Jewish Tribune – Pesach

**True Freedom**

Many years ago, my wife and I were invited to a very fancy wedding. The kallah’s father had struck it rich and no expense was spared. Although the father of the kallah was not English, the wedding itself was. Very English. There was even a formal Master of Ceremonies in full regalia, wearing a long red tuxedo, presiding over the whole affair.

Towards the end of the evening, the Master of Ceremonies announced the cake-cutting and with much pomp and ceremony, welcomed the head chef into the hall. The head chef proudly emerged from the kitchen pushing a trolley bearing the largest cake I had ever seen. The Master of Ceremonies flamboyantly announced the number of eggs, kilograms of flour and of sugar that had created this masterpiece. I thought the best man may suddenly appear from inside the cake when the chef started cutting the cake.

I sometimes think of this wedding and this cake at seder night. Seder night is full of mitzvos and kedusha and there are many symbols on display. The charoses reminds us of the cement used in Mitzrayim during the slave labour. All the items on the seder represent different things. And then there is the matzah.

We start the seder declaring:

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהָתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרָיִם

This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt.

I understand that matzah symbolises slavery. The Ibn Ezra writes that that is what slaves were fed in his day too, in medieval times. It is cheap and quick to make, it’s compact and stores easily and is hard to digest so your slaves will feel well fed for longer.

Later in the seder, after we have told the whole story, and we have emerged מִשִּׁעְבּוּד לִגְאֻלָּה from slavery to freedom, we need a new symbol to represent this new freedom. What symbol do Chazal use? You guessed it – a piece of matzah.

That’s when I think of the extravagant wedding and multi layered wedding cake.

Why didn’t Chazal come up with something more elaborate. Ok, it of course has to be kosher l’pesach, but wouldn’t a mutli layered chocolate mousse matzah toteh, decorated with coconut macaroons and fresh strawberries be more appropriate than a single piece of matzah?

The answer lies in the goal of seder night and of life in general.

Unusually, we begin the evening of seder with a schedule. A programme that even the aforementioned Master of Ceremonies would be proud of. We begin the seder by declaring or singing קַדֵּשׁ, וּרְחַץ, כַּרְפַּס, יַחַץ etc.

Why do we do this?

In total, there are 15 stages in this journey. And that’s what seder should be - a journey. But what is our destination?

The number fifteen always represents steps to holiness, a journey to kedusha. Think of the fifteen steps leading up the עזרה, the courtyard in the Beis Hamikdash. Or the fifteen “shir ha’maalos”, composed by Dovid Hamelech. Or the fifteen stages of miraculous redemption recited in Dayeinu. Or the fifteen praises of Hashem in Yishtabach. Or the fifteen generations from Avrohom Ovinu until Shlomo Hamelech who built the Beis Hamikdash.

When we say the beautiful possuk at the end of Eichah (5,21) and other times in our tefillos, הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ ה' אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם, and we beseech Hashem to return us to Him and to the “good old days”, which days are we referring to? To which point in history do we want to return?

The highpoint in history is the early days of the reign of Shlomo Hamelech. When the Beis Hamikdash had been built and the nations of the world came to the holy land to marvel at this edifice and at Klal Yisroel. It was when the Shechina resided in Beis Hamikdash and the presence of the Shechina was palpable. It is the closest we have come to Messianic times and it is that period we are referring to.

And it is that closeness and connection to HKBH that we are aiming for on seder night. To subjugate ourselves fully to HKBH. That is the goal of the evening.

We start seder night as avodim to Pharaoh and end it as avodim to Hashem. And that really is true freedom. As Chazal say, אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה, there is no one as free as he who busies himself with Torah (Pirkei Avos 6,2).

And the best symbol to represent this is indeed matzah. The only thing that has changed from the beginning of the seder to the end, is who we are avodim to. We start the evening as slaves to Pharaoh (or whatever else we are negatively addicted to) and end it as avodim to HKBH.

May we all merit to make this journey and have an uplifting and inspirational seder and Yom Tov. And may we hear besuros tovos very soon.

Wishing all readers a חג כשר ושמח.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**