

Shabbat Hagadol: Hamaor Hagadol (The week before Erev Pesach Shehal Lihiyot beShabbat)

- Nisson Shulman.

(The Shabbat HaGadol derasha will be given in most synagogues a week early because of erev Pesach shehal lihiyot beShabbat.)

Many reasons why it is called Shabbat Hagadol. (Avi Mori zt"l list a number in his book, Hilchot Hag HaPesach.) The Aruch Hashulchan explains the relationship between Shabbat (testimony to briat haolam) and Pesach (testimony to Hashgachat HaBoreh). Each gives meaning to the other. This thought can also be perceived in the first commandment as found in Yitro compared to Vaetchanan. In the spirit of this thought Rav Soloveitchik explained the relationship of Hamaor hagadol and the maor hakatan, where the gadol illuminates the katan by sharing its light. A lesson for all of us.

SHABBAT HAGADOL: (The week before Erev Pesach shehal lihiyot beShabbat)
(Including a thought from Harav Yoseph Dov Soloveitchk zt"l)

There are many reasons why the Shabbat before Pesach is called Shabbat Hagadol. Avi Mori zt"l (Rav Moshe Yitzchok Shulman), lists some of the reasons in his short book, "Hilchot Hag HaPesach" (published by Vaad Hahinuch Haharedi), including Rashi's explanation that it refers to the great miracle of our setting aside the Pesach offering, designating it for slaughter, and the Egyptians did not harm us even though they worshipped such animals (Siddur Rashi, No. 352), the Pri Chadash who suggests it was because on this Shabbat we were given the first commandment as a new nation, to set aside the lamb, the reference to the Haftarah when we read of yom Hashem hagadol vehanora which Eliyahu Hanavi will come to herald (Malachi 3).

The Aruch Hashulchan gives a unique reason for calling this Shabbat Hagadol. He says, Shabbat is the testimony to God's Creation. It teaches that the world belongs to God and everything in it. He made it. We are all His. Pesach is the Symbol of God's intervention in history. He saved us from Egypt. Our people are His in a special way. So Sabbath testifies that the world is God's. Pesach testifies that our people are God's. In Hebrew terms Sabbath is witness to the bria, God's Creation of His world. Passover is witness to hashgacha, God's providence over His world and His people. Each without the other is meaningless. For that reason, right after the Exodus God gave us the Sabbath at our first stop, Mara, and did not wait until Sinai. Therefore, this Shabbat which is connected to the Exodus (and its karban Pesach) is called the Great Sabbath, for it is the prototype of all the Sabbaths, and it gives meaning to Pesach just as Pesach gives meaning to the Shabbat.

This thought can also be perceived in the Ten Commandments as they appear in Yitro and Vaetchanan. In Yitro the stress is on our testimony to the creation of heaven and earth; ki sheshet yamim asa.... In Vaetchanan the stress is on our testifying to God's hand in history, vezacharta ki eved hayita lePharoh beMitzrayim.... In fact, when we say zachor veshamor bedibur echad neemru, we mean more than that Shabbat is composed of positive and negative commandments

that are indivisible. We are actually saying that both facets of the Shabbat are one. The Creator of the universe is the same as the Guide of our history.

Now in the spirit of this thought, I heard an explanation given by my revered teacher Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, zt"l. He said, Let us examine the word gadol. Where was it first used in the Torah? In the story of creation, where the sun is called the great light, hamaor hagadol, and the moon is called the lesser light, hamaor hakatan.

They are so called, not only because of the amount of light, the power each manifests, but rather and especially because the sun gives light to the moon. The sun is great because, not only does it shine with its own light, but it also gives the light whereby the moon, by reflection, can also shine. And this is the true definition of greatness according to our sages; enabling another to shine through you.

Why then is this called the Great Sabbath? Because it was the Sabbath which gave meaning to all the rest. Being connected with the theme of Pesach and being fulfilled by it, reflecting each the other's theme so as to make a whole concept of God's Creation and God's Providence – this Sabbath gives meaning and significance to all the other Sabbaths of the year. Since they all take their meaning from it, it can be called hagadol, according to the true significance Judaism gives to the word; of hashpaa, influence over others.

People and institutions are the same way. When are they considered truly great? When they influence others and share their greatness with them. A Synagogue can be famous, warm and beautiful. Its services may be magnificent. Its people might be intellectually superior, financially and politically powerful leaders in the Jewish world. But it will be great only according to the true Jewish measure, only insofar as it shares its gifts and blessings with the entire community, with Israel, with Jews all over the world. The people in it show greatness in that measure with which they demonstrate how much they care for their brothers and sisters.

There are many people who are scholarly and pious, and their number is increasing, thank God. There are many neighborhoods in Israel where the scholarly and pious have spread yama vakedma, tzafona vanegba. This is gratifying and hopeful. But they will only be great if they learn to share their wisdom, their piety, and their learning with the community that was not so blessed. Like the sun reflects upon the moon, the pious community in Israel and in America must learn ways to reach out to the non-religious community and share blessings with them. We dare not overlook this challenge. Meeting it is the only measure by which Jews become truly great.

This is the thought of Rabbi Soloveitchik. It is well to remember this upon this prototype Sabbath, the Great Sabbath which will take place next week Erev Pesach, the Shabbat that lends its power and its meaning to all other Sabbaths of the year.

(Submitted by Nisson Shulman)