

Why Is The Miracle Of Shabbos Hagadol Celebrated On Shabbos? & The Connection To Parshas Tzav

The Shaloh Hakadosh¹ tells us that the parsha of the week is connected to the time of year that 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 Haggadol?

What is Shabbos Hagadol? Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi² in the Shulchan Aruch Harav³ says, "We call the Shabbos before Pesach Shabbos Hagadol, because a great (gadol) 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 first borns of Egypt gathered near (the Children of) Israel, and asked them, why are they 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, 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 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, either the enemy was destroyed or they were 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, that food is elevated to holiness.

Then there are things that are intrinsically unholy, and we can't make them holy, all we are meant to

¹ Shaloh, at the beginning of parshas Vayeshev. See also Zohar volume 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, Lekutei Torah/Torah Ohr, the Shulchan Aruch Harav, and more.

³ Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim beginning of chapter 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 Lekutei Sichos vol 12 p. 33 footnote 5.)

⁵ Psalms 136:10.

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 and 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 can't be elevated, to do what Hashem wants, so too, the passing of Miriam atoned for low and depraved sins that can't become holy. And true atonement means that the actual sin 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, 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. Being that the essence of the great miracle, was that the darkness itself became light, and 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 it tells about the seven days of miluim, 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 and complete. About the time of Moshiach it says, "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 give 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 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 raised 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.

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.

⁶ See Tanya chapters 7 and 8. Lekutei Torah Shir Hashirim p. 6d.

⁷ Rashi to Numbers 2:1.

⁸ Tanya, Egeres Hakodesh chapter 28.

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

¹⁰ Lekutei Torah Drushei Rosh Hashanah p. 56a, and many other chassidic discourses based on this maamar.

¹¹ Leviticus 8:1 and on.

¹² Lekutei Torah Tzav p. 10:4.

¹³ Isaiah 30:26.

This idea is seen in the name of the parsha, Tzav. In the Talmud¹⁴ it says that whenever it says Tzav, it is referring to idol worship. At the same time, the Torahs Kohanim¹⁵ tells us about the word Tzav, that it means, "alacrity (to fulfill Hashem's will), now and for generations, even if it means taking a loss." And Tzav (96) has the numerical value of the two names of Hashem, E-I (31) and Adnai (65) combined. What is dark is itself giving light.

We can accomplish turning the darkness itself into light through teshuva. When we do teshuva, 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 the suffering of the exile itself will become light. The time has come.

On The Haftora Of Shabbos Hagadol: To Touch The Essence

The Haftora¹⁸ for Shabbos Hagadol is from the book of Malachi, who lived at the beginning of the second Temple era. He foretells of the time of Moshiach, and rebukes the Jewish people for putting the wicked on a pedestal, for not serving Hashem and especially for not tithing, and it ends with the redemption.¹⁹

Many communities including Chabad, read this Haftora only when Shabbos Hagadol falls on Erev

Pesach. Others read it on Shabbos Hagadol, whether or not it falls on Erev Pesach.

The reason we read this Haftora, is because it speaks of giving tithes,²⁰ and on Erev Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the Sabbatical cycle, one is obligated to give whatever tithes are left in his possession.²¹ Another reason is that it tells about the future redemption, and being that Pesach is the holiday of the redemption and the most opportune time for the coming of Moshiach, we read about the redemption before it, especially since it tells of Eliyahu the prophet heralding Moshiach's coming.

Both traditions could apply both reasons, but one applies more to one and the other applies more to the other. According to those who read it only on Erev Pesach, the reason for giving tithes takes precedence, but you can also say that Erev Pesach is before the holiday of redemption, and Eliyahu comes prior to the coming of Moshiach. According to those who read it on Shabbos Hagadol, regardless of whether or not it falls on Erev Pesach, the reason of Moshiach and Eliyahu heralding his coming takes precedence, but you can also say that it comes before or on Erev Pesach as a reminder to tithe.

The Haftora begins, "(V'Arva) The offerings of Yehuda and Yerushalayim will be sweet to Hashem, (kimei olam) as in early days and the (shanim kadmonious) former years." Being that it begins with the word V'Arva, the Haftora is called V'Arva.

"As in early days and the former years," seem to have the same meaning. Why the double expression? We have to say that they are two distinct things, and that is why the verse brings them both. What is the meaning of these two expressions? And how do they work together?

The Midrash²² gives two answers. First, "In early days," refers to the days of Moshe, and "the former

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

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

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

¹⁷ Based on Lekutei Sichos vol 12 pp. 33-38.

¹⁸ Malachi 3:4-24.

¹⁹ Malachi 3:4.

²⁰ Ibid 3:10.

²¹ Shulchan Aruch Harav 430:3.

²² Vayikra Rabbah 7:4. End of Aicha Raba.

years," refers to the time of Shlomo. Second, that "In early days," refers to the days of Noach.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains that "kimei olam," which literally means the days of the world, refers to the world, spiritual and physical realms included. And shanim kadmonious, which literally means the years before, refers to before or beyond the world, beyond all of existence, spiritual and physical.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains²³ that this connects to Shabbos Hagadol, as it says in the Haggadah, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem took us out." "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt," refers to the world, and in the world, to the lowest place, and the lowest predicament, being slaves in exile, and "Hashem took us out," refers to the essence of Hashem, beyond existence, as we read in the Haggadah, "The King, King of kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, in His glory and by Himself, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them."

This is the meaning of, "The offerings of Yehuda and Yerushalayim will be sweet to Hashem, as in early days and the former years," Yehuda and Yerushalayim refer to the Jewish people, as all the Jewish people are called Yehudim, and they are called daughters of Yerushalayim. The offerings refer to the general idea of sacrifices, which is meant to bring us closer to Hashem. And in a more general sense, it refers to our service to Hashem through Torah and mitzvahs, which brings us closer to Hashem. And even more, our daily mundane actions that are done for the sake of Heaven. These offerings reach the highest levels of G-dliness, to the essence of Hashem beyond existence. And this is what is sweet to Hashem, our service is sweet and pleasurable to Him, it is the greatest pleasure, as the Sifri²⁴ tells us that Hashem says, "it is a pleasure before Me, because I said it and My will was done."

And this service has both "In early days and the former years," it reaches beyond existence, and it affects the world by drawing G-dliness from beyond

existence into even the lowest levels of existence, this physical world. And that is our purpose as Jews, to make this world into a home for Hashem, where His essence beyond existence could dwell openly in this physical world. And it is our service to Hashem through Torah, mitzvahs and our daily activities done for the sake of Heaven, that draws G-dliness from "shanim kadmonious," beyond existence, into "kimei olam," into the world, making a home for Hashem.

And this is the meaning of, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem took us out." That the essence of Hashem beyond existence was drawn into the lowest part of creation, Egypt, and He Himself took us out.

This is a deeper reason for reading this Haftora on Shabbos Hagadol. Shabbos represents the culmination of our service to Hashem all week. As the Alter Rebbe tells us²⁵, that the prayer time of every day, is considered the Shabbos of the day, that is the time that all of one's service to Hashem during the day ascends on high. Shabbos is the day that all the prayers of the week go up. Now Shabbos Hagadol is the great Shabbos, it represents our service to Hashem at the highest level.

Why is it called Shabbos Hagadol?²⁶ Because a great miracle happened on that day, "To smite Egypt with their firstborn." The Firstborn of Egypt went to war against Egypt on behalf of the Jewish people. This is the ultimate turn of events, when your enemy becomes your advocate, or as the Talmud puts it²⁷, "from the forest itself comes the handle of the ax." This is the highest level of service to Hashem, when the actual darkness is turned into light, and bitterness is turned sweet²⁸. And that is what Shabbos Hagadol is all about.

Why is it possible for the Jewish people to draw the highest levels of G-dliness into the lowest levels of the physical world?

²⁵ Likkutei Torah; Behar 41:1. Bracha 97:1.

²⁶ Shulchan Aruch Harav 430:1

²⁷ Talmud, Sanhedrin 39:2. Tanya beginning Ch 31.

²⁸ Zohar I, 4:1.

²³ Ohr Hatorah Pinchas 1111.

²⁴ Pinchas 28:8

The Haftora continues²⁹, "For I Hashem have not changed, and you the children of Yaakov have not been destroyed."

There are a few ways of understanding this verse.

Some people phrase it like a question, "If I Hashem have not changed, then why haven't you, the children of Yaakov expired (of ecstasy)?" In other words, you realize and sense My greatness, why haven't your neshamas left your bodies yearning to be with Me?

Others read it as a statement. "Because I Hashem have not changed, therefore you the children of Yaakov have not been destroyed." meaning, that Hashem's love for us has not changed, therefore, we are still here today. Even deeper, because we are one with Hashem, and He doesn't change, we don't either change, therefore, we are here today. And where are we one with Him? In His essence beyond existence, and therefore we have the ability to draw from there into the lowest part of creation.

The idea of "For I Hashem have not changed," is seen primarily in nature, because miracles are by definition a change in nature. In truth, the greatest miracle of all, is nature itself, but we don't see it that way, because we are used to it. The fact that so much in nature is predictable, every day the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, we plant seeds and they grow, etc. etc., is where we see that Hashem doesn't change.

We have to be like Hashem, we have to act and serve Hashem in a predictable way, in the Torah way, and being that we are and were consistent in the Torah way, therefore, "you the children of Yaakov have not been destroyed. It is our consistency that has kept us alive, while other nations that were bigger and stronger than us, are only found in history books and museums, the tiny nation of the Jewish people are here and we are making a difference.

And now we will understand why the Haftora ends with³⁰, "Behold I will send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers..." Because through our service to Hashem, especially in the way of Shabbos Hagadol, that we turn the darkness itself into light, we will merit the "great and awesome day," the coming of Moshiach. And then we will see the connection between us and Hashem openly. Father refers to Hashem beyond existence, and children refer to us within existence. We will see how he will "turn the heart of the fathers back through the children," this is us reaching above through our service, to the essence of Hashem beyond existence, "and the heart of the children back through their fathers," this is us drawing that great level of G-dliness into the world, making a home for Hashem.

May we merit to see the prophecy of Malachi come true, the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.³¹

²⁹ Malachi 3:6.

³⁰ Malachi 3:23-24.

³¹ Based on Maamar V'Arva 5741.