YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PESACH 5782**

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Dedicated in memory of HaRav HaGaon R. Chaim Heller zt"l,  
whose yahrzeit falls on the 14th of Nissan,  
by Vivian S. Singer.

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In memory of Pinhas ben Shalom (Paul) Cymbalista z”l   
Niftar 20 Nissan 5752.  
Dedicated by his family.

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Dedicated in memory of Sidney Gontownik,   
brother of Jerry Gontownik,   
on the occasion of Sidney's upcoming twelfth Yahrzeit,   
on the 24th of Nissan. May his memory be for a blessing.  
The Gontownik Family

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**Eating Matza on the Seven Days of the Festival of Matzot**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**I. Seven or Six Days?**

Nine verses in the Torah contain a mitzvato eat *matza*, unleavened bread, for seven days. Indeed, it is because of this mitzvathat the whole festival is called "the Festival of Matzot":

1. *Shemot* 12:15: Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread…
2. 12:18: In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.
3. 13:6: Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the Lord.
4. 13:7: Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with you…
5. 23:15: The feast of unleavened bread shall you keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Aviv…
6. 34:18: The feast of unleavened bread shall you keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Aviv…
7. *Vayikra* 23:6: And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.
8. *Bamidbar* 28:17: And on the fifteenth day of this month shall be a feast; seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.
9. *Devarim* 16:3: You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it.

But then in our *parasha,* it is stated in the last verse dealing with the Pesach offering and the Festival of Matzot:

*Devarim* 16:8: **Six days** you shall eat unleavened bread; and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God; you shall do no work therein.

This surprising verse contradicts all of the nine verses that precede it. Special mention should be made, however, of *Shemot* 13:6, the content and structure of the verse are very similar to those of v. 8 in our *parasha*, apart from the contradiction between the numbers six and seven:

*Shemot* 13:6: **Seven** days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day shall be a feast to the Lord.

Verse 8 contradicts not only the verses in the previous books of the Torah, but also the verse in the very section in which it is found. At the beginning of the festivals section it is stated:

*Devarim* 16:3: You shall not eat leavened bread with it; **seven** days you shall eat unleavened bread with it.

Does the mitzva of eating matza last seven days or only six days? And which day is it on which, according to v. 8 in our *parasha*, that this mitzva does not apply?

Tractate *Pesachim* 120a brings the following *baraita* (which has parallels[[1]](#footnote-1)):

"Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God" – Just as [on] the seventh day [the eating of unleavened bread] is voluntary [Rashbam: As it is written: "And on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly," but it is not written: "You shall eat unleavened bread," as it was removed from the general law], so [on] the six days it is voluntary [Rashbam: For if one wants to eat meat without bread or to fast, he may do so]. What is the reason? Because it is something that was included in the general law and then excluded from the general law, in order to clarify [other cases], [which means that] it was excluded not in order to shed light upon itself, but in order to shed light upon the entire general law.

According to this *baraita*, when the verse states: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread," it comes to remove the seventh day from the general law of eating matza. The verse is built on the contrast: On the first six days of the festival, you shall eat matzot, whereas on the seventh day, it shall be a solemn assembly and you shall not do work, but there is no obligation to eat matza.

The *baraita* then uses one of the thirteen hermeneutical principles by way of which the Torah is expounded (which appear in the *baraita* of R. Yishmael at the beginning of the *Sifra*): "Anything that was included in the general law and then excluded from the general law was excluded not in order to shed light upon itself, but in order to shed light upon the general law." The seventh day of the Festival of Matzot was included among the other days about which it is stated: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread." It was removed from that general law in verse 8 to teach that on that day there is no obligation to eat matza. But not only on the seventh day itself is there no such obligation; the verse comes to teach that on all seven days there is no obligation to eat matza, just as on the seventh day itself.

What, then, is the meaning of the verse: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread"? That verse does not establish an obligation, but rather a voluntary act: If one wishes to eat bread on those seven days, he should eat unleavened bread and not leavened bread. But he is not obligated to do, for he has the option of eating vegetables or meat or not eating anything at all. That this is meaning of the verse we learn from the fact that the verse in our *parasha* removed the seventh day from the general law governing the seven days. Just as on the seventh day there is no obligation to eat matza, so on the six preceding days there is no obligation to do so.

The *baraita* then continues to clarify the status of eating matza on the first night of the Festival of Matzot:

You might think that on the first night too it is [merely] voluntary; therefore, it is stated: "They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (*Bamidbar* 9:11).[[2]](#footnote-2) I know this only when the Temple is in existence [when we are obligated to eat matza together with the Pesach offering]; from where do we know it when the Temple is not in existence [and there is no Pesach offering]? From the verse: "At evening you shall eat unleavened bread" (*Shemot* 12:18) – thus Scripture made it a permanent obligation.

**II. “Six days you shall eat unleavened bread” – To exclude the first day**

Is the *baraita*'s interpretation of the verse, "Six days shall you eat unleavened bread" – that it comes to exclude the seventh day from the obligation of eating matza – the plain meaning of Scripture? Are there other interpretations of this verse?

Before we turn to the medieval and modern commentators to the Bible, let us examine another exposition of the verse by *Chazal* themselves. In *Menachot* 66a and in several parallel texts,[[3]](#footnote-3) we find the following *baraita*:

R. Shimon ben Eliezer said: One verse says: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread," whereas another verse says: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread." How are they to be reconciled? [In this way:] You may not eat unleavened bread of the new produce seven days [for on the first day, the *omer* meal-offering has not yet been brought, and the new produce is still forbidden], but you may eat unleavened bread of the new produce six days [starting from the sixteenth of Nisan, when the *omer* meal-offering is brought].[[4]](#footnote-4)

According to this *baraita*, the day which our verse comes to exclude is not the seventh day, but rather the first day. What the verse means is that on six days, beginning on the sixteenth of Nisan, you shall eat matza made of the new produce, and the seventh day, counting from the fifteenth of Nisan, shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord.

It is difficult to accept this interpretation of our verse as the simple meaning of the text, for in the verse there is not even a hint to the distinction between new and old produce, which is of no concern to our passage. However, the explanation that "six days" comes to exclude the first day is accepted by several commentators who seek the plain meaning of the text, for reasons other than those put forward by the *midrash*.

Before we discuss these explanations, let us first consider the explanation offered by the Ibn Ezra:

It is possible that "on the seventh day" is joined to "six days," and it was removed from one corner to the other, in order to forbid on it: "You shall do no work."

The Ibn Ezra seems to read the verse as follows: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day [you shall also eat it], [and on the seventh day] shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God; you shall do no work thereon." The words "and on the seventh day" are read with both parts of the verse, as if they were doubled. This explanation likens our verse to the verse in *Shemot* 13:6: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the Lord." In our verse, the seventh day is removed from the general law, but it was removed not with regard to the eating of matza, but with regard to the doing of work. This explanation is not persuasive.

Let us now turn to the explanations proposed by the above-mentioned commentators who seek the plain meaning of the verse.

R. Sa’adya Gaon translates our verse in a non-literal manner, thereby revealing his interpretation (*Peirushei Rabbeinu Sa’adya Gaon al Ha-Torah*, ed. R. Y. Kafih):

And after that he shall eat matza for six days, and on the seventh day…

What is the meaning of the words "and after that he shall eat"? R. Sa’adya undoubtedly alludes to the end of the previous verse (7): "And you shall turn **in the morning** and go to your tents." The term "after that" in R. Sa’adya's commentary alludes, then, to the "morning," when those who offered the Pesach offering turn to their tents.

What morning is this? Since from that day on there are six days left to eat matza, it must be the morning of the sixteenth of Nisan. This is indeed the way Rashi explains verse 7: "'You shall turn in the morning' – in the morning of the **second** day. This teaches that he [the pilgrim] is required to stay [in Jerusalem] during the night when the festival terminates."[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Chizkuni explains the verse in the same way that R. Sa’adya Gaon did (without, of course, having seen his words):

"Six days you shall eat unleavened bread" – This does not come to exclude the seventh day from the law governing the other days. Rather, it refers to what is stated earlier, and this is what it means: "And you shall turn in the morning and go to your tents" – and all "six days" that are left from then on, "you shall eat unleavened bread."

"And on the seventh day" – from the first day.

The author of the *Ketav Ve-Ha-Kabbala*,R. S.R. Hirsch, and R. D.Tz. Hoffman in their commentaries all followed in the footsteps of R. Sa’adya and the Chizkuni.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The interpretation offered by these commentators raises the following question: Why did the Torah count the number of days left for eating matza after those who offered the Pesach offering turned to their tents? After all, it was already stated in the previous books of the Torah, and even in our *parasha*, that one must eat matza for seven days. Why, then, is a reminder needed in verse 8, that after each person turns to his tent, six more days are left for eating matza?

The answer to this question is connected to the purpose of the entire section. We already said that our *parasha's* perspective on the festivals is their connection to "the place that the Lord shall choose." The laws of the Pesach offering and the Festival of Matzot discussed in verses 1-8 are also discussed from this perspective – which of them must be observed in the place that the Lord shall choose and which of them apply also outside this place. Most of the laws mentioned here must be kept in the place that the Lord shall choose, but there are some laws that extend to outside of it, and this extension takes place in two dimensions – the dimension of place and the dimension of time.

The prohibition of *chametz* is connected to the Pesach offering, which must be brought to the place that the Lord shall choose, as is stated in verse 3: "You shall eat no leavened bread **with it,"** but it spreads out beyond it, as is stated in verse 4: "And there shall be no leaven seen with you **in all your borders seven days."**

The commandment to eat matza is also connected to the Pesach offering, as is stated in verse 3: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread **with it,** even the bread of affliction."[[7]](#footnote-7) However, only on the first day must it be eaten in the place where the Lord shall choose. The morning of the second day marks the end of the obligations connected to that place, and the people of Israel return to their tents. But the Festival of Matzot continues. Verse 8 mentions the *mitzvot* related to the festival that apply on the coming days of the festival, when the people are already home in their tents. The mitzva of eating matza continues during those six days, and refraining from working on the seventh day (as on the first day) applies even after a person has returned to his home.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**III. The Halakha that Eating Matza all Seven Days is Voluntary**

Let us return to the other interpretation of the verse: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread," according to which the intention is to exclude the seventh day from the obligation to eat matza. As noted above, this interpretation serves in the *baraita* in tractate *Pesachim* as the source of a fundamental *halakha* – that the instruction that repeats itself many times in the Torah to eat unleavened bread for seven days was not meant as an obligation, but as a voluntary act (apart from the first night, on which it is obligatory to eat matza).

As we saw, in tractate *Menachot*, another *baraita* is brought in the name of R. Shimon ben Elazar, according to which the verse: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread" refers to matzot from the new produce, which can only be eaten for six days, beginning with the second day of the festival of Matzot – the day of the waving of the *omer.*

*Tosafot* (*Menachot* 66a, s.v. *katuv echad omer sheshet yamim tokhal matzot*) comment about the relationship between the two *baraitot*:

At the end of *Arvei Pesachim* (120a), they expound from it [the verse: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread"] – just as [on] the seventh day [the eating of unleavened bread] is voluntary, so [on] the six days… Perhaps two things are learned from it [the verse].

The resolution offered by the *Tosafot* is difficult. It is impossible to derive both *derashot* from the verse, as they interpret the verse in opposite manners, and therefore exclude one another! According to the *baraita* in *Pesachim*, the "six days" are from the first to the sixth days of the festival, whereas according to the *baraita* in *Menachot*, the "six days" are from the second to the seventh day. It turns out that according to the *baraita* in *Menachot*, the seventh day is included in "six days you shall eat unleavened bread" and is not removed from the law of eating matza; it cannot shed light on itself or on the other six days, teaching that eating matza on them is a voluntary act.

This is also the case according to the commentators from R. Sa’adya Gaon and the Ibn Ezra to R. Hoffman. According to their understanding of the verse: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread," there is no room for the exposition: "Just as on the seventh day eating unleavened bread is voluntary, so on the six days it is voluntary."

The question may now be raised: Do the exposition of R. Shimon ben Elazar in tractate *Menachot* and the explanations of the commentators cited above cancel the law that established the eating of matza all seven days as a voluntary act, thereby turning the eating of matza all seven days of the festival into an absolute obligation, as it follows from the plain meaning of many verses (cited at the beginning of section II)?

This is wholly unreasonable. The accepted halakha is that the obligation to eat matza is only on the first night, while on the other days of the festival, there is no such obligation. It seem that this halakha does not depend on the exposition brought in the Talmud – not on the interpretation that the verse "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread" comes to exclude the seventh day, which is not the plain meaning of the verse, and not on the expansion of this law to the rest of the days of the festival based on the principle that "anything that was included in the general law and then excluded from the general law was excluded not in order to shed light upon itself, but in order to shed light upon the general law."[[9]](#footnote-9)

It stands to reason that this halakha is included among what the Rambam refers to in the introduction to his commentary to the Mishna as "explanations received from Moshe," about which there is no disagreement whatsoever:

But even though they are transmitted and there is no dispute about them, we can – with the wisdom of the Torah that is given to us – extrapolate these explanations [from the Torah] by one of the ways of reasoning, or from the associations, proofs, or hints found in Scripture. And when you see in the Talmud that they are investigating and disagreeing… and bringing proofs for one of these explanations, and similar to these… they did not bring these proofs because the matter was in doubt to them, until it became known to them from these proofs… But rather without a doubt, we have seen from Yehoshua until now… And there is no disagreement about it, but rather they were probing for the hint that is found in Scripture for this transmitted explanation… And this matter is that which they said: "Its general principles and its details [from Sinai]," that is to say, matters that we can extrapolate by "the general principle and the detail" and the rest of the thirteen [hermeneutical] principles, but they were [also] transmitted from Moshe from Sinai.[[10]](#footnote-10)

If so, even someone who interprets the verse in a manner different from the exposition brought in tractate *Pesachim* agrees about the halakha itself, which was accepted from time immemorial, that there is no obligation to eat matza all seven days.

Now the question arises: What is the relationship between this received halakha and the plain meaning of all the verses, which clearly implies a mitzvato eat matza all seven days?

**IV. A Voluntary Act that is a Mitzva**

One who examines the list of verses cited at the beginning of section II will see that most of them are formulated as clear imperatives: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" (*Shemot* 12:15); "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Aviv" (*Shemot* 23:15); and may others like them.

Indeed, some of the medieval commentators observed that the plain meaning of Scripture indicates that there is a mitzvato eat matza all seven days. The first of them was the Ibn Ezra, who noted this in two places in his long commentary to the book of *Shemot*. In his commentary to *Shemot* 12:15, "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread," he adds and explains also the verse in *Devarim* 16:3: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, even the bread of affliction; for in haste did you come forth out of the land of Egypt; that you may remember the day when you came forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life":

The reason for "you shall eat unleavened bread" – in remembrance of your eating when you went forth from Egypt… of that which happened to you when you went forth from Egypt, for there it is written: "for it was not leavened" (*Shemot* 12:39). Had the Egyptians allowed them to tarry a little, they would have made their dough leaven. And during the seven days after they went forth, they ate unleavened bread until Pharaoh drowned on the seventh day…

And thus it is written about Pesach [in *Devarim*]: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, even the bread of affliction." Here it is mentioned about Pesach "seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" – **an obligation according to the plain meaning.** And the proof is: "that you may remember the day that you came forth" [for if it is not an obligation, but a voluntary act, how can the Torah give as a reason for this: "that you may remember"].

The Ibn Ezra says this a second time in his commentary to *Shemot* 23:15:

Here it is written: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread," like: "You shall keep the festival of Sukkot seven days" (*Devarim* 16:13). We see here that **it is an obligation.**

So it would appear also from the words of the Rambam in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (3: 43), where he gives a reason for the mitzvaof eating matza on Pesach:

If, however, the eating of the unleavened bread would only last for one day, we would not take notice of it and its meaning would not be made clear. For man often eats one kind of food for two or three days. Accordingly, the meaning of [the eating of unleavened bread] only becomes clear and the account with which it is connected only becomes generally known through its being eaten for a complete period [a full week].

It is difficult to reconcile this reason for eating matza all seven days with the assumption that this eating is voluntary.

It may be added that the very name of the festival in the Torah – "the Festival of Matzot" – testifies to the fact that eating matza on all the days of the festival is what characterizes it and gives it its name, as is the case with "the Festival of Sukkot." If the eating of matza on the festival is not an ongoing mitzvabut a voluntary act, what is the point of calling it "the Festival of Matzot"?

R. M.M. Kasher dealt with this issue at length (*Torah Sheleima*, vol. 10-11 [to *Parasha Bo*], in the addenda, no. 27, "Eating matza all seven days – does this involve a mitzva" (pp. 228-232), and in the introduction to his *Haggada Sheleima*, pp. 159-166).[[11]](#footnote-11) R. Kasher brings more than ten sources from the two Talmuds, from Midrashei Halakha, and from the words of the halakhic arbitrators among the *Geonim* and the *Rishonim* from which it may be inferred that there is a mitzva to eat matza all seven days.

Is it possible to reconcile what seems to be the plain meaning of all those verses in which it is stated that the mitzva of eating matza applies all seven days (an understanding that is supported by several sources in the Oral Law) with the accepted halakha that the eating of matza all seven days is a voluntary act?

A short passage in the second chapter of tractate *Sukka* (27a) may serve as a basis for solving this problem. The *mishna* there states:

R. Eliezer said: A man is obligated to eat fourteen meals in the *sukka*, one on each day and one on each night.

The Sages, however, say: There is no fixed number [Rashi: If he wishes to fast, we do not concern ourselves with him. But if he eats, he must not eat outside the *sukka*], except on the first night of the festival alone.

The Talmud clarifies their disagreement:

What is the reason of R. Eliezer? "You shall dwell [in *sukkot* seven days]" (*Vayikra* 23:42) implies just as you normally dwell. As in a [normal] abode [a man has] one [meal] by day and one by night, so in the *sukka* [he must have] one meal by day and one by night.[[12]](#footnote-12)

And the Rabbis? [They say that the implication is] like an abode. Just as in an abode a man eats if he desires and if he does not so desire he does not eat, so also with the *sukka*; if he desires he eats, and if he does not so desire he does not eat.

But if so, [why should he not have the option] on the first night of the festival also?

R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon ben Yehotzadak: With regard to *sukka* it is stated: "the fifteenth" ["On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Festival of Sukkot"; *Vayikra* 23:34); and with regard to the Festival of Matzot it is stated: "the fifteenth" (ibid. v. 6). Just as there [regarding the Festival of Matzot] the first night alone is obligatory, but from then on it is optional, so here [regarding the festival of Sukkot] also the first night is obligatory, but from then on it is optional.

And in the case [of Pesach], from where do we know this [that the first night is obligatory]? Since the verse states: "At evening you shall eat unleavened bread," Scripture thus establishes it as an obligation.

R. Yochanan draws a double comparison between the mitzvaof dwelling in a *sukka* for seven days and the mitzvaof eating matza for seven days: On the first night, the night of the fifteenth, there is an absolute obligation to dwell in the *sukka* by taking his meal there, just as it is an absolute obligation to eat *matza*; from then on, it is optional. That is to say, one is not obligated to eat a meal in the *sukka* on the Festival of Sukkot, but if one wishes to eat a meal, he must eat it in the *sukka*, just as one is not obligated to eat on the Festival of Matzot, but if one wishes to eat, he must eat matza.

Here it is clear that if one eats in a *sukka* during the seven days of the festival, he fulfills the positive Torah commandment: "You shall dwell in *sukkot* seven days," even though if he does not eat a meal during those seven days (but he eats fruit or meat that need not be eaten in the *sukka*), he has not cancelled this mitzva. R. Yochanan's comparison all but necessitates that this is also the case on the Festival of Matzot: If one eats matza on the seven days of the festival, he fulfills the positive Torah commandment of: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread," even though if he does not eat matza during those seven days, he has not cancelled this mitzva. R. Yochanan refers to both of these halakhic situations as "a voluntary act."

It follows, therefore, that the Festival of Matzot, which teaches us about the obligation to eat in the *sukka* on the night of the fifteenth, learns from the Festival of Sukkot what it means that on the seven days of Pesach, eating matza is a voluntary act.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The parallel that is implied by the words of R. Yochanan between eating a meal in the *sukka* on the other days of the festival and eating matza on the other days of the festival – that they are both "voluntary" acts, but one who performs them fulfills a Torah commandment – raises a question that is discussed by various *Rishonim*. Why do we recite the blessing "to dwell in a *sukka*" over eating a meal therein during the week of Sukkot, whereas over eating matza on the rest of the days of the festival, we do not recite the blessing "about eating matza"?[[14]](#footnote-14)

Here is the answer proposed by R. Zerachya Ha-Levi, the *Ba’al Ha-Ma’or*, at the end of tractate *Pesachim*:

It may be answered: Because on the other days [of Pesach] a person can go without eating matza, and feed on rice and millet and all kinds of fruits. This is not true on Sukkot, for one cannot go for three days without sleeping, and so he must sleep in the *sukka* and pass his leisure in it… This is the reason that we recite a blessing over the *sukka* all seven days, but we do not recite a blessing over matza all seven days. This is a correct reason.

In other words, the mitzva of eating in the *sukka* does not stand on its own, but is rather part of a broader mitzva – to dwell in the *sukka*. The obligation to dwell in the *sukka* includes sleeping there and taking one's meals there, and it is recommended that one even "pass his leisure" in it (*Sukka* 28b). The blessing that was established for eating in the *sukka* is essentially a blessing for all of these activities. Indeed, the wording of the blessing is "to dwell in the *sukka*," but for various reasons it was established that the blessing be recited only over eating, representing also the other activities that must be performed there. Therefore, a blessing is recited over the *sukka* all seven days when one eats there, for even if he could avoid eating a meal in the *sukka* for seven days, he cannot avoid the other activities that must be performed in the *sukka*, and the blessing he recites relates to all those duties as well.

On the Festival of Matzot, on the other hand, eating matza is the entire mitzva, and it does not represent other obligations. The wording of the blessing was accordingly established: "about eating matza." How, then, can a person say that God **commanded** him about eating matza, when in fact this is a voluntary action, and he can free himself of eating matza all seven days by eating meat and fruit?

**V. “All seven days a mitzva” – The Position of the Vilna Gaon and the Chizkuni’s Explanation of the Mekhilta**

This conception of the mitzva of eating matza all seven days as a Torah commandment that is a "voluntary act" because one can avoid observing it is clearly formulated in the words of several *Acharonim*, but first and foremost it is attributed to the Gaon R. Eliyahu of Vilna.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The Gra himself did not write this, but his disciple R. Yissachar Ber recorded his position for posterity in his book *Ma'aseh Rav*, in which he describes the Gra's customary practices. In *Hilkhot Pesach*, he writes as follows (no. 181):

"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" – All seven days it is a mitzva, and it is called a voluntary act only in relation to the first night, when it is an obligation. A mitzva in relation to an obligation is called a voluntary act.[[16]](#footnote-16) **Nevertheless, it is positive commandment by Torah law.**

He was very fond of the mitzva of eating matza all seven days, and on the last festival day he ate a third meal, even though he did not eat such a meal on other festival days, because of his fondness for the mitzva of eating matza, whose time was passing.

We find a very similar position in the words of the medieval commentator the Chizkuni, in his commentary to *Shemot* 12:18. The verse states:

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.

In the *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael* (*Bo, massekhet de-pischa, parasha* 10), it is stated regarding this verse:

"Until the twenty-first day of the month in the evening" – what does this verse come to teach?

Since it is stated: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" – I only know about the days. From where do I know about the nights? Therefore the verse states: "Until the twenty-first day" – to include the nights [because this notation of the time from one point to another includes everything in between].

This is the way the Chizkuni explains these words of the *Mekhilta* (as they were cited by Rashi, ad loc.):

For certain things one receives reward for doing them and punishment for not doing them, e.g., matza on the first night [of Pesach].

And for certain things one does not receive reward for doing them or punishment for not doing them, e.g., matza from the first night and on. [This is the conventional understanding of the voluntary nature of eating matza all seven days, but on this the Chizkuni asks]:

Nevertheless, it is written: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" [and the plain meaning of the verse indicates that this is a mitzvafor which reward **is** given for its performance]. That is to say, if one ate matza all seven days, he fulfilled this verse of "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread."

"From where do I know about the nights?" [This is the *Mekhilta's* question]. That is to say, if one ate matza all seven nights, from where do we know that he fulfilled the verse? Therefore the verse teaches: "until the twenty-first day."

According to the Chizkuni's explanation, the *Mekhilta* explicitly states that there is a Torah mitzvato eat matza all seven days of the festival, and the verse discussed by the *Mekhilta* comes to teach us that this mitzvais fulfilled not only by day, but also during the night.

\* \* \*

The concept presented in the last sections of our study regarding the mitzva of eating matza all seven days of the festival – that it is not an obligation, but one who eats matza on these days fulfills a Torah commandment – need not be based on an exposition of the verse in our *parasha*: "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread," and on the hermeneutical principle regarding "something which was included in the general law and then excluded from the general law." Even those who explain the verse in our *parasha* in its plain sense – that it does not remove the seventh day from the general law regarding the eating of matza – can accept the conception presented at the end of this study. This conception stems from the plain meaning of many verses that teach that there is a mitzva to eat matza all seven days of the Festival of Matzot, as well as from the broad comparison between the mitzva of eating matzaand the mitzva of dwelling in a *sukka*, both of which begin on the night of the fifteenth with obligatory eating and continue during the rest of the festival with eating that is a mitzvabut still voluntary.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael* *Bo, massekhta de-pischa, parasha* 8, on *Shemot* 12:15: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread"; *Torat Kohanim*, *Emor* 11:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This verse, which is frequently quoted in the *gemara* and in the words of the *Rishonim* as the source for eating matza and *maror* together with the Pesach offering, is stated with respect to *Pesach Sheni*. Clearly, the *gemara* is referring to the similar verse stated with regard to the first Pesach offering (*Shemot* 12:8): "And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it." See also *Torah Sheleima*, XI, p. 94, and in the addenda to that volume, pp. 210-213. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael Bo*, *massekhta de-pischa, parasha* 8; Yerushalmi *Pesachim* 6:1 (33a); *Torat Kohanim, Emor* 12:5; *Sifrei Devarim* 134; Targum Pseudo-Yonatan on our verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This verse is brought in tractate *Menachot* (as well as in *Torat Kohanim, Emor*)as proof that the time for the waving of the *omer* "on the morrow of the Sabbath" is on the morrow of the first day of the Festival of Matzot, for only in that way are we regularly left with six days to eat unleavened bread from the new produce. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is not how Rashi interpreted what is stated in a *baraita* in tractate *Pesachim* 95b: "The first Pesach requires spending the night [in Jerusalem] – the **first** night he must sleep in Jerusalem; from then on he is permitted to dwell outside the wall within the limit. This is the meaning of 'to your tents' – to the tent outside the wall, but not to his actual house, for it is a festival day." According to his explanation there, "You shall turn in the morning" refers to the morning of the fifteenth.

   However, in tractate *Rosh Hashana* 5a (s.v. *ta'un lina* and s.v. *u-fanita ba-boker*), Rashi explains the matter as he explains in his commentary to the Torah; so too in *Sukka* 47a (s.v. *ve-lina*). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It should be noted that the commentators cited above – who connect the end of verse 7, "then you shall turn in the morning and go to your tents," to the beginning of verse 8, "six days you shall eat unleavened bread" – actually solve two difficulties in these two verses. First, the "morning" on which it is possible to turn "to your tents" is clarified. The commentators widely debated the matter (see the various explanations of Rashi discussed in the previous note). See also the detailed discussion in R. Hoffman's commentary to *Vayikra*, p. 122, note 45. Verse 8, which is a continuation of the preceding verse, establishes that this morning is the morning of the sixteenth of Nisan, which is reasonable also for other reasons. Second, this connection clarifies which are the six days on which "you shall eat unleavened bread." If verse 8 is a continuation of verse 7, it is clear that the six days are from the second to the seventh day. If so, these two verses explain each other and prove what the correct explanation is of each one of them. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Chizkuni's interpretation of these words, cited at the end of note 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. R. Hoffman offers a similar explanation in his commentary to the book of *Devarim* (Tel-Aviv, 5720, pp. 264 and 269) of the fact that our *parasha* mentions a prohibition of work only with respect to the seventh day of the Festival of Matzot: "The book of *Devarim…* does not repeat this [the prohibitions of work on the days of the festivals] in a specific manner, with the exception of the seventh day of Pesach, because according to the plain sense of 16:7, the people of Israel were not obligated to appear before God on that day, and it falls out during the period of the harvest, and therefore they could have erred and thought that work is permitted then." [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Indeed, the use of this hermeneutical principle here raises a difficulty, as was pointed out by the editor of *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael*, Ch. Sh. Horwitz, in his commentary to the *Mekhilta's* exposition (*Bo, massekhta de-pischa, parasha* 8, p. 27), which parallels the exposition of the *baraita* in *Pesachim*: "This exposition is puzzling, for how can it be called 'something that was excluded from the general law in order to shed light upon the general law," when it contradicts the general law, for in one verse it says 'seven' and in the other verse it says 'six'?" Indeed, one who examines the examples brought for this principle in R. Yishmael's *baraita* will find that they are not at all like the exposition under discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Hakdamot Ha-Rambam La-Mishna*, ed. R. Y. Shilat, pp. 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In *Haggada Sheleima* he repeats what he writes in *Torah Sheleima*, but adds valuable additions in various places. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The practice of eating three meals a day is a relatively new practice. In Biblical, Mishnaic, and Talmudic times, people dined twice a day. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Ibn Ezra alludes to this comparison between the *mitzva* of dwelling in the *sukka* for seven days and the *mitzva* of eating matza for seven days in his commentary to *Shemot* 23:14, and his words are cited at the beginning of this section. He, however, concludes from this comparison that the eating of matza is an obligation, but perhaps he means that it is a *mitzva*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Some *Rishonim* (the *Ittur*, *Aseret Ha-Dibrot*; R. Shemuel, *Orchot Chayim*, *Hilkhot Sukka*) answer this question by rejecting the very comparison between the "voluntary act" of eating in a *sukka* and the "voluntary act" of eating matza, arguing that the former is a "voluntary act of a *mitzva*," whereas the latter is an "absolutely voluntary act," which involves no fulfillment of a *mitzva*. However, the answer that we will bring below from the words of the *Ba’al Ha-Ma’or* does not accept this distinction, which is clear already from his formulation of the question: "Some ask: When eating matza, why do we not recite a blessing over it all seven days, in the way that we recite a blessing over the *sukka* all seven days, for we learn the one from the other, that the first night is an obligation and from then on it is a voluntary act, both regarding matza and regarding *sukka*, as is stated in chapter *Ha-Yashen* (*Sukka* 27a)." [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The other *Acharonim* who mention this were influenced by what they heard in the name of the Gra; this includes the *Chatam Sofer* (*Responsa*, *Yoreh De'ah* 191); *Arukh Ha-Shulchan*, *Orach Chayyim* 475:18; the author of the *Ketav Ve-Ha-Kabbala*, R. Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, in his commentary to *Devarim* 16:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is how the *Tosafot* (*Berakhot* 26a, s.v. *ta'a*) explain the words of Rav (*Berakhot* 27b): "The evening prayer is optional" – "That which we said it is optional, that is to say, in comparison to a different *mitzva* whose opportunity to fulfill it is passing… but it should not be cancelled for no reason." [↑](#footnote-ref-16)