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PARASHAT HASHAVUA

PARASHAT BO

**Pesach and the Feast of Matzot –
Two Holidays Rather than One**

By Rav Yoel Bin Nun

In the Torah, Pesach (Passover) and the Feast of Matzot (*Chag Ha-Matzot*) are two connected holidays, rather than a single holiday that begins with the Paschal offering. As the Torah states in the section dealing with the festivals:

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at dusk, is the Lord's Pesach. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Matzot to the Lord; seven days you shall eat matzot. (*Vayikra* 23:5-6)

But Pesach also appears in the Torah and in the Prophets on its own, without the Feast of Matzot, in various forms and sometimes even without a date, in the sense of miraculous rescue.

Pesach

1. The place where, according to the plain sense of the text, Pesach appears without the Feast of Matzot in the clearest and most explicit manner is the passage concerning the "Pesach of the wilderness," and from there Pesach Sheni, the "Second Pesach" (*Bamidbar* 9:1-14). Not only is Pesach Sheni not connected to the Feast of Matzot, but even the Pesach that was observed by the Israelites in the wilderness in the first month does not appear to be connected to the Feast of Matzot, which is not mentioned there at all!

In my opinion, the Feast of Matzot applied for the first time in "the month of Aviv" (*Devarim* 16:1) of Eretz Yisrael. Even though for later generations it was established as the Halakha that the festivals apply in all places, and do not depend on Eretz Yisrael (i.e. agriculture), the pilgrimage undertaken on the festival – which, according to the Torah, is the essence of "Three times shall you keep a feast to Me in the year" (*Shemot* 23:14) – certainly applied only in Eretz Yisrael, in a place from which a pilgrimage to the Temple could be undertaken.

2. In the passage describing "Pesach of Gilgal" at the time of Israel's entry into the land of their fathers in the days of Yehoshua (5:2-12), mention is made of circumcision and Pesach, with an allusion to the *omer* from the produce of the land, unleavened cakes, and parched corn, "on the morrow of Pesach." There is no mention there of the Feast of Matzot.

3. Allusions to Pesach are found in many places in Scripture. Already in the book of *Bereishit* (chap. 19), we find the account of Lot's rescue from Sodom. After a meal with matzot inside a closed house, an angel of God takes him and his family "outside the city," and from there two nations are born – all this by virtue of Lot's hospitality, which he had learned from Avraham. Of course, no date is given in that account, and there is no allusion to the Feast of Matzot, nor to any festival; even the name Pesach is not found there. But the parallels to the story of Pesach

observed in Egypt are surprising in their scope ("But he lingered").¹

4. The prophet Yeshayahu describes the deliverance of Jerusalem in terms of Pesach. In particular he describes the siege in a way that brings to mind the Pesach observed in Egypt:

Come, my people, enter into your chambers and shut your doors about you; hide yourself for a little moment until the fury passes. For, behold, the Lord comes forth out of His place to visit upon the inhabitants of the earth their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose her blood... (*Yeshayahu* 26:20-21)

In another prophecy, he makes explicit use of the root *p-s-ch* and of terms similar to the plagues in Egypt:

As birds hovering, so will the Lord of hosts protect Jerusalem; He will deliver and protect it, He will rescue it as He passes over (*pas'o'ach*)... Then shall Ashur fall with the sword, not of man, and the sword, not of men, shall devour him... (ibid. 31:5-9)

In yet another prophecy, in clear connection to the night of watching of the Exodus, we find:

You shall have a song as in the night when a feast is hallowed; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with the pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel. (ibid. 30:29)

It was from this verse that Rashi (ad loc.) and the composers of the *piyyutim*² learned that the plague that struck Sancheriv's army at the gates of Jerusalem took place on the night of Pesach.

In none of these prophecies is there a hint to a seven day Feast of Matzot, but only to Pesach, as a miraculous rescue.

II. The Pesach of Egypt, the Pesach of Future Generations, and the Feast of Matzot

The most complex passage (*Shemot* 12) is the foundational passage of the Pesach observed in Egypt and the Pesach of future generations, in which the Feast of Matzot appears not only as a command, but as an inseparable part, which leads to the idea that Pesach and the Feast of Matzot constitute a single holiday.

However, if we read the passage without the verses dealing with the Feast of Matzot (15-20), we find that the entire section deals exclusively with Pesach – the Pesach observed in Egypt and two verses dealing with the Pesach of future generations. The Feast of Matzot is mentioned only in God's command regarding the future generations; Moshe says nothing of it to the elders of Israel. Even though he mentions the Pesach of future generations, he says nothing of the seven days of the Feast of Matzot itself. Similarly, at the end of the section, mention is made only of the laws of Pesach – "This is the law of Pesach" – but no mention is made of the laws of the seven-day Feast of

¹ See my article, "*Pesach Lot U-Pesach Mitzrayim*," on my website; an expanded version of the entire *shiur* can be found in my article, "*Pesach Ve-Chag Ha-Matzot*," on my website.

² Yannai and the Kalir in the *piyyutim* "*Va-yehi ba-chatzi ha-layla*" and "*Ve-amartem zevach Pesach*."

Matzot! To our great wonderment, Pesach rules over the entire chapter (with the exception of verses 15-20, which are directed at future generations).

Were Moshe and Aharon commanded in Egypt, already prior to the Exodus, about the Feast of Matzot as a remembrance of the Exodus? If so, why did they say nothing about it to the elders of Israel? And why weren't the laws of the Feast of Matzot mentioned together with "the law of Pesach"?

Furthermore, if Moshe and Aharon were only commanded in Egypt about the Pesach observed in Egypt and the Pesach of future generations, why were the verses dealing with the Feast of Matzot (15-20) written as a continuation of the command regarding Pesach and as part of it?

The Ramban explains here that the commandment was given to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt exactly as it is written –concerning the Pesach observed in Egypt, concerning the Pesach of future generations, and concerning the Feast of Matzot, with all of their laws. The Ramban further explains that Moshe told all of this to the elders of Israel, even though this is not mentioned in the text, for "it is obvious that Moshe commanded Israel everything that he had been commanded by God." According to the Ramban, the people of Israel baked matzot at the time of the Exodus because they already knew from the outset about the matzot of the Exodus from Egypt, and not because their dough did not have a chance to rise. This seems very far-fetched.

We wish to suggest the opposite approach (following the Ibn Ezra in his commentary to *Shemot* 12:14). Moshe and Aharon were commanded in Egypt only about the Pesach observed in Egypt and about the Pesach for future generations. Therefore, only Pesach is mentioned in the entire section from the command to the elders of Israel until "the law of Pesach." Only at Mount Sinai, when Israel was commanded about the three pilgrimage festivals, was the command regarding the Feast of Matzot written, but the Torah wished to integrate this with Pesach and to join the two festivals into a single unit. Therefore, the verses regarding the Feast of Matzot were written as a direct continuation of the verses concerning Pesach, as a command for future generations. As *Chazal* said regarding another matter: "This was stated at Sinai, but written in its place" (*Chullin* 100b, 101b).

A careful and precise reading provides us with an important proof to this understanding from a talmudic passage and from the Halakha.

The verses regarding the Pesach observed in Egypt end in verse 13:

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall be no plague among you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. (*Shemot* 12:13)

This is followed by verse 14, which sets the day of Pesach as a separate festival for all generations, even before the command concerning the Feast of Matzot. The clear words in the verse relate to a one-day feast, and not yet to the Feast of Matzot, which (always) extends for "seven days":

And **this day** shall be to you for a memorial, and you shall keep **it** a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall keep **it** a feast by an ordinance forever. (ibid. 12:14)

The next verse is generally understood as adding details to the verse that preceded it. How shall you celebrate the festival in future generations? "Seven days shall you eat matzot" (ibid. 12:15). But the Midrash Halakha regarding the time for removing *chametz* from the house proves just the opposite. Not only "this day" shall you celebrate in future generations, but rather there shall be seven additional days of the Feast of Matzot, and they shall be joined to Pesach. "**But** (*akh*) the first day" – which is the day of Pesach – "you shall put away leaven out of your houses."

Similarly, the talmudic passage in *Pesachim* (5a) understood the words "**But** the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses" as referring back to the day of Pesach, which begins at noon, at the beginning of "dusk." It is indeed the Halakha and the customary practice of all of Israel to put away and burn all leaven before noon.

This is the way to read the verses (14-15) according to the *midrash* that states: "[The word] *akh*³ divides [the verse]:

And this day [the day of Pesach] shall be to you for a memorial, and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever by bringing and eating the Paschal offering. And in addition,] seven days shall you eat matzot; but the first day [the day of Pesach] you shall put away leaven out of your houses; for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day [of the Feast of Matzot] until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

The same phenomenon of joining the two festivals is also evident in the verses that follow:

And you shall observe the matzot [on the Feast of Matzot]; for in this selfsame day [the day of Pesach, to which the Feast of Matzot is joined] have I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore shall you observe this day [the day of Pesach] throughout your generations by an ordinance forever. In the first [month], on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat matzot [of Pesach and of the Feast of Matzot together], until the one and twentieth day of the month at evening [the end of the seven days of the Feast of Matzot]. Seven days [of the Feast of Matzot] shall there be no leaven found in your houses... You shall eat nothing leavened [on the Feast of Matzot]; in all your habitations shall you eat matzot. (*Shemot* 12:17-20)

The meeting and partial overlap between "this day" – meaning, the day of Pesach – and the seven days of the Feast of Matzot necessitate strange and unusual formulations, such as "on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening," which refers to the night of the fifteenth, the first night of the Feast of Matzot. Why does the Torah refer to it as "on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening"? It is because "this night" of the Exodus from Egypt really belongs to two festivals; it is both the night of the Pesach, for eating it and for remembering the miraculous, passing-over rescue in Egypt prior to the Exodus, and also the first night of the Feast of Matzot, for remembering the Exodus itself.

The strange need to emphasize that the seven days of the Feast of Matzot continues "until the one and twentieth day of the month at evening" also stems from the fact that the day of

³ See the explanation suggested by my father z"l, that *akh* means *akhen*, in *Sefer Eretz Moriya – Pirkei Mikra Ve-Lashon* (Alon Shvut, 5766), pp. 357-380, and especially with regard to this verse on p. 365, and in my n. 212 there.

Pesach begins "on the fourteenth day of the month, at dusk." It would have been easy to mistakenly think that the seven days should also end at dusk of the "one and twentieth day," or already in the morning. Therefore, the Torah had to precisely define the time of the festival of Pesach ["this day"] with its laws, on the one hand, and the time of the seven-day Feast of Matzot with its laws, on the other.

The night of the *seder* is the night of two festivals. This is what it makes it such a special night, so strikingly different from the first night of Sukkot, which is the normal first night of a normal seven-day festival (despite the doubling of *Asif – Sukkot*). The night of the *seder* (which is recognized as being exceptional in relation to all of the year's holidays) is a meeting of two festivals, one of which begins on the fourteenth and the second on the fifteenth, and "this night" belongs to the two of them. There is no other example of this phenomenon, and this is really the uniqueness for all generations of "this day" = "this night."

We can understand the significance of the two festivals that meet if we consider five things: The paschal offering, the matzot, the prohibition of *chametz*, the prohibition of labor, and the punishment of *karet* (excision).

The main element of the festival of Pesach is offering the paschal sacrifice and eating it with matza and *maror*. The matza is not the primary thing, but merely accompanies the paschal offering. The matza of the Feast of Matzot is not the matza and *maror* associated with the Paschal offering, but a remembrance of the matzot of the Exodus. Recall that the paschal offering eaten with matza and *maror* was already eaten in its entirety in our closed houses prior to the Exodus, while the dough that did not rise because of the hasty departure from Egypt was eaten after the Exodus.

The main *mitzva* of Pesach is a positive commandment, and one who fails to fulfill it "and refrains from keeping the Pesach... in its appointed season" (*Bamidbar* 9:13) becomes liable for the punishment of *karet*. There are only two positive Torah commandments the violation of which bears the punishment of *karet*, because they define the identity of the house of Israel – circumcision and the paschal offering (Mishna and Tosefta, *Keritut* 1:1). Circumcision defines the family identity of the descendants of the family of the patriarchs, and the paschal offering defines the belonging of all the families in Israel in the national identity of the people of the children of Israel that went out of Egypt. It is therefore not surprising that the paschal offering depends upon circumcision. Not only may an uncircumcised man not eat of the paschal offering (*Shemot* 12: 44, 48), but a single uncircumcised male in the house, even a slave, hinders the entire house from participating in the paschal offering.⁴

These are the two foundations of Jewish identity, and they are connected – circumcision as a family covenant, and the exodus of the nation of families from Egypt to eternal freedom. This is true for most Jews throughout the generations, even in times of alienation and secularization, such as our times. This is borne out by the percentage of Jews who undergo circumcision and conduct a Pesach *seder* in Israeli society today, which is more than double the number of those who observe Shabbat in accordance with Halakha.⁵

⁴ In accordance with the view of R. Yehoshua in the *Mekhilta* (*Massekhta De-Pischa*, 15); Rashi, *Shemot* 12:44; Rambam, *Hilkhot Korban Pesach* 9:9.

⁵ See the findings of the Guttman survey, "*Emunot, Shemirat Mitzvot, Ve-Yachasim Chevrativim Be-Kerev Ha-Yehudim Be-Yisrael*." The first survey, which was conducted in 1992-1993, was published in Jerusalem in 1994; the second survey from 2000 was published in 2002; the third survey from 2009 was published in 2012. The principle findings changed

In contrast, the prohibition of *chametz* on the festival of Pesach is an ordinary negative prohibition; its violation is not subject to *karet*. Similarly, the prohibitions against *chametz* being seen or found in one's home do not apply on the festival of Pesach, but only on the Feast of Matzot.

In all the places where Pesach is mentioned in the Torah, there is no mention of a "solemn assembly" (*mikra kodesh*), nor is there any indication that labor of work is prohibited. So too, in the passage dealing with the festivals (*Vayikra* 23), where the first and last days of the Feast of Matzot are defined as days of "solemn assembly," Pesach remains by itself; there is no solemn assembly and there is no mention of prohibited labors.

Since the festival of Pesach is celebrated by itself for only about six hours, and the Feast of Matzot begins already in the evening, these differences seem unimportant to the ordinary person. But these differences allow us to understand the different significance of the two festivals that have become joined.

The festival of Pesach is the festival of miraculous rescue. The paschal offering in Egypt was explicitly defined as a tense expectation for that miraculous rescue, which revealed itself in reality from midnight and on. For later generations, Pesach is the memory of this miraculous rescue through the paschal offering, the meal, and the *Haggada*.

On the Feast of Matzot, on the other hand, the main thing is not eating an olive-measure of matza at the beginning of the night of the *seder*. Rather, the main thing is preventing *chametz* from being seen or found, and a violation of the prohibition of eating *chametz* is punishable with *karet* (similar to most punishments of *karet* in the Torah, which apply to prohibitions).

But what is the significance of such a grave prohibition against every crumb of *chametz* on the Feast of Matzot?

Since on the festival of Shavuot there is an obligation to bring as a first-fruit offering the "two-loaf" offering (*shetei halechem*) baked as *chametz* (*Vayikra* 23:17), it is clear that the essence of the Feast of Matzot lies in the warning that we have not yet come "to the rest and to the inheritance." The Exodus from Egypt is only the beginning of an exceedingly long journey to the full gratitude and to the leavened first-fruits of the festival of Shavuot, which connects both to the first fruits of the land and to the giving of the Torah.

The Feast of Matzot by Itself – A Reminder of the Exodus (and Not of the Rescue)

Only in the passage of *Kadesh/ Ve-haya ki yevi'akha* (*Shemot* 13) does the Feast of Matzot appear by itself, with its laws and its prohibitions, and its main element is remembering the Exodus from Egypt. Pesach is mentioned only by allusion in one verse – in the expression "this service" (*ha-avoda ha-zot*), a phrase that was explained in the previous chapter (12:26-27) as referring to the Paschal offering:

slightly in the second survey in the wake of the mass aliya from the former U.S.S.R. of hundreds of thousands of Jews and mixed families, the majority of whom observed neither circumcision nor Pesach. However, the findings of the third survey were similar to those of the first survey. Indeed, this is the miracle of the ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the world, which is reminiscent of the Exodus from Egypt but immeasurably greater than it in its scope.

And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you into the land of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Hivite, and the Yevusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep **this service** in this month. (*Shemot* 13:5)

This verse does not come to explain the significance of the paschal offering service, as this was already explained in the previous passage, but only to emphasize the obligation of keeping "this service in this month" – that is to say, "in the month of Aviv," the lunar month that falls out in the agricultural-solar season of the spring. This is the most striking novelty of this passage – keeping a double calendar, a monthly calendar based on the moon and a seasonal calendar based on the sun, and linking the remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt to "the beginning of months" (12:2), to the agricultural spring of the land of the patriarchs.

The main part of the passage is dedicated to the Feast of Matzot by itself, a feast of remembrance:

And Moshe said to the people: Remember⁶ this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage... This day you go forth in the month of Aviv. And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you into the land of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Hivite, and the Yevusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat matzot, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the Lord. Matzot shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with you, neither shall there be leaven seen with you, in all your borders.

And you shall tell your son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign to you upon your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand has the Lord brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep⁷ this ordinance in its season from year to year. (*Shemot* 13:3-10)

In this passage, the son does not ask any questions, and we must tell him. But we can ask: Why is no mention made here (and also not in *Devarim* 16:1-8) of the first festival day of the Feast of Matzot, which is a day of "solemn assembly" and which is subject to the prohibition of labor like other festival days (*Shemot* 12:16; *Vayikra* 23:7; *Bamidbar* 28:18)?

As was explained above, the day of Pesach is combined with the day of the Feast of Matzot because the night (at least until midnight) belongs to both festivals, and this requires a detailed and complex explanation, as we read in the verses regarding the Feast of Matzot (12:15-20), which were joined to the Pesach celebrated in Egypt and to the Pesach for future generations (12:14).

In the passage dealing with remembrance (chapter 13), the Torah does not repeat this complexity. Since in this passage the Torah presents the Feast of Matzot alone, it cannot mention the first festival day of the seven days, which is combined with the day of Pesach, in partial overlap, and therefore mention is made here only of the festival day on the seventh day.

A similar (but slightly different) situation prevails in the section dealing with the festivals in the book of *Devarim* (16:1-8). It all begins with keeping Pesach in its appointed season, but the joining of the Feast of Matzot and Pesach is described in brief. The first day is included in the overlap with Pesach, while the seventh day, the day of "Atzeret," is especially emphasized.

In this passage, we encounter the one son in the Torah who asks no question, and with whom we must fulfill the obligation of "And you shall tell your son." Once again, we ask: Why specifically here does the son not raise any questions, and who is this son who does not ask?

Here we must pay attention to the agricultural context of the land of the forefathers ("And it will be when the Lord shall bring you"). Keeping the paschal offering as a memorial to the rescue, in the month of Aviv, can be accepted like the celebration of the Pesach seder in our time. But the seven days of the Feast of Matzot, with its prohibitions against *chametz* being seen or found in our homes, present an enormous difficulty, especially in an agricultural society, because the spring⁸ is an active agricultural season, and great effort must be made to prepare for the harvest at the appropriate time for each field in accordance with the maturation of its crops. People's minds and hearts are not open for such a long and difficult festival. This son (who is not wicked) will not ask any questions because he is busy⁹ preparing for the harvest; he is wholly immersed in the blessing of the land and the difficulties of the harvest. The idea of remembering the Exodus from Egypt precisely at this time is liable to be taken by him as a reflection of the stubbornness of the priests and Torah scholars, who do not give sufficient consideration to the needs of life and the concerns of existence.

The Torah knows in advance and expects that the sons will ask¹⁰ about the paschal offering service and its significance (12:26-27), about the redemption of the firstborns (13:14), and about the reasons and purposes of the *mitzvot* in general (*Devarim* 6:21-25). But a son who is a farmer will not ask about a seven day festival, with far-reaching prohibitions against *chametz*, and especially not during an active agricultural season!

Therefore, there is no choice but to tell the son who is a farmer preparing for the harvest in "the land flowing with milk and honey" that if your fathers or your fathers' fathers had not left Egypt, you would not have fields to harvest. This is precisely what the Torah says: "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt." It was for this field in the land of our forefathers that "the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt." This bit of knowledge one must remember and keep every day (through the laying of the sign of freedom and remembrance "upon your hand"

⁶ In the commandment regarding Shabbat in the Ten Commandments, we find "remember" (*Shemot*) and "keep" (*Devarim*); and similarly regarding the keeping of the double calendar: "Remember this day... this day you go forth in the month of Aviv" (*Shemot*), and "Keep the month of Aviv, and keep the Pesach to the Lord your God" (*Devarim*).

⁷ As in, "And the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath" (*Shemot* 31:16); in *Shemot* the word "keep" is used also in connection to the calendar: "And you shall keep."

⁸ "Aviv" in Scripture refers to ripening grain (and not to flowering). See *Shemot* 9:31; *Vayikra* 2:14.

⁹ This is also "the son who does not know how to ask" in the *Haggada*, the category in which the great majority of children fall. There is no basis for the prevalent notion that the reference is to a young child just learning to speak; the Torah and *Chazal* are, of course, talking about adult children with full intelligence.

¹⁰ The Torah distinguishes not between different sons, but between different questions: the meaning of the Paschal offering, the redemption of the firstborns, and the reasons for the *mitzvot* in general.

and "between your eyes"), and of course one must remember and keep it "from year to year" (according to the double calendar).¹¹

We shall conclude once again with a clarification of the structure of the passages (*Shemot* 13), which seems difficult because of the juxtaposition of God's words about the sanctity of the firstborn to Moshe's words about remembering the day of the Exodus from Egypt specifically in "the month of Aviv." There are here two openings (the words of God and the words of Moshe) and two conclusions ("And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you"/ "And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you"). The words of God (which come first) concerning the sanctity of the firstborn connect in fact to the second part of the passage:

<p>And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Sanctify to Me all the first-born... it is Mine.</p>	
	<p>And Moshe said to the people: Remember this day...</p>
	<p>And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you...</p>
<p>And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you into the land... as He swore to you and to your fathers, and shall give it you; that you shall set apart to the Lord all that opens the womb... and all the first-born of man among your sons shall you redeem...</p>	

Translated by David Strauss

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¹¹ See Rambam, *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, end of positive commandment 153 (sanctification of the month and intercalation of the year); and Ramban, commentary to *Shemot* 13:4.