

## Parshat Tzav: Inner Service of G-d

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

When a korban mincha was offered in the Mishkan, a kemitza, a specific amount of flour, was placed on the altar and burned for Hashem. The remainder of the flour or matzah was eaten by the kohanim. However, if a kohen himself brought a mincha, the entire offering was burned on the altar. Why was this so?

There is also an interesting distinction between the kohen and the levi. Before beginning the service, the kohen was commanded to wear four special garments, and the kohen gadol eight, while the levi was permitted to wear his regular clothing. Why did the Torah require a uniform for the kohen but not for the levi?

The Shem MiShmuel, quoting the Avnei Nezer, explains that the kohanim represent penimiyut, an inner, hidden holiness, while the leviim represent chitzoniyut, an external and revealed holiness. Much of the kohen's

service was performed privately and in sanctity, whereas the leviim served openly through song and music. Inner holiness must be covered and sanctified; outer holiness can be revealed. Since the kohen's kedusha was internal, it required special garments.

This idea parallels the deep inner holiness of a Jewish woman, which is why there are greater expectations of modesty. The kedusha of men is more outward, and therefore their external role is more public. Men are meant to function in the public arena and serve as leaders of the community, while women reign in the private domain of the home. They are called the akeret habayit, the foundation of the Jewish home. According to Kabbalah, the man symbolizes the right side—more dominant and open—associated with chesed, reaching outward and connecting. The woman symbolizes the left side—less visible—associated with din, restraint and discipline.

Every parent is an educator, as the Torah states, "V'shinantem levanecha." In teaching children, we must address both dimensions. We focus on the externals of Jewish life, the practical details of how to live as a Jew. At the same time, we must convey the inner love and warmth of Torah. There is a part of us that is chitzoni, a visible holiness meant to be shared, and a private kedusha meant to remain within. The Avnei Nezer points to Shabbat as a time when one can access that inner sanctity of the soul.

When a Jew brought a mincha offering to the Mishkan, the kohen symbolically took the deepest and holiest part, the kemitza, and offered it to Hashem. The remainder, representing the more external dimension, was eaten by the kohen. But since profound inner kedusha defines the very essence of a kohen, when he brought his own mincha, it was entirely burned—completely given over to Hashem.

## The Fast of The Firstborns

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Michael Taubes

There is a custom for every firstborn to fast on Erev Pesach. The source is a Gemara in the Yerushalmi. Rav Yehuda ben Bereisa said, "Chametz and matzah are prohibited on Erev Pesach." Although Rebbe was not a student of Rav Yehuda, he would fast on Erev Pesach because he was a firstborn.

The Rosh notes that there is a tradition to fast, but the Shiblei HaLeket writes that some communities did not have this practice. The Meiri writes that it is a custom, but there is no absolute obligation. The Baraisa states that although in general we do not fast in Nissan because it is a joyous month of redemption, the bechorim do fast on Erev Pesach. We see that this is an ancient tradition. Tosafot refers to the Gemara Yerushalmi, explaining that the firstborns fast on Erev Pesach to thank Hashem for sparing

them during the plague of the firstborns.

The Shulchan Aruch notes that whether one is a firstborn from the father or the mother, one should fast. The Mishna Berura says that it applies to all firstborns. In Egypt, even if a family did not have a firstborn son, the oldest member of the household — even if it was a girl — died. Based on this, the Shulchan Aruch writes that there are those who say even a firstborn girl should fast. However, the Rema states that this is not the common practice. The custom is that a father fasts on behalf of his firstborn son until the child reaches bar mitzvah.

On certain occasions, when a person is required to fast, he may break his fast by attending a seudat mitzvah, such as a brit milah or a wedding. In addition, if one

completes a mesechta of Gemara, it is a mitzvah to rejoice and make a celebratory meal, and this too qualifies as a seudat mitzvah. The widespread practice is for firstborns to participate in such a seudah and thereby break their fast. Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that it is permitted to arrange a siyum on Erev Pesach for this purpose. Rav Ovadia Yosef concurs with this ruling.

Many people fast on Erev Rosh Hashanah. Why is Erev Pesach different? The Arugat HaBosem explains that the fast is meant to call attention to the miracle of the firstborns who were saved. This can be accomplished through learning just as well as through fasting. We commemorate the miracle in a positive way, and since the fasting itself stems from a sense of gratitude and joy, many join a seudat mitzvah instead.



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## Pesach: Focusing Forward

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Every year as Pesach approaches, we begin frantic preparations for the holiday. We check every nook and cranny of our homes and make multiple trips to the grocery store, carefully examining ingredients and rabbinic supervision. There is no other time of year when attention to detail is so intense. The central symbol of Pesach is matzah, the “bread” made of flour and water. The entire baking process must take no more than eighteen minutes; otherwise it becomes unfit for use. The Torah therefore warns us, “Guard the matzot,” lest they become chametz, fermented and leavened.

The sages offer a deeper reading: instead of matzot, read mitzvot. Just as we guard the matzah from becoming chametz, we must guard the mitzvot, performing them with alacrity so they do not become stale. Just as a slight delay can invalidate matzah, so too delaying a mitzvah can diminish its vitality. Even in writing, a tiny stroke transforms the Hebrew word matzah into chametz. Rav Reiss notes that the questions of the wise son and the wicked son are nearly identical, yet

subtle differences in wording make one wise and the other wicked. Small distinctions can reflect worlds apart.

The Siftei Chaim explains that the miracles of Pesach form the foundation of faith for every generation. Hashem told Moshe that the purpose of the redemption was so that Bnei Yisrael would serve Him at the mountain. Each year, as we read the Haggadah, we reinforce that faith. Rav Dessler writes that at the Seder we are not merely commemorating history; we are transforming it into a present reality, reminding ourselves to fight for spiritual freedom. True freedom comes from overcoming the yetzer hara and accepting the yoke of Heaven.

Our challenge, explains the Siftei Chaim, is to serve Hashem on His terms, not ours. Rabbi Pincus writes that the detailed preparations for Pesach train us in this discipline. We go beyond our natural inclinations to fulfill Hashem’s will with precision. Rav Reiss notes that we begin Hallel with the words, “Praise, you servants of Hashem,” and Moshe is described in the Haggadah as “Moshe, His

servant.” Just as Moshe devoted his entire being to Hashem, so must we strive to see ourselves as true servants, attentive to detail and committed solely to fulfilling His will.

Rabbi Gamliel explains that we eat matzah, the food of slaves, to remind ourselves that we are still servants—servants of Hashem. The goal of the Seder is to transform us into genuine avdei Hashem. Yet this service is not meant to feel like coercion. The Mishchat Shemen writes that if we see our service as a privilege and a joy, we will invest our whole selves in it and sing Hallel מתוך gratitude. The Netivot Shalom teaches that once we accept doing something because it is Hashem’s will, we can access deep joy in its performance. What begins as accepting the yoke of Heaven should culminate in simchah.

On that first Pesach in Egypt, Hashem Himself redeemed us, as Rabbi Pincus reminds us, and we merited that redemption through faith. At the Seder each year, we must rekindle that faith by observing every detail with love, emunah, and joy.