

For a seven-day period, shall you eat matzos ... You shall safeguard the matzos. (12:15,17)

The association of our departure from Egypt and the prohibition against eating *chametz*, leaven, for seven/eight days, requires some explanation. Furthermore, the fact that a *mitzvah d'Oraisa*, Biblical commandment, obligates us to eat *matzah* (on the first night) begs elucidation in its relationship to the Exodus. The fact that we were compelled to rush out of Egypt, which precluded our ability to make leavened bread, is the obvious and accepted reason for eating *matzah* (for its commemorative value). Is there a deeper reason for negating leaven and replacing it with *matzah*?

Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl, explains that when one mixes flour with water, the flavor of the finished product is that of *matzah*. The leaven flavor is not derived from the actual flour/water mixture, but from the delay. Another "ingredient" is added to the equation: the dimension of time, which produces a flavor from another factor, not from the mixture itself. Thus, the law prohibits leaven, because it is a product that is incongruous to Pesach, a festival which decries delay, the time when *chametz* is prohibited for seven days. The underlying concept that delay of any sort undermines a *mitzvah* is a Rabbinic theme that applies to all *mitzvos*. In *Rashi's* commentary to *Shemos* 12:17, *U'shemartem es ha'matzos*, "You shall guard the *matzos*," he writes, "Guard the *mitzvos* [same spelling as *matzos*]. A *mitzvah* that comes into your hand, *al tachmitzenah*; 'do not allow it to become leaven.'" Its performance must be devoid of any delay.

This exhortation applies to all *mitzvos*, such as Torah-study, *Tefillin*, etc., They must be executed without delay, since delay provides an added flavor that is foreign to the mixture, a false flavor that is not of the mixture itself. When we add delay to the *mitzvah*, that *mitzvah* becomes leaven.

Let us extrapolate from the above. One who delays indicates that he belongs to time. It has a hold on him, it controls him. One who acts in a timely fashion indicates that he is in control of time. The first *mitzvah* given to the Jewish people in Egypt was *Ha'chodesh hazeh lachem rosh chodoshim*, "This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you" (*Shemos* 12:2). Why was this *mitzvah* given at the time of the liberation? *Horav Avraham Pam, zl*, explains that the difference between a slave and a free human being does not lie in how hard or how long each works. Free people often work long and hard hours at the most difficult and arduous tasks. The difference is in who controls time. A slave works as long as the master wishes that he/she work. A free person works as long as he/she chooses to work. Control over time is the essential difference between freedom and slavery. The ability to determine the calendar, to calculate when the Festivals are to occur, is based upon the power to decide when the New Moon occurs. The Jewish People were given authority, domination over time. This first command was their prelude to freedom, indicating to them the path for valuing and sanctifying time.