

KABBALAH LOOKS AT THE KORBAN PESACH

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

On the tenth of this month they shall take for themselves - each man - a lamb for each father's house.

Why, specifically, a sheep? We usually suppose that because the sheep was venerated, the Bnei Yisrael had to bring themselves to slaughter it. This is certainly true, but it is not all that can be said about it. Why was it that the Egyptians worshiped this particular animal?

Whatever explanation they offered themselves, we have a deeper explanation that gets to the very root of their choice. The lamb - seh in Hebrew - relates to the nature of G-d we know as Elokim - the Name attached to the attribute of judgment.

We can show this - at least by way of allusion. The full or expanded gematria of Elokim (arrived by spelling out each letter, i.e. aleph equals aleph plus lamed plus fei, etc.) equals 300, or the gematria value of shin, the first letter of seh. The second letter of the word seh is hei, or the five letters of the word Elokim.

The Egyptians could not relate at all to the Four-Letter Name, or the essential Name of G-d. As Paroh put it, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice?" "Elokim" is different. It signifies the creator, giver, and enforcer of Law and Nature. Its offshoots run a gamut of application, reaching at their lowest point to elohim acheirim, or false gods. These false gods were worshipped in the Egyptian religions. The Egyptians could relate to the notion of law - but nothing more, and so there concept of a deity was stuck at that point.

Law has wonderful, positive applications, but it has a darker side as well. The concept of law - particularly of boundaries, limits, and limitations - leaves room for limiting the clarity of Hashem's existence and Will. In turn, this creates the possibility of evil - of denying the presence of Hashem and the need to heed His commands. The sitra achra and the kelipos thus "feed" off din, i.e. they are nourished and sustained by these limits.

Once evil is allowed into existence, it has to be dealt with justly. Therefore, the notion of punishment follows from Law as well.

The tikkun, the remedy for the ill effects of a degraded sense of din is to "sweeten" them, to redeem their value at their conceptual point of origin. When Klal Yisrael obeys the dictates of Torah Law, it responds to the concept of Law at its source, and elevates it even further, bridging the chasm between Right and Left - between the poles of Chesed and Din. In the absence of this elevation, not

even a surfeit of chesed and good deeds solves the problem created by the consequences of din. It is true that mitzvos etc. generate kedushah, and the kelipos and the like cannot coexist with this holiness and thus flee. They are still sustained, however, by the mere existence of din, until such time that din itself is "sweetened" and elevated at the source.

The optimum time for this is the month of Nisan. The avodah of the korban Pesach begins with the slaughter of the sheep, which represents the attribute of Elokim. The draining of the blood of the korban is the "sweetening" of din.

The Torah specifies that the lamb be "unblemished." A blemish is the sitra achra, relative to Elokim of kedushah. (Mum, or blemish, happens to equal Elokim in gematria. It represents the deficient form of Elokim, or foreign gods, elohim acheirim.) A blemished korban is always invalidated.

The Torah also demands that this sheep "be yours for examination until the fourteenth day." This would not be a requirement at all future celebrations of Pesach. This first, crucial observance, however, was designed not just for the moment, but to "sweeten" din at its source. Just as the lamb had to be unblemished, so did those who offered it. The four-day inspection period from the tenth till the fourteenth of Nisan mandated careful examination of the lamb - but alluded as well to days of self-examination by the people. They were to use this time to purge themselves of their own imperfections.

The pesach was to be eaten with matzah and maror. The former stands for chesed (it lacks the chametz that derives from din), while maror alludes to din. Combining them through the lamb of the korban pesach means that the two poles of chesed and din should be joined together through the avodah of the evening, as din is elevated at its source. The pesach had to be roasted over a fire (always related to din) rather than cooked in water (= chesed), because din can only be "sweetened" at the source of din, rather than masked or drowned out in a flood of chesed.

By the "source" of din we mean that at its root, the notion of din, paradoxically, is only about chesed. Hashem created a world as a backdrop for creatures - us - to enjoy the greatest benefit possible, which is accessed only by attaching ourselves to Him as the source of all good. In order to truly enjoy the benefit He gives us, we must earn it and deserve it. (What is given to us without effort is never enjoyed as much as that which we earn.) For this reason He created a world in which we have to constantly struggle against a yetzer hora in order to make the correct choices.

The existence of a yetzer hora, therefore, is ultimately a great chesed. But the "space" for such a yetzer comes about only because of din. Resolving the apparent tension between the two is the "sweetening" of din at its root