

PARSHAS METZORAH

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

The Tur, in Orach Chaim, writes that the Shabbos before Pesach is called Shabbat HaGadol because a great miracle was performed for Israel. Each family took a lamb, the god of Egypt, and tied it to their bedposts and kept it there for four days. They told the Egyptians that they were going to slaughter it on the fourteenth of Nisan as the korban Pesach, and the Egyptians were powerless to do anything to Israel. That year the tenth of Nisan was a Shabbat.

There are many questions that have to be raised in connection with this. We call the Shabbat before Pesach Shabbat HaGadol, even though in some years it does not fall on the tenth of Nisan. It seems that we should rather call the tenth of Nisan, irrespective of what day it falls, Ha'asiri HaGadol. We also know that there were many miracles done for Israel in Egypt before they were commanded to take the Pascal lamb. Those miracles were very great ones in which the forces of Nature were radically changed. Therefore those days should be known as HaGadol. If one says that we go after the end, then the day of Makat Bechorot, should be known as HaGadol.

'Yours, HaShem, is the greatness and the strength' (I Chronicles 29: 12), the greatness refers to the Creation and the strength to the Exodus from Egypt (Berakhot 58). The Creation was an act of pure Chesed as there was nobody or nothing in the world that was entitled to it. HaShem did everything in the world a Chesed that he diminished himself to create the world and everything in it. Chesed is known as 'greatness', the World is built on Chesed.

All the plagues that were visited on Egypt were only a judgment on the Egyptians, and Israel had no benefit from them. Now the merit of Justice, Midat HaDin, demanded that before they were redeemed, the people had to have performed some Mitzvot. Otherwise they would have been the same as the Egyptians. So G-d gave them the Milah and the Korban Pesach, so that their redemption would not be a Chesed to the Avot.

These two attributes, Chesed and Din are two contradictory merits. In the Ten Commandments in Shmot the reason for Shabbat is given as the Creation. The Ten Commandments that appear in Vetchanan gave the Exodus as the reason for Shabbat. So Shabbat has the ability to be Chesed and Din. It has the ability to contain these two contradictory and opposing merits. That's why the first time that Israel took the Pascal lamb, the tenth of Nisan, had to be on Shabbat; and that is why we call the Shabbat before Pesach Shabbat HaGadol, irrespective of whether it is the tenth day or not.

The Shem Mi Shemuel elsewhere sees a similar idea that can explain why the Shofar is blown on

Rosh Hashanah that falls on Shabbat in the Bet Hamikdash, while it is not anywhere else. True teshuva and atonement require both Din and Chesed. Only the Bet Hamikdash has this power to integrate the two opposing concepts.

Copyright © 2003 by Rabbi Meir Tamari and Project Genesis, Inc.

Dr. Tamari is a renowned economist, Jewish scholar, and founder of the Center For Business Ethics (www.besr.org) in Jerusalem.