



## Pesach 2009

### Maimonides on The Seder and Korban Pesach

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It is customary at the *seder* to lift the *matza* and the *marror* while reciting the passage toward the end of *maggid* (“*Rabbi Yishamel omer...*”) which discusses the meaning behind these *mitzvot*. This section actually addresses three *mitzvot* – the paschal offering, *matza* and *marror* – yet we lift only the *matza* and *marror*; we do not lift the piece of meat placed on the table to commemorate the *korban pesach*. As the Talmud (Pesachim 116b) explains, one should not lift the piece of meat because this would give the impression that we are actually partaking of sacrificial meat. It is strictly forbidden to eat sacrifices outside the walls of Jerusalem, and we must therefore avoid doing anything that might appear like eating sacrificial meat in our homes. For this reason, even though we place a piece of meat on the table as a commemoration, we do not lift it when discussing the paschal offering, to make it clear that the meat serves only as a symbol, and not as an actual sacrifice.

Maimonides, however, appears to rule against the Gemara’s conclusion. He codifies this *halakha* in his *Hilkhot Chametz U-matza* (8:4), but draws no distinction between different historical periods. It appears that in his view, even when the Temple stood, and the *seder* revolved around the *korban pesach*, one would only point to the sacrificial meat, rather than lift it, when discussing its significance.

Leaving aside the issue of why Maimonides did not follow the clear implication of the Gemara, the ruling itself requires explanation. Why would the *korban pesach* be any different than *matza* and *marror*? Why did Maimonides deem it appropriate to lift the *matza* and *marror* while discussing their meaning, but not the meat of the paschal sacrifice?

Rav Shimon Diskin, in his *Mas’at Ha-melekh* commentary to the *Haggada* (published posthumously), answers by examining the reason for lifting these foods in the first place. It is commonly understood that they are lifted in order to draw the family’s attention to what is being said. The *Haggada* clearly states that one must explain the symbolism of these three *mitzvot* at the *seder* in order to fulfill his obligations of Pesach, and we therefore seek to keep people’s minds focused by lifting the items in the air. Maimonides, however, may have ascribed to this lifting a more fundamental halakhic purpose, namely, to formally designate the foods for the *mitzvot* they have come to fulfill. The lettuce and *matza* that one eats for the *mitzva* must first be formally assigned as the *marror* and *matza* through which one will fulfill these obligations. The *korban pesach*, however, had already been designated as such before the slaughtering of the animal, as all sacrifices must be formally consecrated before they are slaughtered. Therefore, its meat requires no formal designation before it is eaten at the *seder*.

Rav Diskin's theory gives rise to the question of why one's *matza* and *marror* would require specific designation. One possibility might be that we are to perceive these items as part of the paschal sacrifice; they, too, have a quasi "sacrificial" status. During the times of the *Mikdash*, one was required to partake of the *korban pesach*, *matza* and *marror* all together, as we commemorate through *koreikh* even today. Possibly, as the *matza* and *marror* are combined with the *korban pesach* into a single entity of sorts, they, too, require specific designation for this purpose, just as sacrifices are formally consecrated. This *halakha*, then, might reflect the unique nature of the *matza* and *marror*, which, during the times of the *Mikdash*, were treated as an integral part of the sacrificial rite of Pesach, and were thus treated like a sacrifice.