

The Weekly Daf



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Pesachim 114-121

Week of 19 - 25 Kislev 5759 / 8 - 14 December 1998
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

The Fast Bake

"Why do we eat this matza?" This is the rhetorical question we ask at the Pesach Seder while saying the Haggada.

We answer by recalling the hurried departure of our ancestors from Egypt: "They baked the dough which they took out of Egypt into matzos, for it did not leaven into chametz, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry." (Shmos 12:39)

What would our ancestors have done had they been given more time?

There are two radically different approaches to this question.

Rabbeinu Nissim (RaN) writes in his commentary on our gemara that they would have allowed it to become chametz and would have baked it into bread. Although at Sinai we were forbidden to eat or own chametz the entire seven days of Pesach, this first Pesach took place before receiving the Torah at Sinai and had different rules. The ban on eating chametz was limited to the first day alone, and there was no ban on possessing chametz even on that day. Had time allowed, they would have baked their dough into loaves of bread which they could begin eating the day after their Exodus.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban), in his commentary on Chumash, dismisses such an approach, because he contends that even on that first Pesach it was forbidden for Jews to have chametz in their possession. Had they been given more time, he concludes, they would have baked matzos in the comfort of their homes, and transported the finished product, rather than be compelled to carry out dough which they could only bake in an improvised manner at their first stop.

This approach raises the question of how they were able to avoid the dough automatically becoming chametz when left unattended for so long. Natural and miraculous explanations can be found in the Midrash, the Targum of Yonasan ben Uziel and the commentaries of Ohr Hachayim and Malbim.

Pesachim 116b

A Reward for the Reward

"Give thanks to Hashem for He is good, for His loving-kindness is forever." (*Tehillim 136:1*) This is probably the most familiar passage of the Hallel, which we say at the Seder table and throughout Pesach and other Festivals. Rabbi Chisda offers a fascinating perspective of Hashem's extraordinary graciousness based on this passage.

When a Jew is loyal to Hashem, he is promised Divine protection for his possessions. As the Torah says "No one will covet your property when you go up to be seen before Hashem your G-d three times a year (*Shmos 34:24*)." The Sage Issi ben Yehuda explains this to mean that even though you are not at home, your cow will safely graze with no wild beast attacking it, and your chicken will rummage for its food with no cat threatening it. (*Pesachim 8b*)

But when a Jew abandons his responsibility to observe the Torah and has to be reminded of his duty, Hashem does not immediately strike at his body or life. He sends his warning instead in the form of withdrawing those material blessings which He has granted. The rich man loses his ox, the poor man his sheep, the orphan his egg and the widow her chicken. It is with the good that He has given man that He enables man to achieve atonement for his sins, and this is indeed an expression of magnificent lovingkindness.

Since it is obvious that it is Hashem's preference to bless man with prosperity, we may gain a new insight, as Tiferes Yisrael suggests, into the statement of the Sage Shimon ben Azai that "the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah" (*Avos 4:2*). Since it is the Divine will to increase human prosperity as a reward for obedience, the one who fulfills a mitzvah gets credit not only for obedience but also for generating prosperity. The converse is true of the sinner. "Retribution for a sin is a sin" means that the sinner is held responsible for the destruction of possessions necessitated by his sinful ways. In this sense, the sinners are called "destroyers of the world" (*Avos 5:1*) while the righteous are called "preservers of the world" (*Ibid*).

Pesachim 118a

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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Production Design: **Eli Ballon**

Issue #252 - Pesachim 114-121

For the week of 19 - 25 Kislev 5759 / 8 - 14 December 1998 (Parshas Vayeshev)