

A taste of Shabbat

Pesach 5776

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Translated and edited by his students

"Matza of champions"

The eve of the fourteenth of Nissan

The story of Pesach starts the day before the festival. Pesach is the only festival with preconditions that are critical in order to keep its laws. The evening before the seder, after the stars come out we check our houses for chametz:

*"On the eve (in hebrew – Or – light) of the fourteenth we check for chametz by candlelight"*¹,

the next morning we burn the chametz and completely cancel it by saying :

*"Any Chametz I have in my property, that I haven't seen or destroyed, is nullified as if it is dust"*².

The main part of the removal of chametz is not the checking of our houses or the burning – these are all rabbinical additions, the main part is nullifying the chametz in our hearts! Our Rabbis define the mitzvah as follows:

*"One must nullify the chametz in one's heart, think of it as dust, and positively think that one doesn't own any chametz at all"*³

As we shall see, this mitzvah is the gateway to the story of the exodus , both then and now.

Being free

The Rambam quoted above has two special expressions: "at all" and "dust". "Not owning chametz at all" - there is no other law in the Torah that is so strict, no cancelation of one in sixty or a thousand, no majority or minority – Chametz is forbidden even in a tiny quantity , and thus the nullification of chametz in our hearts becomes the most practical and effective way.

"Dust" we look at as something to tread on, but if we look deeply we see that dust is earth with a potential to sprout new life.

This idea – that our thoughts can change reality, is the first message of Pesach. This is what stands behind the opening question of the Seder:

*"Why is this night different from all other nights – because all other nights we eat chametz and Matza , this night only matza?"*⁴.

The question is about the difference between chametz and matza . Our rabbis teach that the difference is in the two letters differentiating the word – the chet ח and the hey ה (the other two letters are common – חמץ מצה). The difference is in the small gap at the top of the hey. This is not just a simple answer – as we shall see.

Chametz is produced when a raising agent is introduced to dough, and the it starts to rise. This is a sign of pride and haughtiness. If the dough doesn't rise, it stays itself – we have matza. The expanding of the dough is a sign of self-importance.

The difference between chametz and matzah

The difference between chametz and matzah is the story of our war with Pharaoh, and perhaps of the whole hagada. Pharaoh has one problem

הֲנִי עֲלִיד פֶּרְעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם הַמַּגְדִּיל הַרְבֵּץ בְּתוֹךְ אֲרָצִי אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לִי יֵאֲרִי וְאֲנִי עֲשִׂיתִנִּי 5

Pharaoh, who lays like an alligator in his river, who says "it is my river – I created it"

A piece of advice – during the seder don't talk about "other people" – think of yourself, the story inside each one of us. We all have a little Pharaoh inside us who goes out each morning to the river, or to the mirror, and sees his reflection – we don't know if he thinks the river is god or his (our) reflection. How can we fight him?

Mishna Pesachim 1:1 ¹

From the Hagada ²

Rambam 2:2 ³

From the Hagada ⁴

יחזקאל כ"ט ג' ⁵



*Even if we are all clever and educated, with knowledge of the Torah, we must tell the story of the exodus*⁶

Even if we have a doctorate in Egyptology and have spent ten years in yeshiva..... This is the idea, we must stop showing off and become like simple matza – even if I am a clever person, I still have to continue telling myself how to leave Egypt (מצרים – Egypt and also personal constrictions).

If we had taken ourselves out of Egypt

*We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and if G'd hadn't taken us out, we, our children and our grandchildren would still be enslaved.*⁷

How? G'd promised us

יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי גַר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם וַעֲנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע וְגַם אֶת הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנֹכִי וְאַתְּרִי כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְרַכּוּשׁ. מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה בְּדוֹל 8

*Know that your children will be enslaved in a foreign land for four hundred years.. then they will leave with a great fortune.*⁹

Promises must be kept – so how could we still be enslaved?

This is true, but still – we were one step away from disappearing . As the angels said to G'd:

*These ones (Egyptians) and those ones (Israel) are idol worshippers – Why differentiate between them?*¹⁰

If G'd hadn't taken us out, if it had been up to us, perhaps physically we may have left Egypt, but we would still be enslaved to pharaoh . To tell the story of the exodus is to remember G'd took us out, as we say whilst eating Matza –

This Matza we eat because our forefathers bread didn't have time to rise because G'd appeared to them and redeemed them.

He redeemed us, the matza signifies that we didn't leave on our own merit. The truth is that if I rid myself of all self-pride, nullify myself like dust, I can reveal an internal G'dlyness that can beat Pharaoh. This is the story of the Hagadah – to rid myself of pride, of the idea that so can prevail ourselves. If we rid ourselves of this idea, and realise that only the "G'd given part of our soul"¹¹ gives us strength, we can fight against Egypt and win. We must completely remove all chametz – until the last crum.

Matzah gives you wings

Chassidut explains the difference between the Het and the Hey. The Het has an opening only on the bottom side – as our Rabbis teach:

*Anyone who is full of pride, G`d says he cannot dwell in the world with him*¹²

If there is no opening to the above, we can only be dragged down. On the Hey there is one – because we have free choice, and we can choose to leave Egypt. A small gap – but through it we can rise higher and higher..

The barriers (Meitzarim – Egypt) of the Het leave only one option , Pharaoh's agenda:

תִּכְבֵּד הַעֲבָדָה עַל הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵה וְאֵל יִשְׁעוּ בְּדַבְרֵי שִׁקְרָה 13

Make the people heavy with labour, and then they will not have time for false dreams

This heaviness can pull us down and deny us salvation. The small hole in the Hey, of the matza that hasn't risen or swelled with pride and air, allows me to tell the story of the exodus, like a child, ask the four questions, and ask to be able to change

For more details of Rav Elon's Shiurim and to receive "A taste of Shabbat" weekly www.hithabrut.org hithabrut613@gmail.com

Hagada ⁶
From the hagada ⁷
בראשית ט"ו י"ג ⁸
Gen. 15:13 ⁹

Yalkut Shimoni Veetchanan 247 908 ¹⁰
Tanya ¹¹
Sotah 5 ¹²
שמות ה' ט' ¹³