



The Haggadah, based on the Mishna in Masekhet Pesachim (10:5), explains the reason for eating *matza* on Pesach on the basis of the haste with which our ancestors departed Egypt. The moment of the Exodus came so suddenly that they did not even have the opportunity to bake proper bread, and were instead compelled to prepare unleavened *matza*. Maimonides cites this Mishna in the eighth chapter of Hilkhot Chametz U-matza (*halakha* 4) and in his text of the Haggadah (printed in *Mishneh Torah* after Hilkhot Chametz U-matza).

One chapter earlier, however (7:5), where Maimonides codifies the requirement to discuss at the *seder* the reasons behind the *mitzvot* of *pesach*, *matza* and *marror*, he explains the reason for *matza* much more succinctly: "*Matza al shem she-nig'alu*" – "*Matza* – to commemorate that they were redeemed." As noted by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Maimonides appears to equate "redemption" with the haste and abruptness with which the Exodus unfolded. He describes *matza* as commemorative of our having been "redeemed," which must refer specifically to the sudden departure which did not allow our ancestors time to prepare leavened products. Apparently, in Maimonides' view, the essence of redemption lies in this element of haste and suddenness.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that redemption means God's intervention when all hope has been lost, when the situation has deteriorated to the lowest depths, from which there appears no possibility of rising. Indeed, just prior to God's revelation to Moshe in the burning bush where he is designated as the nation's deliverer, the Torah records, "...the Israelites groaned due to the labor and cried; their pleas from the labor ascended to God. God heard their wailing; God remembered His covenant" (Shemot 2:23-24). It was at that moment, when *Benei Yisrael's* suffering reached the point of hopelessness, when they no longer saw any basis for optimism or any reason to anticipate a brighter future, that God spoke to Moshe and set the process of *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim* into rapid motion.

For this reason, Rav Soloveitchik added, Maimonides writes in introducing the text of the Haggadah that one begins telling the story of the Exodus by declaring, "*Bi-behilu yatzanu mi-Mitzrayim*" – "We left Egypt in haste." Once again, the theme of suddenness takes center stage as we reflect upon the experience of *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim*. We are to commemorate on Pesach not merely the Exodus itself, but rather the sudden turn of events, the notion that our situation can be transformed so drastically in but an instant. Our belief in divine providence and divine omnipotence means that through

God's intervention even the direst, most desperate and seemingly hopeless crises can be peacefully resolved in the blink of an eye.

Understandably, then, *matza* commemorates the fact "that we were redeemed." For to be "redeemed," in Maimonides' view, is to experience the sudden transition from bondage to freedom, from oppression to royalty, and from crisis to comfort, and the realization of God's power and ability to extricate His people from any situation of despair, even when all hope seems lost.