

What if I Don't Like Roast?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rosh Beit Midrash, Zichron Dov
Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Beit Midrash of Toronto

"ואכלו את הבשר בלילה הזה עלי אש ומצות על מרורים יאכלהו"
"And they shall eat the meat on this night;
fire-roasted, with matzot, upon maror they shall eat it."
(Shemot 12:8)

Korban is one of the most tangible expressions of the relationship between human and Creator, an incarnation of thanksgiving or apology or loyalty or joy, celebrated in the sanctum of the Jewish nation. Such a powerful religious experience, so rich in possibility but so vulnerable to abuse and misunderstanding, must be governed by regulations regarding its substance, time and place, its attendants and its ritual.

Must Korbanot be Roasted?

Even in the regimented world of the korban, though, the korban pesach stands out for its unique Divine prescriptions. In particular, only the korban pesach must be roasted over an open fire. Witness the texts regarding the preparation of other korbanot, and the preparation of the korban pesach:

The pesach is consumed only at night, only until midnight, only by its members and only roasted.

Mishnah Zevachim 5:8

הפסח אינו נאכל אלא בלילה ואינו נאכל אלא עד
חצות ואינו נאכל אלא למנויו ואינו נאכל אלא עלי:
משנה מסכת זבחים פרק ה משנה ח

For all [korbanot], the kohanim may vary their consumption, to eat them roasted, stewed or boiled.

Mishnah Zevachim 10:7

ובכולם הכהנים רשאים לשנות באכילתן לאכלן
צלויים שלוקים ומבושלים
משנה מסכת זבחים פרק י משנה ז

The variation for the korban pesach is, itself, surprising. What is still more intriguing is a separate talmudic passage in which Rav Chisda seems to oppose these mishnaic rulings, imposing the guidelines of the korban pesach upon other korbanot as well:

Rav Chisda said: The gifts of the kohanim may only be consumed roasted, and only with mustard. Why? The Torah says (Bamidbar 18), 'I have given these for anointing,' meaning for greatness, as [anointed] royalty consumes.

Chullin 132b

אמר רב חסדא מתנות כהונה אין
נאכלות אלא עלי ואין נאכלות אלא
בחדל מאי טעמא אמר קרא למשחה
לגדולה כדרך שהמלכים אוכלים
חולין דף קלב:

By what right did Rav Chisda reverse the mishnah's dictum permitting consumption of korbanot in any manner?

Tosafot offers one approach, arguing that Rav Chisda did not intend to contradict the mishnah, but only to apply the roasting requirement as a first-step, *lechatchilah* option. Despite his use of the term “only”, Rav Chisda meant that korbanot *should* be roasted, in the manner of kings, unless the consuming kohen would prefer to eat them in some other manner:

It appears, certainly, that one may eat them in the way that is good for him, causing him greater benefit. However, if roast is as good to him as stewed or boiled [meat], he should eat them as roast, which is more fitting for royalty.

Tosafot Chullin 132b

ונראה דודאי כמו שטוב לו ונהנה יותר מצי
אכיל להו אבל אדם שטוב לו צלי כשלוק
ומבושל יאכל צלי שהוא דרך גדולה יותר.
תוספות חולין דף קלב:

The Rambam, though, offers a different reconciliation of the sources, ruling that the mishnah and Rav Chisda dealt with separate cases. Rav Chisda addressed the *zroa*, *lechayyayim* and *keivah* gifts given to kohanim from non-korban animals, and the mishnah dealt with korbanot.

Regarding the *zroa*, *lechayyayim* and *keivah*:

The kohanim may only eat these gifts roasted, with mustard,⁹² as it is written, ‘for anointing,’ as royalty consumes.

Rambam Hilchot Bikurim 9:22

ואין הכהנים אוכלין המתנות אלא צלי בחרדל
שנ' למשחה כדרך שאוכלים המלכים.
רמב"ם הלכות ביכורים ט:כב

Regarding korbanot:

And one may eat these sacred items in any fashion. Even the kohanim may eat their portions – whether of lower level or higher level korbanot – in any fashion, varying their consumption, eating them roasted, stewed or boiled.

Rambam Hilchot Maaseh HaKorbanot 10:10

ומותר לאכול את הקדשים בכל מאכל,
אפילו הכהנים מותרין לאכול חלקם בין
מקדשים קלים בין מקדשי קדשים בכל
מאכל, ולשנות באכילתן ולאוכלם צלויים
שלוקים ומבושלים
רמב"ם הלכות מעשה הקרבנות י:י

Rambam’s approach has the advantage of satisfying Rav Chisda’s exclusive language (“may only be consumed roasted”) where Tosafot’s approach does not, but it begs explanation. Why would we distinguish between the culinary preparation of food gifts given to the kohanim [which must be roasted], the culinary preparation of korbanot consumed by the kohanim [which should be roasted, but may be prepared otherwise], and the culinary preparation of the korban pesach [which must be roasted]?

Roasting: Royal Volition and Royal Ceremony

The words of the Klausenberger Rebbe z”l, in his *Divrei Yatziv* (OC 204), lead us to an enlightening explanation of all three categories. He defines two different aspects of royalty, Volition and Ceremony, which are present when a korban or gift is roasted.

A king is empowered to do as he chooses; as the gemara⁹³ says, the king may be פורץ גדר, breaking through the boundaries of property in order to ease his path. This is Volition. Roasting

⁹² On the subject of royalty and mustard, see Bava Metzia 86b, and Rashi there להשנות בחרדל

over an open fire is a demonstration of Volition; subjects and citizens are need-bound to prepare their food in a manner which will preserve every filling drop, but kings may eat as they wish, even at the cost of losing the fat.

Separately, a king is surrounded by the rituals and pomp which accompany him as closely as his royal robes, declaring for all his wealth and power; this is Ceremony. Roasting is a demonstration of Ceremony, an extravagant act which demonstrates the wealth of the throne.

As the Sefer haChinuch presents the practice of roasting the korban pesach:

This is why we are instructed to eat it roasted, specifically, because princes and officers eat their meat roasted, as this is good and tasty. The rest of the nation cannot eat but small amounts of meat, as they can afford, in boiled form so as to fill their bellies. We eat the Pesach to remember that we departed to freedom, to be a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation, and so it certainly suits us to conduct ourselves in the manner of freedom and royalty in eating it. This is aside from the fact that eating it roasted demonstrates haste, for they left Egypt and could not delay until the food would be boiled in a pot.⁹⁴

Sefer haChinuch Mitzvah 7

וזהו שנצטוינו לאכול צלי דוקא, לפי שכך דרך בני מלכים ושרים לאכול בשר צלי, לפי שהוא מאכל טוב ומוטעם, אבל שאר העם אינם יכולים לאכול מעט בשר שתשיג ידם כי אם מבושל, כדי למלא בטנם. ואנו שאוכלים הפסח לזכרון שיצאנו לחירות להיות ממלכת כהנים ועם קדוש ודאי ראוי לנו להתנהג באכילתו דרך חירות ושרות. מלבד שאכילת הצלי יורה על החפזון שיצאו ממצרים ולא יכלו לשהות עד שיתבשל בקדרה.

ספר החינוך מצוה ז

Resolving a Conflict of Volition and Ceremony

When a kohen wishes to roast his korban, the traits of Volition and Ceremony coincide and are satisfied. But what happens when the kohen's will is not in accord with his prescribed rite of roasting? Is Volition or Ceremony the greater display of royalty?

For the *zroa*, *lechayyayim* and *keivah* gifts, the kohen has a ready solution: He is permitted to transfer the gifts to another kohen, who will roast and eat them. Therefore, these gifts must be transferred, and then consumed in roasted form, satisfying both royal Volition and royal Ceremony. This is the case Rav Chisda described.

For the generic korban, the kohen does not have the option of transferring the korban; he is specifically instructed⁹⁵ to eat the korban himself. If so, the kohen faces an irresolvable conflict between Volition and Ceremony, and the mishnah instructs the kohen to prioritize Volition over Ceremony, eating them in whatever form he chooses.⁹⁶

⁹³ Bava Kama 60b, for example

⁹⁴ It is worth noting that the Rama, in Torat haOlah 53, presents an additional explanation: Roasting takes longer than the gluttony of eating food raw, but is quicker than boiling, and so it demonstrates an appropriate patience without an inappropriate delay. Cf. Pesachim 86b on different drinking paces.

⁹⁵ Rambam, Sefer haMitzvot, Aseh 89

⁹⁶ There is support for this reading in the Mishneh l'Melech to Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Maaseh haKorbanot 10:10, in his explanation of why the Rambam said, "even the kohanim." The Kesef Mishneh, on the other hand, would not be consistent with this explanation.

For the korban pesach, the conflict is similarly irresolvable; there is no option of transferring the korban pesach to another, since every Jew is obligated to eat from the korban. In this case, though, Ceremony overrides Volition, and the owner is required to roast the korban and eat it.

Why is the resolution for the korban pesach different from the resolution for other korbanot? Perhaps because the korban pesach commemorates our unwilling transformation into ממלכת כהנים, a royal nation, and this demands Ceremony.

The Message of the Seder

We cried out for relief from our Egyptian suffering, but we were selected for national exceptionalism without our agreement; no Jewish slave in Egypt requested a covenant or a land. Our pain was our only concern; indeed, when the enslaved Hebrews witnessed Moshe's initial failure to deliver them from their agony, they protested his very presence, calling upon HaShem to judge and punish Moshe for catalyzing Pharaoh's increased cruelty.

Pesach is not about the realization of a national dream; rather, Pesach is about the *My Fair Lady* extraction of slaves from their milieu and their forced metamorphosis into the royalty that is Yisrael. In this context, Ceremony is of far greater importance than Volition. Giving a slave free rein does not convert him into aristocracy; an unfettered slave remains a slave in his thoughts and deeds, and his liberty is wasted. Ceremony is necessary in order to transform his worldview, his input and therefore his output, to suit the palace. As the Sefer haChinuch is wont to comment, "אחרי הפעולות נמשכים הלבבות," "After deeds are the hearts drawn."

Seen in that light, the Seder's emphasis on ceremony is most sensible. The ritual of the Seder is the story of a slave learning his freedom and adjusting to the world of imbibing and reclining, to a sense of himself as someone who serves no man. And in this context, the korban pesach, too, must emphasize Ceremony over Volition. If the slave wishes not to roast the korban pesach but to boil it, he is told: Now you must become a king.

The Continuing Royal Struggle

The Jew is surrounded by the royal ritual which reinforces her special status; we are privileged to experience daily audiences with our Creator, to clothe ourselves in the special garb of tzniut and tzitzit, to sanctify time with kiddush and havdalah and the rites of numerous holidays. Each of these is a ceremony of sorts, and each of these adds to our sense of ourselves as exceptional.

This is Ceremony, regardless of Volition. True, certain elements of our religion are left to custom and discretion, much as the kohen may eat certain korbanot in the manner of his preference. But the great majority of our ceremonies and mitzvot are modeled on the korban pesach, requirements established to aid in our daily transformation into Yisrael. The King of Kings has stated His expectation; ours is to meet it.