

In tomorrow's Torah reading, the last verse of the third Aliyah (page 515 in the Sidur) reads: "Six days you shall eat matzot, and on the seventh day is a day of restraint ... you shall do no work." (Devarim 16:8)

And, here we are on the "seventh day," restraining ourselves from work and celebrating Yom Tov. But, what was that about eating matzah for six days? We are still eating matzah today, just as we have been for the six days. And, back on the second day of Pesach in the Torah reading, we read "For seven days you shall eat matzot." (Third Pasuk of the Levi Aliyah on page 499 in the Sidur). And, again, in the Torah readings of Shabbos Chol Hamo'ed and of Sunday we had similar verses about eating matzah for seven days. (We can pause for a moment while you look for those verses.) There are similar statements in other places in the Torah as well. So what is the meaning of "Six days you shall eat matzot?"

Here we see an application of one of R. Yishmael's thirteen principles of expounding the Torah (in the Sidur on page 25), #8 to be precise. "When a particular case that is included in a general law is singled out to instruct us concerning something new, it is singled out not only to teach concerning its own case, but is to be applied to the whole of the general law." (A mouthful, but read it through carefully and it makes sense.)

This is how it works: The seventh day was included in the general statement about eating matzah on the seven days of Pesach in numerous places in the Torah as we have seen. But, then, in the verse we started with, the seventh day is "singled out" and excluded from that general rule as this verse specifically speaks of six days. The fact that this verse does not require eating matzah on the seventh day teaches us, 1) that there is no obligation to eat matzah on the seventh day, and, if one wants, they may subsist on potatoes and meat. 2) this applies not only to this day but to the whole of the general law, meaning that there is no obligation to eat matzah on any of the seven days mentioned in these verses. Why then do we make a bracha and eat matza the first night(s)? Because there is another verse which says "In the evening you shall eat matzot" (Shmos 12:18) which explicitly requires us to eat matzah on the first night of Pesach.



To sum up, there is an obligation to eat matzah on the first night of Pesach. For the rest of Pesach there is no obligation to eat matzah, but since chametz is prohibited it is practical to use matzah as our “bread.”

Why is it chametz is prohibited for seven days, while matzah is mandated for only one night? One would think that the prohibition of chametz and the mitzvah of matzah would be two sides of the same coin and where one applies the other would apply as well. And why does the Torah specifically single out the seventh day in order to teach us that matzah is a Mitzvah only on the first day?

Interestingly, that very first year when the Jewish people left Egypt the prohibition of Chametz applied only to the first night. This is evident from our declaration in the Hagadah that the dough which they took out of Egypt was baked as matzah because it had no opportunity to rise, which implies that had they had more time they would have baked it chametz.

Why was Pesach a one day holiday that year, and a seven day holiday with a seven day prohibition in all subsequent years since? We know that the seventh day of Pesach is special and is a Yom Tov because that is the day of Krias Yam Suf, when the sea was split, as we just read in today’s Torah reading. This event was the culmination of the exodus from Egypt which began on the first night of Pesach.

The Maharal says that the Mitzvah of eating matzah is only on the first day of Pesach because that was when they experienced the redemption from Egypt and the mitzvah of not eating chametz extends for seven days because the redemption was for a duration of seven days until the splitting of the sea.

I hope your reaction to that is the same as my reaction when I learned that. I very articulately and eloquently said, “HUH?!” Why is the redemption considered a one day event for the mitzvah of eating matzah and a seven day event as far as not eating chametz.

The story is told that when the Alter Rebbe chose the path of Chasidus, his parents in law were less than thrilled. At the time, they provided for the young



couple and they lived together. They tried in various ways to dissuade him, including making life difficult for him. For example, when he davened at great length on Friday night, coming home late for the Friday night meal, they hid all the wine so he would not be able to make Kiddush. Eventually, he decided that the wisest thing would be to place some distance between them. After his father-in-law passed away, his mother in law asked the Alter Rebbe to move back. The Alter Rebbe replied, “When the baby is in the womb, life is very good. All needs are provided for, the baby does not have to make any effort at all. Once the baby is born, there is a whole new reality with all of life’s challenges. But, once out, there is no going back into the womb.”

The redemption from Egypt is compared to a birth. Until then, the Jewish people was totally contained inside another nation, with no independent existence of its own, much like a fetus inside the womb. Departing Egypt was like the baby emerging from the womb to become a person in its own right. That new reality of a Jewish people is irreversible, as the Maharal famously says, that the *cheirus*, the freedom, which we attained upon leaving Egypt can never be undone. For this reason, even during the harshest darkest moments of Golus, under the most crushing oppression, Jews celebrated Pesach. Because present circumstances notwithstanding, Hashem had made us free and no nation has the power to undo that.

Matzah is the symbol of that freedom. That is why the matzah is eaten at the Seder while reclining, to show that it represents freedom. (Maror on the other hand is eaten not reclining because it is a reminder of the bitterness of enslavement before being taken out of Egypt.)

Birth happens once at a specific point in time, and there is no going back into the womb. Therefore the Mitzvah of eating matzah is only once at the time when we became free.

So, why do Pesach and the prohibition of chametz last for seven days?

In 1940, shortly after the Previous Rebbe came to America, he spent Pesach in Lakewood, NJ. (770 was acquired at the end of the summer and the Rebbe moved



in several days before Rosh Hashana.) At the Seudah of the seventh day of Pesach he related that the Tzemach Tzedek (third Lubavitcher Rebbe) when he was 5 ½ years old, asked his grandfather the Alter Rebbe: If Hashem Himself in all His glory was revealed to the Jewish people on the first night of Pesach as we say in the Hagadah, what then was the revelation at the splitting of the sea?

The Alter Rebbe answered by way of a brief parable: “The revelation and redemption from Egypt resemble a father’s turning towards his child and hugging him; the exclamation of ‘This is my G-d!’ at the splitting of the Sea resembles the child’s turning to face his father.” The Rebbe does not explain any further though he notes that ten years later the Alter Rebbe expanded on this answer and that subsequently the Tzemach Tzedek amplified it on many levels.

Whatever that means, it certainly explains why Pesach lasts for seven days. Perhaps it also explains why the prohibition of chametz lasts for seven days as well, while the Mitzvah of Matzah is only the first night. Being born is not of the child’s volition or action. Being born happens to us, and it happens to us once and at a single point in time. Looking for our Parent (“turning to face his Father”), seeing the revelation of G-d because we look for it and we recognize it, requires a process. We have to nourish our sensitivity to G-dliness and holiness, by diminishing our engagement with the opposite. Chametz represents an inflated sense of self. It takes a full week of refraining from Chametz until we are there. We are now able to seek and see for ourselves the great revelation of Hashem Himself. And the revelation itself is that much greater because of that.

Going out of Egypt was not a one-time-in-history event. In every generation, and in every day, we must see ourselves as going out of Egypt. We continue to be the beneficiaries of Hashem’s revealing Himself and taking us, His people. And while we are oblivious to much it, we must strive to “turn our face to Him” to recognize in the events which we see, that “Zeh K-aili” “This is my G-d Who is doing this.” May the security and reassurance which we find in knowing that Hashem is turning the world upside for us, be confirmed with coming of Moshiach NOW and the revelation of Hashem’s glory for all the world to see.

