Pesah, Matsa, Maror

According to Rabban Gamliel, there are 3 concepts that should be mentioned in the Pesah Seder to meet the minimum requirement to transmit to our children the story of Pesah. These three concepts are: Pesah, Matsa and Maror.
Before explaining these ideas, one by one, see how they interrelate. Pesah is what HaShem did for us. Matsa is what we 'am Israel did to deserve our freedom. And Maror is what the Egyptians did ti us. Thus, these 3 concepts signal to the role of the three main characters of the story of Pesah. Let us begin from the later.

MAROR

Yesterday we explained "Maror", the way the Egyptians mistreated us, demonized us and made us suffer (see here). Rabban Gamliel says we should not deprive our children of this painful information. That somehow they must become aware of our suffering and know that our destiny as the chosen people involves exposure to the demonization and persecution of peoples. Why is so important for our children to become aware of our suffering? The Torah teaches us to positively channel the memory of the suffering of our fathers in Egypt. How? By not letting other people to suffer. Caring for those who have less. Remembering that we should not oppress the weak or those who work for us, Jews or Gentiles. Why? *ki gerim heytem be-erets Mitzrayim*, "because you were slaves in Egypt," we know, firsthand, the pains of the abused. And we "honor" the memory of our suffering, by preventing others from suffering.

MATSA

Matsa represents what we Jews did to deserve our freedom. On the 10th of Nisan HaShem commanded the Yehudim to take a sheep and keep it. Remember that the Egyptians worshiped many animals, because for them the animals embody the powers of their gods. The crocodile or hippo, for example, were worshiped as sacred gods because they were believed to embody power and violence against enemies. The sheep, especially male-sheeps known as "rams", embodied virility and the power of procreation. Now, the Jews were faced with a great challenge: they had to take one of those sheeps and keep it until further notice. Which was extremely dangerous vis-a-vis the Egyptians (as dangerous as it would be today to capture

and sacrifice a cow in India). But there was something even more difficult, and more meritorious. The people of Israel had to demonstrate that they were FREE from the idol-worship culture. Keep in mind that the Jews lived immersed in that culture for ten generations, exposed to all kinds of superstitions and fetishism, typical of the 'Aboda zara (idolatry) society. Now, on the 14 Nisan, God commanded the Yehudim to sacrifice the "ram", expose its blood on the doors, grill it and eat it. Can you begin to imagine the tremendous psychological difficulty of taking by force, kill and eat an animal that your masters worship?. Slaves naturally fear their masters to death. Imagine how much more they should have feared the "masters of their masters," the animals that their masters considered gods! HaShem wanted the Yehudim to "deserve" their freedom, demonstrating that they were mentally free of idolatry and superstitions. They had to understand that the Egyptian gods were false, mere products of human imagination. The Jews did not hesitate and they did as HaShem thru Moshe told them. They showed that they were psychologically prepared to leave Egypt and leave behind the idols. And they did all this in one night. Faster than what takes the dough to ferment into bread, the Jews we were able to unmask idolatry, leave it behind and deliver themselves into the hands of Bore Olam. The prophet Yrmiyhau remembered this great merit, as he said in the name of HaShem, "I remember your merit of young, your love [to Me]: when you followed me into the desert, a dry land [with no food, and no water] "(Jeremiah 2: 2).

PESAH

In English Pesah is called "Passover", which means that when HaShem was killing the Egyptians firstborns, He "skipped" passed-over the houses of the Yehudim and did not affect them. This is the classic interpretation of the word Pesah.

However, according to Rab Menashe Ben Israel and many others, the idea of Pesah is a little different, yet often unknown. Rabbi Israel Ben explains that the word "Pesah" or "pasah" should be understood as "protected" (hayis, as Targum Onkelos translates). When HaShem unleashed the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, which the Tora calls "mashchit" (destroyer, pest) this plague would have affected "naturally", all the firstborn of Egypt, Gentiles and Jews indiscriminately.

HaShem, however, “protected” the houses of the Yehudim (“pasah”) and did not allow the deadly plague affect the Jewish firstborn (to understand this reading, carefully read the pasuq in Shemot 12:13 and 12:23 or see this). Pesah, then, is the holiday in which we celebrate the constant, direct and “supernatural” protection HaShem grants the people of Israel. This “selective protection” (hashgaha peratit) which began the night of 15 Nisan, suggestively called in the Tora lel Shimurim (the night of protection), is the Divine Protection that watches over Am Israel throughout its history until today. As it happened that night in Egypt, God protects Israel in “miraculous” ways. The existence of Israel defies statistics or the most logical predictions. The Jewish people, the most persecuted and harassed human group in the history of mankind, should not exist “statically”, and yet, exists! Moreover, how is it that the State of Israel—the only country in the world whose existence is delegitimized and credibly threatened, the only country completely surrounded by neighbors (and neighbors of neighbors) who seek its destruction, and have plenty international support for it, and 100 times more population and territory—still exists! The truth is that Am Israel, the people, the state, exists “miraculously”, only because HaShem, today as in those days, continues to protect us