

Yachatz: Superfluous or Significant?

Yachatz has long troubled me. While it seems simple at face value and it seems to get lost in the gallimaufry of Seder activities, behind Chad Gadya, it's perhaps the strangest thing we do at the Seder. Why do we break the matzah? On Shabbos and Yom Tov, we are so careful about using only whole challoos or matzahs for *lechem mishneh*, why not tonight? And more troubling — why do we need a ceremony to break the matzah? We don't have a ceremony of putting the wine or the silverware on the table? Or for that matter placing the three whole matzahs initially on the table! Clearly, there are certain things that are preparatory stages that need to be done before we can even begin the Seder, putting a tablecloth on the table for example, so why don't we simply use one of the broken matzos in the box instead of breaking a perfectly good whole one?

Furthermore, on all other nights of Shabbos and Yom Tov, we have two loaves — why do we have three matzahs to begin with? Additionally, why do we break the middle matzah? What's wrong with the top or the bottom? And why is this matzah used for the *afikoman*? Do we just need to do something with it or is there a more intimate, closer connection? And why the bigger piece for the *afikoman*? Finally, why do we then hide the *afikoman*?

It seems that *yachatz* is more than just



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a preparatory stage for the Hagada and the mitzvos that follow, but it is in fact the great divide that informs, influences and inspires the very nature of the Seder night.

The concept and significance of using a broken matzah on Pesach emerges from the Gemara, *Pesachim* 115b, where the Gemara expounds upon the term the Torah used to describe matzah — *lechem oni* — a poor man's bread- the Gemara says *ma darko shel ani biprusa* etc., just as a poor man normally eats only a piece not a whole matzah, so too, on Pesach, because it's called *lechem oni* — we use a piece instead of a whole.

It's now clear why we use only a piece instead of a whole on Pesach as we do on other holidays, but a new difficulty emerges. If the definition of bread on Pesach is a piece instead of a whole, why don't we use pieces exclusively and no whole matzahs on Pesach?

Taking a step backwards, what is the source that we use any whole matzahs? The Gemara states:

הכל מודים בפסח שמניח פרוסה בתוך שלמה
וברצת מאי טעמא לחם עני כתיב.
ברכות לט:

All opinions concur that on Pesach you put the broken piece of matzah inside a whole one and make hamotzi. What is the reason? Because the verse states "bread of affliction."

Brachos 39b

Clearly, both a whole matzah and a broken piece are used. Why this change in practice on Pesach?

The Rishonim explain that we make a compromise on Pesach. On the one hand, we need to use a whole matzah in order to satisfy the requirement for *lechem mishneh* as we do on every other Shabbos or Yom Tov. On the other hand it says *lechem oni*, teaching us that we need to use a piece as a poor man does. Therefore, we place the whole matzah and the piece together.

The details of this compromise however, are the subject of a dispute among the rishonim, and directly relate to understanding the issue of *yachatz*. The fundamental dispute is whether on Pesach you use one and a half matzahs or two and a half matzahs. According to most Rishonim, Rashi, Rashbam and Tosfos to *Pesachim* 116a, as well as

Rosh, *Pesachim* 10:30, you need two and a half matzahs. You use the broken piece for the bracha of *Achilas Matzah*, the aspect of the eating of the matzah that is unique to Pesach and you use the two whole matzahs for the bracha of Hamotzi. The aforementioned Gemara in *Brachos* seems to indicate that Hamotzi on Seder night can't be inferior to other holidays when we make the bracha on *lechem mishneh*, two whole loaves. In practice, this means we hold all of the matzahs during the first bracha of Hamotzi so that we have a full *lechem mishneh* with the top and the bottom and we drop the bottom one to focus on the broken piece during the second bracha of *achilas Matzah*.

However, the Rambam disagrees. In *Hilchos Chametz UMatzah* (8:6) the Rambam writes that you take two whole matzahs and break one of them (obviously not the middle one) and put the piece together with the whole and make the bracha of Hamotzi. The Rambam proceeds, in uncharacteristic style, to ask a question on himself: why don't you need two whole loaves, as is normally required on Shabbos and Yom Tov? The Rambam explains that since the Torah uses the term *lechem oni*, on Pesach we act like the poor man. Just like a poor man uses a piece, so too, we use a piece for Hamotzi on Pesach.

A fascinating *machlokes* thus emerges. According to Rashi, the halachic requirement of *lechem oni* is an added requirement to the standard *lechem mishneh* requirement and therefore, in order to satisfy both, we need to add a matzah. According to the Rambam, however, the two requirements are in fact conflicting and the requirement of using a broken piece on Pesach reveals to us that in fact there is no obligation to have *lechem mishneh* on Pesach.

Therefore, we have only one and a half matzahs.

The Vilna Gaon in his *Biur HaGra* to *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 473:4, points out that the Rambam is appealing in the sense that it is difficult to explain that *lechem oni*, the requirement to have poor man's bread actually requires us to use more matzah than usual. It certainly seems more logical to assume that it would decrease the number of matzahs we use from two to one. However, one must still understand according to the Rambam, if there is no requirement of *lechem mishneh* then why do we even need to have one whole matzah, just use two broken pieces and mimic the life of the poor man even more accurately?!

There is an additional *machlokes* between Rashi and the Rambam related to *yachatz* that may come as a bit of a surprise and we need to understand if it in fact relates to the previous *machlokes*. They in fact argue when to do *yachatz* (interesting that everyone seems to agree that it's irrefragable that we don't simply start out the night with a broken piece, and there must be a formal breaking of the matzah). The *Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim*, no. 473, explains that according to Rashi, the matzah is broken immediately prior to Maggid following *karpas*. The Rambam, however, disagrees. He writes that after you wash *netilas yadayim*, you break the matzah (*yachatz*) and only then do you make Hamotzi. You do *yachatz* after Maggid not before!

In truth, the Rambam's opinion is quite compelling. Once it is a given that we don't start off the night with a pre-broken matzah—wouldn't the most logical time to prepare it for use for *achilas matzah* be immediately prior to

eating it—why would we do it before Maggid? Maggid has nothing to do with the matzah. Why not wait until you need it and then break it and prepare it for the bracha on eating the matzah?

It appears that a fundamental *machlokes* exists between Rashi and the Rambam as to the function of *yachatz* vis-a-vis the obligation to have a broken matzah at the Seder. The Rambam understands that the obligation to have *lechem oni* is part of the mitzvah of eating the matzah. Therefore, we demonstrate the aspect of it being a poor man's piece after Rabban Gamliel's statement explaining why we have matzah, and immediately before we are going to eat the matzah.

Rashi, however, disagrees and understands that *lechem oni* is not a halacha that informs the nature of eating the matzah on the Seder night. Rather, it relates to the overall experience of the night, of reliving the experience of slavery and redemption. We relive the experience throughout Maggid. As such, when do we break the matzah? Not just right before Maggid, but before *Ha Lachma Anya* — the paragraph in which we announce that this is the bread that was eaten by our forefathers **in Egypt**. This is a very different reason than the one given in the Rabban Gamliel paragraph where we proclaim that this is the matzah that was eaten as our forefathers **left Egypt**, because they were hurried and unable to let the dough rise and could only eat matzah.

Both reasons for eating matzah are true and each has a different role in the Seder. The *machlokes* about when to perform *yachatz* is about which aspect of *lechem oni* we want to stress when we break the matzah.

The issue about the nature of *lechem*

oni seems to hinge on the second interpretation that Chazal derive from *lechem oni*. In the very same *sugya* (topic of discussion) where the Gemara states that *lechem oni* refers to a broken piece, the Gemara states that *lechem oni* refers to *lechem sheonim alav devarim harbeh*, the bread upon which many things are said. Rambam understands that both derivations relate solely to the mitzvah of eating matzah on the Seder night. In order to fulfill the mitzvah of matzah, we need to describe why we eat the matzah — as we do in the Rabban Gamliel paragraph — because we left Mitzrayim in a hurried manner. When eating the matzah, we also must fulfill the second *drasha* of taking a broken piece, like poor man’s bread. Therefore, the Rambam says that we break the matzah at the point immediately following Rabban Gamliel’s declaration before we make the bracha on the matzah because that’s when it becomes relevant. There would be no additional benefit to breaking the matzah before Maggid than if we did so before the seder!

Rashi also understands that the

two derivations work together but that *lechem sheonim alav devarim harbeh* refers to the Hagada — to the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (recounting the Exodus). We must recite the Hagada over matzah and the type of matzah upon which we need to recite the Hagada is the broken piece of matzah — the poor man’s bread. The broken piece of matzah relates to the experience of leaving Mitzrayim that is so essential to the Seder night. Therefore, the logical place to break the matzah is right before the Hagada and even more precisely, immediately before we say *Ha Lachma Anya*, where we actually describe how the matzah relates to the experience of being enslaved in Egypt and in the end being redeemed.

Why don’t we begin the night with the broken matzah? Why do we need a ceremony to break the matzah? According to both opinions, the breaking of the matzah is an essential part of the mitzvah because the Seder night is about experience. It is about reliving and appreciating the past. A ceremony highlights that it is not accidental that we have a broken

piece of matzah at the seder. It’s not because someone leaned too hard on the matzah while passing the karpas around the table, but because we need to demonstrate that there is an aspect of matzah as it relates to the night of the Seder that reminds us of our poor status in Egypt and to where we have risen.

This also explains why we use one or more whole matzahs together with the broken piece. It is not only because of the *lechem mishneh* aspect but because there is more to matzah than just the broken piece. We juxtapose the broken to the whole reflecting the dual nature of matzah — our poor status and our redemption.

We have now answered several of our questions, but we still have some questions remaining:

- Why do we break the middle matzah? What’s wrong with the top or the bottom?
- Why is this matzah used for the *afikoman*? Do we just need to do something with it or is there a more intimate, closer connection?
- Why the “bigger half”- or more

- Why do we break the middle matzah? What’s wrong with the top or the bottom?
- Why is this matzah used for the *afikoman*? Why the “bigger half”- or more precisely “bigger piece” for the *afikoman*?
- Why do we hide the *afikoman*?



precisely “bigger piece” for the *afikoman*?

- Why do we then hide the *afikoman*?

I would like to offer what I hope is not only a comprehensive answer for all of these questions, but a deeper level of understanding of all the questions we’ve asked and to understand how *yachatz* as a whole is in fact the great divide, an essential part of our Seder experience.

Certainly, there is a relationship between the two halves of the matzah. The smaller part we will use for the mitzvah of matzah and the larger part, we put away and hide for the *afikoman*, the climax of the seder, which stands instead of the korban Pesach and represents that *geulah* we hope and pray and yearn for. But the depth of the relationship and the journey from slavery to redemption needs to be better understood.

In his book entitled *The Pursuit of Perfect*, Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar explains that the path to happiness in life is not always the one we plan or wish for. We all hopefully have goals and aspirations — personally, communally and nationally. We have a picture in our mind’s eye of where we want to get to and what we want to achieve in life. We also all, presumably, want to live happy lives.

The crux of the book relevant to our topic is the role of failure in life. Nobody likes to fail or make mistakes in life, but different people react

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differently when things don’t go quite right. There are those perfectionists for whom failure has no role in reaching the pinnacle they are striving for. The ideal path to reach the goal is the shortest, most direct path — a straight line. Anything that comes up along the way and impedes progress towards the goal is unwelcome — it is an obstacle to reaching a goal.

But there can be someone else who has the exact same goal — no less ambition in life, but he or she understands that realistically, failure is an inevitable part of the journey — the “optimalist” (not optimist, but optimalist). He realizes that the optimal realistic journey is not a straight line, but rather some sort of imperfect irregular spiral that moves upward. While ultimately, this person will reach his or her goal, the knowledge that there will inevitably be deviations along the road is ever present. Success gives us satisfaction, but it is failures that make us flourish.

For the perfectionist, achieving the goal is the only thing that is of import. The process of getting there is meaningless. It is simply a necessary component of reaching the goal. The journey involves avoiding obstacles, mistakes and pitfalls that could slow down and get in the way of reaching the peak. There is no enjoyment in the process, nor can there be, because the only perceived source of happiness is reaching the milestone. The optimalist, who may very well be reaching and striving to the exact same goal differs in that he can value the journey as well. The path that leads to the destination can be filled with detours, some desirable, others not. But much of life is the journey, not the destination, and it is that which is learned, appreciated and taken in along the path that may have a larger

long-term effect on one’s outlook, one’s new goals or aspirations, than actually arriving at the destination.

Failure is not just inevitable on the road to success — it is essential to achieving success. We have two options in life: “learn to fail, or fail to learn.” But we don’t have a choice. We must learn to fail and pass that lesson on to the next generation as well.

The hand of G-d in this world is often hidden. We picture for ourselves as individuals or for our children a beautiful scene of serenity and happiness. We picture for Am Yisrael, on a national level, a beautiful serene peaceful destiny. Yet all too often, the reality does not match the picture. Things don’t go so perfectly or smoothly, there are speed bumps or even giant boulders thrown in our path that we could never have or would have wanted to imagine, but now the reality of life is that we must deal with what we are dealt. Why G-d does it we can never know, but that He wants to see how we learn from our failures or from obstacles we face is our responsibility and mission.

As a nation, just look at our Pesach story, the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Talk about an irregular spiraling pattern to eventually reach a destination! Forty years in the desert. Let’s put this in perspective. From Cairo, Egypt to Yerushalayim is 264 miles. Buffalo, NY is farther from Washington Heights than that, and neither Cairo nor Yerushalayim are border cities. How long should it have taken? A week, and if moving slowly a little longer. Yet it took 40 years! And whenever we are in exile, it’s the same thing. There’s a long journey, a painful one. Certainly our current exile from after the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash until today has seen

so many obstacles along the way: the Crusades, pogroms, the Holocaust, and terrorism. We are required to learn along the way as we journey confident that there is a destination, but the path Hashem has taken us on, somehow for our own good is not the short direct line, but a very circuitous one. If we choose to be the perfectionist and are unable to rise when stumbling along the way, our chance to have growth and *simchas hachayim*, a joy in life, is severely threatened. We need to be optimalist people who see the goal and yearn for it, but will adjust and learn at every step along the way.

Yachatz — We break the matzah to show that the path to geulah is not a perfect circle like a beautiful round matzah (or even a perfect square matzah). It has many breaks in it, it involves hardship, it involves difficulty and we are challenged at many different junctures along the path.

However, simultaneously, we need to show and express our reaction to those breaks. We take the broken part and we save it for the *afikoman*. The *afikoman* is the matzah that represents the korban Pesach. It represents our hopes for the future, *leshana haba'ah beyirushalayim*. But we still hide the *afikoman* because as much as we believe *be'emunah shleimah*, with full faith, that Hashem is orchestrating events in this world, that there is a plan and these obstacles are part of the journey that will bring about the ultimate redemption, how the plan comes together and how we'll merit reaching our destination is hidden.

Therefore, the piece of matzah reminds us that although our path in life may have breaks, Hashem is there guiding us in a hidden way and so we put that away for the future.

But we hide the bigger part. Why?

Because we express our realization that more in this life-long journey is hidden than revealed. The world at times seems so cruel. We seem to get closer and then we move farther. There is so much we don't understand so we save the piece and hide it to show that we realize it's all part of one journey, one story, one matzah, but the bigger piece is the one hidden from view.

Perhaps that is also why we break the middle matzah. It is that one that is hidden in the middle of the whole matzahs showing that even the revealed part of life, that which we see, has an element of unclarity and indecision. It's not hidden away like the *afikoman*, yet is covered by the other matzahs.

Yachatz is not an afterthought or merely a preparation for having a broken piece and an *afikoman* for the later stages of the Hagada. It, in fact, sets the tone for the entire night and carries within it the secret of Jewish success as individuals and our entire nation. It is the demonstration for all to see that the same pattern always repeats itself: that Hashem has a plan for us, one that we are not privy to the details, but our *emunah* and resolve in the knowledge that He is doing what is best for us keeps us going. It is the two elements of matzah, of *avdus*, the broken piece the bread our fathers ate in slavery in Egypt, and the *lechem sheonim alav devarim harbeh*, the bread that we ate in our redemption, that contains the secret to our current exile. The broken matzah symbolizes all the breaks in the path, but the bigger part, the clarity of redemption, is part of the very same mission but hidden away in that piece of *afikoman*, hopefully to be revealed *b'meheirah v'yameinu*.

