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SHABBOS HAGADOL/07

RABBAN GAMLIEL'S DILEMMA

I

The story of Pesach is a narrative of miracles. From the open wonders of the splitting of the Yam Suf to the progression of seemingly innocuous events that caused a Vnhaphuch Hu (Pharaoh decreeing all Jewish baby boys to be killed, all the while raising the future savior of the Jews in his own palace), making it quite a feat to work out which wonders we celebrate in deed and thanksgiving during the Seder and which ones we leave out of obligation. Yet, the Mishnah teaches, that our main focus is on three events:

פסחים קטז:

חובתו פסח מצה מרור... " ידי אומר כל מי שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו לא יצאהיה" רבן גמליאל
"Raban Gamliel was wont to anyone who does not utter the following three things has not fulfilled their obligation: Pesach, Matzah and Marmor".

In previous years we have focused on Matzah and it being, seemingly, but a minor footnote in the story of the exodus. This year let us concentrate on the miracle of "Pesach".

1) We all know the event, the imagery has been with us since childhood; The Egyptian firstborn were dying, screams rang out throughout the country, and G-d, while reeking destruction on Egypt's homes, passed over ours. This is indeed cause for celebration but is it cause for singling it out from all other Makkos? Were not the other Makkos too

Restricted mainly to the Egyptians, in many cases killing them as well, while the Jews in Goshen (mostly) were left unscathed? Why is this Makka different from all other Makkos? מה נשתנה? ¹

2) Even if we could explain the uniqueness of this Makka we would still be left with another problem. Matzah, for all its difficulty, at least relates to the exodus in that we were rushed to *leave*. Marror too represents what is at the center of the Hagadah, namely, our *slavery* from which we were redeemed. Pesach and Makkos Bechoros, although a punishment to our brutal masters, had little to do with *us* as opposed to G-d's retribution on criminals, which, as well, begs the question why should we *not* have been saved.

3) The events leading up to this Makka have bothered scholars for years. G-d commanded us to leave the blood from the Paschal Sacrifice on our doors "...so I (G-d) can see the blood and (therefore) skip over you..." (Shmos 12:13), "...and He saw the blood on the door frame and skipped over the door ways..." (Shmos 12:23), did G-d need a sign to know we were there?

4) We all call these days Pesach. Even the English equivalent – Passover – has its root from this miracle, yet the Torah never refers to it such, only as Chag Hamatzos (see Moadim B'Halachah by Rabbi Zevin who writes extensively on this point). Stranger still, the one time the Torah does refer to "Pesach" as a day it is in Bamidbar 33:3 "...on the 15th of the first month the day after Pesach..." presumably referring to Eruv Pesach as Pesach, which would not be an issue save for the fact the name Pesach and the sacrifice that shares this title commemorates an event that happened on the 15th!²

5) Also interesting is that there is no consensus in Midrashic literature on what Pesach means; some say it means to pass-over while others interpret it to mean to have mercy (see Rashi 12:13). What, if any, is the significance of this disagreement?

And most crucial:

The Seforno (12:42) says:

¹ Zevach Pesach answers in a Kabalistic light: The constellation for the first born was affected on this night and it affect should have harmed all – even Jews.

² Although the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach is to take place on the 14th, its name too is from the event of G-d's passing over. The idea that half of this Mitzvah (the Shechitah, actually the Shechitah is a Mitzvah to itself) takes place on the day preceding the miracle will be dealt with at the end of this essay.

"...אבל לא מצא את ישראל מכונם וראוים לגאולה עד אותה הלילה
 "...this Jews were not worthy of the exodus until this evening..."

The Jewish people at that time were on the second lowest rung of impurity - what was so powerful about what we did that night, the Korban Pesach (Paschal sacrifice) and its blood on our doorways, which actually *caused* our redemption?

II

There is a Halachic debate as to the extent of the obligation that Raban Gamliel prescribed regarding these three events and their recital. It is the contention of the RA"N (10th century) (ad loc) that although they are strongly recommended, one's obligation on this night can be satisfied without them for they are not compulsory. From Tosfos (ad loc and Sukka 3a, see Beckurei Yaakov 625:3) however it would seem they disagree; in fact it appears they go as far as to say that on a *Biblical* level one has failed in their duty if one omits this passage. Some have suggested a third approach³ that these three are only to set a minimum for our obligation, but, presumably, one can fulfill his duty in other, more passionate ways.

However, what is not discussed by those in this debate is *which* obligation or Mitzvah Raban Gamliel was referring to that one must satisfy when he obligated discussion of these three events.

The Rambam(CHU" M 7:5) after he codifies Raban Gamliel's view ends with this – "ודברים אלו כולן הן הנקראין הגדה" – "...these articulations are called the Hagadah...". It would seem that the Mitzvah this Mishnah was concerned with, at least according to the Rambam, is מצות סיפור יצאת מצרים – the Biblical commandment of the recital of the story of the exodus on Passover night. This seems to also be the view of Meiri as well.

It would appear that the Maharshah (ad loc) saw it differently:

"...ולא מצינו בשאר מצוות דבעינן על שם מה... כמו על שלש אלא..."

He wonders why these three Mitzvos are different than all others in that we must discuss their reasons before we do them. Ostensibly, the Maharshah sees these three utterances independent of each other and the "Mitzvah" the Mishnah was addressing was Matzah, Marror and Pesach, in that one can not fulfill, Matzah, without recounting our rush to freedom and להם עוני, Marror, without discussing our bitter slavery etc.

³ See Malbim Shmos 12:8

These differences of view are not without distinction. If the understanding of Rambam is right, as the ל' ציון points out, than on Pesach Sheni when there is no Mitzvah of יצאת מצרי, one need not utter this passage of Raban Gamliel. If the Maharshah is correct, since these Mitzvos – Pesach, Matzah and Marror – are in play on Pesach Sheni, the obligation *would* return.

Others⁴ suggest a difference based on the requirement to tell the story to your children on this night – according to Rambam one must not only say these three to one self but to their children as well.

I, for a time, felt I had discovered another distinction between these two views: most editions of the Rambam, and indeed most Haggadahs, have the reading מה וכו' שום , however, in the newer printings of the Yad, specifically that of R' S. Frankel, the language is slightly different; מה...מצה על שפסח על . This is not without significance.

In מה וכו' שום it is brought down in the name of R' Chaim Solevatchik that the correct reading must be מה...מצה על שפסח על because searching for המצוות is at best frowned upon and at worst forbidden. Rather, he continues, we are only asking the reasons behind their *names* and what events they symbolize.

At first blush, I thought to say that according to the Rambam who understands Raban Gamliel as referring to the Mitzvah of יצאת מצרים the גירסא of מה וכו' שום would seem correct, for that would speak to the historic symbolism these Mitzvos had in the story of the exodus, the mentioning of these three is only a way to further the dialogue of this story. The גירסא of מה...מצה על שפסח על on the other hand, which is a question more germane to each Mitzvah *independent* of the others - why are they called by these names - would seem to appeal to the view of Maharshah.

It was only later that I found something that is most intriguing autonomous of the last paragraph, although it may also disprove my theory:

In later generations, both the Tzlach⁵ in his explanation of the “Maharshah approach” (he does not name any specific source for his reading but it is clear the Tzlach shared his

⁴See הגדה מועדים וזמנים .

⁵ Pesachim ad loc.

view) and the Aruch L’Ner⁶ in his interpretation of the “Rambam approach” (again, source not cited) come to the same conclusion: we are not looking for טעמי המצוות - either for elements within יצאת מצרים סיפור (Aruch L’Ner) or these actual three Mitzvos (Tzlach) - rather, being that we were in a very low spiritual stage before we left Egypt, we are asking and hopefully discovering in what possible זכות were we rescued and what spiritual ingredient could we have had to be rescued by the A-Imighty. Indeed, this would be the reading of "בעבור זה..." (Shmos 13:8), *because of this...* did we merit, specifically, they both cite (Tzlach/Aruch L’Ner) the blood on the doors and the קורבן פסח. (Why they focused only on Pesach and not Matzah and Marror - for both are included in Raban Gamliel’s statement – needs further analyses which will be provided and the end of this essay).

Clearly, R’ Chaim was correct in his reading – according to all views מה...מצה פשפסה על מה וכו' פשעל is the better reading for the reasons he cited – indeed both views, as explained by the Tzlach and Aruch L’Ner, are coming to circumvent R’Chaim’s dilemma of טעמי המצוות.

This idea, namely, not to sincerely delve into the inner meaning behind these most staple commandments of the night, seems revolutionary. After further investigation we find however that it is not so radical after all or that it at least has strong pedigree. Rebbe Akivah, in fact, seems to take it one step further. The Talmud (Eruvin 96) brings a debate regarding the Mitzvah of Tefilin. At the center of that discussion is the interpretation of a Pasuk in the end of Sedrah Bo 13:10, "ושמרת את החוקה הזאת...". Rebbe Akiva, in a departure from what seemed the normative opinion, felt that this verse is referring not to the Mitzvah of Tefilin but rather "לענין פסח...". It would seem and it has been suggested⁷ that Rebbe Akiva sees the Mitzvos Hoyom of Pesach as law rather than tools about and for the exodus narrative. Indeed this is not the only time the word חק is used in this story see Shmos 12:14 and 12:43 (see also Meshech Chochmah ad loc for a striking interpretation).

III

There is a rule in the Talmud⁸ that whenever a Tanna’s statement is preceded with אומר... ליהרהר – *he was wont to say*, then what is about to be said was a battle cry, a life’s mission of the person uttering it and it was something that was said by this individual not just once but throughout his life.

אומר כל מי שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו... ליהרהר בן גמליאל

⁶ Sukkah 28a

⁷ See Hagadah HuAruch vol. 3 pg 245.

⁸ See Rav Bartanura, Avos 1:2

What was it about his statement here, more than any other Halachic dictum of his, that Raban Gamliel felt so fervent about and fanatical for as to repeat it every year?

First we must be formally introduced to Raban Gamliel the man.

Raban Gamliel and Rebbe Akivah were contemporaries and intimate friends. We all know that throughout the Talmud we find instances where Rebbe Akiva laughed and we have in the past, in other venues, discussed them. But in many of those same instances it was Raban Gamliel was the one *who cried*, see end Makkos, Sanhedrin 101 et al. The most telling of these occasions, where the dichotomy of these two great personalities, their different Haskofos Hachaim, is most pronounced is a Gemarah in Sanhadrin 81a:

א עמוד פא דף סנהדרין מסכת בבלי תלמוד

לא. - הוא דחיי, בחדא מינייהו -כשהיה רבן גמליאל מגיע למקרא הזה היה בוכה, ואמר מאן דעביד לכולהו ה הכי נמי, בכולהו אין, בחדא מינייהו לא? ויקרא י"ח אל תטמאו בכל אל אמר ליה רבי עקיבא: אלא מעתה אלא: באחת מכל אלה, הכי נמי: באחת מכל אלה.

Rebbe Akiva finds Raban Gamliel in tears. Raban Gamliel explains that he had come to the conclusion, supported by a Pasuk, that in order to enjoy life in the next world and to be deemed a Tzadik in this world, one has to keep every single mitzvah correctly (see Rashash who suggests which Pasuk he had learnt this from). Rebbe Akivah consoles his friend by explaining (and, seemingly, proving, see there) that one need only keep but one mitzvah properly to achieve the status of a Tzaddik.

Raban Gamliel was a realist, Rebbe Akivah on the other hand was the undying optimist who even saw in his last tortured moments reason to find joy (see Eleh Ezkarah and Sanhedrin;+), who saw hope even in the fox treading on the holiest of grounds (end of Makkos) or when his Rebbe was about to die (Sanhadrin 101). Raban Gamliel, in all these cases had good reason to cry, this need not be said, it was Rebbe Akivah though who gave us reason to hope and dream in our darkest hour.

Raban Gamliel was deeply perturbed by one element to our exodus; how could it be that בני, who at that time were on the 2nd lowest rung of impurity, *deserved* to be taken out? It should have been hopeless! This is a central question to Pesach and one that only a Raban Gamliel could ask. What was so special about any of these three miracles/events or all of them together that should count as if the entire Torah, all of its commandments, were kept? על שום מה?

To Rebbe Akiva the answer is clear; the בני needed only to keep one Mitzvah to save them, any Mitzvah, as he had taught in that stitch of Talmud above. What that מצוה was is

meaningless to the point, a חק, because it could have been any. The key to this approach lay behind the name of the holiday - מה...שם⁹ - as follows:

The name פסח, according to Rebbe Akivah, does *not* mean to pass-over rather compassion –

שאתם עושים אני נגלה וחס עליכם, ואין פסיחה אלא אלא בשכר מצוה אחת רבי ישמעאל אומר...היה " (ילקוט רחסות...)

"Rebbe Yishmael was wont to say...it was only in merit of (our performance) in any one Mitzvah that you did that I (G-d) revealed myself and had compassion on you, and "Pesach" means compassion" (Yalkut, 200).

Clearly Rebbe Yishmael, in this Medrash, felt there is some connection between his belief of the ability of one Mitzvah having the muscle to redeem us and the word Pesach meaning mercy.

Like Rebbe Akiva, he believed that our salvation from Egypt was not a tick for tat but rather an act of mercy by G-d by the power of our commitment to even one Mitzvah. This is why the name is so vital to the story in Rebbe Akivah's view (מה שם על) – its meaning changes everything and most people, in his view, have it wrong.

But Raban Gamliel knew that there had to be more to these Mitzvos Hoyom than just Chukim. We had to *earn* the exodus. The Mitzvos Hoyom on the eve of Makkos Bechoros were סיבות – *causes* for our salvation not mere Simanim –signs- for G-d. This fits well with the view of Rashi.

12:13 רש"י

א אמר הקב"ה נתן את עיני לראות אם הכל גלוי לפניו אל-וראיתי את הדם " – " לאות...ובפנים...לכם..."
אתם עסוקים במצוותי ופסחתי עליכם..."

"The sign (of the blood on the door frame) was for us (not G-d)...All is revealed to G-d and His seeing the blood was essentially His seeing our involvement with His commandments, and He therefore skipped over us..." (See also his commentary on 12:11 and 12:23).

This is also why the day *before* Pesach is called Pesach – סופו משום התחלתה – the end by power of the beginning; it was because of what we did and began on the 14th did we *deserve* the freedom of the 15th. Pesach was the *source* – טעם – for the exodus, not just a solitary event that occurred by the 10th Makka

The most important difficulty is still unanswered: what then is Raban Gamliel's response? What was the secret to these 3 מצות and specifically the first and the אב of the

⁹ Interestingly, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch explains joy – שמחה - as coming from the same root as a שם – name, happiness and especially laughter, as Rav Sadia Gaon explains is the sudden seeing of an underlying truth, a name too is the inner essence of that which you are calling – see Mesukim Mdvash – Vaeschanan, 5764, for a brilliant treatment on this. It would seem that a reading of מה על שם מה fits well therefore to the life theses of Rebbe Akiva.

other two, the blood of the Pesach causing the passing over, that was the catalyst, as the Tzlach, Aruch L'Ner and Malbim have explained and the ספרי 12:42 writes explicitly (as Tosfos ad loc explain; the other two Mitzvos – Matzah and Marror – came only as an offshoot of the Pesach)?

IV

Something was different about Makkos Bechoros. It was the only Makka that the Jews knew about before it arrived. Moshe had told them. The anticipation must have been brutal. That evening was terrifying - would *our* children, *our* firstborn, survive? This fear was understandable on its own but also reasonable considering that we just came out of Makkos Choshech were many Jews had died.

We were told all we needed to do was take blood. Blood which commenced the Makkos (Makkos Dam) will now end them.

It is fascinating to me that blood is the only necessary component of life one need not do anything for. We must breathe to get oxygen, eat to get nourishment etc, but blood just flows on its own into the pumping heart.

Perhaps דם shares its root with ממוך – inanimate; we need not move or do anything to make it work.

The hardest moment for the person of faith is when one knows there is nothing more he can do, he can only now sit and wait for G-d to act or not act. This is what we were told to do. After the Dam Milah was spilled and the Dam Hapesach was poured on the doorway, *we* were Dam – still.

How fascinating that Pesach, when spelled with a Samech and Pesach when spelled with a Tuvf mean the opposite things. Over or to pass/ to enter or to go in. *Within and without*. As the Pasuk says in 12:22 – "פתחה ה' על פסח"ו – we took care of our duty in our domain and G-d took care of his on the outside.

What Raban Gamliel is teaching is that even according to his world view – perfection in service to G-d in order to merit salvation – here, in Yetzias Mitzraim, we needed to show G-d that we were *ready* for perfection. That great prerequisite - faith in G-d - was the one necessary ingredient to create an eternal bond with our creator thus proving we were ready for the Torah and the perfection only that could bring. Perforce, this Mitzvah was neither arbitrary nor generic in nature.

A great illustration of this point is the very out of style comment of the Remah in the end of סימן תפ"ו:

ולפתוח הפסח כדי לזכור שהוא ליל שמורים ובזכות אמונה זו יבא משיח... "וי"א שיש לומר שפוך חמתך...
 "...some say to recite (at this point in the Seder) the Shfoch Chamuschah prayer...and we open the doors (to our homes) to demonstrate that tonight we are protected (by G-d, from bad things base on Shmos 12:+=) **in order that in the merit of this faith the Messiah will come...**"

No where else in the entire code of Jewish Law is the hastening of the redemption mentioned by the Remah, yet here, in what is merely a random custom of the Seder, such strong statement is made?! YES! This is how, by having faith and trust in G-d on this night so many years ago, we merited in our low state to be redeemed, ergo, this is the secret for future redemption.

Not yet have all the dots been connected.

It was not just our sitting still that night in perfect faith while Armageddon was taking place outside. It was even deeper, I believe.

V

How did we *get* to Egypt?

The Chuzkuni explains in Parshas Vayeshev that the promise to Abraham of 400 years of slavery for his people hung over his children like a dark cloud. Issac and then Jacob and in turn the Shevatim waited uncomfortably for that dreaded moment to arrive. Finally, when the Shevatim could not take this anticipation any longer, they put it in their own hands and sold Yoseph, convinced that the slavery would only affect him and his progeny¹⁰.

Perhaps we can take this Chuzkuni on step further.

To help facilitate their plan the Shevatim:

(אל פסוק לז פרק בראשית) את הכתנת בדם: לזוישחטו שעיר עזים ויטב ויקחו את כתנת יוסף **slaughtered a goat, took it's blood and poured it on Joseph's tunic** and showed it to Yaakov convincing him that his son had died¹¹.

We know how that story ended; we all ended up in Egypt.

¹⁰ See also Shabbos 10b with Tos. And Maharshah ad loc.

¹¹ See Medrash Rabah, Bamidbar 14:5.

Now, to be freed, we had to prove that we will not take such lofty matters into *our own hands* (the Bnei Efraim failed in this regard by trying to leave Egypt on their own), be דומם and wait for G-d. We also had to atone for that original sin – so we too poured blood – בְּדָמוֹשִׁבְלֵתָם וּלְקַחְתָּם אֶגְדַּת אֲזוּב – 12:22, but no more was it an act of independence for it had now transformed into an act of trust.

It was not that so much that we had to earn the exodus, the Torah was not yet given and our low state was irrelevant to the fact the we were descendents of forefathers who were already *promised* of the day G-d will redeem their progeny, what was critical however, in Raban Gamliel's world view, was a Tikkun to repair an *obstacle* for the realization of this promise. The Tikkun – Repairing - that was needed was for what got us there, to Egypt, to begin with now that we had rectified it we were ready to realize the promised perfection that only Sinai can bring.