



Likkutei Sichos — Adaptation

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The Community and The Individual

Adapted by Rabbi Eli Block

A note to our readers: For technical reasons, we are unable to publish a translation of this *sichah*. In its place, we offer this adaptation, which summarizes the *sichah*.

A note on the adaptation: This adaptation carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. **Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org**

The Context:

The Paschal Lamb contains elements of both an individual and a communal sacrifice:

Similar to an individual sacrifice, it was offered by a cohort of families, from their own funds, and consumed by each member of the group. Similar to a communal sacrifice, it was offered in a communal fashion, “by a multitude,” in the Temple. (*Yoma* 51a)

The law is that a communal sacrifice can be offered on Shabbos, but an individual sacrifice cannot.

Based on this information, we can suggest the reasoning behind a dispute concerning the status of the Paschal lamb.

A Dispute over Definition:

B’nei Beseira (Sages and leaders of the Jewish people toward the end of the Second Temple era) and Hillel disagreed whether the Paschal lamb was able to be offered on Shabbos. (*Pesachim* 66a) B’nei Beseira maintained that it could not be offered then; Hillel maintained that it could.

They disagreed about what the primary aspect of the Paschal lamb was: its individual element or its communal element. Bnei Beseira defined the Paschal lamb as an individual sacrifice; as such, they forbade it from being offered on Shabbos. Hillel defined it as a communal sacrifice, which overrides Shabbos; thus, he allowed it to be offered on Shabbos.

Extending the Dispute:

Rabbi Yeshaya and Rabbi Yonasan had the same dispute. Rabbi Yeshaya maintained that the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbos. Rabbi Yonasan maintained that it does not. (*Sifrei, Pinchas* 28:2) It follows that according to Rabbi Yeshaya, the primary element of the sacrifice is its communal aspect, and according to Rabbi Yonasan, its primary element is its individual aspect.

Many other areas of disagreement between these two Sages fall along these same lines of the community vs. the individual. In laws related to the human realm, to sacred food, to monetary concerns, and to time itself, Rabbi Yeshaya emphasizes the communal aspect, while Rabbi Yonasan emphasizes the individual.

Reiterating for a Reason:

Why debate the same issue (community vs. individual) as it applies to several different cases? The Talmud could have recorded the Sages' positions once, allowing us to apply those positions to all other cases. The Talmud didn't do so because there is a unique aspect to each case that prevents us from applying what we would assume to be their rationale to other cases. Thus, their dispute had to be recorded in each instance.

Applying this to our discussion: The individual and communal elements of the Paschal Lamb are inseparable. To explain — a community can be defined in two ways:

- 1) A collective which subsumes, and erases, the individual.
- 2) A collective that consists of a critical mass of individuals. In this formulation, individuality is maintained.

The Paschal Lamb has the markers of the second definition — the **community** of Israel offers multiple **individual** sacrifices. Thus, the communal and individual elements here are not distinct from each other; they are totally intertwined.

It might be thought that, due to this complexity, Rabbi Yeshaya and Rabbi Yonasan would change their views in the case of the Paschal Lamb. By explicitly recording their dispute in this case, the Talmud confirms that each maintains his position, despite the fluidity of the community and the individual regarding the Paschal lamb.

The Spiritual Application:

Why does the Paschal Lamb involve this tension between the community and the individual? At the Exodus, a group of disparate individuals were transformed into a singular entity — the “Jewish people.” The Paschal sacrifice, therefore, reflected the enduring importance of both the individual Jew who is a “complete world” (*Sanhedrin*, 37a), and the community.

On an Individual Level:

Hillel stressed the importance of both the individual and the community. His statement, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” emphasizes the value of the individual; “And if I am only for myself, what am I?” emphasizes the value of the community. (*Avos* 1:14)

This can be applied to our interpersonal relationships as well: We must love another Jew because we share one essence (community), and also because of every Jew’s unique value as an individual.

In merit of this two-pronged love, G-d will redeem us, both individually, “and you shall be gathered one by one” (*Yeshayahu* 27:12) and as a nation, “in a vast throng they shall return here.” (*Yirmiyahu* 31:7)