

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLVII: Re'eh (Deut. 11:26–16:17)

Essay 8. Why is matzah called the bread of affliction?

"לא-תאכל עליו חמץ שבועת ימים תאכל-עליו מצות לחם עניי פי בחפזון" וכו' "למען תזכר" וכו' "כל ימי חייך". קשה אם המצה זכר לחירות ומשום הכי נאכלת בהסיפה היפה המרור, אם פן למה נקראת לחם עוני? ועוד דמפשט הפתוב נראה שנקרא "לחם עני" בשביל "כי בחפזון" ומה ענין חפזון עם לחם עוני? ועוד שנקראה שחייב לזכור יציאת מצרים "כל ימי חייך" בשביל "כי בחפזון" וכו' הא אם לא הנה בחפזון לא היו חייבים?

“You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread [matzah], bread of affliction—for in haste you departed from the land of Egypt—so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life” (Deut. 16:3).

Question 1: **A difficulty is that if the matzah is a remembrance of freedom, and because of that it is eaten while reclining—which is the opposite from the bitter herbs [maror], which are not eaten while reclining—if so, why is [matzah] called the bread of affliction?**

Question 2: **Also, from the plain meaning of the Scripture, it appears that it was called “bread of affliction” because “for in haste you departed,” and what connection is there between haste and it being bread of affliction?**

Question 3: **Also, it appears that one is obligated to remember the Exodus from Egypt “all the days of your life,” because “in haste you departed;” but if it had not been in haste, would one not have been obligated to remember the Exodus all the days of his life?**

ומצאנו במכילתא על פסוק "ונאכלתם אתו בחפזון" יכול אף לעתיד לבא יהיה בחפזון תלמוד לומר כי לא בחפזון מצאו וכו'.

We found in the Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:11:1 on the verse, “This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly: it is a Passover offering to the L-rd” (Ex. 12:11): Is it possible that even in the Future to Come,¹ it will be [eaten] hurriedly? We learn [otherwise], as it is stated, “For you will not depart in haste” (Isaiah 52:12).

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¹ This includes the Messianic era and the period after the Resurrection of the Dead.

ופירוש שם המפרש כי הענין ידוע שיש חמשים שערי בינה, ובטומאה יש גם כן חמשים שערי טומאה, כי "גם את־זה לעמת־זה עשה" וכו'. ומשה זכה במ"ט שערי בינה כדאמרין על פסוק "ונתתסרהו מעט" וכו'. וישראל במצרים כבר נכנסו במ"ט שערי טומאה ואם היו נכנסים חס ושלום בשער החמשים לא היה להם תקנה, כי בהיות הגאולה על יד משה רבינו עליו השלום לא היה יכול לעמוד רק כנגד המ"ט אבל לא היה יכול לעמוד נגד השער החמשים.

The commentator explained there,² that the matter is known that there are 50 gates of understanding,³ and with regard to spiritual impurity there are also 50 gates of spiritual impurity, because "[G-d] has made the one as well as the other" (Eccl. 7:14).⁴ Moses merited 49 gates of understanding, as it is said on the verse, "You have made him little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty" (Ps. 8:6).⁵ Israel while in Egypt had already entered into the 49th gate of spiritual impurity,⁶ and if, G-d forbid, they had entered into the 50th gate of spiritual impurity, there would not have been any remedy for them. That is because at the dawn of the redemption by Moses, our rabbi, peace be upon him, he was only able to stand up to the 49th gate of spiritual impurity, the counterpart of which was the 49th gate of understanding that he had attained. But as he had not attained the 50th gate of understanding, he was not able to stand up to the 50th gate of spiritual impurity. Thus, at that point it became urgent for Israel to leave Egypt, and to leave in haste, before they entered the 50th gate of impurity.

ואם תאמר, ומה צורך להפזון הזה, והלא אף אם היו נכנסים בשער החמשים, היה יכול הקב"ה לגאלם כי מי יעכב על ידו? ויש לומר שאם היתה גאולתם על ידי הקב"ה היתה גאולת עולם ולא היתה אחריה עוד שעבוד כמו שיהיה לעתיד לבא. ואברהם בירר לו מלכיות לטובתם של ישראל כדי שינצלו מגיהנם, ואם פן הוכרח ההפזון כדי שיהיו לישראל גלויות אחרות עכ"ל בקיצור.

You might say, what need is there for this haste, for even if they had entered into the 50th gate of spiritual impurity, wouldn't the Holy One, Blessed be He, have been able to redeem them, for who can impede His hand? It can be said that if their redemption had been by the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, they would have been redeemed forever, and there would not have been any servitude afterwards, as the Future to Come will be free of servitude. In another midrash, we learn Abraham chose for himself [that Israel would in the future be subjugated by four] kingdoms for the good of Israel, in order that they be rescued from Gehenna, i.e., that punishment by exile would be preferred to Gehenna.⁷ If so, the haste is

² The translator doesn't know if Zera Shimshon refers to a commentary on the Mechilta, or what source he is referencing.

³ This is stated in Rosh Hashana 21b and Nedarim 38a.

⁴ The Kabbalists recognize that the gates of spiritual impurity are parallel to the gates of understanding, and therefore there must be 50 gates of spiritual impurity.

⁵ Rosh Hashana 21b: "Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all of them were given to Moses, except for one." See also Nedarim 38a.

⁶ Zohar Chadash, Yitro 3 discusses that Israel had reached the 49th gate of impurity; also Midrash Tehillim (Shocheh Tov), 12:3.

⁷ Midrash Gen. Rabbah 44:21: "Shimon bar Abba in the name of Rabbi Yochanan said, 'Four things [G-d] showed [Abraham]: Gehenna, and [the] kingdoms [that would conquer Israel], and the giving of Torah, and the Temple. He said to him, "As long as your children occupy themselves with [the latter] two, they will be saved from [the former]

necessary in order that there would be other redemptions for Israel. These are his words in shortened form.⁸

ומעתה שפיר יובן הפתוב, אמת הוא שהמצה רמז לגאולה אבל הואיל שהיתה בחפזון ונה רומז שיהיו להם גלויות אחרות, לכן נקרא "לקחם עוני" מהטעם "כי בחפזון" וכו'. ולמה יצאו בחפזון? הלא אף בלא חפזון היה יכול הקב"ה לגאולם? ומירץ "למען תזכר" וכו' "פל ימי חייך", שאם היו נגאולים על ידי הקב"ה לא היה להם גלות לכפר עון. ואם חטאו היו מתים בלא זמנם וכדאמרין בפרק ד' דייבמות לא זכה פוחתין לו, ואם בן לא היה יכול אדם לזכור יציאת מצרים פל ימי חייך שיהי בשביל חטאיו היו מתקצרים שנותיו, מה שאין בן עתה שיש הגלות. והגלות הוא לכפרת עון אין צורך שיתקצרו הימים, ומשום הכי, יכול לזכור יציאת מצרים פל ימי חייך.

Answer 1: **Now the Scripture is well understood: The truth is that the matzah hints at the redemption from Egypt, but [the redemption] was in haste** before Israel could fall to the 50th level of spiritual impurity, from which Moses could not save them. **This hints that they will have the need for other redemptions** in the future, because otherwise G-d could have waited until they fell to the 50th level of spiritual impurity, and rescued them by His own hand. But that would have precluded further exiles or redemptions, which are important as a means of atonement for sins. **Therefore, we see that [matzah] is called the bread of affliction**, because it hints that there will be further exiles and redemptions.

Answer 2: Likewise, we can answer the second question, the connection between matzah and “**because in haste** you departed from the land of Egypt” was the need to redeem Israel quickly, before they fell to the 50th level of spiritual impurity.

Answer 3: **Why did they go out in haste?** How is that related to remembering the exodus from Egypt all the days of one’s life? **Even if they had not been in haste, wouldn’t the Holy One, Blessed be He, have been able to redeem them? The solution is “so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life.” For if they had been redeemed by the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, they would not have any exile to atone for sin. If they would sin, they would have died before their time, and as it says in the fourth chapter of tractate Yevamot (50a), “if he is not deserving, [G-d] reduces his [lifespan].”⁹ If that is so, a man would not be able to remember the exodus from Egypt all the days of his life, because of his sins, his years will be shortened, something that is not the case now, as we indeed have the exile. Thus, the exile is to atone for sin, so there is no need for the days to be shortened, and because of this, he is able to remember the exodus from Egypt all the days of his life.**

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two. If they neglect [the latter] two, they will be punished by [the former] two.” [G-d] said to [Abraham]: “Would you rather that your children descend into Gehenna, or into the [subjugation of] the kingdoms?” ’ Rabbi Chanina bar Papa said, ‘Abraham himself chose [subjugation to the] kingdoms.’ Rabbi Yudan, and Rabbi Idei, and Rabbi Chama bar Rabbi Chanina said, ‘Abraham chose Gehenna, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, chose [subjugation to the] kingdoms for him.’ ”

⁸ The translator doesn’t know whom the Zera Shimshon is quoting.

⁹ Yevamot 50a: “If he is deserving, [G-d] completes his [allotted lifespan]. If he is not deserving, G-d reduces his [lifespan]; this is the statement of Rabbi Akiva. [Rabbi Akiva assumes one cannot outlive one’s preordained allotted lifespan.] The Rabbis say: If he is deserving, [G-d] adds years to his [lifespan].”