



Parashat Bo
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Parashat Bo tells the story of the night of the Exodus, in preparation for which *Benei Yisrael* were bidden to designate a sheep as the paschal sacrifice. The meat of the sacrifice was then eaten on the night of the 15th of Nissan, as God smote the firstborn of Egypt, the plague which ultimately led to the nation's freedom.

The *korban pesach* features a number of special laws and guidelines that do not apply to other sacrifices. Maimonides proposes possible reasons for these *halakhot* amidst his famous discussion of the reasons for the *mitzvot* generally, in the third section of his *Guide for the Perplexed* (chapter 46). He attributes most of the unique laws of the *korban pesach* to the concern that *Benei Yisrael* conduct this ritual in a hasty manner. Most obviously, this is the reason why God instructed them to eat *matza*, rather than bread, with the sacrifice, as *matza* can be prepared much more quickly than proper bread. For the same reason, Maimonides asserts, God commanded that the *korban pesach* be roasted over an open flame – as opposed to boiled or baked – as roasting is the fastest method of preparing meat. The Torah also forbids breaking the bones of the paschal offering, which Maimonides explains as primarily a prohibition against sucking the marrow from the bones. As the meat was to be eaten rapidly, God allowed partaking of only the readily accessible meat. Similarly, the Torah forbids households from sharing the sacrificial meat with other households, which would delay the process of consumption, as the family would naturally wait for the person to return after delivering the meat.

Maimonides explains the reason for the hasty consumption as follows:

...the object of these rules was to make a show of the hurry and haste, in order that none should be too late to leave Egypt with the main body of the people, and be thus exposed to the attacks and the evil [designs of the enemy]. These temporary commandments were then made permanent, in order that we may remember what was done in those days.

At the time of the Exodus, each member of *Benei Yisrael* had to ensure to leave together with the rest of the nation, or he would otherwise be vulnerable to the danger posed by the vengeful Egyptians. It was therefore imperative to complete the *pesach* meal quickly, so that everyone would be ready to leave the moment the time of the Exodus came. Subsequent generations commemorate this event by observing these laws which helped guarantee a quick departure from Egypt.

There is, however, one unique feature of the *korban pesach* which Maimonides chose not to explain along the lines discussed above. The Torah establishes that a number of different people or households could join together to participate in a single *korban pesach*, but this had to be determined in advance. Meaning, the *korban pesach* required “registration.” A person could partake of the sacrificial meat and fulfill his

obligation of *korban pesach* only if he had formally “registered” for inclusion in a given sacrifice.

Theoretically, we could have explained this *halakha*, too, on the basis of the concern for speed. “Pre-registration” helped ensure orderliness on the night of the Exodus, as everybody knew in advance with whom they would partake of the sacrifice. Had *Benei Yisrael* been allowed to procrastinate in planning for the *korban pesach*, we could conceive of many members of the nation running about at the last minute searching for a family with whom they could participate. This could have easily resulted in a degree of chaos, and cause a delay in some people’s departure.

Maimonides, however, chose to present a much different reason for this *halakha*:

Each Passover lamb was only eaten by those who had previously agreed to consume it together, in order that people should be anxious to procure it, and should not rely on friends, relations, or on chance, without themselves taking any trouble about it before Passover.

According to Maimonides, this provision served to ensure that every member of the nation would proactively prepare for the paschal ritual. In essence, this *halakha* means that nobody may participate in the *korban pesach* unless they had first made the necessary arrangements. The Torah wanted everyone to take personal responsibility for this *mitzva*, rather than remain passive, relying on “friends, relations, or on chance.”

This explanation provides a meaningful lesson that bears relevance for all *mitzvot*. If we approach our religious obligations with the seriousness and sense of commitment that they deserve, then we will be vigilant and proactive in doing all that is necessary for their fulfillment. All too often, our attitude toward Torah observance is cavalier and passive, doing only that which conveniently comes our way. The laws of the *korban pesach* perhaps remind us what responsibility to Torah means, that we must proactively pursue high religious goals and standards, rather than leaving our Torah observance to the unpredictable fate of circumstance.