

CHAGIM U ZEMANIM - SHABBAT HAGADOL AND PESACH

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

The Tur in Orech Hayim writes that the Shabbat 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 doorposts and kept it there for four days. They told the Egyptians they were going to slaughter it on the 14th of Nisan and the Egyptians were powerless to do anything to them. That year the 10th 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 10th of Nisan. It seems we should rather call the 10th of Nisan, irrespective of what day of the week it falls, Ha'asiri HaGadol. We also know that many miracles were 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 and shown to be powerless before HaShems' will. Therefore, those days should be known as HaGadol; alternatively, if we wish to go to the end of everything, then the day of Makat Bechorot, should be known as HaGadol.

'Yours, HaShem, is the greatness and the strength' (1 Chronicles, 29:12); the greatness in the verse refers to the creation, while the strength refers to the Exodus from Egypt (Brachot 58). The act of creation was an act of pure chesed as there was nobody or nothing in the world that was entitled to such an act. HaShem did a chesed in that he diminished himself to create the world and everything in it. Chesed is known as greatness, and the world is built on chesed.

All the plagues that were visited on Israel were only a judgment on the Egyptians as 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. Without these, they would have been the same as the Egyptians, and so there would be no justification for their redemption. So God gave them milah and the chorbah Pesach, so that their redemption would not only be a chesed to the Avot.

These two attributes, chesed and din, are two contradictory merits, but Shabbat has the ability to contain these two contradictory and opposing merits. In the Ten Commandments in Shmot, the reason for Shabbat is the Creation, whereas in Ve Etchanan the reason given for Shabbat is the Exodus. So Shabbat is both chesed and din. That is why the first time that Israel took the Pascal lamb, the 10th 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 10th day or not.

The Shem MeShmuel elsewhere sees a similar idea that can explain why the shofar is blown on Rosh HaShannah that falls on Shabbat, only in the Beit HaMikdash, whereas elsewhere the shofar is not blown on Shabbat. True teshuva and atonement require both din and chesed. Only the Beit HaMikdash has the power to integrate these two contradictory and opposing concepts.

PESACH.

'It was necessary to instruct them to take the Pascal Lamb 4 days before slaughtering it because Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were without mitzvot- even as it is written (Yechezkiel, 17:7) 'but you were naked and bare' -so

Hashem gave them 2 mitzvot to busy themselves with, the blood of korban pesach and the blood of milah' (Rashi quoting the Mechilta).

Why was it necessary to mention milah that was only performed on that night? Why was it necessary for them to busy themselves with the care of the lamb for 4 days and insufficient for them only to visit it as is the case in Pesach dorot? Why was the commandment to take the lamb on the 10th given to Moshe on Rosh Chodesh, whereas the actual work and care connected with it only started on the 10th?; [This would be correct according to Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel who taught that we should study the laws of Pesach 2 Shabbatot before Pesach but not according to the Chachamim who say that one asks and teaches the laws from a month before].

Understanding the essence of the two mitzvot, mila and korban pesach and their relationship to the redemption from Egypt will help to clarify our problem as well as how busying themselves specifically with those 2 would help them merit redemption as the Mechilta teaches.

The Zohar teaches us that when Israel said they remembered the food that they ate free of charge in Egypt, they were referring to free of mitzvot. Now we know that we were slaves to Pharaoh and one cannot serve 2 masters simultaneously so they were free of the yoke of Heaven; that is fear of Hashem like the fear of a king. Pharaoh's oppression of us weaned us from recognizing the Lordship of Hashem and that led us to idolatry, the serving of others in stead of Him. However, we were subject to a hard king, Pharaoh, who ruled over a hard people, Egypt, and they were immoral, led by their animal instincts and given over to unbridled lusts, so they brought about the subjection of Israel to desires and lust, in addition to the idolatry.

When Hashem wanted to redeem Israel He gave them the 2 mitzvot to busy themselves as counter-weights to both idolatry and immorality.

The korban Pesach that corresponds to worship through fear, since in bringing the korban a person is required to see himself as a servant of Hashem and take upon himself the yoke of Heaven. The Avnei Nezer taught that when we eat the Pesach, that is from on High we are showing that we are like the eved whose whole sustenance is dependent on his master (Yoreh Deah, Section 474, subsection 12). That mitzvah was the antidote to the substitution of idols for the Kingship of Hashem

and rejection of the yoke of Heaven that they had been brought to by Pharaoh. The lamb was the god of Egypt and for them to eat its flesh was an abomination to the Egyptians. When they took the lambs on the 10th of Nissan, kept them tied to the legs of their beds and busied themselves with looking after them, the noise caused by those lambs and the public attention to their act, was an open rebellion against the kingship of Pharaoh.. Once having made that declaration of rebellion and the contrary acceptance of Hashem's rule during the 4 days, they warranted eating the korban Pesach.

Shem Mi Shmuel, Haggadah Shhel Pesach, Pekudei- Hachodesh 5675.

Milah was the antidote to the immorality and hedonism that they had gained from the Egyptians. Milah is essential for one to be allowed to eat of the Korban Pesach. This is because the Pesach is Avodah MeiYirah and that is incomplete teshuva; the removal of the orlah demonstrates that we are accepting His Yoke with simcha and love.

The 10 days that they waited between the taking of the lamb and its slaughter correspond to the 10 days of teshuvah between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During those days, each day we intensify our self- examination, increase our dedication to repentance and accept His yoke as King, thereby being worthy of atonement. So, Israel in Egypt, too, had 10 days to intensify and to strengthen both their yirah and their ahavah and so to merit being redeemed.

Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Meir Tamari and Torah.org.

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