Preparing for Pesach

At the beginning of *Parshas Vayikra*, Hashem called to Moshe before their conversation inside the *Ohel* *Moed*. Rashi explains that even though Hashem revealed himself to the prophets of the other nations abruptly and without warning in a manner which is described as “and Hashem happened to meet Balaam” (*Bamidbar* 23:4), Hashem called to Moshe prior to speaking with him as an expression of personal affection. The *Sfas Emes* explains further that Hashem announced his meeting with Moshe beforehand in order to give Moshe time to properly prepare himself for their encounter. Rav Tzadok Hakohen (*Pri Tzaddik*), derives from here that in order for any spiritual experience to be meaningful and leave a lasting impact upon us we must first ready ourselves sufficiently beforehand. Only if we make a concerted effort to appreciate the value and significance of what is about to occur can we internalize and assimilate the message and lesson that is being conveyed.

Whenever we experience a moment of genuine spiritual inspiration, if we are unprepared for it in advance, its effectiveness will be muted and its ability to serve as a catalyst for real change will invariably be diminished. At the time of *keriyas Yam Suf* the people present pointed at Hashem and unequivocally declared, “This is my God and I will glorify him” (*Shemos* 15:2). The *Yalkut Shimoni* (section 244) comments that even the maidservants at *keriyas* *Yam* *Suf* were granted a more intense divine revelation than that which was experienced by both Yechezkel and Yishayahu. Nonetheless, despite this awesome and overwhelming event the maidservants did not become prophetesses, they remained maidservants. Rav Chaim Shmuelevtiz (*Sichas Mussar*) suggests that this was because the maidservants entered into the moment unprepared, they invested nothing in advance, and therefore they received nothing in return. The degree to which a spiritual experience impacts upon us is directly dependent and contingent upon the amount of effort we expended preparing for it beforehand.

The *Gemara* (*Gittin* 77a) states that the three days prior to Shabbos, from Wednesday to Friday, are attributed to the following Shabbos, and the three days following Shabbos, from Sunday to Tuesday, are related to the previous Shabbos. The Shem Mishmuel explains that the holiness of Shabbos continues for an additional three days precisely because we invested three days beforehand. Since we prepared for three days in advance of Shabbos, the impact of the Shabbos can be felt for an additional three days after Shabbos, corresponding exactly to the measure of effort we invested beforehand. For this reason as well, the *Gemara* in *Gittin* claims that the influence of *yom tov* lasts for a period of thirty days following the conclusion of *yom tov*. This too is a function of the requirement mentioned in the *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 6a) to prepare before Pesach for a period of thirty days. Since we prepared for a period of thirty days before yom tov, the influence of the *yom tov* also continues for an additional thirty days.

However, according to some *rishonim* (see *Biur Halacha* 429:1) the obligation to prepare for thirty days prior to *yom tov* is limited to the *yom tov* of Pesach. This is supported by the *Gemara* (*Megillah* 32a) which implies that on every other *yom tov* it is sufficient to review the laws of that particular *yom tov* on the day of *yom tov* itself. Pragmatically, the *yom tov* of Pesach might demand extra preparation since it encompasses so many intricate and complicated laws. However, perhaps the *yom* *tov* of Pesach needs a greater investment of time beforehand since the impact of Pesach must endure well beyond the conclusion of the *yom tov*. It is during the *yom tov* of Pesach that we must cultivate and refortify our foundation of *emunah* and *bitachon* that will sustain us throughout the coming year, therefore, in order to create this effect, we must prepare well in advance of Pesach as well.

As a result of the coronavirus crisis which is gripping our community and the entire world, preparing for Pesach this year will undoubtably require an even greater effort than usual. However, if we invest properly in preparing for Pesach, may the themes of Pesach define our home and our lives throughout the coming year, and may we be *zoche* to a *refuah* and a redemption as individuals and as a community, culminating with the ultimate *geulah* *be’meheirah be’yameinu*.