

PESACH: WHY SO MANY DETAILS?

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The extraordinary devotion of the Torah to all of the intricate details of the celebration of Pesach and of its sacrifice strikes one as demanding explanation. After all, the Torah will command many mitzvot to the Jewish people in the course of the next books of the Torah, without necessarily going into particulars and details about their method of observance.

All of that, so to speak, was left to the Oral Law and to Moshe to fill in the exact details to fulfill the commandment. The Mishna and Talmud comprise sixty-three volumes of these details and explanations, but somehow regarding Pesach and its mitzvot, the Torah itself provides this necessary information.

A simple understanding is that these laws and details were given to the Jewish people before they stood on Sinai and before the Oral Law was granted to Moshe - and through him to all of Israel. Therefore Moshe had to instruct the people in clear detail what was expected of them and how to properly observe the Pesach sacrifice and holiday.

The Torah faithfully records for us Moshe's instructions to the people - instructions which remain valid and operative in future times as well and not only for the first Pesach commemoration in Egypt. Though all of this is, in effect, correct technically, it still, to a certain extent, begs our original question of why Pesach instructions are so detailed while the commandments regarding the other holy days of the year are certainly less explicit and detailed.

The answer to this can be found in the nature of the holiday of Pesach itself. It is not an agricultural holiday as are Shavuot and Succot. Its uniqueness is not purely in being an historical commemorative day, a reminder of past events and occurrences, for both Shavuot and Succot are also days of memory and national recollection. The uniqueness of Pesach lies in its miraculous occurrence from which all of later Jewish practice and life emanates. You could say that Pesach is God's holiday, while Shavuot requires the acquiescence of Jews to accept the Torah at Sinai and Succot requires an act by the people in building and living in succot during their sojourn in the desert. Pesach is a Divine event, God imposing His will so to speak on Pharaoh and Egypt and upon the Jewish people as well.

For this reason, it was necessary for the Torah to clearly delineate and detail for the Jewish people what God expected, hence the complexity of the laws of Pesach as they appear in this week's parsha. Pesach is a top-down holiday while the other holidays are more of a two-way street type of

commemoration.

By observing Pesach as commanded in every detail of the instruction manual the Jew submits Divine authority without question or logical demands. The laws of Pesach tested Jewish loyalty and discipline even before the Torah was given to them. It is therefore the leading holiday of the year, the one still mostly treasured and observed by the masses of Israel.

Shabat shalom

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