

"You Comfort Me in Vain"

- A Clarification of the Connection Between Pesach and Tish'a be-Av

by Rav Elyakim Krumbein

"Satisfy me with maror (bitter herbs)' - This refers to the first day of the festival of Pesach, the day on which we eat [the Paschal sacrifice] 'on matzot and maror'; 'Sate me with wormwood' - Just as you satisfied Me on the first night of Pesach, so should you satiate Me on the night of Tish'a be- Av, with wormwood. Hence the night [of the week] on which Pesach begins is the same night [of the week] as Tish'a be- Av." (Eikha Rabba 3:5, and also the beginning of 18).

The midrash is commenting on the fact that Pesach and Tish'a be-Av always fall on the same day of the week. Although the Beit Ha-Levi concludes in his responsa (Derush 2) that "there seems to be no practical difference as to which day it falls," the midrash nevertheless appears to indicate a qualitative connection between the two. This question is discussed further on in the Beit Ha-Levi, Derush 4, as well as in the commentary of the midrash on the spot. Let us take the midrash a step further and add our own contribution. The Significance of the Maror on Pesach Night

In both the Written and the Oral Law, we make a distinction between the Pesach sacrifice as commemorated in Egypt and the Pesach sacrifice of all future generations. Which of them is the "real" Pesach? A superficial consideration of the two would lead us to the conclusion that the real Pesach was that of the Exodus, the sacrifice in the merit of which - according to the well-known midrash - our forefathers came out of Egypt, while the Paschal sacrifice of all future generations is simply a commemoration of that first Pesach. However, this perception contradicts the explicit wording of the text: "And you shall tell your son on that day saying, 'Because of THIS God did for me when I came out of Egypt'" ([Shemot 13:8](#)) - i.e., "in order that I should fulfill His commandments, including this Paschal sacrifice, this matza and this maror" (Rashi). From here it would appear that the whole purpose of the exodus from Egypt was in order that the Paschal sacrifice should be offered throughout the generations.

A strong proof for this view can be brought from the unique combination of history and halakha which characterizes the episode of the exodus from Egypt as described in the Torah. It is specifically at the point where the drama reaches its peak that God sees fit to command the nation

with the tiniest details, not only those pertaining to their immediate task - their own Paschal sacrifice - but also those pertaining to the Paschal sacrifice for all generations. For Bnei Yisrael it was a time of entirely new experiences and great tension; they were required to undertake an operation the likes of which had never been imagined. Could God not have found a more relaxed and appropriate time for instructions which in any case had no bearing on that moment itself?

This question certainly makes sense, but only if we assume that Pesach for future generations is nothing more than a commemoration of the Pesach in Egypt. If, however, we look at the situation in light of the expression "because of THIS..." then there is no more natural and obvious place than here for God to command the nation with regard to Pesach for future generations. It is essential that Bnei Yisrael understand their redemption and its purpose. Moreover, were it not for the commandment regarding Pesach for future generations, there would have been no way of understanding the Pesach in Egypt itself.

What passed through the minds of those Hebrew slaves upon hearing the command to sacrifice the Pesach? They were certainly familiar with the festive sacrifices - le-havdil - offered by their pagan neighbors. The majestic celebrations, the joy of the masses, the feeling of security and stability of a nation sovereign in its own land - all this they observed among the Egyptians, and despaired. Now, Moshe Rabbeinu appears in front of our forefathers with the news of the command - a festival for God! A festival for Israel! But how? Without an altar? Smearing the blood on the entrances to their clay houses? Some type of underground activity ("No man shall go out from the entrance of his house")? In haste? With all their bags packed? The Pesach of Egypt could not have been commanded without a full disclaimer of any hint of mockery of the downtrodden slaves. The true festival is ahead of us, in the future, in Eretz Yisrael, and "ba'avur zeh" (because of this) - for the sake of that future - you are leaving. What is required of you today? A demonstration of your faith in that future. You will celebrate the Pesach today, in a foreign land, under the whips of the overlords, in unbearable conditions, because you await the future redemption and long for it - and I shall consider it as though you celebrated the Pesach in all its halakhic details and with all the appropriate majesty.

To what can this be compared? To the command of the prophet Yirmiyahu: "Place markers for yourself, make for yourself road-signs" (31:20). On our way out of Israel and towards our exile we were commanded to place markers and road-signs in order that the way back would be easily recognizable. These would serve as a tangible sign that "your hope is not lost, because you will still

return to these your cities" (Radak). And our Sages commented in the Sifri: "Although I am banishing you from the land and sending you into exile, keep yourselves identified with the mitzvot, such that when you return they will not be new to you" (quoted by the Ramban, [Vayikra 18:25](#)). For the purposes of our argument it makes no difference whether the Sifri is referring here to all the mitzvot, in accordance with the Ramban who holds that "the mitzvot are directed mainly to the dwellers of God's land" (in which case their observance in exile is in any case only for the purposes of "identification"), or to those mitzvot which de-oraita (as biblically mandated) fall away during the time of the Temple's destruction (but which were declared obligatory by the Sages for our time, for the duration of the exile). Either way, our devotion to the Divine command and our faith in the future are expressed in our observance of the mitzvot under impossible conditions, during the periods of destruction and exile. In this respect we follow in the footsteps of the generation which left Egypt, which "celebrated" the Pesach in the shadow of their slavery, but with an unshakable faith that their modest actions would be amplified in the future by their descendants, in the full commemoration of the Pesach for all generations. They were redeemed in the merit of this faith.

With this in mind we are able to resolve a substantial problem with regard to the mitzva of maror, which - according to the Torah - is connected to the Paschal sacrifice, which must be eaten "on matzot and maror:" How do we explain the combination of the eating of the Pesach, symbol of redemption, together with the symbol of the bitterness of slavery? And on what basis did Hillel take this a step further, expounding that the maror must literally be eaten in the same mouthful as the Pesach?

We must remember that for our forefathers in Egypt, the maror symbolized the eternity of their faith: We are in exile, the taste of the maror is still in our mouths, and nevertheless we celebrate the Pesach! The same is true of Pesach for all future generations: the maror symbolizes the thread connecting every Paschal sacrifice to the Pesach of Egypt. Each Pesach started then, in the fiery furnace; it was there that the seed was planted, and today we are enjoying its fruit. The Pesach of future generations is the explanation of Pesach in Egypt - its inevitable conclusion.

In summary: The combination of the maror and the Pesach declares that faith in the future is victorious over the depression of the present; it is indeed possible to taste the redemption in the very grains of the maror. A Perversion of the World Order

In order to see the connection between Pesach and Tish'a be-Av, we must first clarify one issue pertaining to the portions of the Torah dealing with rebuke of the nation. Our nation has, during its long existence, become very familiar with the experience of the decline from the heights of joy to the depths of despair. But there is one specific point which seems to highlight the tragedy; a point which is exemplified by a comparison of the parallel curses in the two Torah portions of rebuke. In parashat Bechukotai we read, "And I shall make your heavens like copper and your land like brass... and your land will not give forth its produce, and the trees of the land shall not give their fruit." In contrast, in Sefer Devarim we find, "The field shall give forth much seed but you will reap little, for the locusts will destroy it. You shall plant vines and work at them, but wine you shall not drink and you shall not gather, for the worms will eat it." Why is the second scenario so much more terrifying than the first? Because the first describes the total removal of blessing and its replacement with curses (no rain, no produce), while the second describes a situation where there is a potential for blessing, but it is wasted - there is produce, but it is eaten by the locusts. Further examples: the leading away into exile as described in Vayikra is absolute, while in Devarim it is executed in stages - the head of the family remains on his land in order to try and stave off the catastrophe. Once, his house resounded with children's laughter; now, "your children are given to a foreign nation, and your eyes see it." The stranger, who once accepted our authority, now assumes a position "higher and higher above you." In Vayikra we are told, "And you shall consume the flesh of your children," but Devarim emphasizes the fact that it is specifically "the soft-hearted and delicate man," the epitome of gentleness and humanity, who will carry out this horrifying act. In short: the crux of the tragedy is not in being led off to exile, but rather in life at home becoming a nightmare; not when the reality changes to a point where it becomes unrecognizable, but rather when it is easily recognizable, when just beyond the perversion and violence we can still make out the outlines of the same world which once showered us with its good and its blessings. "I called to my beloved ones (me'ahavai); they have deceived me" (Eikha 1:19)

In light of the above, we may explain the strange words of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the midrash on the pasuk, "I have called to my beloved ones (or 'endearers'), they have deceived me." He explains that the "me'ahavim" referred to are specifically the genuine prophets, "who endear me to God: 'they have deceived me' - they deceived me by saying, 'separate teruma and ma'aser.' As if there is any teruma and ma'aser applicable in Babylon! Rather, they say this in order to endear me to God. This is what Yirmiyahu refers to when he says, 'Place markers for yourself' - remain identified by the mitzvot by which the Jews were previously identified."

Here again we are confronted by the same wonderful concept which we examined above. What "deception" can there possibly be in this beautiful idea which expresses our faith in and devotion to the Torah, despite everything which befalls us? It seems that when we look at the situation from the perspective of the destruction, we are incapable - and unwilling - to see in the command to "place markers for yourself" anything more than a bitter illusion. Teruma and ma'aser outside of Israel? Shaking of the lulav on the seven days of Sukkot - "and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God" - on the rivers of Babylon? Can there be any greater perversion? It is perfectly clear to anyone with eyes in his head that the entire observance of Torah is built on one central assumption: that the nation of Torah is dwelling in its land. Who on earth dreamed up the absurd idea of Torah observance, communal life, even the mitzvot which pertain specifically to Eretz Yisrael - all continuing in exile? Could any right-minded Jew seriously believe, as the prophets claimed, that such a situation would "endear" us to God? Surely, if we were genuinely beloved to God, then we would still be there, in Eretz Yisrael, instead of sitting here and playing "make believe." Such a situation is nothing but the expression of melancholy of a young bride whose husband has left her, and who continues to beautify herself in his honor as though nothing has happened.

In fact, were it not for the stubbornness of those "endearers," claims Israel, the destruction would yet be somehow bearable. We would then be able to distance ourselves spiritually from those mitzvot, considering them as inapplicable until the coming of Mashiach, and that would be that. But the "endearers" will not give up. For some reason they feel compelled to take the once glorious Torah and to squeeze it and twist it to make it fit exile as well, and then to make us keep it. The result is that we are reminded every day anew of what could have been, of our glorious past, which now peeps at us through the pathetic mask of "make yourself markers." It is in vain that the prophets comfort us with their visions of the future, with their promises and their oaths. The reality is that God has cast us away from before Him. We cannot share their view that by placing markers for ourselves it will be possible to "live the dream," because we believe that as the years go by, our lives and our history became one great illusion.

Just as the experience of the destruction forces us to view the command to "place yourself markers" differently, so does the prototype of that view - the Pesach of Egypt. Once we ate the maror in order to identify with the heroic faith of our forefathers in Egypt, which attained its justification and its realization in the celebration of the Pesach in the Temple. But now the Pesach of the Beit Ha-mikdash, too, appears to have been a passing euphoria, and meantime the Pesach of Egypt - observance of the mitzvot under difficult conditions - has become the dominant situation for all

generations. For the weary nation of Israel only absolute redemption can justify the old understanding of Pesach in Egypt - as a road-sign for the future. At this stage the Pesach of Egypt appears as nothing more than yet another example of the gloomy scenario which plays itself over and over - a perverted observance of the beautiful Torah which exists only in the dreams of seers. The maror was supposed to be the basis for the Paschal sacrifice, but Tish'a be-Av gives it a new perspective: the sacrifice has disappeared, but the maror remains. The maror of Pesach joins the maror of Tish'a be-Av, and the two together embody the expression, "Satisfy Me with maror, satiate Me with wormwood." "Hold this, and from this, too, do not allow your hand to falter" ([Kohelet 7:18](#))

We have presented above two points of view regarding the issue of "place yourself markers" - the traditional and generally accepted view of the prophets, and that of Knesset Yisrael as we believe it to be expressed in the words of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Midrash Eikha. We subscribe to the first view, just as we try as a general rule to see all the events of our times in an optimistic light. However, on Tish'a be- Av, at least, we have to examine things realistically. Specifically for us - we who have merited to return to Eretz Yisrael - this is crucial. Otherwise we are bound to spend our whole lives using concepts such as "the beginning of the dawning of our redemption," etc., without noticing that what we have merited is in fact only the "markers;" a shriveled version of how things really should be. It is specifically because we have merited to see many of the signs of redemption that we have to feel the full pain of the question: Where is the content that should exist here? May we soon merit a full answer.