

Matzoh – *Lechem Oni*  
The Inner Point of Divine Truth  
Passover 7<sup>th</sup> Day  
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**Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter** (1847-1905) also known by the title of his main work, *Sefat Emet* שפת אמת, was one of the great Hassidic rabbis of Poland. His published work is a series of *d'vrei torah* given across the span of his 30-year reign as the Gerer Rebbe.

***The Language of Truth, The Torah Commentary of the Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger*** is a collection of excerpts from these *d'vrei torah*, translated by and with commentary from Rabbi Art Green.

In a collection of essays about Pesach, the Sefat Emet writes:

The holiday of Pesach is called Shabbat in the Torah, as in “from the day after the Shabbat” [Lev. 23:15]. Pesach is like Shabbat, of which Scripture says “remember” and “keep.” Of Pesach too it says: “this day will be a remembrance for you” [Ex. 12:14] or “so that you remember the day you came out of Egypt” [Deut. 16:3] and “Keep the month of Aviv” [Deut. 16:1]; “Keep the matzot” [Ex. 12:17]. For memory is a point within, one where there is no forgetfulness. Since this point is revealed within the souls of Israel on Shabbat, it has to be “kept” or guarded from flowing into that place where forgetting occurs. That is why “keep” and “remember” were said [in the Ten Commandments] in a single utterance.

This first paragraph seeks to equate Pesach with Shabbat in that both require keeping as well as remembering. Why? The Sefat Emet wants us to understand his deeper message that within each of us is a palce of memory, a memory of the Divine Truth.

The same is true of the redemption from Egypt. On every Pesach a Jew becomes like a new person, like the newborn child each of us was as we came forth from Egypt. The point implanted by God within our hearts is renewed. That point is called *lehem 'oni* (poor people's bread) because it is totally without expansion. Matzah is just the dough itself, not having changed through fermentation. Every Jew has this inner place, the gift of God. Our task is really to expand that point, to draw all our deeds to follow it. This is our job throughout the year, for better or worse. But this holiday of Matzot is the time when the point itself is renewed, purified from any defilement. Therefore, it has to guard from any “ferment” or change on this holiday.

*Lehem 'oni* (poor people's bread) is the point, that memory of Divine Truth that God placed within each of us that must be remembered and guarded. It is the point that is renewed annually on Pesach. This space within each of us is like the matzoh that we eat on Pesach in that simple, pure and true. It is our job throughout the year to nurture this basic Truth and help it to grow while letting it guide us in our lives.

As the Sefat Emet continues on, he references this verse, Ex. 12:17:

וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת־הַמַּצּוֹת כִּי בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־צְבָאוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם:

And you shall guard the unleavened cakes, for **on this very day** I have taken your legions out of the land of Egypt, and you shall observe this day throughout your generations, [as] an everlasting statute.

The word **בְּעֵצֶם** is a difficult expression to translate into English, thus giving it a lot of room for interpretation. It means, “essentially, as a matter of fact, actually.”

“Keep the matzot, for on this very day I brought the children of Israel forth from the land of Egypt” -- *be-'etsem* (“this very day”) refers to that inward point, just as it is in itself (*be-'atsmo*), without any change. This is why it needs “keeping.” “This day is a remembrance” --for the renewal of that point within, the point of memory. One could also read it “a remembrance” indeed, a day that reminds us of the real reasons we were created in this world: to do God’s will...

We are here to do God’s will. We are to take that point of Divine Truth that is placed within each of us, that is renewed on Pesach, that we must guard, protect and remember, and expand it throughout the year in order that we able to do God’s work in this world.

Rabbi Art Green adds his interpretation:

*The liberation from Egypt happened to Israel be-'etsem, “in their very selves.” Here, no place is given to the old debate between those who first want to transform the inner life or renew the human spirit and those who believe first in alleviating the social and economic woes of humanity. In this paradigmatic event of liberation, both take place at once; both the souls and the bodies of Israel become free. Of course the biblical tale is somewhat different. They may be free be-'etsem from this moment, but the realization and acceptance of that freedom will take forty hard years and the passing of a strife-torn generation.*

When we were redeemed from Egypt, we were redeemed both in soul and body. We can understand this to mean that we are obligated in both personal transformation as well as continuing to work towards a better world through *Tikkun Olam*.

Every year we say that we are to see ourselves as though we personally left from Egypt. The Sefat Emet takes it further to say that this is an opportunity for us to renew our connection to the Divine Truth that resides within each of us. This Divine Truth is like the matzoh that we eat on Pesah. It is simple, pure and must be “fermented” throughout the year in order that it be the guiding principles of our lives. It is through remembering this point of Divine Truth that we can truly be free, spiritually to do the work needed for each of us to be a better human being as well as in our world to make the world a better place.