

## The First Pesach

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### Pesach Day I

Everyone is tired, so let's do something different. It's time for a pop quiz! Here is a trivia question, one you can ask your guests at the Seder tonight- or at least anyone who wasn't here today. Does anyone know when the first Pesach was celebrated? To put it a little differently, when is Pesach first mentioned in the Torah?

Most of you have answered that it is mentioned where Pesach is first mentioned- in Parshas Bo, which we read from this morning. That is an understandable mistake, but actually, it happens much earlier than that. The Torah tells us that as the city of Sodom was about to be destroyed, two angels come to Lot to warn him and his family of the city's ultimate demise. Lot requests that his guests stay with him, yet they decline, saying that they prefer to sleep in the street. Nevertheless, Lot provides them with hospitality, and even bakes them something:

בראשית פרשת וירא פרק יט

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(ג) וַיִּפְצֵר בָּם מֵאֵד וַיִּסְרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמִצּוֹת אֶפֶה וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

The food Lot offered his guests was Matzah. Now, this is not sufficient proof of anything Paschal going on. After all, Matzah could have been eaten at any time, or describe any flat bread. My father in law, whom we are blessed to have here with us for Yom Tov, eats Matzah non stop between Pesach and Purim each year! But Rashi really says it-

Rashi's explanation strains the boundaries of believability. Even if you subscribe to the view held by many commentators (like Rashi, for example) that our forefathers kept all the mitzvos, Pesach is a holiday we have to commemorate a historic event- an event that had not yet happened! So how can we say that Lot kept Pesach?

This question was raised by Rav Yoel Bin Nun, one of the great Tanach teachers in the Dati Leumi community in Israel today, and I'd like to share his answer with you this morning. Look at some of the parallels between the two incidents- the Exodus from Egypt and Lot's hasty departure from Sodom.

1. In each case, the protagonists are ordered by God to evacuate, and with the same language. Lot told his family-

(יד) וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל חֲתָנָיו לֵקְחֵי בְנֹתָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ קוֹמוּ צְאוּ מִן הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי מִשְׁחִית יִקְנֹק אֶת הָעִיר וַיְהִי כַמְצִחֵק  
בְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו

Aharon and Moshe were told the same thing-

(לא) וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ קוֹמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי גַם אַתֶּם גַּם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ עֲבַדוּ אֶת יִקְנֹק פְּדֻבְרָכֶם:

2. Second, God rained brimstone and fire on Sodom, and rained thunder and fiery hail onto Egypt.

3. In each incident, Matzos were consumed.

In light of these striking parallels, Rashi's two cryptic words begin to make a lot more sense. Lot may not have been experiencing the actual holiday of redemption that takes place in the Spring,

in Nissan. But if he was not experiencing the actual Pesach, he was living through its exact analogue, and was experiencing the spiritual Pesach. In each case, one family was saved from the wreckage of an immoral nation that took them in and promised hospitality, only to turn on them later on. And in each case, the protagonists were saved from the carnage and chaos by virtue of their current or future hospitality- the hallmark of the house of Avraham. Rashi's comment connects the Pesach of Egypt with its spiritual father, to show that even the original Pesach draws its inspiration from a Pesach that came before it, by means of a symbol- the Matzah. That is what Pesach is about each year, isn't it? Each year, at the Seder, we connect the Pesach we are experiencing to an "original Pesach." Today is the 400th anniversary of the birth of William Shakespeare. In the context of our celebration of Pesach, it's worth quoting one of the most famous lines from *The Tempest*:

*Whereof what's past is prologue, what to come*

*In yours and my discharge.*

The past is prologue; connecting to the past prepares us to rise to the occasion in what is to come. Of course, we recount the exodus from Egypt, but we often use symbols to connect us to the Pesach observed by our parents, grandparents and other forebears, whether through the kiddush cup our Zaydie used, the pillowcases that came from our grandmother or the tunes for the Seder that have been passed down through the generations. But it's not just symbols we connect with; after all, not everyone has a tangible symbols that have been handed down as symbols of a Pesach heritage. But even if you don't have a visible memento of a Pesach heritage, we all have Pesach narratives in our families, in which we have experienced oppression and freedom. An ancestor's escape from the murderous Nazis or forcible expulsion from hostile Muslim nations. A grandparent who was a bookkeeper because there were Jewish quotas in Law Schools. A cousin who experienced deliverance in the form of a cure from an

illness. These are the Pesach narratives we all can and do connect with at our own Seder experience, even as we write our own Pesach narratives to pass on ourselves. Unfortunately, we are in the diaspora, but we have been given the gift of having a second Seder in which we can expand upon- or make up for- the first. Let us use it in the best way possible- to create and share lasting memories that connect us to the original Pesach of our lives.