pursuing the Bnei Yisroel, and they all sang that song of happiness to Hashem: they went wild with a delirium of ecstasy.

And because of that they became so grateful, and they loved Hakadosh Baruch Hu with such an intensity that they were ready to do anything that He asked. And therefore with such a big preparation, when they came to Har Sinai, they were in the mood, they were ready to commit to anything.

So the entire Torah is אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים. You should never forget that; day and night, day and night, think about that. Oh you should, always. And so when we eat the matzah, we recall that gratitude, מאפילה לאורה לגאולה how Hashem to us from darkness to light and from servitude to redemption.



Takeaway:

Matzah calls to mind the contrast between our situation today and the affliction we suffered in Mitzrayim. This should engender gratitude in us and a sincere commitment to serve Hashem.

Seventh Day

FOOD OF PRIESTS

Now there's another symbolism that's not difficult for us to see. Anybody who reads the Chumash knows that there's a *korban minchah* that is eaten by the *kohanim*. It's a *korban* made of flour. And one of the important *dinim* of the *minchah* is לֹא תֵאֶפֶה חֶמֶץ; it cannot be leavened. It has to be matzah, not *chometz*.

In the Beis Hamikdash the *kohen* eats *matzos* all year round. It's a special food for the *kohanei Hashem*. No *chometz* means no outside influence; it means complete dedication to *avodas Hashem*.

So why do we eat matzah?

And the answer is because Hakadosh Baruch Hu told us, **ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים** – You will be to Me a nation of Kohanim. It's not a *moshol*; it's not just poetic words. That's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu told us at the beginning of our history – *You are going to be for Me a nation of kohanim.*

What is a *kohen*? Every Yisroel must know that his function is to be a servant of Hashem. All of Am Yisroel should know – at the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim every Yisroel was given the status of a *kohen*. Of course, there's a difference. A *kohen* of **זרע אהרן** has different *dinim*. But nevertheless, every Yisroel, man and woman, is a *kohen*.

Yeshayah Hanovi says, **ואתם כהני ה' תקראו** – you will be called the *kohanim* of Hashem, **בני א-ל** – the sons of the living G-d. Not **לעתיד לבוא**. Not some time in the distant future. No! Now, as soon as we came out of Mitzrayim, Hashem said that we must eat *matzos*. Hashem was declaring that we are *kohanei Hashem*.

And as a *kohen* you are *mechuyav* to do things that a *kohen* has to do. A *kohen* must dedicate his life to the service of Hashem. And every Yisroel knows that that's his function in life. Our function in this life is to serve Hashem.

So you might be a grocery man or you might be a doctor, whatever you are, but it's only to earn enough money to support your family. But your function in life is to be a *kohen* who serves Hashem. Now people will say, “Certainly I'm an *oveid Hashem*. Certainly. But that's only part of my life. I have to do other things too. I have a job. I have a family.” The answer is “No! Whatever you are doing in life, you are still a *Kohen Hashem*. Look, a *kohen* can also get a job. But he's still a *kohen*. Every Jew is a servant of Hashem, that's our function in this world.

You have to go to your office, to your store, whatever it is, to make a living. But you're still a *Kohen Hashem*. You have to take care of your

children, feed them, bathe them. That doesn't in any way affect your status. You're a servant of Hashem. You must keep that in mind. Hashem made you a *Kohen Hashem*. There are no options. Nothing can change that fundamental truth. A Yisroel can never change his function in life. And therefore, the Am Yisroel, all of them without exception, should realize the importance of being the *Mamleches Kohanim*.

And therefore, once a year, on the Chag Hamatzos, we eat *matzos* to remind us that we are *kohanei Hashem*. That's what the *matzos* are testifying. For these eight days, we are eating *matzah* like the *kohanim*. Because we are *kohanim*! Eating *matzos* is a privilege, a sign of nobility. We are the *Mamleches Kohanim*. We're chosen by Hashem for our excellence and we must put all our efforts into the career of being *Kohanei Hashem*.

So whenever you eat the *matzah*, keep in mind that this unleavened bread is teaching you who you really are. You are important. You are a *kohen*. You shouldn't look down at yourself at all. You are a *kadosh*. Of course, other Jews are also *kadosh*. We are all *kadosh*.



Takeaway:

When we eat *matzah* - the bread of *kohanim*, we remember our purpose in life, to be a Kingdom of Priests. Every Jew who eats *matzah* is a holy servant of Hashem.

Eighth Day

HIS SERVANTS

At the Seder the child asks his father the four questions, and the wise father gives his answer. He doesn't even have to be so wise because the Baal Hagadah tells him what to say: **עבדים היינו**

לפרעה במצרים – We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu took us out.

Now, if you recall, the first of the four *kashes* was the question we're discussing now: "Why are we eating matzah now?" That's what the child, and all of us too, wanted to know. And so we'll have to say that this answer that the father gives, "Because we were slaves in Mitzrayim and Hashem took us out," is the answer to the matzah question as well.

That's what the father says: "My son, you're asking why we do certain things, why we eat matzah, why we do other things. But you have to know, it's not only four questions, it's *taryag* questions – why do we do *all* the laws of the Torah? And in each law there are many different details. So it's many, many questions.

And there is one answer to all of them: עברים היינו לפרעה במצרים – We were slaves to Pharaoh and when they gave us orders we couldn't ask any questions, "Why do we have to do this?" If we asked a question, they knocked your teeth out. You do what you're told because you're an *eved*.

And now the time came and they walked out of Mitzrayim! Not they walked out – Hashem took them out. Instead of serving a *basar v'dam*, a flesh and blood king, we were taken out now to serve the Melech Malchei Hamelachim, the King Above All Kings. בצאת ישראל ממצרים – *When the Bnei Yisroel came out of Mitzrayim, יהיה יהודה לקדשו – Yehuda became devoted to his Holy One, ישראל ממשלותיו – we became His subjects. He ruled over us.*

And so matzah, like all other mitzvos, is because of *avodim hayinu*. We don't need reasons. Of course, there is no harm in knowing reasons, but the fulfillment of the mitzvos, obeying the mitzvos, is not contingent upon knowing any reasons. Because there is a reason; the reason for everything is עברים היינו – we were slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim and Hashem took us out

and we're His slaves now and now we'll do whatever He tells us.

So the reason that we do mitzvos is because Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. That's the basic fundamental reason for obeying the Torah. That's why, when Hakadosh Boruch Hu began giving the Torah, He said, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים – I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Mitzrayim. They exchanged one form of *shibud* for another form of *shibud*. They didn't get liberty. Instead of being *avodim* to Pharaoh, now they became *avodim* to Hakadosh Boruch Hu.

And therefore when you put on *tefillin* tomorrow morning and you put on *tzitzis* tomorrow morning and when you say *krias shma* and *tefillah* and when you give charity, when you salt meat, when you make *kiddush* on Shabbos, when you sit in the *succah*, when you take your clothes to the *shaatnez* laboratory for inspection, whatever you do, you have to realize that all these things are expressing only one thing. Torah and mitzvos, everything you do is merely a demonstration that you are subject to Him.

That's what our Sages tell us. The Gemara says that if someone composes a special prayer, a *piyut* praising Hashem for commanding us in the mitzvos as a way of teaching us good character so משתקין אותו – we tell him, "Keep quiet. Don't say such things!"


Why? So the gemara says the reason we tell him to stop is שעושה מידותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא – *because he's making the laws of Hakadosh Boruch Hu as if they are laws of mercy, ואינן אלא גזרות – but really it's not so; they're only decrees.* And Rashi says, they are decrees of a *melech*, of a king in order for us to show that we are His *avodim*.

Isn't that a novel idea? The laws of the Torah are not for good character and mercy and they're not for this or that – fundamentally every mitzvah is for the purpose that we should be able to


demonstrate that we are *avodim*, that we serve Hashem.

Of course every mitzvah has solid benefits for the doer. Hakodosh Boruch Hu has planned all the laws of the Torah so that by doing them, we learn something. We gain in character, we gain in our *neshamos*, absolutely. But our purpose in doing *mitzvos* is not for that. We only have one purpose and that's to serve Him. The whole Torah is nothing but *avodas Hashem*, nothing but a form of demonstrating that we are subject to Him and loyal to Him.

And therefore on Chag Hamatzos, we should remember this function of the matzah. "I'm eating this matzah because *avodim hayinu*; because Hakodosh Boruch Hu chose us to be His servants. And it's because of that great privilege, that's why I'm eating matzah today – to express my servitude to Him. And that lesson of the matzah, that testimony, I'll take with me all year long whenever I have the privilege to do any mitzvah – "I'm doing this now to express my *avdus* to You Hashem and to demonstrate my undying loyalty to You."



Takeaway:
The mitzvos are our obligation toward Hashem which we fulfill just as we fulfilled our obligations to Pharaoh in slavery. We did not gain liberty when we were redeemed. Hashem redeemed us so that we may serve Him.



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Q:
The rabbi said that in our time, especially in America, we're so busy with work and other things that we don't spend enough time in the morning on prayers. Is it better this way – I mean praying without much concentration – or are we better off just not praying at all?

A:
No; everybody should continue to pray that way. Only that I recommend that at least for the first *brachah* they should put in all that they have. In the first *brachah*, the blessing which concludes with the words ברוך אתה השם מן אברהם, you should be *moser nefesh!* Put all your *kochos* into it! Because that *brachah* is *meakeiv* according to the *din* and therefore it's very important to at least concentrate by the first *brachah* in *shemonah esrei*. The rest, if a person is ambitious he can undertake a program; every day he should try to do a little more and by the time he's in his sixties or seventies maybe he'll be trained to keep his mind concentrated on the davening.

It's a great pity! Because when we pray without any thought a big part of our lives is wasted. If we would learn first of all what it means – you have to learn what the words mean. There are deep things there and they deserve to be studied. By the way, I would like to talk about this all the time but I know it would be boring for you. On *tefillah*, I would like to talk for a whole year. An entire year only on the subject of prayer! We could take every word and analyze it; we could study it deeply and it would be worth every minute. I have it written down at home; it's one of my specialties.

But whatever it is, it's a career that is available for every Jew and it's a tragedy that lives are being wasted. I've said it before that it's a cancer, this sickness of what we are doing with our *davening* today. The truth is that it's one of the greatest failings in Jewish life today. And therefore, to restore *tefillah* to its proper place should be one of our highest aspirations. However, I'll settle for five minutes too. Because it's so valuable that no matter how little it is, it's a precious achievement.