

PREPARING FOR PESACH, III: MARKET PRICE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

It is well known that the matsah that we eat on the night of Pesach represents the sudden freedom we experienced and the maror -- bitter herbs -- represent the hard bitter lives of bondage we suffered for 210 years. The question is why do we eat the matsah before the maror and why did Rabban Gamliel list the matsah before the maror in the list of 3 things one MUST say on Pesach night to fulfill the misvah of mageed -- telling our children about the miraculous salvation?

The Hafetz Haim said that the years of World War I were very difficult times. Many were uprooted from their homes, farms were destroyed and villages were left desolate by the battling armies. Money was scarce and many suffered the hunger pangs of poverty. When the war ended and market conditions began to normalize a wheat farmer came before the great sage for a blessing for success in his business.

"If you survived and did well in the war years certainly you do not need my blessing to do well financially in the more prosperous times of peace," said the Rabbi.

"Quite the contrary," replied the farmer. "There are really no better times for a man like me than war time. Food is scarce and people pay a hefty price as demand drives the prices upwards. Even poor quality produce moves quickly and without inspection. The hard times for me begin with the advent of peace and prosperity. The buyers become tougher, the competition stronger and the demand for quality higher."

"Woe," sighed the Hafetz Haim, "I wish we would learn from this situation. In times when the study of Torah and the performance of misvot are widespread, each misvah does not carry a high price in the "market". But when spirituality and misvah performance are weak every act shines brightly in the darkness and earns a high heavenly reward. Now is the time to increase our Torah learning and misvah performance."

This is the way that Rabbi Yisrael Salanter answered our question -- why is matsah mentioned before maror? When the time for the Exodus arrived Hashem saw no merit that would earn our people redemption. He, therefore, commanded the people to do 2 commandments --the blood of the Pesah lamb and the blood of brit milah -- circumcision. Could it be a people so steeped in idol worship [a nation that had sunk to the 49th level of spiritual impurity could earn total redemption with only two misvot? The answer is "maror"! Only because they were at such a low level and because our lives were so bitter and hard did Hashem place such a HIGH MARKET VALUE on our

two simple misvot and release us from bondage. The bitter maror was the cause of our salvation. It is not only a symbol of bitterness it too is a symbol of freedom and geulah.

TABLE TALK-- QUESTION FOR THE SEDER TABLE

In the Dayenu we say "Had He brought us before Har Sinai and NOT given the Torah to us -- it would have been enough." What good would it be to go to Mount Sinai and not receive the Torah?

The answer is that at Har Sinai the spiritual nature of the Jew was transformed from that of a normal human being -- to a special status afforded only to the Chosen People. The words of prayer, the good intentions and the performance of good deeds all took on a supernatural quality that only the Jewish people have because they alone accepted G-d's offer to keep the Torah. They alone said, "We will do and we will listen" and they alone were transformed into spiritual giants. All of this took place at Sinai BEFORE the Torah was actually given. If we had just gone through that transformation -- dayenu -- it would have been enough.

DID YOU KNOW THAT

On the day preceding Pesach [This year Tuesday March 25th] it is forbidden to eat any type of massah, which one might use to fulfill the misvah of eating matsah on the night of the Seder. This includes both matsah shemurah and regular matsah. Matsa meal should not be eaten even if it has been rebaked into cookies or cakes. If, however, it is fried or cooked into a matsa ball --it is permitted. [Source --Gateway to Halacha, P. 65- 66]

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