

Bo, 5781

Rabbi Zev Wiener

While it is hard to describe any Korban as “typical,” the Korban Pesach stands in its own league of atypicality. As described in Parashat Bo, this Korban -- the first of all legislated Korbanot -- is characterized by a myriad of specific laws that apply to no other Korban. For example, it must be roasted whole, none of its bones may be broken, it must be consumed by a predesignated group, and it may not be removed from this group at any point during its consumption. The novelty of these and other details cannot go unnoticed.

On a mystical level, the Maharal of Prague and others explain that the nuanced laws of the Korban Pesach represent the all-encompassing oneness of G-d and the oneness of the Jewish people. For example, the Torah's specification that the lamb be in its first year of life associates the Korban with the number one, evoking supreme unity. The requirement to roast the Korban Pesach as a single whole, as opposed to cut into slices, or cooked in liquid which could soften and shrivel it, further conjures a sense of oneness. The prohibition to break a bone into two pieces prevents any sense of fragmentation or multiplicity, and the requirement to eat it as part of a predesignated group, or *חבורה* (literally, fusion), without removing it from the group, bears out the theme of a unified and indivisible whole.

As such, when we eat the Korban Pesach, we attach ourselves to the oneness of the Jewish people, which itself is the ultimate manifestation of the oneness of G-d in this world: *אתה אחד ושםך אחד ומי כעמך ישראל, גוי אחד בארץ* -- *You are One, and Your Name is One, and who is like Your nation of Israel, a nation of One, in the land?* It is likely for this reason the Medrash, cited by Rashi in our Parasha, tantalizingly entertains the possibility that a convert to Judaism must offer a Korban Pesach on the day that he or she converts, regardless of the time of year. While this notion is ultimately rejected on technical grounds, the very consideration reflects the role of the Korban Pesach as the paradigmatic declaration of becoming part of something greater than ourselves, identifying with the collective soul of Knesset Yisrael.

In allowing us to identify with a collective self that exceeds our individual selves, the Korban Pesach's role as the Korban of freedom takes on an additional level of spiritual depth: the Korban Pesach liberates us not only from servitude to the historical Pharaoh, but also from our timeless enslavement to the misperceptions of our ego. If I go

through life seeing myself as a completely independent, self-contained being, interested only in my own achievements, my own pleasures, and my own disappointments, I live an illusory existence that is driven by my ego. Imprisoned in a mindset of “me,” I become fixated on the deficiencies in my life, whatever they may be, and I become increasingly self-conscious -- that is, conscious of my *false* self. I begin to live with the mentality that I have one life to live, and it better be the most enjoyable and pleasurable one possible; any deviation from this expectation leads to immediate frustration. My personal shortcomings stand front and center in my mind, and depression -- a condition often characterized by a sense of disconnection, isolation, and insignificance -- may soon follow. Even if people are superficially immersed in a robust social circle with shared Shabbat meals and Simcha invitations, if they do not feel deeply connected to an entity and a mission beyond themselves, they are prone to become increasingly stuck in their own heads, and life quickly becomes purposeless, boring, and unbearable.

When we eat the Korban Pesach, transcending our false ego and attaching to the oneness of the *Klal*, we find true freedom. Seeing myself as a component of a larger organism with a timeless mission, I feel connected and purposeful. As my perspective becomes more expansive and panoramic, less focused on me as an end unto myself, the disappointments and pains of life become easier to absorb -- after all, my life is not just about me. I don't have the luxury to become consumed by unhealthy guilt or frustration, since the nation and the mission need me to pick up and keep going. My every move becomes laden with significance -- I'm eating this snack, taking this vacation, and working hard in the office not just for me, but to have nourishment, recuperation, and financial stability to support the eternal mission of the Jewish people in this world. In light of this mentality, my entire life attains remarkable coherence and consistency. It is not merely a piecemeal assortment of random, disjointed experiences and events, but rather, every detail tells a meaningful story of trying to do whatever I can to manifest G-d's oneness in this world by identifying with and supporting the Jewish people.

While we no longer offer the physical Korban Pesach, we are commanded to read about it and to study its laws, as its message remains as relevant as it ever was. Some have taught that praying with a Minyan serves to awaken a similar consciousness, reminding us that our lives are part of something far greater than ourselves every time we pray. Whatever the vehicle, we must remember this concept in order to change the way we think and the way we live. Every single person, no matter his or her level of erudition, wealth, or popularity, can dedicate his or her life's mission to attaching to and strengthening the Jewish people. Through the power of everyone -- נערינו וזקנינו, בנינו --

ובנותנו -- combining our forces, we will elevate an entire world and be blessed to offer the physical Korban Pesach speedily in our days.

*Dedicated in loving memory of Dr. Morris Golomb, Moshe ben Avraham, z'l, and Mr. Arnold Wiener, Avraham ben Yitzchak Menachem, z'l, who used the gift of freedom that they were given to live the message of the Korban Pesach every day of their lives.*