Jewish Tribune – Pesach

**The Gift of Pesach**

The man has been incarcerated for decades. Slave labour, solitary confinement and malnutrition were his lot. One night, at 3am, he heard knocking underneath the floor of his cell. The quiet but constant knocking woke him up and is got slightly louder until all of a sudden, the tip of a pickaxe broke through the floor. A little hole formed which got bigger and bigger with the repeated blows of the metal instrument

All of a sudden, to the disbelief of the prisoner in the cell, a head emerges through the hole on the floor.

“Quickly” he whispers, “We’ve come to rescue you”.

Moments later, the prisoner is crawling on his hands and knees through a two hundred metre tunnel that takes him underneath the prison complex, out and beyond the perimeter wall.

He emerges from the tunnel and sees the prison behind the barbed wire fencing.

“Quickly” says the rescuer. “You need to run through the forest. Don’t stop. When you get to the end, a car will be waiting for you.”

The prisoner runs and fifteen minutes later reaches the car and is whisked off to safety.

Years later, when recalling this incident, the man describes the feeling of euphoria of running through the forest. The sweet taste of freedom.

You would not expect to hear him complain that the forest was quite muddy, and his shoes got dirty or that there was a bit of a chill and he wished he had brought a scarf.

Of course not. This makes a Rashi describing yetzias mitzrayim all the more perplexing.

The Torah repeatedly tells us that Pesach took place in the “chodesh ha’aviv”, in the spring.

שמור את חדש האביב ועשית פסח לה' אלהיך כי בחדש האביב הוציאך ה' אלקיך ממצרים לילה

Keep the month of spring, and make the Pesach offering to Hashem, your G-d, for in the month of spring, Hashem your G-d, brought you out of Egypt at night. (Devorim 16,1)

היום אתם יצאים בחדש האביב

Today you are going out, in the month of spring. (Shemos 13,4)

Rashi asks the obvious question. Why does the Torah need to tell us that the Pesach story took place in the spring? We know every detail of Yetzias mitzrayim!

Ask an American questions about the Mayflower’s historic journey to the New World in 1620. What were few English families on board wearing? What did they eat?

We know what time our ancestors left mitzrayim, what they ate, what they took with them and so many details of the journey. We certainly know the date and the fact that it was in spring!

Rashi explains that the Torah emphasises this to teach us how much HKBH loves us. He took us out in a month which is not too hot, not too cold, not too rainy.

Really?

We have just been freed from decades of slave labour. Our task masters have been brought to their knees and we taste the sweet smell of freedom. Do we really care about the weather?

Let me give you another moshol.

It’s coming up to their first wedding anniversary. The husband has found a nice piece of jewellery to give to his wife. He takes the bracelet and puts it in a cheap Tesco bag and hides it in the boot of his car so that his wife doesn’t discover it before their dinner date.

On the big day, sitting down in the quiet restaurant, he takes out the gift to give to his wife. Rustle, rustle. As he pulls the Tesco bag out of his jacket pocket.

She thinks to herself “What has he got me? An apple, a carrot?”

To her surprise, there is actually a very tasteful bracelet inside. But the young man has blown it. Had he put the bracelet in a nice box, gift wrapped it with a pretty ribbon and bow, and most importantly, a meaningful note, the gift would have been so much better received.

In defence, the husband thinks to himself. Look, the bracelet cost me one hundred pounds. Does it really matter if I spend a few more pounds on some wrapping paper, ribbon and a card?

The answer is of course “Yes!” It will be so much better received! (As I tell the chasanim I teach – more important than the flowers they buy every erev Shabbos, is the note that goes with it!)

Chodesh ha’aviv is the gift wrap. Of course, the overriding gift is freedom. HKBH redeemed us from our oppressors and gave us freedom. The fact that He did so in a month which was not too hot, too cold or rainy was Hashem’s way of telling us that He loves us. As Rav Chaim Shmulevits calls it, a neshika, a kiss from Hashem.

I recently overheard a very sad conversation which disturbed me a lot. Someone was telling a friend that he had really wanted to be in Eretz Yisroel for Pesach but wasn’t able to go for one reason or another. Why was he so keen to be in the holy land? The answer he gave – because this year yom tov is on Thursday and Friday and he can’t take a three-day yom tov. At least if he’s in Eretz Yisroel, where he will keep one day, it will break things up a bit.

How sad. It reminded me of a comment I once heard about two days of yom tov in chutz l’aretz. For some some people, two days is not enough, and for some people, one day is too much.

Many years ago, my wife was in a store on the day after Pesach. She overheard a conversation where a woman exclaimed “This is my favourite day of the year. The day in the calendar furthest away from next Pesach!”

Of course, the build up to Pesach can be stressful. There is a lot going on; the cleaning, cooking and preparation and the expense. But Pesach is a gift. It is a priceless gift from HKBH. Aside from the wondrous and many opportunities to perform numerous and special mitzvos, the family time, the sedorim, shul, chol hamoed, above all, it is a priceless gift from Hashem and His special gift-wrapped present to each of us.

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