

Thoughts For Pre-Pesach  
Corona Diary #26: Time After Time  
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Jewish holidays recount seminal moments of Jewish history. These annual celebrations shape our collective memory just as they animate our common future. The celebration of our history creates eternal meaning for Jews across the generations and across the globe. As these celebrations are timeless and transcend time and place, we wouldn't assume that the weather of Pesach would be significant. Surprisingly, the Torah binds Pesach to the spring season; by designating that Pesach be celebrated during 'chodesh ha'aviv' or spring, the Torah tethers Pesach to a particular season. To ensure that Pesach coincides with spring, it is necessary to periodically adjust the Jewish calendar by adding an extra month. Synchronizing Pesach and spring is valuable enough to mandate calendar adjustment. It is striking that a seasonal backdrop should so deeply shape the celebration of Pesach- even to the point of altering the calendar. We would assume that a historical event such as Pesach should cycle independent of seasonal factors.

This twining of Pesach with the spring season, showcases that Pesach isn't merely a miracle of liberation but also a moment of national revival. Prior to our slavery in Egypt, we had already assumed our status as G-d's chosen, and our small nation had already launched its mission of representing G-d in our world. The initial success described in the book of Bereishit was stunted by our journey to Egypt and our descent into slavery. For more than two centuries of persecution, the Jewish 'project' went into hibernation. The Jewish spirit was broken by

Egyptian oppression as our people fell into national and historical irrelevancy. Suddenly, G-d revived this dream and restored our mission. This Pesach awakening revived ancient promises and reawakened a mission which had been slumbering for two centuries. Suddenly, Jewish history was once again alive and promising. For this reason, the Pesach revival occurred just as the revival of Nature began. During spring, Nature revives her strength and bounces back to life. The holiday of hope and vision occurred just as Nature herself became reinvigorated with life and vitality. This parallel between historical and natural revival must be forever maintained - even at the cost of calendar adjustment.

The 'spring renaissance' isn't merely a backdrop to Pesach or a prop to help us more deeply experience the restorative nature of Pesach. Readyng us for redemption in Egypt, G-d's first command was to establish a separate Jewish calendar- which would launch in Nissan and not in Tishrei. Living two parallel calendars creates two parallel 'modes' to our lives. We are all born of flesh and blood and all inhabit a concrete natural world governed by the natural order. This world feels very stable and unchanging. In the book of Kohelet, as he charts the endless and cyclical flow of water, Shlomo Hamelech comments upon the unchangeability of Nature: "all the rivers flow to the sea without the sea becoming full; to the place where the rivers flow the waters return".

By contrast, alongside our natural world, we also occupy a historical world- one that is very much affected by human decisions and behavior. The historical process isn't random but driven by moral values, and is constantly surging toward a better state- a condition we refer to as redemption. The timeline of history possesses a beginning and an endpoint. Redemptive history began the night of Pesach and leading up

to the launch, G-d established a parallel track of experience and a separate calendar history and of redemption.

These two realms- the realm of static nature and of dynamic history aren't unrelated. The events within the historical realm deeply impact the realm of Nature. As religious and moral history progresses and Man advances toward G-d, the natural world around him improves. Throughout history, human failure damaged our world- beginning with Man's first disobedience which plunged Nature into a diminished state. One day, Man will once again return to a more perfect religious state and the natural world will return to a more perfect state. The march of history impacts the state of our natural world. Pesach must overlap with the rebirth of Nature because the historical trajectory which Pesach drives will shape the natural world we inhabit. Pesach launches history and through this launch also awakens the spring of Nature. Pesach, more than any other holiday, reminds us of how historical/religious experience and general time experience mesh.

Annually, as the Pesach season begins, we sense a shift. Our imaginations turn to thoughts of past and present redemption just as our emotional state is released from the winter doldrums. This year, the Pesach and spring shift feels even more important. In general, our lives feel more meaningful when our time is partitioned rather than interminable or uninterrupted. For example, the partitioning effect of day and night creates a natural and healthy bio-rhythm, which frames humans experience. Typical daytime activities are separated from nocturnal activities and this segmentation creates order and organization. When this rhythm is unsettled - such as when we suffer jet-lag- our experience becomes discombobulated or cloudy. Healthy time-partitioning between night and day helps

us process our past experiences and reset our energies and ambitions toward our future experiences. In fact, in parshat Bereishit, the Torah presents planetary orbits as a manner of providing 'time-partitioning'. Without planetary orbit night would run into day and our experience would become blurred and fuzzy rather than sharp and segmented.

Shabbat provides an additional weekly time partitioning. The weekly suspension of our routine allows reflection and processing; Shabbat allows us to internalize the past week while reimagining the next week. Without this "break" the days start to bleed into weeks and the weeks into months. Continuous and undifferentiated life can become disorienting. Both daily bio-rhythm and Shabbat observance are divine gifts allowing us to partition our time into smaller more "manageable" units.

Holidays create further partitioning. Each holiday conjures a different past event and each holiday poses distinctive religious and historical lessons. Ideally, a holiday is transformative forcing us to pivot our routine and shift our imaginations to different themes and ideas. This shifting and resetting creates refreshed experience, without which our lives can feel endless and aimless.

This year I appreciate the value of the 'holiday-shift' even more. The arrival of Pesach has many of us startled: "didn't Pesach just happen a few weeks ago?". Sukkot feels like it was month ago and Chanukah as if it happened just yesterday. This pandemic has blurred our normal timelines. As our lives have become very monotonous, our ability to partition time and differentiate experiences has been diminished. Work schedules have shrunk, travel has disappeared, and our lives have become smaller and more unvaried. The past year

sometimes feels very indistinguishable and it is almost impossible to partition our past year into distinct experiences.

During this 'never-ending' year I am even more grateful for our holidays, which encourage me to pay attention to the calendar, experience the holiday shift and create partitions of time.

Hopefully, Pesach and spring will bring new vigor, refreshed hope and restored vision. Hopefully Pesach will help me sharply outline my life and my experiences.