

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Tzav
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Tzav – Shabbat HaGadol

This week is Shabbat HaGadol – the Shabbat before Pesach. The Shulchan Aruch¹ explains that this Shabbat is called Shabbat HaGadol because of a great miracle that happened on that day.

The Tur² elucidates the background to the story. On the 10th of Nissan, before they left Mitzrayim, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to take a young lamb or goat and put it aside for the korban Pesach. The Midrash³ expounds that Bnei Yisrael took the animals into their houses and tied them to their bedposts. The sheep was the Egyptians' god. This act of desecrating the Egyptian god was a great act of courage and faith on the part of Bnei Yisrael. Despite the fury of the Egyptians, Bnei Yisrael trusted in Hashem and followed His command. The miracle was that Hashem did not allow any of the Egyptians to retaliate, although Bnei Yisrael did not know that this would be the case. The exodus took place on a Thursday. This great miracle took place five days before the exodus, which was a Shabbat. Thus, in remembrance of this event, the Shabbat before Pesach is called “Shabbat HaGadol”.⁴

The Taz⁵ points out that it is unusual that we do not commemorate this miracle on the 10th of Nissan. We usually commemorate important events based on the date, not on the day of the week upon which they occurred. The Taz explains that another great miracle also occurred on the 10th of Nissan. Namely, when Yehoshua led Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael after wandering in the desert for 40 years, the Jordan River split to allow Bnei Yisrael to cross. This wondrous miracle, reminiscent of the more famous splitting of the Reed Sea, reminded Bnei Yisrael that Hashem was still with them and put the fear of G-d (literally) into the hearts of the Canaanite occupants of the land. In order not to confuse the two miracles, which occurred on the same date, it was decided that the miracle of the korban Pesach would instead be commemorated on the Shabbat before Pesach.⁶

Perhaps another reason for moving the commemoration of this miracle to a different day is to spread out our simcha over two days so as to maximise our joy.⁷ In contrast, when it comes to sad days, we prefer to minimise the sadness. Therefore, we commemorate many sad events on the one day of Tisha B'Av.

However, we may still ask why it was the miracle of the korban Pesach that was ‘pushed off’ to Shabbat? That miracle took place *before* the miracle of the splitting of the Jordan River. So why wasn't the later miracle moved to the day of the week on which it occurred? I would like to suggest that it is important that the korban Pesach miracle is specifically commemorated on the Shabbat before Pesach for another reason, and this will teach us an important principle about our avodat Hashem at this time of year.

There is a basic kabbalistic principle that the beginning of any process contains within it the seeds of the end of that process. For instance, we sing: “סוף מעשה בחשבה תחלה” (“last in deed but first in thought”) in Lecha Dodi on Friday nights. We see this principle expressed throughout creation, in both the physical and spiritual spheres. For example – a fertilised egg contains all of the DNA, it just needs to be unpackaged. Similarly, Shabbat contains within it the seeds of the coming week. We sing in Lecha Dodi: “For it [Shabbat]

¹ Orach Chaim 430:1.

² A Halachic code authored by R' Yaakov ben Asher (1270–1340). The four-part structure of the Tur and its division into chapters (simanim) was used as the basis for the Shulchan Aruch.

³ Yalkut Shimoni, Bo 191.

⁴ The term ‘HaGadol’ also appears towards the end of the special Haftarah that we read this Shabbat (Malachi 3:23). Please see there for the context.

⁵ A significant commentary on the Shulchan Aruch written by R' David ha-Levi Segal (1586–1667).

⁶ In some years, Shabbat HaGadol actually does fall out on the 10th of Nissan (like this year).

⁷ This is similar to the idea that we do not mix one simcha with another (see Moed Katan 8b).

is the source of blessing". The Zohar teaches that all the weekday blessings and success come as a result of the Shabbat's holiness.⁸ Each Shabbat contains within it the energy for the week ahead. That is why, for example, we bless the new month on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh; we commemorate Shabbat Teshuva on the Shabbat before Yom Kippur; and we have a tradition to read part of the Haggadah on the Shabbat before Pesach (i.e. this Shabbat).

If we commemorated the miracle of the korban Pesach on 10th Nissan, then in some years it will fall in the same week as the first day of Pesach and in other years it would fall in the previous week. By commemorating the miracle on Shabbat HaGadol, we ensure that it always takes place on the Shabbat before Pesach. As we learnt, the Shabbat before Pesach already contains within it all of the energy for the upcoming festival.

Why is it so important for to commemorate this miracle on Shabbat HaGadol which leads into Pesach?

A major theme of Pesach is that Hashem saved us and we remained passive.⁹ Spiritually we were on a very low level (the 49th of 50 levels of impurity), and yet Hashem still granted us redemption because we are His beloved nation. All of the plagues and great miracles that took place were purely the work of Hashem. Even the Egyptian soldiers recognised this just before they drowned in the sea, when they said, "Hashem is waging war for them [Bnei Yisrael] against Egypt".¹⁰ Bnei Yisrael were merely required to walk across the sea.

[As an aside, in contrast, the festivals of Tishrei represent the opposite theme – i.e. the Jewish people *are actively* involved in the teshuva process. Nissan is the time when the Jewish people play a passive role and Tishrei is the time that we play an active role. We see the same themes in nature and the agricultural cycle. Pesach is in the spring when the plants start to blossom with no human effort. Tishrei is in the autumn when we manually bring in the crops after a long season of working the land.¹¹]

However, this passivity may lead us to erroneously assume from the great miracles of Pesach that we can just take it easy and not worry about our spiritual level. Hashem will simply and miraculously save us. So, we therefore celebrate Shabbat HaGadol before Pesach, in order to teach us that even though Hashem saves us, we still need to take the first step. Bnei Yisrael demonstrated emunah by taking and slaughtering the lambs right under the noses of the Egyptians. The taking of the lambs might only be a tiny step compared to the miracles that Hashem granted to us, but it showed real emunah. Hashem wanted to save Bnei Yisrael, but he wanted them to take that first step in order to merit the miraculous redemption.

We see the same message in the special Haftorah that we read this week for Shabbat Hagadol:

"...Return to Me and I will return to you..." (Malachi 3:7)

Hashem wants to return to us. But He is waiting for us to *first* return to Him. Hashem is waiting to come to our aid and to redeem us. But He just wants us to initiate the process. He will then swoop in and save us.

Let's try something this week:

1. On Shabbat HaGadol, contemplate the enormous act of emunah that Bnei Yisrael demonstrated. Remember their reward – they were finally granted freedom from the land of Mitzrayim. They set a precedent and we are blessed to have it as an example to follow.
2. In whatever area that we are working on, daven to Hashem and ask Him for assistance. Then summon every vestige of emunah and courage and act on that emunah. Remember – it's up to us to take that first step and Hashem will then come to our aid.

Darchai Noam will BE"H return after Pesach. Chag kasher v'sameach to all!

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁸ Artscroll Siddur (Ashkenaz), footnote to Lecha Dodi, page 317.

⁹ While cleaning the house for Pesach we certainly don't feel like we are being passive. In the physical sense it is a lot of work! However the Kabbalists teach us that in the spiritual realms Pesach is a time when Hashem is active and we are relatively passive – thus we can accomplish a lot with very little effort on our part. (Heard in a lecture by Rabbi Akiva Tatz.)

¹⁰ Parshat B'shalach, Sh'mot 14:25.

¹¹ See Darchai Noam for Noach 5775 where we deal with this idea at length: (<https://darchai-noam.com/archives/darchai-noam-noach-5775/>).