

Parshat Bo

By Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Already four hundred years BEFORE the Exodus, Pesach (Passover) was celebrated in the city of Sdom! According to Rashi (Br. 19:3), Lot baked matzot, because his guests arrived on Pesach. At first glance, this statement seems rather absurd, for what possible meaning could there be in commemorating an event which had not yet taken place! In this week's shiur, while discussing the purpose and significance of the Korban Pesach, we will uncover the fundamental biblical theme of "Yom Hashem". This theme will help us understand the relationship between the destruction of Sdom and the process of Yetziat Mitzraim.

INTRODUCTION / REVIEW In our study of Sefer Shmot thus far, we have focused on the double mission which Moshe receives at the burning bush: (1) The mission to Pharaoh, that he allow Bnei Yisrael to worship God in the desert. (2) The mission to Bnei Yisrael, that they recognize that God has come to fulfill His covenant.

Although these two missions are interrelated, each constitutes an independent Divine goal: Firstly, it is significant that Egypt, the center of ancient civilization, recognize the existence of God and Bnei Yisrael's right to worship Him. [See shiur on Parshat Shmot.] Likewise, it is crucial that Bnei Yisrael be aware not only that the God of their forefathers has come to redeem them, but also that they be willing and ready to obey Him ([Shmot 6:2-9](#)). Unfortunately, Bnei Yisrael do not heed God's call for "teshuvah". Nonetheless, the miraculous redemption process (bshem Havaya) continues, for the Sake of His Name ([Ezekiel 20:5-10](#)). [See shiur on Parshat Va'eiyra.]

Bnei Yisrael's redemption from Egypt is merely the first step towards the fulfillment of God's covenant. However, it is not only

God's responsibility to redeem them, Bnei Yisrael are expected to BECOME His Nation. [A covenant, by its very nature, requires active commitment by BOTH partners.] By following His laws and establishing a model nation in the Promised Land, Bnei Yisrael will lead all mankind toward the recognition of God - the final goal of that covenant (the theme of Sefer Breishit).

BNEI YISRAEL AND THE FIRST NINE PLAGUES It is interesting to note that during the first nine "makkot" (plagues), Bnei Yisrael appear to be 'out of the picture'. From the time that "makkot" (plagues) are introduced to Moshe and Aharon (7:1-7) until the completion of the ninth plague (10:29), Sefer Shmot focuses exclusively on the confrontation between Moshe and Pharaoh, i.e. between God and Egypt. During that lengthy narrative, we find no mention of any instruction or commandment to Bnei Yisrael. The purpose of these makkot is stated explicitly in the introduction to this unit: "v'yadu MITZRAIM ki Ani Hashem" - And EGYPT will recognize that I am God, when I stretch out My Hand over Egypt..." (7:5)

These chapters form a distinct unit, for they describe the fulfillment of Moshe's mission to Pharaoh (1). [Note the connection between the opening (7:1-7) and closing psukim (11:9-10) of this unit.] In contrast, from this point in Parshat Bo and onward, Chumash changes its focus from the Egyptians to the Israelites. Moshe must now complete his mission to Bnei Yisrael (2) by encouraging them to become an active partner in the process of Yetziat Mitzraim. "Parshat Ha'Chodesh" (12:1-20), containing the first "mitzvah" given to Bnei Yisrael, begins this new unit.

THE TENTH PLAGUE During the first nine plagues, God finds no particular difficulty differentiating between Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians (e.g. arov, dever, barad, choshech). Nevertheless, for the final plague - Makkat Bchorot - it seems that a special sign is necessary: Bnei Yisrael must sprinkle the blood of the

"korban Pesach" on their doorposts so that God can distinguish between them and the Egyptians. Surely, God is mighty enough to recognize who was an Israelite even without a sign on their doorposts. Why then is this special sign necessary? Based on our introduction, the answer is quite simple: God does not need to see the blood on the doorposts to determine the ethnic identity of the household. Rather, God requests this sign in order to determine who is WORTHY of redemption. Through the korban Pesach, Bnei Yisrael show that they understand the purpose of their redemption. They prove to God that they DESERVE to be saved. This explains why Bnei Yisrael are commanded to prepare this korban on the tenth of Nisan (12:3). The three (or four) days before their redemption need to be dedicated to spiritual preparation. The korban Pesach is significant in itself. Its purpose was not only to provide the blood for the sign on the doorposts. Offering this korban pesach serves as thanksgiving to God for His fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim [see Further Iyun Section]. With Bnei Yisrael free from their affliction and their oppressor punished (see Br. 15:13-14), the korban Pesach serves as proper recognition of God's fulfillment of that covenant.

PASS-OVER To fully appreciate this idea, the special name of this korban - Pesach - requires additional explanation. A change in lifestyle, especially that of a nation, cannot take place overnight. How much more so, the transformation of an enslaved people, immersed in Egyptian culture, into a free nation willing and ready to obey God. Had Bnei Yisrael begun this teshuva process prior to the first plague, as God had originally demanded, they could have been ready for the ideal redemption process. Possibly, Bnei Yisrael would have commenced their three day journey to Har Sinai immediately after the tenth plague. Spiritually ready to obey God, they would have received the Torah and continued to the Land of Israel only a short time later.

Had Bnei Yisrael truly been worthy of this ideal redemption, the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts may not have been necessary. However, as we explained in last week's shiur, the

people were not worthy; their hastened preparation for the Exodus was hardly sufficient to entirely erase their past. Now that God is about to reveal Himself b'shem Havaya, they deserve to be punished together with the Egyptians; but God has Mercy (Ezekiel 20:7-9). The fact that God has to PASS OVER their houses emphasizes this very point - that they actually deserve to be punished, but instead of smiting them, He saves them at the last minute. ["po'sey'ach" in Hebrew implies skipping over. One 'skips over' that which he should have stepped on.]

Therefore, the Korban Pesach serves a double purpose: (1) By sprinkling the blood of the korban Pesach on their doorposts, Bnei Yisrael display recognition that they do not deserve to be saved. [Blood is a fitting symbol.] (2) Offering the korban in thanksgiving for the fulfillment of the first stage of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, reminds them that if they are saved, it is IN ORDER that they can fulfill the next stage of that covenant, i.e. to become His special Nation in the Promised Land. [The special laws which govern HOW this korban is to be eaten (12:8-11), further enhances Bnei Yisrael's perception of this purpose.]

This awareness, that although they deserve punishment, God 'passes over' them, is the primary purpose for offering this korban in this situation; and hence its name - "korban Pesach". Any "teshuva" process must begin with both (1) man's recognition of God's Mercy in allowing him a second chance, as well as (2) man's realization of his purpose in life.

[Note: Even if Bnei Yisrael had been deserving of their redemption, it may have been proper to offer this "korban l'Hashem" at this time (or three days later at Har Sinai) in thanksgiving for Brit Bein Ha'Btarim. However, the ritual of sprinkling the blood on the doorposts would have been superfluous. One could also suggest a reason why God afforded the second chance. Although inexcusable, their stubbornness was understandable. As we explained in last week's shiur, because of their crushed spirits and cruel bondage ("m'kotzer ruach u'm'avodah kasha"), Bnei Yisrael did not heed God's

original call (6:9). Possibly, for this reason Sefer Shmot only hints to their low spiritual level at that time, and does not record what Sefer Yechezkel mentions explicitly.]

PESACH IN SDOM Lot's situation in Sdom is strikingly similar to Bnei Yisrael's in Egypt. Recall that Lot is originally attracted to Sdom because of its climatic similarities to Egypt (Nile & Jordan Rivers / See Br. 13:10). The people of Sdom, as a result of their natural resources, are confident in themselves. They find no need for God and thus evolve into a corrupt society (13:13 / see shiur on Parshat Va'yera). In total disgust for this society, God punishes them b'shem Havaya (18:20-21). Before destroying Sdom, God first consults with Avraham Avinu. Antithetical to the society of Sdom, Avraham's offspring were destined to become a 'blessing to Mankind' by establishing a Nation characterized by "tzekek u'mishpat" (see 18:17-19). Can Lot, a disciple of Avraham, not save that city? Upon hearing of the forthcoming destruction of Sdom, Avraham immediately assumes exactly what we have posited - that God would not punish the righteous together with the wicked: "Will you sweep away the innocent together with the guilty?... Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (18:23-25).

Although he is more righteous than his neighbors, Lot does not merit to be saved from the destruction of Sdom. [He preferred the lifestyle in Sdom over the challenges of life with Avraham (13:10- 12).] In an act of Divine Mercy (19:16!), and for the sake of Avraham (19:29), God removes Lot from Sdom before He destroys the city. Lot is so undeserving that he is not even permitted to look back and watch the destruction.

It is only God's covenant with Avraham Avinu that evokes Divine Mercy. Like Bnei Yisrael during Makkat Bchorot, Lot is saved from destruction even though he is not worthy. Based on this thematic similarity, we can appreciate Rashi's concise comment regarding the time of year when the destruction of Sdom took place.

Rashi comments on the pasuk that describes the meal which Lot prepared for the two "malachim" (who came to destroy Sdom): "And he [Lot] made for them drinks, and baked MATZOT, and they ate..." (19:3).

On the word MATZOT, Rashi explains that 'it was PESACH' that evening. After all, why else would they be eating matzah? Does Rashi need to inform us what time of year this episode took place? Do we need to know how 'frum' Lot was, that he kept all mitzvot, even matzah on Pesach? Rashi is not coming to teach us "pshat" (the simple meaning of the text). Rather, he hints to the thematic similarity between Lot and Yetziat Mitzraim.

[Note: The following explanation illustrates the danger of understanding "drash" as "pshat". When we too quickly accept "drash" as "pshat", not only are we liable to miss the beauty of "pshat", we might also lose the full appreciation of the "drash".]

According to "pshat", Lot did not bake matzot (19:3) because it was Pesach. He baked matzot instead of bread because his guests arrived SUDDENLY. In order to bake bread, the dough needs time to rise; matzot can be baked much more quickly. The "drash", brought down by Rashi, that Lot baked matzah because it was Pesach, thematically links the events leading to the destruction of Sdom to the story of Yetziat Mitzraim. In both events, God reveals Himself, b'shem Havaya, in Judgement. Thus, Rashi's commentary of this pasuk does not explain "pshat", rather, it points to a much deeper biblical theme - that of 'Yom Hashem'!

YOM HASHEM This biblical concept of a day when God reveals Himself, causing the wicked to be punished while the righteous are saved, is known throughout Tanach as "Yom Hashem" - God's Day of Judgement. For example, when Yeshayahu foresees the destruction of Bavel ([Isaiah 13:1-22](#)), he consistently refers to that day as 'Yom Hashem' (see 13:6,9,13). While describing that calamity, Yeshayahu even compares Bavel to Sdom: "Bavel, glory of kingdoms, splendor of the

Kassdim, shall become like Sdom and Amorah, overturned by God" (13:19)

Another important example is found in Amos. During the time period of Yerovam ben Yoash, Israel had reached prosperity and affluence. They eagerly awaited an even greater redemption, even though they were not deserving. In reaction, Amos warns the people concerning the danger involved: "Woe, you who wish for 'Yom Hashem', why should you want 'Yom Hashem', [for you] it shall be darkness and not light" (5:18) If the people are not spiritually prepared for God to reveal Himself, Amos warns, 'Yom Hashem' will bring upon them destruction rather than salvation.

Our final example comes from God's 'farewell' message to Mankind; the last prophesy of the last prophet - Malachi: [also a popular song] "Hiney anochi sho'lay'ach la'chem..." - Behold I am sending you Elijah the prophet BEFORE the great and terrible Day of the Lord ['Yom Hashem'] comes. And he will bring about the REPENTANCE of the fathers by the sons, and the repentance of the sons by the fathers, LEST I COME and STRIKE the entire land with DESTRUCTION." [this last phrase, we don't sing!] (3:23-24)

Here again we find the necessity to perform teshuva prior to redemption, otherwise God's revelation will lead to destruction. Since the ultimate redemption of Am Yisrael is the hope of all the prophets, it is only fitting that this becomes the closing prophetic message to Am Yisrael.

KOS SHEL ELIYAHU As we have seen, the redemption process begins without Bnei Yisrael being worthy of salvation. However, its continuation - receiving the Torah and inheriting the Promised Land - require spiritual readiness. In this week's shiur we explained how the offering of the korban Pesach was the 'first step' in the right direction, an important milestone on the road to spiritual redemption. Every year, when we commemorate the events of Yetziat Mitzraim on 'Passover', we thank God for His fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim (MAGID) and pray for our final redemption (HALLEL/ NIRTZAH). Before that prayer, we invite

Eliyahu to our Seder table ('fathers and sons' gathered together), the same Eliyahu promised by Malachi: not only to taste our wine; and not only to encourage him to smite our enemies.

Eliyahu comes to remind us that we need to do proper "teshuva" PRIOR to our redemption, and to warn us of the consequences lest we do not.

shabbat shalom menachem

----- FOR FURTHER IYUN A. KORBAN TODAH AND KORBAN PESACH In the above shiur we mentioned that the Korban Pesach itself could be considered as a type of "korban todah" (thanksgiving offering). The reason is quite simple. When one is required to thank God for being saved (see Tehilim 107/ nowadays, we bench ha'goymel instead), he must bring a Korban Todah, a subcategory of Korban Shlamim. This is the only type of korban which the owners are permitted to eat ("kodshim kalim" - see [Vayikra 7:11-21](#)). The Korban Todah is special in two ways: 1) The time frame in which one can eat it is limited to the day when it was offered and that evening, while a regular Shlamim can be eaten the entire next day. 2) It must be eaten together with MATZOT: The Korban Pesach is similar in both these aspects. It can only be eaten that evening, and it must be eaten together with matzot. However, in addition to the fact that it is a type of Korban Todah, it also specifically commemorates the fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, therefore, it has extra mitzvot, such as being eaten with "maror" (to remember the bondage) while retelling the story of Yetziat Mitzraim.

1. Attempt to explain all the special laws of the Korban Pesach ([Shmot 12:4-14](#)) in light of our explanation in the above shiur.
2. In what other halachot is the Korban Pesach different from the Korban Todah. [Is it considered a Korban Tzibur in any aspect?]
3. What is the halacha of a Korban Pesach which was not used?

B. KORBAN PESACH AND BRIT MILAH [a mini-shiur and some questions] We mentioned that the one could view the Korban Pesach as a thanksgiving offering for God's fulfillment of Brit

Bein Ha'Btarim. Last week's shiur claimed that Yetziat Mitzraim also contained aspects of the fulfillment of Brit Milah, therefore, one would expect that the commemoration of Yetziat Mitzraim include some reference to that covenant. Lo and behold, this is precisely what we find. At the end of Parshat Bo, after the Torah recaps the events of [Exodus \(12:37-42\)](#) [note use of Bein Ha'Btarim terminology - 400 years], God commands Moshe and Aharon additional laws regarding offering the Korban Pesach, even for future generations (12:43-50/ read carefully). The primary point made in these additional laws is that one who did not perform Brit Milah cannot participate in Korban Pesach. Even if one's servant must been circumcised! This point is emphasized in 12:48 - "v'chul a'reyl lo yu'chal bo" - [no uncircumcised male can eat from it]. No other mitzvah in the Torah contains such a strange condition. For example, we do not find that one can not shake a lulav an etrog if he did not perform Brit Milah. Why should the fact that one mitzvah was not performed limit one's ability to perform other mitzvot? Based on our explanation in last week's shiur of the connection between Brit Bein Ha'Btarim and Brit Milah in the process of Yetziat Mitzraim, the answer is obvious. Because every Jew must recognize that Yetziat Mitzraim constituted the fulfillment of both Divine covenants, there is no meaning to thanking God for the National aspect (Bein Ha'Btarim), unless he takes upon himself the responsibilities of the individual, as symbolized by Brit Milah.

1. What is the punishment of one who does not perform either Brit Milah or offer the Korban Pesach? 2. Are there any other 'mitzvot asey' that carry this punishment? If not, why are these two mitzvot special? 3. Read [Yehoshua 5:12](#). Explain according to this week's shiur! Why must this take place BEFORE the battle of Yericho?

C. CHAG HA'PESACH AND CHAG HA'MATZOT These two holidays are often confused with one another, even though each one exists independently! 1. Read 12:1-20. Attempt to break these psukim into two distinct groups. Give a header to each group. 2. Explain now 12:14. Does it belong in group One or Two? 3. When were these mitzvot given by God to Moshe.

When were they given by Moshe to Bnei Yisrael? (see 12:21-28 and 13:2-10, explain based on 12:39!) 4. What does each chag commemorate, be specific. 5. How long does each chag last for? Do they overlap? See [Vayikra 23:4-8](#)! 6. What is the thematic connection between them?

D. THE DOUBLE SHLICHUT / FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF YIRMIYAHU Read [Yirmiyahu 7:1-28](#), especially 7:21-24. While censuring Am Yisrael for their hypocrisy when bringing their korbanot to the Bet ha'Mikdash, Yirmiyahu makes an amazing statement: "For I never SPOKE to your forefathers, nor did I COMMAND them, on the DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM OUT OF EGYPT about offering 'olah v'zevach' (sacrifices)". [Rather,] this is what I commanded them: 'OBEY ME' ("shimu b'koli"), and I WILL BE YOUR GOD AND YOU WILL BE MY PEOPLE.... but you did not listen..."

How could Yirmiyahu possibly say that when God took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, He never told them about korbanot? The ONLY thing He did command them when they left Egypt was to bring the Korban Pesach! 1. Based on last week's shiur - Compare Yirmiyahu's statement, [Yechezkel 20:5-9](#), and the beginning of Parshat Va'eyra 6:6-8! Use this to explain which day Yirmiyahu refers to when he mentions - the 'day I took you out of Egypt'. 2. Note that Bnei Yisrael were told only that God had come to fulfill His covenant, i.e. Ani Hashem Elokeichem etc., but Moshe DOES NOT tell Bnei Yisrael what he did tell Pharaoh - that they need to go for a three day journey into the desert to OFFER KORBANOT. Why didn't Moshe bother to tell Bnei Yisrael of God's plan? Relate your answer to Yirmiyahu's prophesy! Relate also to what Bnei Yisrael may have perceived as 'tafel' (secondary) and as 'iykar' (essential).

E. PREPARATION FOR PARSHAT B'SHALACH After the Exodus but before Matan Torah, God charges Bnei Yisrael with certain mitzvot and places them in extraordinary circumstances. (e.g. mitzvot at Marah, shabbat, "kriyat Yam Suf", thirst for water, Rfidim etc.). Based on this week's shiur, explain the purpose of these events. [ly"h - the topic of next week's shiur]

Visit our website: <http://vbm-torah.org>