

MATZAH AND GUIDEPOSTS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Toward the end of the part of the Seder "Maggid," we find reasons given for why we have the commandments of Pesach (The Paschal sacrifice), Matzah (unleaven bread) and Maror (bitter herbs). (See I:11) The reason behind Matzah we find in the Hagadah is an elaboration of the one given in the Talmud (Pesachim 116b): The unleavened bread is [eaten] because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt, as it is said, "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt . . ." The Hagadah continues that when G-d redeemed our forefathers from Egypt, their dough did not have time to rise, as the verse says (Shemos 12:39) "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not remain, neither had they prepared for themselves any provision." We therefore eat Matzah on Pesach in commemoration of this event.

This reason is a bit perplexing. When G-d gave the commandment to the Jewish people to eat the Korban Pesach in Egypt, it was prior to the nation's departure. One part of the commandment was (Shemos 12:8) "And they shall eat the meat in that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread . . ." The consumption of unleaven bread, Matzah, was given to the nation even before they left, before the incident with the dough that did not have time to rise occurred. How, then, does the reason given by the Talmud and the Hagadah suffice to explain why we eat Matzo?

Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein answered this question with a parable: A man was walking the streets of an unfamiliar neighborhood. He was looking for a certain address, and he was clearly lost. He approached a man he saw on the street and asked him if he knew where the address was found. The man responded with the following instructions: "When you walk down this block, you will see a home with a large wall, with adornments on top. If you go to the right of this wall, you'll notice a small street running nearby. Go down this street, and you will find the address you are looking for." The lost gentleman thanked the man and proceeded to follow the directions. Upon reaching his destination, the man wondered "That big wall with the elaborate decorations was there to point me in the right direction. Now that I got to where I am going, why is it needed anymore?"

This man, Rav Epstein said, is obviously not very bright. We all know that the wall was not built to serve as a directional marker for this individual. A homeowner who wanted to enclose his property built it. As a prominent landmark, it happened to be used by many when wanting to give clear directions around the neighborhood. No one would posit that it was built solely to serve as a street sign or directional marker! So too, Rav Epstein said, is Matzah in a similar situation. G-d gave all of the

Mitzvos, the commandments, to us so that we have a means to do His will and merit reward. There may be deep underlying reasons for each commandment that we are not privy to and that we will not understand. However, that does not mean that Mitzvos cannot carry any other significance. Our forefather Avraham ate Matzah on Pesach, our Sages told us, some 400 years before the nation of Israel left Egypt. The Mitzvah to eat Matzo is a wall. It has a solid concrete basis for existing. Once G-d redeemed the nation from Egypt, a new significance was attached to Matzah. It serves as a reminder of our redemption, of the miracles that G-d performed for us. We often find streets named after famous people who traversed the subject area. Matzah, after the exodus, served as a street sign, directing us to memories that should inspire us to praise G-d. The Mitzvah to eat Matzah has more than one underlying reason. Nevertheless, as the Talmud points out, there is a very important reason attached to Matzah, and this reason we cannot forget on Pesach.