

# ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

Pesach is an eight day holiday (outside of Israel) that commemorates the Jews' redemption from slavery in Egypt.

There are a tremendous amount of laws and customs associated with Pesach. One of the observances which, due to the absence of the Temple, we unfortunately are not able to perform, is the bringing of the Korban Pesach, the Passover Offering/Sacrifice. There are eleven different commandments associated with this observance. (For a listing of the specific commandments, see YomTov I:11) The Sefer HaChinuch, when explaining these commandments, writes that there is one underlying reason behind them: The Jewish people have to remember, forever, the great miracles that G-d performed for us when He took us out of Egypt.

For example, the Korban Pesach must be roasted over a fire. It can not be cooked in any other fashion. Why? Roasted meat is a thing of royalty. It is only fitting that the remembrance we have of how G-d redeemed us from slavery should be eaten in the way that the free and the distinguished eat their meat. Similarly, all of the Korban must be eaten. Leftovers are not permitted. Why? The upper echelons of society have no need to keep leftovers. They know that they will have food tomorrow. Only the poor, the slaves, who do not know where their next meal is coming from, keep leftovers. Therefore, on the night we celebrate our status as free men, slaves only to G-d, we eat all of our meal, leaving nothing over, just as royalty does.

Many other commandments we have on Pesach share the reason for their performance with the Korban Pesach: to remember the miracles G-d performed for us in conjunction with our departure from Egypt. Why do we do have so many commandments which share the same reason? Why are there so many performances which we observe which commemorate the same event?

In Shemos 12:3, we find that the Jews in Egypt were commanded to go out and get the sheep they were to use for the first Korban Pesach. This taking occurred 4 days before the Korban was actually brought. The Mechilta asks why the Jews needed to take the sheep four days before bringing the Korban - wouldn't taking it right before it was needed suffice? The Mechilta answers the question: The Jews while in Egypt were steeped in idol worship, the largest denial of G-d's providence. In order to provide the Jews time to extricate themselves from the grips of idol worship, they were presented with a commandment - take the main object of worship of the Egyptians, and set it aside as a sacrifice. This way, they were removing themselves from the idol worship they were used to, and setting themselves aside for the service of G-d.

HaRav Henschel Leibowitz asks a question on this answer. At that point in time, the Jews had seen the Egyptians struck by nine miraculous plagues. One would think that the Jews definitely believed in G-d by this point in time. In fact, that has to be the case, as if they did not, why should the Jews bother to go out and get a sheep for sacrificial purposes, something which they all in fact did? The answer, R' Leibowitz says, is clear once one understands the power of habit. The Jews did indeed believe in G-d. However, because they were so accustomed to worshipping idols, idol worship was a part of their inner being. When something is deeply ingrained in a person, it is very difficult to remove. Therefore, even though the Jews saw miracles and did believe in G-d with 99% of their being, it was that 1% that needed work. That lingering belief in idols needed to be removed. The remedy to this situation was to take an object of worship and set it aside for slaughter. This demonstrated that all connection to the idol was gone - it was now an object to be sacrificed to G-d.

This answer, however, leads us to a further problem. If idol worship was so deeply ingrained into the Jews' being so that even after seeing the miracles of the plagues they still kept a small belief in idol worship, why did this action work? Why wouldn't more miracles suffice to sway the Jews? Why did the Jews need to take the sheep? The answer, R' Leibowitz says, is because the effect of a person physically performing an action on his own is that much greater than the effect of anything a person may see or hear. Viewing miracles may lead to an intellectual realization of G-d's power, and may even elicit an emotional response. However, doing a physical action as an affirmation of one's belief in G-d, such as the taking of the sheep, effects every fiber of one's being. The feelings are deeper and the effect is greater. Therefore, the Jews needed to perform an action in order to rid themselves of the last remnants of the desire to worship idols. Only the performance of an action packed the punch that the Jews needed.

We read in the Hagada every year that in every generation, a person is obligated to view himself as if he was taken out of Egypt. How is a person to accomplish this? G-d has provided us with the answer. In order to truly feel that we were taken out of Egypt, that we were and continue to be the beneficiaries of G-d's kindness, we were told to take action. We eat Matzo (unleavened bread), we conduct a Seder, we have a Korban Pesach with all of its applicable laws. We have all these actions to bring out the deep feelings within us. There are those who have the custom to place the Matzo on their shoulders and over their backs at the Seder, just as the Jews leaving Egypt did. It is actions like these that have a great effect on us, that should inspire us more than "just remembering" what G-d did for us. If we take the required actions, we will hopefully come to truly feel thanks to Hashem for performing the miracles that He did for us when we left Egypt. The Pesach commandments will then truly serve their purpose: The Jewish people have to remember, forever, the great miracles that G-d performed for us when He took us out of Egypt.