

## **Pesach and Sukkot: *Two Ways of Looking at the World***

The festivals of Pesach and Sukkot are located almost exactly at opposite ends of the calendar, one in the Spring, the other in the Fall. Both have the identical cause--the exodus from Egypt, **זכר ליציאת מצרים**. Yet they are significantly different from each other. In a most interesting commentary on a major verse concerning Pesach, the Sages (**ספרא אמור פרשה ט ד"ה פרק יא**) say the following:

יובחמשה עשר יום לחודש הזה חג המצות--**יום זה** טעון מצה ואין  
חג הסוכות טעון מצה. והלא דין הוא, ומה אם זה שאין טעון סוכה  
טעון מצה, זה שטעון סוכה אינו דין שטעון מצה? ת"ל זה, חג  
המצות **זה** טעון מצה, ואין חג הסוכות טעון מצה

A special word is inserted by the Torah to indicate that, contrary to what one might expect, the proper observance of Passover does not require that we observe as well all the mitzvot peculiar to Sukkot, such as the dwelling in a *sukkah* and the **ארבע מינים**. Undoubtedly, the same assumption and opposite conclusion can be worked the other way around, namely, that Sukkot does not really require eating matzah and refraining from *chametz*.

The underlying idea behind the assumption is quite reasonable: since both holidays are motivated by the theme of **זכר ליציאת מצרים**, all observances of the festivals should be identical. However, the conclusion, based upon the **דרשה**, restricts matzah to Pesach and the *sukkah* and **ארבע מינים** to Sukkot, because while both memorialize the Exodus from Egypt, each emphasizes a completely different dimension of the fundamental experience of such remembering.

The Zohar (23a), on the verse **אל אברהם אל יצחק ואל יעקב בא-ל ש-די ושמי ה' לא נודעתי** להם, focuses on the word **וארא**, "and I appeared," and teaches that there are two ways of viewing the world. Before the Patriarchs, the world was there but people were spiritually blind: they could not see what they were looking at. The Patriarchs arrived at the high level of **גוּוּיִן דַּתְחִיזִין**, a way of penetrating the visible world--by which is meant that they could contemplate the natural scene and find in it the footprints of the Almighty, they could discover Him from within the created order. That is the significance of the divine Name **ש-די**, which indicates the divine power that created the natural universe. (Thus, the Sages teach that the Name relates to the expression **מי שאמר לעולם די**, "He who said to

---

\* This paper is based upon a talk, part of a "Musal" series, at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, March 27, 1996

the world, 'Enough!'," i.e., the divine restraint on His creativity to allow a "real" world to exist. The great R. Bunam of Pershiskha, however, explained the Name as *די בריאה זו להכיר אלקותו ית' על ידו*, there is "enough" in this creation wherewith to recognize the divinity of its Creator.) Thus, e.g., Abraham was said to come to his belief in God by observing a busy metropolis and concluding that *אין בירה בלא מנהיג*, there can be no functioning city without some leader or brain behind it--the "teleological proof" of God's existence--which is a way of coming to faith through nature.

The next or higher level was attained by Moses, who attained the status of *גוויין דלא אתחזיין*, the way of seeing the invisible--an oxymoron which implies the ability to contemplate nature and see beyond it, to transcend the natural scene and, as it were, become independent of it in arriving at religious insight. This was the way of Moses, who pleaded *הודיענו נא את דרכיך*, "show me Your ways," to which no direct reply was given by God; instead, He revealed to him the Tetragrammaton, symbol of the divine existence for all eternity--before and after as well as during the existence of the world. This Name was revealed to Moses but not to the Patriarchs: *ושמי ה' לא נודעתי להם*.

R. Zadok Hakohen of Lublin (in his *קצט*, *אות הצדיק*, *צדקת הצדיק*) refers to these two ways of perceiving Divinity as *מעשה בראשית*--the perception of Divinity via Nature, the created world; and *מעשה מרכבה*, in which God, as it were, "rides" above the created world, He transcends Nature.

In essence, these two ways of "looking" or attaining faith are equivalent to the two festivals of Pesach and Sukkot, with Sukkot representing the *מעשה בראשית* or *גוויין דלא*, and Pesach the higher, supernatural *מעשה מרכבה* or the *גוויין דלא*. Sukkot is associated with the Patriarchs and the divine Name *ש-די*, while Pesach is connected to the perception of Moses and the ineffable Tetragrammaton.

Sukkot thus motivates us to *return to Nature*. We are bidden to leave our comfortable, well-appointed homes and repair to a *דירת ארעי*, a temporary dwelling, a mere hut, and we take four species of vegetation, the *ארבע מינים*--symbol of the produce of Nature---and recite a blessing over them. We effectively declare our independence from the whole elaborate superstructure of our technological civilization. By abandoning the artifacts of our mechanized culture we symbolize our dependence on the Creator and His creations--as opposed to *our* creations. In so doing, we propose to experience the presence of the Almighty made manifest within the natural order, for the creation testifies to the Creator. It is Him, and Him alone, upon whom we can rely for our survival and growth, and that knowledge is the source of our happiness and felicity, Thus, Sukkot is declared the *שמחתנו* *זמן*.

Passover, however, transcends this fascination with Nature as the realm in which to find and foster faith. If Sukkot represents a movement of *back to Nature*, Passover is a *backing away from Nature*; it urges us to declare our *independence from Nature*. The mitzvot of Passover allude to this theme. Thus, *chametz* is the *natural* outcome of mixing flour and water and exposing it at room temperature to the floating microbes that cause fermentation. Left to its own devices, such a mixture will puff up into bread, into *chametz*. The Talmud was aware of the ubiquitous nature of *chametz*, as a natural substance, and therefore legislated special stringencies concerning its use: חמץ אסור במשהו דחמץ. אכלי מיני כולא שתא ולא בדילי מיניה. Matzah, contrariwise, suppresses this natural process, as it were. Halakhically it requires שמירה; we must pay close attention to the wheat, keeping it scrupulously dry and then hurrying the baking process of the dough to avoid fermentation, thus making sure that the "natural" developments are aborted--for there is something that goes *beyond Nature*, and that is the realm of Divinity.

The teachers of Musar often refer to *chametz* as a moral symbol: it represents the puffing up of the ego, the vacuous self-assertion of the psyche as it "naturally" seeks prominence or dominance--much like the fermenting dough... Such "natural" tendencies to arrogance and self-centeredness must be abandoned (ביעור חמץ) and transcended in the scheme of Passover. Instead of *chametz* we must use matzah, which the Zohar refers to as נהמא דמהימנותא, "the bread of faith," the symbol of reliance upon the Almighty who is beyond Nature--as is evident in the miracles performed in Egypt, culminating in the splitting of the Red Sea.

The special sacrifice on Pesach, the קרבן פסח, is unusual in that the Torah specifically requires that only circumcised males may eat of it: וכל ערל לא יאכל בו. So much so is Pesach a transcending of Nature, that the sacrifice is banned to those who have submitted biologically to Nature by remaining uncircumcised!

One finds both the Sukkot and Passover themes in the works of Maimonides. In his religious phenomenology, where he describes the nature of Love and Fear of God, Rambam ascribes each of these profoundly fundamental categories of religious experience to the contemplation of Nature (הלי יסודי התורה, פרק ב, הי"ב). The wonders of Nature inspire one to cringe in "fear" or awe, the painful awareness of one's finitude and pettiness in the face of such grandeur, and the opposite emotion of "love" or fascination, which motivates man to want to know more and more about the Creator. This a Sukkot-type approach, what R. Zadok refers to as the perception of Divinity through מעשה בראשית. But elsewhere, especially in his ספר המצוות, Maimonides adds the element of love of God attained through the study of Torah--and thus a supernatural, Passover-type of experience.

This Passover theme is evident as well in Maimonides' ethical philosophy as elaborated in his הלכות דעות, where he presents his theory of the mean, the "middle way," in character development. The Rambam is not so much committed to the mid-point of the spectrum of character traits as such, as he is to the need for man to make a conscious, deliberate, rational decision as to the kind of character he wishes to become: לפיכך צוו חכמים הראשונים שיהא אדם שם דעותיו תמיד. ומשער אותם ומכוון אותם בדרך האמצעית (הלי דעות, פ"א, ה"ד). The act of weighing and evaluating and moulding one's self is what makes one fully human, surpassing the "naturalness" of character dispositions which normally fall along a variety of points on the spectrum of each such disposition. It is that, and not the "middle way" as such, that accounts for his description of it as the דרך ה', the "way of the Lord."

Following upon this line of reasoning, it appears clear that the highest expression of both faith and freedom, the one we identified with Moses rather than the Patriarchs, and with Passover rather than Sukkot, is that of Torah. Torah, by dint of its supernatural origins (and, according to the Kabbalists, its supernal character), qualifies as the most characteristic expression of Jewish religious experience and aspiration. The Sages equated Torah with freedom--the equivalence of תורות-חרות is well known--and we therefore understand why Passover is regarded as זמן חרותנו, the season of our freedom: not only liberation from Egyptian servitude, but freedom from the bonds of nature itself.

Hence, Passover is a much more difficult holiday than Sukkot, not only because of the restrictions of *chametz*, etc., but because the spiritual strength required to transcend Nature is so much more daunting than the ability to find Divinity within the natural order--meritorious as that is. Much more difficult than this overpowering of mute Nature is the ability to overcome habit, what is popularly and correctly called "Second Nature." The "nature" that encrusts our daily routines and that so grievously limits our spiritual horizons--that "nature" is the really critical challenge to our moral-spiritual integrity.

The great Hasidic master, R. Elimelech of Lizhensk, writes often in his נועם (as well as in his other brief but significant writings) of the concept and practice of שבירת המדות, the "breaking of traits," by which he means the arduous but liberating smashing of encrusted habit and the full mastery of one's own self. Like the Rambam, R. Elimelech's formulation of the ethical task of the Jew is based upon going against one's nature, not passively conforming with it. It is a Pesach approach, and it is far more severe discipline than that of Sukkot.

A contemporary Hasidic Rebbe wisely implied this when he truncated a verse in the Passover Haggadah to read: חייב אדם לראות את עצמו...--a person must look into *himself*... The self is the hardest and most challenging conquest of all, even as the slavery by one's ego is the most difficult to throw off.

But the prize is worth the effort--and that prize is חרות, freedom on the highest level. And therein lies the secret of Passover.