

Pesach: Shehechyanu on Matza and Maror? Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe

Class of 2017

It seems strange that the haggadah does not include the berakha of *shehechyanu* on matza and maror. I would have expected to see this blessing, which is typically said whenever we perform a mitzva that is commanded for specific infrequent occasions. We say this blessing when we first take the lulav and etrog each year and the first night we light Chanukah candles. And surely we have been looking forward to the Seder night and our eating of the matza and maror. So why is there no *shehechyanu* said on our performance of these mitzvot?

Perhaps the *shehechyanu* said as part of kiddush at the beginning of the seder is intended to encompass all the unique elements of the seder, including the matza and maror. There are Halachic opinions who take this view. Still there is such a time lag between kiddush and the eating of the matza that this seems like a difficult read. Moreover, if the *shehechyanu* of kiddush was intended to apply to the matza and maror wouldn't we be instructed to keep those mitzvot in mind at the time of saying the berakha?

Alternatively, perhaps we don't say *shehechyanu* on matza and maror because we don't say this berakha on negative things. Maror certainly feels negative as it reminds us of the bitter lives we led during the period of our slavery. And while matza is the bread of freedom, it is also the bread of affliction.

The Abudraham (14th century, Seville) has a wonderful explanation. He points to the berakha immediately preceding the washing of the hands before eating matza and maror. That berakha begins by blessing God:

"who has redeemed us and redeemed our fathers
from Egypt, and **brought us to this night** to eat
matza and maror."

אשר גאלנו וגאל את אבותינו ממצרים, והגיענו
הלילה הזה לאכל בו מצה ומרור.

The language in this berakha is very similar to the language of *shehechyanu*. One can even say it is an UBER-*shehechyanu* as it includes a specific reference to matza and maror, while thanking God for bringing us to this night on which we eat them. What a beautiful way to express our joy in performing these once-a-year mitzvot!



Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe served, for many years, as Community Educator and Director of Mercaz Center for Adult Education in Beth Tfiloh synagogue in Baltimore, MD. Her love of tefilla and ritual led her to be an experienced gaba'it and organizer of women's tefilla groups. She has taught many women and girls to leyn and is the voice of the JOFA Megillat Esther App. Rabbanit Bracha interned at United Orthodox Synagogue in Houston, Texas and at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale in New York. She participated in chaplaincy programs at New York Presbyterian Hospital and at a maximum security women's prison. Rabbanit Bracha is a 2017 graduate of Yeshivat Maharat, following a long career in hi-tech in Israel. She feels blessed to be following this path which nourishes and fills her soul.