

Sefer Vayikra

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WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Bread Of Many Lessons

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Part I. Bread of Priests

The Priestly Diet

In Parshas Tzav we are introduced to the special diet of the *kohanim* who were serving Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash. ... וְזֹאת תִּנְתֶּן הַמִּנְחָה ... לֹא תֵאָפֶה חֶמֶץ – And this is the law of the *korban mincha*, the meal offering ... it should be eaten as matzos, as unleavened bread, in a holy place ... it is forbidden to bake it into chametz” (Tzav 6: 7-10).

It's talking here about the *korban mincha* that was brought from flour, and the *possuk* says that the *kohanim* have to bake their portion of the flour into *matzah* – no *chametz* allowed for the *kohanim*.

Of course a *kohen* doesn't live on *matzah* – he can eat *chametz* too. At home he can eat bread and *challah* to his heart's content – until his wife says he should stop. He can even bring a sandwich with him to the Beis Hamikdash to eat for lunch, why not?

But what he eats at his job as a *kohen*, when he's eating from the *korban mincha*, מִצֹּת תֵאָכֵל – it has to be *matzah*, לֹא תֵאָפֶה חֶמֶץ – and it's forbidden to bake a *mincha chametz* (*ibid.*) Now, why that should be so is a good question. It's not so simple – we'll talk about it soon – what the *matzah* means. But whatever it is, we see that the *matzah* is an especial type of food that is set aside for the *Kohanei Hashem*.

Their Diet For Everyone

Now, there's one time a year when everyone from the Am Yisroel has a *chiyuv* to eat the same food that is set aside especially for *kohanim* – on Pesach *matzah* becomes the food of everyone. *Nashim* too; even though it's a *mitzvas asei she'hazman grama*, a time-bound *mitzvah* that women are usually exempt from, the Torah explicitly included women in the *mitzvah* of eating *matzah*.

That means that on Pesach, Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants the entire Am Yisroel to imitate the priestly diet. For seven days we declare to the world, and more importantly, we declare to ourselves, that we too are *kohanim* – that we are the *mamleches kohanim*, the nation of priests.

The Nation Is Changed

At Har Sinai, before the Torah was given, Hakodosh Boruch Hu made an earth shattering

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declaration to the Am Yisroel, words that should ring in our ears always. And yet, even people who are familiar with the words, they sometimes take it as a poetic expression, beautiful and noble words that maybe make a nice *drasha*, but that's about it.

Let's listen to the words of Hakodosh Boruch Hu: וְעַתָּה אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי – I'm going to give you the Torah now, and I expect you to listen to My words. It doesn't mean merely to listen to *kriyas hatorah* in *shul* – that's not enough. It's not enough to hear; you have to *der'her*. *Herren* – no; *der'herren!* Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to internalize the Torah attitudes. And once you learn how to hear, וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת בְּרִיתִי – you must keep My covenant. It means that you're going to have to keep that promise of *na'aseh v'nishma*. “And if you are willing to do that,” says Hashem; “If you'll stand at Har Sinai and you'll say to Me, ‘Yes Hashem, we accept You forever and ever,’ then וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֵגֻלָּה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים – You'll be for Me a special treasure from all the nations.”

Charged With Responsibility

Now, when Hakodosh Boruch Hu said that He's going to make us His *am segulah*, He wasn't merely saying, “I'm going to give you *smicha*; like some sort of rabbinical certificate to hang on the wall so that you'll be honored by the title.” It's not just that Hashem has chosen the Am Yisroel and that He will love us forever and ever. That too, but *Am Segulah* means much more than that.

What is our function as Hashem's treasured nation? So we open our ears and listen closely to the next words in that *possuk* – and if you listen well you'll understand why on Pesach we imitate the *kohanim* and eat *matzah*. “In what way will you be My *Am Segulah*?” says Hashem. וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי מִמְּלַכְתַּת כֹּהֲנִים – You're going to be for Me a ‘Nation of Kohanim’ (Shemos 19:6). “From now on everything is going to be different because I'm raising you up and making from you an entirely new type of people – a ‘Nation of Priests.’” *Mamleches Kohanim* doesn't mean “a nation ruled by priests” or “a

nation with a priestly class.” What it means is “a nation of priests” – a nation in which every individual is a *kohen*. On that day Hakodosh Boruch Hu charged us with the responsibility of *kohanim* – the entire people, *kohanim*, *levi'im*, *yisroelim*, men, women and children, were to become a nation of *meshorsai Hashem*, servants of Hashem, just like a *kohen* serving in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Our Purpose

Of course, there's a difference. A *kohen* that's descended from Aharon has different *dinim*, certain laws that he must follow at home and in the *Beis Hamikdash*. But nevertheless, the entire nation, in a certain sense, are *kohanim*. Because what is a *Kohen*? Someone whose life is dedicated to the service of Hashem. A *kohen* wasn't given any land in *Eretz Yisroel* because he's expected to do nothing except serve Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Look, a *kohen* can also get a job; he also has a family. He's a plumber maybe; he has to pay the bills after all and the *matnos kehuna* are not always enough. But whatever he's doing to make a living, it's *tafel* to his primary function in life which is the service of Hashem.

And that's what the *ben Yisroel* is supposed to be – someone who knows that his primary function in life is the service of Hashem. Sometimes, in addition to his service to Hashem, he has some profession, some *parnasah* too, alright, that's good. But fundamentally he's a *kohen*! That's how a *Yisroel* too is expected to think – his main job in life is the service of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

I know that these words will fall flat on your ears – you'll tell me, “Certainly I'm an *oived Hashem*, certainly. But that's only part of my life; I have a job, a family – but that's all wrong. וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי מִמְּלַכְתַּת כֹּהֲנִים tells you that whatever you are doing in life, you're still a *kohen Hashem*.”

Mamleches Kohanim! These words should ring in your ears always because that's your business in

life. Nothing can change that fundamental truth that describes your purpose in this world.

Comparing Roles

The rest of the world, all the nations of the world can make their way through the mundane days of life, fulfilling their purpose of being the *mishpechos ha'adamah*, nations whose purpose is *this* world. And we don't begrudge them for that. We appreciate them! A fireman is very important in this world – a big *yasher koiach* to all the firemen. He might be the one who will come to pull us out of a burning building *chalila*. He might be the one who will come to revive one of us with mouth-to-mouth breathing.

The *mishpachos ha'adama* have a certain role to play in this world. They'll drive the city buses. They'll take us and our children to the *yeshiva*. They'll be the police. The police don't do anything, but at least they're present on the street to frighten some people from doing crimes. We need them. We need *goyim*, no question about it.

But on that great day at Har Sinai when we became the *Mamleches Kohanim*, we were lifted way up above that. Way, way up. We're not from the nations of the world who live for this world – now we're the *Kohanei Hashem*, who spend our days standing before Hashem living for the World to Come.

You're not in the Beis Hamikdash now – you're living in Brooklyn, in a little house and nobody knows about you; but no matter – you're from the *Mamleches Kohanim* and your *avodas Hashem* is no less important than the *kohanei Hashem* who work in the *Mikdash*.

Kohanim Eat Matzah

Now I don't imagine myself capable of explaining everything that's included in the words “*Mamleches Kohanim*,” but we understand now that when we eat *matzah* on Pesach – the food that the *kohanim* eat in the *Beis Hamikdash* – we

are making a big demonstration. Just like the *kohanim* in the *Beis Hamikdash* eat the *korban mincha* of *matzah*, we, the *Mamleches Kohanim* also sit down in our homes to eat a “*korban mincha*.” And even though *שָׁבֹבֶל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִים חֶמֶץ*, all year around we eat *chametz*, but *הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה בְּלוֹ מִצָּה*, once a year we have to remind ourselves that we are chosen for this function of *וְאַתֶּם כִּהְיִי הַשֵּׁם תִּקְרָאוּ* (Yeshaya 61:6).

And therefore we eat *matzah* – it's a demonstration that we are devoted to *avodas Hashem*; that's our job. All of us – men, women, children, *kohanim*, *leviim*, *yisroelim* – we sit around our table, in the *mikdash me'at* of our homes, and we make a public demonstration of recognizing that we understand our role in this world – we are a nation of *kohanim*. Every Jew is a *kohen*. We don't have a clergy because all of us are clergymen. Every Jew is a chosen servant of Hashem and when we eat *matzah* we demonstrate the principle that we are *kohanim lakeil elyon*, servants of the Highest One of all.

The Best Persuader

Remember that when you're chewing the *matzah*! You never heard it before? You're lucky you came tonight. Of course, we're going to enjoy the *matzah* too. No harm; *matzah* tastes good – it's a pleasure. We're sitting around the table and our mouths are watering – we're just waiting for the chance to fulfill the *mitzvah* of putting that delicious *matzah* into our mouths. But don't forget the lesson – that's the purpose of the *matzah* anyhow, the lesson; only that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a good salesman, *k'viyachol*. He knows how to make a good sale. You know when is the best time to make a sale? When you sit a person down to eat, that's the time you can talk to him. In *Mesichta Chulin* (4b) it tells us that – it says that if you want to persuade somebody of something, words are not enough – you can do it best by means of food.

Let's say you want to sell your product to a potential customer; so you're going to take out a big prospectus describing the product, how good it is and everything else – so while you're talking he's yawning; he's already falling asleep. That's not how you do business. If you want to make a big sale, you take him to a restaurant and give him a big lunch; and after he's burping at the end of the meal, so that's the best time to pop the question – “Do you want to buy my product?” And that's when he'll be persuaded to give you an order.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a salesman too – only that He's selling Torah attitudes. And by feeding us the priestly food, the *matzah*, on Pesach, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is selling us the important ideal that we're His *Mamleches Kohanim*. And therefore it's a *mitzvah* to enjoy the *matzah* because the more you'll enjoy it, the more you'll absorb the lesson. That's why it says in the *hagadah*: **לֹא אָמַרְתִּי** – *When did I say you should start talking about these things that the matzah comes to teach you?* **בְּשַׁעַה שְׂיֵשׁ מִצָּה** – *When it's right there in front of you.* **וּמְרוֹר מִנְחָה לְפָנֶיךָ** – *When everything is on the table, now you can start thinking and talking.* Eat, enjoy – but you have to remember that the lesson is all important – eating *matzah* like a horse is not going to get you anywhere. If you're not thinking when you chew the *matzah* so it's a big waste – it's a *mitzvah*, but it's a waste of a great opportunity to achieve more *daas*. But if you chew with idealism, if you're thinking as you chew, then there's nothing that can beat that. Because as we are enjoying the *matzah*, we are also absorbing the lesson that we're the *Mamleches Kohanim*.

Part II. Bread of Affliction

Planted In Mitzrayim

When Hakodosh Boruch Hu made us the offer to become His “Nation of Kohanim”, do you remember how He introduced Himself? Did He say **אֲנִי הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּרָאתִי שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ** – “I Am

Hashem your G-d who created the heavens and earth”? No, He didn't mention anything about that. He said like this: **אֲנִי הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם** – *I am your Hashem who took you out of Mitzrayim.* “These are My credentials,” Hashem said. “I'm the one who saved you from Egypt.”

And then He added two more words: **מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים** – *I took you out from the house of slavery.* Mitzrayim was a *beis avodim*. Now, some people think it happened by accident. They think that the whole story wasn't supposed to be that way; only that when Yosef Hatzadik passed away the *Bnei Yisroel* became now a little more free footed, a little more lax, and they started going where they were not supposed to go. They started mingling a little bit with the Egyptians and learning from their ways and therefore Hakodosh Boruch Hu sent a *shibud* on them as a punishment. Now, it could be that it's true to a certain extent, but we have to understand that this absolutely was not the reason for the *tzaros* of the *beis avodim*.

The Preface to Matan Torah

The truth is that the *tzaros* of Mitzrayim came to prepare us for Matan Torah! One of the biggest benefits that ever happened to our nation in history was our stay in Mitzrayim. I say “one of the biggest” – if we look back, it could be it was the biggest because it was due to the *tzoros* of Mitzrayim that our nation accepted the Torah. Now, I'll explain that.

You people who learned *chumash*, and some of you learned *gemara* too, so you think you have a certain understanding of the *shibud* of Mitzrayim. You think you know all about it and your ears therefore are closed up to understanding anything more. But you must realize that even if you studied very much – and I'm sure you didn't study *all* the *aggados Chazal* – but even if you did; to understand it perfectly takes a lifetime. And it's a *chiyuv*. **חַיִּב אָדָם לְרִאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ בְּאֵלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם** – *Every Jew is obligated to view himself as if he went free from*

Egypt; and if you don't know how much our people suffered you just won't be able to do that.

Bone-Breaking Labor

Imagine that you were enslaved – you and your family; your children and your father and grandfather too – for 210 years you were in a strange country; you couldn't get out. And they worked you with cruelty; they beat you if you didn't produce the number of bricks they wanted – they beat you mercilessly. You remember when Moshe Rabbeinu saw an Egyptian hitting a fellow Jew and he intervened to save his brother. Who else intervened? Nobody else intervened because it meant big trouble; it meant sure death. That's how it was – the Egyptians were hitting Jews and maiming Jews and there was nobody to stop them. Who knows how many they killed in their cruelty?

And they forced you to work terribly. We have no picture of the difficulty of the *shibud Mitzrayim*. It was *avodas perech* – *perch* means to break somebody. Pharaoh worked them to the bone – and then he broke their bones too. The heavy labor was intended to break them because Pharaoh was afraid *פֶּן יִרְבֶּה*, that they might increase and overwhelm Mitzrayim.

Alarming Increase

It says there, *פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבוּ* – *They we're delivering children in swarms*. A woman is capable, if all things go right, to have six children at one time. And at that time Hakodosh Boruch Hu activated all the powers of nature and very many delivered six at one time – I won't say it was everybody, but very many did.

And Pharaoh was alarmed when he saw that! We can't blame the poor man; when he saw that they were delivering six babies at one time, he became insane with fear. He was panicking. *פֶּן יִרְבֶּה* – They're increasing like nobody's business and they have to be stopped. You think you'd be

different? *אַל תִּדְרִן אֶת הַבְּרֶדַד עַד שֶׁתִּגִּיעַ לְמִקוֹמוֹ* – Don't judge Pharaoh until you come in his place. You'd be maybe even worse than him. Pharaoh was frantic with fear and therefore he tried everything that they shouldn't increase.

All the *gezeiros* were intended to break them, that they should have no *koach* and no interest in having children. He did everything he could; he tried very hard and the cruelty was indescribable. *Avodas perech* – it was work that broke the body; it was terrible. We don't know all the *tzaros* that took place in Egypt – you would need volumes in order to relate it; we can only imagine what Pharaoh would do in order to tread on our nation; in order to discourage and break their spirit. He did everything.

Too Much Time

We see Pharaoh's intention all the way to the end. When the Bnei Yisroel were talking about the news that Hashem said they were going to leave Mitzrayim soon, so Pharaoh became very angry; he said, "These lazy people have too much time on their hands – too much time to think about foolish things." So he said *תִּכְבֹּד הָעֵבֶרָה* – *The work should be made even heavier now*, *וְאַל יִשְׁעוּ בְדַבְרֵי שָׁקֶר* – *so that they shouldn't pay attention to false things*. "I see that they have too much time so they're talking about foolish plans; now I'm going to give them so much work so they won't have time to talk at all."

Up till now they were working like horses but at least they were given straw to make bricks. But now Pharaoh said, "You're going to have to use your spare time go pick your own straw for the bricks." *וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעֵבֶרָה קָשָׁה* – *And they embittered their lives with hard work; with mortar and bricks* (Shemos 1:14).

In The Clay Pit

You have to spend a long time thinking into that *possuk* otherwise you're not doing justice to what happened to us in Mitzrayim. Imagine what

it is to work in *chomer* – it's not like working in diamonds, or with paperwork in an office. They had to dig mud out of the earth. There's a clay pit and you climb down into the pit and with your hands you're digging out mud. It gets all over you – your entire body, all your clothing, is slimy. It dries and cakes on you and all day long you're filthy. What a *tzaar* it is – and a shame too; the children of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov are now being degraded to the lowest level of society in Egypt.

And these poor broken hearted people were slaving away in the clay pits. All day long they were running with the clay to the fiery kilns, where they baked the clay into bricks. They didn't make little bricks – the bricks they made were very big. In the ancient buildings of Egypt we see huge bricks of clay – even one brick was very difficult for a person to carry. And then they were forced to carry heavy loads of bricks back and forth to the building sites where they had to start building.

It wasn't easy building Pison and Raamses. And you had taskmasters with whips standing over you looking for excuses to whip you – and they found plenty of excuses. "FASTER! Move faster you lazy good for nothing Hebrew!" They bled profusely where the whips cut their backs open. Bang! bang! Their heads were cut open; their teeth were knocked out.

Meals In Bondage

And so וַיִּמְרָרוּ – the bitterness was so great. They wept from their *shibud* and they cried out to Hakodosh Boruch Hu constantly. It was heavy, back breaking work and וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעָתָם אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים מִן הָעֵבֶרָה – the Am Yisroel cried out to Hashem because of their suffering. In the fields as they gathered straw they cried and as they made bricks they cried. As they struggled under the weight of heavy bricks they cried. A great outcry rose up from all corners of Mitzrayim. And at night they got together and cried out more. When they came home from work broken and bruised they got

together in crowds and they cried out: *Hosha na* – Hashem help us! Constantly, every day, they cried out to Hashem *min ha'avodah*, because of the backbreaking work.

And that's what we're thinking about when we sit down to eat the matzah on Pesach. It's a reminder of the *lechem oni*, it's the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in Egypt – that's the plain meaning; *matzah* is a poor man's bread. Slaves don't have time to bake bread until it ferments and leavens properly. They eat on the run – if a slave can pound together a handful of grain and make some kind of rough flour, put in a little water and bake it quickly as a dry wafer over the fire, he's lucky he has something to eat. That's *matzah* – we ate *matzah* in Mitzrayim because we couldn't get anything else to eat. We lived with utmost privation.

And the truth is that whatever they ate was *lechem oni*; even when they found some fish or a piece of bread to eat, it was *lechem oni* – how can you enjoy eating your piece of bread when it's eaten under such tyranny, such afflictions? Whatever you eat is the bread of affliction! And therefore *matzah* surely reminds us of the years that we were subjected to Egypt when we ate *lechem oni* – and it's important to keep that in mind as you're fulfilling the mitzvah of eating *matzah*.

Remembering the Tzaros

And so as we're chewing on the *matzah* and picturing their suffering, very good, we're accomplishing an important purpose of *matzah zu she'anu ochlin* – that's a very important purpose, to recall the suffering in Egypt. We sit down at the table with our families and eat the *lechem oni* remembering the days when we lived under the oppression of the task masters. Even though we enjoy the *matzah* – whether it's machine-made 18 minute *matzah* or the hand made *matzah*, the change from bread to *matzah* is always welcome – but as your teeth are crunching into the *matzah*,

you can't help but taste the *lechem oni* that our forefathers ate in Mitzrayim.

They were eating a *matzah* that was bitter – a simple tasteless food that was sometimes the staple of their diet. And they ate with tears in their eyes as their children were snatched from them, taken away to be destroyed. Jewish fathers and mothers wept – they broke down. I don't doubt that some went insane from *tzoros*. That's how it was.

Part III. Bread of Gratitude

The Pain Preamble

But that's not the whole picture – the *matzah* is really much more than a reminder of the bad times. Because actually, the suffering was only an introduction to something very great. It wasn't just for nothing that we suffered – all this pain and suffering had a tremendous result.

Because we have to ask ourselves, how did it happen that we accepted to be servants forever and ever to Hakodosh Boruch Hu? You know, when we accepted, when we agreed to be His *mamleches kohanim*, we meant business. The *Am Yisroel* weren't thinking about just being *frum*, about going to *minyan* a few times a day, keeping Shabbos, making a *bracha* once in a while. To be a nation of priests means much more than that. They understood that they were accepting now to live lives of dedication, lives of *kohanim* who breathe only for Hashem. And so it's a big question – that's a very big commitment; why would they do that?

You think it just so happened that a nation of millions accepted upon themselves the service of Hashem? What do you think, that the *Bnei Yisroel* were *lemechlach*? A nation of lock step people – if one person says yes, then everybody else says yes too? By no means! They were people with independent minds!

We Are Not Gullible

Now, had the Torah been offered to the Egyptians, or maybe to the Slavs or to the Chinese, it would have been a minor matter. The fact is that when they were offered alternative religions, they went all out. It didn't take much to reel them into buying some of the most foolish ideas ever presented to the world.

You know, when Yushka Pandra's mother had a son and they said it's "Hashem's son", so the *Am Yisroel* laughed at that. It was a *mamzer* and that's all. **לֹא יָבֵא מְמֻזָּר בְּקִהְלֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם** (Devarim 23:3) It's a *rachmanus* on the child, but a *mamzer* is a *mamzer*. But the foolish nations had no minds of their own – you could feed the most foolish garbage into their minds and they accept it: hook, line and sinker. And that's what happened – we see that all around us.

But the *Bnei Yisroel* was a unique kind of people with an unparalleled attitude towards the world. They had been trained for many generations not to accept every foolish thing that was told to them. They were one little family living in a world of great and powerful nations all who served idols and lived according to magic and superstition – an entire world steeped in the conviction that magic ceremonies and the worship of images were the cause of prosperity, health and all good things. And here was a little nation that lived by reason and by logic, trained to ridicule the claims of the idolaters that boasted of "miracles" wrought by their gods; even the children were reared with the attitude that such tales were false, and they laughed at the world.

And then suddenly Moshe Rabeinu appears on the scene and he wants to turn everything upside down on its head. He says, "Are you ready to receive a Torah?" At Har Sinai there wasn't only a Matan Torah – Hakodosh Boruch Hu wouldn't just force it down our throats. There was *kabolas Torah* too – they had to accept it too.

Accepting the Torah

And some would have said, “We’ll consider accepting the Torah, but we have to know some things about it first. Why should we accept everything? After all it’s up to us, isn’t it? Maybe we’ll accept part of it.” Today, after the fact, we imagine it’s an insult to think we wouldn’t accept everything but the *Am Yisroel* had the choice not to accept everything. And they were expected to make a decision – not to just be *lemechlach*.

The *Am Yisroel* should have held meetings and caucuses. There would have been different parties arguing out the details. Some would say *bein adam lachaveiro* yes, *bein adam lamakom* not. Others would be willing to accept only the *bein adam lamakom*. Someone would say, “Why *shaatnez*? Give me a good reason why I shouldn’t be able to wear wool and linen together! I’ll do it, but tell me what’s going on here?” They wouldn’t accept everything.

And if they wouldn’t have accepted it, it would never have been. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wouldn’t give them half of the Torah. “You’re saying *mah kesiv bah*? You want to know what’s written in there? I won’t give it to you then. You’re not ready to be My *mamleches kohanim*.” You have no idea how it would have looked, how the whole thing would have turned out – we would be today just another nation. It would have been the Chinese, the Italians, the Puerto Ricans and the Jews too.

And therefore we must know what it was that catalyzed the *Am Yisroel* – what was it that inspired them with a burning fire to accept the whole Torah and to accept the function of being the *mamleches kohanim* of Hashem?

The Torah of Gratitude

The answer is it was the *matzah*! We became the *mamleches kohanim* just because of the *lechem oni*. I’ll explain that. The only way that a nation of millions should come together and say *na’aseh v’nishma* would be because of a great love for

Hashem – and that burning love was a result of the tremendous gratitude they had to Him for redeeming them from all those years of eating *lechem oni*. It’s a euphemism, *lechem oni*. It wasn’t just the bread that afflicted them – it was years of all types of suffering and affliction. All those years, decade after decade, when they didn’t see any possibility of being rid of their troubles – there seemed to be no end to the *shibud*. תַּכְבֵּד הָעֶבֶדָה – The work is getting worse and worse and the groans of the people are not being answered; they’re weeping and crying out to Hashem in despair and there’s no answer.

And then suddenly, וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִצְאִים בְּיַד רָמָה – The *Bnei Yisroel* left *Mitzrayim* with a raised hand, וּמִצְרַיִם מְקַבְּרִים אֶת מֵתֵיהֶם – and on all sides the Egyptians were busy burying their dead as the *Bnei Yisroel* were marching out carrying all the gold and silver. We can’t even imagine the exhilaration of that time! The *Bnei Yisroel* are marching out now in finery and in jewelry, and they’re so overwhelmed with gratitude to Hashem that they’ll do anything for Him. “We finally got rid of this whole mess – Pharaoh and his regime and the whole caboodle.” And they said בָּרוּךְ שֶׁפָּטַרְנִי and fell into the arms of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Powerful Waves

Moshe Rabbeinu didn’t have to go like a salesman and sell them the Torah and tell them the *maalos* of the Torah. They didn’t want to hear. “We don’t want to know *mah kesiv bah*; you don’t have to tell us what’s written in it. We accept everything! All we want is to do! Out of love for our Creator, we’ll do anything. *Na’aseh vnishma!* What’s even the question?! Certainly we accept to be Your *mamleches kohanim* no matter what.”

“And we’re not going to be just a *frum* nation; *frum* let’s say, like the *frum* people of Edom or the *frummeh* of Midyan. No! You saved us from such *tzaros*, such hardships, that we’re not satisfied with being *frum* – we are so indebted to You Hashem that we’ll do anything You ask. You want

us to be *kohanim* who serve You always? That's it then – we'll be nothing but a *mamleches kohanim*. I'm a doctor? Could be I do that too. A peddler or a street cleaner – why not? But that's only in addition to my chief function of serving Hashem." That's what a Jew is – every Jew is a *kohen*.

And so we see it was *tzaros*, the **הָא לְחֵמָא עֲנִיָא** we ate in Mitzrayim that caused such waves of gratitude in our hearts that the powerful waves washed us up on the shores of Torah and *avodas Hashem* – the waves of joy and gratitude were so overwhelming that it swept over the entire nation at one time and nobody even stopped to think.

Plan Ahead

And therefore, when you eat the *matzah* at the seder – and the *marror* too; **מִצּוֹת עַל מְרָרִים** **יֵאָכְלוּ** – so we understand why remembering the suffering is so important. You have to remember the *tzaros*. You certainly must remember the *tzaros*. It's not enough to eat *matzah* and *marror* – you have to think of the troubles that our forefathers had. Of course it's not so easy; eating *matzah* is fun. It tastes good! Even the *marror* is good; especially if you're eating romaine lettuce. But what can you do? You still have to think.

Now, the best way is to think before Pesach; you're cleaning, cooking – whatever you're doing – use the time to think. Of course, if you didn't think about it before Pesach you can still start thinking at the last minute, but the best thing is to plan ahead of time. While you're scrubbing down the cabinet, plant these seeds in your mind and that way, when you sit down to the *seder* you'll be able to remind yourself of all those beautiful ideals and attitudes that you planted, and they will grow over Pesach into big beautiful trees with luscious fruits.

Easier Said Than Done

Now, I know that it's easy to say these things, but we have to actually work on it. **חֵיב אָדָם לְרְאוֹת אֶת**

עֲצָמוּ בְּאֵלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם. We have to picture ourselves as if we were there. Imagine you were in a situation of terrible oppression for a long time and you didn't see any hope of getting out, and then somebody came and redeemed you. Wouldn't you think, "I have to devote my life to thinking always about my debt of gratitude to this redeemer?" I don't know; maybe you wouldn't think so because today we are a corrupt people. We are spoiled in *middos* today and we don't appreciate anything.

And therefore we'd better get busy appreciating; we must learn the lesson of the *matzoh*, the *lachma anya*, because that's the reason we continue to accept the Torah today. We're *mekabel* the Torah every day – we're partly asleep while we're doing it but we say: **אָמֵת וְיָצִיב וְנִכּוֹן וְקָיָם** **וְיִשְׁתַּר** – *The words of Hashem are true and firm and established and enduring and right and trustworthy* – look into the *siddur* and you'll find sixteen adjectives describing our acceptance of the Torah – and we say that we're accepting it with all of these sixteen words **וְעַד עַלְמֵינוּ לְעַלְמֵינוּ** – *upon ourselves forever and ever*. **עַל בְּנֵינוּ וְעַל דּוֹרוֹתֵינוּ** – *saying the words but we're not thinking: חַק וְלֹא יֵעָבֵר* – *It will never pass away forever and ever*. That's our *kabolas hatorah* every day.

The Thunderbolt of Happiness

And when did it start? Why are we *mikabeil* the Torah **עַלְמֵינוּ וְעַל בְּנֵינוּ וְעַל דּוֹרוֹתֵינוּ** forever and ever? We realize that it was the days of *matzah* and *marror* that brought us to the great day of *Kabolas Hatorah at Har Sinai* – the *Kabolas Hatorah* that continues to this day. We didn't achieve *matan Torah* as a result of living in luxury. It wasn't because of the happiness of the good times when we lived under Yosef with privilege, no! It was the blessing of **בְּעֲצָבוֹן תֵּאֲכַלְנָהּ**, the blessing of hardship, the blessing of suffering. It was during the years when they were beating us, when they tried to throw children into the Nile, and when Jewish children were sometimes

immured into the brick walls. Every kind of ignominy, insult was heaped upon our heads and then like a thunderbolt, הַפּוֹרְנוּ מִיַּד מְלָכִים – Hashem redeemed us from the hands of the kings.

It was amazing; a wild happiness that you couldn't even conjecture – nobody would have even imagined such a cataclysmic event – but it happened to us. And so, on Pesach we go wild with joy that Hashem spared us. When we eat the *matzah* we review in our minds again and again that great happiness of being taken out from a *beis avadim* to become a nation of priests.

Returning to Cairo

And the *ba'al ha'hagada* goes on and explains a little more, because the more you understand what it means to escape from Mitzrayim, the more your gratitude will be increased. וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ לֹא הוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם – *If Hashem had not taken us out of Egypt, we would still be there.*

Imagine you are taking a trip to Cairo for business and you're walking through the streets to your hotel and you see sitting on the street corners some degenerate creatures – dope addicts, the lowest of the low. If you go to Egypt you find them on the street corners. And they're criminals too; during the day they have their hands out asking for alms, but at nighttime they'll put a dagger in your back.

We were slaves in Mitzrayim; we weren't the aristocrats. And in the course of time the slaves tend to become the dregs of the population – we would have gotten lost in Egypt; whatever would have remained of us, would have gone lost, there's no question. If we hadn't been taken out of Mitzrayim, we would have been lost forever in that land. And to this day travelers to the land of Mitzrayim would find among the various strains of the Hamitic peoples that there are also Semitic peoples and he would think, many years, thousands of years ago, there was a Semitic nation that was enslaved here and finally it got lost.

A Nothing Nation

And instead of having Rabbi Akiva and the Rambam, we'd be sitting on the street corners of Egypt smoking hashish. Instead of sitting here, wearing black hats or *tzitzis* – whatever it is you're wearing – and being Hashem's people, whatever remained of us would have been sitting on the street corners, barefoot, lousy, sick with Egyptian snail disease. The waters of Egypt are full of diseased snails and the poor people drink that water and get snail disease. You know, American soldiers, when they were in Egypt in the last war they got snail disease from the water. And the snails increase and multiply in your intestines, and your whole body is full of worms; it's a sickness you can't eradicate. And you become so debilitated and so demoralized – you're not even human anymore.

So when you're chewing on the *matzah* you have to remember that. If Hashem wouldn't have taken us out of Mitzrayim, not only would we have not been what we are today – the *Mamleches Kohanim* – but we would have been those people. If not for the kindness of Hashem; if not for His desire that we should be His nation, we would be a nothing nation.

The Night of Metamorphosis

All of Pesach we think these thoughts as much as possible, but the *seder* night is the most special night of the year. We come together – fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, grandparents – to thank Hashem and the opportunities are tremendous. At the end of the night we are changed – we've accomplished a metamorphosis in our minds and our *neshamos* and we become different through and through – because in addition to the great function of thanking Hashem, we remind ourselves of our great elevation in this world, that we are Hashem's *mamleches kohanim* forever and ever.

But you have to make use of the precious time. You have in your life only 120 *sedorim*. In the first twelve or so, you don't have much sense and in the last fifteen also, you'll be in an old age home, so who knows what's going to be. How many *Pesachs* will you have? So make sure to use each one – each one of them is a precious opportunity for gaining *da'as*. And so we approach this night of *kodesh kodoshim* with the utmost anticipation – we look forward to the achievement of *da'as* that eating *matzah* will bestow upon us.

Creating A Matzah Mind

Very good that the *matzah* is baked with such carefulness, with *hashgocha*, with such *dikdukei mitzvah*. Wonderful! It's *shemurah matzah*, baked in this and this place and it costs a lot of money. Wonderful! But now that it's all done, **מִצָּה זוֹ שְׂאָנוּ אוֹכְלִים עַל שׁוּם מָה** – This *matzah* that we're eating now, what's it all about?

And the answer is that the *matzah* is supposed to create for you a new mind! Families all over the world sit down to celebrate the great principle of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* by eating the special food of the *kohanim*, because it was *Yetzias Mitzrayim* that was the reason we became the *Mamleches Kohanim*. Yeshayah Hanavi says **אַתֶּם בְּהַיְי הַשֵּׁם תִּקְרְאוּ** – You, the entire nation, shall be called *kohanei Hashem*. We were chosen on *Pesach* to come out of *Mitzrayim* for one purpose only – to become *Kohanei Hashem*. And as we eat the *matzah* on *Chag Hamatzos* we demonstrate that we – all of the *Am Yisroel* – are elevated now to be Hashem's chosen people, His *kohanim*.

And just like when the *kohanim* were chosen with the word *li* by Hashem – *V'hayu li haleviim, You will be Mine* – it means to be especially Mine forever, so too when the Nation on a whole was chosen to be the *Mamleches Kohanim* with that same word. **וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת בְּהַנִּים** – “And you shall be for Me a Kingdom of Priests,” is the mark of eternal honor. “Wherever it says *li*, “For Me,” it means that it will never cease in this world and in

the World to Come” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 2:2). It's a mark of distinction that we must live up to, to be always aware that all of our actions must be for the purpose of serving Hashem; and if we keep that in mind always, then we become the **מְמַלְכֵת בְּהַנִּים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ**, the holy nation set aside for Hashem forever and ever.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos And a Kosher'n Freilech'n Pesach

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Eating and Internalizing the Lessons

This week as I eat *Matzah* I will take a few seconds to think “*Matzah zu she'anu ochlin al shum mah* – Why am I eating this *Matzah*?” I will remember that – among other things – the *Matzah* teaches that we are a people dedicated to the service of Hashem. I will remember the *lachma anya* – the bread of affliction we suffered through for years in Egypt and how that pain was a catalyst for our dedication to Hashem forever.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

259 - Preface to *Pesach* 6 | 504 - *Pesach* 13 | 683 - *Pesach, Matzah and Maror* | 734 - The *Pesach Seder* 2 | 735 - The *Pesach Seder* 3 | 777 - *Pesach* | 900 - Greatness in the Midst of Difficulty | E-165 - A Nation To Serve Hashem
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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביד ויגדד זקניד ויאמרו לך

Q:

What is one of the lessons that we can learn from the korban pesach?

A:

In the *hagaddah* we read ברמייד חיי – “With the blood of the korban pesach you will live.” What does that mean? Listen to me because this is of utmost importance. Just because we were willing to throw away the ideas of the environment around us and to demonstrate that we are the servants of Hashem – that alone gave us the right to live forever. By slaughtering the god of the Egyptians, we were demonstrating that we disregard completely all of the ideals of the gentiles; and because of that blood of the *korban pesach*, Hashem said, “You will live.” ברמייד חיי.

We shouldn't lose sight of this great significance of the *korban pesach*. It's two ideas but they are really one. Number one is that Hashem skipped over us. And why did he skip over us? Because we slaughtered the god of the Egyptians in their presence. Moshe Rabeinu said: הן נזבח את תועבת מצרים לעיניהם ולא יסקלנו – “Won't the Egyptians stone us if we slaughter their *avodah zarah*?!” But we did it anyhow. And that's why Hashem skipped over the Am Yisroel and that's why we're going to live forever.

The navi says, ברמייד חיי – “You will live forever because of the blood that you shed.” Now, the *dam milah* was there too, but the *dam* of the korban Pesach was a much more perilous thing to do. And it's a symbol actually, of what is expected of us. We are expected to slaughter all of the ideals of the *umos ha'olam*. You have to slaughter the ideal of literature. Literature is false. The literature of the gentile world is all false literature. It never happened. It's fiction.

People today have accustomed themselves to fiction, to drama and it's all false! People are being paid to act in a certain way. It's all false. You have to slaughter their movies. You have to slaughter their music. You have to slaughter all their sports. A Jew is not interested in sports. No interest at all, unless he's exercising for himself, for his health. Otherwise, it's nothing.

When I was in Slabodka, somebody needed a visa to be able to come to America. Today he is one of the *gedolei ha'dor* (The Rav was referring to Rav Elya Svei *zatzal*). I was an American boy and I spoke a good English, so I went to the Consul to ask for the visa. So I spoke with the Consul and then he says, “Oh, you come from America? What's the score?” There were big baseball games going on in America so he asks me, “What's the score?” The first thing you ask when you see a *landsman* is, “What's the score?” A *meshugas!* *Meshuganehs!*

When I came back from Europe, I was walking in Baltimore on the street minding my own business and somebody shouts out at me from across the street, “Mister, what's the score?” He's asking *me* for the score! People live with the idea that that is what's important. A man with a stick and he's hitting a ball. That's important. That's the big news. Newspapers have whole sections devoted to that.

So the Am Yisroel slaughtered this *avodah zarah* of all the things that are important to the gentiles. And they were demonstrating that it's a sin to be gentilized. It's a sin to be Americanized. You can be a good, loyal citizen, but don't Americanize! As much as possible you must rid yourself of all these gentile ideas. There's so much that you have to slaughter. There are many worse things than sports. And when the Am Yisroel is able to slaughter all the *avodah zarah* – all the ideals and ideas and attitudes of the *goyim* – then Hashem says, “If that's the case, then I'm going to skip over you. The destroyer will destroy everybody else, but will skip over you.” And that's one of the most important lessons that you can learn from the *korban Pesach*.

TAPE # E-126 (April 2000)