

History Re-actualized

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Many families have a custom to eat an egg at their Pesach Seder meal, as explained by the Rama (Rabbi Moshe Isserles, 16th c.) in his comments on the laws of Pesach:

*In some places there is a custom to eat eggs at the meal as a symbol of mourning. **It seems to me that the reason is because the night of Tisha Bav is established as the night of Pesach, and, in addition, as a memorial to the destruction [of the Beit Hamikdash], where they used to offer the Korban Pesach.***

Rama, Orach Chaim 476:2

הגה נוהגים בקצת מקומות לאכול
בסעודה ביצים זכר לאבלות ונראה לי
הטעם משום שליל תשעה באב נקבע
בליל פסח ועוד זכר לחורבן שהיו
מקריבין קרבן פסח
רמ"א אורח חיים תעו"ב

The Rama explains the presence of mourning at the Seder night in light of the curious “coincidence” that the eve of the Pesach Seder is always the same night of the week as the eve of Tisha Bav of that year.

In his comments on this passage, the Chok Yaakov (Rabbi Yaakov Reisher, 18th c.) finds an allusion to this idea in the traditional calendar mnemonic called “א-ה-ב-ש.” This pairing of Hebrew letters, connecting the first and last and the subsequent pairs, is mentioned by the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 428:3) as a way to arrange the holidays in the Jewish calendar. According to this pattern, the first letter (aleph) connects to the last letter (tav) hinting to the first night of Pesach (aleph) coinciding with the letter tav, which stands for Tisha Bav.¹

This parallel between Pesach and Tisha Bav surfaces on Tisha Bav as well. It is featured in the kinnah “A fire kindles within me (aish tukad bekirbi)”:

*A fire kindles within me as I recall- when I left Egypt,
But I raise laments as I remember- when I left Jerusalem.*

*Moses sang a song that would never be forgotten- when I left Egypt,
Jeremiah mourned and cried out in grief- when I left Jerusalem.*

*The sea-waves pounded but stood up like a wall- when I left Egypt,
The waters overflowed and ran over my head- when I left Jerusalem.*

*Moses led me and Aaron guided me- when I left Egypt,
Nebuchadnezzar and the Emperor Hadrian- when I left Jerusalem... ”*

¹ Similarly, the second night of Pesach (bet) corresponds to the letter shin, which stands for Shavuot, and so on.

This lament highlights the contrast between the celebration of Pesach when we left Egypt triumphantly and the catastrophe of Tisha Bav when we left Jerusalem in mourning. The question remains: what is the thematic connection between Pesach and Tisha Bav?

Let us begin our exploration with an unusual ruling in the Shulchan Aruch.

If there is a mourner in the city, he goes at night to the synagogue and also at daytime until they conclude the kinnot.
Shulchan Aruch 559:6

אם יש אבל בעיר הולך בלילה לבית
הכנסת וגם ביום עד שיגמרו הקינות :
שלחן ערוך תקנט:ו

This ruling is puzzling. We know that during the period of mourning, a mourner may not leave his house (Yoreh Deah, 393)?

The Magen Avraham (Rabbi Avraham Abele Gombiner, 17th c.) in his commentary on this ruling resolves our question with three words, which set the tone for our experience of Tisha Bav: “*Since we are all mourners - אכלים אכלים*”

On Tisha Bav each year we re-actualize² the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, and we all experience mourning firsthand. Hence, although the mourner leaves his personal home, he is still in a house of mourning when he enters the shul. On Tisha Bav, all of our homes are houses of Aveilut, as we are all in mourning. In a similar vein, some communities had a custom to recite the beracha of Dayan Haemet on Tisha Bav before the reading of the Torah³, much as a mourner would do immediately after the loss of a close relative. We now also understand why the Rama writes (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 552:5) that some have the custom to eat eggs in the Seudah Hamafseket, the pre- Tisha Bav meal, as eggs are eaten by mourners, and on Tisha Bav, we all experience mourning. The destruction of the Beit Hamikdash is not a matter of history. On Tisha Bav we re-actualize this calamity and all Jewish suffering, and we relive the memory of mourning.

Perhaps now we can appreciate the connection between the egg of the Seder and the Seudah Hamafseket; the experience of Pesach and the experience of Tisha Bav, in light of a passage in the Rambam. On Pesach night, one of the salient features of the Seder is the responsibility for each of us to see ourselves as if we are actually marching out of Egypt on the Seder night, as the Rambam describes:

In each generation, a person is obligated to demonstrate as if he himself is leaving the servitude of Egypt right now as the Torah states, and He took us out from there and on this Hashem commanded in the Torah, and you should remember that you were a slave, as if to say that you yourself were a slave and you went out to freedom and were redeemed.

Chametz UMatzah 6:7

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו
כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משעבוד מצרים
שנאמר דברים ו' ואותנו הוציא משם וגו', ועל
דבר זה צוה הקב"ה בתורה דברים ה' וזכרת כי
עבד היית כלומר כאילו אתה בעצמך היית עבד
ויצאת לחירות ונפדית.
הלכות חמץ ומצה ו:ז

² This term is coined by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in his volume on Jewish History and Jewish Memory, *Zakhor*, which served as an inspiration for this article.

³ For a discussion of this practice, see *Minhagei Yisrael*, vol. 4, p. 24.

The essence of the Seder is to re-actualize the Exodus. Each year we sit and reflect not on a historical event, an exodus of old, but on the current experience of redemption. Much like Tisha Bav, Pesach is a time of re-actualization. Both of these are days in which history becomes reality and memory becomes experience. On Pesach each of us experiences freedom firsthand as we feel a sense of immediate redemption, while on Tisha Bav we experience acute mourning as we feel an immediate sense of destruction. We demonstrate these experiences visually; on Pesach we recline as kings, and on Tisha Bav, we sit on the floor as mourners.

This parallel between Pesach and Tisha Bav is found in the Tisha Bav liturgy in another interesting place. Some Sephardic communities have a kinnah which begins with Ma Nishtana, why is this night different than other nights. In an obvious allusion to the Pesach Haggadah, the author of the kinnah reflects on how the night of Tisha Bav is unique in its sadness, in contrast to the night of Pesach which is singular in its exaltation.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his exposition of the kinnot of Tisha Bav, suggested that these poems of lament are a fulfillment of a requirement to tell over the story of our misfortune, much as there is a mitzvah of sippur yetziat Mitzrayim:

Just as there is a mitzvah on Yom Tov to stimulate every member of one's household to be happy and rejoice (Rambam, Hilkhot Yom Rov 6:17-18), so too on Tish'ah be-Av is it important for the head of the household to stimulate the members of his house to feel a sense of mourning? In the kinnah beginning "A'addeh ad hug shamayim," Kalir writes, "I will stimulate everyone I know, all who come into my house (agoreh itti kol benei vayit)." This refers not to telling the story of the exodus from Egypt (sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim), but to telling the story of the destruction of Jerusalem (sippur hurban Yerushalayim)...

There is apparently a mitzvah to engage in sippur hurban Yerushalayim. Although it is not a biblical obligation, the story is told in the same manner as sippur yetziyat Mitzrayim. Just as the latter is told to the son within the frame of reference of his intelligence- the son who understands more should be told a different story than the son who does not understand as much (Pesachim 116a)- so too should we engage in sippur hurban Yerushalayim.

The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways, pp.186- 187

We now understand that the placement of Pesach and Tisha Bav on the same day on the calendar is no coincidence. It reflects the common character of these two days as days of re-actualization, and it highlights the painful contrast between the height of redemption and the nadir of exile. This notion of re-actualization is purposeful. On the Seder night the sippur yetziat Mitzrayim enables us to focus on the key themes of the evening and convey these lessons to our children. Similarly, on Tisha Bav, the experience of mourning and the sippur churban Yerushalayim should give us pause to contemplate our current state of exile, its origins and various ways in which we can merit an end to our current state of mourning.