

Parshat Bo 5781

I believe that it would neither be incorrect nor irreverent, to suggest that the written Torah (Shebichsav) does not always express itself as clearly as many might be consider ideal, although further clarity is provided by the oral Torah (Sheba'al peh) and within the numerous commentaries of the Rishonim and Acharonim.

Within our Sedra, we read (Shemos 12:15), *“(For) seven days you shall eat matzos, but on the first day (bayom horishon) you shall nullify the leaven from your homes.....”*. Yet, there is no obligation to eat matza for all seven days except Seder night and effectively too on the other evenings and mornings of Pesach where a seudah is mandated, as on any other Shabbosim or Yom Tov. However, there is a second issue here, with the definition of bayom horishon, which I will attempt to resolve by examining what was/is being celebrated and when precisely.

The words bayom horishon, in the context of the above, cannot possibly mean the first day of Pesach itself, but rather the previous day, Erev Pesach (14 Nisan), as indeed Rashi confirms, before continuing to say that it is called “the first” because it precedes the seven (days of the festival), citing similar usage elsewhere (Job 15:7). Somewhat teasingly, Rashi then posits the idea of bayom horishon meaning (what we know it does not mean!), the first day of the seven day festival, only to row back and teach us otherwise, by citing the discussion, in Pesochim 5a, on the possuk in Parshas Mishpotim (Shemos 34:25), *“You shall not slaughter the blood of My offering upon Chometz.....”*, meaning do not slaughter the Korban Pesach whilst Chometz remains in your possession, an instruction for Erev Pesach, automatically resulting in no possibility of Chometz existing at the start of Pesach.

Some years ago, in his derosho on Shvi'i Shel Pesach, Rabbi Kimche drew attention to the final Rashi on Parshas Shelach (3rd paragraph of the Shema), something of a curiosity, since it is on the words p'sil techeles, found in Bamidbar 15:38, but in Rashi, after his commentary on possuk 41! Rashi concludes that the eight threads of the tzitzis correspond to the eight days that Israel waited, from when they left Egypt until they sang (the) Shiro at the sea. Since we know that the Shiro was sung on the seventh day after yetzias Mitzrayim, it can be understood, that extra significance is being attached here, to the previous day, 14 Nisan.

It was on the day of 14 Nisan, that the Korban Pesach was slaughtered, but it was eaten that night, by which time it was 15 Nisan, the festival as we know it. So, we celebrate a festival most commonly known as Pesach, which commences on 15 Nisan,

notwithstanding that the Torah repeatedly references the word Pesach, whether referring to (the slaughter of) the Korban Pesach or the name of a day, to 14 Nisan.

This is reiterated in Parshas Mo'adim (Vayikro 23:4), whilst the next possuk denotes that 15 Nisan is the start of a seven-day Chag HaMatzos (no mention of Pesach). Further, it is instructive that there is no place for a second Chag HaMatzos on Pesach Sheni, but only a second opportunity, for those unable to bring the Korban Pesach at the proper time, to do so a month later, on 14 Iyar.

Thus, it seems to be apparent from the foregoing, that in times of the Beis Hamikdash, Erev Pesach (14 Nisan, albeit extending into the night of the 15th) functioned almost as its own festival, celebrating the bringing of the Korban Pesach, whilst the remainder of Pesach, 15-21 Nisan, was simply Chag HaMatzos.

There is a most profound insight, from Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, on this dichotomy of names, whereby the Torah generally refers to Chag HaMatzos, whilst we tend to call this festival Pesach. He explains that in Egypt, the B'nei Yisroel had sunk to the 49th level of tumo and were on the verge of being irredeemable. Nevertheless, Hashem demonstrated his faith in our potential, by saving us both spiritually and physically, passing over our homes during makas bechoros and taking us out of Egypt. On account of His immense kindness and faith in us, we use the name Pesach, to express our gratitude, praise, and love for Hashem.

Conversely, Hashem Himself uses the name Chag HaMatzos, to praise the B'nei Yisroel for their trust in Him, which is expressed through the matzos. As our sedra famously tells us, there was no time to delay upon leaving Egypt and allow the dough to become leavened, so the B'nei Yisroel could only hurriedly bake and take with them (cakes of) matzos, thereby demonstrating their complete faith in Hashem, that He would continue to provide for all their needs in the midbar. It is for this reason that the Zohar calls matza 'bread of faith' (לחמא דמהימנותא).

Perhaps our continued use of the name Pesach, despite there being no Korban Pesach nowadays, can be considered representative of a collective yearning of the Jewish people for its resumption, in the newly rebuilt Beis Hamikdash – may this occur speedily in our days.

(This piece is dedicated l'ilui nishmas Alta bas Meir a"h, my mother-in-law, ahead of her first yahrzeit on Tu B'Shvat.)