**S.A.L.T. – PESACH 5779 / 2019**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Midrash (*Midrash Tanchuma*, Vayera, 4) draws a curious association between the *pesach* sacrifice and the feast Avraham served to the three angels who appeared to him as weary wayfarers. Avraham approached the angels and asked, “***Yukach*** *na me’at mayim*” – “Let some water be taken, please” (Bereishit 18:4), and the Midrash notes that God commanded *Benei Yisrael* to designate a sheep for the *pesach* sacrifice with the word, “*ve-****yikchu***” (Shemot 12:3) – which stems from the same root as “*yukach*.” Additionally, the Midrash observes, Avraham formulated his invitation with the word “*na*” (“please”), and God later commanded *Benei Yisrael* not to eat the meat of the *pesach* sacrifice when it is “*na*” – not yet fully cooked (Shemot 12:9). The Midrash thus establishes that the *mitzva* of the *pesach* sacrifice was given to Avraham’s descendants in reward for the kindness he extended to the three wayfarers.

How might we explain this connection? Why would *Chazal* seek to associate the *pesach* feast with the feast hosted by Avraham?

The answer, perhaps, can be found in the sharp point of contrast between these two feasts. Avraham invited three complete strangers whom he had never before seen, and who, as the Gemara (Bava Metzia 86a) famously comments, appeared to him as idol-worshippers. The meal which Avraham hosted embodies his commitment to looking out for all people, of all kinds and from all backgrounds, to extending kindness and showing concern even for those who were very different from him. The *pesach* sacrifice, by contrast, is characterized, in part, by its exclusivity. The Torah explicitly forbids allowing members of other nations to partake of the sacrifice (Shemot 12:43), and even members of our nation who have yet to undergo circumcision – the symbol of our people’s distinct ethnic identity – are barred from this celebration. And, the original *pesach* sacrifice offered in Egypt served to set *Benei Yisrael* apart from the Egyptians, as the sacrificial blood was placed on the doorposts, thus rescuing the Israelite homes from the plague of the firstborn that struck Egypt that night. The *pesach* sacrifice, at its core, relates to *Am Yisrael*’s separateness, our having been singled out and distinguished from the other nations of the world.

In light of this distinction, we might perhaps explain *Chazal*’s comment that the *pesach* sacrifice came in reward for Avraham’s hospitality. Our ability to celebrate our designation as a special, unique nation stems from our commitment to following Avraham’s example of extending kindness to all people. The exclusiveness of the *korban pesach* signifies our forging a unique national identity – but this unique identity is forged for the purpose stated by God in His first prophecy to Avraham: “All families on earth shall be blessed through you” (Bereishit 12:3). We were taken from Egypt to become a unique nation charged with the unique mission to bring blessing to the rest of mankind by serving as examples of morality, kindness and Godliness, and conducting our lives on a higher plane. And so the feast that celebrates our unique national identity is linked to the feast served by Avraham, signifying that our unique identity must serve the purpose of assisting and uplifting the rest of the world.

Sunday

The Gemara in Masekhet Pesachim (59a) teaches that the *korban pesach* – the sacrifice offered by all *Benei Yisrael* on the 14th of Nissan – is exceptional in that it is offered after the *tamid shel bein ha-arbayim* – the daily afternoon sacrifice. The rule of “*aleha hashleim kol ha-korbanot kulan*” (Pesachim 58b) establishes that the afternoon *tamid* sacrifice must be the final sacrifice offered each day (just as the morning *tamid* must be the first sacrifice offered each day). The *korban pesach* marks a striking exception to this rule, as it is sacrificed after the offering of the *tamid*.

Not only does the *korban pesach* mark an exception to this rule, but it disrupts the entire schedule of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The Mishna (Pesachim 58a) teaches that normally, the afternoon *tamid* was slaughtered eight-and-a-half (halakhic) hours into the day, and offered on the altar an hour later. On Erev Pesach, the process began an hour earlier, in order to allow time for all the *pesach* offerings that were brought afterward. When the 14th of Nissan fell on Shabbat, the offering of the *tamid* was moved up even earlier – to six-and-a-half hours into the day – in order to allow time for all the *pesach* sacrifices to be roasted before the onset of Shabbat, when roasting became forbidden.

This unique feature of the *korban pesach* perhaps points to one of the important general themes of the celebration of the Exodus.

Fixed routines, schedules and habits are, on the hand, vitally important sources of stability and consistency. So much of the good we do is done by force of habit and routine, by our having grown accustomed to acting and living a certain way. The value and importance of routine is symbolized by the *tamid* sacrifice, which was offered each and every morning and afternoon in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, without exception, thus embodying the notion of consistency in our service of God. At the same time, however, set routines can stifle us, and even “enslave” us. They run the risk of discouraging bold ambitions and aspirations, of blocking our minds from extending “out of the box,” from thinking creatively and with ingenuity, and from striving to new heights of achievement. Steady good habits prevent us from falling into bad habits, but they also threaten to hold us back from working to develop even better habits.

One of the themes of the Exodus, and of our celebration of Pesach, is the breaking of presumed norms. In the ancient world, it was accepted that the powerful exploit the weak, and thus it was natural for the mighty Egyptian empire to feel perfectly entitled to enslave the helpless Israelite population living in its borders. The society was constructed based on a caste system whereby those born into the slave class forever remained part of the slave class. This basic order was shattered through the miracles of the Exodus. And thus we proclaim at the *seder* as we prepare to tell the story of the Exodus, “All who are hungry shall come and eat.” We affirm that people’s present conditions do not have to dictate their future conditions, that the hardships to which we may have grown accustomed until now will not necessarily continue, because the current order of things is subject to drastic change. We then add, “Now – we are slaves, but next year – free people; now – we are here, but next year – in Jerusalem.” The *seder* experience is to assure us that we are not “enslaved” by our current condition, that we are capable of growing, changing and improving, that just as our ancestors were instantly transformed from lowly slaves into a proud, free nation, we are all capable of transforming ourselves into much better and more accomplished people.

Appropriately, then, the *pesach* sacrifice is the only offering that disrupts the basic structure of the Temple rituals. Notwithstanding the importance of the message of the *tamid*, of the consistency wrought by a fixed, orderly routine, our focus on Pesach is to shift towards freeing ourselves from the constraints of our habits and familiar structure. It is a time to feel empowered with the confidence of knowing that we are not slaves to our past or present, that we can rise higher and extend beyond our current condition. Just as our ancestors achieved freedom from the chains of actual bondage, so are we to aspire to freedom from our perceived constraints, and trust that we can be far greater than we are now.

(Based on a *derasha* by Rabbi Dov Loketch)

Monday

Yesterday, we noted the exceptional *halakha* requiring that the *korban pesach* – the special sacrifice offered by all *Benei Yisrael* on the 14th of Nissan – be offered after the daily afternoon sacrifice in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. Whereas all other sacrifices need to be offered before the *tamid shel bein ha-arbayim* (the daily afternoon offering), the *korban pesach* is unique in that it is to be sacrificed specifically following the afternoon *tamid*.

The Gemara in Masekhet Pesachim (59a) infers this *halakha* from the fact that the Torah in Sefer Devarim (16:6) speaks of the *pesach* sacrifice as being offered “*ba-arev*” – literally, “in the evening.” Earlier, in Sefer Shemot (12:6), the Torah requires slaughtering the sacrifice “*bein ha-arbayim*” – in the afternoon, the same expression used in reference to the afternoon *tamid* offering (Bamidbar 28:4). The fact that the Torah speaks of the timing of the *pesach* sacrifice with both these terms indicates that it is offered later than the *tamid*, the timing of which is referred to only with the term “*bein ha-arbayim*.” This inference is made also by the *Sifrei*, in Parashat Pinchas (Bamidbar 28:4).

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 5:1) brings a different source for this *halakha*, noting that in the aforementioned verse in Sefer Devarim, the Torah requires slaughtering the *pesach* sacrifice “*ke-vo ha-shemesh*” – at sundown. As this term does not appear in the context of the afternoon *tamid*, the Yerushalmi deduced that the *korban pesach* is to be sacrificed after the *tamid*, closer to sunset than the offering of the *tamid*.

The Rambam, surprisingly, explains this *halakha* differently, offering a logical reason that seemingly has no textual basis. In *Hilkhot Temidin U-musafin* (1:3), the Rambam writes that as the afternoon *tamid* is sacrificed eight-and-a-half hours into the day (Pesachim 58a), it must precede the *korban pesach* for a simple practical reason. The *korban pesach* may not be offered before midday, and there simply would not be enough time between midday and the slaughtering of the *tamid* to sacrifice the multitudes of *pesach* offerings brought by the people. According to the Rambam, it appears, this *halakha* is not inferred from a nuance in the text of the Torah, but is rather based on purely pragmatic considerations. Numerous *Acharonim* addressed the question of why the Rambam resorted to this logical explanation rather than simply accept the Talmud’s textual inference.

Rav Menachem Kasher, in his *Torah Sheleima* (Shemot 12:6, note 158), speculates that the Rambam presented this explanation in response to the claim of the heretical Karaite sect, who rejected the traditional halakhic interpretations of the Torah. The Karaites contended, based on their reading of the Torah’s command, that the *korban pesach* is to be offered only in the final hour and one-third before sundown. Rav Saadia Gaon, as cited by Ibn Ezra (Shemot 12:6), argued against this view by noting that it would be impractical to offer all the nation’s *pesach* sacrifices in such a short time span. Conceivably, then, the Rambam felt it worthwhile to add this argument as compelling proof to the traditional halakhic view, as part of his effort to refute the heretical theories espoused by the Karaites. The Rambam may have likely accepted the Gemara’s inference from the text, but noted this practical consideration to provide logical support for the Gemara’s conclusion, in opposition to the Karaites’ reading.

Tuesday

Yesterday, we noted the surprising comments of the Rambam, in *Hilkhot Temidin U-musafin* (1:3), explaining the unique provision mandating that the *korban pesach* be offered following the afternoon *tamid* sacrifice. On all other days of the year, the afternoon *tamid* is the final sacrifice offered in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. On the 14th of Nissan, however, the nation’s *pesach* sacrifices are offered only after the offering of the afternoon *tamid*. The Rambam presents a practical reason for this exception, explaining that there would not be enough time to offer all the nation’s *pesach* sacrifices if they were offered before the *tamid*. As the Mishna teaches in Masekhet Pesachim (58a), the *tamid* was normally sacrificed eight-and-a-half hours into the day. As the earliest time for the offering of the *korban pesach* was midday, only two hours would be available for the sacrificing of all the nation’s *pesach* offerings if they were to precede the *tamid*. For this reason, the *tamid* was offered first.

Later writers raised several questions regarding the Rambam’s comments. One question (noted already by the *Tzelach*, Pesachim 59a) is why the *tamid* could not simply be delayed to a later time in the afternoon. The aforementioned Mishna states that on the 14th of Nissan, the *tamid* was offered earlier in order to allow time for the offering of all the *pesach* sacrifices. Seemingly, the *tamid* – which is permitted to be sacrificed until sundown – could have just as easily been delayed to allow the *pesach* offerings to be sacrificed first. Why did the Rambam assume that the *tamid* could be scheduled for an earlier time to accommodate the *korban pesach*, but not for a later time?

One answer perhaps emerges from the controversial comments of the *Minchat Chinukh* (5:3) in his analysis of this *halakha*. The *Minchat Chinukh* understands the *halakha* to mean not that the afternoon *tamid* must precede the *korban pesach*, but rather that the time for the *pesach* offering begins after enough time has passed to offer the *tamid* sacrifice. In other words, according to the *Minchat Chinukh*, there is no requirement that the *tamid* offering precede the *pesach* offering; rather, the time for the offering of the *pesach* offering begins after the time needed for the offering of the *tamid*. The practical ramification of this analysis is that if, for whatever reason, the *tamid* cannot be offered, the *korban pesach* should still be sacrificed no earlier than the point at which the *tamid* could have been offered. The obligation is not to offer the *pesach* after the *tamid*, but rather not to offer the *pesach* before the point at which the offering of the *tamid* could be completed.

On the basis of the *Minchat Chinukh*’s analysis, Rav Shlomo Wahrman (*She’eirit Yosef*, vol. 5, chapter 25) suggests a creative reading of the Rambam’s comments. Perhaps, the Rambam was addressing the question of why it was not arranged that the *korban pesach* would be offered at its earliest time – immediately after the time needed for the offering of the *tamid* – and then the *tamid* would be offered. Since the *tamid* may be offered anytime before sundown, seemingly, it would be preferable not to disrupt the basic structure of the Temple sacrifices, whereby the afternoon *tamid* is the final sacrifice offered. And since, as the *Minchat Chinukh* established, the *pesach* does not actually have to be offered after the *tamid*, but merely after the time that was needed for the *tamid* to be sacrificed, it was possible to offer the *korban pesach* at the proper time without making an exception to the fundamental rule that no sacrifice is offered after the *tamid*. It was this question, perhaps, that the Rambam sought to answer by explaining that this was simply impractical. Since the offering of the *pesach* sacrifice could not begin until after the time in which the *tamid* would be sacrificed, the *tamid* needed to be offered first in order to allow time for all the nation’s *pesach* sacrifices to be offered before sundown.

Wednesday

The Mishna in Masekhet Pesachim (99b) famously establishes the obligation of *arba kosot* – drinking four cups of wine on the night of Pesach. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1) cites (appropriately enough) four different explanations for this requirement, all of which view the four cups as corresponding to some series of four. The first and most famous explanation is that the four cups represent the four “expressions of the redemption,” the four promises which God made to *Benei Yisrael* in assuring them they would be freed from Egypt, as we read towards the beginning of Parashat Vaeira (Shemot 6:6-7). But the Yerushalmi also brings other opinions. According to one view, the four cups symbolize the four exiles that *Benei Yisrael* would endure over the course of its history, and according to another view, the cups represent the four “cups” of calamity that the prophets foresaw would befall *Benei Yisrael*’s enemies.

But perhaps the most intriguing of the explanations cited by the Yerushalmi associates this *mitzva* with the dream of the *sar ha-mashkim* – Pharaoh’s cupbearer who was in prison together with Yosef. As we read in Parashat Vayeishev (Bereishit 40:9-11), the cupbearer dreamt of squeezing grapes into a cup which he then served to Pharaoh, and Yosef correctly interpreted the dream to mean that the *sar ha-mashkim* would soon be released from prison and reinstated. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, as the Yerushalmi cites, noted that the word “*kos*” (“cup”) appears four times in this context – three in the cupbearer’s account of his dream, and a fourth time in Yosef’s interpretation. The four cups which we drink at the *seder*, according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, corresponds to these four instances of the word “*kos*.”

The obvious question arises as to why Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi viewed this episode – the *sar ha-mashkim*’s dream and Yosef’s interpretation – as relevant to the Pesach celebration. Why would this incident be worthy of commemoration at the *seder*?

On one level, perhaps, the association lies simply in the chain of events that was triggered by this dream. It was a result of Yosef’s accurate interpretation of this dream that the cupbearer later advised Pharaoh to consult with Yosef after the king dreamt his peculiar dreams, setting the stage for Yosef’s sudden rise to the position of vizier – in the capacity of which he eventually brought his family to Egypt, effectively beginning the Egyptian exile. Conceivably, then, the commemoration of the *sar ha-mashkim*’s dream at the *seder* might be intended to draw our attention to the long string of unusual events carefully orchestrated by the Almighty for the purpose of bringing our ancestors to Egypt from which He would later miraculously deliver us.

There may, however, also be an additional element, one which can perhaps be discerned by taking note of the contrast between the cupbearer’s dream and that of his cellmate, the *sar ha-ofim* (chief baker). The baker also beheld a dream that night – that he was carrying baskets of bread on his head, which was being eaten by birds. Yosef interpreted that dream as foretelling the baker’s execution three days later. One of the important differences between these two dreams is that the cupbearer dreamt also of the production of wine, whereas the baker dreamt of only the final product. The *sar ha-mashkim* told Yosef that he saw a vine with ripened grapes, which he then took and squeezed into Pharaoh’s cup to produce wine which he then served to his master. This is in contrast to the baker, whose dream began with the loaves of bread already made. As such, the opposite fates of these two royal servants might perhaps express to us the importance of appreciating and embracing the process, and not just the final product. We should not dream about and aspire to only the end result; rather, our dreams and aspirations should include the process, the work and effort that must be invested in reaching the desired goal.

If so, then we can perhaps understand the relevance of this episode to the Pesach celebration. On Pesach we are to remember and relive not only the exhilaration of freedom, but also the bitterness of slavery that preceded it. The entire experience of the *seder* revolves around our connecting to and appreciating our roots and origins, the long, difficult journey we have traveled to reach our current condition. We closely study our humble beginnings and the miraculous events that brought us to where we are now, reinforcing our faith in the success of the journey that still lies ahead of us. The Pesach *seder* is all about the process, appreciating the struggles and hardships that we endured before emerging as a proud, strong nation. And it thus reminds us to embrace not only our successes and triumphs, but also the challenges we must overcome to reach those achievements, recognizing that all meaningful goals in life can be reached only through hard work and effort.

(Based on a *derasha* by Rabbi Dov Loketch)

Thursday

The famous first Mishna of Masekhet Pesachim (2a) instructs that one is obligated to search his home for *chametz* on “*or le-arba’a asar*,” which the Gemara concludes refers to the night of the 14th of Nissan. Although the word “*or*” means “light,” such that the term “*or le-arba’a asar*” would seem to indicate that the search should take place during the day of the 14th, the Gemara clarifies that the Mishna refers to the nighttime. The Mishna uses the word “*or*,” the Gemara explains, as a “*lishna ma’alya*” – a more refined way of speaking of the dark, nighttime hours.

Rav Natan of Breslav (*Likutei Halakhot* – *Netilat Yadayim Shacharit*, 2) finds in the Mishna’s use of the word “*or*” in this context an allusion to one of the important themes of Pesach – faith in divine providence, in God’s governance of the world. *Chametz*, Rav Natan writes, is a symbol of the way the natural order conceals the hand of providence, giving the appearance that the world runs on its own, randomly, and is not governed. Ridding our homes of *chametz* thus represents ridding our minds of this belief, and reinforcing our faith in God. For this reason, Rav Natan suggests, the Mishna refers to the night of *bedikat chametz* as “*or*” – “light.” As we set out to eliminate the *chametz* from our homes, our aim is to kindle the “light” of faith. Without faith in providence, the world might seem “dark” – gloomy, chaotic and frightening. But if we believe that the world is governed by the Almighty, we live with “light,” with the joy and confidence of knowing that we are under the control of a kind, compassionate Creator.

Developing this point one step further, leavened bread is fully processed, and thus hardly recognizable as the product of its original ingredients (flour and water). It signifies human creativity and ingenuity, the world which has been developed by mankind, which has the effect of concealing the hand of providence. *Matza*, the simplest combination of flour and water, is far closer to its roots and origins than leavened products, and it thus represents the hidden hand of God which is the true source and cause of all that transpires.

Shortly before the Exodus, God presented to Moshe a series of commands to relay to *Benei Yisrael* in preparation for the night of the final plague, when they would be set free (Shemot 12). Notably, these commands do not include any practical measures to be taken by *Benei Yisrael* to secure their freedom. The instructions all revolved around the *pesach* sacrifice which the people were to offer, and had nothing to do with the Egyptians. In fact, *Benei Yisrael* were specifically commanded to remain in their homes throughout the night (Shemot 12:22) – underscoring the fact that they played absolutely no role in defeating the Egyptians. Their involvement in the Exodus process was strictly spiritual – displaying their commitment to God by offering the sacrifice in compliance with His commands (which included circumcision, formally entering into an eternal covenant with God). They were not involved in the process of attaining freedom in any pragmatic way. This passivity is reflected by the *matza*, the crudest, least developed baked product, which represents the absence of human creativity and innovation. (This symbolic understanding of *matza* is developed by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch in several contexts.)

Generally, of course, we are to combine resolute faith in God with effort and ingenuity. Throughout the year, we are not to remain “in our homes,” passively depending on God’s grace and assistance to protect us and care for us. We are to put in the effort needed to secure our needs and ensure our safety, and trust that the success of our efforts ultimately depends on the Almighty. Pesach, however, is the time when we must eliminate the “*chametz*,” look beyond our initiative and innovation, and recognize our absolute dependence on God. Whereas at other times we focus our minds both on our proactive efforts as well as on our faith in God, on Pesach we are to focus exclusively on the hand of providence which is the true cause of all that happens here in our world.

Friday

Towards the beginning of the *maggid* text whch we read at the *seder*, we recite several passages relevant to the *mitzva* of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* – telling the story of Exodus at the *seder*. These include the statement that “even if we were all wise, we were all intelligent, we were all elders, we all knew the Torah – there is a commandment for us to tell about the Exodus from Egypt.” We emphasize that even if all of us assembled around the table were learned, aged scholars, we would still be bound by the Torah obligation of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*. As proof to this precept, we tell the story of the four *Tanna’im* who spent Pesach night together with Rabbi Akiva in Bnei-Brak, how these five towering sages spoke about the Exodus throughout the entire night, until the morning – demonstrating how this *mitzva* applies even to the greatest scholars.

This passage is often understood as emphasizing the point that we always have more to learn and achieve, that even if we study something many times over, we reveal some new information or insight each and every time. Additionally, it has been explained that the *mitzva* of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* is not merely cognitive, but experiential. The obligation is not simply to study the information, but also to relive the Exodus each year, and thus it is relevant to even the greatest scholars who are already well-versed and proficient in all aspects of the Exodus. They, too, must engage in *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* on Pesach night in order to experience the Exodus anew.

Rav Avraham of Slonim, in *Beit Avraham*, adds yet another perspective on this statement in the *Haggadah*, explaining that it is directed specifically to the people with whom we are conducting the *seder*. As we prepare to tell the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, we note that even if everyone assembled is a scholar, we all have what to learn from one another. Each scholar brings a unique angle and understanding to whatever subject is being discussed. And thus when scholars come together to discuss a topic in which they are all very proficient, they are nevertheless enriched by listening to one another and learning from one another. This, the *Beit Avraham* writes, is our intent in emphasizing that we must speak of the *Yetziat Mitzrayim* “even if we were all wise.” No matter how much we might know, and how many times we have read through and studied the text of the *Haggadah*, we must share our perspectives and insights with each other, and hear what others have to say with an open mind and with an insatiable desire to learn and understand. On this night of learning and reflection, we are bidden to recognize the value and importance of hearing new and different thoughts and angles, and to eagerly listen to and absorb new information and new insights, appreciating the unique perspective that each scholar has to offer and contribute to our understanding.

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