

# Matzah: A Lesson in Trust and Community

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*Lest one say, "HaShem gives us food and drink, but without peace there is nothing," the Torah pledged, "I will create peace in the land." This teaches that peace is the equal of all. And so it is written, "Who makes peace and creates evil" This teaches that peace is the equal of all.*

**Sifra to Bechukotai 1:1**

*HaShem did not find a receptacle to hold blessing for Israel, other than peace.*

**Mishnah, Uktzin 3:12**

*Gatherings of tzaddikim are beneficial for them and for the world. Dispersion of tzaddikim is bad for them and bad for the world.*

**Kallah Rabti 6:4**

שמא תאמרו הרי מאכל והרי משתה  
אם אין שלום אין כלום ת"ל ונתתי  
שלום בארץ, מגיד שהשלום שקול  
כנגד הכל, וכן הוא אומר עושה שלום  
ובורא רע, מגיד שהשלום שקול כנגד  
הכל.

**ספרא בחוקותי א:א**

לא מצא הקב"ה כלי מחזיק ברכה  
לישראל אלא השלום  
**משנה עוקצין ג:ב**

כינוס לצדיקים, הנאה להם והנאה  
לעולם; פיזור לצדיקים, רעה להם  
ורעה לעולם  
**כלה רבתי ו:ד**

Without peace there is no blessing, because the dispersion created by the absence of peace eradicates all of the benefits and advantages we hold as individuals. Peace allows for gathering and builds community, and it is **trust** that builds this peace.

So it is that economists and sociologists have come to view trust as a form of currency, "social capital," greasing the wheels of society and enabling its administration. From product safety oversight to social service provision to financial investment and transaction, every engagement of human being with human being or of individual with government requires trust that the other will act in the best interest of the community. As Francis Fukuyama wrote,<sup>53</sup> "A nation's well-being, as well as its ability to compete economically, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society."

Halachah recognizes this need for trust as well, and dedicates at least four areas of legislation to its maintenance:

<sup>53</sup> *The Economics of Trust*, National Review (August 14, 1995)

- **Standards of Neemanut:** Behaving in a trustworthy way.
- **Darchei Shalom:** Following behaviors which build trust and peace.
- **Marit Ayin:** Avoiding actions which trigger suspicion.
- **Dan l’Kaf Zchut:** Presuming righteousness in assessing others’ actions.

Rav Menasheh Klein<sup>54</sup> has pointed out that the Talmud Yerushalmi,<sup>55</sup> regarding the need to remain above suspicion of malfeasance, cited two separate pesukim: “And you shall be innocent from HaShem and Israel,<sup>56</sup>” and “And you shall find favor and a reputation for wisdom in the eyes of HaShem and Man.” Rav Klein explains that that these two separate pesukim are needed to obligate us not only to be trustworthy, but to proactively create a trustworthy and trusting society.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin identified this theme - the essential nature of trust in building our society – as the key to answering two questions regarding the matzah we eat on Pesach night.

## What is the significance of matzah for us?

Rav Sorotzkin<sup>57</sup> noted that matzah is considered one of the three major themes of the Seder, such that one has not fulfilled his obligations of the night unless he has mentioned all three. As Rabban Gamliel expressed it:

*One who has not mentioned these three items on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation: Pesach, matzah and maror.*

**Mishnah Pesachim 10:5**

כל שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו ואלו הן: פסח מצה ומרור  
משנה פסחים י:ה

The Korban Pesach is clearly vital for all generations, with its message that HaShem miraculously punished the Egyptians and saved us on that original Seder night. Maror is also of clear cross-generational significance, with its demonstration of the bitterness our enemies inflicted upon us in Egypt and in many other lands since. But what is the message of matzah for the Jew today? What does this artifact of a rushed exodus teach the Jew more than three millennia distant?

## What was the significance of matzah for them?

Rav Sorotzkin also asked a second question: What was the significance of matzah for the Jews who escaped Egypt, themselves?

Clearly, matzah was not simply a product of unavoidable haste; HaShem told the Jews exactly when they would eat their korban pesach, and He instructed them to prepare matzah for the meal that night:

*And they shall eat the meat on this night; fire-roasted, with matzah, upon maror they shall eat it.*

**Shemot 12:8**

ואכלו את הבשר בלילה הזה צלי אש ומצות על מררים יאכלהו:  
שמות יב:ח

<sup>54</sup> Mishneh Halachot 5:95

<sup>55</sup> Yerushalmi Shekalim 3:2

<sup>56</sup> Bamidbar 32

<sup>57</sup> Haggadah haShir v’haShevach

Further, the Jews knew when they would leave Egypt, and they could have prepared leavened bread beforehand, had they chosen. It appears that matzah was a planned component of the fleeing Jews' diet. But if matzah was not an accidental element of the original Seder, we must ask ourselves: What was its purpose, its message, for the Jew departing Egypt?

## We descended to Egypt to learn Trust

Rav Sorotzkin asserted that nations normally begin their existence on their own lands, in peace and harmony. The Jews, in contrast, gasped, opened their eyes and inhaled their first breaths as a nation of slaves in the domain of their oppressors.

The talmudic sages were also troubled by this odd origin of the Jewish national experience, and offered numerous suggestions to justify the Divine plan:

*Rabbi Avahu asked, citing Rabbi Elazar: Why was Avraham Avinu punished, and why were his descendants enslaved in Egypt for 210 years? Because he enlisted talmidei chachamim... And Shemuel said: Because he challenged Divine attributes... And Rabbi Yochanan said: Because he kept people from entering the Divine presence...*

**Nedarim 32a**

אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי אלעזר: מפני מה נענש אברהם אבינו ונשתעבדו בניו למצרים מאתים ועשר שנים? מפני שעשה אנגרייא בת"ה ... ושמואל אמר: מפני שהפריז על מדותיו של הקב"ה ... ורבי יוחנן אמר: שהפריש בני אדם מלהכנס תחת כנפי השכינה.  
**גדרים לב.**

Moshe Rabbeinu asked the same question, and offered an answer of his own:

*Moshe was wondering, 'What sin did the Jews commit, to be uniquely enslaved?' When he heard [Datan]'s words, he said, 'They have harmful speech in their midst! How will they ever merit redemption?' And so he said, 'Now, the matter is known' – Now I know why they are enslaved.*

**Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 1:30**

היה משה מהרהר בלבו ואומר מה חטאו ישראל שנשתעבדו מכל האומות, כיון ששמע דבריו אמר לשון הרע יש ביניהן היאך יהיו ראויין לגאולה לכך אמר אכן נודע הדבר עתה ידעתי באיזה דבר הם משתעבדים.  
**שמות רבה א:ל**

And Rav Zalman Sorotzkin presented his own explanation, based on Shlomo haMelech's words:

*Always love friends, and a brother will be born in times of trouble.*

**Mishlei 17:17 (as explained by Rashi)**

בכל עת אהב הרע ואח לצרה יולד:  
**משלי יז:יז**

The forebears of the Jewish people lacked unity, and lacked a sense of obedience to a ruler; this deficiency was planned, a trait vital for their break from Mesopotamian and Canaanite society. Had Avraham felt too strong a bond to his family and surroundings, he would never have been able to leave his land and challenge the ideals with which he had been raised. Had Yitzchak and Yaakov felt attached to their neighbors, the earliest seeds of the Jewish people would have been absorbed into the tribes among whom they lived. Yosef and his brothers clearly lacked trust and

obedience; indeed, the history of Esav's monarchy is biblically juxtaposed with the sale of Yosef, highlighting the social cohesion we lacked, and others possessed.

But the rebellion of those early years was not appropriate for building an enduring nation, and so HaShem brought the Jews to Egypt and burdened them with slavery, that they might learn to accept a master. The social strife of their national gestation would not serve creation of a landed society, and so HaShem immersed the Jewish people into a cauldron of suffering, so that brothers would be born in times of trouble.

This, suggested Rav Sorotzkin, is why Avraham does not react with horror at the news that his descendants will be made to suffer in a foreign land. Avraham understands the need for this experience, the national apex which requires this national nadir.

## The significance of matzah for them

This may explain why HaShem insisted that the Jews eat matzah at their original Seder: Matzah is a physical symbol of the powerful bonds that that come with trust.

In creating matzah, we combine two representatives of division, flour and water:

- Flour, with its lightweight granules, is the epitome of division – it blows with the wind and scatters in every direction.
- Water flows freely and apart, and so demonstrates division of its own; HaShem's choice of this tool to punish the divisive generation of the Flood, and the Egyptians who created internal strife by taking advantage of a minority, was particularly ironic.

When we combine the divided flour and water, we create a material that coheres and forms a dense unit. Wait too long and the dough will inflate outward and become chametz, but bake it immediately and you have a clear representative of the unity the Jewish people required. This message was crucial for the Jews who would leave Mitzrayim.

## The significance of matzah for us

The Yom Tov of Pesach, in every generation, highlights the importance of the Tzibbur. We offer the Korban Pesach, which is identified as a *korban tzibbur*, a communal korban, even though it is brought by individual families. Each Jew is responsible to take membership in a specific Korban Pesach, to establish and demonstrate his commitment to a group of people. Indeed, one prominent view among the tannaim was that a Jew was not permitted to bring a private Korban Pesach; he was required to share with others.<sup>58</sup> This is the message of communal trust, leading to peace, unity and blessing.

In our own era, when we cannot yet bring the Korban Pesach, we retain a reminder of that unity through our matzah and its cohesion. And so the Jew of every generation must mention matzah, and remember the trust it symbolizes.

May we soon learn the lessons of our matzah, and so merit to eat it in our groups along with the fire-roasted Korban Pesach, atop maror, at the site of the rebuilt Beit haMikdash.

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<sup>58</sup> Pesachim 99a

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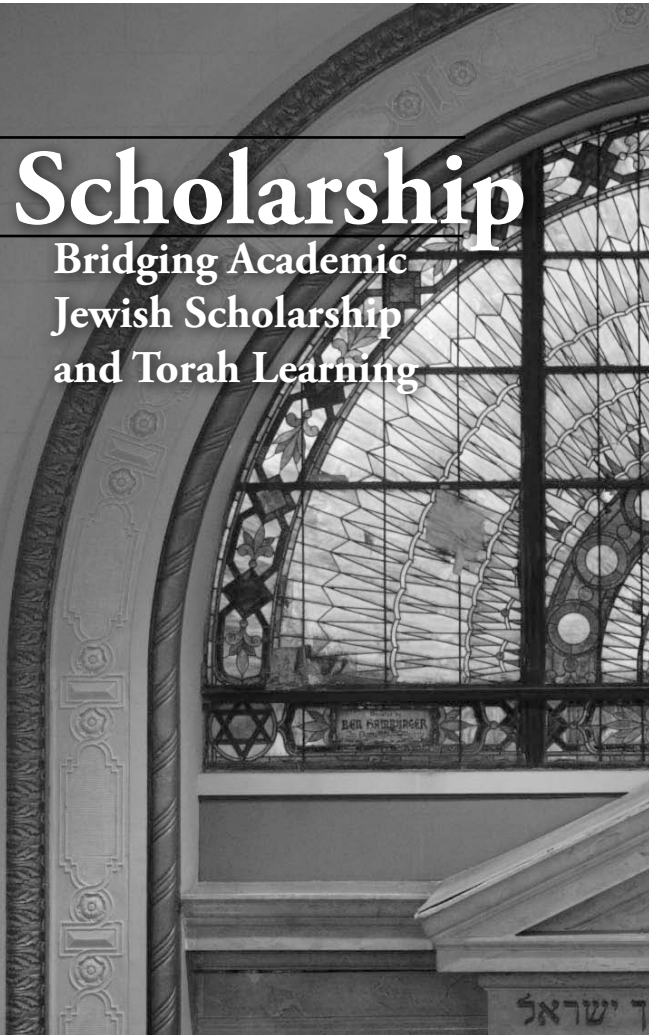
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**Professor**  
**Smadar**

**Rosensweig**  
*The Interface of Pshat, Chazal, & Parshanut: The Model of Benot Zelaphchad*

**10:30am**  
**Rabbi Hayyim Angel**  
*Avigayil and David: The Role of That Narrative in Sefer Shemuel*

**Rabbi Shalom Carmy**  
*Halakha and Rape: Three 20<sup>th</sup> Century Perspectives on One Rambam*

**Rabbi Daniel Feldman**  
*Bound by Time? Women and Sefirat Ha'Omer*

**Mrs. Nechama Price**  
*Strong or Weak? Women in Tanach*

**11:30am**  
**Rabbi Mark Dratch**  
*Love, Honor and Obey? Marital Relations and Relationships in the Talmud*

**Rabbi Shmuel Hain**  
*Family Redeemed and Marriage Sanctified: An Overview of Seder Nashim*

**Dr. Aaron Koller**  
*Rabbinic Readings of a Radical Book: Esther in Hazal*

**Mrs. Shoshana Schechter**  
*Reflections on the Mirrors of Mitzrayim: Looking Forward to Make Change*

**12:30pm**  
**Rabbi Yosef Blau**  
*Halakhic Responses to the Changing Role of Women in Society*

**Rabbi Benjamin Blech**  
*If Brit Milah is the Sign of our Covenant with G-d, What About Women?*

**Mrs. Yael Leibowitz**  
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