

Parsha Ponders

Pesach | April 5, 2020 | 12 Nissan 5780

You take half, and I'll take the other half¹

ויקח מצה האמצעית ויבצענה לשתים ויתן חציה (הגדולה) לאחד מהמסובין לשומרה לאפיקומן ונותנים אותה תחת המפה וחציה השני ישים בין שתי השלימות

Take the middle matzah and split it into two. Give the (larger²) half to one of those at the *seder* to guard it for the *Afikoman*, and they put it under a cloth. The second half place among the other two complete *matzos*³

Many people have the custom to have three *matzos* on their seder plate⁴. While there are practical reasons to have this number⁵, there's also symbolism in the number three. A famous explanation is that they represent the three forefathers: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov⁶. The simple explanation behind this symbolism is that it was in the merit of the forefathers that the Jews were redeemed from Egypt⁷. The part of the seder known as *Yachatz* is where we break the middle *matzah* and save the larger half for the *Afikoman*. Is there any connection behind this symbolism, and the fact that it's specifically the middle *matzah* that is broken?

There's an astounding story described in the *gemarra*⁸, a rendition of a conversation that will take place in the end of days. Hashem will so-to-speak approach our forefather Avraham, and tell him: "Your children have sinned." Avraham, uncharacteristically, will say: "Destroy them!" Hashem will say to Himself: "Avraham never really had a hard time raising kids. Let's ask Yaakov, who struggled with childrearing. Maybe he'll have mercy and pray for his descendants." Hashem will tell Yaakov: "Your children have sinned." Yaakov as well will respond: "Destroy them! They are sinners!" Hashem, will so-to-speak feel frustrated. He'll say: "The old man Avraham doesn't have reasoning, and the young Yaakov doesn't have concern. Let's see what Yitzchak has to say".

Hashem will tell Yitzchak: "Your children have sinned." Yitzchak will respond: "Master of the World, they're my children? Are they not Your children? From the moment they said, 'We will do' before they

¹ Based on *Minchas Asher Sichos Al HaMoadim Pesach* s.v. פלגא עלי ופלגא עלך, said over in a *shiur* on the *Arbah Kosos* given in 5773 (found on <https://www.torahbase.org/four-kosos-5773/> at the end)

² *Magen Avraham* *ad. loc.* § 21, citing *Sefer Maharil Seder HaHaggadah* § 21 and *Bach* *ad. loc.* s.v. ומ"ש חציה

³ *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 473:6, based on *Pesachim* 115b and *Piskei Rosh Pesachim* 10:30

⁴ *Shulchan Aruch* *loc. cit.* § 4, based on *Tosafos* to *Pesachim* 116a s.v. מה and *Piskei Rosh* *loc. cit.*, amongst others. Cf. *Biur HaGra* *ad. loc.* § 11, who rules like the *Rif Pesachim* 25b and *Mishneh Torah Hilchos Chametz UMatzah* 8:6, who say to have two *matzos* on the seder plate. He notes this is also the opinion of *Rav Menachem Minyoni*, cited in *Tosafos* *loc. cit.*

⁵ *Tosafos* and *Rosh* *loc. cit.* say that you need *lechem mishneh* even on Yom Tov, so there needs to be two whole *matzos* at the time of the blessing. As well, *Pesachim* *loc. cit.* says that *matzah* is referred to as לחם עוני, poor mans' bread (*Deuteronomy* 16:3), because it's supposed to be eaten as a piece, and not whole. Therefore, one of the three is split in two, and the other two are (initially) left whole

⁶ *Ma'aseh Rokeach* 16:58. Another famous explanation is that the three *matzos* represent the three categories of Jews: Kohen, Levi, and Yisroel. This comes from the teachings of the *Arizal*, written in *Pri Eitz Chaim Sha'ar Chag HaMatzos* Chapter 6, brought by the *Ba'er Heitev* *ad. loc.* § 8. For sure there are *kabbalistic* explanations for this, but see *Shevet HaLevi* 1:136 for a practical explanation. See also *Aruch HaShulchan Orach Chaim* 460:6

⁷ *Shemos Rabbah* 15:4

⁸ *Shabbos* 89b

said, 'We will listen'⁹ You called them 'My firstborn son'¹⁰ And now, they're considered my children and not Yours? Further, how much could they really have sinned? How many years does the average person live? Seventy years¹¹? Take away the first twenty of those years, as a person is not held accountable in Heaven until they're twenty¹². Of the remaining fifty, half of that is at night, when it's not practical to sin. Of the remaining twenty-five, half of that is spent praying, eating, and relieving oneself." Yitzchak concluded: "All that remains is twelve and a half years to sin. Hashem, if You can bear all of that, then great. If not, I'll bear half myself, so long as You bear the other half. Even if You say that I have to bear all of it, behold, I offered myself to You on an altar.

We see from here that it will only be Yitzchak who will try to defend us in the end of days¹³. In his merit, and due to his intervention, the Jews in the future will see Divine mercy and eternal redemption. Yitzchak's winning argument will be that he bear half the Jews' sins, and Hashem bear the other half. Perhaps, to hint to this future dialogue, we specifically break the middle *matzah*. This middle one is the one that represents Yitzchak. Half of it we keep for the *Afikoman*. In fact, we take the larger half for the *Afikoman*. Maybe when Hashem and Yitzchak divide up the sins of the Jews, it won't be evenly split. If there were to be one half that is larger than the other, presumably Hashem would take the larger half upon Himself. This is symbolized by the larger half being reserved for the *Afikoman*, eaten at the end of the seder, which represents the ultimate redemption¹⁴. That is to say, in the merit of our forefather Yitzchak, we will merit the ultimate redemption. May it come speedily in our days.

Chag Kasher VeSameach!

⁹ Exodus 24:7

¹⁰ Ibid 4:22. This can't be understood literally, as Hashem called them this while they were still in Egypt, and they said ונשמע after the Exodus. Perhaps since Hashem knew they would say this, they got this title even then

¹¹ Based on Psalms

¹² אין ב"ד של מעלה מענשין עד עשרים שנה. This idea also appears in Yerushalmi Bikkurim 2:1, brought by Tosafos to Moed Kattan 28a s.v. מה בחמישים; Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 11:5; Bereishis Rabbah 58:1, brought by Rashi to Genesis 23:1; Bamidbar Rabbah 18:4 and Midrash Tanchuma Korach § 5, brought by Rashi to Numbers 16:27. See also Torah Sheleimah to Genesis Chapter 3 § 202. For discussions on the ramifications of this concept, see Teshuvos Chacham Tzvi § 49 (and the Chida's rebuttal in Nachal Kadumim Chayei Sarah), Noda B'Yehudah II Yoreh Deah § 164, Teshuvos Chasam Sofer Yoreh Deah § 155, Chavos Yair § 166, Pardes Yosef to Genesis 23:1, and Sichos Chochmah UMussar § 50 (from Rav Dovid Kronglass zt"l, mashgiach of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel)

¹³ See Sanhedrin 107a which says all of the forefathers underwent tests, and Emes L'Yaakov to Genesis 27:12 understands that this dialogue will be Yitzchak's test, as it goes against his inherent nature

¹⁴ Rav Asher Weiss said this like it was a known idea. I only found it in Derashos Chasam Sofer II p. 306 col. 4 ד"ה כתוב, although it probably appears elsewhere