

The *Korban Pesach*

by Aaron Potek

The *korban pesach* was the centerpiece of our first seder before leaving Egypt. When the *Beit Hamikdash* was still standing, anyone who did not participate in the *korban pesach* was cut off from the Jewish people. Even after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, it has remained a critical part of the seder. Leading up to the seder, the Vilna Gaon would recite all the *psukim* from *Tanach* that relate to the *korban pesach*. Each year, at the seder, we read Ramban Gamliel's statement that one who does not mention the *korban pesach* the night of the seder does not fulfill the obligation to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt [Mishnah Pesachim 10:5].

Many reasons can be given for the importance of this commandment. It is the first detailed *mitzvah* we received as a nation [Exodus 12:3-13], it symbolizes a blatant rejection of Egyptian theology, and it recalls G-d's passing over and protection of B'nei Yisrael the night He struck the Egyptian firstborns. However, about all of these reasons we can ask: Now that the *Beit Hamikdash* is destroyed and we cannot bring the sacrifice, why should it still hold the same importance in our modern-day *sedarim*?

Though we can no longer offer the *korban pesach*, I believe this *mitzvah* conveys values that are still relevant today. The *mitzvah* to sanctify time through counting the months immediately precedes the detailed instructions for *korban pesach* [Exodus 12:1-2]. Jewish holidays may be celebrated cyclically, but it is during this moment that G-d reveals linear time. This is a radical concept for an about-to-be-liberated people who had previously known each day to be much like the previous one. In our new lives as a freed people, the calendar symbolizes our constant progress. With the exodus from Egypt, we began our calendar and thus our belief in a future that we can shape.

Passover is a celebration of the day the Jewish nation entered world history. To appreciate our growth, we must acknowledge significant moments in our lives and in our nation's history. But simply celebrating this intellectually, in our minds, is not enough. It is no coincidence, then, that the Torah transitions from the commandment about counting months to the commandment about offering the *korban pesach*. The *korban pesach* is G-d's way of allowing us to celebrate through action. It is the same reason we were commanded to offer the first fruits at the Beit HaMikdash or to say kiddush on Shabbat—to sanctify moments through action.

Just as there are significant moments in our lives that require special awareness, there are also significant acts, such as the eating of meat, about which the Torah also demands a special awareness. Rav Kook writes “The regulations of slaughter, in special prescriptions, to reduce the pain of the animal registers a reminder that we are not dealing with things outside the law, that they are not automatons, devoid of life, but with living things” [Ben Zion Bokser, *Abraham Isaac Kook: The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems*, Paulist Press, 1978, p. 319].

The *korban pesach*, the only commandment in the Torah to specifically require everyone to eat meat, shows that we can heighten our consciousness of spiritually significant moments through holy deeds. And this consciousness in turn can give significance to the physical act.

Today, we don't offer the *korban pesach*, but we can regain the spiritual practice of eating meat by limiting it to these special moments. In doing so, we will internalize the broader message of *pesach* – that active celebration of our past should lay the groundwork for building a better future.