



“Shabbas HaGadol” Alludes to Avraham Avinu a Giant among Men Who Transformed the Small “Hei” of “בהבראם” into the Enlarged “Hei” of “הלה’ תגמלו זאת”

The auspiciously approaching Shabbas Kodesh is referred to as **Shabbas HaGadol**; this designation refers to the Shabbas immediately preceding Chag HaPesach. In the words of the author of the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 430): **The Shabbas before the Pesach is called Shabbas HaGadol, because of the miracle that was performed on it.** The Tur (ibid.) cites a Midrash that explains the miracle that was performed:

The exodus took place on a Thursday. On the preceding Shabbas, the tenth of Nissan, every Jew was commanded to take a lamb for his family as a Pesach offering and tie it to the foot of his bed. When the curious Egyptians inquired about this strange ritual, they responded that they planned to sacrifice these animals to their G-d. The Egyptians stood by silently as Bnei Yisrael prepared to slaughter their deity. It is called Shabbas HaGadol to commemorate this miracle.

In the sefer Yavin Shemuah (Chametz, Chapter 1), the Rashbatz explains why they named this Shabbas **HaGadol**—in the masculine—rather than **HaGedolah**—in the feminine. Even though the term Shabbas is usually considered to be feminine, it can also be masculine. As proof, he quotes the passuk (Bamidbar 28, 10): “עולת שבת בשבתו”. Notwithstanding, if Shabbas is both masculine and feminine, we must endeavor to explain why they saw fit to name this Shabbas **Shabbas HaGadol** in the masculine.

Yisrael Slaughtered the Pesach Offering in Mitzrayim in the Merit of Avraham Avinu

We will suggest an explanation based on the teachings of the Chiddushei HaRim, zy”a. He asserts that the historic Shabbas on which Yisrael were commanded to take animals for a korban-Pesach is called **Shabbas HaGadol** in honor of Avraham Avinu, who is referred to as “**hagadol**” in the following passuk (Yehoshua 14, 15): “וְשֵׁם חֶבְרוֹן לְפָנִים קָרִית אַרְבַּע הָאָדָם הַגָּדוֹל בְּעַנְקִים: הוּא—formerly, the name of Chevron was Kiryas Arba, who was the biggest man among the Anakim (giants). They expounded in the Midrash (ibid. 14, 6): **The biggest man (“hagadol”) among the Anakim refers to Avraham.** The Chiddushei HaRim goes on to explain the connection between Avraham Avinu and the offering of the korban-Pesach in Mitzrayim.

We will expand on his sacred insight based on that which is written (Shemos 12, 21): ויקרא משה לכל זקני ישראל ויאמר אליהם משכו וקחו לכם צאן למשפחותיכם ושחטו הפסח—Moshe called to all the elders of Yisrael. He said to them, “**Draw away and take for yourselves sheep for your families and slaughter the Pesach offering.**” They expounded in the Mechilta: “**Draw away**” your hands from avodah-zarah and “**take for yourselves**” sheep for a mitzvah.

Now, we know that Avraham Avinu was the first to deny the validity of avodah-zarah by shattering

the idols of Terach, his father. Here is the pertinent passuk (Bereishis 11, 28): **”וימת הרן על פני תרח אביו בארץ: מולדתו באור כשדים—Haran (Avraham’s brother) died in the presence of Terach his father, in his native land, in Ur Kasdim. Rashi comments in the name of a Midrash Aggadah: For Terach denounced Avram, his son, before Nimrod for having smashed his idols, and he (Nimrod) threw him (Avram) into a burning furnace. Since HKB”H performed a miracle on his behalf and saved him from the fire, Avraham spent the rest of his life publicizing the name of Hashem throughout the world, as is evident from the following passuk (ibid. 21, 33): ”ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה’—he planted an “eshel” in Be’er Sheva and there he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe.**

As we know, Avraham Avinu imparted his kedushah to all the generations that followed him, as it is written (ibid. 18, 19): **”כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת—for I have cherished him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they abide by the way of Hashem, doing tzedakah and justice.** His willingness to sacrifice his life to disprove the credibility of avodah-zarah was passed down to Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim. Thus, when it was time to depart Mitzrayim, they also placed their lives in jeopardy to discredit the power and legitimacy of the Egyptian deities. They did this by taking lambs on the tenth of Nissan for korban-Pesach offerings without fear of the Egyptians.

Therefore, this Shabbas on which Bnei Yisrael **withdrew their hand from avodah-zarah and took lambs for a mitzvah** is called **Shabbas HaGadol**. This designation indicates that they inherited the power to abolish avodah-zarah from Avraham Avinu—**“hagadol (the biggest man) among the Anakim.”** This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

Yisrael Were Aided by the Combined Kedushahs of Shabbas and Avraham Avinu

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to add a spicy tidbit to the remarks of the Chiddushei HaRim, zy”a. We will refer to the question posed by the Bach (O.C. ibid.). HKB”H established all of the holidays and festivals on the dates they occurred, not on the day of the week they occurred. Since the miracle related to the taking of the Pascal lamb occurred on the tenth of Nissan, it would seem appropriate to commemorate the miracle on the tenth of Nissan, even if it happens to fall on a weekday. Yet we commemorate it specifically on the Shabbas preceding Pesach, which is usually not the tenth of Nissan.

Many answers have been suggested for this question, but they are all based on one fundamental principle—that the kedushah of Shabbas helped Yisrael destroy the Egyptian avodah-zarah, rendering the Egyptians helpless and speechless. As the Shela hakadosh writes (Maseches Pesachim) based on the statement in the Gemara (Shabbas 118b): **”כל” המשמר שבת כהלכתו אפילו עובד עבודה זרה כדור אנוש מוחלין לו—”whoever observes Shabbas according to its law, even if he worships avodah-zarah like the generation of Enosh, he is forgiven.** In other words, Shabbas observance is a tikun even for the severe transgression of avodah-zarah.

Thus, we see that the appellation **Shabbas HaGadol** indicates that a wonderful combination of two entities of kedushah were instrumental in Yisrael’s salvation enabling them to withdraw their hands from the practices of idolatry prevalent in Mitzrayim at that time—the kedushah of **Shabbas** and the kedushah of Avraham Avinu, who is referred to as **“hagadol.”** This also explains why our sages chose to call this Shabbas **Shabbas HaGadol**, using the masculine adjective, rather than **Shabbas HaGedolah**, using the feminine adjective. They wanted to connect the kedushah of

Shabbas with the kedushah of Avraham Avinu—**“the biggest man among the Anakim.”**

The Small “Hei” of “בהבראם” versus the Enlarged “Hei” of “הלה תגמלו זאת”

I would like to continue following the insightful path of the Chiddushei HaRim, zy”a, by adding an insight of our own regarding the appellation **Shabbas HaGadol**. We will begin by introducing a Midrash Pliah presented by the Bnei Yissaschar (Nissan 3, 4): **A person who committed an aveirah, had regrets, and performed teshuvah, HKB”H forgives him all of his iniquities; therefore, it is called Shabbas HaGadol.** This implies that there is an intimate connection between the process of teshuvah and the name **Shabbas HaGadol**, which we must try to understand.

It appears that we can explain the message conveyed by the Midrash based on a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Ha’azinu 297b). In the entire Torah, we find two modifications of the letter **“hei.”** The first appears in a passuk in parshas Bereishis (Bereishis 2, 4): **“אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם”—these are the products of the heavens and the earth when they were created.** Tradition dictates that the **“hei”** of **“בהבראם”** be inscribed in a sefer Torah as a smaller letter than the other letters. The second appears in a passuk in parshas Ha’azinu (Devarim 32, 6): **“הלה תגמלו זאת עם: נבל ולא חכם הלא הוא אביך קנך הוא עשך ויכוננך”—is this how you repay Hashem, you worthless, unwise people?! Is He not your Father, the One Who acquired you? He has made you and established you.** Here tradition dictates that the **“hei”** of **“הלה”** be inscribed as an enlarged letter. It behooves us to consider why these two **“hei”**s specifically were modified from one extreme to the other.

I would like to propose an intriguing explanation based on an illuminating teaching from the incredible teachings of the esteemed Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy”a, in Zera Kodesh (Chag HaSuccos, 1st Night). He brings

down what they expounded in the Midrash (B.R. 12, 9) on the passuk cited above: **“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth בהבראם”—read this as באברהם.** They (the heavens and the earth) were created in the merit of Avraham (**“באברהם”** is an anagram of **“בהבראם”**). Elsewhere in the Midrash (ibid. 10), they expounded: **“בהבראם” indicates that He created them with the letter “hei”—i.e., this word can be read as “בה בראם”.**

The Zera Kodesh asserts that these two elucidations go hand in hand. The world was created with the letter **“hei”** in the merit of Avraham who had the letter **“hei”** added to his name by HKB”H when he performed the mitzvah of **“milah,”** as it is written (Bereishis 17, 5): **“ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם והיה שמך אברהם”—your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham.**

To provide further clarification, the Zera Kodesh refers to a teaching in the Gemara (Menachos 29b):

“ומפני מה נברא העולם הזה בה”י, מפני שדומה לאכסדרא שכל הרוצה לצאת יצא. ומאי טעמא תליא כרעיה, דאי הדר בתשובה מעיילי ליה.” **And why was Olam HaZeh created with the letter “hei”? Because it resembles a pavilion (Rashi: it is open underneath); so that anyone who wishes to leave (go astray) can leave (to lead a life of sin).** Then the Gemara asks: **And for what reason is the left leg of the “hei” hanging (i.e., it is not connected to the top of the “hei”)? So that if he performs teshuvah, they can bring him back in (through the upper opening between the suspended leg and the top of the “hei”).**

A Sinner Who Performs Teshuvah Is Accepted Back by HKB”H in the Merit of Avraham Avinu

From the aspect of **“midas hadin,”** a person who sins against the King of Kings does not deserve a tikun; strictly speaking, his teshuvah should not be accepted. In His infinite mercy, however, HKB”H treats the sinner with divine **“chesed”** above and beyond the dictates of

“din,” and accepts his teshuvah. This is evident from the following passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Makkos 7a): **שאלו לחכמה חוטא מהו עונשו, אמרו להם חטאים תרדף רעה, שאלו לנבואה חוטא מהו עונשו, אמרה להן הנפש החוטאת היא תמות, שאלו לקודשא בריך הוא חוטא מהו עונשו, אמר להן יעשה תשובה ויתכפר לו, היינו דכתיב על כן יורה חטאים בדרך, יורה לחטאים דרך.** **They asked “Chochmah” (Wisdom): “What should the punishment of a sinner be?” She answered them (Mishlei 13, 21): “Evil pursues sinners.” They asked “Nevuah” (Prophecy), “What should the punishment for a sinner be?” She answered them (Yechezkel 18, 4): “The soul that sins shall die.” They asked HKB”H, “What is the punishment for a sinner?” He answered that he should perform teshuvah, and it will atone for him, as it is written (Tehillim 25, 8): “Good and upright is Hashem; therefore, He guides sinners on the proper path”—for He shows the sinners the path to perform teshuvah.**

The Zera Kodesh asserts that the acceptance of a sinner back into good standing via “midas hachesed,” accepting his teshuvah, is in the merit of Avraham Avinu. For, he served Hashem with “midas hachesed” by hosting guests and teaching them to return to their Father in Heaven by means of teshuvah. As it is written: **He planted an “eshel” in Be’er Sheva and there he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe.** Rashi comments: **By means of that “eshel,” the name of HKB”H was proclaimed as G-d of the entire universe. After they would eat and drink, he (Avraham) would say to them, “Recite a blessing to the One of Whose you have eaten.” Do you think that you have eaten of mine? Of that which belongs to Him Who spoke and brought the universe into being you have eaten.**

He asserts that this was HKB”H’s rationale for adding the letter “hei” to Avraham’s name. The right side of the “hei” is an intact, uninterrupted, straight line. It represents Avraham’s flawless, unmitigated,

right sided “midas hachesed.” The left side of the “hei,” on the other hand, is broken and incomplete. It represents the left sided “midas hadin,” which has been broken and diminished due to the merit of Avraham. Therefore, there is an opening in its upper left corner to accept a sinner back once he has performed teshuvah. Thus, the two elucidations of ם truly go hand in hand. The world was created with the letter “hei,” which has an entrance for “ba’alei teshuvah” (on its left side) in the merit of Avraham, who epitomized “midas hachesed” (represented by the intact right side of the “hei”). This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

On Shabbas HaGadol It Was Revealed that HKB”H Accepts the Teshuvah Even of Someone Who Is Guilty of the Sin of Avodah Zarah

Let us continue to elaborate on the marvelous combination of the kedushah of **Shabbas** and the kedushah of Avraham Avinu—who was described as hagadol—to obtain the appellation **Shabbas HaGadol**. Now, we are familiar with the vital concept that Yisrael are allowed a process of tikun by means of teshuvah, because of their status as children of the Omnipresent—“banim laMakom.” We find a source for this concept in the Midrash Tanchuma (Ha’azinu 4):

”כתיב ישא ה’ פניו אליך, וכתוב אחד אומר אשר לא ישא פנים, עושה תשובה נושא לו פנים, יכול לכל, תלמוד לומר אליך, ולא לאומה.” **And it is written (Bamidbar 6, 26): “And Hashem shall lift His face to you”; but another passuk states (Devarim 10, 17): “Who does not lift the face.” Only if one performs teshuvah does He lift His face to him. It is possible that He does this for all. Hence, the passuk says “to you,” but not to another nation.**

Apropos this concept, the Bnei Yissaschar explains (Sivan 2, 5) in the name of the Chida (Rosh David, Emor) why, in fact, teshuvah only works for Jews but

not for goyim. As mentioned above, Jews are G-d's children, as taught in the passuk (ibid. 14, 1): **בְּנֵי** "אתם לה' אלקיכם—you are children to Hashem, your G-d. Now, the Gemara teaches us (Kiddushin 32a): **"האב שמחל על כבודו - כבודו מחול"**—**a father who waived his honor, his honor is waived.** Since Hashem is our father, He is legally permitted to accept Yisrael's teshuvah and forego His kavod.

In contrast to the other nations, who were not willing to accept the Torah, they have the status of servants. As such, HKB"H is their king, not their father, as expressed in the passuk (Tehillim 47, 9): **מֶלֶךְ** "אלקים על גוים—G-d reigns as King over the goyim (nations). It is also written (Yirmiyah 10, 7): **מִי לֹא** "יראך מלך הגוים—who would not fear You, O King of the nations? As such, they are not deserving or entitled to be accepted back by Hashem via teshuvah. This concurs with the Gemara's teaching (ibid.): **מֶלֶךְ** "שמחל על כבודו אין כבודו מחול"—i.e., a king is not allowed to renounce his honor.

Additionally, the Bnei Yissaschar (ibid. 6) cites the Chida (ibid.) explaining the reason for the Gemara's pronouncement (Sanhedrin 58b): **בֶּן נֹחַ שֶׁשָׁבַת חַיִּיב** "מיתה—an idolater ("ben Noach") who observes Shabbas is liable to death. For, Shabbas is the King's scepter; on Shabbas, HKB"H rested from all the work that He had performed, as it is written (Bereishis 2, 2): **"וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה"** — **and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.** Also, we have an established law (Sanhedrin 22a) that a person who utilizes the king's scepter is subject to death as one who rebelled against the sovereignty.

This coincides magnificently with the teaching in our sacred sefarim that Shabbas is the ideal time for teshuvah. The Sidduro shel Shabbas suggest the following "remez": **שְׁבַת** is an acronym for **שְׁבַת בְּיוֹם תְּשׁוּבָה**—**on Shabbas, you shall repent.** In other words, teshuvah is intimately related to Shabbas

Kodesh. After all, we learn from Shabbas that we possess the status of Hashem's children; and in that merit, HKB"H accepts our acts of teshuvah as a father who is permitted to waive his kavod.

We can now return to the teaching in the Zohar hakadosh: In the passuk: **אלה תולדות השמים והארץ** "הבראם", tradition dictates that we inscribe the word "בהבראם" with a small "hei." In contrast, in the passuk: **הלה תגמלו זאת** tradition dictates that the word "הלה" be inscribed with an enlarged "hei." We learn from the anagram of "בהבראם" that the world was created for the sake of Avraham—"באברהם". Also, in the merit of the letter "hei" that was added to his name, we are able to make amends for all our wrongdoings via teshuvah. However, before they left Mitzrayim, the people of Yisrael did not yet appreciate the incredible power of teshuvah—that it rectified even the serious sin of avodah-zarah. Therefore, the "hei" of "בהבראם" remained small.

Yet even though they were guilty of worshipping avodah-zarah during their galus in Mitzrayim; nevertheless, HKB"H instructed them: **משכו וקחו** "לכם צאן". They were afforded the opportunity of withdrawing from the practice of avodah-zarah and beginning to perform mitzvos. This enabled them to appreciate the true significance of the "hei" that HKB"H added to the name of Avraham Avinu—that it illustrates the amazing power and mechanism of teshuvah (as explained above).

Therefore, when HKB"H admonished Yisrael for not performing teshuvah for their transgressions and iniquities, He said to them: **"הלה תגמלו זאת"** with an enlarged "hei." Is this how you repay Hashem?! After all, you witnessed the incredible power of teshuvah at "yetzias Mitzrayim." Even though you worshipped avodah-zarah, you were still forgiven and redeemed. This incredible power is signified by the enlarged "hei." So, why do you not perform teshuvah?!

We can now truly appreciate why Chazal chose to designate the Shabbas prior to Pesach—when Bnei Yisrael took lambs in Mitzrayim for a korban Pesach—as **Shabbas HaGadol**. They wished to highlight the wonderful combination of the kedushah of **Shabbas** and the kedushah of Avraham Avinu, who is described as **“hagadol.”** Both are associated with HKB”H’s magnanimous chesed; He forgives even a Jew’s most serious sins and accepts a Jew’s teshuvah.

At this point, we can also begin to comprehend the statement in the Midrash Pliah cited by the Bnei Yissaschar: **“האדם שעשה עבירה וחזר בו ועשה תשובה”** הקב”ה מוחל לו כל עוונותיו ולכך נקרא שבת הגדול” It became apparent on Shabbas HaGadol that if a Jew performs teshuvah, HKB”H forgives all of his iniquities, even the serious sin of avodah-zarah. In keeping with this essay, we can propose that the appellation **“שבת הגדול”** alludes to the fact that the large **“hei”** of **הלה’ תגמלו**

“זאת”, alluding to the incredible power of teshuvah, was revealed on that Shabbas.

In conclusion, it should now be clear that **Shabbas HaGadol** is a time suited to perform teshuvah. It is the time to incinerate all of the chametz of the yetzer hara embedded in our 248 limbs and 365 sinews. Doing this will prepare us for the kedushah of Chag HaPesach commemorating the exodus of Bnei Yisrael from Mitzrayim. Hopefully, we will be able to fulfill the dictum (Pesachim 116b): **“בכל דור ודור חייב אדם”** **“לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים”**—**in each and every generation, one is obligated to view himself as though he has departed from Mitzrayim.** May we be privileged to experience the complete geulah, in keeping with the teaching (R.H. 11b): **“בניסן נגאלו ובניסן”** **“בניסן נגאלו ובניסן”**—**in Nissan they were redeemed and in Nissan they are destined to be redeemed again—**swiftly, in our times! Amen.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

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