

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## Parshas Bo

### Inside the Exodus - Understanding the Korban Pesach

#### INTRODUCTION: ONE THREAD TOO MANY?

Our discussion this week begins with a mitzvah that will not actually appear until the middle of Chumash Bamidbar. Although not formally one of the mitzvos that commemorate the Exodus – and there are many of those – the mitzvah of *tzitzis* nonetheless has a significant connection with that event. Indeed, the parsha of *tzitzis*, which we read daily as the third paragraph of the Shema, concludes with the Exodus from Egypt:

אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים

*I am Hashem, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to be a God unto you.*<sup>1</sup>

Developing this theme further, Rashi<sup>2</sup> quotes his teacher, R' Moshe Hadarshan, who explains numerous details within this mitzvah as reflecting aspects of the Exodus:

- ▷ The place on the garment where the *tzitzis* are attached, the “כִּנּוֹף” (corner), corresponds to the verse which states that Hashem took us out from Egypt “עַל כְּנָפֵי נְשָׁרִים” – *On eagles’ wings*<sup>3</sup>
- ▷ The *tzitzis* are attached specifically to a garment that has four corners, corresponding to the four expressions of deliverance from Egypt, mentioned in the beginning of Parshas Vaeira.<sup>4</sup>
- ▷ The eight strings of the *tzitzis* correspond to the eight days from when the Jewish people left Egypt until they sang at the banks of the Red Sea.

This last comment of Rashi has been the focus of much discussion over the generations, for a very simple reason: There were not *eight* days between us leaving Egypt until crossing through the Red Sea, there were *seven* – including both of the day of leaving and that of the crossing! Indeed, Rashi himself states this explicitly in his commentary to Parshas Beshalach.<sup>5</sup> How then, can he say elsewhere that the crossing took place eight days after leaving?

1 Bamidbar 15:41.

2 Commentary to Bamidbar Ibid. s.v. *ani*.

3 Shemos 19:4.

4 Ibid. 6:6-7.

5 Shemos 14:5 s.v. *vayugad*.

## THE EXODUS: PROCESS AND PURPOSE

Coming back to the verse itself at the end of the parsha of *tzitzis*, we note that it not only mentions the event of the Exodus, but also emphasizes its purpose: “להיות לכם לאלקים – to be a God unto you.” Indeed, to lack awareness of this goal is to see the Exodus purely in a negative light, that is to say, to define it solely in terms of what we are *not* – i.e. no longer slaves to Pharaoh. However, it doesn’t touch on what we *are* – Hashem’s people – so that the sum-total of our freedom is simply defined as the absence of slavery. It is our singular connection to and relationship with Hashem that was formed through the Exodus that gives a positive definition to that process. Moreover, the verse later on in Chumash Devarim<sup>6</sup> refers to Egypt as a “כור הברזל – smelting furnace,” informing us that everything we experienced there was in order to refine us of core impurities and enable us to become Hashem’s nation. In light of this defining statement, to lose sight of that goal would be to render the entire Egypt experience – both the subjugation therein and the deliverance therefrom – not only incomplete, but effectively meaningless.

## “A FESTIVAL FOR HASHEM” – FOR ALL GENERATIONS

This fundamental idea will not only give us a fuller and more meaningful understanding of the Exodus from Egypt, it will also explain both its scope and its permanence. The Jewish people have not always enjoyed the political freedom that they attained on that first Pesach. There have many times in our history when we have found ourselves in conditions that were not too dissimilar to those in Egypt – if not worse. And yet, the attainment of our status as Hashem’s People has never left us. It is with reference to that aspect of the Exodus to which we refer in the *Maariv* prayer when we say:

ויוצא את עמו ישראל מתוכם לחירות עולם

*And He took His nation Israel out from [the Egyptians’] midst to everlasting freedom.*

Political freedom has not always been with us, but the freedom of becoming Hashem’s nation is eternal and ongoing. According to the Meshech Chochmah, this profound idea is expressed in a simple reading of one of the verses in our parsha concerning the festival Pesach:

וְחִגַּגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חֹג לַיהוָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם תִּחְגַּגְהוּ

*And you shall celebrate it as a festival for Hashem, for your generations, as an eternal law shall you celebrate it.*<sup>7</sup>

As if to say: If you celebrate Pesach primarily as a festival over your temporal freedom, there may be generations where such celebration is not warranted or appropriate. However, when you celebrate it as a festival for Hashem, over the relationship with Him as His people that you attained upon leaving Egypt, then it will be a festival worthy of celebration every year – in all generations and for all time.

## INITIATING THE RELATIONSHIP

All of this should give us new appreciation of the significance of the Korban Pesach that we brought on the day preceding the Exodus. For it turns out that although the *full realization* of the purpose of the Exodus, namely, becoming Hashem’s people, took place at Har Sinai seven weeks after we had left Egypt, the *first step* of that process was actually initiated **before we left** – with the offering of the Pesach! Our relationship with Hashem is expressed by us being His servants. As such, the actualization of our status as “*avdei Hashem*” (servants of Hashem) occurred through the *avodah* – Divine service –

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<sup>6</sup> 4:20.

<sup>7</sup> Shemos 12:14.

of the korban Pesach.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this idea was especially accentuated with the first korban Pesach, which incorporated a public repudiation (and renunciation) of idolatry, taking the lamb that was worshipped by the Egyptians as a deity and leaving it tied to the bed-post for four days before offering it as a korban to Hashem.

Understanding the Korban Pesach as the initiation of our relationship with Hashem will explain why neglecting to bring this korban carries the unusually severe punishment of *kares* (Divine excision). Failure to fulfil a positive mitzvah almost never results in any punishment, certainly not one as severe as *kares*. In fact, there is only one other example of this, and that is one who fails to perform *milah*. And indeed, we now understand that the reason for both of these is the same. They are not “only” mitzvos; rather, they both represent our entry into a covenantal relationship with Hashem. Hence, their neglect carries with it such severe consequences.

Moreover, in this light, we can further understand that the Pesach that is to be brought each year in subsequent generations is not merely commemorative in nature, but rather represents a *renewal* of the relationship that began with the original Korban Pesach in Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

### **PESACH AS THE NAME OF THE OFFERING**

Developing this idea further, we know that the Korban Pesach is intimately bound up with the plague of the firstborn, with its very name deriving from the fact that Hashem “passed over” (*pasach*) the houses of the Jewish people during that plague, whose doorposts and lintels were smeared with the blood of the offering. Here, too, the full significance of this act was not just that the blood on the doorposts acted as a sign that there were Jews inside so that Hashem would “know” to pass over the house. Rather it was a sign that the occupants of the house had involved themselves in service of Hashem, thereby connecting themselves to Him and elevating themselves beyond reach of the plague.

Indeed, the placing of the blood on the doorposts also had a basic function within the mitzvah of bringing the korban. Every korban requires the application of some of its blood on a *mizbeyach* (altar). The Gemara<sup>10</sup> states that on the original Pesach, the doorposts and lintels of the Jewish houses assumed this role, and the blood that was smeared on them fulfilled the requirement of applying the blood of a korban! Although this appears to be a distinct idea from the blood as a “sign” for Hashem to pass over, upon deeper reflection they are the same. The fact that the doorposts attained the status of a *mizbeyach* was the product of the Divine presence having entered the homes of the Jewish people to initiate the relationship, thereby elevating those homes to the status of the Mishkan. Hence, the blood on the doorposts, as the sign of that elevation, indicated that the occupants of the house were likewise elevated beyond the harmful effects of the plague.

### **FEASTING AT GOD’S TABLE**

Appreciating the role of the korban Pesach as establishing our unique connection with Hashem as His people will give us a deeper insight into one of the central features of the offering – partaking of its meat. Although there are numerous offerings which contain a mitzvah to partake of their meat, this element is highlighted in the Pesach to a degree not found in any other offering. Thus, for example:

- ▷ If an animal is brought as a korban Pesach, but none of its participants are capable of partaking of its meat, the offering is disqualified.<sup>11</sup>
- ▷ A Pesach that is brought when the people are in a state of *tumah* (impurity) can also be consumed by them even though they are *tamei*. This is in contrast to other communal

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8 MaharaI, Gevuros Hashem chap. 35, 60.

9 R’ Leib Mintzberg, Ben Melech Parshas Bo.

10 Pesachim 96a.

11 Pesachim 61a.

offerings which, although they can be brought in a state of *tumah*, they cannot be consumed in that state.<sup>12</sup>

The central importance of partaking of the Pesach is also reflected in the Rambam's codification of the mitzvos. Whereas with other korbanos that are eaten, the Rambam categorizes the eating of the korban as a detail within the mitzvah of that korban, when it comes to the Pesach, he codifies the eating of the korban as a separate mitzvah from actually bringing the korban.

Why does the eating of the Pesach enjoy such central status within the korban? In truth, the very idea of eating from an animal that has been brought as an offering to Hashem is itself most unusual. Surely, having been sanctified and offered to Hashem as part of Divine service, the notion of people then partaking of it seems inappropriate in the extreme! Rather, the aspect of the kohanim – or the owners of the korban – partaking of a korban is an indication of the fact that *they, too, are sanctified*, to the extent that they have an affinity with food even of such consecrated status. Indeed, the Talmud phrases this idea most profoundly and beautifully by saying, “They receive [this food] from the table of On High.”

The sanctification of the Jewish people to the degree that they could partake of korbanos itself took place at the time of the original Pesach offering, for it is an expression of the relationship that was initiated with Hashem as His people. Hence, this element of eating the offering receives such special emphasis within the korban Pesach.<sup>13</sup>

### **THE CLOCKS OF REDEMPTION**

Let us now return to the strings of the *tzitzis*, which Rashi informed us correspond to the days from when we left Egypt until we sang at the Red Sea. The connection of the mitzvah of *tzitzis* to the Exodus is that the reminder that it serves to fulfill all of Hashem's mitzvos is the purpose of Hashem taking us out of Egypt. Hence, a garment must have four corners to be obligated in *tzitzis*, corresponding to the four expressions of redemption. The first three of those expressions refer to Hashem saving us from the Egyptians, while the fourth expresses the goal of that salvation, “*And I shall take you to Me as a people and I will be a God unto you.*”<sup>14</sup>

As we have seen, this relationship began with the bringing of the korban Pesach the day before we exited Egypt – the fourteenth of Nisan. We can now appreciate why, in terms of the association of *tzitzis* with the Exodus, it is *that day* that will be considered the first day of our freedom, with the day on which we sang Az Yashir then being the eighth – represented by the eight threads of the *tzitzis*!<sup>15</sup>

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12 Ibid. 76b.

13 Ben Melech *ibid.*

14 Shemos 6:7.

15 See Maharal, Gur Aryeh to Shemos 14:5. [The Maharal points out that while the mitzvah of eating matzah does not begin until the fifteenth of Nisan, the prohibition against eating chametz already starts from midday on the fourteenth, expressing thereby in that in some sense, the festival has already begun at that time. Indeed, the Taz (Orach Chaim sec 432) points out that in commanding to destroy chametz, the Torah (Shemos 12:15) refers to the fourteenth as “*יום הראשון*”, which generally means “the first day”. Although Rashi explains, based on the Gemara Pesachim 5a, that the word “*ראשון*” can also mean “prior”, nonetheless, the simple reading also indicates that while this is not the first of the seven days of the “Festival of Matzos,” it is still in some way the first day of the festival celebrating our freedom.]