

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash  
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**Remembering the Exodus from Egypt**

**By Rav Meir Spiegelman**

"This day shall be for you for a remembrance, and you shall celebrate it as a festival to God, for all your generations – you shall celebrate it as an eternal statute." ([Shemot 12:14](#))

The Torah commands us to celebrate, for all generations, the day of our exodus from Egypt. When are we to celebrate this festival? It turns out that the answer to this question differs from parasha to parasha, depending on where it appears. In some places the "festival of Pesach" is attached to the date upon which it fell (14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan), while in others the date is noted according to the season (in the "month of spring").[1]

The difference between these two definitions stands out in the verses in Sefer Devarim that command the commemoration of Pesach:

"Observe the month of spring, and you shall make a Pesach to the Lord your God, for in the month of spring the Lord your God took you out of Egypt, at night." ([Devarim 16:1](#))

The Torah commands that we observe the "month of spring," emphasizing specifically the season, rather than the month, in which Bnei Yisrael left Egypt. Similarly, we are told that God took the nation out of Egypt "at night," and that the Pesach sacrifice must be offered "in the evening, at sunset, the time of your departure from Egypt" ([Devarim 16:6](#)). These verses create the impression that the exact DATE of the exodus is of no great significance; what is important is the exact TIME of the departure. A similar phenomenon is to be found at the end of parashat Bo, in the command to sanctify all the first-born ([Shemot 13:1-10](#)): "Today you are going out, in the month of spring." As a comparison, in the parasha listing the sacrifices for the festivals ([Bamidbar 28:16-25](#)), the Torah relates to the "fifteenth day of this month." We may therefore discern two perspectives on the same festival: the aspect of the date, and the aspect of the season.

In order to understand the dual dating of the Pesach festival, we must first turn our attention to another problem. Chazal note that the Pesach festival in Egypt was celebrated not for seven days, but rather for a single day. The parasha commanding that

Nissan be counted as the first month, with the first mention of the Pesach sacrifice, comprises three parts:

a. "This month shall be for you the beginning of the months" – taking of the sheep and sprinkling its blood on the lintel and the doorposts;

b. "And I shall pass over the land of Egypt on that night" – the death of the firstborn;

c. "And this day shall be for you as a remembrance... seven days shall you eat matzot" – command to eat matzot and the prohibition of chametz.

Chazal maintain that the third section (c.) refers here not to the Pesach that was commemorated by Bnei Yisrael in Egypt prior to their departure, but rather to the Pesach festival to be celebrated for all generations. Indeed, this distinction seems obvious from a literal reading of the text. God tells Moshe that the day upon which Bnei Yisrael left Egypt is to be remembered, and immediately thereafter lists the laws of the Pesach festival, which is to be celebrated by future generations:

"This day shall be for you as a remembrance, and you shall celebrate it as a festival to God for all your generations; you shall celebrate it as an eternal statute. Seven days shall you eat matzot... On the first day shall there be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day shall there be a holy convocation for you... And you shall observe the [commandment concerning] matzot, for on this very day I took your hosts out of the land of Egypt, and you shall observe this day for all your generations, an eternal statute... For seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses... you shall not eat any leavened food; in all your dwellings shall you eat matzot." ([Shemot 12:14-20](#))

Indeed, when Moshe conveys to Bnei Yisrael what God told him, he does not describe the performance of the Pesach as it is to be commemorated by future generations; rather, he conveys only the command that the sheep be taken and that the lintel be painted with its blood ([Shemot 12:21-28](#)). The command concerning Pesach for future generations is given to Bnei Yisrael only after their departure from Egypt, in the parasha concerning the sanctification of the firstborn ([Shemot 13:3-10](#)).

In light of the above, the following simple question arises: why does the Torah integrate within the parasha concerning the month of Nissan and the taking of the sheep – conveyed prior to the Exodus – verses that were told to Moshe only after the Exodus?

### Pesach in Egypt and Pesach for Future Generations

As noted, it seems that God commanded Moshe concerning the Pesach commemoration for future generations only after the Exodus from Egypt, and the verses relating to Pesach for future generations that appear in the command to take the sheep were not given in the place where they are recorded. According to this understanding, Bnei Yisrael were not commanded in Egypt concerning the prohibition of chametz ("there shall not be seen..."; "there shall not be found..."); they were commanded only concerning the Pesach sacrifice.

If we explain the situation thus, we can solve the well-known question concerning the prohibition of eating chametz. The prohibition is customarily explained as commemorating how "the dough of our forefathers did not have time to rise." But in our parasha, we see explicitly that Bnei Yisrael were commanded concerning the prohibition of chametz on Pesach in the original command to take the sheep, even before they left Egypt! In light of what we have said above, there is no difficulty here: Beni Yisrael were commanded in Egypt only to eat matza ("and they shall eat it with matzot and with bitter herbs"); there was no prohibition concerning chametz.

Indeed, this is quite logical: on the day of the Pesach, when God protected the houses of Bnei Yisrael, they were commanded to transform the houses in which they dwelled into altars. Therefore, they were commanded to place some of the blood of the lamb upon the lintel of the house, just as blood is placed upon the altar. The consumption of the Pesach sacrifice paralleled the partaking of an offering of thanksgiving. Just as an offering of thanks requires matzot – so the Pesach sacrifice of the generation that left Egypt was consumed with matzot and bitter herbs.[2] Therefore it was not appropriate that that generation be prohibited from eating chametz.[3] The prohibition of chametz comes later, and relates to the Pesach of future generations, because the dough of those who left Egypt did not have time to rise before God was revealed to them and redeemed them from Egypt.

In light of this, the question we posed has become even more difficult. If God commanded Moshe concerning Pesach for future generations after the Exodus from Egypt, why does the Torah record the command in the parasha concerning the sanctification of the month and the taking of the sheep – prior to the Exodus?[4]

### The Length of the Pesach Festival

In order to answer our question, let us address a different question that would appear to require no discussion: what is the length of the festival of Pesach?[5] In Sefer Devarim, the Torah explains the prohibition of eating chametz on the basis of the fact that it is forbidden to eat chametz together with the Pesach sacrifice – and this applies for seven days. Clearly, then, the consumption of the Pesach sacrifice continues – at least thematically – for seven whole days.[6] On the other hand, Chazal teach that the splitting of the Red Sea took place on the seventh day after the Exodus from Egypt, and the Pesach festival lasts for seven days because it includes the seven-day process of the Exodus, starting from the death of the firstborn and continuing up until the splitting of the sea.[7] The Torah, then, provides two different explanations for the length of the Pesach festival: because of the Pesach sacrifice, and because of the Exodus.

The two aspects that we have discovered for the Pesach festival similarly affect its date. As we have seen, the Torah dates Pesach in two ways – according to the date, and according to the season. It is Bnei Yisrael who sanctify the times and the months, and therefore the date is "worldly time" that God has nothing to do with, as it were. The seasons of the year and of each day are fixed times over which mortals have no influence, and therefore these seasons are "heavenly dates," suited to God's perspective.

The parasha of the new month begins with the fact that it is Israel who determine the seasons. In this same parasha, the festival of Pesach is dated as the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, relating to the world of Bnei Yisrael, who establish the month of Nissan as the first of the months of the year. From God's point of view, there is no significance – as it were – to the months established by mortals; there is significance only to the seasons of the year, which are fixed and have existed since the time of Creation. The dual system of dating the Pesach festival therefore hints at two different perspectives: the perspective of Israel, who have left Egypt and who now sanctify the months, and the perspective of God, Who has taken them from slavery to freedom. These two celebrations happen to fall on the same day, but not at the same time: Israel's festival of Pesach falls in the month of Nissan, while God's festival of Pesach falls in the month of spring.

Let us now return to our question: why does the Torah record the command concerning Pesach for future generations in the middle of the parasha concerning the sanctification of the

month, prior to the Exodus from Egypt? The answer is that the Torah wants to link the parasha of the month to the establishment of the festival of matzot as occurring between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of Nissan. The parasha concerning the firstborn, which also describes the Pesach festival, presents it from God's perspective, and therefore the festival is said to occur in the "month of spring."<sup>[8]</sup> The list of festivals in parashat Pinchas relates to the sacrifices and the Mishkan, and therefore it relies on "worldly dates," characteristic of parashot that command certain behavior on the part of Bnei Yisrael. Likewise, in the parasha of the festivals in Sefer Vayikra, where the Torah commands the mitzvot from the point of view of Bnei Yisrael ("These are the festivals of God which you shall declare as holy convocations"), the Pesach festival is dated in accordance with the day and month.

Let us now explain one further point. If we read chapters 12 and 13 carefully, we discover that the Torah commands the beginning of the festival of Pesach on two different days. From chapter 12, it arises that Pesach for future generations must be celebrated starting from the second year (i.e., a year after the Exodus), while in chapter 13 we are told: "And it shall be when you come to the land that God will give to you, as He promised, and you observe this service." Is the festival of Pesach to be commemorated immediately, or only after entry into the land of Canaan?

According to what we have said above, both answers are correct. >From the point of view of Bnei Yisrael – as described in chapter 12 – the Exodus began when Pharaoh banished them, and ended with the splitting of the sea, when Pharaoh was finally and thoroughly destroyed. From God's perspective, in contrast, the splitting of the sea was still part of the beginning. The end of the process, beginning with the Exodus and continuing to the foot of Har Sinai, came only after Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael. Only then – forty years later – was the process that had been promised to Moshe in parashat Vaera, following his mission to Pharaoh, complete:

"I shall take you out from under the suffering of Egypt, and I shall save you from their servitude, and I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments, and I shall take you as My nation... and I shall bring you to the land... and I shall give it to you as a heritage; I am God." (Shemot 7:6-8)

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

NOTES:

[1] I do not refer here to the date according to the solar calendar as opposed to the date according to the lunar calendar. The Torah could have commanded the observance of the day according to the exact date in the solar year, rather than sufficing with an indication of the season alone – the "month of spring."

[2] The time of consumption of the Pesach sacrifice and of the sacrifice of thanksgiving are likewise the same: the thanksgiving offering may be eaten that day and that night, while the Pesach sacrifice is eaten on that night. (Clearly, the Pesach

sacrifice cannot be eaten by day, prior to the time of the Exodus.)

[3] It would, though, have been possible to say that since the entire dwelling functioned as an altar, it was forbidden to keep leaven there, just as leaven may not be offered upon the altar.

[4] In fact, there is another parasha whose location in parashat Bo does not fit chronologically. The parasha of "This is the statute of the Pesach; no stranger shall eat of it" (Shemot 12:43-50) is written after the Exodus from Egypt, but it appears to have been conveyed to Moshe prior to the departure. I am not able, within the present framework, to discuss at length the question of why the respective places of these two parashiot are exchanged. I shall merely note that the Torah describes the Exodus from Egypt twice: first Pharaoh banishes them (Shemot 12:30-36), and afterwards God takes them out (Shemot 12:51). It seems that the parasha of "This is the statute of the Pesach," located in between the two descriptions of the Exodus, belongs only to the removal of Bnei Yisrael from Egypt by God, and not to their banishment from Egypt by Pharaoh. In order to emphasize this duality, the Torah introduces the parasha of the sanctification of the month and that of "This is the statute of the Pesach" in a similar way: "And God spoke to Moshe and [to] Aharon." This introduction is special in two respects: it addresses both leaders – Moshe and Aharon, and it employs the expression, "And God said" (va-yomer Hashem) rather than "And God spoke" (va-yedaber Hashem). Furthermore, the two parashot also conclude in a similar way: "And Bnei Yisrael did as God had commanded Moshe and Aharon; so they did."

[5] Throughout this shiur, I have ignored the difference between the "festival of Pesach" and the "festival of matzot." See also note no. 7.

[6] Similarly to other actions that last for seven days: the seven days of inauguration of the Mishkan, the seven days of purification of a zav, etc.

[7] As noted above, I do not distinguish here between the "festival of Pesach," celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, and the "festival of matzot," celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Elsewhere, I hope to explain that both festivals last for seven days, but the "festival of Pesach" begins on the 14<sup>th</sup> while the "festival of matzot" begins a day later.

[8] Therefore this parashia is recorded only after verse 51, which describes the Exodus from Egypt from God's perspective.

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