

Pesach Part I : Our Day Of Dependence (Edited Transcript)

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Let's journey back in time to the very first Pesach that the Jewish people celebrated in the land of Israel. We've just spent 40 years in the desert, and now, under the leadership of Yehoshua, we've crossed the Jordan River into the land of Israel. We've set up camp in a place called Gilgal where we will be stationed for 14 years while we conquer, and then divide the land. And one of the very first things we are going to experience is Pesach, which is just days away.

Examining the timelines

How do we know this? The Gemara in Kiddushin provides the precise timeline. After 40 years in the desert, Moshe passes away on the 7th of Adar. The Torah then tells us that the nation mourned for a month, which takes us up to the 7th of Nisan (the month immediately after Adar). It's at this point that the Book of Joshua begins, and G-d tells Yehoshua to prepare to enter the land, which they do three days later - the 10th of Nisan. That is exactly four days before the Pesach sacrifice is brought and five days before seder night. So literally within days of arriving in the land of Israel the Jewish nation celebrate their very first Pesach. The question is, why is that G-d orchestrated events in such a way that Pesach is among the nation's first experiences upon entering the land?

Also significant is that this Pesach was the last time the Jewish people ate manna. For the 40 years that they were in the desert G-d provided them with this miraculous food from heaven. Each day a specific amount literally fell from the sky and it was precisely enough for that day. If anyone attempted to store it up for more than a day, it rotted. The manna stopped falling on the 7th of Adar - the day that Moshe passed away. But the portion that fell on this final day was different: it lasted for five weeks. And so this time, the Jewish people were able to store the manna, and though it no longer fell from the sky, this final portion kept them going all the way through the crossing of the Jordan River, right up until the first day of Pesach.

That Pesach was the first time in 40 years that the Jewish people ate regular food - as the Torah puts it, "from the produce of the land". On the first day of Pesach - the 15th of Nissan - there was still a small amount left, and by the following day - the 16th of Nissan - it had completely run out. And so that first day of Pesach was the transition period - the shift from relying on manna from heaven to relying on the produce of the land. And on seder night, that first taste of the produce of the land was matza.

We noted earlier that the Jewish people ate manna for 40 years, and the Torah itself mentions this explicitly. But there's a peculiar discrepancy in the timeline. The Gemara points out that seemingly, it was 39 years and 11 months. Tracing the timeline, the Jewish people left Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, Pesach night. The manna only began to fall a month later, because, for the first month the Jewish people ate the provisions with which they'd left Egypt. After a month - on the 15th of Iyar - those provisions ran out. The nation cried out to Hashem for food, and the manna rained down from heaven. As mentioned, that manna lasted all the way up until Pesach 39 years and 11 months later. We are missing a month.

Matzah and manna

The Gemara provides a puzzling answer. It explains that the matzah that was taken out of Egypt tasted like manna so that month was counted as part of the 40 years during which we ate manna. To understand exactly what this means, we need to delve into what these two substances - matza and manna - are in their essence. In doing so, we will discover a strong correlation and connection between them.

Our Sages describe manna as "the bread of faith". G-d, Himself, refers to the manna as a "test". What is the test? The Ramban, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1135-1204), explains that only enough fell for one day. So the people had to trust in Hashem that tomorrow the manna would fall again. Consider that there were about three million people in the desert - men and women, children

and the elderly ? and they were all living day-to-day, hand-to-mouth. That was the tremendous test of faith of the manna.

Matzah is also referred to by our Sages as the 'bread of faith'. It required a tremendous leap of faith on the part of the Jewish people to leave Egypt and venture out into the desert. It seems a strange thing to say ? they were leaving behind slavery after all ? but it was no simple matter heading out into a burning, barren, unforgiving wilderness with only one month's supply of food. This is why it was an act of sublime faith and courage. As the prophet Yirmiyahu said many years later, in the name of Hashem, 'I remember the kindness of your youth, when you walked after me in the desert, in a land that was not sown.'

The duality of matzah

So both matzah and manna represent our faith in, and dependence on, Hashem. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) points out an interesting dichotomy in matzah. On the one hand, it's called the 'bread of affliction?', on the other hand it's called the 'bread of redemption?'. Furthermore, Rabbi Hirsch asks, the Torah tells us we eat matzah because when the Jewish people left Egypt there wasn't enough time for the bread to rise. Why wasn't there enough time? Surely Hashem could have coordinated things better so that there was enough time for the bread to rise? Can you imagine ? leading three million Jews out of the land of Egypt into the desert and, of all things, not getting the catering right. Leaving the people with nothing but glorified crackers. Can you imagine the complaints that were directed at Moses?

Rabbi Hirsch answers that of course it was intended to happen this way. It was necessary that the bread wouldn't have time to rise so that the matzah could be the symbol of the redemption for all time. It's called the 'bread of affliction?'. Why? Because it symbolises our oppression and slavery. We endured back-breaking labour and were constantly under the whip of the oppressor, which means, in a certain sense, our bread never had time to rise. And yet, in an instant this same bread of affliction transmutes into the bread of redemption. It's not an evolutionary process or a natural progression. One moment we're in the depths of slavery, the next we're marching out of Egypt, completely free. How did that happen? How did we extricate ourselves so quickly and so completely? Nothing other than Divine intervention. And so this duality of matzah is a visceral reminder that our freedom is G-d given. Rabbi Hirsch describes chametz as the 'bread of independence?', and matzah as the 'bread of dependence?' ? a sign that we are completely reliant on Hashem for who we are and what we are able to do in this world.

Still in the picture

Returning to our original question, why did G-d orchestrate it that one of the very first things the Jewish people encountered after crossing the Jordan River was a Pesach experience? To answer this, we need to look at the context. In entering the land of Israel, the Jewish people underwent a major transition. In the desert, all of their nutritional needs were taken care of. Every day for 40 years manna fell from heaven. A miraculous well of water accompanied them wherever they went. Clouds of Glory protected them from their enemies and from the elements. And then it all came to an abrupt end. The manna ceased, the well disappeared, the clouds of glory dispersed. Now, they would have to plant seeds, harvest crops, make bread, assemble an army, build homes, deal with the elements.

It would have been easy to start thinking that they were now masters of their own destiny; that G-d was no longer in the picture, no longer needed. But the message of Pesach is that whether you are in the desert or the land of Israel, everything is dependent on Hashem. Whether you are getting your bread from the ground or from the heavens, it requires G-d's blessing. It's a miracle of equal magnitude. The only difference is that bread is a hidden miracle and manna is a revealed miracle.

Perhaps now we can begin to understand why G-d orchestrated this overlap between the manna from heaven and the matzah. The message to the people was that there's no stark difference ? that even though the manna from heaven ceased to fall, it wasn't the case that they were now on their own, left to fend for themselves. And the message of Pesach ? the message transmitted to the Jewish people almost immediately after arriving in Israel ? is that we didn't redeem ourselves, G-d, Himself, redeemed us.

At the outset of our journey as an independent people, we ate matzah as a reminder of our dependence on Hashem; as a reminder that in the same way G-d took us out of Egypt and looked after us for 40 years, He looks after us still. The miracles are hidden. The

Hand of G-d is no longer visible as anything more than an occasional glimpse. But He is there nevertheless, and we are as dependent on his largesse as we ever were.