

# Shabbos HaGadol Drashah

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## Halachah

The mitzvah of *matzah* seems to derive its significance from the alacrity in which the Jewish people left Egypt:

וישא העם את־בצקו טרם יחמץ משארותם צררת בשמלתם  
על־שכמם

“And the nation lifted their dough before it was leavened- that which was left was wrapped in their clothes upon their shoulders (12:34)”

While this pasuk addresses the physical form of *matzah*, it might even go a step further in implying when the mitzvah should apply. It would seem, based on this, that the most significant time to eat *matzah* is during the first day of Pesach, the time when the Jewish people actually left in such a hurry. We may know this from our scrupulous measurements which we do only for the Seder night. The question therefore remains: What about the rest of Pesach? What status -if any- does the eating of *matzah* have during the other six and days? Is there a mitzvah to do so? Should we strive to eat as much *matzah* as we can?

### Descriptive Vs. Prescriptive

To a seasoned *baal-koreh*, they may think an obvious answer lies in any number of pesukim. For example, the Torah says (13:6):

שבעת ימים תאכל מצת וביום השביעי חג ליהוה  
For seven days you shall eat matzah, and on the seventh day it shall be a Holiday to Hashem

The simple reading of this verse gives us a straightforward answer: It is a mitzvah for all seven days!

To assume this conclusion, however, would be to misrepresent the way in which we interpret instructive verbs in the Torah. While it could very well be that the verse is a command “You shall eat...”, meaning you must, one could just as easily understand this phrase not as an instruction, but as a description- “for seven days you *will* eat Matzah”. In fact, the implication is such by virtue of the very next pasuk (13:7):

מצות יאכל את שבעת הימים ולא־יראה לך חמץ ולא־יראה לך  
שאר בכל־גבלך  
Matzah shall be eaten for seven days, and you shall not see leavened bread or yeast in your territories

In other words, one could understand the phrase “you will eat *matzah*” as the natural consequence of the fact that “you shall not see leavened bread” in your home. There’s no real *requirement* to eat *matzah*, it’s just the only thing to eat!

So, it would seem, we can’t conclude the nature of eating *matzah* outside of the first day based on a pasuk.

### Let’s Work Backwards

Interestingly enough, however, the Shulchan Aruch (475), when codifying the laws of *matzah*, explicitly addresses this question!

אין חיוב אכילת מצה אלא בליל הראשון בלבד:  
There is no obligation to eat *matzah* except for the first night alone

While this, too, seems clear, the words “there is no obligation” may also leave room for interpretation. The Mishneh Brurah, commenting on this phrase says the following:

ובשם הגר"א כתבו דעכ"פ מצוה איכא לאכול מצה כל שבעה

אלא שאינו חיוב:

In the name of the Gr”a, they write that there is nonetheless a mitzvah to eat *matzah* all seven days, there is just not an obligation.

Looking back at the pasuk, we can find similar sentiments in the commentaries. If we look at the Chizkuni (12:18) for instance, he explains the same concept more thoroughly:

יש לך דברים שמקבלים שכר בעשייתם ועונש כשאינ עושים אותם  
כגון מצה בלילה הראשון ויש לך דברים שמקבלים שכר בעשייתם  
ולא עונש כשאינ עושים אותם כגון מצה מליל ראשון ואילך...  
There are some things for which we receive reward when they are done and a penalty if not done, like *matzah* on the first night. And there are things for which we are rewarded when they are done but no penalty when they are not done, like *matzah* the rest of the days...

### Chazal’s Take

Until now we have deciphered the bookends of halachic development- the Torah itself, and the Shulchan Aruch’s conclusion. What we’ve found is that both seem open to interpretation. The only thing we seem to know for sure is that there is no strict obligation to eat *matzah* the last six days of Pesach (but see the Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Shemos 12:15 if you want to really make it complicated!). What still remains unclear, however, is

whether or not one would achieve the fulfillment of a mitzvah to eat matzah on the last six days of Pesach.

To analyze the bridge between what the pasuk says and how the Shulchan Aruch rules, we find an interesting comment in support of Rava during a discussion in the Gemara (Pesachim 120a):

תניא כוותיה דרבא ששת ימים תאכל מצות וביום השביעי עצרת  
לה' אלהיך מה שביעי רשות אף ששת ימים רשות  
It was taught in a baraita in accordance with the opinion of  
Rava: "Six days you shall eat matzot, and on the seventh day  
shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God"  
(Deuteronomy 16:8). Just as eating matza on the seventh day  
is merely optional, eating matza during the first six days is  
optional.

Commenting on a pasuk which implies that there is no reason to eat matzah on the seventh day the Gemara explains that for the entire last six days of Pesach, eating matzah is "optional". But what, in this context, does "optional" mean?

Rashi explains that it means if one wanted to eat only meat (and no bread) -or even fast- for the rest of the holiday, one would be allowed! It would seem, therefore, from Rashi, that there is absolutely no fulfillment by one who eats matzah on the last six days of Pesach.

With that reasoning, however, one could think that the Mishneh Brurah and the Chizkuni quoted above would be ruling in contradiction to an explicit Gemara! Given the fact that they're certainly familiar with it, how else could it be understood?

Although the Gr"a -the source of the Mishneh Brurah- doesn't provide a comment on the Shulchan Aruch, his understanding is brought in the sefer *Ma'aseh Rav* (185):

שבעת ימים תאכל מצות כל שבעה מצוה ואינו קורא לה רשות  
אלא לגבי לילה ראשונה שהיא חובה ... אעפ"כ מצוה מדאורייתא  
הוא  
Seven days you shall eat matzah- all seven days there is a  
mitzvah. And when [the Gemara] calls it "optional", it  
means only relative to the first night when it's a strict  
obligation... nonetheless it is still a Biblical mitzvah to do so.

Despite the word "optional", one could interpret it to mean that one has the choice to do the mitzvah or not. It does not necessarily mean that one gets nothing for doing so.

### A Sign for the Ages

But why? Why does the Gr"a feel such a necessity to understand the pasuk and the Gemara like he does? We understand how he can interpret the Gemara differently, but why not understand it in its simplest way? What is the source for establishing his position the way he does?

To understand this we have to understand a completely different topic: Tefillin on Chol HaMoed. As we know, there are diverging minhagim as to whether or not one should, and how one should wear tefillin on Chol HaMoed, but it all boils down to a simple question: Is there enough of a sign ("os") of the relationship between us and Hashem during that time?

The Gemara (Menechos 36b) explains:

ר' עקיבא אומר יכול יניח אדם תפילין בשבתות ובימים טובים  
ת"ל (שמות יג, טז) והיה לאות על ירך ולטוטפת בין עיניך מי  
שצריכין אות יצאו שבתות וימים טובים שהן גופן אות  
Rabbi Akiva says: One might have thought that a person  
should don Tefillin on Shabbatot and Festivals. To counter  
this, the verse states: "And it shall be for a sign for you... for  
with a strong arm God brought you out of Egypt" (Exodus  
13:9)- when the Jewish people require a sign to assert their  
status as God's nation... to exclusion of Shabbatot and  
Festivals, as they themselves are signs

We only need one sign at a time that we are Hashem's people. To require the sign of tefillin when we already have a sign of Shabbos would be an affront to the sanctity and symbolism of Shabbos. But what about Chol HaMoed? That would depend on what constitutes a "sign".

Tosafos on that daf tells us:

אות בפסח דאסור באכילת חמץ ובסוכות דחייב בסוכה  
The sign on pesach is that there exists a prohibition of eating  
chametz, and the sign on Sukkos is that one is obligated to sit  
in a Sukkah

Based on this logic, Tosafos explicitly rules that one retains a sign of our relationship with Hashem, and therefore need not put tefillin on during Chol HaMoed.

In his commentary to Hilchos Tefillin (31:3; as well as in *Ma'aseh Rav* 185 above), however, the Gr"a changes one small, but important detail. Instead of saying that the "sign" of Pesach is the prohibition of chametz, he says the sign is the mitzvah to eat matzah. To explain this discrepancy, the commentary "Peulas Sachir" says:

אפשר שדעת הגאון דכל מידי דלא מיתסר אלא בלאו לא בעשה  
לא מיקרי אות ואף להמפרשים שהאות הוא שבימת מלאכה שאני  
איסור מלאכה בשבתות וי"ט שהוא בעשה ול"ט  
It's possible that the Gaon's opinion is that anything which  
is only prohibited by a negative command and not a positive  
one cannot be called a "sign". Even according to the opinions  
that it depends on full-fledged prohibited melacha (on  
Shabbos/Yom Tov), that is only due to the accompanying  
positive commandment (to rest)

In other words, to achieve the status of a "sign", it must be recognizable- a visible expression of our relationship with Hashem. To simply *refrain* from eating chametz is not a sign, it's a passive, lack of expression. It is

therefore imperative, according to the Gr" a, that the mitzvah of Matzah is not only for the first night of Pesach, but rather for all the days of Pesach- as that is the sign between us and Hashem which precludes the wearing of Tefillin.

(As an aside, the fact that many still do wear tefillin might be based on the possibility that matzah is *not* a mitzvah, and therefore we are left bereft of a sign during Chol HaMoed.)

(As another aside, it is not clear how, according to the Gr" a, one explain the "os" of Shavuot. See the Torah Temimah on Shemos 13:9 note 33 for a possible approach.)

### Why no Brachah?

If, as the Gr" a contends, there truly is a mitzvah to eat matzah that one can opt-into during the last six days of Pesach, why is there no brachah recited on its fulfillment?

And lest one respond that perhaps we don't make blessings on voluntary mitzvos, we find many examples of doing so- like Shechitah, tzitzis, or Sukkah!

Speaking of Sukkah, the connection/parallel between it and matzah is rather significant. In regards to this point specifically, the Gemara (Sukkah 27a) explains:

א"ר יוחנן משום ר' שמעון בן יהוודק נאמר כאן חמשה עשר ונאמ' חמשה עשר בחג המצות מה להלן לילה הראשון חובה מכאן ואילך רשות אף כאן לילה הראשון חובה מכאן ואילך רשות  
Rav Yochanan said in the name of Rav Shimon ben Yehotzadak: It says here (by Sukkah) "fifteenth" and it says "fifteenth" by Pesach: Just like on Pesach the first night is obligatory (to eat matzah) and the rest of the holiday is optional, so too here, the first night is obligatory (to sit in the Sukkah), and the rest is optional

While reiterating the concept of "optional", the Gemara explicitly mentions that both matzah and sukkah share the same levels of obligation. The only difference, as we know, is that while we opt-in to sit in a Sukkah we say a brachah each and every time. When we opt-in to eat matzah, however, we don't say a brachah! What accounts for the difference?

Already in the times of the Rishonim (1000-1500) they explicitly addressed this question. For now, let us look at three possible approaches:

### 1. Baal Hamaor

(Rav Zerachia HaLevi, 1125-1186, Provence)

יש להשיב לפי שאדם יכול בשאר ימים לעמוד בלא אכילת מצה

ויהיה ניזון באורז ודוחן וכל מיני פירות משא"כ בסוכה שאין יכול לעמוד בלא שינה ג' ימים והוא חייב לישן בסוכה  
One could respond: A person is able to withstand the rest of the days (of Pesach) without eating matzah but rather with rice, millet, and fruits. This is not so with a Sukkah- a person cannot go three days without sleep, and is therefore obligated to sleep in a Sukkah

According to the Baal Hamaor, the necessity to use the Sukkah creates the natural obligation during the other days. In a theoretical sense- a person is not commanded to use a sukkah. In a practical sense, however, one is forced to.

The explanation as to why that precipitates a blessing could be as follows: Through the reality that Hashem instilled within us -to not go many days without sleep- it must be the case that Hashem naturally requires our use of the sukkah. It is therefore relevant to assume that Hashem "sanctified us with His mitzvos, and commanded us to sit in a Sukkah". By Matzah, however, despite the fact that one can volunteer to do so, its sheer lack of necessity means we cannot use those same words of the brachah.

### 2. Kol Bo

(Possibly Rav Aharon ben Yaakov HaKohein, 14th century, Provence)

אותה אכילה אינה אלא לצורך גופו ולהשיב רעבונו אבל אכילה בסוכה בשאר ימים מברכין עליה... כיון שהישיבה אינה צורך גופו אלא קיום מצוה...

Eating (matzah) is simply for the need of one's body, and to satiate one's hunger, but eating in a sukkah on the rest of the days -we make a brachah... since the sitting is not a bodily need but rather a fulfillment of a mitzvah...

While it's not entirely clear what he means, the Kol Bo differentiates the two cases by noting the distinction of benefit: While a person who eats fulfills a personal desire of satiation, a person who goes outdoors to sit in a Sukkah could only be doing so for the sake of Hashem. Perhaps due to the obvious expression of service to Hashem, one is justified in reciting a brachah.

(The difference between these first two approaches goes beyond just logic. It could be inferred that the Baal Hamaor believes that there truly is a mitzvah to eat matzah when one eats, there's simply no strict necessity to do so, so it precludes the recitation of a brachah. From the Kol Bo's formulation, however, it could be that he believes there is not even a mitzvah to eat matzah. Simply put- there's no brachah because there's no mitzvah. The Meiri (to Sukkah 27a), however, proposes -without explanation- that these two opinions "when one scrutinizes the matter, these are one and the same".)

### 3. Rashba

(Shlomo ben Aderet, 1235-1310, Spain)

בסכה – כל שאוכל פת וכל שהוא ישן מחוייב לאכול ולישן בסוכה  
דתשבו כעין תדורו אמר רחמנא, והילכך כל שהוא אוכל או ישן  
חייבתו תורה להיות בסכה

In a sukkah- anyone who eats bread and anyone who sleeps is obligated to eat and sleep in the sukkah because the Torah says “settle like you normally reside”. Therefore, anyone who eats or sleeps is required to be in the sukkah.

According to the Rashba, the distinction between “opting-in” by sukkah and “opting-in” by matzah is not about the difference in the two acts of eating voluntarily. Instead, the nature of the mitzvos are completely different. When it comes to eating matzah, it’s a one-time activity that begins and ends with that action. Sukkah, on the other hand, is a transformative lifestyle change. The purpose of Sukkah is not a detail within each act, that if you eat it has to be in the sukkah. Rather, the week of Sukkot requires one to live normally in their sukkah. That means that whatever substantial activity one does should naturally happen in the sukkah. In terms of that aspect of the mitzvah, it applies all seven days of Sukkot. On top of that, however, there is an additional independent obligation learned from the Seder night (Sukkah 27a) that one must eat bread on the first night of Sukkot.

In essence, the Rashba’s answer is that we've been comparing apples and oranges. The mitzvah of Sukkah is not the same as the mitzvah to eat matzah. Or, at least, according to the Gemara in Sukkah (27a), while it’s true that they are the same, and a brachah wouldn’t be appropriate for sukkah either, sukkah contains completely different mitzvah- to make our sukkah into our home. It’s on that mitzvah that we make a brachah.

### Conclusion

While we cannot definitively answer which opinion is correct, we generally assume that one need not try to fulfill the possibly-available mitzvah to eat matzah during the last six days of Pesach. If, however, one takes it upon themselves to try and fulfill this mitzvah, they might need to consider other ramifications as well. For instance- one might need to take special care that they eat the right amount of matzah in a given time period, as we are sensitive to do on the Seder night. One may also want to be stringent in terms of what kind of matzah one uses (This latter ramification is of much debate and may or may not be relevant in this context).

## Drashah

Based on the above, we can presumably come back to where we started: Regardless of one's opinion, the only time there exists an absolute obligation to eat matzah remains limited to the first night. This focus on the first night harkens back to the very first time that we, as a nation, ate matzah. One does, however, wonder- did the Jewish people even eat matzah that first year in Egypt?

### “Matzah of Egypt”

As we noted earlier, we often cite the reason for eating matzah as being due to the alacrity in which the Jews left Egypt. As they were on their way out they had no chance to let the dough rise and it remained a lowly “flatbread”. But if that were the case, how exactly do we reconcile the pasuk earlier in Shemos (12:7-8):

ולקחו מן-הדם ונתנו על-שתי המזוזות ועל-המשקוף על הבתים  
אשר-יאכלו אותו בהם. ואכלו את-הבשר בלילה הזה צלי-אש  
ומצות על-מרורים יאכלוהו

They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs.

If they had not yet left, how did Hashem instruct them to eat matzah already? Why couldn't they bake fully-leavened bread beforehand? Were they already in a hurry the day before?

The truth is that according to many commentaries, there were two separate types of matzah. The Ramban (Devarim 16:2) writes that even in Egypt -during their day-to-day living- they ate matzah because it was simply “poor man's bread”. As slaves, they lacked the resources and time to make real bread. The Sforno (ibid.) adds that they were always rushed by their aggressive officers to eat quickly.

It was only once they fled -not as slaves but as free men- that we find the second institution of matzah. This, which was meant to be bread of a free and wealthy people, was also cut short and limited to remaining matzah because of how quickly the redemption took place.

In this sense, we understand that there's a fundamental difference between the nature of the matzah on the first night of Pesach and the ensuing days. The first night's matzah was that of a slave, a recognition of our struggle and persecution. The matzah of the rest of Pesach, however, represents the quick and sudden culmination of our freedom through the kindness of HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

This, perhaps, is what the Rambam alludes to when he says the following in his Mishneh Torah (Chametz U'matzah 5:20):

... וביום הראשון אסור ללוש ולקטף אלא במים בלבד. לא משום  
חמץ אלא כדי שיהיה (דברים טז ג) "לחם עני". וביום הראשון  
בלבד הוא שצריך להיות זכרון לחם עני:

But for the first day [of Passover], it is forbidden to knead and to brush with [anything] but water alone. Not because of chametz, but rather in order that it be "bread of poverty" (Deuteronomy 16:3). And it is only on the first that it must be a remembrance of the bread of poverty.

We explained earlier that our obligation to eat matzah is limited to the night of the fifteenth- that then, and only then, *must* we eat it. It would seem, therefore, that the emphasis of our matzah -the most significant aspect of matzah- is how it represents our slavery and struggle. The matzah of freedom that comes afterwards is a nice, optional activity, but that's not our obligatory focus.

Perhaps we can suggest that it's particularly this vulnerability that allows us to appreciate Hashem's kindness. As we know, the Midrash also tells us that the Jewish people were on the lowest level of spirituality while they were in Egypt. Bereft of all mitzvos, it was purely out of Hashem's commitment to us that He engaged in our salvation. To extend our concept, the matzah of the first night represents not only our literal slavery, but our “poverty” in merit. We were poor not only in financial or physical terms, but in spiritual terms as well.

### Matzah of Empathy

With this understanding, we can appreciate the beginning of Maggid from a different angle:

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים. כל דכפין ייתי  
ויילל, כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח.

This is the bread of poverty that our forefather ate in the land of Egypt. Anyone who wants, come and eat, anyone who needs, come join our Pesach.

As we specifically recall the “poor” matzah -the one they ate while they were still “in Egypt”, we invite others who also feel inadequate or vulnerable. They should know that just as our forefathers lacked in Egypt, we all share in that lacking on this night. And just as Hashem saved them then, He can bring redemption to us now- “we are slaves now but next year we will be free”.

### The Darkest Darkness

During the plague of darkness, the pasuk (10:23) tells us:

לא-ראו איש את-אחיו ולא-קמו איש מתחתיו שלשת ימים  
ולכל-בני ישראל היה אור במושבתם:

People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was; but all the Israelites enjoyed

light in their dwellings.

In its literal sense, the verse simply means that because they couldn't see anything, no one moved, out of fear. The Midrash and commentaries explain that this could have also been due to the thickness created by such darkness (See Ibn Ezra who compares it to the fog of England he experienced).

The Chiddushei HaRim however, explains the verse in a different, but fundamental "light". The greatest darkness a person can experience is when he or she is in a dark place and no one else "sees them". The reason, says the Chiddushei HaRim, why "no one could get up", was precisely because they didn't "see one another". The power of empathy is such that it brings light to another person's darkness- even if they're both 'in the thick of it'.

As we begin the Seder, we make a point of reliving the affliction- aspect of matzah, not the freedom aspect. As such, we invite our guests and make clear that we're in the darkness with them *and we see them*. It is within the backdrop of this vulnerability that we can then appreciate Hashem. But before we appreciate Hashem, we appreciate others: "This is the poor matzah that they ate in Egypt- whoever needs a place to eat, you should feel welcome here. Together, Hashem will save us".

### With a Strong Hand

In general, mitzvos are instituted in order to bring out a lesson or instill within us something which we would not have accomplished on our own. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 16), in discussing the purpose of why the Torah prohibits the breaking of the bones while we eat the Korban Pesach -and thereby the purpose of all mitzvos- explains as follows:

רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות,  
כדי להתפיס בהן כל מחשבותינו ולהיות בהן כל עסקינו להטיב לנו  
באחריתנו. כי מתוך הפעולות הטובות אנחנו נפעלים להיות טובים  
וזוכים לחיי עד.

"God wanted to grant merits to Israel, therefore he gave them many laws and commandments (Makkos 23b)," to occupy all of our thoughts [with those deeds], to benefit us at our end [i.e. in the world to come]. Because from the good actions we are influenced to be good and merit eternal life.

Meaning, the purpose of mitzvos is not simply to rack up points and rewards at the end of the day, but rather because they have a positive influence over our development. When we follow Hashem's guidance -whether we realize it or not- we do change for the better. More often than not, we need a push to do those things that benefit us, but which we're naturally apprehensive towards.

Towards the end of Parshas Bo (13:9), the Torah says that Hashem gave us the mitzvah of tefillin because it was "with a strong hand that Hashem took us out of Egypt". Is this a cute parallel of some kind? Why would Hashem's strong arm necessitate us putting something on our arm? Are we equating ourselves to Hashem when we don the tefillin, *chas veshalom*?

The Netziv explains in Ha'amek Davar:

שלא תתפלא למה הצריכנו הקב"ה כ"כ מצות ותחבולות לבטחון  
ואמונה בהשגחתו ית'. ע"ז נותן טעם משום שהנך רואה ויודע  
שדבר זה אינו מתקבל ברצון לפניך עד שבע"כ היינו ע"י מכת  
הדבר שהוא ביד חזקה הוציאך ה' והיינו משום שלא היו נוחים  
לקבל ע"ע השגחתו ית'.

Do not wonder why Hashem obligates us with so many mitzvos and challenges to believe in His providence. For that He gives a reason, because as you see and know, an instruction would not be accepted willingly, only through imposition through the force of a "strong hand...". Meaning, we would not accept upon ourselves comfortably His providence/guidance.

Hashem knows when an activity stands to benefit us, even when we ourselves don't fully appreciate how. *Lehavdil*, like a doctor prescribing painful treatments, we trust that despite the discomfort in the moment the benefits will speak for themselves later on.

With this in mind, we can add another element as to why there may be a greater emphasis on the first type of matzah, the matzah of affliction. As we recognize and appreciate the wonders that Hashem does for us, it is understandably much easier for us to appreciate that which clearly benefits us. The matzah of freedom, as we left Egypt and headed off to become our own nation, is an absolutely vital aspect of our gratitude to Hashem. But simply- it is easier to feel. When someone does us a favor, we don't need anyone to force us to say thank you. When there's blatant and obvious reason to show gratitude, it need not be legislated.

But when it comes to those times where we don't understand; the situations we cannot appreciate in the moment- it's for those that we need extra encouragement. As difficult as the slavery was for us in Egypt, we're tasked to appreciate that there was kindness in it too. It was the vulnerability we experienced then that directed us towards Hashem. Without the struggle and uncertainty, we wouldn't have merited the redemption afterwards. It is because of that discomfort that we made it out of Egypt, and it is because of that discomfort that Hashem obligates us to recall and appreciate it now.

## Outside Help

On the face of it, we recall that discomfort because we weren't there. We conjure up in our minds and speak about the matzah in Egypt as a way to feel the affliction and appreciate something we couldn't otherwise. In truth, however, the lack of feeling is not limited to someone trying to recall a difficulty from thousands of years prior. That lack of feeling can also exist by someone living through the moment themselves.

Rav Yonasan Eibeschutz (1690-1764, Poland) explains in his Tiferes Yehonasan that Par'oh believed he could outsmart the Jews by keeping the Levi'im outside of the slavery. He knew, through his predictions, that the savior of the Jewish people would be a Levi. With that in mind, he thought that as long as the savior never experienced the difficult of slavery himself, then he would never be motivated to help.

In reality, however, the opposite might have happened. The pasuk (6:6) says:

לֹא אֶמְרָא לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת  
מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבַדְתֶּם וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזֵרוּעַ נְטוּיָה  
וּבִשְׁפָטִים גְּדֹלִים

Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the LORD. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements.

While the word "sivlot" is often translated as labor or struggle of some kind, the Sfias Emes explains that it may mean "tolerance", like the word "savlanut". He explains, therefore, that it wasn't just the slavery that Hashem saved them from, but also from themselves. They'd grown complacent and tolerant of living as slaves under Egyptian rule. To break the mold, they needed an outsider. They needed someone who did not experience the slavery and was still sensitive to how tragic the situation really was.

Perhaps this is the meaning of when we first find Moshe Rabbeinu fight on behalf of the Jewish people (2:11):

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־אֲחִיו וַיִּרְא בְּסַבְלָתָם וַיִּרְא אִישׁ  
מִצְרִי מַכֵּה אִישׁ־עִבְרִי מֵאֲחָיו

Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their *sivlot*. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen.

Moshe realized that their existence in Egypt wouldn't change as long as they were tolerant of the abuse they experienced. As the Netziv explains on the next pasuk (2:12):

וַיִּךְ אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וְגו'. בַּמָּקוֹם שָׂאִין שֵׁם אִישׁ הַשְּׁתַּדֵּל הוּא לְהִיּוֹת אִישׁ  
"And he hit the Egyptian" - In a place where there is no person (doing anything), he put in the effort to become that person.

Whereas Par'oh thought that keeping the Levi'im separate would ensure that they wouldn't feel the pain and try to change anything, it was the Jewish people themselves who no longer felt the pain, that they had grown accustomed to their tragic existence. Hashem sent them an individual from outside the system, someone who had the sensitivity and empathy to overcome that tolerance.

When we take the broken matzah, hold it up and say "this is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in Egypt", not only do we recognize the aspect of suffering within matzah, but we strive to inculcate the same intolerance to that difficulty. We're given a mechanism to feel that vulnerability, to make sure we know it was not okay to suffer as we did in Egypt.

And so it is with many things in life. We grow accustomed to routines and realities despite the generally intolerance one should have for that situation. We become complacent with how we daven haphazardly. We don't care that we get to shul late. We're okay without learning Torah or doing chessed. We turn a blind eye to what we know intellectually as the wrong activities because we don't *feel* the pain they should cause. We become numb to our own shortcomings.

As we say "Ha Lachma Anya" and invite guests into our home, we declare loudly and clearly- we too are trying to get out of our "poverty"; we, too, are sensitizing ourselves to the ways we might still be eating the "matzah of Egypt". We cannot judge what lackings anyone else has because we realize that we're all poor. "We're all slaves this year. We hope to be free men next year".

## The Take-Home

While it's always somewhat peculiar on a practical level that we "invite guests" to our Seder once we've already started, this year specifically raises that peculiarity to a theoretical level as well. Even if we wanted to invite others; even if we could plan for someone to walk in at that point of Maggid, we still couldn't do so in the current state of affairs. As Coronavirus wreaks tragic havoc across the country, we instead take precautions to protect life -our own lives and the lives of others.

But what are we to learn from such a pandemic? What lesson should we take to heart from this societal upheaval? What message is Hashem sending us?

Simply put- we cannot know. Quite possibly, even Hashem doesn't want us to know for sure. Part of the

lesson is for us to find the lesson. Where are our blind spots? What have we been missing but tolerant of nonetheless?

The Rambam tells us (Hilchos Ta'anis 1:3)

אבל אם לא יזעקו ולא יריעו אלא יאמרו דבר זה ממנהג העולם  
אירע לנו וצרה זו נקרה נקרית. הרי זו דרך אכזריות וגורמת להם  
להדבק במעשיהם הרעים. ותוסיף הצרה צרות אחרות.  
But if they do not cry out and sound [trumpets], but rather  
say, "What has happened to us is the way of the world, and  
this trouble is merely happenstance" — it is surely the way  
of cruelty, and it causes them to stick to their bad deeds. And  
the trouble will add other troubles.

We all have the responsibility to find something to work on. We have to introspect and look at what areas of our lives need improvement.

At the same time, perhaps we can offer one area that might be relevant to work on based on the circumstances.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 9:10) explains:

מפני מה הביא הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהן דם? מדה כנגד מדה, שכך  
אמר לאברהם (בראשית טו, יד): וגם את הגוי אשר יעבודו דן  
אנכי וגו'. לפי שלא היו מניחין בנות ישראל לטבול מטומאתן, כדי  
שלא יהו פרין ורבין, לפיכך לקו המים בדם.  
Why did Hashem bring the plague of blood? It was measure  
for measure, as Hashem said to Avraham, "And I will judge  
the nation for which you work..." (Bereishit 15:14). Because  
the Egyptians didn't allow the Jewish women to go to the  
water for ritual immersion so that they could not procreate,  
Hashem therefore plagued their water with blood.

In a concept we may be familiar with, Hashem often punishes in accordance to the transgression. What message are we to glean from the fact that we've been forced to separate, distance and restrict ourselves from being close to others?

Perhaps a message we could take to heart at a time like this is to appreciate the value of social connectivity. Have we become complacent and tolerant of the person we see in Shul who could use a hand but we "have no time"? Have we become comfortable saying Gut Shabbos only to the same friends every week? When was the last time we reached out to an old friend who we knew was going through a rough patch?

At this moment of darkness, perhaps our avodah is to "see each other" again. As we lift the obligatory matzah of the Seder night and call it the "poor man's bread of Egypt", Hashem forces us to recognize our own inadequacies, and then reach out to others in need. Im yirtzeh Hashem, as we endeavor to improve our relationships with others, and look to Hashem for guidance, then He too will bring us back to a time and

place where we are once again deserving of being with each other, "seeing others" in the truest sense of the word. 'This year we are slaves, next year -or sooner!- we shall be free again'.

Shabbat Shalom, Chag Kasher -U'bari- VeSameach,

Rabbi Katz