

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Tzav – HaGadol - Pesach 5786

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The great wonder of Shabbos HaGadol.

דַּבְּרוּ אֶל-כָּל-עֵדֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמֶר בְּעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שְׁנֵה לְבַיִת-אָבֹתָהּ
שְׁנֵה לְבַיִת:

“Speak to the entire congregation of Yisroel, saying, on the tenth to this month, and they shall take for themselves to a man, a lamb per ancestral home, a lamb for the house.” (Shmos 12:3).

Why is this Shabbos called Shabbos HaGadol? The Gemara says that Bnei Yisroel left Mitzrayim on Thursday. (Shabbos 87b). That means the the tenth, when Bnei Yisroel took their lambs and tied them to their bedposts, was Shabbos. This act of taking a lamb to offer to Hashem was important for two reasons. First, it reflected Moshe’s main request of Pharaoh: “Hashem the Lord of the Hebrews happened upon us, and now, let us go for a three-day journey into the wilderness and offer up to Hashem our Lord.” (Ibid 3:18). Pharaoh refused time and again. If Pharaoh would not let them leave to serve in the wilderness, they will serve right there in Mitzrayim. Second, Hashem wanted an act from Bnei Yisroel to get rid of their idol worship and only serve Hashem. (Midrash Shmos Rabbah 16). This means that Hashem wanted Bnei Yisroel to get idol worship out of their system and to learn to only offer up to Hashem. This reason is also cited in Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael. (Psachim 5). The Midrash gives a second reason and says, based on an earlier pasuk. After makos arba (locusts), Pharaoh told Moshe to offer up to Hashem within the land. (Ibid 8:21). Moshe said, “This is not correct to do so, because it is an abomination to the Egyptians.” (Ibid 8:22). Based on this, the Midrash allegorically says the lambs were a deity of the Egyptians. (Midrash Shmos Rabba 16).

Did Egypt worship lambs as idols? And if not, then what is special about taking a lamb on Shabbos? Tosfos (Shabbos 87b) says it is because when the Egyptian firstborn saw the lambs being tied up, and they learned the lambs would be eaten the same night the firstborn of Egypt would be slain, so they rose up and rebelled. Onkelos translates the “abomination of the Egyptians” as “revered” not a god.

The Torah gives several indications about what was an abomination to the Egyptians. Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews (Yosef’s brothers) because it was an abomination to them. (Bereishis 43:32). Clearly, they did not worship the Hebrews eating bread. Yosef told his brothers to specifically tell Pharaoh they were shepherds – men of livestock – because shepherding was an abomination to the Egyptians. (Ibid 46:34). Moshe also told Pharaoh that they could not offer within the borders of Mitzrayim because doing so would be an abomination to the Egyptians. (Shmos 8:22). When Moshe spoke to Pharaoh, he was not referring to lambs, he was referring to all animals. As Moshe told Pharaoh, we will go out with our flocks and with our cattle. (Ibid 10:9). “We will go out with our cattle, too, not a hoof to be left behind.” (Ibid 10:26). Therefore, it was not

lambs that were the abomination. It seems raising animals and shepherding for food were abominations.

The Torah does not say it, and the Gemara does not opine, that lambs were a deity of the Egyptians. To be sure, since the 1800s, Egyptian history has been open to the public and the world keeps learning about ancient Egypt. There are ancient Egyptian deities associated with the ram (adult lamb). Amun-Re, the patron of Thebes, and known as Kamut-ef – bull of his mother. This statute is a lion with a ram's head. Khnum is a man with a ram's head and was lord over the Nile. A ram deity, Banebdjedet, oversaw fertility. Another fertility deity was Heryshaf, also a man with a ram's head. There were also deities with bull heads – Hathor, Apis, and Mneis. There is no evidence of the Egyptians worshiping actual live animals. They were sophisticated enough to know the difference between a lamb and their powerful deity (men with ram heads). They would not confuse eating a lamb with killing their deities. There is evidence, however, that ancient Egyptians were vegetarian. The Torah indicates this. When the famine got severe, the people gave their money for grain. (Bereishis 47:14). When the money ran out Yosef demanded their livestock. (Ibid 47:16). Mikne means animals as property – for work or milk. They did not just eat their livestock because they were vegetarians. They only used animals for milk and burden. When that was depleted, they sold their farmland and their farm bailiffs. (Ibid 47:20). Therefore, shepherds and cattle ranchers were an abomination to them because they did not slaughter animals. (They merely buried slaves with their dead Pharaohs). It was an abomination for them to eat with Hebrews because Arameans (where Hebrews came from) were known to be shepherds. Avraham, Lot, Rachel, and Lavan were all shepherds.

If the lamb was not their deity, then what was the great miracle that Shabbos? This lamb was their ticket out of Eretz Mitzrayim. They could have taken it the eve of Pesach, that Wednesday. However, Hashem had them take it four days early. It was not to start rebellions or show off to the Egyptians. It was an act of obedience. Take it, watch it, care for it, and then serve it up to Hashem. Thus, they earned their freedom.

“Speak to the congregation of...” This was the religious aspect of the nation. This was not news of redemption or of an impending strike. This was religious law.

“On the tent of this month.” Read this as *regarding* the tenth of the month.

“And they should take...” And connects the religious law. The laws of Rosh Chodesh are directly connected to counting out ten days to take a lamb.

“For themselves.” This is for their own wellbeing, their own merit of redemption.

“To a man.” This signifies they are becoming men of Hashem. This is how they will fight for their own redemption and freedom.

“A lamb for each ancestral household.” This korban is a thanksgiving offering for each family. It serves as merit for all those that perished from that family in Mitzrayim.

“A lamb...” The same lamb. “For the house.” The lamb will serve as redemption for the household itself. Even if non family members or even if non-Yisroel slaves join them. It will be a sign on the house. (Ibid 12:13). It will signify their commitment and service to Hashem. It is an overt act of faith and observance and they are again entering the bris of Hashem to serve Him alone. Have a Great Shabbos.