YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**In memory of Pinhas ben Shalom (Paul) Cymbalista z”l**

**Niftar 20 Nissan 5752.**

**Dedicated by his family.**

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**These Pesach Shiurim are dedicated in memory of Sidney Gontownik, brother of Jerry Gontownik, on the occasion of Sidney's upcoming eighth Yahrzeit, on the 24th of Nissan.**

**May his memory be for a blessing.**

**The Gontownik Family**

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**Dedicated in memory of   
HaRav HaGaon R. Chaim Heller zt"l,**

**whose yahrzeit falls on the 14th of Nissan,  
by Vivian S. Singer.**

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**"And They Shall Eat of the Meat on that Night"**

**Harav Baruch Gigi**

Translated by David Strauss

The sacrifices offered in the Temple include individual offerings and communal offerings. The communal offerings consist primarily of the daily offerings and the additional offerings brought on special days, while the individual offerings include sin-offerings, guilt-offerings, burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings.

What type of offering is the Pesach offering? The Pesach offering is clearly an individual offering, as every member of Israel must bring it from his own money. To be more precise, the Pesach offering is a joint offering, which is halakhically identical to an individual offering, as it is brought in the framework of a *chabura*, a group of people consisting of a family or several families that gather together for a shared eating of the offering. But if, indeed, the Pesach offering is an individual offering, why does it override Shabbat, and why is it offered even in a state of ritual impurity? These laws are usually reserved for communal offerings, and not individual offerings!

### The Blood of the Pesach Offering and the Blood of Circumcision

There are only two positive commandments the transgression of which carries liability for the punishment of *karet* (excision): the Pesach offering and circumcision. We find in the *midrash* (*Pesikta De-Rabbi Kahana* 7:4) that it was by virtue of these two *mitzvot* that the people of Israel left Egypt:

"Because of Your righteous judgments" (*Tehillim* 119:164) – Because of the judgments that You brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and because of the righteousness that You performed with our forefathers in Egypt. For they only had two *mitzvot* to their credit by virtue of which they were redeemed – the blood of the Pesach offering and the blood of circumcision. This is what is said: "And when I passed by you, and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: In your blood, live; yea, I said to you: In your blood, live" (*Yechezkel* 16:6). "In your blood" [*damayikh* – a plural form] – the blood of the Pesach offering and the blood of circumcision.

The *mitzva* of circumcision was given to Avraham and his descendants as a sign of the deep covenant that God entered into with every member of Israel: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you" (*Bereishit* 17:7). One who does not enter into this covenant is liable to *karet*: "And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (*Bereishit* 17:14). One's connection to the people of Israel, God's people, and his belonging to it begins with his imprinting the seal of his master on his flesh (see Seforno, *Bereishit* 17:11).

The *mitzva* of bringing the Pesach offering was given to the people of Israel on the eve of their exodus from Egypt, and from then it became the sign of the covenant between God and His people for all generations. At that very moment when God was smiting Pharaoh with the plague of the firstborn, God asked of His firstborn son – the people of Israel – to enter into a covenant with Him as a collective, by placing the blood of the Pesach offering on the lintel and the two side-posts. As is the case with circumcision, one who does not enter into the covenant of the Pesach offering is liable for *karet*: "But the man that is clean, and is not on a journey, and forbears to keep the Passover, that soul shall be cut off from his people, because he brought not the offering of the Lord in its appointed season…" (*Bamidbar* 9:13). The Torah even introduced the possibility of Pesach Sheni, the second Passover – an additional chance for one who is on a far off journey on the fourteenth of Nissan and cannot bring the Pesach offering in its appointed time – in order to allow him to enter into the covenant along with his brothers.

The blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pesach offering are connected to one another, for with regard to the Pesach offering it is stated: "But no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof" (*Shemot* 12:48). A person may not enter the collective covenant – the covenant of the Pesach offering – unless that was preceded by the individual covenant – the covenant of circumcision. As we saw in the *midrash* on the words, "In your blood, live," *Chazal* emphasize that these two *mitzvot* are the foundation of the covenant. The blood of circumcision is the common denominator of all the people of Israel; the blood of the Pesach offering unifies the entire people, and through the bringing of the offering the individuals transform into a collective. Therefore, the Torah assigned this offering – despite the fact that it is an individual offering – some of the characteristics of a communal offering, obligating that it be brought even on Shabbat and even in a state of ritual impurity.

Since the Pesach offering transforms individuals into a collective, it is brought in a family framework: "A lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household" (*Shemot* 12:3). The family is the community in miniature; it is the path that leads from the individual to the collective. With the bringing of the Pesach offering, the entire house of Israel turns into one large family – the people of God. As *Chazal* expounded: "'And the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at dusk' (*Shemot* 12:6) – this teaches that all of Israel can fulfill their obligation with one Pesach offering" (*Pesachim* 78b).

### The Pesach Offering Brought in Egypt: The House as an Altar

Was the Pesach offering brought in Egypt actually a sacrificial offering? The answer to this question is not simple, for in contrast to all other offerings, the Pesach offering in Egypt was not offered on an altar. In truth, however, many of the laws governing that Pesach offering are clearly taken from the laws of sacrifices: The Pesach offering is a "lamb without blemish, a male of the first year… from the sheep, or from the goats" (*Shemot* 12:5), and the Torah even commands that one may not leave over from it until the morning (*Shemot* 12:10).

It would appear that the Pesach offering brought in Egypt was a sacrificial offering with unique characteristics, the most striking of which is the fact that it is slaughtered at the entrance to one's house rather than brought to the altar. *Chazal* determined that the house of each individual in Egypt turned at that time into an altar: "R. Yosef taught: There were three altars there – on the lintel and on the two side-posts" (*Pesachim* 96a). The house is the altar, and the two side-posts and the lintel are like the horns of the altar upon which the blood must be placed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The side-posts of the house, upon which the blood of the Pesach offering was placed, became consecrated for later generations through the *mitzva* of *mezuza*. The truth is that these two *mitzvot* – the Pesach offering brought in Egypt and the *mezuza* –are connected through the protection they provide for the house. The blood that was placed on the side-posts protected the house from the Destroyer that smote the firstborns of Egypt, and the *mezuza* is similarly a sign that God protects the house. As *Chazal* said: "A person sleeps in his house, and the Holy One, blessed be He, protects him from the outside" (*Devarim Rabba,* *Parashat Va'etchanan*). A person who affixes a *mezuza* to the entrance of his house turns the house into a Temple and the gates of his house into an altar, and thus his house is protected. This might be the essence of the Pesach offering – an offering of a covenant, by way of which man and God dwell in the same house, like the lover and his beloved who live together in their bridal home.

### The Pesach Offering Brought in Later Generations: The Eating as Sacrifice

The *mitzva* of the Pesach offering in later generations is not fulfilled in each person's house, but rather in the Temple. There they would slaughter the Pesach offering, put of its blood on the altar, and burn on the altar those parts that are due it. What is the nature of the Pesach offering in later generations?

All of the offerings brought in the Temple require the placing of blood on the horns of the altar. In the case of sin-offerings, there must be four applications of blood on the four corners of the altar. In the case of most of the other offerings, there must be two applications on two of the altar's corners. The Pesach offering is unusual (along with the firstborn and the tithe-offering) in that it does not require the application of blood on the horns of the altar; it suffices that there be one application at the base of the altar. Thus writes the Rambam (*Hilkhot Korban Pesach* 1:6): "The blood of the Pesach offering should be poured out on the base of the altar." Unlike the rest of the sacrifices, the blood of the Pesach offering does not touch the horns of the altar, nor does it encompass the altar. Rather, it is merely poured out against it so that it reaches it.

The four main services relating to every sacrifice are connected to the blood: slaughtering the animal, receiving its blood in a receptacle, bringing the blood to the altar, and sprinkling the blood on it. The difference between the Pesach offering and other sacrifices teaches that as opposed to the other sacrifices, the essence of the Pesach offering is not the service of its blood.

It would appear that the Pesach offering brought in later generations was also intended to be a family sacrifice, one that is offered at the entrance of each person's house. However, after the Torah was given and the law was introduced prohibiting the bringing of sacrifices in any place except for the place chosen by God, it was no longer possible to bring the Pesach offering anywhere else but to Mount Moriya. Therefore, even the Pesach offering is brought to the Temple – but its blood is poured in a merely symbolic manner against the altar. After the blood is poured on the base of the altar and after those parts of the offering that may not be eaten are offered on the altar, the members of the party associated with the Pesach offering take the offering home and eat it there. Thus rules the Rambam (*Hilkhot Korban Pesach* 1:6):

After the blood was poured, its belly should be opened up, the fats and organs to be offered on the altar removed. The fats of each Pesach offering should be offered on the pyre individually. The owner of the sacrifice should take his Pesach offering with its hide to his home in Jerusalem. There he roasts it and eats it in the evening.

As a substitute for the service of the blood, the essence of the Pesach offering is the service of the meat that is performed in each person's house in the company of his family and friends. For this reason, the Torah established the special *mitzva* to eat of the Pesach offering: "And they shall eat the flesh in that night" (*Shemot* 12:8).[[2]](#footnote-2) The Pesach offering is also the only individual offering regarding which one must recite the *Hallel* at the time it is slaughtered and when it is eaten, and if it was slaughtered for the sake of people who were not assigned to it, it is disqualified. The focus of the Pesach offering is on the eating, and the essence of its preparation is on the skewer of the family that gathered to eat it together. In this way, the connection of the Pesach offering to a household framework that marked the offering when it was brought in Egypt is preserved even in later generations.

### Eating at God’s Table

From a simple halakhic perspective, the Pesach offering belongs to the peace-offering set of sacrifices, the offerings of lesser sanctity. Like a peace-offering, the Pesach offering is eaten by its owners, in contrast to a burnt-offering, which is entirely for God. However, there are significant similarities between the Pesach offering and the burnt-offering: Both are brought exclusively from males, and both are offered "its head with its legs and with the inwards thereof" (*Shemot* 12:9).

It is therefore possible that the Pesach offering is in fact a burnt-offering, but of a special kind. Instead of the offering being eaten by the altar, it is eaten by its owners. If the house is the Temple and if the skewer upon which the meat is roasted is the altar, then like a burnt-offering, the flesh of the Pesach-offering is eaten in its entirety on the altar. Regarding all the other sacrifices, the person may eat only those parts of the offering that are not burnt on the altar, and even the priests eat only those parts that are not burnt there. In the case of the Pesach offering, however, each person is invited to eat of the flesh of the offering itself. The Pesach meal is the meal of a covenant, and the two parties to the covenant – God and man – share this meal, as it were. In the case of a Pesach offering, every person is invited to eat with God at His table.

On the night of Passover in Egypt, God appeared in order to smite the firstborns of Egypt and to save His firstborn son and take him out of Egypt. On the night of Passover in later generations, every member of Israel merits achieving great intimacy with God and eating at His table. The Pesach offering is eaten only at night, as it may be eaten only at the time when the lover and His beloved meet – when God appears to take the children of Israel as His people.

We can now once again compare the covenant of circumcision to the covenant of the Pesach offering. The covenant of circumcision, as we noted, is the seal of the master on his servants. The covenant of the Pesach offering is the covenant between a father and his children. After God redeemed us from Egypt and chose us from among all the nations, we are His children, and we are therefore invited on the night of Passover to enter His palace and eat from His table.

1. In the case of ordinary sacrifices, the altar is the site where the blood is sprinkled and the site where the portions that are not eaten are burned. The *gemara* in *Pesachim* (96a) records R. Zeira's question: "Where did they burn the portions that had to be burned of the Pesach offering in Egypt?" The *Rishonim* disagree about how to understand the passage. Rabbeinu Chananel explains that all parts of the Pesach offering were eaten, and there was therefore no need to put any portions on an altar. The Meiri proposes that there was an altar there – the skewer upon which they roasted the portions that had to be burned. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eating the other offerings is also a *mitzva*, one that is even counted among the 613 Torah commandments. But there is a special *mitzva* to eat the Pesach offering, over and beyond the general *mitzva* to eat of hallowed offerings (see the Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, positive commandments 55-56, 89). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)