

Why is the Miracle of Shabbos Hagadol Celebrated On Shabbos?

And the Connection to Parshas Tzav

The Shaloh Hakadosh¹ tells us that the Parsha of the week is connected to the time of year when it is read. In a regular year (not a leap year), it is very common that Tzav falls on Shabbos Hagadol, the Shabbos right before Pesach. What is the connection between Tzav and Shabbos Hagadol?

First let us examine, what is Shabbos Hagadol? Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi² in the *Shulchan Aruch Harav*³ says, “We call the Shabbos before Pesach Shabbos Hagadol, because a great [*gado*] miracle⁴ happened on it. Because the Pesach [lamb] was taken on the 10th of the month [of Nissan]... That day was Shabbos... And when [the Children of] Israel took their Pesach [lambs] on that Shabbos, the firstborns of Egypt gathered near [the Children of] Israel, and asked them why they are doing so? They responded that this is a Pesach offering to Hashem, because He will slay the firstborns of Egypt. The firstborns went to their fathers and to Pharaoh, to beseech that they send Israel [away], and they didn’t want to. The firstborns made war with them and killed many of them; this is the meaning of the verse, ‘To hit Egypt with their firstborns.’⁵ They established to remember this miracle in all generations on Shabbos and called it Shabbos Hagadol. Why didn’t they establish [the remembrance of this miracle] on the tenth of the month, whether it fell on Shabbos or during the week, like they established all of the [other]

holidays? Because on the 10th of Nissan, Miriam passed away, and they established it as a fast day when it falls during the week...”

So we call it Shabbos Hagadol, the Great Shabbos, because a great miracle happened.

What was so great about the miracle that we should remember it in every generation? This miracle didn’t really help the Jewish People; even after they had their war, the Jewish People were still stuck in Egypt. It wasn’t until the death of the firstborn that they were able to go free. So it doesn’t seem to have helped them at all.

Miriam passed away 39 years after the miracle of Shabbos Hagadol. Why was the fast that was established on the day of her passing able to push off the remembrance of the miracle to Shabbos?

There were many miracles that happened for the Jewish People over the generations, as we say in the Haggadah, “In every generation, they stand up to destroy us, and Hashem saves us from their hands.” In those miracles, the enemy was either destroyed or subdued.

What made this miracle great was that it came from the Egyptians, themselves, and not only that, it came from their firstborns, the strength and vigor of Egypt. They, themselves went to their fathers and to Pharaoh and demanded that Israel be released, and they even went to war against their own for this. The darkness *itself* became the light, our enemies became our advocates.

To take it a step further, a miracle is a change in nature. But in this case, even the nature of *Torah* was changed. In the Torah system, there are things that are holy, and there are things that are neutral, but with some work, we can elevate them to holiness. For example, food. Food is generally neutral, but if you recite a blessing over it and use the energy that the food gives you to serve Hashem, then that food and the act of eating it are elevated to holiness.

¹ Shaloh, at the beginning of Parshas Vayeshev. See also Zohar, vol. 2, p. 206b.

² The founder and first Rebbe of Chabad, called the Alter Rebbe, aka the Baal Hatanya. His major works were the Tanya, *Likkutei Torah/Torah Ohr*, the *Shulchan Aruch Harav*, and more.

³ *Shulchan Aruch Harav*, *Orach Chaim*, beginning of Chap. 430.

⁴ “*Ness Gadol*” – Tosafos (Shabbos 87b) and Tur (beginning of chapter 430) use the same term regarding this miracle. The Shulchan Aruch does not, but he doesn’t usually explain the reason behind the laws, so it makes sense that he would just say a general statement, such as, “because of the miracle that happened.” (See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 12, p. 33, footnote 5.)

⁵ Tehillim, 136:10.

Then, there are things that are intrinsically unholy, and we can't make them holy; all we are meant to do with them is avoid them.⁶ For example, non-Kosher food – there is no way to elevate it.

The Egyptians fell into the “unholy that we can't elevate” category, and here they were transformed to do Hashem's will.

This is a truly great miracle, beyond any other. Therefore it is called great, hence the name “Shabbos Hagadol.”

This will help us understand the connection between Shabbos Hagadol and Miriam's passing.

Rashi⁷ asks, “Why is the passing of Miriam near the teaching of the *Parah Adumah* [the Red Heifer]? To tell you that just as the Parah Adumah atones, so, too, the passing of Tzadikim atones.” Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi⁸ explains that this means that “they accomplish salvations in the midst of the land by atoning for the sin of the generation, even for those done intentionally, low and depraved.”

Just as the miracle of Shabbos Hagadol changed the unholy and what couldn't otherwise be elevated, allowing them to be able to do what Hashem wants, so, too, the passing of Miriam atoned for low and depraved sins that couldn't have otherwise become holy. And true atonement means that the sin actually becomes a merit, the darkness itself becomes light.

Now we understand why the remembrance of the miracle could be pushed off to another day, in this case, Shabbos.

It is similar to when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos: the law is that we don't blow the Shofar, because an ignorant person may want to hear the Shofar and mistakenly carry it to the person who knows how. By carrying in a public place (where there is no Eruv), he would be breaking the

Shabbos. To protect him from breaking the Shabbos, we all don't hear the Shofar.⁹

You may ask, why should we all miss out on the great Mitzvah of Shofar because of a few ignorant people? The answer is that we don't exactly miss out on the Mitzvah, because what is spiritually accomplished by blowing the Shofar gets accomplished by the day of Shabbos, itself.¹⁰

The same is true about Miriam's passing. Since the essence of the great miracle was that the darkness itself became light, and since that is also what the passing of Miriam represents, it is not truly pushed off. The essential idea is accomplished by commemorating Miriam's passing.

At the end of Parshas Tzav,¹¹ the Torah tells about the seven days of *milu'im*, a time of training for Aaron and his sons in the Mishkan service. Why was it called *milu'im*? Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi¹² explains that it comes from the word *miluy*, which means “full” or “complete.” About the time of Moshiach, it is written “that the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun.”¹³ That which was lacking in the moon will be filled (it will generate its own light). A similar thing happened spiritually when the Mishkan was set up during that week, the spiritual attribute of *Malchus* was raised up.

To explain: The moon doesn't give its own light; it reflects the light it receives from the sun. But when Moshiach comes, its status will be raised and it will then give its own light. Same thing applies to the spiritual attribute of *Malchus*. Right now, it has nothing of its own to give, it only reflects what it receives from the other attributes; however, when Moshiach comes, it will be elevated and have what to give on its own. And what Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi is saying is that in a small way, this happened when the Mishkan was set up.

⁹ Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 29b, it is called *gezeira d'Rabba*.

¹⁰ *Likkutei Torah, Drushei Rosh Hashanah*, p. 56a, and many other Chasidic discourses based on this maamar.

¹¹ Vayikra 8:1 and on.

¹² *Likkutei Torah, Tzav*, p. 10:4.

¹³ Yeshayahu, 30:26.

⁶ See Tanya, Chaps. 7 and 8. *Likkutei Torah, Shir Hashirim*, p. 6d.

⁷ Rashi to Bamidbar, 2:1.

⁸ Tanya, *Igeres Hakodesh*, Chap. 28.

In other words, that which is normally dark and doesn't give its own light – the moon and Malchus – will begin to give their own light. The darkness, itself, becomes light.

This idea is seen in the name of the Parsha, Tzav. The Talmud¹⁴ says that whenever the Torah uses the word 'Tzav,' it is referring to idol worship. At the same time, the *Toras Kohanim*¹⁵ tells us that the word Tzav means, "alacrity [to fulfill Hashem's will], now and for generations, even if it means taking a loss." And Tzav (whose *Gematria*, numerical value, is 96) has the same numerical value as two names of Hashem – E-I (31) and Ad-nai (65) – combined. What is dark is, itself, giving light.

We can accomplish turning darkness into light through Teshuva. When we do Teshuva, even our worst sins become merits.¹⁶ The darkness *itself* becomes light.

The common denominator between Shabbos Hagadol, Miriam's passing and Parshas Tzav, is that the darkness itself becomes light.¹⁷

May we merit to see the coming of Moshiach soon, when we will see how the darkness and suffering of the exile, itself, will become light. The time has come.

¹⁴ See Talmud, Sanhedrin 56b. Also see Zohar, vol. 1, pp. 27b and 35b.

¹⁵ Toras Kohanim to Leviticus 6:2, brought by Rashi.

¹⁶ Talmud, Yoma 86b. Also see *Derech Mitzvosecha*, 191a.

¹⁷ Based on *Likutei Sichos*, vol. 12, pp. 33–38.