

## SHIELD OF AVRAHAM, SHIELD OF OURS

Sevent Day Pesach 5779

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I always like to talk about one part of Hallel at some point over both Sukkot and Pesach but this time I want to use it as a broader launch-point to discuss something we reference every single day, multiple times a day.

During the first days of Yom Tov in the evenings we learned how the translation of the word *pesach* as “Passover” is a mistake. It’s an understandable, forgivable, easily-made mistake. But a mistake, nonetheless. The correct translation is “protect.” This is seen most clearly in one of the key verses describing *yetziat mitzrayim*:

וְעָבַר יְהוָה לְנִגְףֵךְ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם ֹ וְרָאָה אֶת־הַדָּם עַל־הַמַּשְׁקֹנֶף וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַמְּוֹזוֹת וּפָסַח  
יְהוָה עַל־הַפֶּתַח וְלֹא יִתֵּן הַמַּשְׁחִית לָבֹא אֶל־בְּתִיכֶם לְנִגְףֵךְ:

For when the LORD goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the LORD will pesach the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home. (Ex. 12:23)

God is standing in the way of the *mashchit*, the Destroyer, *pesach*-ing the door, protecting our homes from the destruction wreaked on Egypt.

And this idea that God is our protector or shield is reinforced in Hallel. One of the best-loved passages, *Hashem zekharanu yevarekh*, is actually the second half of Psalm 115 (קטו). And that declaration, “God has remembered us, He will bless us,” is a response to the preceding verses – which in Hallel are the last lines of the previous paragraph – all of which end with the phrase עֲזָרָם וּמִגְנָם יהוה, “He is their help and shield.”

And this idea, that God is our shield, is not only exemplified on Pesach and expressed in Hallel but is mentioned every single time we daven our amidah:

מֶלֶךְ עֶזְרָר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמִגֵּן: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מִגֵּן אַבְרָהָם:

King, Helper, Savior, and Shield. Blessed are You, O Lord, Shield of Abraham.

It’s the same notion but here we have its origin, as it were, here we know why God is our *magen*: because He was Avraham’s – as we read in *parashat lekh lekha*,

אַחַר | הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם בְּמַחְזָה לֵאמֹר אֶל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם  
אֲנִכִּי מִגֵּן לְךָ שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד:

Some time later, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said, “Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.” (Gen. 15:1)

God announces He will be Avraham’s shield and, by extension, then, our own. But why? What is it about Avraham that he merits God being his shield? It’s simple. Avraham was willing to wander off into a wilderness, to leave everything behind, on the instruction of God. Such a willingness to do as God asks results in a reward: divine protection.

And I’d argue that the actions of the Jewish people as they leave Egypt reveal a similar willingness. After all, does an omniscient God need the Jewish people to daub their doors with blood to know where they live? No! The purpose is different. As captured by a *midrash*:

בְּשַׁעַה שֶׁאָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה לְשַׁחֵט הַפֶּסַח, אָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָם  
הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה הֵיטָב אֲנִי יָכוֹל לַעֲשׂוֹת, אִי אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁהַצֹּאן אֱלֹהֵיהֶן שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם הֵן!  
“When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to slay the paschal lamb, Moses  
answered: “Lord of the Universe! How can I possibly do this thing? Do You not  
know that the lamb is the Egyptian god? (Ex. Rabbah 16:3)

The very fact that the Jewish people are willing to do something purely for the sake of God, even when it threatens them, is testament to them being the descendants of Avraham, the one who was willing to enter a foreboding wilderness on the instruction of God. It’s their *lekh lekha* moment, as it were.

But what about us? What’s our *lekh lekha* moment? By what actions do we merit God being our shield?

I’d argue that it’s the *mitzvot* themselves. The fact that they go against the grain of so many of our instincts – something amplified on Pesach when our typically restricted diet gets even more restricted – shows our willingness to follow God. He commands us to not eat bread for over a week, we do it. The Ashkenazi willingness to take a bullet before a bamba on Pesach captures just how willing we are to follow *devar Hashem*, the word of God.

He is not just *magen Avraham* but ours, too. And on Pesach more than perhaps any other festival we illustrate why.