

## Ugot-Matzot & Exodus from Egypt, Why we eat Matzot during Pesach



### Introduction

Ask any Jewish child and he/she would tell you that we eat Matzot because our ancestors left Egypt in a hurry and had no time to bake bread. But is it true or false?

### Matzah in the Beginning

The first reference to a fast baking of Ugot (cakes/wafers) is found in the Torah when Abraham and Sarah received 3 guest-angels and Sarah speedily prepared for them something to eat.

Our sages tell us that these were in fact unleavened cakes or matzot because they were prepared with a great speed, unlike leavened bread or cakes. It used to take 24-27 minutes to back Matzot in antiquity, being the same time it took to walk a Roman mile. The Matzah of old was up to one hand-breath (Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 37a).

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Matzah became thinner and thinner, until today it is several millimetres thick and takes 18 minutes to bake<sup>1</sup>.

Sefaradi communities still bake a thick Shemura Matzah up to one finger's thickness.

The Biblical Hebrew word Ugot is interchangeable with thin cakes, wafers or Matzot as the text indicates below

### Text Concerning Eating Matzot during Pesach

#### Bereshit Genesis 18:6 - visit by 3 angels:-

וַיַּמְהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֱלֹהָהּ, אֶל-שָׂרָה; וַיֹּאמֶר, מַהֲרִי שְׁלֹשׁ סְאִים קֶמַח סֶלֶת-לוֹשִׁי, וַעֲשִׂי עֲגֹת. 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said: 'Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make [unleavened] cakes.'

The Midrash mentions that the three angels who visited Abraham and Sarah were Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. Michael came to inform Sarah of the birth of Isaac, Raphael came to heal Abraham after his circumcision, and Gabriel came to annihilate Sodom (BT Bava Metzia 86b). On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (the first day of Passover) the angels came to bless Sarah, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan Isaac was born, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan the Israelites went out of Egypt (Seder Olam Rabbah 5) - the Exodus.

*This is the FIRST REASON why we eat Matzot during Pesach (Passover).*

#### Shemot Exodus 12:8 & 15:-

ח וַאֲכָלוּ אֶת-הַבָּשָׂר, בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה: צֹלִי-אֵשׁ וּמִצֹּת, עַל-מִרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ. 8 And they shall eat the meat in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened cakes; with bitter herbs they shall

<sup>1</sup> Was Matzah Always Hard and Thin? The history of crunchy matzah, By Yehuda Shurpin

eat it.

טו שבעת ימים, מצות תאכלו--אך ביום הראשון, תשביתו שאר מבתיכם: כי כל-אכל חמץ, ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מישראל-מיום הראשון, עד-יום השבעי.

15 For seven days you shall eat unleavened cakes, but on the preceding day you shall clear away all leaven from your houses; for whosoever eat leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

### Devarim Deuteronomy 16:3:-

ג לא-תאכל עליו חמץ, שבעת ימים תאכל-עליו מצות לחם עני: כי בחפזו, יצאת מארץ מצרים--למען תזכר את-יום צאתך מארץ מצרים, כל ימי חייך.

3 You shall eat no leavened bread with it [pascal sacrifice]; seven days shall you eat unleavened bread with it, bread of affliction; for in haste did you come out of the land of Egypt; that you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.

### More Explanations & Answers

We eat Matzot NOT because we had no time to bake bread or leavened cakes but because the Matzah is considered a "quick bread", which reminds us that we left Egypt quickly in a hurry (bechipazon).

*This is the SECOND REASON why we eat Matzot during Pesach.*

*The THIRD REASON why we eat Matzah is because it is not only a bread of affliction and poverty but also a bread of distress.*

It reminds us of our harsh slavery in Egypt, so as free people who celebrate freedom, we relive the experience by eating a bitter herb PLUS Matzot. We experience the difference between subjugation and freedom. The children of Israel in Egypt baked and eat Matzot on a regular basis, while being in a state of anxiety, sorrow and pain.

Korban Pesach (pascal sacrifice) was also made and eaten quickly together with the Matzah that accompanied it. Therefore, the whole process was in haste (bechipazon).

In Deuteronomy chapter 16, after telling us that we should not eat Chametz with the pascal offering, the text also tells us that we should eat Matzot - indicating that the two are interlinked. The Afikoman at the end of the Seder serves as a reminder because we also it eat quickly (within 4-8 minutes approx.).

*This is the FOURTH REASON why we eat Matzot during Pesach.*

The Matzot are perforated, contain no yeast and do not rise. These factors signify our deflated and perforated ego, which is not raised like bread but indicates humility.

The yeast represents the rising ego just as the risen bread and Matzot express the exact opposite!

*This is the FIFTH REASON why we eat Matzot during Pesach!*