

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

PESACH

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

EIGHT DAYS OF MATZAH

CONTENTS

Eight Days of Thinking - **1** | Magnifying the Neis - **3** | Hashem's Timetable - **5** | Escaping the Leavening - **8** | Affliction and Prayer - **10** | Suffering For Our Beliefs - **12** | Gratitude and Kabolas | HaTorah - **15** | Food Of Priests - **17** | His Servants - **19**

Introduction

Eight Days of Thinking

Chag Hamatzos

The *yom tov* of Pesach, we have to know, actually refers only to *erev Pesach* – the afternoon of the fourteenth day of Nissan when they slaughtered the *korban Pesach* – and also the night of the fifteenth when the *korban* was eaten. It's a *yom tov* of about twelve hours or so, and then it comes to an end. You can't eat from the *korban* the next morning anymore; nothing is even allowed to remain. You're finished now with Chag Hapesach – the lessons of the *korban Pesach*, whatever we achieved at night when we ate the meat of the *korban*, or nowadays when we have the *zecher laPesach*, that's finished, and now it's a new *yom tov* called Chag Hamatzos.

Now, that's a very important point to consider because Chag Hamatzos means that it's a special time set aside to learn the lessons of the matzah. It's not merely the way we imagine, that we have the Seder night and then the rest of the festival is a *tafel* to that. No, it's a new *yom tov* now, the Festival of Matzos. The days of *tes-vuv* Nissan until the last

day of *yom tov* are set aside to learn the lessons of the matzah.

The Minimum Kavanah

Now, I'm not saying that the lessons are everything. Matzah is a *mitzvas aseil min haTorah* and therefore it's enough if while you eat the matzah, you have in mind that it's a *mitzvah*. That's very important and it's good enough for people who are not able to think too much. At least that! When you sit down to eat matzah at the Seder don't just think of it as a change of diet; *think about the mitzvah of matzah*.

And not only the first night; some say that it's a *mitzvah* all Pesach. The night of Pesach is a *מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה מִן הַתּוֹרָה* to eat a *kezayis* of matzah, this everybody agrees, but there is a *shittah* that says the rest of *yom tov* it's a *mitzvah* too – only it's not a *mitzvah* that you're *mechuyav* to do. You can eat potatoes if you wish instead of matzah. The night of Pesach you must eat a *kezayis matzah* but the rest of Pesach you can eat potatoes if you prefer. But if you eat matzah, you are doing a *mitzvah*. That's an opinion in the *poskim* and so at least that you should think about – that you're doing the *mitzvas Hashem*.

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Now, that's enough for the one who doesn't want to think much; he's happy with the minimum and we can't force him to do more. But for those who want to live up to their greatness, they don't want to get away with the minimum, so as much intelligence and meditation they accompany the matzah with, they have to know that there are great lessons in the mitzvah of matzah and the more time they put into these lessons, the more successfully and honestly they are living their lives.

Mitzvos That Testify

Now, what it means 'lessons' – lessons of a mitzvah – requires a short introduction. If you recall the Seder night, you'll remember that the chochom, when he asks his father about the laws and practices of the Torah, he says, מָה הָעֵדוּת – What are these testimonies, וְהַחֲקִים – and the statutes, וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים – and the judgments, that Hashem commanded us? And so right away we see from the words of the wise son that there are three different categories of mitzvos – *eidos*, *chukim* and *mishpatim* – each one with its own name and its own important purpose in the life of a Torah Jew.

What is meant by *eidos*? It's often translated as 'laws' but actually it means 'testimonies' and it refers to that category of Torah laws which have the special function of testifying to certain historical events and their corresponding principles. They're 'testimonial commandments' because that's their function, to serve as testimonies.

Those things that are commanded to us for the purpose of memorializing certain great events or certain great principles are called *eidos*. And you're expected to use that mitzvah-testimony, to create for yourself a Torah mind.

Shabbos Testifies

I'll give a few examples just so that we should better understand. Shabbos is one of the *mitzvos eiduyos*. Now, very many Jews are meticulous when it comes to keeping Shabbos but they overlook the intention, the purpose of Shabbos. The purpose of

keeping Shabbos is to testify to certain Torah truths and to give you a Shabbos Mind.

Shabbos, first of all, testifies that there's nothing in this world except the will of Hashem. He created the world out of nothing and there's nothing in the world except the *ratzon Hashem*. כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי – He spoke and it became, הוּא צִוָּה וַיֵּעָמֵד – He commanded and it came into existence. The Shabbos also testifies to the great principle of בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹתָהּ הוּא, the special connection between the Am Yisroel and Hashem, and to the *chochmas Hashem* and *chesed Hashem* in the *briyah*.

Shabbos testifies to many important principles and it's a tragedy when people work hard to bring in the Shabbos and they're meticulous, they're careful to keep the Shabbos, and yet when it's all over they haven't thought once about the purpose of Shabbos. Actually a Jew is expected to be a different person after Shabbos than he was on *erev Shabbos*. He just passed through a full day that was testifying to him, reminding him of various ideas and ideals, and so he's a changed person now.

A Panorama of Opportunity

But Shabbos is only one example of many *mitzvos eiduyos*. The Torah is full of these things. Let's say you sit in the *sukkah*. Of course it's a great thing to fulfill a mitzvah even in its most simple sense. And many people are *moser nefesh*; besides the expense they also get blisters and splinters on their hands building the *sukkah*. Excellent! It's a beautiful thing! But did you ever think about what the mitzvah is testifying to? It's an entire subject, what the *sukkah* wants you to know, and if you don't pay attention to the testimony then you're missing out on the most important function of that mitzvah.

There are many other examples like that. Mezuzah and Tzitzis and Tefillin are *mitzvos eduyos*. Also Peah and Pidyon Haben; many others too. And each one is an *eidus*, a testimony to some great ideal. Isn't it a shame to neglect the opportunity, the purpose, of these commandments? They're

intended to work on our psychology, to make new people out of us, people with Torah Minds.

The Guest of Honor

And so we come now to the guest of honor, the mitzvah of matzah. Isn't it a pity if people go to bake matzos and they spend a lot of money too – good matzos are expensive – but they forget to listen to what the matzah is trying to tell them?

Avadeh it's a mitzvah to eat. And it tastes good too. Absolutely you should enjoy it, no question about it! And it should be matzah shemurah! It's a big mitzvah to be machmir in all the hiddurim of making matzah, all the chumros of matzah. And yet, *af al pi ken*, nevertheless, it's possible to do it *b'simhon leivov*, to do it with an empty mind and miss out on the most important function of the matzah.

And so the Jew who wants to suck out all of the honey that's possible from Chag Hamatzos has to become a thinker. And as the matzah goes into your intestines, at the same time all of the matzah's lessons, ideals and attitudes, should go into your head.

And the more you could put into the matzah – as you eat it and you're chewing you're trying to think of whatever you could apply to this symbol of matzos in a sensible way, that's the way to eat. Matzah is telling us an important message – actually messages, plural. Especially when the Torah gives you hints, that's the way to eat matzos. There's a purpose in a matzah and it's a mitzvah to ask that question: *מַצָּה זוֹ שְׁאָנוּ אוֹכְלִים עַל שׁוּם מָה* – What does matzah mean? What is it trying to tell me? And that's what Chag Hamatzos is for; it's the *yom tov* of planting all of these great thoughts in our minds, thoughts that will continue to grow all year round.

Editor's note:

Throughout Rav Miller's many Pesach lectures he addressed many different ideas symbolized by the

matzah. In reviewing the many tapes we have identified at least twelve different lessons that the Rav gleaned from the mitzvah of eating matzah. In our sefer "Toras Avigdor Moadim vol. 1" we have published a short essay briefly outlining these ideas. In this booklet we have chosen eight of these lessons expounded by the Rav, and we have arranged them as one idea per day for the eight days of Pesach.

While the words in the booklet are taken from the Rav's lectures the division of the lessons into days was not made by the Rav. It is an arrangement prepared by the Toras Avigdor team following the Rav's practical advice in other areas of *avodas Hashem* where he set aside separate days, each day focused on acquiring separate achievements of the mind. We hope that this system of reading each day's testimony and trying to think about the lesson as you eat the matzah that day will be a practical and effective way of best incorporating these lessons into our minds and having a successful Chag Hamatzos.

Day One

Magnifying the Neis

The First Matzah Chabura

One of the reasons we eat matzah, and we could even say it's the first reason, is what we explained at the Seder: *לֹא הִסְפִּיק בְּצִקָּם שֶׁל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְהַחְמִיץ* – The dough of our forefathers didn't have the opportunity to sour, to turn leavened, *עַד שֶׁנִּגְלָה עָלֵיהֶם הַקֶּב"ה* – before Hashem redeemed them (Haggadah Shel Pesach).

Everyone knows that when you make dough, it takes time for the dough to rise – you wait for the dough to rise sufficiently, to leaven, and then you bake it as bread. But on Pesach night something happened that made it impossible. *וַיֹּאפּוּ אֶת הַבֶּצֶק* – They had to bake the dough, *עוֹגוֹת* – into unleavened bread, *כִּי לֹא חָמַץ* – because it didn't have a chance to leaven, *כִּי גֵרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם* – because they were driven out of Egypt, *וְלֹא יָכְלוּ*

לֹהֲתַמְהִימָה – *and they couldn't wait any longer* (Shemos 12:39). *B'leis breirah*, with no other option, they baked it as it was, and that's how they ate their bread that day, as unleavened matzos. And so without going off into fanciful reasons, that's the fundamental reason the Torah gives for the mitzvah of matzah.

You know, if you're interested in understanding a mitzvah it's always good to follow the simple statements of the Torah. I say 'simple' – nothing is simple in the Torah but the statements that are most available, most open, those are the statements that are of the utmost importance. And so if it says here that we eat matzah on Pesach because when the time came they were driven out and couldn't bake bread so that's the first thing we should think about as we're eating.

The Impossible Escape

Now if this idea of haste is intended as one of the lessons that matzah is reminding us of, it makes sense that we should spend a little time thinking about what it means, why Hakadosh Baruch Hu made it so. After all, He could have made it happen in other ways. Their dough could have finished rising and then they could have been pressed to leave only afterwards. Or maybe Moshe Rabbeinu could have warned the nation ahead of time to prepare their dough early and be ready to leave with bread. No; instead Hakadosh Baruch Hu arranged it so that Pharaoh was pressing them to leave, and so they had to carry the unleavened dough with them out of Mitzrayim and now they were stuck with matzos.

And so we understand that the entire story was a charade; it was a performance that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was putting on. He wanted it to happen just this way, that we're settling down for the night and suddenly Pharaoh is chasing us out, pressing us to leave. And that means that as we're eating the matzah we're expected to think about the purpose of that charade.

First of all we have to remember that from the very beginning when they entered Egypt it was already hopeless to think of leaving. That's how it was – once you came in, you stayed there. Even Yosef, the second-in-command, couldn't leave without Pharaoh's permission. And surely when they became a slave-nation, there was no question that they weren't going anywhere. It was impossible!

Even to imagine such a thing was impossible. Not like how it was before the Civil War in America; from the beginning there was an abolitionist movement agitating for an end to slavery, and there was the Underground Railroad too – it was something that was spoken about as an eventual reality, the blacks would go free. In Mitzrayim, there was no such thing. It was like a concrete wall, a big concrete wall, and the Bnei Yisroel were imagining that this big stone wall would suddenly disappear and become thin air. Impossible!

V'nahapoch Hu

That's why when Moshe Rabbeinu came to Pharaoh and he proposed, in the name of Hashem, that they should leave even just for a few days, Pharaoh said, "Nothing doing!" He looked at Moshe like a *meshugene*, like someone who lost his mind. Again and again Pharaoh refused. And he did it adamantly, *b'chizuk leiv*. Moshe was saying, "We're going!" and Pharaoh said, "Never!" And so, it seemed irrevocable.

What happened? All of a sudden in the middle of the night, Pharaoh is running around the streets looking for Moshe Rabbeinu, to tell him that the Bnei Yisroel should leave immediately. He's pushing them out.

Now if you know a little bit about kings, you know that usually they sleep at night. A Pharaoh doesn't get up in the middle of the night to run errands; even for a million dollars he doesn't get up in the middle of the night. But this night was different from all other nights. Pharaoh jumped out of bed and he ran to find Moshe Rabbeinu. It's a

remarkable thing! Pharaoh? In the streets at midnight? And he's begging, קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי – “Hurry up and get out! Leave my land. Take your people and get out of here! And make it snappy! No procrastinating!”

And because of that the Am Yisroel baked their dough into *matzos*. “No time to waste! We have to leave on the double quick!”

The First Testimony

And so what is the first *eidus* of the matzah? “Remember the *neis* that made me!” That's the plain *pshat* in the Chumash. We don't let our dough become *chometz* to show that the Yetzias Mitzrayim was done with such a haste. At least on the first day of our program forget about fanciful explanations, about *p'shetlech*. Today the matzah is telling us “Remember the *neis*! That's why I'm here, to remind you about that, to remind you about how for two hundred and ten years, the Pharaohs wouldn't listen at all. And when the time came in the middle of the night this Pharaoh jumped out of bed and said ‘Get out!’ They were so desperate to send you out that you had to bake your dough into matzos.”

And so we're chewing and thinking and chewing and thinking. That's what it means ‘a mitzvah of testimony; it's testifying, and so, we should be listening. It tastes good also the more you chew, but don't forget to think. It was something tremendous that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should take a גּוֹי מִקְרָב גּוֹי, a nation that was stuck, constrained, subjugated to another nation without a way out (Devarim 4:34).

The Miracle Nation

It was something impossible but Hakadosh Baruch Hu had plans for us. We had to live out our destiny as the *Am Hashem* and so He took us out to be His people. And in order to magnify the *neis*, in order to accentuate the miracle, He did it in this way, He arranged it so that the obstinate Pharaoh – the one who said, “No!” and “No!” and “Never!” – now he's running around in the middle of the night

pressing us to go, so much so that we had to quickly bake our dough.

The matzah is testifying to a sudden turn of events, something that could only happen because Someone with a capital S is pulling the strings. And because He intentionally played out our leaving Mitzrayim in such a way that matzos had to be baked in order that we should use them as a way of remembering the *neis* forever, that therefore is the first lesson that the matzah is testifying to.

The Matzah Testifies:

Matzah is a food prepared in haste in order to inspire our thoughts to remember the neis of how it happened that the Bnei Yisroel baked matzah in Mitzrayim. Pesach means remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim, thinking about the miracles of that night, and the matzah is an especial testimony to what happened that night. Only that we have to listen to what the matzah is saying.

Day Two

Hashem's Timetable

Valid Testimony

Now, when we eat matzah on the second day of Pesach, it's a good idea to add a second thought, an additional reason why Hakadosh Baruch Hu arranged it so that our dough shouldn't have time to rise. And don't think that “additional” means that it's not a true *kavanah*. Because there's a statement אַחַת דָּבָר אֱלֹקִים שָׁמַעְתִּי – Hashem said one thing and I heard two things (Tehillim 62:12); which means that the words of Hakadosh Baruch Hu are very, very profound and it is an error therefore to ascribe only one interpretation to them. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu speaks in the Torah He has many things in mind, many different explanations, and so we can add now a second idea that's included in what the mitzvah of matzah wants to tell us.

Why are we eating matzah today and reminding ourselves of the haste, the rush, of being sent out of Mitzrayim? Because there's an important principle that we have to incorporate into the corpus of Torah attitudes we have in our minds: That when Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants something to be, His timetable will be *the* timetable. And in order to emphasize that, that's why **לֹא הִסְפִּיק בְּצִקָּם לְהֶחְמִיץ** – *it happened so suddenly that there was no chance for the dough to rise.*

My Time, My Laws

That's what the matzah says *b'pashtus*, that when the time comes, Hashem's plan is carried out to the second. The Pharaohs can be stubborn for 210 years. "You're stuck here!" the Pharaohs used to say. "It's against the law to leave Egypt."

"Law shmaws," Hashem says. "I'm the One Who makes the laws and now is My time!"

That's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu played along with them until the time came that He wanted and then in a split second, in the middle of the night, Pharaoh came running.

It has to be in the middle of the night? Just wait till the morning already. No; Hakadosh Baruch Hu disregards everything and He wakes up Pharaoh from his bed because He wants to make an especial display of this principle of **הָשֵׁב אֶת הַקֶּץ**, that His calculation, His timetable, is the only timetable. "You'll see," Hashem says, "that when My moment arrives, when the time that I planned comes, even if Pharaoh has to jump out of bed and order you out of the land, that's how it's going to be." And in memory of that night, in order that it should be remembered forever, we had to bake matzah; the matzah demonstrates that everything is calculated to the second by Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And so as we're chewing on the matzah on the second day of Chag HaMatzos we are reminding ourselves that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has a timetable of history; He is the **קוֹרֵא הַדּוֹרוֹת מֵרָאשׁ** – *the One Who proclaims the generations beforehand* (Yeshayah

41:4). But not just the generations; the weeks and the days and the hours and the minutes. That's what the Bnei Yisroel saw that night; that Hashem is the Boss, that He's in control, and when He presses the button, that's the time to leave.

The Talking Matzah

And so when something happens, the matzah is testifying that He is the One Who decrees that it has to happen *at that moment*. He is in control of history and therefore when the time comes He is the One Who gives the signal for things to happen. "Don't despair!" the matzah says. "There's nothing to worry about. Hashem is on the job and therefore nothing is late and nothing is early. Everything is in the Hands of the All-Powerful One, Who presses the buttons *when* He wants and *how* He wants."

Even today there are some places, in Teiman I think, where there is still a custom on Pesach night by the Seder to have a staff in hand and bundles on their shoulders when they eat the *matzos* to show that they are ready to leave. Because that's included in eating the matzah, to imagine how the Bnei Yisroel were dressed that night; **מְתַיְיכֶם הָגָרִים**, ready to go.

We Want Moshiach Now

Now, we don't have that *minhag* but it's still true; that's what the matzah wants us to know, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge. And so when the time comes it doesn't matter what the Pharaoh will say or how much he likes to be comfortable under his blanket; we are going to go out to our destiny and freedom.

And it means also that even though for a long time we have waited for Moshiach – we thought, "So long we waited already. Who knows how much longer we have to wait?" – all of a sudden, maybe on a Wednesday afternoon, everybody is in his business, out of nowhere Moshiach is here! We'll have to drop everything and go. We'll all board huge jets and **נִעְלָה לְצִיּוֹן בְּרֶפֶה**. But our businesses, our

projects, our stores? Forget about it! Hakadosh Baruch Hu has announced His schedule!

Don't Wait for Moshiach

Now, it doesn't mean we shouldn't be busy accomplishing right now in Golus. Just like in Mitzrayim the Bnei Yisroel became very great – we'll talk about that yet, how they acquired a tremendous perfection of character in Mitzrayim – we also have to be busy gaining perfection while we're in Golus.

Don't listen to what some people say that our destiny is only Eretz Yisroel, *aliyah*. Like I heard almost forty-five years ago at a banquet in Boston; it happened to be my business to be there, I couldn't help it, and a Mizrachi *gadol*, one of the biggest leaders of the Mizrachi, was speaking there. I won't mention his name because he's long dead but he said, "You American Jews are making a great error by building big synagogues and yeshivos in America. Go to Eretz Yisroel and build," he said. "That's the only place that has any future."

In those days there was no Lakewood yet. There was no Chaim Berlin, no Mirrer Yeshiva, no Torah Vodaas, no Tiferes Yerushalayim – there was nothing except for YU. And he was telling the world then that it doesn't pay to build in America.

It's so silly what he said! During those years, from then till now, a whole generation grew up of Beis Yaakovs and yeshivos; a glorious young generation. And we'll continue like that. Let's hope that we'll keep on building yeshivas until in Dayton, Ohio you'll have big *kollelim*. And way out in Sioux City and in Grand Rapids there'll be big Torah centers! And we'll be fortunate enough to bring back our lost brothers and sisters; Jews all over America will come back to the Torah.

The Great Surprise

And then one day – maybe soon – we'll be surprised when suddenly we hear the great shofar blast announcing that it's time for a new stage of our history. We'll be surprised but we'll be ready

because we ate the matzah every year and the matzah was telling us that Hashem is watching and guiding history; that He's in charge, and that whatever has to be done for us to reach our destiny, it's going to happen according to His Plans and His Timeline.

And no Pharaoh and no President Bush and no Queen of England, nobody, can do anything about it. If it means Mayor Koch will be running around in the streets of New York, asking us to pack our valises so it'll be. Because Hashem's destiny for the Am Yisroel will be fulfilled by hook or by crook. If He has to pull a crook by putting a hook in his nose, He'll do that too. Because the matzah means that He has a Timetable and that His schedule will be carried out!

And that's what the matzah is telling you. The loyal Jew eats his matzah and reminds himself of this eternal principle that our forefathers learned on Pesach night, that everything in history – our national history and our personal histories – is done according to the exact timetable of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The Matzah Testifies:

Hashem is in complete control of history and operates according to His perfect timetable. The matzah comes to symbolize this principle; it reminds us that when the time comes for Hashem's plans to unfold, nothing can delay them – not Pharaoh, not laws, not circumstances.

The matzah says that everything, from large-scale historical events to personal experiences, occurs precisely when Hashem wills it to and it encourages hope and readiness by testifying to us that just as the Bnei Yisrael were unexpectedly redeemed from Egypt, we too should have faith in the ultimate redemption. The matzah is a "talking" reminder of Hashem's power, precise timing, and the trust we must have in His plans.

Escaping the Leavening

The First Command

Now, these symbolisms of the matzah for the first two days are excellent reasons for the dough that didn't rise **כִּי גָרְשׁוּ**, because they were driven out. And had it been the case that they left Mitzrayim first and only then they were commanded to eat matzah, so we'd understand that these are the only reasons.

But actually it wasn't so. They were commanded to eat matzah before the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim even took place! **וּמִצּוֹת עַל מַרְרִים יֵאָכְלוּ** – They weren't driven out yet when they were given the mitzvah of *achilas matzah* for the first time. And so it's a question. That matzah that the Bnei Yisroel were commanded to eat on Pesach night, *even before the story happened*, what is that telling us? After all, when we eat matzah on Pesach, we're eating because of that first command too and so we must understand what it's testifying about.

A Hint of Chometz

The answer is they were told to eat *matzos* on Pesach night in order that they should understand an entirely new lesson. Pay attention now because what does it mean to make matzah? To make matzah you wait a certain amount of time but you can't wait too long; you have to bake it quickly before it turns *chometz*. **וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הַמִּצּוֹת** – you have to watch the matzah, because if you wait a second too long, it becomes *chometz*. That's what we say 'eighteen minute *matzos*', because you have to be careful that it shouldn't be nineteen minutes. Now the truth is it could be nineteen minutes too; we are being *machmir* when we say eighteen but whatever it is, if you don't watch the *matzos*, then sooner or later it becomes 'spoiled' – instead of the mitzvah, now it's *kareis*, *chametz* on Pesach.

Now the Kadmonim in the early *seforim* taught us that *chometz* signifies the *yetzer hara*; it's a *remez*

in general for the *yetzer hara* but especially the *yetzer* of gentile influence. And so *chometz* means that you're already too long in a gentile influence and that you're leavening, you're spoiling.

On Pesach night in Mitzrayim, even before we went out, we were commanded to eat matzah in order to let us know that our time was up, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was taking us out of Egypt now because we couldn't afford to remain there one more day. You must get up and get out of Mitzrayim to save yourselves – or else you'll perish as a nation.

Quicksand

It's like a man sinking in a quagmire in the swamp. So first his knees go down into the mud. He has no place to hold on to; all around him is only mud. But he's not in danger yet of being destroyed. A little more time and now he's down to his waist; it's closer to the point of no return. And then he's down to his shoulders and then to his chin. He's drowning in mud! One more minute his nose is going to be submerged and he'll be lost forever.

Don't you see what's happening in America, the wickedness that we're drowning in today? All kinds of *chometz*, all kinds of gentile influences are in the air today. Everything is included in *chometz*. The academicians and the colleges and the press – even the Jewish press – it's filled with the stupidities and the *shekarim* of materialism and atheism and *leitzanus*.

All around us, bilge water, sewer water is filling our minds. And don't say you're not being affected. Even the *frumme* get spoiled; no question about it, *frumme* get spoiled. Even the biggest *chossid* in Williamsburg, with the longest *payos*, is changing. A person has to know, maybe he's already sinking.

That's what happened to our forefathers in Egypt – they were sinking into the *shaarei tumah*. Egypt was a gentile nation and the Am Yisroel, when they're too long among the gentiles something happens to them, something fatal *chalilah*. A Jew

can only be so long among the nations; he sinks into the mire until *chas v'shalom* it's too late.

And so the Am Yisroel, their nostrils were beginning to touch the level of the mud, and now Hakadosh Baruch Hu went into action. Forget now about Pharaoh driving us out; this is between us and Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He was driving us out! He had to take drastic and rapid action to save us. גִּרְשׁוֹ לֵהֲתַמְהֵמָה – We had to hurry up and save ourselves because we couldn't wait a second more. We had to be pulled out of Egypt before we would leaven.

Change of Plans

That's הקב"ה חֲשַׁב אֶת הַקֶּץ – He calculated that it doesn't pay to let the Bnei Yisroel remain in Egypt any longer. If they wait a little longer they'll become *chometz* and so I have to hurry up and bake the nation before they spoil. They resisted the influence of Mitzrayim for 210 years. לֹא שֵׁנוּ אֶת שְׁמֵם – Even their names they didn't change; nobody called themselves with gentile names in Mitzrayim. 210 years! Imagine Jews who came to America in 1780 and until 1990, they didn't change their names. לֹא שֵׁנוּ אֶת לְשׁוֹנָם וּמְלִבוֹשָׁם – They didn't change their language or their clothing.

But that was the nation in general. Some people however were yielding already; some people were no good already and they didn't go out of Mitzrayim. You know, some Bnei Yisroel weren't worthy of going out; they were lost in Mitzrayim. It was a great test and many passed the test but too much they couldn't endure. Two hundred and ten years is a long time to be in the *tumah* of Mitzrayim; it's an ordeal which even the Am Hashem wouldn't be able to withstand.

Now don't get any wrong ideas. It doesn't mean they would be like the Egyptians. The Egyptians didn't sink down to their nostrils – they were already far underground. All the nations were miles underground. But the Am Yisroel, their nostrils were beginning to touch the level of the mud – they

were the best of all the peoples in the world, but for the Am Hashem they weren't good enough – and now Hakadosh Baruch Hu went into action.

The Emergency Rescue

But there's a prophecy of 400 years? Hakadosh Baruch Hu had told Avraham that the Bnei Yisroel would be in Exile for four hundred years! Where does 210 years come in? The answer is that for the sake of the survival of Am Yisroel, הקב"ה חֲשַׁב אֶת הַקֶּץ לְעֵשׂוֹת כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ – Hakadosh Baruch Hu calculated a new end. "If I wait any longer," He said, "the Bnei Yisroel will go lost and the purpose of creation will go lost." And so He made now a new calculation.

It doesn't mean 'new' the way we think. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "When I declared My prophecy to Avraham Avinu that his children would be 400 years in an אֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם I had in mind many things. I could have calculated it in a number of ways. It could have been four hundred years in Mitzrayim from the time that יָצְקָב וּבְנָיו יָרְדוּ מִצְרַיִם, when they came to Egypt. It could have been even more because when Yosef was alive they really didn't suffer bondage. So it could have been four hundred years *after* Yosef's death. It could have been any number of calculations because when Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives a prophecy, we don't know exactly what He means. It's only after it's all done then we look back retroactively and we discover what He meant.

And so שֶׁהַקֶּב"ה חֲשַׁב אֶת הַקֶּץ – He calculated the *keitz* and he said, "They have to go out. I can't keep them here any longer. I see it's too dangerous for them to remain any longer and so the 400 years means from the time that Yitzchok was born." And so Hakadosh Baruch Hu learned a different *pshat* in His *nevuah*. The *pshat* is going to be, not four hundred years from their coming into Egypt, but four hundred years from the time when Yitzchok was born, That's also an אֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם because Yitzchok was also among *goyim*. He lived in Eretz Canaan. The Canaanim were abominable people. Canaanim and Mitzrayim both came from Cham; they're

wicked people, both of them. And so, in order to save the Am Yisroel, Hashem used that calculation instead and immediately, presto, they were driven out of Egypt before it was too late.

Matzah: Snatched From Oblivion

It's not *drush* what we're saying now; we're not trying to force any symbolism into the matzah – we're merely taking out the symbolism that's already there. That's why the *matzos* on that night were eaten in order to symbolize that there's a time when it becomes too late, when people are too long under gentile influence and they become *chometz*.

And so when we eat the matzah today we should keep in mind that we are grateful that we were snatched out of the jaws of oblivion while we were still matzah. It's not merely we went out to freedom; it's that we were saved to be Hashem's beloved nation. Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves His people and that's why He pulled us out of Mitzrayim before we leavened, in order that we should merit to be His eternal nation.

The Matzah Testifies:

Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim in haste, to ensure that we do not sink into oblivion. It means that He cares about us and will take whatever steps necessary to ensure our survival as a nation as long as we fulfill our side of the deal by being loyal to Him even when faced with the chometz of the world around us.

Day Four

Affliction and Prayer

Bread of Calling Out

When we eat matzah on day number four of Chag Hamatzos we have to remember that the Torah calls it **לֶחֶם עֲנִי** – *the bread of affliction* (Devarim 16:3). And if the Torah gives matzah that

name, that title, we understand that it's something we should spend time on.

Now, the word *oni* we translate in English 'affliction' or 'suffering'. And of course it's connected to the word **עָנִי** which means a poor man – a man 'afflicted' by poverty. If you have no money to buy food or to buy clothes, there's no question it's an affliction.

But the word *oni*, suffering, or *ani*, a poor person, is not the original word. Actually it comes from the word **עֲנֶה**, to speak up. Like **וַיַּעַן** – *and he spoke up*, or **עֲנֶה** – *he answered*. Fundamentally the word **עֲנֶה** means to speak up, to call out.

And why is the poor man, the sufferer, called an *ani*? Because he speaks up all the time; he cries out. He's calling out to Hashem or to the *gevir* or to the welfare office; whatever it is, he's *oneh*, he's calling out. It's a borrowed word, a cognate; the 'poor man' means 'the man who is calling out for help.'

A Name That Fits

Now, if it was one of us, we would have thought of a better, more appropriate word for the poor man; a word that describes maybe his suffering or his embarrassment. But "the crier"? What's that about? Is that the fundamental quality of a poor person?

And the answer is yes! The poor man is called "the crier" because that is what it's all about! The purpose of affliction is to make you call out to Hashem.

Now, in Mitzrayim the bread they ate was the kind of food that caused the eaters to cry out. It didn't have the taste of real bread because they were too busy working – they didn't have the chance to let their dough become leavened like ordinary bread. They were in a hurry. They had to work all the time.

And it's possible they weren't given enough bread. Why should they be given bread? The Egyptians were not the most kindhearted people. And even if they were well fed but they were

suffering terribly and so whatever they were eating, it was in the midst of suffering. And so the Bnei Yisroel cried out; the bread of affliction became the bread of calling out. עֹנֵן עָלֵינוּ דְּבָרִים הַרְבֵּה – They cried many words, many times, because of that matzah.

Crying Out Successfully

Now I have to explain something. When it says they cried out, it doesn't mean only that this one cried out and that one cried out. They did that too but they also came together; they had sessions when they cried together. That was a tradition of theirs, to come together in multitudes whenever they could in order to cry out to Hashem. It was a scene to see – hundreds of people, thousands, getting together and weeping and shouting and crying to Hashem. That's what it meant וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי – I heard the outcries of Bnei Yisroel (Shemos 6:5). Not the *davenen*, not the prayers; the *outcries*. And that's what we have to think about while we're eating the 'Bread of Crying Out'.

Why is that so important? Why do we want to remember that suffering and the crying out by eating matzah?

The answer is that crying out was our success. When we cried out to Hashem we gained such an Awareness, such a clarity of perception, that nobody else in the world could rise to this greatness of being close to Him as we were then. We became so clear in our Awareness of Hashem that now we were ready to go out and see Hashem at Har Sinai. Becoming intensely aware of Hashem was the preparation for greatness!

Now you know how our forefathers in Mitzrayim became great; and not only the ones who came out on Pesach. There were very many good ones who suffered in Mitzrayim and died before Pesach happened. They suffered as slaves, eating *lechem oni* every day, and they never saw the miracles of Yetzias Mitzrayim. But they were successful! They lived successfully because they became great in

Awareness of Hashem! And they left this world as successful people and went to Olam Haba.

And therefore the affliction in Mitzrayim was an achievement and a very great benefit to us. Because they cried out and they gained such a greatness that they became the most perfect of any generation in history. How did they gain that perfection? לָחֶם עֹנֵן! It was the bread of affliction that they ate in Mitzrayim and the reaction of crying out that made them perfect.

Answering Excellence

And that's why when we were answered, when we were finally saved it was only because of the excellence we gained by crying out to Him. That's the fundamental principle of הָעֹנֶה לְעַמּוֹ בְּעֵת שְׁוֹעָם שְׁוֹעָם – He answers His people, not when they need His help, but when they cry out to Him. He doesn't help them because they need help. He helps them because of this excellence that they have now achieved by crying out to Hashem. That's why Hashem answers them and takes action, to reward the perfection that they achieved by crying out.

And so, we eat the matzah today to remind ourselves of what the לָחֶם עֹנֵן is saying: About the lives of our forefathers in Mitzrayim, the suffering they lived with, and how because of the עֹנֵן, the suffering, they were עֹנֶה, they spoke up, and how they achieved greatness just because of that.

Forget Me Not

Now, once you understand this *peirush* of what *lechem oni* is – it means you spent time thinking about what the matzah is testifying to – so you'll understand already a lot about the purpose of *tzaros* in general. Matzah, 'The Bread of Affliction and of Crying Out', means that the primary purpose of trouble is so that people should cry out to help and achieve more *yiras Hashem*, more Awareness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

You know when it comes to awareness of Hashem the world is fast asleep; even good people,

from people, are sleepwalking through life – they forget about Hashem.

Oh yes, He's in the *siddur*. And when they come to the synagogue, they mention Him. But outside, after Shachris, nothing. We put Him back in the *siddur* until Mincha.

Shul Reminders

Sometimes even during *davening* we're not thinking about Hashem. The words, the *peirush hamilim*, yes. But Hashem? Not so much. Like I told you this story many times. In the *shtiebel* of Rav Levi Yitzchok M'Berditchev, the Rebbe once sent his *gabbai* up to the *bimah* during *davening* to make an announcement. Everybody is shaking and *davening* – it's in the middle of *davening* after all – and the *gabbai* gives a *klop* on the *bimah*: "The Rebbe wants everyone to know that there is a Ribono Shel Olam!" So you see that even in the shul we need reminders. Out of shul, surely we forget about Him.

But the Torah says, הַשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – Beware lest you forget Hashem (Devarim 8:11). Don't forget Me! If there's one thing in the world you have to remember, *this* is the subject. Don't forget Me! That's a person's success! Nothing else! And therefore, when troubles come and the person utilizes them and he cries out to Hashem, then the trouble is fully justified.

That's the reason why הקב"ה אוהב עניים. It's a statement in the Gemara. "Hashem loves the poor." Why does He love the poor? What's so good about the poor? You know, if you don't have money you can't give a lot of *tzedakah*. You can't buy the most *mehudar tefillin*. A lot of *mitzvos* you can't do. So what's so special about poverty?

Pray, Don't Grouch

The answer is that a poor man is always being pressed to cry out to Hashem. Of course, you have to cry out to the right Address. Just to bellyache and grouch to his wife, then he's addressing his petition to the wrong address. It's like taking an envelope with a letter inside and you put the wrong

address on it and you throw it into the mailbox. But if you talk to Hakadosh Baruch Hu – you *daven* and cry and importune – that's the right Address. And when you cry out, something is accomplished. You're changed now! You gained an Awareness of Hashem.

And therefore when a person *chalilah* in life has troubles – many people suffer a good deal in life – he should know Hakadosh Baruch Hu is bestowing on him a very great opportunity to rise to the occasion of the *oni*, the suffering, and use it to be an *oneh*, a 'caller out' to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. If a person responds to the squeezes and pinches by calling out to Hashem, he's walking in the footsteps of our forefathers in Mitzrayim and he becomes especially great just because of that. And when the time will come, when he finishes his time in this world – whether he was saved or not – this man is going to be proud of how he responded to the troubles; how he cried out to Hashem and gained perfection by transforming his 'Bread of Affliction' into his 'Bread of Crying Out'.

The Matzah Testifies:

The matzah was a bread of affliction, but also a bread of 'crying out'. One of the purposes of the affliction in Mitzrayim was to cause us to cry out to Hashem and become greater thereby; we were forged into a great nation because of constant crying out and the increased and more intense Awareness of Hashem we achieved thereby. And that stands as a model to us forever; we appreciate the purpose of our troubles and use them to grow in Awareness of Hashem.

Day Five

Suffering For Our Beliefs

Willing Affliction

When we consider that matzah is *lechem oni*, bread of affliction, it's important to understand that

the affliction we suffered in Egypt was not necessarily the fault of the Mitzrim. It's true they worked us to the bone and we suffered terribly from them but there's another aspect to the 'affliction' that we can't blame especially on the wickedness of the Egyptians – the *lechem oni* represents also the affliction we willingly accepted upon ourselves in Mitzrayim. Now that's an entirely new subject that the matzah is testifying to and it needs to be explained.

The fact is that in the ancient days any minority, even a slave nation, that lived in the midst of a host nation had a choice: either you assimilate or you suffer. Among nations of antiquity there was no such thing as living in another country and yet maintaining a separate identity. Unless you're willing to suffer, to intentionally remain separate and different and suffer all the degradation and affliction that comes along with remaining an outcast, you'll assimilate – sometimes immediately, sometimes a little longer – and after a while you become part of the nation that had originally enslaved you. In the course of time the slaves merged with their masters. They intermarried with them and became lost among them.

A Different Nation

But the Bnei Yisroel were a different story. They had a different destiny, a higher destiny, than all the nations of the world and so they refused to change.

לֹא שִׁנּוּ אֶת שְׁמָם – *They didn't change their names.* Imagine a Jew has to go into a profession, an office in Manhattan, and his name is, let's say, Moshe; so he signs up as Maurice or Murray or something else so he shouldn't be so conspicuous among the gentiles; he shouldn't be uncomfortable. But look at the names of that generation in Mitzrayim! Beautiful Hebrew names! They continued to call themselves names that set them apart: פְּרֹהַצוֹר – *Hashem, our Rock, will redeem us.* Or שְׁלוֹמִי'אֵל – *Hashem is my peace.* צוּרִי'אֵל – *Hashem is my rock.* גַּמְלִי'אֵל – *Hashem bestows all good on me.* All distinct Jewish names.

Egyptian Harrasers

לֹא שִׁנּוּ אֶת לְשׁוֹנָם – *They didn't change their language.* They spoke only *lashon kodesh*. Imagine, a Hebrew is sitting in an Egyptian bus; imagine there were buses in Egypt and there are Egyptians all around you and they are chattering in Egyptian. And you have a friend of yours and you want to talk to him. So you talk in *lashon kodesh*.

You know what that means? To the Egyptian it sounds outlandish, backwards. "What's this?" They look down at you. They laugh at you and mock you. It's quite uncomfortable.

Now they could have spoken Egyptian. Why not? They knew the language. But no, they insisted on maintaining their separate identity even though it meant *oni*, affliction; even though it meant they were exposing themselves to ridicule and harassment.

לֹא שִׁנּוּ אֶת לְבוּשָׁם – *They made sure to wear different clothes than the Egyptians.* You think the *goyim* took that sitting down? They knew what was doing here, that the Jews wanted to be different, that they looked down at the Egyptian ways. And so the Mitzrim reacted. You can be sure the Egyptian boys threw things at them and the adults harassed them as well. Don't think it didn't happen. When you walked through the streets at night with your Jewish hat, whatever it was that identified you, so the Egyptians would throw stones.

American Harassers

You young Americans don't know how it was in the past, even here in America. I remember when the Italians threw stones at us. They used to set their dogs on Jews who passed by. We suffered a great deal of harassment.

I remember when I was seven years old, a Christian gang in front of the church stopped me. They said "Are you a Jew?" I was a little boy; I was afraid of them and I said, "No." I'm still sorry I said no, but they would have beaten me up. I was a little

boy, only seven years old. I said no and they let me go.

And even today when a person walks in a neighborhood of let's say Italians and his tzitzis are out, so the Italians know these are 'Jew strings'. And they see he's wearing a beard on his face so he's exposing himself to a certain amount of persecution.

Now you can be a very good Jew without a beard. Only that you're not advertising your identity. You know, if you walk down the street waving an American flag, then you're going to be the target of all the bums, of all the beatniks, of all the liberals. Whereas, if you carry the American flag inside, beneath your lapel, you might be a big patriot, but you're not suffering for it. A beard is a flag. I'm not saying that you have to wear a beard in order to be a *tzaddik*, but you're not suffering for Judiasm.

So if you want someone to spit in your face like a woman did in mine – I was walking up the subway stairs and a woman looked at me and spit directly into my face. “Jew!” she said. And it didn't happen only once. Here I was standing by the roadside, and a motorist spit in my face as he passed by. Now he wouldn't spit in your face. Because he thinks you're a brother Italian! Three times people spat in my face. Stones have been thrown at me. Once I was bruised! All because of the beard.

Success in Egypt

In Mitzrayim, it was even more so, because the Jews were especially hated. They were looked down upon more than in America. But the Jews insisted on dressing like Jews anyhow. And they spoke only the Jewish language and they called themselves only Jewish names. And they were harassed and persecuted just because of that. But they did it anyhow. They looked down on the persecutors and they were proud. They knew who they were.

It was hard; it could be that there were some people who weren't *matzliach* and they reacted by trying to curry favor with the Egyptians. There are

always some weaklings, people without backbones who will try to adopt gentile ways in order to avoid embarrassment and suffering. But on a whole the Am Yisroel willingly ate this bread of affliction – in the midst of persecution they still held steadfast to all their traditions. The loyal Jew said, “I'll suffer. I'll eat the bread of affliction. I'm going to demonstrate who I am even if it means a stone in the head.”

Bread of Successful Suffering

And so when eat **לֶחֶם עֹנִי** today we have to remember the greatness of our nation that voluntarily accepted the role of discrimination because they wanted to remain a separate people. Don't think that our nation was chosen for nothing. They earned it by years and years of privation that they willingly undertook to suffer. When they ate this bread of affliction they gained weight – spiritual weight. They became better and better, more and more loyal, stronger and stronger. Never did they succeed as much as the time when they were in Mitzrayim!

That's a very important lesson that the matzah is testifying to. The most glorious era of our history was the era of *lechem oni*, when we ate the bread of affliction and so we are reminded also that this is the greatness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu expects from us too. Certainly it's a diet that is very good – to eat the bread of voluntary affliction, suffering for the sake of loyalty to Hashem – and so the matzah testifies to those glorious days, and it stands to us forever as a model of the glory of a loyal Jew, how he succeeds in Golus.

The Matzah Testifies:

The bread of affliction was a choice our ancestors made. They chose to be afflicted in order to remain a separate entity and stay true to their noble ideals. That was their greatness and it's a model for our greatness as well.

Gratitude and Kabbolas HaTorah

Poor Tasting Bread

Now, for the sixth lesson on our list we'll study again what it means that matzah is called *lechem oni*. We know it's a poor man's bread, but there's another *peirush* too – it's a poor kind of bread. Bread is more tasty when it's allowed to ferment and leaven; Hakadosh Baruch Hu puts certain bacteria into materials and certain chemical reactions and it starts creating gasses, carbon dioxide, which causes the dough to rise. The fermentation also creates various flavorful byproducts, such as alcohols and organic acids, which add flavors into the bread.

Matzah on the other hand is much poorer in taste. Because it's made quickly without the fermentation, it doesn't have the time or the conditions to develop those flavors and so generally matzah tastes less flavorful, less enjoyable than *chometz*. And that's the purpose! We eat a poorer type of bread because we want to go through the motions of reliving, at least in a very small way, the suffering of our forefathers in Mitzrayim and we'll see soon how important it is to think about that.

Of course we enjoy the matzah too but the contrast between the tasty bread we always eat and the less flavorful matzah today is a reminder that our forefathers lived for a very long time in affliction. They suffered for a long time and they suffered very much.

Remembering the Bad Old Days

So here's a man; he's sitting down to lunch on Chol Hamoed, Wednesday afternoon; he's eating matzah and he's thinking. "Imagine being enslaved; me, my family, my wife and children." And your father was enslaved too; for two hundred and ten years you couldn't get out of the country. And the Egyptians worked them with cruelty. It was *avodas perach*, work that broke the person. *Perach* means

to break a person, to break bones, to break spirits. **מִקְצָר רוּחַ** – They could hardly breathe from the severity of the labor; they couldn't catch their breath.

They beat you mercilessly if you didn't produce the number of bricks. They were hitting and they were whipping and they were maiming. Who knows how many they killed in their cruelty? Nobody was there to help.

You remember when Moshe Rabbeinu saw an Egyptian hitting a Hebrew of his brothers and he intervened. Who else intervened? Nobody else. And in addition, the Egyptians despised them. They looked down on them and harassed them. We have no picture of the difficulty of the *shibud Mitzrayim*, how much they suffered.

Appreciating Contrast

Now, why is it so important to remember the poor life we had? Why is it so important to eat a poor type of bread so that even our mouths, our taste buds, remember it?

And the answer is: in order that we should appreciate the changeover! A poor man who becomes wealthy appreciates it much more than one who is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, no question about it. The poor man sits at his table now and enjoys everything that he has on his table, whereas the rich man never saw anything else. And so the Bnei Yisroel in Mitzrayim absolutely appreciated the changeover. You know how much they appreciated it? *They accepted the Torah, all the obligations of being a Jew, because of that!* When they left Mitzrayim they became so intoxicated with happiness and gratitude that they fell in love with Hashem and they were *mekabel* the Torah.

Hashem Reminds Us

How do I know that? Because when Hakadosh Baruch Hu first spoke to the whole Am Yisroel for the first time, how did He introduce Himself? Did He say **אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּרָאתִי שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ** – "I am Hashem Your G-d who created the heavens and the

earth”? No, He didn’t say that. He said “I am Your Hashem **אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים** – Who took you out of Mitzrayim.” And He adds the words **מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים**. What are those added words? **בֵּית עֲבָדִים** means tzaros. It means you were in *gehakte tzaros* until finally suddenly something happened. What happened? I happened! I saved you!

And now we’re leaving Mitzrayim! You remember that day? Oh, was that a day when they walked out of Egypt! Their spirits were soaring! They weren’t walking on earth; they were walking in the air. They never thought they’d get out. Two hundred and ten years?! Even under the Nazis it wasn’t as long as that; it was a short period under the Nazis. And so it was the happiest day, not only of their lives – *never* was there a happy day like that.

And we’re loaded down with our enemies’ wealth. **וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת מִצְרַיִם** – *They emptied out Mitzrayim*. We marched out of Mitzrayim loaded down with silver and gold. And then, for the icing on the cake Hashem showed us the destruction of our oppressors at the Yam Suf. More happiness! Our enemies were chasing us to kill us, to bring more tzaros on our heads, and now they’re drowning, gurgling in the water! And we sang that song of happiness to Hashem. We went wild with a delirium of ecstasy.

Purim, Pesach, Shavuos

It was one big **וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם**! Everything turned upside down! All of the tzaros, the *lechem oni*, it’s finished, and now we’re free! And because of that they became so grateful, and they loved Hakadosh Baruch Hu with such an intensity that they were ready to do anything that He asked. Naturally, if Somebody rescues you from a very dangerous situation, you’re more grateful to Him. And therefore with such a big preparation, when they came to Har Sinai, they were in the mood, they were ready to commit to anything. *Naaseh v’nishma!*

If Hakadosh Baruch Hu asked them that they should leap in the fire for Him, absolutely! That’s

what they meant when they accepted the Torah. We’ll give our lives for the Torah. We’ll slaughter ourselves and our children for Your Torah!

And they did that in the generations that came. We know that in the Middle Ages when the pilgrims attacked the Jewish ghetto in a number of cases, with the intention of forcing the Jews to accept baptism, the Jews slaughtered their children they shouldn’t fall in the hands of the gentiles and be forcibly baptized. And then they slaughtered themselves. It’s described in the *kinnos* of Tisha Ba’av. The *chosson* slaughtered the *kallah* and then he slaughtered himself. And when the enemy finally broke through they saw a nation lying in its own blood.

That was the result of *kabbalas haTorah*. That’s what they meant, *Na’aseh v’nishma*. It wasn’t merely a pious statement that they promised to do something – they meant it from the bottom of their hearts. And they meant it because they were so full of love to Hashem, so grateful that He took off from us the great burden of *shibud Mitzrayim*. “We are forever grateful to You and no matter what You are going to ask us to do *naaseh v’nishma*.”

Long Term Gratitude

Now, because it happened 3,000 years ago, should it be any less? Where is the gratitude? Ingratitude is the worst of all crimes. Hakadosh Baruch Hu implanted in human nature a certain reaction and this reaction has to be obeyed; otherwise we are not human. If a person is not human, he doesn’t deserve to exist. He must obey the dictates of the decent conscience and the decent conscience says to be grateful.

Now you have to be grateful to everybody. If not, then you’re lacking in the attributes of humanity. But gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu supersedes every other form of gratitude. And the gratitude for taking us to be His nation, that supersedes everything else. It doesn’t matter if it’s

3,000 years or 3,000,000 years, that's the reaction we should feel.

And so as you eat the matzah today you have to try and remind yourself of the suffering that they endured in Mitzrayim. **הָאֵל לֶחֶמָא עֲנִיָּא** – *This is the bread of affliction*. We go through the motions of eating poor bread, bread that's not as tasty, not as rich in flavors, as we're used to. We're chewing and we're thinking "Oy, this is the bread of affliction we ate in Mitzrayim."

It's yom tov and we have to be happy but this is the introduction to the happiness. We take time to recall the **קוּשִׁי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד**, the difficulty of our bondage, and to speak about the details of what our fathers suffered in Egypt, *in order to be grateful that Hakadosh Baruch Hu redeemed us from it!* The more we understand that our forefathers were subjected to ordeals, to suffering, the greater we'll appreciate their deliverance from bondage and from the suffering. And that's going to be the dynamo that's going to motivate you; gratitude for Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to be expressed always by doing *mitzvos*. And so matzah, that's the entire Torah. **אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם** – *I am Hashem Who took you out of Mitzrayim*. And just because of that we'll serve You forever.

The Matzah Testifies:

Matzah calls to mind the contrast between our situation today and the affliction we suffered in Mitzrayim. This should engender gratitude in us and a sincere commitment to serve Hashem.

Day Seven

Food Of Priests

A Priestly Diet

Now, there's another symbolism of the matzah that's not difficult for us to see. It's not written

openly in the Chumash but for thinkers, for those who want to listen to *everything* the matzah is testifying about, they'll see the hint in the Torah and they'll have another important idea to think about while they're eating matzah today.

Anybody who reads the Chumash knows that there's a certain *korban*, the *korban minchah*, that is eaten by the *kohanim* in the Beis Hamikdash all year round. It's a *korban* made of flour and one of the important *dinim* of the *minchah* is **לֹא תֵאָפֶה חֶמֶץ**; it cannot be leavened. It has to be prepared as matzah, not *chometz*, and then the kohen takes a *kometz*, a little handful of the flour offering, and he burns it on the *mizbeiach*, and after that the *kohanim* are permitted to eat the rest of the *minchah*. But even what the *kohanim* eat, **מִצּוֹת תֹּאכֵל** – *it has to be matzah* (Vayikra 6:9).

There's a certain reason for that by the way; *chometz*, we know from the *seforim*, symbolizes the *yetzer hara*, outside influences. And a *kohen* especially has to be reminded always that in order to succeed at his function – in order to be a successful servant of Hashem – it requires that he stifle the *yetzer hara*; he shouldn't allow it to bubble up, to rise.

A Nation of Priests

Now, the *mincha* is a special food for the *kohanei Hashem*. A non-kohen who would eat from the *mincha*, it's considered a *cheit*, a big sin. And so the question is where do we come in here? All of a sudden, on Pesach, every Jew is commanded to eat the food of *kohanim*?

And the answer is because the Pesach matzah is reminding us about what Hakadosh Baruch Hu told us when we came out of Mitzrayim: **וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמֻלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים** – *You will be to Me a Kingdom of Kohanim*, **וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ** – *and a holy nation* (Shemos 19:6). That's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu said at the beginning of our history, that not only are we a nation that has representatives, *kohanim*, who

serve Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash but we are a nation of *kohanim*, a holy nation.

Later, the Navi Yeshayah came along and reminded us about that: וְאַתֶּם כֹּהֲנֵי ה' תִּקְרְאוּ – You will be called the *kohanim* of Hashem, מַשְׁרָתֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ – servants of our G-d (Yeshaya 61:6). Not *le'osid lavo*, at some time in the distant future. No! Right away, as soon as we became a nation, every Yisroel was given the status of a *kohen*. Every Jew, every man and woman, every boy and girl, is a *kohen*.

Of course, there's a difference – a *kohen* of זֶרַע אַהֲרֹן has different *dinim* that he has to keep – but nevertheless, every Yisroel must know that he is a *kohen* too, that his function in Olam Hazeh is to be a servant of Hashem. That's what it means Mamleches Kohanim; every Yisroel knows that *avodas Hashem* is his only function in life and that he must, as much as possible, dedicate his life to the service of Hashem.

Primarily a Priest

Now people will say, “Certainly I'm an *oved Hashem*. But that's only part of my life. I have to do other things too. I have a job. I have a family.”

The answer is “No! Whatever you are doing in life, you are still a *kohen Hashem*.” After all, a *kohen* can also have a job. He might be a grocery man or a pushcart peddler, whatever he does, but he's still a *kohen*. That's his pride, that's who he is.

And so whatever you do, that's a sideshow. Absolutely you'll have to go to your office, to your store, whatever it is, to make a living. Certainly you have to take care of your children; you must feed them, bathe them. *Everything* you have to do. But that doesn't in any way affect your status: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים – You are an elevated nation, *kohanei Hashem*. Your *parnassa* is not your function in life; your purpose is to be a *kohen* who serves Hashem.

Eat and Elevate

Now, because a person might think that it's just a *marshal*, poetic words, therefore as soon as we came out of Mitzrayim, Hashem said that we must

eat *matzos*. “I want you to know,” says Hashem, “that when I declare that you are all *kohanim* I mean business. And because I want you to mean it too therefore, once a year, on the Chag Hamatzos, I command you to eat *matzos* to remind you that you are *kohanei Hashem*.”

And so that too is what the *matzos* are testifying about. You want to know why you're eating this food of *kohanim* for eight days? Because you *are* a *kohen*! And we wash down the lesson best with *matzah*. “I'm chewing and I'm demonstrating, ‘I am מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים. I am a *kohen* to Hashem.”

Living Up to the Matzah

Of course, you have to mean it too. Eating *matzos* is a privilege, a sign of nobility, of being chosen by Hashem *but you have to do something about it*. Just because you say that you're a doctor, you'll be a doctor? Even a barber has to understand what it means to be a barber. *Matzah* means you must put all your efforts into the career of being a *kohen* and so while you're eating you're thinking, “What does it mean to be a *kohen*? It means I have to be more devoted to Hashem's service. I have to find ways and means of being *entirely* devoted to Him. I have to learn His Torah and understand what He wants from me. I have to be an *oved Hashem*; just like a *kohen* is an *oved Hashem* doing the *avodah* of the *korbanos*, I am an *oved Hashem* too.”

And so eating the *matzos* is a ceremony to demonstrate who we are. The *matzah* is telling you that you're important, that you're from the מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ.

You never heard that before? So listen to it now. We, the holy nation, eat the *matzos* with our holy mouths to demonstrate that we are chosen by Hashem to be His especial servants among all the people in this world. אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים – He chose us to serve Him, and so whenever you eat the *matzah*, keep in mind that this unleavened bread is teaching you who you really are. “You have a great function in this world!” the *matzah* says. “You're a

kohen Hashem and you should live up to that greatness all the days of your life.”

The Matzah Testifies:

When we eat matzah - the bread of kohanim, we remember our purpose in life, to be a Kingdom of Priests. Every Jew who eats matzah is a holy servant of Hashem.

Day Eight

His Servants

The Grand Finale

And now for the grand finale we come to one of the most fundamental testimonies of the matzah; so fundamental that we'll see that it's a *eidus* we'll have to think about not only on the eighth day of *yom tov* but on *Isru Chag* too and then on the next day and the day after that too. And we'll keep listening to that *eidus* again and again all the way till next year, next Pesach, when we'll start all over again.

You remember at the Seder how the child asks his father the four questions, and the wise father gives his answer. He doesn't even have to be so wise because the Baal Haggadah tells him what to say: עֲבָדִים הָייְנוּ לַפְּרֹעָה בְּמִצְרַיִם – We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, וְיוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם – and Hakadosh Baruch Hu took us out. That's the answer. There's more there but this is the answer; this is the crux of what the father answers his son.

The Father's Answer

Now, if you recall, the first of the four *kashes* was the question we're discussing now: מָה נֶשְׁתַּנֵּה הָיָה הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה – “Why are we eating matzah now?” That's what the child, and all of us too, want to know. And so we'll have to say that this answer that the father gives, “Because we were

slaves in Mitzrayim and Hashem took us out,” is the answer to the matzah question as well.

“My son,” the father says, “you're asking why we do certain things, why we eat matzah, why we do other things. But you have to know, it's not only four questions, it's *taryag* questions – why do we do all the laws of the Torah? And in each law there are many different details. So it's many questions; very many questions.

One Size Fits All

“And there is one answer to all of them: עֲבָדִים הָייְנוּ לַפְּרֹעָה בְּמִצְרַיִם – We were slaves to Pharaoh and when they gave us orders we couldn't ask any questions, ‘Why do we have to do this or that?’ If you asked a question – ‘Why do we have to collect straw for the bricks and still complete the same amount as yesterday?’ – so they knocked your teeth out. ‘No questions,’ the Mitzri said, ‘You do what you're told because you're an *eved*.’

“And now the time came and they walked out of Mitzrayim, free from their taskmasters! But not they escaped on their own, walked out on their own; no, Hashem took them out! Instead of serving a *basar v'dam*, a flesh and blood king, we were taken out now to serve the Melech Malchei Hamelachim, the King Above All Kings. בְּצֵאת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם – When the Bnei Yisroel came out of Mitzrayim, הִיָּתָה יְהוָה לִקְדֹשׁ – Yehuda became devoted to his Holy One, יִשְׂרָאֵל מְמֹשְׁלוֹתָיו – we became His subjects (Tehillim 114:1). It means we came out of Mitzrayim so that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should rule over us and we should fulfill whatever He tells us.”

The Fundamental Testimony

And so matzah, like all other *mitzvos*, is because of *avodim hayinu*. We don't need reasons. Of course, there is no harm in knowing reasons – especially a *mitzvah* like matzah which is testifying to so many things – but the fulfillment of the *mitzvos*, obeying the *mitzvos*, is not contingent upon knowing any reasons. Because there already is a reason; it's the first and best reason, the reason for everything we

do: עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ – We were slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim, וְיוֹצִיאָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם – and Hashem took us out. And so we're His slaves now and now we'll do whatever He tells us.

That's the most basic and fundamental reason for obeying the Torah and that's why, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu began giving the Torah, He introduced Himself like this: אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם – I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of Mitzrayim (Shemos 20:2). Because that's the introduction to everything.

A Different Type of Freedom

We didn't come out of Mitzrayim for liberty, for American liberty. Liberty, that's for Americans; that's for the Negroes and their Emancipation Proclamation. But us? We exchanged one form of *shibud* for another form of *shibud*. Instead of being *avodim* to Pharaoh, now we became *avodim* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And therefore when you put on *tefillin* tomorrow morning and you put on *tzitzis* tomorrow morning and when you say *krias shma* and *tefillah* and when you give charity, when you salt meat, when you learn Torah, when you make *kiddush* on Shabbos, when you sit in the *sukkah*, when you take your clothes to the *shaatnez* laboratory for inspection, when you raise *frum* children in a *frum* home, whatever you do, you have to realize that all these things are expressing only one thing. Torah and *mitzvos* is merely a demonstration that you are subject to Him.

Don't Even Say It!

That's what our Sages tell us. The Mishna (Berachos 33b) says that if someone composes a special prayer, a *piyut* praising Hashem for commanding us in the *mitzvos* as a way of teaching us good character so *מִשְׁתַּקֵּן אוֹתוֹ*. We tell him, "Keep quiet. Don't say such things!"

Why? So the Gemara says we tell him to stop *שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה מִדּוֹתַי שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רַחֲמִים* – because he's making the laws of Hakadosh Baruch Hu as if they

are laws of mercy, וְאֵינָן אֱלֹא גְזֵרוֹת – but really it's not so; they're only decrees. And Rashi says, they are decrees of a *Melech*, of a King, in order for us to show that we are His *avodim*.

Of course every *mitzvah* has solid benefits for the doer. Hakadosh Baruch Hu has planned all the laws of the Torah so that by doing them, we learn something. We gain in character, we gain in our minds, we gain in our *neshamos*, absolutely. But our purpose in doing *mitzvos* is not for that. We only have one purpose and that's to serve Him. The whole Torah is nothing but *avodas Hashem*; nothing but a form of demonstrating that we are subject to Him and loyal to Him.

Isn't that a novel idea? The laws of the Torah are not for good character and mercy and lessons; they're not for this or that. Of course they're for that too but fundamentally every *mitzvah* is for the purpose that we should be able to demonstrate that we are *avodim*, that we serve Hashem.

The First and Final Eidus

And therefore on Chag Hamatzos, we should remember this function of the matzah. "I'm eating this matzah because *avodim hayinu*; because Hakadosh Baruch Hu chose us to be His servants. And it's because of that great privilege, that's why I'm eating matzah today – to express my servitude to Him.

"And that lesson of the matzah, that testimony, I'll take with me all year long whenever I have the privilege to do any *mitzvah* – 'I'm doing this now to express my *avdus* to You Hashem and to demonstrate my undying loyalty to You."

The Matzah Testifies:

The *mitzvos* are our obligation toward Hashem which we fulfill without any questions – just like we had to fulfill our obligations to Pharaoh in slavery. We did not gain liberty when we were redeemed. Hashem redeemed us so that we may serve Him.