

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 16

Bo, Sicha 3

The Context:

As the Jewish people were preparing to leave Egypt, G-d commanded them to perform two mitzvos: all males were to undergo circumcision, and each family had to set aside a lamb for a sacrifice. They were to set aside the lamb on the tenth of the month of Nissan, and keep it for four days, until the fourteenth of the month, when they would slaughter it, apply its blood to the doorposts, and partake of the sacrificial meat. (Shemos 12:1-7)

Why did G-d command the Jews to hold on to the lamb for four days and not simply to take the lamb and slaughter it on the fourteenth?

Rashi addresses this question as follows:

The Rashi:

Now why was the lamb to be taken four days before it was to be slaughtered, something not required with respect to the Passover sacrifice of later generations? Rabbi Masya the son of Charash used to say: ...{G-d said,} The time to fulfill the oath that I swore to Avraham that I would redeem his children has arrived. But the Jewish people have no commandments in their hands with which to occupy themselves in order for them to be redeemed, as it says: "But you were naked and bare." (Yechezkel 16:7) So G-d gave them two mitzvos — the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of circumcision....

And because the Jewish people were passionately fond of idolatry, Moshe said to them, "Withdraw and take for yourselves — withdraw from idolatry and take for yourselves sheep for the mitzvah." (Rashi on Shemos 12:6)

The Questions:

1. Rabbi Masya's teaching does not explain why the Jews had to keep the lamb for

four days. In fact, he does not mention the mitzvah of taking the sheep; he only mentions the application of the blood on the doorposts!

2. Rashi continues his comment with another teaching: "And because the people were passionately fond of idolatry..." This teaching is from Rabbi Eliezer Hakapar, who actually disagrees with Rabbi Masya and maintains that the Jewish people were commanded to perform certain mitzvos prior to this episode. Why does Rashi include his comments here? Additionally, Rashi introduces the comment with the conjunction "and," implying that it is a continuation of the previous comment!

The Explanation:

In his concluding remarks, Rashi actually explains why the Jewish people kept the lamb for four days: "And because the Jewish people were passionately fond of idolatry, Moshe said to them..., 'withdraw from idolatry and take for yourselves sheep for the mitzvah.'"

Sheep were an Egyptian deity, and the Jewish people had fallen prey its idolatrous worship. In order for the Jews to rid themselves of their attachment to this corrupt, foreign influence, they had to "withdraw from idolatry." Meaning, they needed a sustained period of repudiating Egyptian idolatry. Taking the sheep and

slaughtering it immediately would be a one-time, rash act. But taking the sheep and holding onto it for days would display their conscious and premeditated rejection of idolatry.

But an objection could be raised. The objective of the Pesach sacrifice was seemingly to allow G-d to distinguish the Jewish homes from the Egyptian homes so that He could "pass over" the Jewish homes. What does "withdrawing from idolatry" have to do with this objective?

To explain this, Rashi prefaces with Rabbi Masya's comment, that the Jewish people required two mitzvos to remedy their "nakedness." Why two? Because the Jewish people were lacking in two spheres of spiritual life. They had not performed any positive deeds, and they were actively engaged in the performance of negative deeds. Therefore, they needed one mitzvah to highlight their active commitment to G-d — this was circumcision, which forms a covenant with G-d. And they needed one mitzvah to highlight their abandonment of negative behavior. This was the Pesach sacrifice, which demonstrated their willingness to consciously "withdraw from idolatry" by holding onto the lamb for four days.

Further Clarification:

To further explain why the Jewish people needed mitzvos in order to merit

redemption, even though G-d had promised Avraham that they would be redeemed, Rashi includes the name of the author of this teaching — Rabbi Masya ben Charash — who had established a Yeshiva in Rome. (Sanhedrin 32b) Presumably, Rabbi Masya's students bemoaned the fact that they had to leave the Holy Land for Rome in order to learn Torah from him. To comfort his students, "Rabbi Masya the son of Charash used to say," meaning, he often repeated the teaching that the redemption was earned for those who were naked of mitzvos by accumulating mitzvos. So, too, the current redemption would be earned through bringing Torah study and mitzvos to the Jews in "Rome," both physically and spiritually.

The Lesson:

Every Jew is responsible to ensure that those Jews who reside in "Rome," disconnected from a life of Torah and mitzvos, have opportunities to furnish and dress themselves with mitzvos, so that we will merit redemption.

This is why the yahrzeit of the Previous Rebbe often coincides with the reading of parshas Bo: The driving force behind the Previous Rebbe's life work and his decision to establish a yeshiva in New York was to bring the opportunity for mitzvos to the Jews of this spiritually "naked" country.
