

Afikomen. The Afikomen represents the korban Pesach. This is the seminal point of the Seder. The korban Pesach, in Mitzrayim, was taken from the tenth of the month and guarded until it was ritually slaughtered and then roasted on the afternoon of the fourteenth. It was eaten by midnight. Midnight, that night, was when Hashem struck down the Land of Mitzrayim with the plague of the Death of the First Born. When the Land of Mitzrayim was suffering, it was no time to eat the korban. Additionally, from midnight until they actually departed early the next morning, the hour of freedom had arrived. There was no time to eat a korban. It was only time to pack up and go.

“וְכָכָה תֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ מִתְּנִיכֶם חֲגָרִים בְּעַלְיֵכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמְקַלְכֶם בְּיַדְכֶם וְאָכַלְתֶּם אֹתוֹ בְּהַפְזוֹן כִּסְתָה הוּא לֵה” And this is how you shall eat it: with your loins girded (your belt tightened), your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And eat it with haste. Pesach is for Hashem.” (Shmos 12:11). There is further instruction that says the Korban Pesach should not be eaten with chometz, and for seven days Matzah should be eaten, כִּי בְהַפְזוֹן יָצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם “Because in haste you went out of the Land of Mitzrayim.” (Devroim 16:3). In Shmos it says the korban is eaten with haste. In Devorim it says the leaving was in haste. They are saying the same thing. There was time from Rosh Chodesh until the Seder Night to digest that freedom was at hand. Then Seder Night lasted from nightfall until midnight. Once midnight came and the time for freedom arrived, the Bnei Yisroel had to hurry. They had to pack and leave. They could no longer linger. Shortly after midnight, Pharaoh called Moshe and Aharon expelled the Bnei Yisroel. From then the Bnei Yisroel rushed out, crossed the desert, arrived at Yam Suf (the Gulf of Aqaba), then experienced the Mannah, fought Amalek, arrived at Har Sinai in the Saudi Arabian desert, and prepared for three days for Hashem to speak to them. All that followed after eating the Korban Pesach was haste.

In Shmos, Hashem was instructing Bnei Yisroel prior to the final maka. They were told to have a seder and then eat the korban before midnight. They had to eat it in haste because the time for freedom was nigh. After digressing in the desert for four decades, Moshe told the Bnei Yisroel that the Korban Pesach had to be eaten, but could not be eaten with chometz, and that matzah must be eaten for seven days, because they left Mitzrayim in haste. This instruction tied the Korban Pesach to the matzah. As expressed, earlier, in Ha Lachma Anya, the story of *sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim* is told over matzah—the food that tied the bondage and freedom together. This is the Torah source to use matzah in place of korban Pesach during galus, at times when there is no korban. Matzah is eaten as the Afikomen. The korban Pesach was eaten in haste and the matzah—eaten in lieu of chometz—symbolizes the leaving in haste.

The issue of leaving in haste is that there was no time to properly reflect on the tragedy. For centuries Bnei Yisroel suffered poverty, bondage, and hard labor as a nation. Yet, they did not have time to debrief it as a nation. Hashem specifically took them into the desert for this purpose. Their first test was after He spoke to them at Har Sinai. He left them alone, without Moshe, for forty days. Aharon and Chur turned out

to be poor substitutes. The purpose of this period was for the nation to grieve, digest, and reflect together.

At Har Sinai there was a sense of unity. The Torah says “כָּל־הָעָם” four times. It commences with כָּל־הָעָם יִקְדּוּ “The entire nation unified.” (Shmos 19:8). “The entire nation unified said, ‘All that Hashem speaks we shall do.’” (Ibid). On the third day Hashem would appear before the eyes of the entire nation. (Ibid 19:11). The entire nation shuddered. (Ibid 19:16). The entire nation saw the voices and the flames. (Ibid 20:15). There was a unity to the nation. Hashem found this the perfect time to leave them alone, as a nation, without Moshe to rely on. They were to come together and share the experience that they as a nation suffered. However, while they suffered as a nation, they did not heal as a nation.

Moshe left Aharon and Chur in charge. (Ibid 24:14). He did not disclose to them—nor did he know himself—how long he would be in the cloud on top of the mountain. (Ibid 24:18). However, after forty days, and not knowing when Moshe would return, the nation was restless. (Ibid 32:1). There was no unity. וַיִּקָּהֵל הָעָם עַל־אַהֲרֹן “The nation gathered upon Aharon.” (Ibid). There is no more כָּל־הָעָם. They wanted judges to be appointed for them, because they were having civil disputes. (Ibid). אֲלָקִים means judges, just as it did in the civil laws Moshe taught the nation before he went up the mountain. (See ibid 21:6,22 and 22:7,8,27). They already had lower court judges, instituted by Moshe following the advice of his father-in-law, Yisro. (Ibid 18:21). What the people wanted was a panel of Supreme Court justices to take Moshe’s place. (They, for unknown reasons, did not find Aharon to be fit). Aharon’s solution was to take their gold, hoping that taking their wealth would calm their civil disputes. Instead, when seeing the molten calf, the people accused one another: אֵלֶּה אֲלֹקֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלוּךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם “These are your judge, Yisroel, that brought you up from the Land of Mitzrayim.” (Ibid 32:4). In other words, *you are brought up from bondage only to suffer greed and needing money to solve your problems*. The nation—instead of processing their grief and healing together—tore itself apart.

This was the exact reason that Hashem did not want to take Bnei Yisroel to Eretz Yisroel by way of the Philistine route. וַיֹּהִי בְשַׁלְחָה פְּרַעֲוִה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָתַם אֲלֵהֶם דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי “And it was in Pharaoh sending out the nation, the Lord did not guide them the way of Philistine land, because it was close. Because the Lord said, ‘Lest the nation see war and return to Mitzrayim.’” (Ibid 13:17). The pasuk indicates it was Pharaoh that sent out the nation. They did not fully appreciate that Hashem took them out. There were two more events that they needed to undergo in order to appreciate this point: the splitting of the Yam Suf and seeing the total annihilation of the Mitzrayim army (giving them total faith), and the Revelation at Har Sinai and learning the Torah (obtaining His Law and code of ethics).

נָתַם is a unconventional word to use for lead. It is used in the Torah only with Divine Providence. Avraham’s servant uses it when he talks about how it was the Lord of Avraham אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת “that guided me to the true path.” (Bereishis 24:48). It is closely tied to the word for “comfort.” Hashem had to lead Bnei Yisroel and teach them how to be free and how to live freely. He was guiding them along His path. Not just a

physical pathway to the Land, but the *spiritual* pathway to attain Torah and freedom and learning to live like freemen in their new lives and Promised Land.

Importantly, “Because it was close.” The nation would get to Canaan, too soon. They were not ready, yet, to live in Eretz Yisroel as a sovereign nation. They first had to experience the two major events, as noted above. They also had to debrief and heal from their centuries of trauma. This is what the initial traveling to the desert was for.

“And they will return to Mitzrayim.” Not literal Mitzrayim but the mental state of being slaves and suffering bondage. They would still be carrying that baggage with them and a sick and suffering people cannot conquer a land and be sovereigns. They needed the time and distance to heal.

Additionally, Mitzrayim and the Pilishtim both harassed the avos. An earlier Pharaoh tried to seduce Sarah. Avimelech and his people did similar to Sarah and Rivka and also disputed with Avraham and Yitzchok over wells. Mitzrayim was now all but destroyed. Hashem wanted to keep his nation away from the dishonest and antagonistic Pilishtim. There was also a treaty in place between Avraham and Yitzchok, and the Pilishtim. The new nation did not need this false sense of security to think they had peace. Hashem wanted to teach them how to obtain real peace and security: His Law.

Seder Night teaches that Hashem is the ultimate guide and sovereign of the entire world. The nation had to see that, and they saw it at Yam Suf. (Ibid 14:31). This lesson is retold and fortified ever Seder Night. Together, the lesson of unity must also be taught. The nation ate the Afikomen in haste that first seder. The nation left together in haste. They arrived together in unity at Har Sinai. Together the nation will leave this exile and enter the final *geula*.

Haste. Afikomen was eaten in haste in Mitzrayim (Shmos 12:11) and without chometz and only with matzah because Bnei Yisroel left in haste (Devorim 16:3). בְּחֶפְזוֹן is mentioned only three times in Tanach. These two places and then תִּצְאוּ וּבְמַגֵּפוֹתָם כִּי לֹא בְּחֶפְזוֹן תִּצְאוּ וּבְמַגֵּפוֹתָם כִּי לֹא תֵלְכוּן כִּי־הָלַךְ לִפְנֵיכֶם ה' וּמֵאַסְפֵּכֶם אֶלְקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: “Because without haste will you leave, nor will you go with flight; because Hashem will walk before you, the Lord of Yisroel will gather you in.” (Yishayahu 52:12). In converse to the first *geula*, which was an incomplete one, in that it did not lead to ultimate peace and harmony and full sovereignty over Eretz Yisroel, the *geula asida*, the coming Redemption, will be complete. There will not be the haste of fleeing out or running towards anything. It will come nonchalant, simply by walking. Hashem will be there to gather in the exiles and lead the way, in safety and assurance. We end the eating of Seder Night hoping to this very outcome – speedily in our days.