



Shabbos HaGadol - What's So "Big" about Shabbos HaGadol

What Happened?

Shabbos HaGadol could be translated literally as "The Big Shabbos." What's so BIG about *Shabbos HaGadol*?

The Tur tells us that *Shabbos HaGadol* commemorates how on the tenth of Nissan the Jews in Egypt had a one time commandment of designating a lamb in preparation for the first *korban Pesach*. This *mitzvah* of "pulling aside and taking" did not apply to any subsequent *korban Pesach* offerings.

We have a tradition that the tenth of Nissan on the year of the first Pesach fell on a *Shabbos*, so *Shabbos HaGadol* reminds us of the first Korban Pesach's special selection ceremony every year on the *Shabbos* before Pesach.

This explanation only leads to more questions. Why was that *mitzvah* only applicable to the Jews of the first Pesach, and why was that *mitzvah* not necessary for any other generation?

Regarding this question Rashi in Parshas Bo (12:6) brings from Chazal in the name of Rav Matya ben Charash: "Hashem said: it is time to fulfill the oath that I made to Avraham to redeem his children, however, they had no Mitzvos to be worthy of Redemption. Therefore Hashem gave them two Mitzvos the blood of Pesach and the blood of Bris Milah.... **but since they were steeped in idol worship Hashem commanded them "Mishchu v'k'chu" - pull and take, pull your hands away from idol worship and take for yourselves the lamb for the sake of doing a Mitzvah**

Why On Shabbos?

Usually when we commemorate an occasion we do so on the date of the event itself, not the day of the week. Why don't we remember the occasion of the first Korban Pesach on the tenth

of Nissan, just as we celebrate the exodus from Egypt on the fifteenth of Nissan? This all relates our original question: "What's so BIG about *Shabbos HaGadol*?"

What is Big?

Let's explore the philosophical meaning of the word "Big." In every day usage, big is not an absolute concept. It's all relative to what you are talking about. A big orange is fairly dwarfed by a small oak tree. Is there an absolute meaning to the concept of "Big"?

Hashem is, was, and always will be perfect. He is lacking nothing in any way, and it would seem that He is the pinnacle of "bigness" - whatever that means. There can be no change in Hashem. The Posuk says: "I am Hashem I do not change" (Malachi 3:6). Every day we say in *tefilah*: *Ata Hu ad she'lo nivrah ha'olam, Ata Hu mi'sheh nivra ha'olam* - You are He [who was] before the world was created, You are [the same] He after the world was created. And yet, the posuk in *Tehillim* (104:1) says "*Elokai gadalta me'od* - Hashem my Lord You have **become very Big.**" The Midrash (Shochar Tov Tehillim 104) asks what it means by saying "Hashem has become very Big". Says the Midrash: before Hashem created the world He was "Big", but after He created it He became "very Big." Before the praise of the prophets He was "Big", but after the praise of the prophets He became "Very Big. What is this Midrash be telling us? How can we reconcile it with the truth of Hashem's absolute unchanging Perfection?

Extension

Although size is relative, as we mentioned before, there is an objective definition to "Big". Big means extension the more something extends

the bigger it is. In Kabbalah we are taught that that “Gadol”– Big is a synonym for the attribute of “Chesed”-Kindness. **This is because the kind person extends himself beyond his personal space to help others.** Another form of “Big”/extension is **Revelation**. Something “hidden” is confined within boundaries, it is **revealed** to others when it **extends** beyond where it’s hidden. Therefore, when we say “Big” we mean to say: **“extended to be revealed to others.”**

Avraham’s BIG Legacy

Avraham Avinu is referred to as “the man BIG amongst giants” (Yehoshua 14:15 see Rashi). Avraham Avinu has a dual legacy from a common root. He was known for his kindness, as his attribute is “Chesed” but he dedicated, and risked, his life to extend consciousness of Hashem into and throughout the world. For both reasons, that have a common root, he is called “the man BIG amongst giants”.

Purpose of Creation?

With this we reconcile a contradiction in writing of the Arizal and other sources. In some sources it states the Hashem created the world to bestow goodness. In other sources it says that Hashem created the world to reveal the attributes of His Divine Names. Kindness and Revelation come from the same root of “Big”. This is especially true when regarding Hashem – there is no greater “Goodness” than He revealing Himself, He is the ultimate “Good” (see Derech Hashem section 1 chap 2)

What Changed?

Hashem has every perfection imaginable in full actuality, even without us We say daily in Adon Olam “Mater of the universe who Reigned before all was created, when all was made by His Will, He was then called King” Hashem I KING even without a world, the only thing that changed by creation is that now there are others to call Him “King” In a similar vein the Midrash Shochar Tov is telling us that even before creation Hashem was “Big” with all that it implies, He “becomes very Big” when the prophets gain recognition of His perfection and praise him. **The change is in us and in us alone!** He becomes “very Big” in the

sense that we become aware of His greatness as well. After the creation of the world His greatness is extended to the realm of the consciousness of the created beings. Prior to creation knowledge of Hashem is “confined” to Hashem Himself, but with the creation of man it is extended to human consciousness. He was always “Big” in full actuality, but when we gain consciousness of Hashem it can be said that He has “become **Very Big.**” The Hebrew word for Very is “Me’od” which are the same letters as “Adam”. What makes Hashem’s Innate Greatness “VERY (Me’od) Great” is Man’s (Adam) recognition of that Greatness

A BIG Difference

Before the Exodus, the world was in a state of total lack of Hashem consciousness. Hashem had to bring the ten plagues on Egypt to shock the world in order to reveal knowledge of Hashem. The goal was to add to His “Bigness”, and to spread Hashem consciousness throughout the Earth. The Jewish people themselves were and are an essential part of that role. They are the singular vessel to receive and convey the revelation.

What Made Us Different?

The Jewish people were not yet ‘different’ from the Egyptian or any other people on earth. Hashem wanted to give the Jews Mitzvos to set them apart. Here is the problem – you have to be Jewish in the first place for Mitzvos to be of any significance or spiritual power. A goy who does any of our Mitzvos doesn’t generate any spiritual energy not for the cosmos and not for himself. How did the Jewish people ‘break out’ and put themselves in a position of Bris Milah and Korban Peach raising their level? The Jewish people’s act of separation and designation made them a different type of people – a people capable of becoming the vessel for Hashem’s permanent revelation on Earth. The act of separation was necessary, to position them so that on Pesach they were catapulted to another level. Why should we, out of all of humanity, be privileged to attaining this higher level? We made ourselves different through the act of taking aside the lamb. Through this *mitzvah* we symbolically and metaphysically separated

ourselves from Egypt and prepared ourselves for Divine service. We thus made ourselves worthy of all the revelations we re-experience on *Seder* night, and becoming the vehicle of Divine revelation in the world for all time.

Already Separate

The special act of designating the Korban Pesach was necessary then, but we don't need it now. Now we have the Torah and we keep *mitzvahs*, thus constantly renewing our position and testifying to Hashem's 'Greatness'. The one *mitzvah* that truly represents our unique role as Hashem's witnesses is *Shabbos*.

The Midrash tells us how when *Shabbos* saw that each day of the week had a partner and she did not, she asked Hashem for a mate. Hashem made the Jewish people *Shabbos's* mate. It is specially designated for the Jews, and a non-Jew is not permitted to keep *Shabbos*.

Shabbos is Hashem's day, and He shares it exclusively with His people. He's created the world and in six days and rested on the seventh, and He shares this with the Jewish people. Hashem wants us alone to testify that He is the creator. *Chazal* say that Hashem, the Jews, and *Shabbos* are three witnesses that attest to each other. Any one else is trespassing.

A Big Day

During *Havdalah* at the end of *Shabbos* we proclaim "*Ha'mavdil... bein Yisroel l'amim* – the one who distinguishes between holy and mundane, between light and dark, between the Jews and the nations." The same way there is a difference between holy and mundane, light and dark, there is a difference between Yisroel and the other nations. We are the people of *Shabbos*, Hashem's people, and the *goyim* aren't. Every *Shabbos* renews are unique higher status of being the vehicle of the revelation of Hashem in this world, and adding to His 'Bigness', as it were.

In Egypt we did not yet have the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*, so our special status was actualized by way of the *mitzvah* of separating the *korban Pesach* and thus separating ourselves. Now we have *Shabbos*. Every single week it reinforces how we are Hashem's people, we are His

witnesses, and we are the vehicle of His Divine revelation in the world.

With this understanding we see that the essence of what occurred on the tenth of Nissan before the first Pesach now happens every *Shabbos*. Every *Shabbos* reinforces our exalted role, and our higher destiny. On the tenth of Nissan when we first needed to separate ourselves from humanity, we needed the lamb because we were not yet worthy of *Shabbos*.

It's the 'Big *Shabbos*' because this *Shabbos* set the precedent of our being 'Big' and set the tone for everything that follows in our mission of: "who is a **BIG** nation that Hashem is close to them whenever they call to Him"(Devarim 4:7) *Shabbos* is always great. It's a day when we as Jews bring down more awareness of Hashem into the world. But this is "**The BIG *Shabbos***" because the *Shabbos* close to Pesach is the renewal of the 'first *Shabbos*', the *Shabbos* that was the cornerstone of all Divine revelation that has come through and continues to come through us. It is the *Shabbos* that makes us 'Big' and Hashem "Very Big." On *Shabbos HaGadol* we remember the fact that we as Jews have been given the special mission of being the vehicle of bringing expanded Hashem consciousness into the world.

Good Shabbos.



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