

# The Meaning of Shavuot and its Unique Offering

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By Rav Yoel Bin-Nun

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While Pesach and Shavuot are linked by the counting of the *Omer*, they differ radically in their relationship to *chametz* and *matza*: on Pesach *chametz* is forbidden and *matza* is compulsory, while on Shavuot we offer two loaves of *chametz*. How are we to understand this? A proper explanation of the significance of *chametz* and *matza*, analyzing the various sources that appear in the Torah, shows that these are all details of a complete, unified system.

In order to understand all the different appearances of *chametz* and *matza* in the Torah (to be listed below), we need to uncover the essential, unifying concept behind *chametz* and *matza*. Leaven, *chametz* and also honey (the jam of the sweet fruits) represent the completed product of the farmer's work. Both *chametz* bread and the ripe, sweet fruits express the end of the successful process. They therefore also symbolize the wealth and success, the abundant Divine blessing of a person who has seen the realization of that which he had visualized at the start, and which he pursued until he achieved it.

*Matza*, in contrast, represents a station in mid-process, before the end-result is achieved. It represents a deficiency that is waiting for completion. Salt, which must accompany every meal offering (*Vayikra* 2:13), also expresses a raw, primal substance unprocessed by human hands; it is entirely a gift from God.

We may expand this idea somewhat and propose that *matza* – both practically and symbolically – is “poor man's bread”: it is the bread of someone who lacks the ability and resources to bring the material process to its completion in the form of a full, leavened loaf. *Chametz* – the leavening that allows the dough to rise and form a rounded cake – is the symbol of the wealthy person of means and power.

This understanding of the symbolism of *chametz* and of *matza* is the key to understanding all of the various contexts in which they occur in the Torah. Let us list them briefly:

1. The Pesach sacrifice: *Chametz* is prohibited, while there is a mitzva to eat *matza*.

2. The festival of *matzot*: *Chametz* consumption is prohibited and punishable by 'karet,' while *matza* is ubiquitous. Here, the context of the prohibition for all future generations is anchored in the *matza* baked during the Exodus from Egypt (*Shemot* 12:39).
3. The *omer* offering and the two loaves: The *omer* offering of non-*chametz* barley brought on "the day after the Sabbath" (*Vayikra* 23:15-16), meaning, according to Chazal, on the second day of the festival of *matzot*, is followed by a fifty day count until the offering of the two loaves on the holiday of *bikkurim*, where *chametz* is mandated (*Vayikra* 23:17).
4. *Mincha* (the meal offering): All meal offerings sacrificed on the altar are *matza* and not *chametz* (*Vayikra* 2:11-12).
5. *Korban toda* (thanksgiving offering): This offering includes three types of *matzot* along with one type of *chametz* (*Vayikra* 7:12-13).
6. *Korban ha-miluim* (Consecration offering): Like the offering of thanksgiving, there are three types of *matza* involved (*Shemot* 29:2, also *Vayikra* 8:26), as indicated in the mishna (*Menachot* 7:2). However, unlike the thanksgiving offering, there is no *chametz* in this offering.
7. The ram offered by the *nazir*: "On the day that his nazirite vow is fulfilled," the *nazir* brings a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a peace offering. Along with the peace offering he brings two types of *matzot* (*Bemidbar* 6:15), and the mishna (*Menachot* 7:2) points to the fact that these are two of the three types offered in the thanksgiving offering.
8. *Minchat chinukh* (Meal offering of inauguration): This meal offering was brought by every kohen on the day of his inauguration into the service of the Sanctuary, and by the Kohen Gadol upon assuming this position. Like the "consecration offering," the inaugural offering also involves only *matza*, with no *chametz* (*Vayikra* 6:12-16).
9. The prohibition of bringing *chametz* on the altar: "For you shall not burn any leaven nor any honey in an offering to God" (*Vayikra* 2:11). Therefore, even the offering of the two *chametz* loaves on

Shavuot come up until the altar and are waved before God, but are not offered upon the altar itself. The same applies to the first fruits of the honey – i.e., the honey of the sweet fruits.

The offering that a person brings upon the altar is, like prayer, an expression of man standing before God, filled with a sense of his own lowness and insignificance, and with a sense of how beholden and dependent he is on God (see, for example, *Divrei Ha-yamim I* 29:10-15). A person cannot stand before the altar with a proud sense of wealth that declares his independent stature, as in the verse, “My strength and the might of my hand have achieved all of this valor” (*Devarim* 8:17). A sacrifice offered with such a feeling would be an act of impudence, of pride and arrogance – one of the most serious transgressions in man’s relationship with God.

For this reason, “You shall not burn any leaven, nor any honey” – the symbols of wealth and the sense of satiety – “in an offering to God” (*Vayikra* 2:11). Even the first fruits (*bikkurim*) that are brought to the Temple with a ceremonial declaration (*Devarim* 26:2), which serve to inculcate recognition of God’s role in one’s success, may not be offered upon the altar, since they are not offered like “The prayer of a poor man when he is faint, who pours out his case before God” (*Tehillim* 102:1).

It is no coincidence that our sources identify leaven with the evil inclination (*yetzer ha-ra*). A person who is blessed with an abundance of physical health, material assets, and even rootedness in Eretz Yisrael and its Torah, may fall into a false sense of might and independence and forget God, “Who gives you the strength to perform valor” (*Devarim* 8:17-18). This is precisely the aspect of the *yetzer ha-ra* that tempts a person, especially on settling in Eretz Yisrael, and may lead him off the proper path (see *Devarim* 8, and the song of *Ha’azinu*, *Devarim* 32).

Therefore a person is obligated to remember his humble beginnings – his servitude, his wandering in the wilderness, and the manna of the Exodus – specifically at the hour of his great prosperity in Eretz Yisrael:

You shall remember all of the way that the Lord your God has led you for these forty years in the wilderness... in order to make it known to you that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by all that emerges from God’s mouth (*Devarim* 8:2-3).

This is also the significance of the recitation over the *bikkurim*, reminding the bearer of the time of Bnei Yisrael’s affliction and wandering during the time of the forefathers, specifically at the time of celebrating his successful and abundant harvest and the bringing of the first fruits.

## **Sacrifice of Thanksgiving**

An offering of thanksgiving is brought by a person who faced some danger or predicament and was delivered from it. Therefore, when he is saved, it is indeed proper that his offering include both *chametz* loaves and *matzot*. The *matzot* symbolize the trouble that he was in, the bitter cry that he uttered, and the process of redemption from that predicament to an open space of relief. The *chametz* represents the completion of his deliverance and his current state of tranquility; it is an expression of reaching the end of this particular road, the attainment of peace and satisfaction.

There is an interesting parallel between this offering, with its diverse elements, and chapter 107 of *Tehillim*, which presents four instances of redemption from trouble. The halakha takes these groups as detailing the “four who are obligated to give thanks,” those who are obligated to bring the thanksgiving offering (*Berakhot* 54b; *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 219:1), though the psalm relates primarily to the ingathering of the exiles. The psalm describes four models of redemption, each comprising a four-stage progression: 1) trouble and suffering, 2) crying out to God, 3) deliverance, 4) thanksgiving.

One could claim, using some exegetical license, that the three types of *matza* of the thanksgiving offering are parallel to the three stages that precede the thanksgiving: the stages of distress, crying out, and deliverance (which is itself a difficult process, characterized by gradual development and unrest – see below). Along with the *matzot*, this offering also includes the loaves of *chametz*, which correspond to the fourth stage – the singing of thanks to the Master of the world Who redeems and saves – for having brought this person to his state of tranquility.

### **Consecration offering and meal offering of inauguration**

This sacrifice is offered by the *kohanim* as they commence their service. This auspicious occasion signifies the start of a period that continues for as long as the *kohen* serves in his capacity. Therefore it is appropriate that the offering include only *matza* without *chametz*.

### **Sacrifice of the *nazir***

An examination of the *nazir*'s sacrifice in accordance with the principle set forth above sheds new light on the nazirite status. The period of nazirite abstention is not an end in itself, but rather a period of preparation for a more elevated and perfected life afterwards. The entire experience is orientated towards the future: “Thereafter the *nazir* may drink wine” (*Bemidbar* 6:20). In other words, the *nazir* returns to normalcy on a higher level, with improved spiritual protection against deviation and attraction to wine. He is now able to drink wine in a state of moral purity.

For this reason, “on the day that his period of separation is fulfilled,” the *nazir* offers only *matzot*, without *chametz*. The conclusion of his nazirite abstention is not an objective or achievement;

rather, it is the beginning of a more perfected and noble way of life. His great mission of living a better life actually begins only when the nazirite abstention ends. There is no justification for an indulgent celebration with loaves of *chametz* when his vow ends. Rather, he behaves like a *kohen* who is entering his service: he offers two of the *matzot* that are included in the consecration offering.

### **The *matza* of the Pesach offering and the festival of *matzot*:**

We can now apply this principle to the *matza* that characterizes Pesach. Concerning the Pesach sacrifice the Torah speaks of “the bread of affliction” not only because of the haste with which it was baked, but also because those who left Egypt were indeed like oppressed refugees, setting out on a long journey through the wilderness (*Devarim* 16:3).

On Pesach eve, Bnei Yisrael were still in Egypt; until the middle of the night, they were still Pharaoh’s slaves. Under such conditions there is no room – either at that time or on Pesach eve for all later generations – for *chametz*. At midnight, God struck all the firstborn of the land of Egypt, and redeemed His nation from its imprisonment. Generations of spiritual and physical subjugation were brought to a sudden end with the long-awaited fulfillment of the promised redemption. Seemingly, the nation should now have been able to lounge about like free people, setting a festive banquet table and singing praise and thanks in a relaxed atmosphere, with rich bread. But it suddenly becomes clear just how far the redemption is from being complete:

And the Egyptians pressed upon the people, to send them out of the land in haste... and the people took their dough before it was leavened – their kneading troughs bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders (*Shemot* 12:33-34).

The people embark on a long, arduous journey “in the great and terrible wilderness of snakes and scorpions and thirst, where there is no water” (*Devarim* 8:15). Before they have a moment to relax and enjoy their freedom, filling their lungs with the clear air of freedom, they are already gasping with exertion in their hasty flight to a land of dry desolation.

Apparently, redemption is a prolonged, difficult process requiring patience and a great capacity for discomfort; the ability to achieve the desired level of prosperity and comfort is not yet in their hands. “*Chametz*” lies beyond the horizon for them. When Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, all that they have is their *matza* – the bread of affliction (*Shemot* 12:39).

Their ongoing sustenance as exiled refugees continues to be provided not by their own efforts, but rather as a kindness from Above: “They asked and He brought quails, and He satisfied them with bread from the heavens. He opened the rock and water gushed forth; it ran in dry places like a river” (*Tehillim* 105:40-41).

For this reason, *chametz* is strictly forbidden for all generations specifically on the days following the anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt. The *matza* that is eaten for the seven days of the “festival of *matzot*” expresses the true redemption – with all of its trials and tribulations; an ongoing redemption comprising many stages.[1] The prohibition of *chametz* highlights the absence of a complete redemption that happens instantaneously – emphasizing that the *chametz* of Shavuot is not within reach immediately after the Pesach. The danger of expecting “instant *chametz*” (i.e., that things should immediately become easier, more comfortable, perfect), which is quite understandable and natural to a redeemed nation, explains the severity of the prohibition that distances us from it (the need to remove it from the house, and the “*karet*” punishment for eating it during the holiday of *matzot*).

This winding path that starts with the denigration of subjugation, and the Exodus from it, ultimately leading to the hoped-for peace and tranquility of Eretz Yisrael at the end of the journey, finds expression in the counting of fifty days from the beginning of the harvest (*Devarim* 16:9), from the day when the *omer* offering is brought, until the festival of the harvest – which is the day of the first fruits, on the day following the end of the seventh week.

### **Two loaves – *chametz***

The day of the *bikkurim* itself represents the conclusion of the process, the attainment of its real and metaphoric fruits. This conclusion is expressed on two levels. The first, a veiled allusion, leads from the Exodus from Egypt to the Revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Torah. The second, open and explicit, expresses permanent habitation in Eretz Yisrael. Both levels come together and connect with the day of *bikkurim*.

The entry into the land and the permanent habitation in it are mentioned explicitly on this day:

Until the day after the seventh week you shall count fifty days, and you shall offer a new meal offering to God. From your habitations you shall wave two loaves of two tenth measures; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked as *chametz*, they are first fruits to God. (*Vayikra* 23:9-17)

The festival of Shavuot, which is also the harvest festival and the festival of *bikkurim*, is therefore an agricultural celebration in all of these senses. It is the beginning of the wheat harvest in the Land of Israel, and thus it is the day of bringing the two loaves of *chametz* – the climax of the beginning of the harvest, which began with the *omer* offering.

The first aspect – the conclusion of the process that began with the Exodus from Egypt, and which reached its climax at the giving of the Torah – is likewise connected, albeit indirectly, with the day of *bikkurim*. While the connection is not explicitly indicated in the text, it nevertheless arises from the structure of the text and from the broad parallel between the giving of the Torah and the giving of the land. I shall elaborate on this point because of its fundamental importance, arising from Chazal's identification of Shavuot with the time of the giving of the Torah.

The time when Bnei Yisrael gathered in order to receive the Torah is mentioned in the Torah: "In the third month from Bnei Yisrael's exodus from Egypt, on that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai... and Israel encamped there before the mountain" (*Shemot* 19:1-2). In other words, this took place on Rosh Chodesh of the third month (Sivan) of the first year of the Exodus. (In most places in Tanakh, "*chodesh*" or "*ha-chodesh*" refers to Rosh Chodesh.) Even one who claims that the actual date in the third month is missing would have to admit that the giving of the Torah clearly took place close to the fiftieth day, with the commemoration being based on the fifty-day count alone.

An exact parallel to this is to be found in the original plan for the desired arrival of Bnei Yisrael in Kadesh Barne'a, the southern gateway to the land of Israel, in anticipation of the conquest. The original plan for the journey seems to have been aimed at the same date as the arrival on site for the giving of the Torah, one year later – in other words, Rosh Chodesh Sivan in the second year. This can be seen from the fact that Bnei Yisrael left Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month (*Bemidbar* 10:11-13), and the Torah's description of the journey from there to Kadesh Barne'a as an eleven day journey (*Devarim* 1:2).

Taken together, these two sources indicate that Bnei Yisrael were supposed to reach Kadesh Barne'a on Rosh Chodesh Sivan in the second year – exactly a year after arriving at Mount Sinai. Furthermore, each journey is presented as a direct continuation of Pesach. In the case of the giving of the Torah, the connection is manifest; after all, Bnei Yisrael, as well as the Egyptians, had been told in advance that the objective of the journey was to serve God in the wilderness on their way from Egypt, [2] "This shall be the sign for you that I have sent you: when you take the people from Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain" (*Shemot* 3:12).

Thus, the statement of this objective is not a mere excuse meant to convince Pharaoh, but rather a genuine original intention,[3] as evidenced by this verse and by the eventual Revelation and giving of the Torah at that place. Like the Exodus from Egypt, the journey to Israel, in the second month of the second year, comes as a continuation of the Pesach commemorated in the wilderness (*Bemidbar* 9:1-14). These two periods share much in common, and this is reflected in various commentaries.

The description of God's giving of the land, like His giving of the Torah, appears not in the Torah itself, but in *Sefer Yehoshua*, owing to the various travails along the way. Some of the early troubles caused a delay of a month (*Bemidbar* 11:19-20), such that Bnei Yisrael arrived at Kadesh Barne'a after the intended time of the wheat harvest, during the "time of the first of the grapes" (*Bemidbar* 13:20). Thus it was their arrival at the peak of summer, in their exhausted and weakened state, that led to God's decree for weeping for all generations.[4]

While the covenant of the plains of Moav is presented as a parallel to the covenant of Chorev (compare *Devarim* chapters 4-5 with chapters 27-28), the occasion that is most reminiscent of the gathering at Sinai is recorded in *Sefer Yehoshua*, in the conquest of Jericho. The beginning of this process in *Yehoshua* likewise parallels the Exodus from Egypt: the parting of the Jordan unquestionably parallels the splitting of the Red Sea – in terms of the nature of the event, its description, and its psychological effect on all the surrounding kings (compare *Yehoshua* 5:1 to *Shemot* 15:15-16). Indeed, the parallel is given explicit expression in *Tehillim* 114: "The (Red) sea saw it and fled; the Jordan was turned back," with the general introduction for both events, "When Israel came out of Egypt."

The circumcision in Gilgal is likewise an integral part of the exodus from the wilderness, which is somewhat like a renewed Exodus from Egypt, being defined as the point of severance from Egypt and all that it symbolized:

"And God said to Yehoshua: This day I have rolled the reproach of Egypt from upon you" (*Yehoshua* 5:9), "For all the people who left (Egypt) had been circumcised, while all those who were born in the wilderness, on the way from leaving Egypt, had not been circumcised" (5:5).

This parallel between the exodus from the wilderness with the entry into the land, on the one hand, and the Exodus from Egypt, on the other, holds the key to the meaning of the "reproach of Egypt" referred to in the verse cited above, which has posed such difficulties for commentators and scholars alike.[5] It also hints to the circumcision that preceded the Exodus from Egypt, which had been referred to in the Torah only in an indirect fashion.[6]

The Pesach observed by Bnei Yisrael on the plains of Jericho is a fundamentally necessary precondition to the conquest. Just as there is a Pesach sacrifice in anticipation of the Exodus from Egypt, there is a Pesach sacrifice in anticipation of the conquest of the land.

The conclusion that arises from the above analysis is that the Exodus from Egypt represents the point of departure for a dual process. Its goal is, on one hand, the giving of the Torah, and, on the other hand - the giving of the land, which is the clearly stated objective of the Exodus in many sources (see, for example, *Vayikra* 25:38). Since the giving of the land was not achieved by the generation that



left Egypt, the renewed effort to reach the land in the time of Yehoshua starts off with the splitting of the Jordan, a mass circumcision, and the Pesach in Gilgal – a replay of sorts of the Exodus from Egypt.

This parallel between the giving of the Torah and the giving of the land is clearly borne out in the climax of the description in *Sefer Yehoshua*:

1. Mount Chorev (Sinai) and Jericho are both defined as “hallowed ground,” where an angel of God appears to the prophet, God’s emissary. In the case of Moshe, this happens at the burning bush, at the mountain of God at Chorev (*Shemot* 3:1-5). In the case of Yehoshua, this happens at Jericho (*Yehoshua* 5:13-15).
2. In the description of God’s appearance before Bnei Yisrael, before the giving of the Torah, the shofar blast announces God’s revelation (*Shemot* 19:16), His one-time appearance in history to make His word heard and to give the Torah to His people, Israel. Clearly, the shofar is also a central element in the fall of Jericho.

So long as the Divine Presence remains upon the mountain, no one is permitted to approach it other than Moshe (*Shemot* 20:18). Bnei Yisrael are commanded not to approach the mountain, until “The blast sounds long, then they shall come up to the mountain” (*Shemot* 19:12-13). The long blast (“yovef”) announces the appearance of the Divine Presence and its disappearance; thereafter, “they shall come up to the mountain.”

A parallel event took place at Jericho prior to the conquest and the giving of the land to Bnei Yisrael. Everything that happens after Jericho, in the various battles of conquest, should be regarded as the actualization of the original revelation at Jericho.

We find in *Yehoshua* a daily circling of the city for six days, and then seven rounds, with *shofarot*, on the seventh day.

“And it shall be, when the horn’s blast sounds long, when you hear the sound of the shofar, all the people shall shout a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down, and the people shall go up – each person straight ahead” (*Yehoshua* 6:3-5).

The content and style of these verses clearly parallel the experience at Sinai, including the preliminary six days followed by a definitive seventh day:

“God’s glory rested upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days, and He called to Moshe on the seventh day out of the midst of the cloud” (*Shemot* 24:16).

It is also interesting to note that according to the prevailing view in the *midrashim*, the seventh day on both occasions – the Revelation at Sinai and the gathering at Jericho – took place on Shabbat.[7]

The intrinsic reason for this parallel lies in the fact that at Jericho, as at Sinai, there was a revelation and descent of the Divine Presence; an occasion of God’s judgment – of Israel, on one hand, and of the Land of Canaan and its inhabitants, on the other, ascertaining that the “sin of the Emorites” is complete (see *Bereishit* 15:16). The “Ark of God, Master of all the earth” (*Yehoshua* 3:13) which goes around the city, and the sounding of the “*shofarot* of ram’s horns before the Ark of God” (6:13), proclaim that “the supreme, awesome God, King over all the earth... sits upon the throne of His holiness” (*Tehillim* 47:3, 10), and that this represents “a judgment of the God of Yaakov” (ibid. 81:5). Therefore, at that moment, “It is holy ground!”

This may shed light on the verse: “Jericho was tightly shut up before Bnei Yisrael; none emerging and none entering” (*Yehoshua* 6:1). The inaccessibility is not only a technical problem arising from the barred gates. Bnei Yisrael may not enter because a place where the Divine Presence appears is out of bounds to them, just as Moshe is commanded to set bounds around the mountain and sanctify it, “Lest they break through to God to gaze and many of them perish” (*Shemot* 19:21).

The long blast of the horn, just as at Sinai, is the sign that the revelation of the Divine Presence is over; the judgment of the nations is concluded, the verdict has been passed. God has taken the land of Israel from the nations that dwell there and has given it, as He sees fit, to the nation that He has chosen.[8] From this point onwards, Bnei Yisrael are entitled – indeed, obligated – to ascend to the place that God has indicated to them, because God is in their midst, thus they will not be driven back before their enemies.[9]

Everything that happens afterwards to the thirty-one kings of Canaan is the actualization of the verdict passed at Jericho, and therefore the *midrashim* view all of the kings as being concentrated in Jericho when it falls by God’s hand.[10]

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We have found that the day of *bikkurim*, fifty days after the Pesach sacrifice, expresses the conclusion and ultimate purpose of both the Exodus from Egypt and the beginning of the *omer* that is harvested in the land – both regarding the giving of the Torah and the giving of the land, and that these two themes are interwoven in the Torah itself as in the tradition of Chazal.

Therefore, the essential uniqueness of this day lies in the commandment of the two loaves, which are specifically *chametz*, with no *matza* at all – as a sign that the ultimate purpose of the Exodus from Egypt has been achieved. It is now proper and appropriate to set a festive table, to celebrate in tranquility, in the land of our inheritance, the completion of the Exodus and the completion of the counting of the harvest, and to bring a meal-offering of *chametz*, first fruits to God, as a special communal sacrifice, from the land of Israel.

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[1] We see from here the importance of thanking God for the beginning of the redemption – even though it does not yet include either Torah or Shabbat, neither the land of Israel nor a Temple, while, at the same time, appreciating that the beginning of the redemption is not the same as its completion.

[2] See *Shemot* 3:18; 5:3; 7:26; 8:16; 9:1; 9:13; 10:3, 7-11, 24-26.

[3] Hence, the Exodus from Egypt has two simultaneous and equally valid purposes: a. worshipping God at Mount Sinai; b. returning to the land of the forefathers and conquering it, thereby realizing God's promise to the forefathers.

[4] Physical and spiritual fatigue go hand in hand. With the desert sun burning overhead, the people want to remain at the oasis of Kadesh Barne'a. The initiative to send spies may be interpreted as an attempt to postpone the journey. The punishment – “measure for measure” – is that the people miss the most opportune time for a speedy, surprise campaign of conquest, and wait in the wilderness for an entire generation. This, it seems, is what motivated Chazal in their formulation of the fundamental connection between mourning and the months of Tamuz and Av: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said: You wept for nothing; I will establish a weeping for all generations” (*Ta'anit* 29a, and *Yerushalmi*, ad loc.)

[5] The difficulty lies in the phrase, “the reproach of Egypt.” It seems that the proper explanation is based on the documented assumption that the Egyptians practiced circumcision, and scorned Bnei Yisrael for failing to observe it – based on their understanding of the covenant of circumcision as fundamentally bound up with Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the “reproach” – the foreskin – was removed from them for the first time in a mass circumcision prior to leaving Egypt, and then at the second mass circumcision in preparation for the conquest of the land (*Yehoshua* 5:2) – thereby emerging completely from both slavery and their status as “uncircumcised”; the “reproach of Egypt” was removed from them and they merited the land of their inheritance.

[6] This is hinted at in the story of Tzipora's circumcision of her son, as explained by Y. Blau (*Tarbitz* 26 [5717, pp. 1-3]), who maintains that this was a sign to Moshe about the manner of the deliverance

of Bnei Yisrael. God gives Moshe a message to convey to Pharaoh, "Israel is My firstborn son.... Let My son go, that he may serve Me. And if you refuse to let him go, behold – I will slay your firstborn son." Immediately thereafter, we read of the angel seeking to kill him [Moshe's firstborn – see *Targum Yerushalmi*]. It is clear that this narrative should be read in light of the blood of the Pesach offering in Egypt and the circumcision performed by Yehoshua in Gilgal and the Pesach in Gilgal. The *midrashim* (on *Shemot* 4:24-26) hint that if Bnei Yisrael neglect the commandment of circumcision – even for such justified and urgent reasons, their lives would be at risk from the destroying angel that would slay the firstborn of the Egyptians.

[7] This is the opinion of Rabbi Yossi in the Gemara (*Ta'anit* 28b; *Yoma* 4b; *Shabbat* 86b). The *Yerushalmi* asserts that "Yehoshua's conquest of Jericho took place on Shabbat."

[8] Rashi (*Bereishit* 1:1, s.v. *bereishit*), based on *Yirmiyahu* 27:5, reads the entire book of *Bereishit* as background to God's decision to award Eretz Yisrael to Bnei Yisrael. The lesson that Rashi is teaching is not "faith in Eretz Yisrael," but rather faith in God, Creator of the world, Who gives Eretz Yisrael to Am Yisrael provided they are worthy.

[9] The corrective of the punishment from *Bemidbar* 14:40-45.

[10] It is for this reason that Chazal view Jericho as the key to the conquest of the land (see *Bemidbar Rabba*, 15,15; *Tanchuma Beha'alotekha*, 18; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Yehoshua* 32).

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