

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



VAYIKRa

There's Power in the Matza

In the mid '60s, when I was in high school and slowly becoming observant, I used to spend my Erev Pesachs in Brookline, Mass. baking Matza with Reb Levi Yitzchak Horowitz (1921-2009), the Bostoner Rebbe. Well, really we baked, and he sang Hallel, for he was a Levi, and just like his ancestors in the Beit HaMikdash, he sang Hallel while the service of Erev Pesach took place. Back then it was the offering of the Paschal Lamb; nowadays (at least until we rebuild the Temple) it's baking Matzot L'SHEIM MATZOT MITZVA.

It is very special baking Matza, Erev Pesach after Mid-day, when the prohibition of CHAMETZ has taken effect. It's even better when that is the very Matza you consume for MOTZI-MATZA at the Seder. So, what is the importance of the MATZA that we, sort of, give it the place of honor at our annual reliving of Y'TZI'AT MITZRAYIM (the Exodus)?

Now that's a complicated question, because we very publicly refer to the Matza twice at the Seder in almost contradictory ways. At the very

beginning of the Seder we declare that it is: HA LACHMA ANYA ('the bread of affliction'). However, deep into the MAGID section of the evening, at perhaps the climax of the narrative, we explain: This Matza, which we eat, is for what purpose? It is because the dough of our ancestors didn't have sufficient time to rise before God was revealed and delivered them!

So, we reach a conundrum! Does the Matza represent the servitude or the redemption? Actually, there is a verse supporting each contention. In Sh'mot (12:17), we read: You shall observe the Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt. In D'varim (16:3), we read: You shall not eat Chametz with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat Matza, bread of distress. There you have it! Proof for both statements.

Our festival is Chag HaMatzot, but which aspect of the Matza are we declaring? Let's start from the easier side, according to the Maharal MiPrague: Matza is called the bread of poverty [LECHEM ONI], the opposite of enriched [ASHIRA]... And that is because a poor person has nothing besides himself; he does not have money, but only himself and his body. So, too, with Matza, when it only has the essential dough - water and flour - in this way, it is the bread of poverty.

The Rav adds to this picture: Matza symbolizes the trust, boundless and unqualified, which the Jews placed in God on that night in Egypt. Matza represents an act of surrender and unconditional commitment to God, blind obedience to Him and compliance with His word. This faith defied all rational standards... It is the naive approach of the child, a commitment based not on a rationally explicable reason, but an inner, intuitive, emotional, inexpressible experience (Festival of Freedom, p. 63).

That's Matza, the simple symbol of our poverty, paucity and purity. But isn't there another Matza, more complex and nuanced? Definitely! It's the B'nei Yissaschar who describes it: The philosophers have already explained that the nature of dough is to be a vessel for AIR (RU'ACH), and on Shavuot we prepare for this RU'ACH by bringing the Shavuot offering with CHAMETZ... This comes from the hint in 'and you guard the Matzot' in order that the RU'ACH not enter them for 'on that very day, I brought out the Hosts of Yisrael'... The true matter of CHAMETZ is that there is no YICHUD (unity) in its baking. For added to the action of the artisan is another factor: RU'ACH. Therefore the dough has GAVO'UT (haughtiness)... Is it the bread that is poor or the person that is poor? In truth, both. Our Mitzva is not just to eat the Lechem Oni, it is to be the Lechem Oni.

Well, this is more complicated! To truly become the Matza requires a supreme effort to forestall the natural forces in the dough. Dough 'wants' to rise and ferment. It's normal. It's as natural as getting up every morning and doing exactly what I did yesterday, like our ancestors, the slaves in Egypt.

But one morning the sun rose on a new reality. The former slaves rose to a new world, forged by their acceptance of God's command to slay the lamb, one of Egypt's gods, and stop the natural fermentation of the dough!

Baking Challah is a slow, relaxed process. I get up at 6:00am, and mix the water, yeast, sugar, flour, oil, eggs, and salt. After I knead and punch the dough (very therapeutic), I go to minyan. When I get home I punch down the dough, and sit to enjoy breakfast. After about an hour, I roll the now fluffy dough into loaves and then run some errands for another hour. Finally, I bake the Challah for 25 to 30 minutes at 180 degrees C. So, after about 5 leisurely hours of many activities (only one of which is baking), I have delicious Challah for Shabbat.

Now baking Matza, that's a totally different ball game. My converted pizza oven is turned on to HIGH. The water I drew last night is prepared, the special flour (which I schlep to

Me'ah Shearim to purchase) is measured out. Now I set the timer to 18 minutes. Then I start the mix. Very quickly I'm kneading and then rolling out the thin, round doughs. Into the oven they go, and keep repeating until the alarm rings. If there's any dough remaining, it's quickly dispatched to burning in a prepared fire in a bucket. Phew!! It's intense!

Preventing the very natural process of fermentation (CHIMUTZ) is a major effort. I've committed to God's plan; I feel connected to the experience of my ancestors so very long ago. This is complicated, but I'm working on a sense of redemption. What's that even mean?

Rambam wrote: Even great Sages are obligated to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. Whoever elaborates concerning the events which occurred to them and took place is worthy of praise (Laws of Chametz and Matza, 7:1). Notice, things 'happened to them' and 'took place'. Things happened to them because they were passive and God did it all; things 'took place' because they actively participated. How did they actively participate? They wanted it; they freely chose it. We must seek it!

It's like the verse: But from there, you will search for the Eternal, your God, and you will find Him when you seek Him with all your heart and all your soul (D'varim 4:29). In Egypt, the

redemption started with us as passive participants, but then we freely chose to make God our God. That's why the Seder begins with 'God took our ancestors from slavery', but later we discuss how our ancestors originally were idolators, but they freely chose to worship God.

I feel that's our goal: to put effort into the redemptive process represented by the Matza. In 1990, I went to see the Bostoner Rebbe who was giving a speech about Matza. Afterwards, I went over to tell about how the Matza-baking with him was a part of my journey to Torah. He smiled, and said, 'Always remember: There's power in the Matza!' Especially when you make it yourself. 