

SHABOS HAGADOL

Parshas Achrei

By Menachem Rokeach

The name of this Shabos, “the Great Shabos”, “Shabos Hagadol” abounds with exaltation. By honoring it with this name, a compliment is tendered to both, to Shabos and to Passover. Just to list a few of the many reasons why it is called by this cherished name will fill the pages of this essay, and hopefully will remain on the Pesach agenda, as it involves Pesach thought.

1) Shabos is a source of blessing for the whole week (Shabos 118a, Zohar Yisro). This teaching is mentioned every Friday evening when we’re about to receive the Shabos, in Lecho Dodi, “come let us go to welcome the Shabos, for it is a SOURCE of blessing”. Now, Pesach is also called “Shabos” - “You are to count (Sfirath Haomer) from the morrow of the Shabbos...” (referring to Pesach). And it, too, has impact on the days (and weeks) that follow. The source of blessing on this Shabos is therefore divinely broadened in order to exuberate blessing even on Pesach which itself is called Shabos.

2) By the same token, as in wisdom, with a giver and a taker, the giver gains deeper insight as he bestows upon the taker, the Shabos takes from Pesach as it gives. “I have learned a lot from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and from my disciples more than from both” (Taanis 7a). For the Exodus is a basic concept of Shabos. In the Ten Commandments of Chumosh Devorim, in the second Tablets, the Mitzva of Shabos observance is connected to the Exodus. “And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem, your G-d, has taken you out... therefore Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to make the Shabos day” (5:15).

Although the Biblical requirement of Shabos Kiddush is fulfilled with the Maariv prayer (with the blessing “Mekadaish Hashabos”, the

Rabbinic injunction necessitates recital over a cup of wine. The Talmud maintains (Psochim 117b) that mention of the Exodus in the Shabos Kiddush is a requisite, according to most authorities a Biblical requisite (unlike the view of Iben Ezra). (See Mishna Brura, Law of Shabos ch. 271, and his lengthy clarification in Biur Halacha).

A puzzling debate is raised: Since the Exodus connection is Biblical, how is it that the Friday evening Maariv does not mention the Exodus? It may be suggested that the authors of the Shabos Maariv deliberately omitted the Exodus background in order to be in a position to fulfill the Kidush requirement (over a cup of wine), at home, when his wife and younger members of the family can be included in the fulfillment.

The Shabos is here a GRAND taker from Pesach. This too makes it a GRAND Shabos, a Shabos Hagadol.

3) When Erev Pesach coincides with Shabos, the requirement of Korbon Pesach overrides the stringency of Shabos (Psochim 58a). (Otherwise the slaughter of an animal on Shabos is prohibited). Such a day needs the emphasis that Shabos and its restrictions are the core of Yahadus. Erev Pesach is an exception, otherwise Shabos is not compromised.

4) Coinciding this year, Shabos Hagadol with Parshas Acharei Mose, which discusses the laws of Yom Kippur, an interesting parallel comes to mind. Just as Pesach is called Shabos (as above #1), so is Yom Kippur called "Shabos Shaboson" (Vayikro 16:31). Only these two, Yom Kippur and Pesach, are called Shabos, although a differing viewpoint applies the same to other festivals as well. The six months, Nisan to Elul, parallels the six months Tishrei to Adar, with first day of Pesach on the fifteenth of Nisan paralleling the first day of Succoth on the fifteenth of Tishrei. The tenth day of Nissan coincides with Shabos, thus, paralleling the tenth day of Tishrei, Yom Kippur (see Tosfos Shabos 87b, stating that in Egypt at the time of the Exodus the tenth of Nissan coincided with

Shabos). Thus, one ventures to suggest, with some hesitancy, an additional reason for the title Shabos Hagadol: Pesach is the only Yom Tov that the day prior plays such an extraordinarily prominent role. The Torah commands the slaughter of the Paschal lamb and the sprinkling on the altar to take place on the fourteenth of Nissan, erev Pesach, in the afternoon. This is observed, as mentioned above, even if erev Pesach coincides with Shabos. (Only its roasting is prohibited on Shabos). According to the Jerusalem Talmud there is a strong preference, even today when there is no Beth Hamikdosh, nor a Paschal lamb, to bake Matza Shmura on erev Pesach in the afternoon (see Tosfos Yom Tov on the first Mishna of Psochim chapter 4). No such distinction is found prior to any other Yom Tov.

Every Korbon on the altar possesses the element of atonement (Kaporah). It therefore stands to reason to conjecture that the Paschal lamb on erev Pesach is intended (also) to atone for the neglect of erev (prior to) Shabos and Yom Tov. For proper preparation on erev Shabos and Yom Tov, an hour of thoughtful anticipation, possesses the capacity to heighten the holy day immeasurably.

Maimonides concludes his elaborate thirty chapters of Laws of Shabos with some restrictions on erev Shabos “in order to position one’s mind before the arrival of Shabos”(30:13), to welcome it royally when it arrives. With those precious moments added to the Shabos, every Shabos indeed becomes Shabos Hagadol. In the musaf (Tikanto Shabos) “godol, gedula”, bejewels every Shabos of the year. “...those who love its words have chosen greatness, gedula bochoru”.

The above quoted stanza of Lecho Dodi, about Shabos being a source of blessing, begins Likras Shabos Lechu V’Nailcho... let us go to welcome the Shabos (before its arrival) for it is a source of blessing”, indeed, then, of great blessing.

