

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XV: Bo (Ex. 10:1–13:16)

Essay 18. The division of the Passover sacrifice into three groups

The Passover sacrifice was first offered on the night of the Exodus from Egypt, with the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doorposts of the homes of the Israelites. Ex. 12:24–27 ordained that this sacrifice be repeated when the people took possession of the Land of Israel. In the days of the First Temple and the Second Temple, the slaughter of the Paschal lambs was conducted by lay people, who were divided into three groups. This was derived by Mishnah Pesachim 5:5, “The Paschal lamb was slaughtered in three groups, as it is stated: ‘And the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall slaughter it [in the afternoon]’ (Ex. 12:6). [The verse is interpreted as referring to three groups:] Assembly, congregation, and Israel.”

פסחים פרק ה' בירושלמי ניתן פסח בקולו של משה והנה קולו הולך בכל ארץ מצרים, ומה הנה אומר ממקום פלוני עד מקום פלוני פת אחת. משום דהפסח נשחט בשלש פתות. אמר ר' לוי בשם שנייתן פסח בקולו של משה פה ניתן פסח בקולו של פרעה, והנה קולו הולך בכל ארץ מצרים והנה אומר "קומו צאו מתוך עמי". לשעבר הייתם עבדי עכשיו אתם עבדי ה', באותה שעה אמרו "הללו עבדי ה'" ולא עבדי פרעה עכ"ל.

Pesachim chapter 5 in Yerushalmi:

Rabbi Yaakov bar Acha in the name of Rabbi Yasa: **Power was given to Moses' voice and his voice traveled through the entire land of Egypt**, a distance of 40 days of travel. **What did he say? From place A to place B is one group** [of Israelites], from place C to place D is one group [of Israelites]. [From place E to place F is a third group of Israelites.] . . .

- Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim, 5:5

Zera Shimshon explains, from the words of the Mishnah that precedes this paragraph, that these groups are discussed **“because the Paschal lamb was slaughtered in three groups.”** I.e., the implication is that not only were three groups used in the Temple in the Land of Israel, but even in the first Passover sacrifice, in Egypt.

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The Gemara continues:

Rabbi Levi said, just as power was given to Moses' voice, so power was given to Pharaoh's voice, and his voice traveled through the entire land of Egypt, a distance of forty days of travel. What did he say? "Get up, depart from among my people" (Ex. 12:31). In the past you were my servants, from now on you are servants of the L-rd." At that moment, they were saying, "Hallelujah, give praise, servants of the L-rd" (Ps. 113:1), but not servants of Pharaoh.

- Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim, 5:5

מקשים על זה המפרשים דמה בא ר' לוי לתרץ בדבריו, ומה צורך לגס זה שקולו של פרעה ילך בכל מחנה ישראל? ויש לומר דכתב התוספות יום טוב בפרק ט' דפסחים (משנה ה' ד"ה ופסח דורות נוהג כל שבועה), ואם תאמר שלש פתות שגששט פסח דורות, היאך אתה מוצא בשל מצרים. וראיתי בירושלמי שניתן פח בקולו של משה והיה קולו הולך וכו', ממקום פלוגי עד מקום פלוגי פת אחת, הרי דאף פסח מצרים היה בשלש פתות עכ"ל.

The commentators question this, that what was Rabbi Levi coming to explain by his words, and what was the need for this miracle that Pharaoh's voice went through the entire camp of Israel? It can be said that the Tosafot Yom-Tov¹ wrote in the ninth chapter of tractate Pesachim (Mishnah 5, the words beginning "the Paschal lamb [throughout the] generations is observed for seven [days]"): "and if you'll say that the generations slaughtered the Paschal lamb in three groups, how will you find [the law implemented] regarding [the Passover sacrifice in] Egypt?" [I.e., in the Land of Israel, the sacrifices were all conducted at the Temple, but how were they arranged in Egypt?] "I saw in the Jerusalem Talmud that power was given to Moses' voice and his voice went through the entire land of Egypt. From place A to place B, one group, [from place C to place D one group], thus even the Paschal lamb of Egypt was slaughtered in three groups."

In other words, as explained above, the Jerusalem Talmud supports the idea that the Passover sacrifice in Egypt was also conducted by three groups.

והקשה הקול הרמ"ז דאם היו חייבים להחלק בשלש פתות, למה לא למדם בכך מתחלה כשהודיעם כל חקת הפסח, ולמה המתין עד אותה שעה לסמוך על הגס שיהיה קולו הולך וכו'? ויש לומר כמו שתרגם יונתן בן עוזיאל בפסוק "וּאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרַיִם" ואובילית יתכון לאתר בית מקדשא למעבד תמן פסחא. ואם כן, מתחלה היה סובר משה רבינו עליו השלום דאין חייב החילוק לשלש פתות, אלא במקדש דנקא, אבל כשראה שיה' רצה להוליכם שם ממש וכו' אז ניתן בקולו קול עוז עכ"ל.

And the Kol ha'Remez² questions that if they were obligated to separate into three groups, why didn't they learn this from the beginning, when they were informed of all the

¹ Rabbi Gershon Shaul Yom-Tov Lipmann ben Nathan ha-Levi Heller (c. 1579–1654), Bohemian rabbi and Talmudist. Tosefet Yom-Tov (written 1614–17) was his commentary on the Mishnah.

² Rabbi Moshe Zacuto (the "ReMeZ") (c. 1625–97), rabbi, Kabbalist, and poet. *Kol ha'Remez* (Amsterdam 1719).

laws of the Paschal lamb, and why did [Moses] wait until the time [of the sacrifice] to rely on the miracle that his voice would go throughout the entire land of Israel?

It can be said, as Yonaton ben Uziel³ translated on the verse, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, **how I bore you on eagles’ wings** and brought you to Me” (Ex. 19:4): “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you upon the clouds as upon eagles’ wings from Pelusin,⁴ **to take you to the place of the Temple**, there to solemnize the Passover; and in the same night, I brought you back to Pelusin, and from there have I brought you near, to [receive] the doctrine of My law.” **If so, Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was of the opinion that there was no obligation to divide into three groups in Egypt, rather that was only specifically required in the Temple. But when he saw that G-d wanted to lead them precisely there [to the place where the Temple would stand, then Moses thought that they were to bring the Passover offering at the site of the Temple, and that three groups would be required, and] then his voice was given the voice of power.**⁵

והנה קנימא לן דעבד דברח מחוץ לארץ יצא לחירות וכופין את רבו לכתוב לו גט שחרור. ומעתה שהוצרך משה להרים קולו בשביל שהקב"ה הוליקם לארץ ישראל, אם כן היו יכולים ישראל לומר הואיל שבאנו לארץ ישראל, הרי אנו משוחררים ואין אנו רוצים לחזור למצרים. והקב"ה רצה שיסגרו שם אחר אכילת הפסח, כדי שפרעה ישלחם מתחת היד התזקה של הקב"ה, ועוד רצה שיסגרו שם כדי שימבלו השחרור מאת פרעה. והשחרור הנה שאמר להם "קומו צאו", ומשום הכי הנה צריך שישמעו בלם זה השחרור, כדי שיידעו מה מועיל להם לחזור למצרים, אף על פי שכבר יצאו לחירות כשהלכו לארץ ישראל. ומשום הכי אמר ר' לוי בשם שגיתן כח בקולו של משה וכו' כה גיתן כח בקולו של פרעה, דאי לא הכי היו יכולים ישראל להתרעם כנ"ל.

Here we hold that the halacha is that a slave who flees from the diaspora to the Land of Israel goes out to freedom, and we force his master to write a bill of release for him.⁶ Henceforth, Moses had to raise his voice for G-d to lead them to the Land of Israel, so Israel could have said, “Since we came to the Land of Israel, then we are liberated and we do not want to return to Egypt.”⁷ But G-d wanted them to return there after eating the Paschal lamb, so that Pharaoh would send them out because of the strong hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and He also wanted them to come back there so that they would receive the deliverance from Pharaoh, comparable to receiving a bill of release. The release was that he told them, “Get up, depart,” and because of this, it was necessary for all of them to hear this release, in order that they should know that it would be beneficial for them to return to Egypt, even though they had already left for freedom when they went to the Land of Israel.

³ One of the 80 tannaim who studied under Hillel the Elder during the time of Roman-ruled Judea, best known for his Aramaic translations of the Books of the Prophets.

⁴ A town in lower Egypt.

⁵ C.f. Ps. 68:34, “To Him who rides the ancient highest heavens, *Who has given to His voice the voice of power.*”

⁶ Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, siman 267, se'if 85.

⁷ In Ex. 3:18, the only demand made to Pharaoh was to allow the Israelites to travel into the wilderness for three days so that they could sacrifice to G-d, after which they would ostensibly return to their servitude in Egypt. As Targum Yonatan translated, the intent could have been that three-days journey would be enough to reach the Land of Israel and the future site of the Temple, because G-d would bring them there on eagles’ wings.

Because of this, Rabbi Levi said, “just as power was given to Moses’ voice, so power was given to Pharaoh’s voice,” so that his order “Get up, depart from among my people” would be heard by all the Israelites, **for if not, Israel would have been resentful** of the need to return to Egypt, **as above.**

Thus, the Zera Shimshon has addressed the question of why Moses’ and Pharaoh’s voices had to travel throughout Egypt. Moses’ voice had to quickly divide the Israelites into three groups, so his voice had to travel through all of Egypt, and Pharaoh’s voice had to be heard by all the Israelites, so that they would understand why they were brought back to Egypt.

The Zera Shimshon now provides a Kabbalistic view of why those sacrificing the Paschal lambs were divided into three groups.

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לְתַת טַעַם לְשִׁבְחָ לְמָה דִּנְקָא הוֹצֵרְכוּ לְהַחֲלֵק לְשִׁלְשׁ כְּתוּת אַף שְׁהָיוּ הַצְּבוּר מוּעָטִין, כְּמוֹ שְׁפִירֵשׁ הָרַב עוֹבְדֵי מִבְּרִטְנוֹרָא בְּפֶרֶק ה' דְּפִסְחִים, שְׂיָדוּעַ שְׂיָרִידוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַצְרַיִם הִיָּתָה כְּדֵי לְלַקֵּט הַבִּירוּרִין וְהַגִּיּוּצִין וְכִדְכָתִיב "וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם". וְאֵלּוּ הַגִּיּוּצוֹת נִפְלוּ וְנִתְקַלְקְלוּ בְיוֹמֵין קִדְמָאִין, וְסוּדָם בְּסוּד הַיְצִירָה שְׁהִיא בְּחֵינַת זְעִיר כְּנוֹדָע, וְשֵׁם מ"ב שֶׁל "אֲנָא בְכַח" הוּא בְּיְצִירָה.

Further, there is a praiseworthy reason why they specifically had to divide into three groups in Egypt, even though the congregation was small.⁸ As the rabbi, Ovadia of Bartenura,⁹ interpreted in the fifth chapter of tractate Pesachim (mishnah 5), it is known that the descent of Israel to Egypt was in order to collect the means to rectify sin and to collect the sparks of holiness, and as is written, “thus they plundered the Egyptians” (Ex. 12:36). These sparks fell and were corrupted in the earliest days, and their esoteric secret in the secret of Yetzira, the World of Formation, is the aspect of Ze’ir Anpin¹⁰ as is known to Kabbalists, and the 42-letter name of G-d derived from the mystic prayer “Ana b’koach,”¹¹ which is in the Yetzira. [We discussed earlier, in Chapter V: Chayei Sarah, essay 3, that the prayer Ana b’koach has seven verses, each with six words. The acronym of each verse forms a mystic six-lettered name of G-d; and the acronym of the entire 42-word prayer forms a mystic 42-letter name of G-d.]

⁸ For the sacrifice in the Temples, the first and second groups each filled the Temple courtyard, with the third group only partially filling the courtyard. Thus, there was a pragmatic reason for the separation into three groups. In Egypt, there were presumably fewer people performing the Passover sacrifice, so why were three groups needed?

⁹ Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura (c. 1445–c. 1515), Italian rabbi.

¹⁰ The revealed aspect of G-d in Kabbalah, comprising the emotional sephirot attributes: Chesed, Gevurah, Tiphereth, Netzach, Hod and Yesod.

¹¹ “Ana b’koach” is attributed to Rabbi Nechuniah ben Hakanah. The 42 words are divided into seven lines of six words. The first verse of the prayer is אֲנָא בְכַח גְּדֵלַת יְמִינְךָ תַּתִּיר צְרוּרָה, “Please! With the strength of your right hand’s greatness, release the bound!” “Release the bound” is interpreted by some as “free Israel from our Exile,” and is interpreted by others as “untie the bundled sins,” i.e., the accumulated sins of Israel that are bound together as a barrier that prevents our prayers from ascending to the Heavenly Throne.

ולכן השם הראשון יש בו אותיות אבג"י שהם בגימטריא י"ו, שקודם התיקון הנה בסוד רשות הרבים שרחבו י"ו אמה ואחר התיקון נעשו רשות היחיד. ועוד יש בו אותיות ת"ץ שנתצו ונשברו ונתקלקלו, וכל פנונת המצוות היא להעלות הביוריון ההם, ומפל שכן סוד הקרבן שהוא לשון קריבות דהיינו לקרב הרחוקים. ומפל שכן, סוד הפסח שהוא לשון דילוג וקפיצה ליתן פח לניצוצין שיזדלגו ויקפצו, כמו שרומז השם השני קר"ע פנודע בסוד סדר פל נדר¹² של ליל יום הכיפורים, כדי שהניצוצות יעשו עקר וערק ורקע, כלומר שיעקרו מתוך הקליפות, ויערקו ויברחו, ויעשו רקע דהיינו רקיע וכו'. וסוד שם זה מתחלק לשלושה חלקים פנודע מפסוק "בשמים יכסה פניו ובשמים" וכו', ויעשר פעמים מ"ב עולה בגימטריא פ"ת.

Therefore, the first six-lettered name can be divided into two parts. The first part has within it the letters of אבג"י, which have a Gematria of 16, signifying that before the correction there was an esoteric secret of the *reshut ha'rabim*, the public domain, which has a width of 16 amot,¹³ as in Kabbalistic terms, the *reshut ha'rabim* is the realm of impurity, marked by separation, divisiveness and pluralism.¹⁴ After the correction, it will become *reshut ha'yachid*, the private domain, in Kabbalistic terms, the realm of holiness.¹⁵ Also, there is within [the first six-lettered name] the second part, viz, the letters ת"ץ ["broken"] which represent the four early spiritual worlds that existed before the physical universe, which were destroyed and broken and corrupted.

The entire intent of the mitzvot is to raise these means to rectify sin, and of course, the esoteric secret of the sacrifice [קרבן] [*korban*] is that it has the language of "drawing near" [קריבות] [*krivot*], which [means] the bringing close of those distant, encouraging non-observant Jews to repent and to become observant.

Of course, the esoteric secret of Passover is the language of skipping and jumping, to give power to the sparks of holiness, which will skip and jump, as is hinted by the second six-lettered name, קר"ע שט"ן [*kara Satan*] ["tear up Satan"],¹⁶ which is known in the esoteric secret of the order of the Kol Nidre prayer of the night of Yom Kippur, in order that the sparks will עקר [*akar*] ["uproot"] themselves, and ערק [*arak*] ["flee"], and רקע [*raka*] ["spread out"].¹⁷ This is, as if to say, that they should uproot themselves from among the *klipot*, the husks of impurity, and they should flee and run away, and they should make a spread-out foundation, which is a firmament.

The esoteric secret of this 42-letter name is divided into three parts, as is known from the verse, "Seraphs stood in attendance on Him; each of them had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his legs, and with two he would fly" (Isaiah 6:2).¹⁸ The Gemara

¹² The first edition reads נדרים.

¹³ Shabbat 99a.

¹⁴ Zohar III:244a; Tikunei Zohar 34:69a.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The second verse of the prayer is טהרנו נורא עמך שגבנו. טהרנו נורא. "Accept the singing [prayer] of Your people. Strengthen us and purify us, Awesome One." The six-lettered name is thus קר"ע שט"ן [*kara Satan*] ["tear up Satan"].

¹⁷ *Akar*, *arak*, and *raka* are all anagrams of *kara*.

¹⁸ Pri Etz Chaim, The Gate of Conduct while Learning 1:62 discusses the application of this verse to the 42-letter name (though it seems to be focused on dividing each of the six-lettered names into two parts).

explains that on Yom Kippur, the High Priest mentions the Name of G-d ten times.¹⁹ **Ten times 42** [the number of letters in the 42-lettered Name] **adds up in Gematria** to **כ"ת** [“group”], i.e., 420.

ולכן ביציאת מצרים בשחיטת הפסח נחלקו לשלש כתות, וכן בפסח דורות לסימן זה מתחלקים לשלש כתות, שקרא כתיב "כימי צאתך מארץ מצרים" וכו' ועוד "השיר יהיה לכם כליל התקדש-קדש" וכו'.

Therefore, in the Exodus from Egypt, for the slaughter of the Paschal lamb, they were divided into three groups. Also, for the Paschal lamb of later generations, as a sign of what was done in Egypt, they are divided into three groups. This is as Scripture is written: “as on the days when you left the land of Egypt” (Micah 7:15), and also “for you, there shall be singing as on a night when a festival is hallowed” (Isaiah 30:29).

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¹⁹ Yoma 39b. The Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Sefer Avoda, Avodat Yom HaKippurim 6:2, believes this refers to the four-lettered Tetragrammaton, though Kabbalists believe it was the 42-lettered name. Kiddushin 71a references the 42-lettered name, though doesn't state what it is.