

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny Freedman

(Portion of Tzav)

IF you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;

IF you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;

IF you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

IF you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

IF you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
'Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
if neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;

IF *you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!*

If *by Rudyard Kipling*

This Shabbat, as we read the weekly portion of **Tzav**, we are also in the final preparations for the festival of Pesach (Passover). Is there a connection between these two themes, which meet this week?

One of the central mitzvot of Pesach is the injunction not to eat any Chametz, or unleavened bread. Instead, we are commanded to eat Matzah for the entire week of Pesach. And whenever we think of Matzah (the unleavened bread) we always think of Pesach. Less known, however, is the special mitzvah of Matzah, which we read of in this week's portion, which seems to be completely unrelated to the festival of Pesach.

Regarding the *Minchah* (meal) offering in the temple, the Torah tells us (Leviticus 6:9):

“It’s (the meal offering’s) remainder shall be eaten...as Matzot, in the holy area. It shall not be baked with leaven (Chametz)...”

What does the prohibition of eating Chametz have to do with the sacrifices in the Temple?

Indeed, referring to last week’s portion (2:11), it is clear there is a general prohibition of offering Chametz (unleavened bread) up on the altar, though it is mentioned with the Mincha offering, because that is the meal offering where the possibility of flour and water becoming Chametz exists (unlike other animal sacrifices where no bread is offered...). So what do Chametz and Matzah have to do with our current discussions of the sacrifices in the temple?

Additionally, the concepts of Chametz and Matzah (leavened and unleavened bread) are introduced as a central part of the story of the exodus from Egypt, and thus are an important concept related specifically to the festival of Pesach. Is there a connection between the festival of Pesach, the Matzah (and Chametz), and the sacrifices we offer in the Temple?

What, in fact, is the Matzah, and the Chametz, and how are they connected to our portion of sacrifices in the Temple?

Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, in his *Tzidkat HaTzaddik*, alludes to an interesting question. Most people, if asked why we eat Matzah on Pesach, would most probably recall that when we finally left Egypt, bound for the freedom of the desert, we had no time to bake bread for the journey. So we had to take the dough with us, even though it had not yet risen. Hence, to commemorate this event, we eat Matzah on Passover today. Now, to be fair, this would be the correct answer, as attested to in the Torah.

The Jews, say the verses, “*took their dough before it could rise*”, (Exodus 12: 34). And the reason for this was “*because they were chased out of Egypt and they could not tarry, and had prepared no fare for the way...*” (Exodus 12: 39).

So in fact the Jews baked Matzah because they were in such a rush they could not afford the time to allow the dough to rise.

But it’s not so simple.. Because the Torah also tells me, at the beginning of the same chapter (Exodus 12: 15) nearly *a week before* the Jews ultimately leave Egypt (and before even receiving the mitzvah to take the paschal lamb), that the Jewish people will have a festival on which they will eat Matzah for seven days...

So we were given the mitzvah of Matzah a week before we ever left Egypt! Why then, did we not have enough time to bake bread?

While it may be true that our departure ended up being in a hurry, without the time to bake the bread, Hashem (G-d) who knew all this in advance could certainly have arranged for some advanced challah baking! Obviously Hashem engineered such a departure because there was a message we needed to learn which is represented in the mitzvah of Matzah.

There are certain moments, suggests the *Tzidkat HaTzaddik*, when we are presented with a window, an opening to come closer to a relationship with G-d. Such windows appear all too infrequently, and remain open only briefly. In life you have to grab those moments when they appear, otherwise, you miss them.

Such was the case of the Jewish people, who had a small window of opportunity in which to leave Egypt. And make no mistake about it, we all have our own Egypt, which enslaves us in whatever shape or form, and Pesach is the festival that creates the opportunity for each of us to let go, and leave our own Egypt behind.

Hashem engineered our departure from Egypt in such a hurry to teach us that when we are given the chance to leave Egypt, we have to grab those opportunities, because if we don't, they quickly disappear.

Chametz then, represents the missed opportunity, and Matzah represents the moment at which such an opportunity presents itself, full of promise and potential.

And of course, that is all part of the message of the sacrifices and the Temple.

When I offer a sacrifice to G-d in the Temple, what I am essentially tapping into, is a moment of raw potential. Whatever the mistakes of the past, and however far away I have allowed myself to grow, at this moment, on Har HaBayit, the Temple Mount, I have arrived at a window of opportunity; I have the chance to come back home, (hence the name *Har HaBayit*, which really means: '*the hill that is home...*') to do Teshuvah, the Jewish word for repentance. Indeed, Teshuvah actually comes from the root *Shuv*, to return, or come back home...Our challenge in such a moment is to grab on to it, and ensure it does not slip away.

In fact, the real difference between Chametz and Matzah is itself only a moment. Jewish tradition teaches that matzah must be baked in under 18 minutes from the time the water was first mixed with flour. A 19 minute matzah is... chametz. It's all about the power of a given moment.

How often do we miss the moment? How often do we take the time to appreciate the enormous potential every moment contains, and even creates?

And of course, this too, is the message of the sacrifices in the Temple. So often we think there is just no time, or the time has passed, or even that we can never re-claim the time we have lost. We often feel trapped in time, resigning ourselves to the patterns we have fallen in to.

The Torah this week comes to tell us, however, that the only moment we really need to live in is the moment we are in right now.

Never mind the moment you just missed. Grab the moment you have now, because in this moment, you are beginning the rest of your life, and every mistake you ever made, every pit you ever fell in to, can all be overcome.

Each of us, every day, has our own moments of enormous potential, the question is, do we rise to meet them? Do we transform those gifts into Jewish destiny? Do we change the script we have fallen into, and become partners in an entirely new world, the world we are born into every moment.

Do we fill the unforgiven minute, with sixty seconds of long distance run ?

May Hashem bless us, this Pesach, to re-connect with our potential, as individuals, and as a people, so that one day soon, we can all dance together in the beautiful hills and valleys of Jerusalem, on our way up to celebrate the festival of Pesach the way it was really meant to be.

Shabbat Shalom from Jerusalem,
Binny Freedman