YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**The Pesach Offering:**

**With Matza and Maror**

**I. Introduction**

One of the *mitzvot* on *seder* night is *korekh*, the eating of a sandwich in commemoration of Hillel the Elder, who would combine the meat of the *korban pesach* (the special Pesach offering), *matza* (unleavened bread), and *maror* (bitter herbs) as a sandwich and eat them together. The basis of Hillel's position appears in the verses that command the eating of the *korban pesach* together with *matza* and *maror*:

And they shall eat the meat on that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it. (*Shemot* 12:8)

**II. *Matza* and *maror* – a relish for the *korban pesach*, or an independent mitzva?**

The commandment to eat the *korban pesach* specifically with *matza* and *maror* can be understood in two ways. The first possibility is that we are dealing with a single mitzvathat includes several details. According to this approach, the *matza* and *maror* that are eaten together with the *korban pesach* are actually included in the laws of that offering, not independent obligations. Another possibility is to see the various elements here as three separate *mitzvot*, which must be observed at the same time.

In his list of the 613 *mitzvot*, the Rambam counts the three obligations as a single mitzva:

The fifty-sixth commandment is that He commanded us to eat the lamb of the Pesach offering on the night of the 15th of Nisan according to the stipulations mentioned – that is, that it is roasted, that it is eaten in one house, and that it is eaten with *matza* and *maror*. This is what is stated: "And they shall eat the meat on that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it." (*Sefer Ha-Mitzvot le-Rambam*, positive commandment 56)

The Rambam clearly states that we are dealing here with only a single mitzva – both in the count of the *mitzvot* and in its essence. In other words, the *matza* and *maror* can be seen as a sort of condiment that must be eaten together with the *korban pesach*. Just as the *korban pesach* must be eaten roasted, so must it be eaten together with *matza* and *maror*.

The Rambam goes on to explain:

And perhaps a questioner will challenge me and say: Why do you count the eating of the Pesach offering, *matza* and *maror* as one commandment and not count them as three commandments, so that the eating of *matza* is a mitzva, the eating of the *maror* is a mitzva, and the eating of the Pesach offering is a mitzva? I would [then] answer him that it is true that the eating of matza is a separate commandment, as I will explain later (commandment 158), and similarly the eating of the meat of the Pesach offering is a separate mitzva, as we have mentioned, but *maror* is an extension of the eating of the Pesach offering and is not counted as a separate *mitzva*. And the proof of the matter is that the meat of the Pesach offering is eaten to fulfill the commandment whether bitter herbs are available or whether they are not available. But bitter herbs are only eaten with the meat of the Pesach offering, as it is stated: "with bitter herbs they shall eat it." But [if one ate] bitter herbs without meat, he has not done anything; and we do not say that he has fulfilled a commandment. And the wording of the *Mekhilta* [*de-Rabbi Yishmael*] is: "'They shall eat it roasted with fire, with unleavened bread, with bitter herbs' – the verse teaches [us] that the commandment of the Pesach offering is roasted meat, matza, and bitter herbs." That is to say, the commandment is the combination of these. (Ibid.)

What emerges from his words is that when there is no *korban pesach*, there is no obligation to eat *maror*. The Rambam’s source is in the Gemara in *Pesachim*,which explains why today, the obligation of *maror* is only Rabbinic:

Rava said: [The eating of] *matza* nowadays is a Torah obligation, whereas [that of] *maror* is Rabbinic.

Why is *maror* different? Because it is written: "They shall eat it [the Pesach offering] with unleavened bread and bitter herbs," [which implies that] when [the law of] the Pesach offering is in force, [that of] *maror* is in force, and when the Pesach offering is not in force, *maror* is not required either.

Then in the case of *matza* as well, surely it is written: "They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs"?

Scripture repeated [a separate commandment] in the case of *matza*: "In the evening you shall eat unleavened bread" (*Shemot* 12:18). (*Pesachim* 120a)

In contrast to the Rambam, Rabbi Daniel Ha-Bavli, in *Responsa Ma'aseh Nissim*,argues that eating *maror* is indeed an independent mitzva, and he adduces proof for this from the *Mekhilta*:

"Roasted with fire, with unleavened bread, with bitter herbs" – the verse teaches that the mitzvaof the Pesach offering is roasted meat, *matza*, and *maror*. From where do I know that if they do not have *matza* and *maror*, they fulfill their obligation with the Pesach offering? The verse states: "They shall eat it." I only know that when they do not have *matza* and *maror*, they fulfill their obligation with the Pesach offering. *Is it likewise that if they do not have the Pesach offering, they fulfill their obligation with matza and maror?* You can argue: Since the Pesach offering is a positive commandment and [eating] *matza* and *maror* is a positive commandment, thus you learn that just as when they do not have *matza* and *maror*, they fulfill their obligation with the Pesach offering, so when they do not have the Pesach offering, they fulfill their obligation with *matza* and *maror*. (*Mekhilta Pischa* 6)

The *Mekhilta* implies that even when there is no *korban pesach*, there is an obligation to eat *maror* – but this seems to contradict the Gemara we just saw! Rabbi Daniel Ha-Bavli explains that in fact, there is no contradiction, as a distinction can be made between two situations: When the Temple is not standing and the *korban pesach* cannot be brought, the obligation to eat *maror* is only Rabbinic, as is stated in the Gemara in *Pesachim*; however, the *Mekhilta* is dealing with a time when the Temple is standing and the *korban pesach* can be brought, but a particular person is ritually impure and therefore cannot eat from the *korban pesach*. In such a case, the obligation to eat *maror* is by Torah law. Rabbi Daniel Ha-Bavli writes as follows:

From this it is clear that when it says, "when there is a Pesach offering," it does not mean when there is an actual eating of the Pesach offering, but rather when there is a Temple, which is a time that is fit for the Pesach offering. And the fact that an uncircumcised person, and a foreigner, and one who is impure, and one who is on a distant journey are obligated to eat *maror*, even though they do not eat of the Pesach offering, teaches that *maror* is an independent mitzva, and it is only cancelled due to the inability to bring a Pesach offering when there is no Temple. (*Responsa Ma'aseh Nissim*, no. 6)

Another expression of the question of whether *matza* and *maror* are adjuncts to the *korban pesach* or stand on their own is found elsewhere in tractate *Pesachim*, in a dispute regarding the parameters of creating a company [*chavura*] that will share in a joint *korban pesach*. Can they only be partners in the purchase of the *korban pesach*, or can they be appointed to the group even for items that are subordinate to the *korban pesach*? Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi and the Sages disagree:

For it was taught: "And if the household is too little for a lamb" (*Shemot* 12:4) – sustain him with [the proceeds of] the lamb for his food necessities, but not for [other] purchases.

Rabbi [Yehuda Ha-Nasi] said: In his requirements of [general] purchases too, so that if he has nothing [with which to purchase], he may appoint another in his Pesach offering and his *chagiga* offering, and the money he receives is *chullin*. (*Pesachim* 90a)

The Sages interpret the verse "and if the household is too little for a lamb" as permitting other people to be appointed specifically in a case where the members of the household cannot eat the entire *korban pesach* by themselves. In contrast, Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi says that if there are difficulties in purchasing the offering, additional people can also be added to the company. The *Amoraim* debate the precise point of disagreement between them:

Rabba and Rabbi Zeira [disagree]. One maintains: No one disagrees about fuel for roasting it, for since this makes the Pesach offering fit [to be eaten], it is like the Pesach offering itself. Their controversy is only about [one who cannot afford] *matza* and *maror*: the Rabbis maintain that this is a different eating, while Rabbi [Yehuda Ha-Nasi] maintains that since it is a requisite of the Pesach offering, it is as the Pesach offering itself. (Ibid.)

According to this understanding, the dispute is precisely about the matter we have been discussing: according to Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi, the *matza* and *maror* are an inseparable part of the mitzva of eating the *korban pesach*, thus difficulty in purchasing them is a valid reason to include additional people in the offering. The other Sages, on the other hand, apparently see the *matza* and *maror* as a "different eating," separate from the *korban pesach*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The laws of Pesach Sheni offer another proof that the *korban pesach*, the *matza*, and the *maror* are all one mitzva and a single unit. On Pesach Sheni, only the commandment to eat the *korban pesach* applies, not the laws of the *seder*; nevertheless, the *matza* and the *maror* remain as an inseparable part of the offering, as it is stated:

In the second month on the fourteenth day at dusk they shall make it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (*Bamidbar* 9:11)

From here we learn that the *matza* and *maror* are indeed part of the law of the *korban pesach* – unlike other commandments of the *seder*, which are simply eaten at the same time as the *korban pesach*.

Of course, Hillel's practice of wrapping all three elements together further points toward the understanding that we are dealing with a single obligation of eating. Hillel requires, in actual practice, a combined eating.

**III. The three elements of the redemption**

Thus far, we have engaged in a technical analysis of the relationship between eating *maror* and eating the *korban pesach*. This issue stands in the background of the *Or Ha-Chaim’s* commentary, in which he tries to explain why it is so important to eat the *korban pesach*, the *matza*, and the *maror* together.

The *Or Ha-Chaim* opens his remarks by choosing a side in the dispute that was discussed above:

"And unleavened bread, with bitter herbs." According to the plain meaning of the verse and based on what we have seen, that God said that the Pesach offering must be roasted with fire, etc. – this demonstrates that the supernal intention was to demonstrate [Israel's] greatness and freedom and that there was no other authority over them. And according to this, even the bitter herbs that God commanded are because it is the way of those who eat roasted meat to eat something pungent with it, for in this way it will be savory to the eater, and he will eat with full desire. The enjoyable taste of the meat will be more pronounced when he first eats bitter herbs. Eating the *matza* also helps prepare the palate for the taste of the roasted meat.(*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Shemot* 12:8)

The *Or Ha-Chaim* offers the simple explanation that both *maror* and *matza* enhance the taste of the *korban pesach* and make eating it more enjoyable. In principle, there is a law regarding all sacrifices that they should be eaten in the best possible way:

Rav Chisda said: The priestly gifts may be eaten only roasted and with mustard. What is the reason? Because the verse states: "as a privilege" (*Bamidbar* 18:8), that is, as a mark of eminence, as kings eat. (*Chullin* 132b)

One might have argued that the obligation to eat *matza* and *maror* stem from this law; however, they are not obligatory in other sacrifices at all! Therefore, the *Or Ha-Chaim* continues to explain in a more profound way how enhancing the taste of the *korban pesach* specifically with *matza* and *maror* is not only relevant on the culinary level, but also on a higher and deeper spiritual level:

The three components [*serigim*, lit., grape branches]combine to make the meal enjoyable. (*Or Ha-Chaim* ibid.)

The *Or Ha-Chaim* refers to these *mitzvot* as three *serigim*,[[2]](#footnote-2) branches thatstem from the same foundation and belong to the same stock.

We say in the Haggada that *matza* commemorates the redemption, whereas *maror* commemorates our slavery. The *Or Ha-Chaim* as well sees these three *mitzvot* as embodying three different elements, but he connects them all, as stated, to a single foundation – namely, redemption:

They allude to three things: 1) The exile which embittered the Israelites' lives; 2) The sudden and immediate exodus, such that their dough did not have time to rise in Egypt; 3) The fact that God "passed over" the houses of the Israelites, which is the aspect of redemption, since Got passed through the land of Egypt and severed the thick bonds of Israel's previous dependence on the Egyptians, which is an aspect of the firstborn, as I explained elsewhere (*Shemot* 11:5). These three had to be simultaneous; if one had been lacking, there would have been no miracle with the other two by themselves. (*Or Ha-Chaim*,ibid.)

We are dealing here with a process of redemption consisting of three elements, without any of which the entire process would have been deficient. The *Or Ha-Chaim's* description teaches us several principles about how we are redeemed. This is a deep question of *seder* night, as we are not focused on it only as a historical day of redemption; there is an obligation that "in every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he came out of Egypt" (Pesach Haggada). The Maharal explains in *Gevurot Hashem* (chap. 63) that on this day, the entire status of Israel changed from an enslaved people to a redeemed people.

In any case, we must understand how we can be redeemed in our own lives, and therefore it is important to learn what made up the redemption in Egypt and what the significance was of each of its components.

**IV. *Maror***

Without the exile experience, they could not have accomplished what they accomplished though this refining process and that which was clarified. All the more so according to what we have explained elsewhere (*Bereishit* 46:3) that the great nation itself, that God took out of Egypt, they are the aspects of the sparks of holiness that were there. Its removal is symbolized by the *maror*, that they embittered their lives. This is the mystical dimension of what is stated (*Kohelet* 8:9): "[I saw all this…] when one man had power over another to his detriment." (*Or Ha-Chaim*, ibid.)

The exile was part of the redemption, because exile also has a role. We trust that the Egyptian exile was part of the Divine plan for the world. This was explained to Avraham at the Covenant of the Pieces, when this exile was promised to him as part of the building of Israel. We can learn from this that so too, whenever we are in a state of exile on a general national level or on a personal level, that exile builds something in us.

The prophet refers to Egypt as "the iron furnace" (*Yirmeyahu* 11:4), because Egypt smelted the people of Israel and turned them from the family of Yaakov into a nation. The exile in Egypt revealed God's name in the world. This revelation certainly played an important role in the Divine plan for our world. We don't always see the purpose or benefit of exile, thus it is represented by *maror* – but that *maror* is also a mitzva.

We might suggest that the essence of the *maror* lies in understanding and seeing that even in the bitterest of moments, God walks with us.

The fact that without exile there is no redemption is, first of all, a simple fact – if there is no exile, there is no need to be redeemed. But it also expresses a profound idea: when a person undergoes redemption and feels that he has emerged from a crisis, then the crisis as well becomes a part of his experiences and personality – essentially, a part of his building of himself.

Some explain in this way the statement of *Chazal*: "In the place where penitents stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand" (*Berakhot* 34b). The wholly righteous man does not fall, and thus he lacks the strength gained from the experience of falling and rising up again.

**V. *Matza***

Had the exodus not occurred as abruptly as it did, the Israelites might well have returned to Egypt to become ever more deeply mired in that moral morass. This idea is expressed by the author of the Haggada,who says: "If God had not taken us out of there at the time, then both we and our forefathers would have remained subservient to Pharaoh in Egypt." This is what the Torah means when it states (*Shemot* 12:39): "They could not tarry any longer." (*Or Ha-Chaim*, ibid.)

*Matza* symbolizes speed and haste. Rabbi Tzadok Ha-Kohen begins the first paragraph of his book, *Tzidkat Ha-Tzaddik*, as follows:

A person's initial entry into the service of God must be done in haste, as we find with the Pesach offering made in Egypt, which was eaten in haste, but not the Pesach offerings of later generations. Because the beginning involves detaching oneself from all the desires of this world to which he is bound, a person should be careful about the moment in which the desire for God arises in him and hasten at that moment to quickly leave them, and perhaps he will succeed. Afterwards, he should once again advance moderately and slowly, as is the law regarding the Pesach offerings of future generations. (*Tzidkat Ha-Tzaddik* 1)

Redemption begins with haste. There is a moment when the possibility of redemption presents itself, but the person must choose it. Redemption never happens by itself. Even on Pesach, the people of Israel were commanded to offer the *korban pesach* in order to be redeemed. If they would have tarried and thought about where they were headed, it is possible that they would have avoided going altogether. More than once, while journeying in the wilderness, Israel pondered the question of whether it would not have been better to stay in Egypt; the same doubts could have prevented them from leaving at all.

In light of this, we can better understand the great praise that Yirmeyahu heaped on Israel:

I remember for you the affection of your youth, the love of your espousals; how you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2)

**VI. *Korban pesach***

The principal element of the redemption was the "passing over." (*Or Ha-Chaim*, ibid.)

The passing over is what marked the actual redemption. It is difficult to pinpoint the precise moment when Israel was redeemed from Egypt. The most real expression of redemption was the plague of the firstborns, when God Himself passed through the land of Egypt and differentiated between the firstborns of Israel and the firstborns of Egypt. It was at that moment that God's intervention found its clearest and most evident manifestation – "I, and not an angel; I, and not a seraph; I, and not a messenger" (Pesach Haggada).

Ultimately, salvation is Divine – though as we have seen, it does not come without man's desire and actions.

**VII. Conclusion – making a sandwich as did Hillel**

Thus you see that what is most important is the three of them together, and for this reason, Hillel was careful to consume them together as a sandwich (*Pesachim* 115a). (*Or Ha-Chaim*, ibid.)

The *Or Ha-Chaim* explains that the deep understanding is that redemption consists of these three things: tribulation, man's willingness to jump at the opportunity to be redeemed from it, and the Divine redemption.

We can learn from this that we too, in our desire to go free on this night, must pass through these stages. We need to understand that the difficulties we experience in life build us and are meant to make us greater and more glorious. We must jump on the opportunities we are given to emerge from slavery to freedom, and not allow them to slip away. At the same time, we need to remember that in the end, the salvation itself comes from heaven.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Editor’s note: The alternative understanding presumes they agree that the matza and maror being in the category of the *korban pesach* for these purposes, and explains their dispute differently. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Perhaps the *Or Ha-Chaim* alludes here to the three grape branches that the chief butler saw in his dream: "And the chief butler told his dream to Yosef, and said to him: In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; and in the vine were three branches [*serigim*]; and as it was budding, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes" (*Bereishit* 40:9-10). If we wish to push this idea further, it is possible that the *Or Ha-Chaim* sees in this dream an expression of the three stages of the redemption, as we will see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)