



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Our Unique Identity

Rabbi Yitz Kroll

In *פרשת בא פרק יב פסוק מח*, in the course of giving instructions for the Korban Pesach, the Torah says

וְכִי-יָגֹר אִתָּךְ גֵּר וַעֲשֵׂה פֶסַח לֵה' הַמּוֹלֵל לּוֹ כְּ-לִזְכֹּר וְאָז יִקְרַב לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ וְהָיָה כְּאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ וְכָל-עֶרְלִי לֹא-יֵאכַל בּוֹ:

When a stranger dwells with you and makes a Pesach offering for Hashem, all his males must be circumcised and then he will approach to offer it, and he will be as a native of the land; no uncircumcised man may eat of it. (Translation from www.Sefaria.org)

Rashi quotes a Mechilta that explains the necessity for the phrase “he will be like a citizen of the land”: Based on the wording at the beginning of the pasuk, one might think that anyone who converts should bring a Korban Pesach immediately, whenever the conversion takes place. To teach us otherwise, the pasuk continues “and he shall be like a native of the land,” i.e. a Jew from birth. Just as a “native” brings a Korban Pesach only on the 14th of Nissan, so too a convert brings it only on the 14th of Nissan.

The Mechilita is difficult to understand. Why would one have thought that a *ger* must bring a Korban Pesach as part of his conversion process? What does *gerus* have to do with the Korban Pesach?

We can understand this by examining three seemingly unrelated insights from the Netziv.

The Netziv’s introduction to Sefer Shemos cites the Baal Halachos Gedolos, who names the *chamisha chumshai* Torah as follows:

ספר בראשית, חומש שני, ספר כהנים, חומש הפקודים, משנה תורה.

The Netziv asks: Why is Sefer Shemos called Chumash Sheni, “The Second Chumash,” referring to its place in the order, while the other books seem to be called something relevant to what is discussed in that *sefer*? Sefer Bereishis is the book of the beginning of creation; therefore, it is called “In the Beginning.” Sefer Vayikra is referred to as Sefer Kohanim because it discusses many different laws related to the kohanim. In Sefer Bamidbar, Bnei Yisroel were counted, so we refer to this *sefer* as Chumash Pekudim, “The Chumash of Counting.” Sefer Devorim is a recap of much that has taken place in the previous *chumashim*, so it is referred to as “Mishnah Torah,” “Repetition of the Torah.”

The Netziv suggests that Sefer Shemos is called Chumash Sheni due to its content as well. He explains that Hashem created the world for the purpose of establishing one nation as His *chelek*; as the midrash says (Tanchuma Yashan 5), the world was created “*b’reishis*” – for Bnei Yisroel, who are called *Reishis*. This process of creation wasn’t finished until after Bnei Yisroel went through

Yitzias Mitzrayim and a transformation with the acceptance of the Torah – all described in Sefer Shemos. They experienced, and continue to experience, constant *hashgacha* of Hashem. Sefer Shemos is called Chumash Sheni because it is the second book of Creation. It is a creation within a creation; a creation of people connected and under the guidance of Hashem. This idea from the Netziv emphasizes the centrality of Hashem’s *hashgacha* to the identity of the Jewish people: the world was created for the purpose of establishing one nation as Hashem’s people, and the process of creating that nation required a lengthy experience of concentrated *hashgacha* from Hashem.

We find a further allusion to this idea in a passage in Parshas Haazinu (32:11-12):

כַּלְשֵׁר יַעִיר קֶזְוֹ עַל-גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחַף יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְּפָיו יִשְׁאָהוּ עַל-אַבְרָתוֹ: ה' בְּיָד יִנְהַנּוּ וְאֵין עִמּוֹ אֵל גָּבֵר:

He was like an eagle, arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them, carrying them on its pinions.

Hashem alone guided them, and no other power was with them. (Translation from Artscroll Stone Chumash)

The Netziv explains the Torah’s analogy, between an eagle flying with its young and Hashem guiding the Jewish people through the desert, in terms of developing an identity. An eagle, when it is ready to return with its offspring to the nest, spreads its wings wide in order to carry its offspring close, and flies extremely high in the sky for some time, ultimately ending up at the nest. The Netziv explains that the eagle does this to instill in its children their unique identity, namely, that they are able to fly high in the sky, above all other birds. Pasuk 12 then explains that similarly, Hashem guided the Jewish people out of Egypt and through the desert to instill in Bnei Yisroel their identity. By separating them from basic resources and caring for them directly, He impressed upon them that their only source of sustenance is Hashem. This awareness of who is taking care of us defines our national identity and was a necessary prerequisite for Kabblas HaTorah.

If we turn back to Parshas Bo, we can find a third instructive insight into our national recognition of Hashem’s *hashgacha*. In a comment on 13:3, the Netziv points out that *chometz* and matzah have similar ingredients. The difference is that matzah is just plain water and flour, while *chometz* requires an additional ingredient such as yeast, and can only be made through the work and ingenuity of mankind. Thus on Pesach, we refrain from *chometz*, eating only matzah, to signify that we are under the *hashgacha* of Hashem. Indeed, any time we successfully produce

something, we must realize that in truth it is the production of Hashem. Similarly, the Korban Pesach may not be eaten *mevushal* (cooked with water); it may only be eaten after being left to roast. The Korban Pesach must be offered and eaten basically as is, without the extra creative work of Man.

With these ideas in mind, we can answer our original question on the Mechilta. If the *pasuk* had not mentioned the word “*ezrach*,” one might have thought that a *ger* must bring a Korban Pesach as part of his *gerus* procedure. A *ger* is coming to join *Klal Yisroel*, thereby becoming a *briah chadasha*, a new creation. He is joining a people whose identity is defined by being under Hashem’s constant *hashgacha*. A Korban Pesach, eaten together with matzah, signifies the connection between Bnei Yisroel and Hashem, without any middleman or separation. For this reason,

The Power of a Bracha

Sarah C. Rudolph

In honor of my daughter, Avigayil Bracha, reaching the age of mitzvot. May she grow to realize the כוחות contained in those mitzvot.

“...ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' א-לקיך...” - “You will eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem, your G-d...” (Devarim 8:10)

The Torah tells us to bless **after** we eat bread (and the 7 species of Israel, according to some). Chazal added the requirement to bless **before** eating, and **after** all foods – even those not included in the Torah obligation.

Why did Chazal feel it was important to say *brachot* before we eat?

The Tosefta in Brachot 4:1 states that a person must bless **before** benefiting from the world (such as by eating), based on the *pasuk* in Tehilim that states “The earth is Hashem’s, and its fullness” (24:1). If the world and everything in it belongs to Hashem, the Tosefta explains, then anyone who takes from it – such as by eating an apple – has essentially violated *me’ilah*, taking sacred property. But by saying a *bracha*, our use of Hashem’s property becomes legitimate.

Even such a simple thing as an apple counts as sacred property, and even just a bite counts as taking something from Hashem Himself – unless we say a *bracha* first.

It’s interesting that the Tosefta uses the word *me’ilah* for eating without a *bracha*. When we explain the idea of *brachot* to young children, we usually say eating without a *bracha* is like “stealing,” but *me’ilah* is actually different from theft. When someone steals something, there is no way they can change what they’ve done: if the owner doesn’t give permission, the thief has no power to take the object without it being theft. But with *me’ilah*, the

one might have thought that the process of becoming part of this nation would include bringing a Korban Pesach, to demonstrate that one’s identity is to be part of this special nation for whose mission the world was created – just like Bnei Yisroel had to internalize their connection to *hashgachas Hashem* before accepting the Torah. That is why we need to be told that the *ger* does not actually need this *korban*.

As we approach the holiday of Pesach, it is important for all of us to remember the idea behind the Korban Pesach: that we are under *hashgachas Hashem* at all times and we must focus on all that He does for us on a constant basis. This idea is so central to our identity as Jews that one might even have thought the Korban Pesach should be an integral part of becoming a Jew.

person taking the sacred object has the power to determine whether that act is forbidden or permitted, even sacred, by following the rules of using it in a holy way. Usually, that means something like making sure that an animal belonging to the Temple is used only for a sacrifice, not for someone’s personal hamburger. But what does it mean if we apply the word “*me’ilah*” to eating without a *bracha*?

Take that hamburger that I might want to eat, that doesn’t seem to have anything particularly holy about it – but it belongs to Hashem. If I eat it without a *bracha*, I have misused it; I missed the chance to use it for a holy purpose. But simply by making a *bracha* and acknowledging that Hashem is the One who brought this miraculous food into the world, I turn my use of this food into a holy act. As the Gemara says on Berachot 35a: before the *bracha*, the food belongs to Hashem; with a *bracha*, it belongs to the person who said the *bracha*. In fact, once a person says a *bracha*, the Gemara tells us the second half of that *pasuk* from Tehilim applies: “והארץ נתן לבני אדם” - “G-d gave the earth to humans.” I am not only taking legitimately; I am *accepting* something which was given to me. Unlike a thief, we have the power to decide to take ownership of something that had belonged to Someone else. Unlike a thief, we have the power to transform the action of taking: without a *bracha* it’s *me’ilah*, forbidden; with a *bracha*, it becomes not just permitted, but a holy use of the hamburger. Because Hashem gave it to us, as long as we recognize it as His gift and shape our use appropriately.

Berachos give us that power to make even simple actions, like eating a hamburger or an apple, into a holy part of our daily lives.

Sponsorship

This issue of *Cilei HaChodesh* is sponsored by Yosef and Sarah Rudolph
In honor of our daughter, Avigayil, becoming a bat mitzvah.

Rabbi Moshe Berger
Scholar in Residence
(216) 533-5233
moshe@mberger.com

Leslie Seiger
Facilitator
(216) 392-8966
leslie.seiger@sbcglobal.net

Sarah Rudolph
Editor
(216) 291-8918
scredolph@gmail.com

Ronnie Shulman
Sponsorships
(614) 507-3855
rshulman1@gmail.com

YOUNG ISRAEL OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Rabbi Naphtali Burnstein, *Rabbi*
Rabbi Aharon Lebovics, *Associate Rabbi (Hebrew Academy)*
Jeffrey Soclof, *President*

Beachwood Branch
2463 S. Green Road
Beachwood, Ohio 44122



Hebrew Academy Branch
1860 S. Taylor Road
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118