

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XV: Bo (Ex. 10:1–13:16)

Essay 20. Why is the law of the Passover sacrifice called a statute?

פסוק "זאת חקת הפסח". הקשה המטה אהרן בשם של"ה, למה קרבן פסח נקרא חק, ותיירץ משום דקימא לן שפסח לא יאכל בשתי מקומות ולא ידלג מבית לבית, והסבירא הוא להפוך שיקרי פסח ה' על הבית, והיה להם לאכול אדרבא בכמה מקומות, ונה חק.

There is a verse: “The L-rd said to Moses and Aaron: **This is the statute of the Passover sacrifice: No foreigner shall eat of it.**”¹ **The *Mateh Aaron*² asks in the name of the Shelah³ why the Passover sacrifice is called a statute (*chok*) (חק).** The commentators explain that as used in the Torah, a “statute” is a halacha that defies human logic. What is it about the Passover sacrifice that seems illogical? **His solution is that it’s because we hold that one may not eat the Passover sacrifice in two places and may not jump from house to house.**⁴ **The logical thinking is the opposite: that since the L-rd passed over the house, they may, to the contrary of the halacha, eat in different places,** as a remembrance that G-d jumped from house to house. **This fact that the halacha does not accord with the logical thinking is the reason why the halacha regarding the Passover sacrifice is referred to as a statute.**

והקשה הרב הנ"ל דאם זכרון הנס היה מה שדלג מבית לבית וקרג בכורי מצרים, שפיר היה לנו לדלג מבית לבית, אכן זכרון הנס היה על שפסח על בתי ישראל וישראל ישב בביתו וצנה אותם "ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר" עכ"ל. ובאמת שפשט הכתוב מסייע על סברא זו, דכתיב "ואמרתם זבח-פסח הוא" וכו' "אשר פסח" וכו' "ואת-בתינו הציל", שגראה שעקר הנס היה שהציל את בתינו, ועדיין הקושיא במקומה עומדת למה הפסח נקרא חק.

The rabbi mentioned above questioned this solution, that if the memory of the miracle was how He jumped from house to house and killed the firstborn of the Egyptians, it was fine for us to jump from house to house. For indeed, the remembrance of the miracle was

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¹ Ex. 12:43.

² Rabbi Aaron Te'omim (d. 1690), preacher in Prague (1659–70) and Rabbi in Worms (1670–87). Elected rabbi of Cracow, but did not arrive until 1690, and died four months after arrival. His *Sefer Mateh Aaron* (Frankfurt am Main 1719) is a Passover Haggadah with commentary.

³ Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz (Prague 1555–Safed c. 1630). Nicknamed “Shelah” after his sefer, *Shnei Luchot haBrit* (Amsterdam 1649).

⁴ Pesachim 86a.

that He jumped over the houses of Israel, and each Jew sat in his house and He commanded them, “None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning” (Ex.12:2). Actually, the plain meaning of the Scripture supports this thinking, for it is written, “you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the L-rd, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when smiting the Egyptians, but saved our households;’ those assembled then bowed low in homage” (Ex. 12:27). It appears that the principal was that He saved our households, so the halacha actually seems logical from that viewpoint.

Thus, the question remains standing why the Passover sacrifice is called a statute.

וְנִרְאָה לומר דאמר ו'ל' ככל-חקת הפסח יעשו אתו" וכן "ככל-חקתיו" וכו', דחקה היינו מצות שבגופו פגון "אל-תאכלו ממנו נא ובשל מבשל" וכו' "כי אם-צלי-אש" וכו'. והחינוך נתן טעם למה צוה הפתוב שהפסח יאכלו אותו צלי אש, לפי שמהאכל בשר צלי הוא מאכל המלכים והשרים, ולפי שיצאנו לחירות נאכל צלי פדרה השרים. ולפי טעם זה קשה דהא בכל הקרבנות נאמר "לה נתתם למשחה", דהיינו לגדולה פדרה שהמלכים אוכלים, ועם כל זה קיימא לן שבכלו, הפהגים רשאים לשנות באכילתו, לאכלן צלויים, שלוקים, ומבושלים, ולמה הכא דוקא צלי.

It appears to say that [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, “ ‘They shall leave none of it to the morning, nor break a bone in it; they shall offer it in strict accord with the law of the Passover sacrifice,’⁵ and also ‘with all its statutes,’⁶ that its statutes are the commandments applicable to the body of the Paschal lamb itself, meaning that *halachot* pertaining to the actual Paschal lamb on the first Passover apply equally to the Paschal lamb on Pesach sheni (when those who had been ritually impure on Passover would celebrate), such as, “Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted over fire its head with its legs and with the internal organs thereof.”^{7,8}

The Sefer haChinuch, in mitzvah 7, gives a reason why Scripture commanded that the Passover sacrifice be eaten roasted over fire, because eating meat roasted is the food of kings and ministers, and because we went out to freedom, we will eat roasted food, in the way of the ministers. Because of this reason, it is difficult that thus for all of the sacrifices it is said, “unto you have I given them for a consecrated portion,”⁹ which is for greatness, in the way that the kings eat. With all this, we hold, that “for all [of the offerings that are eaten], the priests are permitted to alter [the manner of] their consumption, to eat them roasted, or boiled, or cooked.”¹⁰ I.e., roasting may be considered the best method, but kings and ministers can choose whatever cooking method they want.

Why, therefore must the Passover sacrifice be specifically roasted?

⁵ Num. 9:12.

⁶ Num. 9:3.

⁷ Ex. 12:9.

⁸ Pesachim 95a.

⁹ Num. 18:8.

¹⁰ Mishnah Zevachim 10:7; Zevachim 90b.

ועוד נתן טעם אחר, שאכילת הצלי מורה על החפזון שצא ממצרים ולא יכלו לשהות עד שייתבשל בקדירה עכ"ל. וגם על טעם זה קשה, דלמה אסר להם לאכול נא דהיינו שאינו מבושל יפה, והלא אדרבא אם היו אוכלים נא היה מורה על החפזון. נמצאנו למדים שלטעם הראשון קשה מאי שנא פסח משאר קרבנות, אם בכלם צריך לאכול פדרה שהמלכים אוכלים, וכאן אסר מבושל במים. ולטעם השני קשה, למה צוה "אל-תאכלו ממנו נא". ומשום הכי נקרא קרבן פסח חק שאין בו טעם נכון.

[The Sefer haChinuch] gave another reason, that eating the roasted food teaches about the haste with which they exited Egypt, such that they weren't able to wait until it was cooked in a pot. But there's also a problem with this, for why were they forbidden to eat something raw, that wasn't cooked well? For to the contrary, if they had eaten something raw, it would have taught about the haste with which they left Egypt. We learn that the first reason of the Sefer haChinuch is difficult, regarding how the Passover sacrifice is different about from all other sacrifices, if they all need to be eaten in the way that kings eat, i.e., which is any way they want, but here for the Passover sacrifice it is forbidden for it to be cooked in water. Also, the second reason is difficult, why did He command, "Do not eat any of it raw."¹¹ That would have been the most logical approach, to teach the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt. Because of this, it is written that the Passover sacrifice is a statute, that doesn't have a logical reason.

ועוד יש לומר שהואיל שפנכות אלו שתי המצות נגאלו ישראל ממצרים, דם פסח ודם מילה כנ"ל, והמילה נקרא חק פדכתים "ויעמידה לעקב לחק" וכו', ועיקר גאולתם היתה "בגד חזקה ובזרע נטויה", דהיינו מצד הגבורה" שהיא גימטריא רי"ו, וכן פתוב "ניסע" "וניבא" "ניט" שהם רי"ו אותיות, אף פסח נקרא חק שב' פעמים ח"ק הם בגימטריא רי"ו, וכן הוא ראשי תבות ק"ול ד"ודי ד"ופק כמו שכתבו המקובלים.

Also, it can be said that it was in the merit of these two commandments that Israel was redeemed from Egypt, viz, the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of circumcision, as mentioned above.¹² Circumcision is itself called a statute, as it is written, "He is ever mindful of His covenant, the promise He gave for a thousand generations, that He made with Abraham, swore to Isaac, and confirmed in a statute for Jacob, for Israel, as an eternal covenant."¹³ The principal of their redemption was: "By a strong hand and an outstretched arm,"¹⁴ which is from the side of the Sefira of *Gevura* [גבורה] ["Strength"], which has the Gematria of 216, and thus it is written, "Now the messenger of G-d moved [ניסע], who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, and followed behind them; and the pillar of cloud shifted from

¹¹ Ex. 12:9.

¹² Zera Shimshon, Chapter XV: Bo, Essays 9 and 10; also Chapter XVI: Beshalach, Essay 10. See also Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:6; Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 7:4; Midrash Tanhuma, Vayera 4:1; Ruth Rabbah 6:1; Rashi on Ex. 12:6.

¹³ Ps. 105:8–10.

¹⁴ Deut. 4:34, 5:15, and 26:8; Jer. 21:5; Ezek. 20:33 and 20:34; Ps. 136:12.

in front of them and took up a place behind them. **And it came** [אָבַח] between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel. Thus, there was the cloud with the darkness, and it cast a spell upon the night, so that the one could not come near the other all through the night. **Then Moses held out** [וַיִּשָׂא] his arm over the sea and the L-rd drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split.”¹⁵ **These three verses are 216 letters**, as each verse has 72 letters.¹⁶ **Passover** [פֶּסַח] [Pesach] **is called a statute**, for the Gematria of the word *chok* [חֹק] [“statute”] is 108, and thus **two times the Gematria of the word statute is 216, and similarly this number of 108 is the Gematria of the initial letters of the phrase, “the voice of my beloved is knocking** [וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת-קוֹל דְּוִי וַיִּפְקֹץ],”¹⁷ **as the Kabbalists have written.**

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¹⁵ Ex. 14:19–21.

¹⁶ Moshe Cordovero (1522–1570), founder of school of Kabbalah in Safed, *Or Neerav*, Part VI, Chapter 6.

¹⁷ Song of Songs 5:2