
PESAḤ

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The holiday of Pesah is called Shabbat in the Torah, as in "from the day after the Sabbath" (Lev. 23:15). Pesah is like Shabbat, of which Scripture says "remember" and "keep." Of Pesah 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.

The same is true of the redemption from Egypt. On every Pesah 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 be guarded from any "ferment" or change on this holiday.

"Keep the matzot, for on this very day I brought the children of Israel forth from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:17)—*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 reason we were created in this world: to do His will. . . .

3:99

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.