



The Yom Kippur Before Pesah

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We are doing a lot of prep work this week. We are cleaning our homes, kashering pots and cutlery, making sure we've got everything on our Seder shopping lists.

Starting with the very first observance of the holiday, preparation has been central to Pesah:

שמות יב:יג	Shemot 12:13
דַּבְּרוּ אֶל כָּל עַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּעֶשֶׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וְיִקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׁה לְבֵית אָבִתּוֹ שֶׁה לְבָיִת:	Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the 10 th of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.

The Exodus didn't really start on the 15th of Nisan, the date on which our holiday of Pesah begins. It started five days earlier, on the 10th, when we selected a lamb to be our *pesah* offering.

This preparation is about far more than cleaning our homes or getting a lamb ready for slaughter. The formulation of the timing for this command—"בעשר לחדש הזה - on the 10th of this month"—brings to mind a different context in which the phrase appears: Yom Kippur.



Three—and only three—other times does this phrase appear in the Humash, and all of them in reference to our sacred fast.¹

The 10th of Nisan, then, is in some way a parallel to Yom Kippur. This makes sense, in that both are preparation days. We tend to think of Yom Kippur as a pinnacle, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar—which, legally speaking, it is. Yet when we look both at the literary structure of the holidays in the Torah, as well as the way we experience them in our lives, there is a clear build-up to Sukkot. Rosh Hashanah starts us off with *shofar* blasts to get our attention; Yom Kippur focuses our attention on shedding the spiritual impurities that prevent us from closeness to God. Only then are we ready for Sukkot, on the 15th of the month, when we sit in vulnerable shelters where we are supposed to feel God's presence in an immediate way, as we might have when in the wilderness on our way out of Egypt.

So too, the period leading up to Pesah is a preparation for the holiday itself. We get ready to greet the new month of Nisan with the special Torah and Haftarah readings for Shabbat ha-Hodesh. Things get more serious with Shabbat ha-Gadol, the Shabbat before Pesah. In one common telling, the day takes its name—Shabbat ha-Gadol (“The Great Shabbat”)—from the fact that the 10th of Nisan, the day on which we selected our lambs for the offering that first Pesah, while still in Egypt, fell on Shabbat.² Now we are in the final stage of getting ready for our joyous festival, which, as in the case of the fall holidays and Sukkot, will arrive on the 15th of the month.

Taking the parallel to Yom Kippur seriously means that the 10th of Nisan is not merely a day of technical and logistical preparation. The first Gerrer Rebbe (known as the Hiddushei ha-Ri”m) writes:

¹ Vayikra 16:29; Vayikra 23:27; Vayikra 25:9.

² See Mishnah Berurah 430:1.



<u>Hiddushei ha-Ri”m Al ha-Torah, Shabbat ha-Gadol</u> This 10th is like the 10th of Yom Kippur, which purifies and establishes a return to goodness. Therefore, Yom Kippur is called “The Great Day,” just as [the Shabbat before Pesah] is called “The Great Sabbath.”	חידושי הרי”ם על התורה, שבת הגדול עשור הזה כמו עשור דיוהכ"פ שהוא מטהר ומעמיד בחזרה ביושר, לכן נקרא יוהכ"פ יומא רבא וכמו כן נקרא שבת הגדול
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Shabbat ha-Gadol, precisely because of its historical connection to the 10th of Nisan, is a time not only for household preparation, but more fundamentally for internal repair.

Understanding idolatry (*avodah zarah*) to be emblematic of all those beliefs and insecurities that keep us from connecting to God, the Hiddushei ha-Ri”m further explains the relationship between the selecting of a lamb and our own spiritual preparation:

<u>Hiddushei ha-Ri”m Al ha-Torah, Parashat Bo</u> “Draw [and take for yourselves lambs for your families]” (Shemot 12:21). To draw the hand from idolatry, and afterward “take for yourselves lambs” for the <i>mitzvah</i>. This is because the eating of <i>matzah</i> is called a religious rite (<i>avodah</i>). ... One must first remove all manner of idolatry and its accoutrements. That is, anyone who is arrogant; anyone who gets angry; money.	חידושי הרי”ם על התורה, פרשת בא מִשְׁכּוֹ [וְקָחוּ לָכֶם צֹאן] כו'. למשוך יד מע"ז ואח"כ קחו לכם צאן של מצוה. הוא מאחר שנק' עבודה אכילת מצה... ועבדתם כו' העבודה הזאת ז' ימים כו' מצות. צריך מקודם להסיר כל מיני ע"ז וכל אביזריהו. היינו כל המתגאה כו'. הכועס כו'. ממון.
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We cannot connect to the divine, we cannot engage in sacred service, in *avodah*, until we shed the distractions that keep us from God. The 10th of Nisan then truly is a Yom Kippur—it is, like Yom Kippur, a preparation for the joy that will follow five days later. And it is a preparation of



the soul, a time to assess one's spiritual readiness to celebrate the festival. Are we ready for freedom? Are we ready to tell the story that stretches from enslavement to redemption and Hallel? We are to inspect ourselves with the same precision and care that we would use when inspecting sacrificial animals for the Temple rite. Only then will we be able to go from degradation to praise, from slavery to freedom.

