

# PESACH #3

*by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky*

## **MATZAH: BREAD OF POVERTY, BREAD OF EMANCIPATION**

(The following Dvar Torah is based on a shiur covering the following sections of the Maharal that deal with the subject of matzah and redemption: Gevuros HaShem Chs. 36, 51, 60, and a section in Divrei Negidim.)

A common term used in the Haggadah to describe matzah is "lechem oni." It is commonly translated as "the bread of affliction," or "the bread of poverty," with the understanding that this is what poor people eat, and what the Egyptians fed the Jewish people as slaves. (See Ramban Devarim 16:2, and commentaries on the Haggadah.)

The Maharal disagrees with this interpretation, saying we have no source that the Jews ate Matzah while enslaved in Egypt. In fact, the verse indicates the opposite. "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt, free of charge" (Bamidbar 11:5). Then there is the verse (Devarim 16:3) "Don't eat leavened bread with [the Pesach offering]; seven days shall you eat...matzah, the bread of poverty, for in haste you left Egypt." If the Jews ate matzah as slaves, why is leaving Egypt in haste given as a reason for the commandment to eat it!? And why is bread of POVERTY associated with emancipation and redemption, when we usually associate freedom with wealth.

A poor person, who lacks all money and possessions, has nothing besides himself and his body, the basic minimum for existence. His being and identity, as a poor person, is independent of anything outside of himself and his essence. Matzah, too, has nothing besides the basic minimum for making up the dough, flour and water. If it has any yeast or any leavening, this adds something to the dough beyond the bare minimum, and it is not matzah, not bread of poverty.

Redemption means to leave the state of being controlled by others, independent of any external attachments. A slave is not independent, since he is attached to and controlled by his master. A wealthy person, too, is not independent, since his identity is the result of his attachment to his money and possessions, and can he be controlled by them.. But a poor person, having nothing but himself, stands completely separate and independent from anything outside of himself, and he portrays redemption and freedom.

Matzah doesn't represent a poor person. Rather it represents the process of going free from slavery, which is accomplished by removing any bonds or dependencies on things outside of oneself.

Severing those bonds is exactly the process of redemption.

Therefore, G-d commanded us to eat bread of poverty, matzah, on the night of the exodus from Egypt, because the matzah is composed of the minimum basics of flour and water, with nothing more added. Just as the poor person has nothing beyond his basic existence, on the night of the departure from Egypt, we eat the bread composed of the most basic ingredients, at the time when we are acquiring redemption and freedom, which means to leave the control of anything outside of our essence. It is for this reason that the Mitzvah cannot be fulfilled with "matzah ashira," since it has special liquids added, beyond the basics needed for the dough.

The verses on matzah are now understood as follows. "Seven days shall you eat...matzah, the bread of poverty, for in haste you left Egypt": Eat bread of poverty, the bread which stands independent of anything besides its essence. Why should this bread be eaten? Because you left Egypt in haste. Haste implies a process with no delay in time. This is the appropriate way for redemption, since a process delayed over time includes an addition to the essence of the process. True redemption must take place with no additions beyond the bare essence which is necessary.

The Jewish people didn't leave the bondage of Egypt through a natural, historical process, but rather through a Divine process, with direct emancipation by G-d Himself. While everything in the material world was created and exists within time, G-d transcends time, and the process of this redemption was done without the element of time. Therefore, chametz was prohibited, since it comes about through a process including time, while we are commanded to eat matzah, which comes into being without the inclusion of time.

Another verse which is now understood in a similar way. "For with a powerful hand did G-d take you out from this, and chametz shall not be eaten" (Exodus 13:3). Everything which operates with speed operates with power since speed can create power. Because chametz is made with a delay of time, it is not strong. Something strong and powerful is the result of a process without a delay of time, so matzah, made without any time delay, represents the power of G-d's redemption.

To summarize: A poor person is one who has nothing. It is a deficiency and a handicap in this world, since the material world is one of combination and connections, and its virtue is attained by increasing connections and acquisitions. However, simplicity and independence is a virtue in a system which transcends the material system. On this night, the Jewish people needed redemption, not from within the material system, but from a higher, transcendent reality. Therefore, they were commanded to eat matzah, the bread of poverty, which is a bread of simplicity, since it has only the basic components, with nothing combined with it...This concept of simplicity is illustrated by the High Priest who serves all year with clothes of gold, and on Yom Kippur enters the Holy of Holies in pure white clothes. For he is acquiring the highest level attainable, one of simplicity, lacking connection to anything beyond the essence, which is represented by white, the purest and simplest color. This is the meaning of the verse "Seven days shall you eat...matzah, the bread of poverty, for in haste you

left Egypt." Their departure in haste, with no process extending over time, indicated that they left in an elevated state, with the activity of redemption transcending time, in a supernatural way. Therefore, it was fitting to eat bread of poverty, which has no combinations, but is bread in its simplest and most independent form.

Of course a person needs possessions to exist in the material world in which we live, and one who has money is usually able to accomplish more than a person without money. This is what the Maharal means in the last paragraph when he describes the limitations of a poor person. But our possessions aren't our essence, and we can't let them define us. How often do we allow our financial success, our social status, or the opinions of others define us? None of these things are our essence. The matzah on Pesach is to teach us that redemption, true freedom, means to be free from all the external dependencies that control us. Matzah, as bread of poverty, teaches us to connect with our essence. Of course, all year we eat chametz rather than limiting ourselves to matzah, just as the Kohen Gadol doesn't go into the Holy of Holies all year, but serves in the main part of the Temple in gold clothes. We operate all year in a material world, one of chametz. But just as the Kohen Gadol's annual entrance into the Holy of Holies in the purest white represents the essence of his service all year, the week of Pesach with our diet of matzah, defines the essence of our interaction with the material world for the rest of the year. When we can be independent of everything except our essence, then all the other resources available to us can be used to enhance that essence, rather than create artificial dependencies and slavery. This is the difference between slavery and dependence on the one hand, and freedom and redemption on the other.

May we all merit freedom and full redemption in the very near future.

The class is taught by [Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky](#), Dean of [Darche Noam Institutions](#), Yeshivat Darche Noam/Shapell's and Midreshet Rachel for Women.

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