

Pesach

Hippazon

– Rapid Redemption

The speed or haste of redemption constitutes is a central characteristic of the Exodus, and a prime motif of the Seder. The place in which we recognize this most readily is with Matza:

Why do we eat this Matza? – The dough of our ancestors **did not have time** to rise when God, the King of Kings – appeared, and redeemed them! As it states: "And they baked the dough that they took out of Egypt as cakes of Matza, but not Chametz, for they were expelled from Egypt and **they could not delay**. And they had also not prepared food for themselves." [Shemot 12:39].

The bread "did not have time to rise," the Israelites "could not delay." As we see here, B'nei Yisrael abandon Egypt in something of a hurry. Of course, the 18 minutes timeframe in which one is to bake Matza is reminiscent of this ancient time-pressure.

But this hurried flight from Egypt is manifest in other key symbols of Pesach. The Korban Pesach itself, was marked by certain aspects of haste: B'nei Yisrael were explicitly directed to eat their Pesach Lamb in a rushed and expedient manner:

"You shall eat it (the Paschal Lamb) in the following way: Your loins girded, with shoes on your feet, your staff in your hand – **eat it hurriedly** – it is a Pesach for God!" (Shemot 12:11)

If God instructs us to eat the Korban Pesach "hurriedly", then this speed or haste that characterized the Exodus is not incidental or spontaneous. It is carefully planned and crafted, becoming part of the fabric of Pesach itself. God Himself indicates that the night of Yetziat Mitzrayim will be a night of *Hippazon* – hurried panic².

What is the purpose of all this hurrying? Why not take it slowly?

MATZA MYSTERY

We shall begin by telling the true story of the Matza. The storyline narrated by the Haggadah – that Matza is a product of the surprise withdrawal from Egypt, resulting in the inability to bake bread in normal fashion – needs some further explanation. After all, Bnei Yisrael knew that they were leaving. Why had they, "not prepared food for themselves?" Moreover, as many have remarked, B'nei Yisrael already ate Matza on the night of the Exodus, BEFORE their leaving the borders of Egypt. God had instructed them:

"They must eat the meat on this night broiled, with Matzot and bitter herbs together" [12:8].

If we ate Matza BEFORE the Exodus, then why do we dramatize the scene in which the bread failed to rise and it "turned out" as Matza? It didn't "turn out" as Matza! We ate Matza BEFORE we left!

I believe that if we examine the evidence, we shall expose the straightforward reading of the text regarding the Matza.

Let us begin by posing the following question: When, at what time of day or night, were the Israelites planning to leave Egypt? Bnei Yisrael had been clearly instructed (12:22):

"Let no man leave the house until MORNING"

It is evident that the plan was to wait until daylight and to leave in an organized fashion.

However, after the devastating plague of the Firstborn: (12:33)

"Egypt forced the people to HURRY, ejecting them from the land, for they said: We are all dead."

And in the very next verse, we read about the dough!

We can easily re-construct what happened: On the eve of their departure when eating the Paschal Lamb, the Israelites ate Matza as commanded. But still, they knew that they were to travel the next day. As mentioned by the Mishna, there was no restriction banning the consumption of Chametz for 7 days at this point!³ And so, they began to prepare travel provisions - to knead dough to bake NORMAL BREAD to take with them on their journey. They assumed that they would travel only in the MORNING. It had time to rise. They had time to bake it in a regular oven. Again, the plan was to make leaven bread!

But then the Egyptians forced them out of their homes sooner than anticipated. It all happened faster than planned. And so, they took their dough which they wrapped and placed in their bags. But now they were in transit and they had no means of baking that dough as bread – they had no ovens! They baked it the way one bakes when one is on the road – on a taboon or something similarly portable. But this method cannot produce puffy airy bread; it bakes matza (or something akin to pitta bread.)

One issue is that the dough had not risen because they were pushed out earlier than anticipated (12:35). But their baking it "as matza cakes rather than risen bread,"(12:39) was because the conditions didn't favor baking real bread. There are no ovens in a desert! (It definitely took more than 18 minutes to leave Egypt! **"For they had been forced out of Egypt!"** Their baking Matza was a result of their being taken by surprise! **"They had not made provisions"** – the left in a panicked and disorganized fashion.

What we are proposing is that the night of the Exodus was filled with surprise and certainly involved an atmosphere of panic. It was a hurried affair. Some aspects were choreographed by God, as He designated that they should eat in a hurry. Other aspects happened more spontaneously, for example, the hurried evacuation from Egypt. Nowadays we eat our Seder in a relaxed manner – by leaning – rather than *be-Hippazon*. It would seem that the Matza is our enduring symbol of the Exodus' speed.

¹ I have always been puzzled by the close of this Passuk "Pesach Hu Lashem!" What does it mean? Rashi refers to God jumping over the houses. In other words, if you follow these instructions, God will spare you. But Rashi's comments there to God leaping over the Jewish homes strikes me as a further metaphor of speed. One cannot jump slowly! A leap is a motion of speed! It would appear that the Exodus happens with haste, with a ferocious pace. See Dr. Avivah Zornberg - Particulars of Rapture pgs 169-175.

² Rashi 12:11

³Mishna Pesachim 9:5 although one does need to contend with Shemot 12:15 and explain that this was not passed on to the nation. Read carefully 12:1-29 and 13:1-7. Which commands were applicable that year and which for future years? Which laws were transmitted to the PEOPLE in Egypt and which were given only after the Exodus?

MIDNIGHT OR MORNING?⁴

Why should the Paschal Lamb be eaten in a hurry? The Netziv simply describes it, "Like a man who is in a hurry to leave" (Ha'amek Davar). The Korban Pesach is the first "fast-food!"

But the Ibn Ezra beautifully picks up on the tension between the redemption of midnight and that of the morning, connecting it to our *Hippazon* theme. The Israelites had been told to eat the Paschal Lamb "by MORNING" (12:10,22) indicating that the Exodus would take place only after daybreak. And yet the key moment would appear to be midnight! "And Moses said: "So says the Lord – At midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt and every firstborn will die." (11:5-6)

Should the Israelites eat the Paschal Lamb by midnight or by the morning? The Ibn Ezra suggests a practical consideration for the speed of eating:

"The stick in hand – To guide their donkeys And as for the hurrying, it is in order that they not delay, **to facilitate their eating before the moment in which the "Destroyer" would arrive** in which God would leap over their homes. Hence God commanded that the lamb be fire-roasted so that it would cook speedily. And likewise our Rabbis said: It must be eaten **by midnight.**"

There was a need to eat quickly in order to consume the Pesach before midnight. It is hurried eating that precipitates the Geulat Mitzrayim, and it is hurried food that commemorates it.

RAV KOOK AND THE SANCTITY OF ISRAEL

If we can agree that *Hippazon* is a Hallmark of the Egyptian redemption, we need to probe further as to the purpose of this hurry. What is it about the mechanics of Yetziat Mitzrayim that necessitates this accelerated pace, this frenzied texture?

"The *Hippazon* was at its root God's, idea. It was to create Israel and raise it by circumventing the normal process of development. Every nation develops by natural order rising to its material and spiritual standard gradually. The great potential that lay dormant in a state of enslavement, the nation materially and spiritually diminished, suddenly, surprisingly, burst forth from potential to reality... Behold! A nation was founded, created in an instant! **The main reason was so that the national entity should not be influenced by other cultures.**" (Olat Raaya^h)

Rav Kook explains that the suddenness of the Exodus is a Godly act. It is unnatural for a national entity to be created in a rapid timeframe. Usually national emancipation is a slow gradual process, as institutions are built, infrastructure grows and governance emerges. Why did God prefer to intervene, to control events and to disrupt natural historic mechanisms? Why not wait for political history to take its course? Rav Kook explains that it was essential for Am Yisrael to be developed and born in an atmosphere of Kedusha. A nation develops organically and draws its cultural roots from many sources. An example would be countries that were part of the British Commonwealth, for example India, or even Israel. Many of those countries' parliamentary systems are formed in the image of the colonizing power that governed their countries prior to independence. An emerging country inherits and

absorbs the infrastructure of its predecessor. For Rav Kook, this is the essence of Rav Kook's concern. To what degree might Am Yisrael be affected by Egyptian norms? Rav Kook claims that it was imperative for Am Yisrael to avoid Egyptian values and culture absolutely⁵. Israel had to develop on exclusively holy, Godly foundations, on independent cultural bedrock. But how may this be achieved? A nation is not born in a day! Every society absorbs elements from the cultures that surround it.

This is the reason for *Hippazon*, an instantaneous Geulah; an unnatural birth for our nation. Am Yisrael could not afford slow development which would inevitably ingest and incorporate the imprint of Egyptian political, moral and cultural life. What was necessary was for an entirely new national entity to emerge, guided and influenced by God alone. This is the source of Israel's sanctity! Hence, the nation was created "in a moment" as an act of God, a new fresh creation that immediately set forth to the desert. There they would develop further as they accepted the Torah and formed their national institutions.

GOD'S REDEMPTION AND MAN'S REDEMPTION

But it comes at a price! Even a Godly redemption with all the good, has side-effects that can be more complicated. If God can create a nation instantaneously, can human beings manage with such rapid change? Such a jump in lifestyle?

It is the Sefat Emet who understands a more ambivalent, nuanced, narrative embedded within the reality of *Hippazon*. The Sefat Emet begins with some ground-principles. God can redeem suddenly, in a moment; humans change slowly. God can impose a new order, miraculously, suddenly, immediately. Maybe that is His way; "He spoke and it was; Commanded and it stood." (Tehillim 33:9) Man, in contrast, needs to develop at a natural pace, gradually growing stage by stage.

The Sefat Emet comments on the moment in which Israel, in the middle of the flight from Egypt, were instructed by God to "return back", to make an about-turn and to head for the Red Sea. The Sefat Emet uses this as a metaphor for a step back; a rethinking:

"Speak to the Children of Israel that they return back (14:1): After the Children of Israel left Egypt *BeHippazon*, i.e. in a non-gradual manner – an unstable state of being – they were instructed to retreat and return ... so that there would be some stability. (5634 – 1864)"

"Egypt was a miracle – a huge leap without intermediate stages – and hence it was only temporary. God wished that the redemption remain ... so that it remain in his heart even in times of God's withdrawal. Hence He commanded that (Israel) they go back and raise themselves up, hence "They cried." One may ask: after they saw God's infinite miracles (in Egypt) why did they despair (at the Red Sea)? – But they knew that now they must overcome on their own basis." (5631 - 1861)

"In every situation, Tahara (purity) precedes Kedusha (holiness)... but in Yetziat Mitzrayim the holiness came from "above" (from God) before the Children of Israel had managed to purify their souls. This is the unusual aspect of Pesach in that it came without a (prior) process, as it says; they were on the 49th degree of impurity and their freedom prevented their descent to

⁵ The Rambam, in many mitzvot eg. Hametz, and even the question of Korbanot themselves, refers to the cultural environment in which Am Yisrael were forged. In his Moreh Nevuchim he frequently grapples with which aspects of Egyptian culture should be adopted, adapted or alternatively, rejected.

⁴ See Berachot Daf 9

the fiftieth... and they received a temporary state of Kedusha. However now, afterwards, they need to purify the 49 levels with the Sefira (HaOmer – which has 49 days!)”

In Egypt the Israelites could not free themselves. They were a slave nation. They did not have the independence of spirit, the national courage to emancipate themselves. God took them out miraculously. During the Ten Plagues, God acted; the nation waited passively. And indeed, this is what we celebrate on Seder night. The "Mighty Hand and the Outstretched Arm" of God.

"I – Not an angel
I – Not a Seraph
I – not another agent
I and no other!"

Moses' name is not in the Haggada, and the people of Israel were relatively passive in the process of the Exodus. God freed the nation despite the fact that they had done little to deserve this.

But, this sudden transition means that the nation have not absorbed the process of nationhood, of autonomy, of national spirit, into their lives. They have not assimilated its message or culture. They are underdeveloped. And this results in problems later on. For the Sefat Emet, the nation's complaints in much of Sefer Shemot and Bamidbar are a direct outgrowth of the speed of redemption. Why did the nation complain so much? Why so many failures and upheavals – Korach, the spies, the Golden Calf?

Why? - The nation is immature. They lack mechanisms to function in moments of crisis. They do not yet have a rich cultural heritage to draw upon, giving them stability in moments of despair. They lack the institutions that give society its order. They had come out of Egypt physically, but psychologically, culturally, they are unstable for a long time.

It all happened too fast. The accelerated pace of change left the people in a fragile state.

But, could it not have happened more smoothly? Why did God allow this to happen? Was *Hippazon* a bad thing?

Sometimes, in this connection, I think about the Olim (Jewish Immigrants to Israel) from Arab Lands in the '50's and also the Ethiopians today. These populations moved from very different societies to Israel. They came from religious patriarchal, traditional societies. On arrival in Israel, they faced formidable obstacles, a colossal culture shock. Unable to adapt, their world collapsed. Older generations were estranged from the young, the youth became bitter, the community was poor, and modern education was an enormous challenge. For the Olim in the '50s, it took a generation, maybe two, in order for hundreds of thousands of people to find their feet.

We all recall that with the Aliya of the Ethiopian *Beita Yisrael*, the Israeli government promised that it would not make the same mistakes. But yet, the same cycle prevailed, the same social problems and generation gaps. Why? Because it can be no other way! Because when you emancipate a people *BeHippazon* – suddenly time-warping them from one cultural reality to a very different one – there is a very slow, gradual process of adaptation. Did these Olim have to come? – Yes! But was there going to be a crisis? – Most definitely.

BACK TO THE SEFAT EMET

The Sefat Emet says that after *Hippazon* – God's sudden redemption - the process of nation-building begins. After the rush of the Exodus, the Jewish people now engage in building

from within. This is the period traditionally know as the Omer. As Am Yisrael travel from Egypt to the acceptance of Torah at Sinai, the people grow and mature, slowly learning and building the structures that become the Jewish people.

So *Hippazon* is the sudden redemption of God. It is astounding, overwhelming and rapid. We remember it because it was critical, essential. Without *Hippazon*, had God waited for us, who knows whether we would have ever left Egypt! But it is only the beginning. *Hippazon* has its vulnerable aspects as well.

THE PASSION OF THE BEGINNING

On a very different but connected plane, let us end with the writings of Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin. He makes a fascinating comment about *Hippazon* suggesting that in our religious lives, we need to identify a moment of enthusiasm and capitalize upon that moment, leveraging the inspiration to move ahead to religious action:

"The beginning of a person's entry to Divine Service must be *Be-Hippazon*, just as we find in Egypt where the Lamb was eaten in a rush as opposed to the celebration of Pesach in subsequent years (Pesach Dorot). This is because the beginning necessitates that one break one's ties of worldly desire which a person is entangled by. Hence one needs to preserve the moment in which one feels the impetus to serve God and to seize the moment – fast – and maybe one will see success. Later, one can move more moderately and steadily as in Pesach Dorot. " (Siman #1)

For Rav Tzaddok, *Hippazon* represents a feeling of passion, enthusiasm, an inspired moment, a surge of momentum and desire. Like a first love, there is a sense of urgency, a rush of emotion, a heightened emotional state. *Hippazon* are these feelings.

But why is it necessary? Whenever one wishes to change something in life, there is inertia. We are always bound by bonds of comfort and familiarity. These are the most threatening hindrances to change, growth and development. In life, one needs more energy to start than to continue.

How do we counter the negative forces that persuade me to resist change? – The answer is *Hippazon*! Speed! – Jump out of bed! "Just do it!" *Hippazon* is the flurry of starting, it is a force, an energy, a spirit of the *Carpe Diem*. And one must harness this enthusiasm to conquer inertia, habit and laziness. Sometimes if we do not seize the initial momentum, we get stuck in the details, the bureaucracy, the logistics, and a wonderful idea evaporates and never happens.

Just as a person needs to muster incredible forces to change, so a nation needs colossal ideological energy to propel itself out of familiar surroundings transporting it to a new place. For Rav Tzaddok, *Hippazon* is the passion and rush of energy of Yetziat Mitzrayim. It is the excitement, the thrill of the revolution, the rush of independence, the defiance, the ecstasy of freedom.

Rav Tzadok tells us to celebrate our passions, leveraging us to action, otherwise logistical obstacles can be so formidable that they may have simply stayed put! A heightened ideological and emotional momentum was essential to the success of Yetziat Mitzrayim. It is critical to kick-start our religious lives.

Chag Kasher Vesameach!