



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

PESACH > First Day

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

April 23, 2016

Pesach

The Three Names of Pesach



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

Pesach > First Day > The Three Names of Pesach

April 23, 2016

ABSTRACT

Is there a way to make peace between our need to survive and the divine plan? Between man and God? Between heaven and earth.

Passover provides the answer. And based on the principle of learning lessons from everything around us, we can derive a lesson from Google Inc. – the parent company that owns Google, YouTube etc., who has recently changed its name to Alphabet Inc. What can this name-change teach us?

For starters, it brings to mind that our holiday has three names: 1) “Passover,” 2) the “Festival of Matzoth,” and 3) the “Time of Our Liberation.”

The great lover of the Jewish people, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, teaches us something magical and humbling – that all these three names describe a different aspect of the festival:

- 1) “Passover” is how man calls the festival, an earthly view of the wonder of the divine
- 2) “Festival of Matzoth” is how the Torah calls it, a heavenly reference to the humble beauty of man
- 3) Together, they form a prayer ladder – rooted on earth, but touching heaven – and this holiday becomes the “Time of Our Liberation”

We tend to be one extreme or another – either we glorify God and marginalize ourselves, or we glorify ourselves and marginalize God. The “Time of Our Liberation” shows us how to bridge the two. Because this is what it’s all about: True freedom is about bridging both extremes, glorifying God and sanctifying our own inimitable selves.

This sermon binds it all together with the unleavened crunch of a heaven-opening and earth-shattering story about the Berditchever Rebbe.

THE THREE NAMES OF PESACH

1. What’s in a Name?

The two most popular websites in the world are Google and YouTube respectfully. (Facebook is third.)¹

Google and YouTube are both owned by the same parent company. That company used to be called Google Inc. Now it is called Alphabet Inc.

Why? Larry Page, Google’s co-founder, explains:

[When we got started] we did a lot of things that seemed crazy at the time. Many of those crazy things now have over a billion users, like Google Maps, YouTube, Chrome, and Android. And we haven’t stopped there. We are still trying to do things other people think are crazy but we are super excited about.²

¹ <http://www.alexa.com/topsites>.

² <https://abc.xyz/>.

Sound familiar? Passover, eating matzah, deleting every morsel of *chametz*, the tradition of the Seder, may seem crazy to other people but they are something we Jews are super excited about!

[Larry goes on:] We've long believed that over time companies tend to get comfortable doing the same thing, just making incremental changes. But in the technology industry, where revolutionary ideas drive the next big growth areas, you need to be a bit uncomfortable to stay relevant.

The same could be said about Judaism. Judaism actually pioneered this idea. We Jews have long believed that over time people tend to get comfortable doing the same thing, just making incremental changes. But in the industry of soul and spirituality, where revolutionary ideas drive the next big growth areas, you need to be a bit uncomfortable to stay relevant.

Our company is operating well today, but we think we can make it cleaner and more accountable. So we are creating a new company, called Alphabet ...We liked the name Alphabet because it means a collection of letters that represent language, one of humanity's most important innovations, and is the core of how we index with Google search!...

Why do I bring this up?

Because Google, its names, its innovative nature, and its desire to constantly grow and improve the lives of as many people as it can, may teach us a thing about the name (or names) of our present holiday and about serving our Creator.

After all, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, co-founders of Google, are both Jewish. Their DNA, whether they know it or not, is infused with the timeless messages of Judaism.

2. Is it Passover or Something Else?

If I asked you which holiday we are celebrating today, you would answer, predictably, “Passover.” And, on a certain level, you would be right: Passover is the name by which these eight days of celebration are best known.

But if you were to open the *Chumash*, the Five Books of Moses, and were to turn to the Torah portion that discusses the *Shalosh Regalim*, the Three Pilgrimage Festivals, you would find – perhaps to your surprise – that the Torah refers to Passover not as Passover, but as *Chag Hamatzoth*,³ the Festival of the Matzoth.

Why then do we call it the Holiday of Passover? Instead of the Passover Seder should it not be the Matzoth Seder?

3. Origins of Passover

The name Passover is derived from the Torah’s description of the *Korban Pesach*, the Passover Offering (about which we read today⁴):

*Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Draw forth or buy for yourselves sheep for your families and offer a sacrifice (pesach)...”*⁵

*The Lord will pass through (avar) to smite the Egyptians, and He will see the blood [of the sacrifice] on the lintel and on the two doorposts, and the Lord will pass over (pasach) the entrance, and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses to plague you....”*⁶

³ Exodus 23:15; cf. 34:18; Lev. 23:6; Deut. 16:16.

⁴ Exodus 12:21-51.

⁵ Exodus 12:21.

⁶ Exodus 12:23.

*When you come to the land that God will give you, as He promised, you must also do this ... [and tell your children], "This is a Passover (Pesach) sacrifice to the Lord, for He passed over (posach) the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, and He saved our houses."*⁷

These are the verses from which the term Passover (in English) or Pesach (in Hebrew) is derived.

However, the Torah itself refers to the holiday itself as *Chag Hamatzoth*, Festival of Matzoth. And naturally we wonder why?

As well, we might wonder why – in the Passover liturgy of last night and today, and over the next seven days – this holiday is called by a third name, *Zman Cheruteinu*, the "Time of Our Liberation."

Why these three different names for the same holiday?

And if the Torah calls this holiday the Festival of Matzoth, why are we compelled to call it Passover or Time of Our Liberation?

4. The Teaching of the Berditchever Rebbe

On the subject of Passover, Rabbi Levi Yitzvhak of Berditchev, writes something beautiful in his classic work, *Kedushat Levi*.⁸

Rabbi Levi Yitzvhak of Berditchev was known for his unconditional love of every Jew. The primary theme that runs through the Berditchever Rebbe's writings is his love of Israel, to the extent that the Berditchever will even appear to argue with God, debating the merits of the Jewish people. For this reason, the Berditchever is known as the "Advocate" of the Jewish people.

One of his frequent themes is the Midrashic idea that every mitzvah which God commands the Children of Israel to perform, He Himself performs as well.⁹

⁷ Exodus 12:25-27.

⁸ Bo (New York 5752, p. 37), cited in Likkutei Sichot vol. 17, p. 71, fn. #4.

⁹ Exodus Rabbah 30:9, based on Psalm 147:19.

The Berditchever cites the Talmud's¹⁰ example of the mitzvah of *tefillin* – that just as we don *tefillin* daily, so does God. But while the scrolls contained within our *tefillin* speak of God's oneness and unity, God's *tefillin* speaks of the unity and oneness of Israel.¹¹

The Holy One sings the praise of His children, Israel. Israel sings the praise of the Holy One. We don *tefillin* proclaiming God's singularity and oneness; God dons *tefillin* proclaiming our singularity and oneness.

Since one reflects the other, says the Berditchever, then You God must live up to Your own standard. Just as we could never, ever even imagine the abstract possibility of Your fragmentation, You God can never, ever allow even the abstract possibility of the fragmentation of Your people, Israel.

5. The Berditchever and Pesach

The Berditchever then applies this principle to Passover, or *Chag Hamatzoth*.

As the Jews celebrate Passover on earth, so does God celebrate Passover up in heaven. We, the Children of Israel, down below in this physical plane, call this liberating holiday, Passover. God, with heaven's eye view and top-down approach, calls this miraculous holiday the Festival of Matzoth.

By calling it Passover – or Pesach, meaning to pass over, to ascend, to transcend – we Jews sing the praises of our Creator, Who *passed over* (posach) *the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, and He saved our houses*. God, by calling it the Festival of Matzoth – referring to the bread of affliction, unleavened cakes of humility – sings the praises of the Children of Israel, who fled Egypt taking *their dough before it could rise*.¹²

¹⁰ Berachot 6a.

¹¹ God's tefillin contains the phrase, *Mi K'amcha Goy Echad Be'aretz*, "who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the world," from I Chronicles 17:21.

¹² Exodus 12:34.

This is why the Torah – God’s holy book written from God’s divine top-down perspective – calls this holiday, *Chag Hamatzoth*, the Festival of Matzoth, extolling the virtue of the Jewish people. And this is why we, God’s children, call it Pesach or Passover, exalting God’s transcendence.

And smack in middle, in prayer, we call the holiday *Zman Cheruteinu*, the “Time of our Liberation.”¹³

6. Zman Cheruteinu

Prayer is a ladder, a ladder set on earth but reaching toward heaven.¹⁴ Prayer bridges heaven and earth, connecting us earthly humans who reside on the ground with our dreams and aspirations reaching upward. The freedom and liberation of *Zman Cheruteinu* is the ladder spanning and integrating the heavenly viewpoint of above (*Chag Hamatzoth*, as it is called in the Torah) and the earthy vantage point of below (Pesach or Passover, as we call it everyday).

Matzah represents our humility, our uniqueness. Matzah represents the sweat and tears of our work to bring God into this world. Matzah is how God sees us. This is why the Torah calls this holiday the Festival of Matzoth.

Passover, on the other hand, means transcending – “skipping/jumping” – over obstacles,¹⁵ taking a leap beyond anything we’ve ever known and creating a new experience. Passover represents the wondrous and miraculous nature of the Divine, introducing us to a new and novel reality. Passover is how we see God. This is why *we* call this festival Passover.

¹³ See Likkutei Sichot *ibid.* for an alternative take on the three names of the holiday.

¹⁴ Genesis 28:12.

¹⁵ Rashi to Exodus 12:11, 13, from Mechilta ad loc. (Cf. Mishnah Pesachim 116a-b. Mechilta d’Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, verse 27. Likkutei Sichot *ibid.* p. 75.)

But focusing on one extreme or the other – either the humility and hard work of matzoth or the transcendent miracles of Passover – is not a balanced approach. As we read in our prayers, *Zman Cheiruteinu*, a time of true and everlasting liberation, is when both sides of the spectrum, God’s top-town optimization of us, and our bottom-up glorification of God, are bridged together as one.

This is true liberation, true freedom. Where heaven meets earth. Where matter and spirit merge.

7. Personal Lesson: Three Names, Three Stages

Our observance of the holiday works on three levels:

- it begins with humility – *Chag Hamatzoth*,
- which moves and leads us to liberation, *Zman Cheiruteinu*,
- which allows us to transcend and become Godly – hence Passover (*Pesach*)

All too often, our Jewish experience tends to be one extreme or another. Either we glorify God and marginalize our personal selves; or we glorify our personal selves and we seem to marginalize – or forget altogether – God. Both of these one-sided equations are confining and enslaving.

To counteract this very human tendency, *Zman Cheiruteinu*, the “Time of our Liberation,” balances the two. *Matzah*, *Chag Hamatzoth*, reminds us of our humility, what God sees in us, while *Pesach/Passover* reminds us of our transcendence, what we see in God. In between, we have *Cheiruteinu*, freedom for us all.

Which, to paraphrase the Google/Alphabet’s founder, makes us excited about...

- Getting more ambitious things done
- Taking the long-term view
- Empowering great minds and hearts to flourish
- Investing at the scale of the opportunities and resources we see
- Improving the transparency and oversight of what we're doing
- Making ourselves even better through greater focus
- And hopefully... as a result of all this, improving the lives of as many people as we can

Who would have thought that such a lesson in serving our Creator could be learned from a corporate name-change?

8. The Berditchever's Unleavened Love (Story)

It was the afternoon before Passover, and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev was wandering through the streets of the Jewish Quarter seeking out local smugglers. From one, he quietly asked for a quote on contraband tobacco; from another, he enquired about the availability of smuggled brocades and embroideries. Whatever he sought was available for the right price.

However, when he started asking his newfound acquaintances to supply him with some bread or whiskey (a liquor distilled from grain), those very same businessmen who had previously proved so accommodating, balked. "Rabbi," said one bootlegger, "are you trying to insult me? The Seder will be starting in just a few hours and no Jew would have even a speck of *chametz* left in his home or business!"

Not one merchant was able to come up with even a crumb of bread or dram of alcohol. No matter the price offered. The town had converted into a *chametz*-free zone.

Thrilled with the results of his failed quest, the Rebbe looked up to heaven and declared:

“God Almighty, look down with pride at Your people! The Czar has border guards and tax-commissioners dedicated to his commands. The police and the courts are devoted to tracking down and punishing smugglers and black-marketers, and yet, anything one could possibly want is available. Contrast this with the faith and fidelity of Your Jews. It has been over 3,000 years since You commanded us to observe Passover. No police, no guards, no courts and jails enforce this edict – and yet every Jew keeps Your laws to the utmost!

“Mi k’amcha Yisrael – Who is like Your nation, Israel!”¹⁶

9. Conclusion

I would like to conclude by borrowing a page from the Berditchever’s playbook, by pleading to God to heed His own wisdom:

In His Torah, God Himself calls today *Chag Hamatzoth*, the Festival of Matzoth, after the humble bread that stands as a testament to Israel’s humility.

For over 3,000 years, since You, God, commanded us to observe Passover, every Jew has endeavored to celebrate it with humility and grace. No police, no guards, no courts and jails enforce this edict, and yet every Jew keeps Your laws to the utmost!

Dear God, You Yourself attest to this by calling this very day the Festival of Matzoth!

As this indeed is the case, is it not time for the ultimate and eternal redemption? Is it not – as we prayed and continue to pray – for *Zman Cheruteinu*, Time of Our Liberation?

¹⁶I Chronicles 17:21.

Dear God, we simply ask that You fulfill Your own words in Your own Torah:

All the Children of Israel did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron ... And it came to pass on that very day, that the Lord took the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt with their legions.¹⁷

So may it come to pass today, without delay, speedily, NOW!

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Kasher Ve'sameach!*

© Copyright 2016 The Meaningful Life Center. By downloading this PDF file from Meaningful Sermons, you agree to respect the copyright of this written material. You understand that your right to this material is limited to using it to deliver sermons, classes or other oral presentations to your community. You agree not to publish this material or any part thereof, nor to email, fax, copy, scan, mail, etc. or otherwise share this material with others, nor to verbally share these ideas with others.

¹⁷ Exodus 12:50-51.