



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Vayikra

Parshat Tzav

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The Journey from Matzoh to Chametz

By Hirsh Cogan

Parshat Tzav continues the laws of sacrificial offerings. Last week *Parshat Vayikra* pronounced the general prohibition that *chametz* may not be offered on the altar:

כָּל־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לַיהוָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה חֻמֶּץ כִּי כָל־שֶׂאֵר וְכָל־דָּבָשׁ
לֹא־תִקְטְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אֲשֶׁה לַיהוָה:

No meal offering that you offer to Hashem shall be made with leaven, for you must not sacrifice any leaven or honey as an offering to Hashem (Vayikra 2:11)

Tzav amplifies this restriction and prohibits the *Kohanim* from eating their portion of an offering with *chametz* (*Vayikra* 6:9-10).

The only sacrifice that included *chametz*, but not on the altar, was the *Korban Todah* (*Vayikra* 7:12-13), the Thanksgiving offering given by an individual after being delivered to safety from a dangerous situation – akin to today's *Birchat Hagomel*.

Chametz represents the culmination of a process, a symbol of self-fulfillment and achievement. Matzoh, however, is a process in its infancy, an unfinished state to which the individual has not yet significantly contributed.

The reason for the prohibition of *chametz* in sacrifices may provide insight into the prohibition of *chametz* on *Pesach*. Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, a modern innovative Biblical scholar and one of the founders of *Yeshivat Har Etzion*, addressed this issue in a comprehensive essay. He postulated that *chametz* represents the culmination of a process, a symbol of self-fulfillment and achievement. *Matzoh*, however, is a process in its infancy, an unfinished state to which the individual has not yet significantly contributed.

An individual who brings a sacrifice – a קָרְבָּן from the root ק-ר-ב, an act of gaining closeness to God, must do so with a sense of humility, recognizing that this is a beginning step toward drawing closer to *Hashem*. The offering of *chametz*, implying that one has achieved the culmination of the process, runs counter to the concept of sacrifices and is prohibited.

The exception is the Thanksgiving offering marking the delivery to safety. This celebration of the finality of the journey includes the use of *chametz*, together with unleavened *matzoh* and wafers.

Pesach marks the beginning of the redemptive process, not its culmination. The liberation from Egypt was by *Hashem's* personal intervention, not the Israelite's achievements – a central theme of the *Hagaddah*.

Chametz in any form would conflict with the Exodus being an act of God alone. It would be an act of haughtiness to eat *chametz* and audaciously imply that we had already accomplished redemption.

Rather, *Pesach* is celebrated with *matzoh*, the food of basic ingredients, the unfinished product still a work in process. The garb for the *Seder* is the *kittel* – the cloth of humility and simplicity. And the recitation of the *Arami Oved Avi*, the principal passage of exposition in the *Hagaddah*, which recounts our oppression and redemption, is left unfinished and incomplete.

The culmination of our redemptive process is *Shavuot*. On that day, our spiritual journey is complete with our acceptance of the *Torah*, and our physical journey is fulfilled as we celebrate our achievements in the land of Israel by bringing *bikkurim* – the first fruit.

Therefore, on *Shavuot*, the unique holiday ceremony featured waving two leavened showbread, highlighting *chametz*, and the presentation of the *bikkurim* was accompanied by the recitation of the full *Arami Oved Avi*, including the final sentence omitted from the *Hagaddah*:

וַיְבִאֵנוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ
*He brought us to this place and He gave us this Land, a Land flowing
with milk and honey (Devarim 26:9)*

May our journey this *Pesach* lead to fulfillment.

Pesach is celebrated with matzoh, the food of basic ingredients, the unfinished product still a work in process. The garb for the Seder is the kittel – the cloth of humility and simplicity.

Hirsh and Irene moved to Scarsdale in 1982, and were then the youngest couple in the Shul. It has been their pleasure, as old-timers, to experience the growth and continued vitality of the YIS community.

*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?
Please contact Steve Smith at LivingTorahFund@gmail.com*

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