



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 16 | Bo | Sichah 3

## Steeped in Sheep

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One of the differences between how Pesach was celebrated in Egypt [*Pesach-Mitzrayim*] and the way it was celebrated in future generations [*Pesach-le'dorot*]: In Egypt, the paschal offering was taken on the 10th of the month [of Nisan]<sup>1</sup> four days prior to it having to be slaughtered.<sup>2</sup> In future generations, there was no such requirement, even though the lamb need to be inspected (to detect any blemishes) four days prior to its slaughtering.<sup>3</sup> But the lamb did not have to be *taken* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month.

To explain why, for *Pesach-Mitzrayim*, the lamb, had to be taken 4 days prior to its offering (unlike *Pesach le'dorot*), Rashi notes (as stated in the *Mechilta*): “Rabbi Masya ben Cheresch used to teach: ‘The verse says,<sup>4</sup> *And I passed by you...*— The time has come for Me to fulfill My oath to Avraham to redeem his children, but they have no mitzvos with which to occupy themselves to merit redemption, as it says,<sup>5</sup> *but you were naked and bare*. So He gave the Jewish people two mitzvos: the blood of the paschal offering, and the blood of *brit milah*. For on that night they circumcised themselves....”

We need to clarify:

a) Rabbi Masya ben Cheresch explains only why Hashem issued the command to bring the paschal offering (so that the Jewish people would have mitzvos with which to occupy themselves in order to merit redemption). But the question as to why the *taking* [of the offering] had to precede the slaughtering, and specifically by *four* days, still remains!?

b) Furthermore: Rabbi Masya ben Cheresch isn't speaking at all about the *taking* of the lamb, but about its *blood*. And he is evidently referring to [the blood mentioned in] the command,<sup>6</sup> “And they shall take [some] of the blood and put it on the two doorposts.” But their involvement in [fulfilling the precept entailing the use of] this blood of the paschal offering happened only *after its slaughtering*—on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, in the afternoon!?

<sup>1</sup> Ex. 12:6.

<sup>2</sup> Rashi, on Ex. 12:6, based on the *Mechilta*, *ad loc*.

<sup>3</sup> *Pesachim* 96a. See *Mechilta* and Rashi in our *parsha*. (Rashi's wording implies that the same holds true in future generations.) See *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, entry “*bikur mumim*,” p. 163. Also see *Torah Shleima*, on this *parsha*, appendices to vol. 11, sec. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ezek. 16:8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 12:7.

c) Even if we assume (the implausible) that their business with the blood of the paschal offering also included their prior taking of the lamb, as a preparatory phase of its subsequent slaughtering, it is still not understood why R. Masya mentions the blood of circumcision in explaining the reason that the paschal lamb was taken four days prior to its slaughtering.

d) Moreover: In future generations, the requirement to be circumcised [before participating in the paschal sacrifice] was also in force. And in Egypt, too, anyone already circumcised was not included in this command!?

## 2.

### MOVING THE TAKING OF THE KORBAN UP BY FOUR DAYS

Some commentaries explain that in light of R. Masya's words, "He gave them two mitzvos,"— the blood of the paschal lamb and the blood *brit milah* — we can understand why the lamb was taken four days prior to its slaughtering:

After being circumcised, one mustn't leave on a journey for three days (doing so would be dangerous), as Rashi already noted in *Parshat Shmot*. Therefore, the Jewish people were circumcised on the 10<sup>th</sup>, so that they would be fit to leave Egypt [a few days later]. (When it says "they were circumcised that night," Rashi means on the night of the *taking* of the paschal lamb.)

As such, the taking of the paschal lamb was also moved up to the 10<sup>th</sup> so that these two mitzvos might be observed together — the blood of the paschal lamb, and the blood of *brit milah*.

But reading this solution into Rashi's commentary is very difficult. Because Rashi says here that the blood of *brit milah* happened *together with the blood of the paschal lamb*, "downtrodden with your blood, *with two types of blood*," which happened on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

## 3.

### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ON THE CONTINUATION OF THE COMMENTARY

Rashi goes on to say, “And they [the Jews] were immersed in idolatry. [Moshe] said to them,<sup>7</sup> ‘Withdraw and take for yourselves.’ [He meant:] withdraw from idolatry and take for yourselves sheep for the mitzvah.”

This continuation, however, is not part of R. Masya’s teaching. Rather it’s the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer Hakapar, who argues with R. Masya, and who maintains that the Jewish people did, in fact, have mitzvos to their credit. And on the contrary, [the Jewish people had to their credit]: “Four [such great] mitzvos that the entire world is unable to outmatch.”<sup>8</sup>

This, though, is astonishing. Rashi should have prefaced this second point with the words, “another explanation,” or “and others say,” or something similar, since this explanation argues with the first. Why does Rashi say instead “*And* they were immersed...,” using the conjunctive *and*, indicating that this second interpretation is a *continuation* of the teaching of R. Masya?

#### 4.

#### THE REASON FOR ATTRIBUTION OF THE TEACHING

Rashi’s commentary here is a striking example of the principle, mentioned and underscored a number of times, that when Rashi cites a rabbinic teaching, mentioning the name of the original sage, there is a special reason for doing so. Knowing the name of the sage provides us with a better understanding of the matter at hand.

In the subject of our discussion, Rashi references two interpretations from the Mechilta, one after the other. In referring to the first, Rashi indicates the name of the author—R. Masya ben Cheresch. In referring to the second teaching, however, Rashi omits the name!<sup>9</sup>

We are compelled to say that by mentioning the name of R. Masya ben Cheresch, Rashi intends to elucidate his first interpretation. This, however, is not necessary concerning the second explanation that “they were immersed in idolatry.”

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Viz., They guarded themselves from sexual improprieties, and from slander; and they kept their distinctive Jewish names and language.

<sup>9</sup> This is especially problematic, since the omission may lead a person to erroneously conclude that the author of the second teaching was the same as the first, i.e., R. Masya ben Cheresch.

Finally, we need to clarify the following. Rashi is not satisfied by simply mentioning the name of the author, R. Masya ben Cheresh. Rather, Rashi also quotes the phrasing of the Mechilta—“R. Masya ben Cheresh *used to teach*,” implying that he frequently repeated this teaching. How does knowing this fact add to our understanding of Rashi’s commentary?<sup>10</sup>

## 5.

### THE PURPOSE OF THE PASCHAL OFFERING—TO RECTIFY IMMERSION IN IDOLATRY

The solution to all these questions is the following:

Rashi writes, “they were immersed...,” (and does not qualify this explanation with the phrase, “an alternate explanation, or the like) because when we consider the question from the vantage point of *pshat*, the vantage point of Rashi, this teaching of R. Masya does not address the question as to why the lamb was taken four days prior to it being slaughtered. And R. Masya makes no mention at all about the *taking* of the lamb.

The (uncomplicated) answer to *this* question comes at the end of Rashi’s explanation, “They were immersed in idolatry. [Moshe] said to them,<sup>11</sup> ‘Withdraw and take for yourselves...’”

Meaning, (not only did the Jewish people have to first withdraw from idolatry to be worthy of taking a lamb to perform a mitzvah, for otherwise, eating of the paschal offering would be forbidden, but) the very act itself of taking a lamb to perform a mitzvah would counteract their immersion in idolatry (as explained later in section 7). In addition, the lamb had to be in their possession 4 days prior to its slaughtering (as explained later).

However, this required a preparation: The main purpose of the paschal offering (in Egypt) was, according to *pshat*, as its *name* indicates—“The sacrifice was called פסח because of the skipping and the jumping over, פסיחה,”<sup>12</sup> since the blood of the paschal offering served as a sign for those places that “the Holy One, blessed is He, skipped... and jumped over...”<sup>12</sup> What is the connection between this purpose and the fact that the Jewish people were immersed in idolatry?

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<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that in the second edition of Rashi, the word, *hayah*, translated as “use to,” does not appear.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Rashi on *Ex.* 12:11.

Therefore, Rashi prefaces his explanation with R. Masya's lesson that the mitzvos Hashem gave the Jewish people before their redemption were given primarily to address their spiritual nakedness, and so that they would have mitzvos with which to busy themselves in order to be redeemed. From the fact that the Jewish people were given *two* mitzvos, the paschal offering and *brit milah*, it is understood that the principal purpose of the paschal offering (in terms of rectifying the lack of mitzvos) was not in what it accomplished—its slaughter and consumption, etc.—but rather in what it negated, the neutralizing of something harmful, as will be explained.

## 6.

### TWO MITZVOS—AVOID EVIL AND PURSUE GOODNESS

When we examine more closely the words of R. Masya, “He gave them two mitzvos,” because the Jewish people then were “naked and bare,” the following question arises:

Why did Hashem give *two* mitzvos? If the purpose was simply to obviate their state of nakedness, a *single* precept would have sufficed. And if Hashem's purpose was to outfit them with a number of garments—mitzvos and meritorious deeds—as the verse “when you see a naked person, you shall clothe him”<sup>13</sup> is usually fulfilled, why limit<sup>14</sup> the number of mitzvos to just two?

The explanation: Each of the two mitzvos addressed one *aspect* of their predicament of being “naked and bare.” The Jewish people had a double liability. First, they were lacking in the *performance* of mitzvos, “do good.” As such, they had no way to move forward to reach the objective of “you will worship Hashem on this mountain”<sup>15</sup> (the goal for which they were taken out of Egypt). Second, they were deficient in respect to the avoidance of evil. The wickedness of Egypt, the nakedness of the land, had infected them. Consequently, even if the Jewish people possessed mitzvos with which to busy themselves, it would be impossible to completely redeem them from Egypt, without first ridding them of the evil. For how could they leave Egypt while the evil of Egypt was still clinging to them!?

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<sup>13</sup> *Isaiah* 58:7.

<sup>14</sup> *Cf. Makot* 23b, “The Holy One, blessed is He, wished to make the people of Israel meritorious; therefore, He gave them Torah and mitzvos in abundant measure.”

<sup>15</sup> *Ex.* 3:13, and Rashi *ad loc.*

Therefore, the Jewish people were given two mitzvos: One mitzvah to qualify them in the area of “do good”—the blood of circumcision, which brought the Jewish people into the covenant with Hashem; and a second mitzvah that would lead them to “avoid evil”—the blood of the paschal offering (as will be elucidated in section 7).

[It is now better understood why emphasis is placed on the Jewish people being given the *blood* of the paschal offering as the mitzvah with which to busy themselves. For, at first blush, this is problematic since the main part of the precept is the eating of the paschal offering. (This is born out by the requirement that the designated lamb had to be large enough for every member of the household capable of eating, excluding the very old and sick, to eat a specified amount.<sup>16</sup>) But in light of the above it is understood that it is precisely the *blood* of the paschal offering that emphasizes the negation of the evil of Egypt.]

## 7.

### DESIGNATION OF THE PASCHAL OFFERING—NEGATION OF IMMERSION IN IDOLATRY

In what way is the blood of the paschal offering connected to the avoidance of evil? Moreover, since the Jewish people had no mitzvos in hand, understandably the mitzvos given to them were general ones, such as the mitzvah of *brit milah*. Circumcision is not merely a specific mitzvah, but an all-encompassing one. It is “the sign of a covenant between Me and between you.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the blood of the paschal offering must possess a broader meaning with regards to the avoidance of evil. What is it?

To answer this question, Rashi goes on to say, “And they [the Jews] were immersed in idolatry. [Moshe] said to them, ‘Withdraw and take for yourselves.’ [He meant:] withdraw from idolatry and take for yourselves sheep for the mitzvah.” The paschal offering was a countermeasure against the Jewish people being “immersed in (not just casually involved with) idolatry (not just something unseemly), as will now be explained:

In *Parshat Va'Eirah*<sup>18</sup> we already learnt that sheep were Egyptian idols. As such, the very sequestering of a lamb, “the deity of the Egyptians,”<sup>19</sup> for the

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<sup>16</sup> *Ex.* 12:3-4, and Rashi *ad loc.*

<sup>17</sup> *Gen.* 17:11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ex.* 8:22, and Rashi *ad loc.*

<sup>19</sup> Rashi, *ibid.*

purpose of slaughtering it, served to uproot the Jewish people from this idolatry. Furthermore, the lamb was taken with the intent of slaughtering it—the diametric opposite of being “immersed in idolatry.”

Now we can understand why the lamb had to be taken four days prior to being slaughtered: Since the Jews were immersed in idolatry—they had not worshiped idols just one time—an action had to be carried out that would *uproot* this reality. Had they taken the lamb and slaughtered it immediately, as a single act, this would not have been effective in reversing their *immersion* in idolatry. Only by taking for themselves a lamb (the Egyptian deity) for a protracted time, for the purpose of slaughtering it, could they nullify their immersion into idolatry.

For this reason the process had to take four days. As Rashi already explained<sup>20</sup> regarding the Binding of Yitzchak—it was only on the third day [after Avraham’s departure that Hashem told Avraham exactly where Yitzchak was to be bound], so that people wouldn’t think that Avraham obeyed simply because he was rushed and confused; but had he more time to deliberate, he would not have gone through with it. In other words, the proof that any action was carried out with due deliberation comes only after four days [elapses from the moment the command is given until the moment it is executed]; just as was the case with Avraham: he departed on his mission in the morning<sup>21</sup> after having received Hashem’s command, the “third day,” [the day on which his destination was disclosed], was actually the *fourth* day<sup>22</sup> after he was first commanded to “take, please, your son....”<sup>23</sup>

## 8.

### RABBI MASYA’S NAME SHEDS LIGHT ON HIS INTERPRETATION

To give the novice Torah student<sup>24</sup> a better understanding of R. Masya’s teaching—a teaching that suggests that notwithstanding Hashem’s promise to Avraham to redeem his descendents, the Jewish people first needed to be given mitzvos with which to busy themselves *in order to be redeemed*—Rashi records the name of this teaching’s author. Rashi says, “Rabbi Masya ben Cheresh use to

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<sup>20</sup> On *Gen. 22:4*.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, v. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Because “the third day,” understood simply, means the third day after Avraham left his house (as the *Ibn Ezra, ad loc*; and the *Ramban, ibid.*, v. 3, explain).

<sup>23</sup> *Gen. 22:2*.

<sup>24</sup> In the Heb. original, “*ben chamesh le’mikrah*,” referring to the adage in *Ethics of Our Fathers* that when turning five years old, a child should be introduced to the study of Scripture.



teach”—he was in the habit of repeating this lesson to his students, because this lesson explained *his* definitive approach:

The Talmud<sup>25</sup> tells us that R. Masya’s yeshiva was located in Rome. In his day, there were also other rabbinical academies. Some, too, in the Land of Israel. But at the time,<sup>26</sup> *his* yeshiva was the *largest of all of them*, and it was established specifically in Rome.

Now of all places, why did he establish his yeshiva in Rome, and cause others to have to leave their own places, and travel there? As the Talmud<sup>27</sup> expounds on the verse,<sup>28</sup> “Justice, justice shall you pursue”—Follow the sages to their academies... to R. Masya in Rome.” Why didn’t he establish his yeshiva in Israel (as Rabbi Akiva did—concerning whom the aforementioned Talmudic exposition also applies the verse “Justice, justice shall you pursue”—as did other sages)?

To answer this question, we are told, “Rabbi Masya ben Cheresch *used* to teach”—he frequently consoled his students for their having to be in Rome, explaining to them that the Redemption was contingent on establishing their *yeshiva* in a place like *Rome*, and on identifying any Jew in this situation (“naked and bare”) and on transforming him from a Roman into a yeshiva student. This objective was a preoccupation of R. Masya’s, and for this purpose he situated his yeshiva in Rome, a place of exile: to help these Jews, and in so doing, bring the Redemption.

## 9.

### A LESSON FOR OUR TIMES: LEAVING WITH VAST WEALTH

From the above, a lesson emerges for our times: Being that we find ourselves in the depths of the last exile, the Roman Exile, and knowing full well that our sages have declared that all the forecast times for the end of this exile have already passed,<sup>29</sup> the Jewish people protest: We have been in exile now for nearly two thousand years—What is the limit to the suffering of the Jewish people in exile!?

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<sup>25</sup> *Sanhedrin* 32b.

<sup>26</sup> *Haga’ot Maimonides*, on “The Laws of the Sanhedrin,” near the end of ch. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Deut.* 16:20.

<sup>29</sup> *Sanhedrin* 97b.

Comes Rashi and answers that if the intention were for us only to leave exile, this would have been accomplished long ago. Hashem, however, doesn't want even a single Jew to leave the exile "naked and bare." Rather everyone, without exception, should possess mitzvos and good deeds.

Similar to the Egyptian exodus, concerning which Hashem promised,<sup>30</sup> "afterwards they will go forth with great possessions." The Jewish people had argued that they were prepared to forego the 'great possessions.' For them, the priority was simply to escape exile.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the Almighty insisted that that they leave with vast wealth, with all the deeper layers of meaning implied by this term.<sup>32</sup>

This is also Hashem's intention with the imminent final redemption, concerning which it says,<sup>33</sup> "As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders." The Almighty wants the Jewish people to leave exile with 'great possessions,' with everything that this implies.

## 10.

THE PREVIOUS REBBE LIVED IN DIASPORA TO HELP BRING THE REDEMPTION

This is one of the allusions in this *parsha* to the anniversary of the passing of my teacher, my father-in-law—on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Shevat—on Shabbat, *Parshat Bo*: The Rebbe was preoccupied with the spreading of Torah and mitzvos to the point of self-sacrifice. As has been publicized in numerous accounts, he promoted the widespread observance of mitzvos in *actual deed* among all sorts of Jews.

He went about all this with a method—as explained in his talk<sup>34</sup> based on the verse,<sup>13</sup> "when you see a *naked* person, you shall clothe him, and from your flesh you shall not hide" – when you see a Jew naked, without *tzitzis* and *tefillin*—"you shall clothe him." (As R. Masya expounded the phrase, "you were naked and bare"—He gave them *two* mitzvos.)

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<sup>30</sup> *Gen.* 15:14.

<sup>31</sup> *Brachot* 9b.

<sup>32</sup> The full spectrum of "wealth": from material wealth, to spiritual wealth, i.e., the sparks of holiness that were scattered in Egypt. See *Torah Ohr*, p. 60c, on our *parsha*, where it is explained that the Jewish people elevated 202 of the 288 sparks that fell in Egypt.

<sup>33</sup> *Micah* 7:15.

<sup>34</sup> *Purim 5691* (also published in *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 4, p. 729a), based on *Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, ch. 27.

For the sake of this holy work, he established his yeshiva specifically outside of Israel, in the Diaspora. And within the Diaspora itself, in a metropolis where the tumultuous clamor of Rome reverberates.<sup>35</sup> Why? In order to search *there* for Jews who are floundering in a *bare and naked* spiritual state, and to clothe them – first with a single mitzvah, then two, and so on; to *busy* himself with their welfare, bringing more and more light.

When we are redeemed from this final exile, not a solitary Jew will remain. Therefore, we must look out for all Jews, everywhere, and ensure that each Jew possesses at least one mitzvah, not to be naked<sup>36</sup>—*on this objective* the redemption of the entire Jewish people depends.

By following steadfastly in his ways,<sup>37</sup> we will bring about the immediate redemption. We will then witness fulfillment of the verse,<sup>38</sup> “awaken and sing, you who dwell in the dust,” and the Rebbe will be among them. May this come about speedily, in our days.

**From a talk delivered on *Shabbat Parshat Bo* 5737**

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<sup>35</sup> Borrowing from the Talmudic description, at the end of tractate *Makot*.

<sup>36</sup> Especially, considering that “the performance of one mitzvah brings to the performance of another” (*Avot* 4:2). And so on.

<sup>37</sup> See *Tanya*, “*Iggeret HaKodesh*,” sec. 28.

<sup>38</sup> *Isaiah* 26:19.