

The Sanctity Of The Home – The Message Of The Korban Pesach

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The central feature of the seder night, the eating of the Korban Pesach, is no longer performed today in the absence of the Beit ha-Mikdash. Nevertheless, Chazal saw it necessary to institute many practices throughout the night to keep the memory of the Korban Pesach alive in our hearts. The eating of Korech zecher lemikdash, the eating of the Aphikoman zecher la-pesach and the constant pleas for Hashem to rebuild the Beit ha-Mikdash are integral to our seder. It is incumbent on us to develop a better understanding of the significance of the Korban Pesach to enable us to appreciate what we are missing. Although the actual Korban Pesach is no longer a part of our seder, we can still incorporate its message into our seder and into our lives.

Most of the halachot concerning the Korban Pesach appear in the verses in the beginning of chapter twelve in the book of Shemot. There is a recurring word throughout these verses, drawing our attention to its significance. The word Bayit - home - appears in various forms thirteen times in the section regarding the Korban Pesach. Everything about the Korban Pesach revolves around the house. From its blood being placed on the door of the house to its meat being eaten specifically in the house, the Korban Pesach is linked directly to the Bayit. Even the members of one's group who eat the Korban Pesach are preferably one's family members who are referred to as "Seh le-veit avot seh la-bayit" (Shemot 12:3). What is it about the mitzvah of Korban Pesach that causes the house to take such a significant role in its performance?

When we examine the details of the halachot concerning the Korban Pesach, we find parallels to other korbanot. The Korban Pesach must be eaten within a certain area. Similarly, other korbanot are limited as to where they may be eaten. If meat of the Korban Pesach is removed from its designated area it becomes unfit to be eaten just as meat from other korbanot becomes disqualified, upon being taken out of its halachik

boundaries. Although similar in this general halachah, there is a basic distinction between Korban Pesach and other korbanot in the specifics. The boundaries of other korbanot correspond to specific areas in the Beit ha-Mikdash. Korbanot of higher sanctity cannot be removed from the courtyard of the Beit ha-Mikdash. Those of lower sanctity become disqualified if taken out of Jerusalem which is considered to be an extension of the Beit ha-Mikdash. Although the Korban Pesach cannot be taken outside of its appropriate boundaries, it is unique that its halachik borders are the walls of one's house. What is the significance of substituting the walls of one's home for the walls of the Beit ha-Mikdash?

There is another area of halachah that the Korban Pesach and other korbanot appear to have in common. All grain offerings, with the exception of the loaves of bread brought on Shavuot and those in conjunction with a Korban Todah, may not be made from chametz. The Beit ha-Mikdash essentially is free of chametz the entire year. Obviously the Korban Pesach cannot be eaten with chametz, but the absolute separation between the Korban Pesach and chametz goes even further. The mitzvot concerning owning chametz on Pesach are primarily focused on the Bayit. The negative commandment of "shivat yamim se'or lo yimatzei be-vateichem" (Shemot 12:19), and the positive obligation of "ach ba-yom ha-rishon tashbitu se'or mi-bateichem" (ibid 15) explicitly mention the significance of removing chametz from the home. The entire area designated for the eating of Korban Pesach is given primary concern to rid it of chametz. Even the time for the removal of the chametz is linked to the Korban Pesach. Chazal interpret the phrase ach ba-yom ha-rishon, which is the time given for removing chametz, as exactly the same time one can begin to offer the Korban Pesach. It is inconceivable that after midday on erev Pesach one could still possess chametz, as the Torah prohibits offering the Korban Pesach if any members of its group owns chametz. Whereas for other

korbanot it is sufficient to keep chametz away from the actual preparation of these offerings of grain in the Beit ha-Mikdash, the prohibition of chametz together with the Korban Pesach permeates the entire house. What is it about the Korban Pesach that grants the home such a unique status in halachah?

A fascinating discussion occurs between Moshe and Pharaoh at the beginning of parshas Bo. After having experienced seven plagues, Pharaoh appears ready to give in to Moshe. Pharaoh asks Moshe to identify precisely who would be leaving Egypt to offer korbanot to Hashem in the desert as Moshe initially requested. Moshe responds that all the men, women and children must go. There will be no distinction between the young and the old. Pharaoh refuses and insists that only the men who would be involved in the offering of these korbanot may leave. What was at the root of this disagreement between Moshe and Pharaoh?

From his vantage point, Pharaoh was justified in his response. If Moshe wanted to offer korbanot it was quite understandable to insist that only the grown men who would actually be involved in their offering should be permitted to go. Pharaoh was familiar with religious worship. There was an entire culture in ancient Egypt which revolved around religious service. What Pharaoh failed to understand was the fundamentally different type of religion that was about to be born. To Pharaoh, religion was practiced in temples by designated priests. There was no room for women, children and the elderly in the religious practices of priests in temples removed from one's home. Pharaoh couldn't grasp how a religious experience could include all the members of one's family. Moshe responded that avodat Hashem is fundamentally different. The ultimate avodat Hashem will revolve around the home and family. Every man, woman and child will be actively involved in this avodah.

We also have a Beit ha-Mikdash with Cohanim. Our Beit ha-Mikdash, however, is supposed to serve as a model for avodat Hashem in each of our homes. If the kedushah and taharah of the Beit ha-Mikdash remain aloof from our homes and family units, then our religious experience has reverted back to that of the days of Pharaoh.

The transformation from religion centering on a distant temple to avodat Hashem in one's home occurred at yitziat Mitzraim. A slave has no control over his family life. Pharaoh had issued decrees interfering with the creation of families. At the time of yitziat Mitzraim the Jewish family unit emerged. Central to the celebration of Pesach is the dedication of one's home and family to avodat Hashem.

The Korban Pesach is the korban which expresses this concept. Everything revolves around the home. Mitzvot that are usually associated with the Beit ha-Mikdash are practiced in every Jewish house. Blood of korbanot which is usually placed on the altar was placed on the doorposts of the home during the night of Pesach in Egypt. The walls of one's home take on the halachic status of the Beit ha-Mikdash. Chametz must be removed from one's home just as chametz has no place in the Beit ha-Mikdash. During Pesach the home is transformed into a Mikdash signifying the dedication of home and family to their central role in avodat Hashem.

The climax of yitziat Mitzraim is reached at the end of Sefer Shemot when the Mishkan - Tabernacle - is completed. The promise of "ve-lakachti etchem li le-am -And I will take you to me for a people" (Shemot 6:7) has been fulfilled as the presence of Hashem is visibly present with the Jewish people. The concluding words of the book of Shemot describe the Glory of Hashem resting on "Beit Yisrael" or the house of Israel. No other term to describe the Jewish people at this time is more appropriate. The House of Israel made up of all the individual houses of Israel has come into existence.

As we prepare our homes for Pesach and as we gather around the seder table with our families, let us focus on dedicating our homes and families to Avodat Hashem. May we merit the presence of Hashem in our homes and in the collective home of the Jewish people. May we merit the rebuilding of the Beit ha-Mikdash, enabling its holiness to permeate each and every one of our homes. May the Cohanim doing Avodat Hashem in the Beit ha-Mikdash inspire each and every one of us to live up to our calling as "Mamlechet cohanim vegoy kadosh -a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Shemot 19:6).