

# Acharon Shel Pesach: Don't Get Stuck in Yesterday's Battles

Category: Holidays, Pesach

*The story of Manischewitz machine-matzah.*

## The Debate

Anyone with a connection with Chabad probably received a special gift of hand made Shmura round matzah in honor of Passover. However, in stores, you'll find machine-made matzah that's square-shaped.

Have you ever wondered when this change happened? After all, our ancestors baked and ate round matzah in Egypt, and the Yemenites continue this tradition by making round matzah in the original form — it looks like a pita. So, how did we end up with square-shaped machine-made matzah?

Around 200 years ago, in 1838, a French Jew named Zinger invented the first machine for baking matzah. The use of this machine began in Germany and France, and the rabbis there liked it. Firstly, it lowered the cost of matzah, making it more accessible to the poorer members of the community. Secondly, it sped up the baking process, resulting in even better and more beautifully baked matzah.

However, when the same machine reached Hungary and Poland, most rabbis strongly opposed it, including the Rebbe Rashab.

There were several reasons for this: Firstly, it was difficult to clean the machine, leading to a potential chametz issue. Secondly, the metal heat could cause the dough to rise before the baking process began. Thirdly, anyone who visited a handmade matzah bakery noticed that every 18 minutes, the workers would declare "*L'shem Matzos Mitzvah*" ("for the sake of the mitzvah of matzah"), since matzah must be baked *for the sake* of the mitzvah — but a machine cannot have intent. (Perhaps today, with the development of artificial intelligence, this is a possibility that will arise, but that is a subject for further discussion.)

The machine-made matzah became a serious controversy; the majority of 'Charedi' rabbis were against machine-made matzah, while many other rabbis supported it.

Despite the opposition, it continued to spread. In 1886, a Jewish man named Dovber Manischewitz immigrated to the United States, where he was invited to serve as a shochet in Cincinnati. He opened a matzah bakery where he invested in serious technological developments; he invented a machine to knead the dough, a gas oven — which was a modern idea at the time, and other technological advancements. Those matzos were baked without any human touch at all. He invited important rabbis to visit his bakery, and he made sure to document their visits and distribute the pictures. Later, he also established a Manischewitz matzah bakery in Jerusalem, and his matzos spread far and wide, consumed by millions of Jews worldwide.

His success motivated him to create a variety of kosher products, including wine, canned gefilte fish, and other Ashkenazi Jewish cuisine. From then on, a key part of being Jewish in the United States meant eating and drinking Manischewitz products.

Throughout the years of his leadership, the Rebbe encouraged his Chassidim to ensure that as many Jews as possible receive shmurah matzah.

However, it wasn't a 'one-size-fits-all.'

In the 1980s, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Benjamin Gorodetsky to influence leaders of the Joint Distribution Committee to fund shipments of thousands of pounds of machine-made matzah to countries in South America (which was going through a severe financial crisis, making matzah imports prohibitively expensive) and distribute them for free to all those in need. My uncle, Rabbi Yaakov Chazan, who was on a shlichus in Recife, Brazil at that time, told me that he was among those who received many, many boxes of machine-made matzah to distribute for free among the Jews of the city.

Likewise, the previous Chabad Rebbes worked tirelessly during World War I and II to send machine-made matzah to all Jewish soldiers on the front lines.

# Move On!

This holiday marks the splitting of the Red Sea. What happened the next day (i.e., today), 3334 years ago? What were the Israelites occupied with?

The Torah tells us in Beshalach (which we read yesterday) that immediately after the song of the sea, “Moses led the Israelites away from the Red Sea.” Rashi comments, “He had to drag them away reluctantly.”

Why? Because the Egyptians had adorned their horses with gold, silver, and precious stones, and when they sank, all the jewelry fell into the Red Sea. The Israelites were busy collecting all this immense wealth, and they were so engrossed in it that the next day, Moses had to force them to move on towards Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.

The Rebbe poses a perplexing question:

How could the Jewish people, after experiencing such an incredible miracle as the splitting of the Red Sea, which brought about a profound spiritual awakening that inspired them to sing the Song of the Sea, suddenly turn to chasing money to the point where Moses had to intervene?

This question becomes even more puzzling, in light of the counting of the Omer, which began on the second night of Passover and lasts for 49 days until Shavuot. Counting the Omer is a practice that originated from the Jews’ intense desire to receive the Torah after leaving Egypt, prompting them to count the days until the giving of the Torah. So why, after eagerly anticipating the Torah, did they suddenly shift their focus to gold and silver?

In general, upon the Israelites’ departure from Egypt, they were already quite wealthy. What drove them to desire more gold, especially when they were heading towards the desert, where gold held little significance? In reality, in the desert, a cup of water was worth far more than a golden ornament. So, what was the underlying motivation behind the Israelites’ insatiable desire for gold, which ultimately required Moses’s intervention?

The Rebbe explains that while still in Egypt, they were commanded to “plunder the Egyptians” (Exodus 12:36); they were to take all the valuable items they could find. When they spotted that the Egyptians still had gold and silver at the sea,

they felt it was a Divine mandate to complete the “plundering of Egypt.” They knew that they wouldn’t have another chance to do so because G-d had already promised that they wouldn’t return to Egypt. So, they felt spiritually compelled to pause their journey in the desert and focus on the unfinished task.

If so, why did Moses intervene?

In reality, G-d’s will had shifted after the Israelites left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. While in Egypt, G-d had urged the Israelites to collect as much wealth as possible. However, once they had fulfilled that commandment by plundering the Egyptians and collecting from them at the sea, G-d’s new mission for them was to move forward to Mount Sinai. Moses understood this shift in G-d’s will and knew that it was essential for the Israelites to focus on the next mission rather than getting sidetracked by the previous one.

## **Don’t Fight Yesterday’s Battles**

What can we learn from this story? Sometimes, we think we are doing the right thing and fulfilling a mitzvah with great enthusiasm, but it might just be ‘yesterday’s mission.’ Moses intervened with the Israelites to remind them that they had already fulfilled the commandment to “plunder Egypt” and that it was time to move forward to the next mission of reaching Mount Sinai.

The same is true of machine-made matzos. Some rabbis argued that it was better than handmade matzos since they were baked faster, less hands touched them, and everyone could eat them. However, others strongly opposed their use. Ultimately, it was up to the “Moses of our generation” to guide us, and our Rebbes indeed determined that handmade matzos were preferable. However, in times of war or when many cannot afford to buy matzos, sending machine-made matzos may be the best way to fulfill the mitzvah.

The point is: Don’t get stuck in yesterday’s battles. Continue towards Mount Sinai. This path will lead us to complete redemption, which is closer than you might think.