

פֶּסַח מַצָּה וּמָרוֹר

PESACH, MATZAH, AND MAROR



IN A NUTSHELL

These are the three mitzvot on Seder night which involve eating. Although we no longer eat the *Korban Pesach*, back when there was a Beit HaMikdash this was a biblical command. Normally, mitzvot are fulfilled by performing the required act with *kavanah*, with the intention of observing the commandment. To fulfil the duty of succah, for example, we do not have to tell the story of the wandering of the Israelite in the desert. We just have to plan to sit in the succah, and then we sit and say the *brachah* there. However, in the case of Pesach two commands

coincide: the first, to eat the festive meal; the second, to tell the story. Rabban Gamliel argues that the two are connected. The story explains the food; the food allows us to relive the story.

The Torah states: “When you enter the land which the Lord shall give you as He promised, you shall observe this rite. And if your children should ask you, ‘What is this service you observe?’ you shall say, ‘It is a Pesach offering to the Lord, for He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt while He struck down the Egyptians, but saved those in our homes’” (Ex. 12:25–27). Thus, from the very outset there is an

intrinsic link between eating, asking, and explaining, and it is this connection on which Rabban Gamliel bases his view that all three elements of the Pesach meal must be explained.

Commentary on Pesach, Matzah, and Bitter Herbs,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada



DEEP DIVE

The Pesach lamb symbolises freedom. The bitter herbs (maror) represent slavery. And the matzah combines both. This was the bread the Israelites ate in Egypt as slaves. It was also the bread they ate when

leaving Egypt as free people. Why do the symbols of freedom precede the bitter herbs of slavery? Surely slavery preceded freedom? The chassidic masters explained the answer: only to a free human being does slavery taste bitter. Had the Israelites forgotten freedom, they would have grown used to slavery. "The worst exile is to forget you are in exile."

Commentary on Pesach, Matzah, and Bitter Herbs,
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Why is it important to remember and experience both slavery and freedom on this night?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

In the Torah, the festival of Pesach is more often called by different names.

It is consistently described as *Chag haMatzot*, which translates as "The Festival of Unleavened Bread". The name *Chag haPesach*, in the Torah, applies specifically to the fourteenth of Nissan, the day prior to the Seder, when the Paschal sacrifice was brought.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev gave a beautiful explanation for this dual terminology. The name Pesach signifies the greatness of God, who "passed over" the houses

of the Israelites. The name *Chag haMatzot* suggests the greatness of the Israelites, who followed God into the desert without any provisions.

In the Torah, God calls the festival *Chag haMatzot* in praise of Israel. The Jewish people, though, calls the festival Pesach in praise of God.

Commentary on Matzah,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Was the story of Exodus a triumph for God or for the Israelites?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. What is special about the educational methods used at the Seder table?
2. Do any other *chaggim* have a similar aspect to them?
3. Do you think our schools and other educational institutions can learn anything from the way we learn and teach on Seder night?



EXPERIENCING THE SEDER

At this point in the Seder, when we eat the matzah and maror (and remember the Pesach offering), we

are experiencing the story we have been learning about.

When you eat the matzah and maror, close your eyes and be mindful about what your senses are feeling and experiencing. What do these foods smell and taste like? What emotions and feelings do they create in you when you eat them? Take a moment to imagine what the generation who experienced slavery and left Egypt on the very first Pesach must have felt as they ate these.



A STORY FOR THE NIGHT OF STORIES

Under the communist government in Russia, it used to be illegal to practice Judaism. There was once a Jew who was caught maintaining a whole network of Jewish education during these years, and in punishment he was sent to the harsh prison in Siberia. When he was finally released, he returned and told his friends, "It was difficult to observe Pesach in the labour camp. One year we had no matzot. Another year we had no wine. But of bitter herbs, we were never short!"



A QUIZ FOR THE NIGHT OF QUESTIONS

FOOD

Fill in the blanks for these foods eaten on Seder night:

1. W _ _ e
2. P _ _ _ _ h
3. K _ _ _ _ s
4. S _ _ _ W _ _ _ r
5. A _ _ _ _ _ n
6. M _ _ _ r
7. C _ _ _ _ _ t
8. K _ _ _ _ h
9. M _ _ _ _ h
10. S _ _ _ _ _ _ _ O _ _ _ h

