



THE MITZVAH TO EAT MATZAH ALL SEVEN DAYS OF PESACH

There is a striking contrast between the initial nights of Pesach and their abundance of mitzvos and the remainder of the chag. The concentration of halachic expectations that frame the Pesach Seder create an immersive ritual experience that reveals many dimensions related to the broader theme of redemption. In contrast, the remainder of the chag entails a noted vacuum of unique mitzvos related to Pesach; only the central element remains to provide the underlying character of Pesach, which is the prohibition against consuming chametz. The only positive act that proactively infuses this period with a tone of Pesach is the voluntary consumption of matzah.

The eating of matzah on Seder night is adorned with all sorts of elements that elevate its majestic role in recreating the night of yetzias Mitzrayim: the prohibition of eating Matzah on erev Pesach (and perhaps beyond) in order to create an anticipatory excitement for its consumption; the enhanced obligation of *matzah shemurah*; the amounts of consumption required; and the accompanying *heseibah* (leaning) to dramatize the redemptive quality of the experience. In contrast, the consumption of matzah for the remainder of the chag seems to emerge as more of a pragmatic accommodation for the necessity of eating bread-like products on yom tov. Yet, the substance of matzah still projects the themes of freedom throughout the remaining days of

the chag. How are we to relate to this seeming ambiguity in the role of matzah for the rest of Pesach? Is it some sort of continued ideal engagement with a central mitzvah of Pesach? Does it diminish from its original significance to serving exclusively a practical halachic role in the consumption of bread-like foods on yom tov? Or is there some other perspective that views the consumption of matzah for the remainder of Pesach as unique in the broader landscape of our Pesach experience?

Matzah as a “Reshus”

The Torah, numerous times, explicitly characterizes the mandate to consume matzah on Pesach for seven days.

(Shemos 12:15, 12:18, 13:7, 23:15 and Devarim 16:3) In Devarim 16:8 we encounter an exception:

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצֹּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עֲצַרְתָּ
לֵה' אֲלֶקֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה.

For six days, you shall eat matzah and on the seventh day, it is a gathering for your G-d, you shall not do work.

The Gemara in *Pesachim* 120a, interprets this exceptional formulation as establishing a fundamental quality in the nature of the mitzvah:

תניא כוותיה דרבא ששת ימים תאכל מצות
וביום השביעי עצרת לה' אלקיך מה שביעי
רשות אף ששת ימים רשות מאי טעמא הוי
דבר שהיה בכלל ויצא מן הכלל ללמד לא
ללמד על עצמו יצא אלא ללמד על הכלל כולו
יצא יכול אף לילה הראשון רשות תלמוד לומר
על מצות ומרורים יאכלוהו.

The Gemara comments: It was taught in a baraita in accordance with the opinion of Rava: "Six days you shall eat matzot, and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 16:8). Just as eating matza on the seventh day is merely optional, i.e., there is no obligation to eat matza on the last day of Passover, but only to avoid eating leavened bread, as the verse states: "Six days you shall eat matzot," so too, eating matza during the first six days is optional. What is the reason that it is optional to eat matza on the first six days of Passover as well as the seventh? The seventh day of Passover is something that was included in a generalization but was explicitly singled out to teach. According to the rules of exegesis, it was intended to teach not just about itself but about the entire generalization. I might have thought that even the mitzva to eat matza on the first night of Passover is included by the above principle, and it too is merely optional; therefore, the verse states: "They shall eat it with matzot and bitter herbs" (Numbers 9:11).

Translation: The William Davidson Talmud (Koren-Steinsaltz)

The significance of designating the consumption of matzah during the remaining days of Pesach as a "reshus" (optional) for the remainder of Pesach is the subject of a dispute among the rishonim.

Some rishonim clearly view the consumption of matzah for the remainder of Pesach as devoid of any enhanced spiritual significance. It remains a pragmatic option for a holiday with a limited menu selection because of the constraints of the prohibition of chametz. The Rambam, in his *Sefer Hamitzvos* 158, only mentions the mitzvah to consume matzah on the first night of Pesach:

היא שצונו לאכול מצה בליל חמשה עשר
מניסן, יהיה שם כבש הפסח או לא יהיה. והוא
אמרו יתברך בערב תאכלו מצות.

That He commanded us to eat matzah on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan — whether there is a Pesach lamb or not. And that is His, may He be blessed, saying, "at evening, you shall eat matzot" (Exodus 12:18).

The *Sefer HaChinuch* 10 follows this pattern as well:

מצות אכילת מצה - לאכל לחם מצה בליל
חמשה עשר בניסן העשוי ממין דגן, (פסחים
לה, א) שנאמר (שמות יב יח) בערב תאכלו
מצות. ופרושו ליל חמשה עשר בניסן בין בזמן
שיהיה שם פסח, או בזמן שלא יהיה שם.

The commandment of eating matzah: To eat matzah-bread that is made from a species of grain on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan (Pesachim 35a), as it is stated (Exodus 12:18), "in the evening, you shall eat matzos." And the understanding [of "evening"] is the night of the fifteenth of Nissan — whether it be at a time when the Pesach sacrifice is present or whether it be at a time that it is not present.

The Meiri (*Pesachim* 92b) clearly formulates that there is no benefit to eat matzah the rest of Pesach:

וכבר ידעת שהמצה אין חיובה כל שבעה אלא
לילה הראשון בלבד הא שאר הימים כל שאינו
אוכל חמץ אוכל מה שירצה.

You should know that there is no obligation to eat matzah all seven days, rather just the first night. The other days, as long as we don't eat chametz, we can eat whatever we want.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 475) embraces this approach in stating:

אין חיוב אכילת מצה אלא בלילה הראשון
בלבד.

There is no obligation to eat matzah except for the first night.

The *Magen Avraham* 639:17 follows this approach in explaining why we don't recite a beracha when eating matzah the rest of Pesach:

מה שאין מברכין על מצה כל ז' היינו משום
שאינו מצוה באכילתו אלא שאין אוכל חמץ
משא"כ בסוכה.

The reason why we don't recite a beracha on matzah all seven days is that there is no mitzvah in eating it. The only mitzvah is not to eat chametz. This is not the same as sukkah [where there is a mitzvah to sit in the sukkah all seven days].

However, other commentaries on the Torah interpret the mitzvah differently. The Ibn Ezra, Shemos 12:15, writes that while we are halachically deferential in practice to the interpretation of the Gemara, in the *pshat* realm of Biblical interpretation, it remains clear that there is some obligation to eat matzah for the remainder of a holiday that commemorates the very freedom that matzah symbolizes.

The Vilna Gaon famously advanced a halachic middle ground. In

Maaseh Rav (185), a collection of the practices of the Vilna Gaon, it is recorded:

שבעת ימים תאכל מצות כל שבעה מצוה ואינו קורא רשות אלא לגבי לילה ראשונה שהיא חובה ומצוה לגבי חובה רשות קרי לה אעפ"כ מצוה מדאורייתא הוא.

"You shall eat matzah for seven days" — There is a mitzvah to eat matzah all seven days. The rabbis only called it "optional" because vis-à-vis the first night, which is obligatory, it appears as optional. When comparing a voluntary mitzvah to an obligatory mitzvah, the term "optional" is used. Nevertheless, there is a Biblical mitzvah to eat matzah [all seven days].

The Vilna Gaon suggests that the designation of *reshus* should not be interpreted literally. The Gaon argues that in comparison to the proactive mandate of Seder night, the consumption of matzah for the remainder of Pesach has a diminished status, which is formulated by Chazal as a *reshus*. However, in examining the consumption of matzah under such circumstances independent of that comparison, *reshus* actually means that while there is no obligatory Biblical commandment to eat matzah, there is a *kiyum*, a fulfillment of such a mitzvah if matzah is indeed consumed. According to the Vilna Gaon, there is a spiritual value to consuming matzah during the remainder of Pesach.

Rav Moshe Shternbuch, in his work, *Moadim Uzmanim* 1:90, suggests a conceptual difference in how we can

understand the mitzvah of matzah for the remainder of the week. One approach would view the *mitzvah kiyumis* (non-obligatory mitzvah) as an extension and echo of the original mitzvah. Instead of perpetuating the mandate to engage in the consumption of matzah, the Seder terminates that aspect of the mitzvah's identity, and moving forward there is a more diluted expression of the mitzvah as an optional opportunity for engagement in a *mitzvah kiyumis*. The alternative approach views the *mitzvah kiyumis* of consuming matzah for the remainder of Pesach as an entirely independent mitzvah. The distinction in the mitzvah's character as optional reveals that its underlying identity is fundamentally distinct from the original mitzvah of *achilas matzah*.

Rav Shternbuch asserts that the Rambam, who he argues is consistent with the position of the Vilna Gaon, holds that the mitzvah is indeed independent of the original mandate to consume matzah. For this reason, the particular halachic details that shape the mitzvah of *achilas matzah* on Seder night — namely that the matzah have a halachic status of *"lechem oni"* — are not required in the consumption of matzah for the remainder of the chag.

What emerges from this halachic analysis is a fundamental distinction in the mitzvah of matzah. The initial commandment of Seder night embraces a compelling, and qualitatively more demanding

experience of *achilas matzah*.

Once Seder night is complete, the mitzvah that follows is a standing opportunity to engage the very same action, devoid of the accentuated elements of *lishmah*, *lechem oni*, and reciting a bracha. How are we to understand the presence of these two mitzvos as defining elements of our Pesach experience? What is the true relationship between them, and how does that dynamic serve as a transformational context for our internalization of the values of Pesach?

Redemption is a complex reality. Yetzias Mitzrayim was an extraordinary moment of overt and revealed redemption for the Jewish people, and Seder night generates an obligation to re-experience that defining moment of our history.

The consumption of matzah on that night facilitates the internalization of the emancipating moments of yetzias Mitzrayim. The intentionality and specific character of the matzah, as well as the compelling obligation to engage it, all coalesce to create a spectacular moment affirming our personal connection to the extraordinary story of our redemption. However, Pesach does not end there. The notion of geulah lives within the historical and living consciousness of the Jewish people well beyond the overt moments of yetzias Mitzrayim. The paradigm of Pesach instills within us a capacity to recognize more subtle moments of geulah, even within the context of compromised circumstances of



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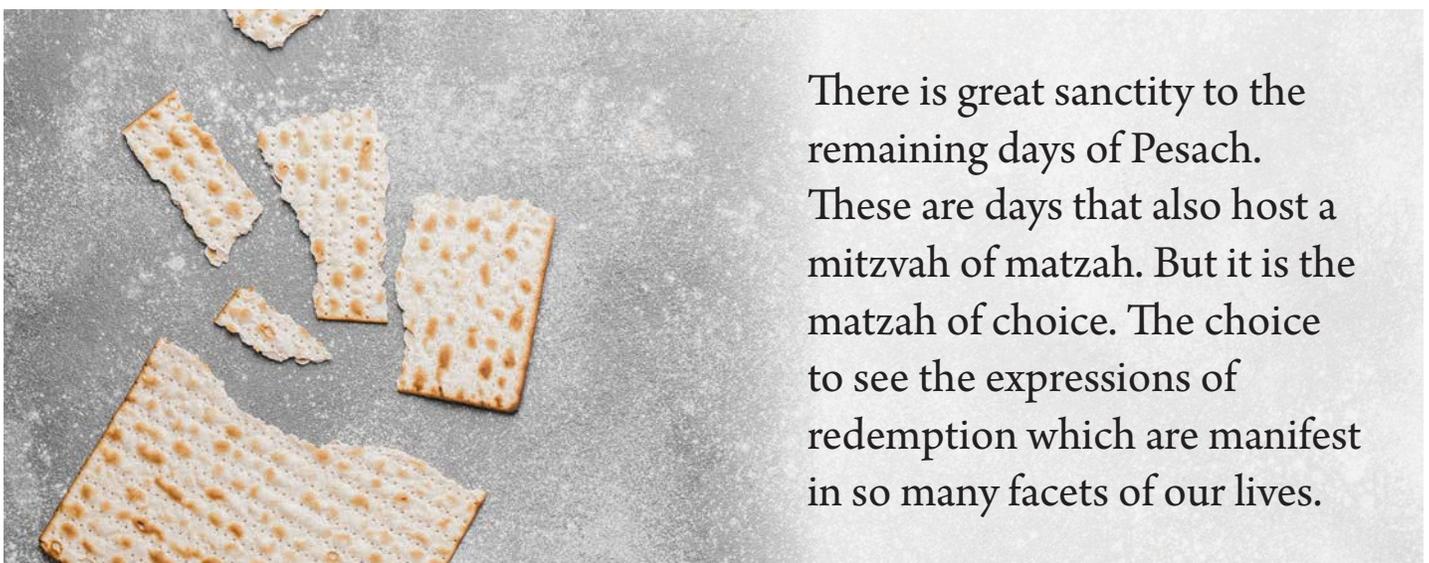
history. Not every redemption in life is as grandiose and transformative as yetzias Mitzrayim. Recognizing the presence of G-d in the momentum and flow of Jewish history, and the personal circumstances of our own lives, is the echoing lesson of Seder night. The remainder of Pesach asks of us not to recreate the majesty of yetzias Mitzrayim, but to embrace the ordinary moments of life and choose to discover the *kiyum* of matzah within that context as well. Devoid of the fanfare of Seder night, and its accompanying elevated halachic requirements, we eat the simplest piece of matzah and internalize its redemptive properties as a manifestation of our recognition that G-d's presence and providence is experienced in all moments of our journey.

Indeed, Seder night itself works to deliver this transition. We experience phenomenal momentum leading up to the crescendo of the Seder of Pesach, matzah, maror, and consuming the foods we are obligated to eat that night. Yet, after that stage, the night begins to assume a different tone.

The afikomen is hidden and must be discovered. Hallel emerges out of the experience of a typical yom tov meal. Eliyahu Hanavi, a prophetic character of mystery and hope arrives. Finally, the songs of Nirtzah express this very transition as well. The song “*Ki Lo Naeh*” begins with angels praising G-d, followed by *Adir Hu* which depicts the greatness of the Mikdash — a space of connection between the upper realms of heaven and the earth itself — followed by *Echad Mi Yodeyah*, which relates to the values and personalities of our people, and culminating with *Chad Gadya*, which relates to the historical events that have shaped our destiny. There is a clear descent from the upper realms of angels, culminating with the grounded realities of our historical journey. This culminating moment of the Seder deposits us at the precipice of the remainder of Pesach. A chag that strives to discover the redemptive presence of G-d, even in the ordinary realities of life. Hallel is truncated, the korbanos are consistent, and the very *kedushas hayom* of the day does not reflect anything transcendent

or extraordinary. Rather, there is a recognition that Pesach and geulah are not just about the great moments of miraculous redemption. They are also about discovering G-d's presence and guidance in all of our experiences in life.

There is great sanctity to the remaining days of Pesach. These are days that also host a mitzvah of matzah. But it is the matzah of choice. The choice to see the expressions of redemption that are manifest in so many facets of our lives. The choice to recognize and acknowledge G-d's presence in our lives. The choice to live as Jews of redemption, with the confidence and sense of historical responsibility, even in eras that lack the overt expression of G-d's presence in our lives. This is our *matzah kol shiva* (matzah for seven days). Our optional, but extraordinary quest to rediscover the sparks of redemption, which can be seen and internalized even in the darkest moments of our lives. To bring the redemptive world of matzah into the concealed world of reality.



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