

CHEVRAH TORAH...LT, 5780

Discovering the Other—Understanding Ourselves

Being a student of Elie Wiesel means being yourself and cultivating your humanity, your sensitivity to others...It means knowing you do not have to choose between your particular identity and your concern for all people...that the particular and the universal can be mutually reinforcing." [Witness Ariel Burger, pgs. 253-254]

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Exodus 12:43-51

Key KOSHI:

HOW does the act of eating the Pesach Offering create the Community of Israel?

WHAT does it teach us about the other, & our Covenant Community today?

P'SHAT...The Story that Unearths THE Question: WHAT Are We to Become

12:43] The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This is the law of the passover offering: No foreigner shall eat of it. 44] But any slave a man has bought may eat of it once he has been circumcised. 45] No bound or hired laborer shall eat of it. 46] It shall be eaten in one house: you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house; nor shall you break a bone of it. 47] The whole community of Israel shall offer it. 48] If a stranger who dwells with you would offer the passover to the Lord, all his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it; he shall then be as a citizen of the country. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. 49] There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you. 50] And all the Israelites did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. 51] That very day the Lord freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop.

43 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן זֹאת
תִּקְחַת הַפֶּסַח כָּל־בְּרִינְכֶם לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ :
44 וְכָל־עֶבֶד אִישׁ מִקְּנֵת־כַּסְּף וּמִלֶּתֶה אֹתוֹ
אִזּוֹ יֹאכַל בּוֹ : 45 תּוֹשֵׁב וְשֹׁכֵר לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ :
46 בְּבַיִת אֶחָד יֹאכַל לֹא־תוֹצִיא מִן־הַבַּיִת
מִן־הַבָּשָׂר חוּצָה וְעַצְמוֹ לֹא תִשְׁבְּרוּ־בּוֹ :
47 כָּל־עַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ : 48 וְכִי־יִגְוֹר
אֲתָדָּגָר וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לַיהוָה הַמּוֹל לּוֹ כָּל־
זָכָר וְאִזּוֹ יִקְרַב לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ וְהָיָה כְּאִזְרַח
הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עָרַל לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ : 49 תּוֹרַה
אַחַת יְהִיָּה לְאִזְרַח וְלִגְר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם :
50 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה
אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן כִּן עָשׂוּ : 51 וַיְהִי
בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶת־בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם עַל־צַבָּאוֹתָם :

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ...An Interchange of Truths: The More Jewish—The More Human

v.43 *This is the Law of the Pesach [offering]; No foreigner shall eat of it...*

SARNA... *Ben Ney-char* is a non-Israelite who resides temporarily in the land, usually for purposes of commerce. He does not profess the religion of Israel and does not identify with the community's historical experiences.

RASHI... "*Ben Ney-char*"—This includes one whose deeds have become alien to his Father in Heaven; Both a non-Jew and a Jew who becomes an apostate, thereby alienating himself from the community of Israel.

B'CHOR SHOR... No one for whom Passover is a foreign experience: gentiles & apostates.

MECKLENBURG... Onkelos' translation of the root *NeyCHaR* makes it clear that even if the Jew in question became estranged to fellow Jews by failure to practice, he is subject to the prohibition. The root to be estranged and to recognize is the same in Hebrew, and its intent depends on the context.

v.44-5 *But any slave may eat of it once he has been circumcised. No bound or hired laborer shall eat of it.*

IBN EZRA ... Of his own free will, to turn to the religion of Israel. The text refers to a slave who has been acquired, but the same rule applies to one born into the household as a slave.

ABARVANEL... One who flouts this law is not wholeheartedly faithful to the God of Israel.

B'CHOR SHOR..."bound"—a slave for life; "*hired*"—a slave for six years.

IBN EZRA ... No one who may not be counted as one of "*the whole community of Israel.*"

ALTER... The Exodus story defines the nation...

This Passover ritual is the cultic enactment of membership in that nation.

v.46 *It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any meat outside the house, nor break a bone of it*

RASHI... "B'Vayit Echad..." In one house, that is, in one group, so that those who are signed up for the lamb do not divide into two groups and split up.

FOX... "*break a bone*" As if to violate its perfection, since the bone was symbolic of the whole—the same Hebrew word for bone means "*essence.*" The biblical idea, found in reference to all sacrifices, is that only unblemished animals are acceptable.

v.47-8 *The whole community of Israel shall offer it. If a stranger...would offer the Pesach to YHVH, all his males must be circumcised...*

ALTER... Circumcision is the mark of belonging to the covenant community...There is a symbolic overlap between the apotropaic blood of circumcision, the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, and God's saving Israel from the bloodbath of Egypt to make them His people.

v.49 *There shall be one law for the citizen & the stranger who dwells among you.*

ETZ HAYIM... Strangers in Israel enjoyed certain rights & privileges: Shabbat rest, protection through cities of refuge, access to share in tithes...They were obliged to refrain from actions that could undermine the social, moral & spiritual well-being—immorality, idolatry, blasphemy... They were not required to celebrate Pesach, but if they desired to identify w/Israel, men had to undergo *Brit-milah*. Having done so, no discrimination between them and citizens of Israel was allowed.

MUNK... Membership in the Jewish nation is not restricted to Abraham's descendants...Every person can make this past his own, and become part of the children of Abraham, redeemed by God. The born heathen receives full equality as soon as he enters the Divine Covenant...Likewise, a born Jew loses his privilege to bring the offering when in his heart he denies his faith. Pesach does not belong only to the past...It is the cornerstone for our present and our future. [R'S.R.HIRSCH]

DRASH...A Dialogue of Celebrating Difference: Listening for the Light

Rev. CHAD REYNOLDS... [Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Lake Wales, FL.]

Covenant Identity – A Passover to the Lord

Passover sacrifice in Exodus points us to Jesus, the once and for all Lamb of God (John 1:29, 35; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 5:9-10). Israel was commanded to observe the Passover annually, along with the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread.

God saved Israel from Egypt and took them to the promised land. He did this because of his covenant with them through their father, Abraham (Genesis 15), to be their God and for them to be his people. But who was to be included? Was it just ethnic Israel; the biological descendants of Abraham only? Exodus 12:38 tells us that Israel was not alone in leaving Egypt. “*A mixed multitude also went up with them.*” What to do with them? The need to establish the terms of covenant identity was crucial. If a man (foreigner, stranger, slave, etc.) and his household were circumcised then they should partake in the Passover as members of the covenant community. Their inclusion was based on their faith in God, which was exhibited in receiving circumcision. If they were excluded, it was because of the absence of faith in the Lord.

The taking on of this new covenant identity in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17) is signified and sealed through the sacrament of baptism for believers and their children. The Gospel is exclusive in that salvation from sin and death comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. There is no other means of salvation. The one who trusts and hopes in anyone or anything but Jesus will be left outside of communion with God, away from his banquet table

One last thing we can glean from this passage is the concept of covenant unity. Israel was to observe the Passover at the same time. Each sacrificed lamb was to be eaten in one house. The lamb was not to be divided (v. 46). All of this seems to drive home the point of Israel’s unity as the people of God.

These various aspects of unity point to Christ and his Church. Just as the Passover lamb was not to be divided, neither did Christ suffer any broken bones on the cross (John 19:32-33, 36). We come to his table to be spiritually nourished, not to an altar for a new sacrifice. We should strive to live out that unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Fellowship Foundation, [Inter-denmtl Bible Group, Sponsors of the National Prayer Breakfast]

The Passover revealed that Israel’s biggest problem wasn’t their slavery to Egypt—it was their standing before God. The Passover was instituted by God for His people...The Passover offering reveals something about the people doing it, as well as the God who gave them these instructions.

The first additional statute of the Passover prohibits foreigners from joining in (Ex. 12:43). What’s going on? Is God xenophobic and exclusionary? Xenophobic no. But exclusionary yes—and for good reason. This exclusionary statute ensured that only Israelites got to participate—it preserved the purity of participation.

Passover had a specific function. It was meant for God’s covenantal people to remember their salvation. Neither the mixed multitude (Ex. 12:38) nor any other foreigner was privy

to the party. Put simply, Passover reflected God's specificity in action and intention. God saved a specific people—His covenantal people. God saved them for a specific purpose—to worship Him. This is why these prohibitions that preserved the purity of God's people were mandated. For God's people to fulfill the purpose for which they had been saved, they had to keep separate from those who were not under God's covenant. Hence, foreigners could not join in the Passover because they were not part of His covenant. The meal was to be consumed within one's household, and neither flesh nor bone were to be brought outside of the house that it might be distributed.

The statute that calls for it to be observed by all of Israel reinforces the communal identity that the Passover created. This was something that all of God's people had to partake of communally. God did not save an individual—He saved a people.

Our God is a holy God and the Passover reminds us of this truth, and so does the Lord's Supper! Paul's warnings in 1 Cor. 11:27-30 remind us that Holy Communion (the Lord's Supper) isn't just another arbitrary sacrament. It's in the very name—we are in communion with a Holy God. Isn't that why the Lord's Supper is reserved only for professing Christians.

Ex. 12:44 and Ex. 12:48 tell us that God provided a way for non-Israelites to join in the Passover—circumcision. Why circumcision? Through the act of circumcision, the Israelites would show the world that they were set apart as God's people, and also remind themselves of the need for purity.

Moses calls the Israelites to “circumcise the foreskin of (their) hearts” (Deut. 10:16), and God promises to circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their offspring in Deut. 30:6. First, we see that God acts to circumcise our hearts. Then, we learn that this circumcision is so that we will love God rightly. This about how any Israelite or foreigner would have felt after undergoing the excruciating demands of outward circumcision. In the midst of the pain and discomfort, Moses' words in Deuteronomy would have rang loud and clear—you must be circumcised on the inside, and God Himself will bring it to pass.

When we see how circumcision is a means by which broken sinners can enter into communion with God, we stop seeing these things are prohibitions that preclude, but provisions that make a way for inclusion!...Ex. 12:49 reminds us that Israelites and the foreigners who would join them would be united under one law. Salvation, through acceptance into God's covenantal community, has always been offered to peoples of every tribe and tongue. God reminds us here that His heart for salvation is bigger than our differences.

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 11:23-26 that Jesus was not merely instituting an arbitrary sacrament during the Last Supper, where He broke bread and shared wine with His disciples. He was instituting a new covenant. It is under this covenant that Christians have had their hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit, and it is under this new covenant that we live.

Remember that you are under a new covenant—bought and sealed by the atoning and redemptive blood of Christ! ...For Christ, the perfect and unblemished Passover lamb fulfilled the Law, that you might know what deliverance from sin truly looks like.

SOD: The Open Questioning that Leads to Love

Rabbi PAULA ROSE... [Cong Beth Shalom, Seattle, WA.]

“They tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat.”

This tongue-in-cheek summary of most Jewish holidays applies most strongly, perhaps, to the Passover Seder. We retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, we praise and thank God for redeeming us, and then we eat a festive meal. Cast in that light, the story of the Exodus seems so straightforward. The Israelites are innocent victims, somehow pawns in God’s larger plan. The Egyptians, and especially Pharaoh, are wicked, oppressing the Israelites with forced labor. God punishes the Egyptians with plagues and redeems the Israelites with signs and wonders. In the popular conception of the story, there’s a clear distinction between good and evil, the Israelites and the Egyptians, those whom God favors and those whom God punishes.

Indeed, in the beginning of the parashah, Moses and God define the Israelite community in relatively simple ways. Moses tells Pharaoh: *“We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the Lord’s festival”* (Exod. 10:9). Men and women, adults and children, are all part of the story of the Exodus. God then adds future generations to Moses’s definition of the Israelite community: *“This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time”* (Exod. 12:14). The in-group is no longer only the Israelites who are experiencing the Exodus in real time, but all of their descendants in perpetuity.

Generally speaking, this is still the way we think about our own community. At the seder table, we reinforce the imagined direct familial link between ourselves and the ancient Israelites...In upholding this model of Jewish communal identity, we assert that God favored our ancestors, and therefore us as well; just as the ancient Israelites are redeemed, so are we. Thus, we maintain the clear-cut dichotomies of self and other, Israelite and Egyptian. But in studying Torah, as in living life, very little is so simple. As we continue reading the story of the Exodus in this week’s parashah, those boundaries between who is in and who is out become much more blurry.

As God gives instructions about not eating or owning hametz during the festival of unleavened bread, the in-group becomes radically expanded: *“For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country”* (Exod. 12:19). In this command, it would seem, those who might not identify as Israelites are still very much included as part of the community. This trend towards wider boundaries continues as the text describes that alongside the Israelites leaving Egypt, a *“mixed multitude”* left with them (12:38). According to the plain meaning of the text, it seems that it is not only the Israelites who are the good guys, whom God protects, but others as well, presumably Egyptians

Given these different definitions of who comprises the Israelite community, it is unsurprising that as God outlines the laws of the paschal lamb, the first element discussed is who may or may not consume it. The child of the foreigner may not partake; the circumcised slave may. The bound or hired laborer may not; the circumcised stranger may (12:43-49). The boundaries of the Israelite community, of the protagonist team of the Exodus, are clearly more complicated than our usual narrative allows for.

These specific categories do not all perfectly map onto the experiences of the contemporary Jewish world. Nonetheless, they raise important questions about the nature of our communal boundaries. Who is in and who is out? Are the answers different depending on the context? What are the relationships between ethnicity, religion, and peoplehood? What identities are we born with, and what identities do we choose?

Too often, we choose simple answers to these questions, preferring the comfort of black and white over the complicated nuances of gray. But people, and therefore communities, are complex, and Parashat Bo reminds us that the answers to those questions are not, and should not be, simple. The boundaries of the Israelite community are porous, with more gray area than perhaps we would always like to admit.