

Maimonides 613 Series

*Don't Break any Bones:
The Deeper Meaning to the Pascal Offering*

Exodus 12:46

...neither shall you break any of its bones.

וְעֹצְמוֹתָיו לֹא תִשְׁבְּרוּ בוֹ

Numbers 9:12

וְעֹצְמוֹתָיו לֹא יִשְׁבְּרוּ בוֹ כְּכֹל חֻקֵּי הַפֶּסַח יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ

...and they shall not break any of its bones. They shall make it in accordance with all the statutes connected with the Passover sacrifice.

Rambam's Negative Commandments #121 & #122

In his *Sefer haMitzvot*, the Rambam writes that the 121st and 122nd negative commandments are an admonishment against breaking the bones of the Pascal offering. He bases this on Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12, which, pertaining to the Pascal offerings, says, "...and neither shall you break any of its bones." This commandment applies to the offerings brought on both Pesach Rishon *and* Pesach Sheini.

Today, without the Holy Temple, we do not bring a Pascal offering, so this commandment seems irrelevant at first glance. Nevertheless, the Torah is eternal and applies to every Jew in every era. What instruction is there for us, living today, in this mitzvah?

The Children of Kings – The Reason According to *Halacha*

The *Sefer haChinuch*, an explanation of the mitzvot, says that we are prohibited from breaking the bones of the Pascal offering because "it is not the honor of

children of kings” to break bones and eat like dogs. Only those who are poor and truly ravenous need to break bones when they eat in order to suck every drop of nutrition from their meager meal. On Pesach, G-d freed us and sent us on our way to Sinai to become a nation of kings and priests. Therefore, at the seder, we are kings and queens, princes and princesses, and so we eat like royalty.

From this we see that our emotions follow our actions: if we live like kings, we will start to act like kings. The Jewish people said at Sinai, “*Naaseh v’nishma*” – “We will do and then we will understand.” Our actions transform our thoughts, which cycle back and influence our actions again. It has been said that attitudes are habits of thought and that attitudes can be acquired.

Faith: The Mystical Dimension

The verse, “Moses took out the bones of Joseph,” refers to Moses’ fulfilling the Jews’ promise to Joseph that they would take his remains when they left Egypt. The Rebbe says that using the term “*etzem*” or “bones” seems derogatory – shouldn’t the Torah have conveyed this in a nicer way, perhaps saying that Moses took out Joseph’s casket? Why did the Torah specifically use the term “bones”?

Bones are the strength and core of the human body. The Rebbe explains similarly that the Hebrew word for “bones”, “*etzem*”, also means “essence” and “core”. The essence and core of a Jew is his or her *emunah*, faith in G-d. On the first Pesach, the Jewish people were endowed with perfect faith. Each Pesach, the strength of our faith is renewed. The Zohar teaches that eating the required amount of matzah on the first night of Pesach serves to inculcate our hearts, minds, and souls with this refreshed faith. The *Mechilta* teaches that our redemption from Egypt came in the merit of our forefathers’ faith. The Rebbe explains that our redemption was not only the reward for having faith, but that the entire Egyptian exile was only for the purpose of allowing us to achieve that

level of faith. Therefore, the Torah tells us that we cannot break the bone, the *etzem*, of the Pascal offering – not only that we *may* not, but that we *cannot*, that the faith of a Jew can never truly be broken because it is our very core. When we learn this law in preparation for Pesach, we are reminded of this fact. No matter what mitzvahs we may be lacking or what shortcomings we may have, our faith always remains perfect and whole.

Another Reason– Joseph’s Essence

Another Chassidic approach to this mitzvah asks, “Who was Joseph?” His mother, Rachel, chose his name, which means “to add” or “to increase”, because “G-d add to me *ben acher*”, an “other son”. Why did Rachel use the phrase “other son” instead of “additional son”?

The Tzemach Tzedek teaches that Joseph has the ability to turn a Jew who is “*acher*”, who is an “other”, a stranger to G-d and Judaism, into a true “*ben*”, a child of G-d. We are not allowed to break the Pascal offering’s bones in order to remind ourselves that Moses took out of Egypt the essence of Joseph – the ability to increase another Jew, the power to transform one who leaves Judaism – an “*acher*” – to a “*ben*”. This is exemplified at the seder, where we gather the Four Children and sit the Wicked Child right next to the Wise Child. Why do we do this? Because the Wise Child must transform the Wicked Child.

Another question: we are told to say to the Wicked Child, “If you had been there [in Egypt], you wouldn’t have been redeemed.” The world asks, “Why would we say this to him?” It was a struggle just to get him to the seder table in the first place! Why would we then turn around and tell him that he isn’t worthy of redemption? The Rebbe gives the answer: “If you would have been **THERE**, you wouldn’t have been redeemed.” We are taught that, in fact, the vast majority of the Jews in Egypt denied their *emunah* and perished in the Plague of Darkness.

But once we left Egypt and received the Torah at Sinai, things changed, and every single Jew will come out of this current exile, whether they want to or not, whether they're ready or not! And this is the idea of "Joseph's bones" – we all have the ability to inspire ourselves *and* another to desire and be ready for the Redemption, to transform *acher* to *ben*.

This power to transform another Jew is also inherent in the message of Pesach Sheini, the Second Passover. Pesach Sheini is the emblem of second chances. Pesach Sheini occurs one month after Passover; it served as a second chance for those who were unable to bring their Pascal offering on the first Passover to come to the Temple and offer their sacrifice. From this, we learn that it is *never* too late to begin inspiring and transforming another Jew. Maybe for the past 20 or 30 years, you forgot to invite the Wicked Child to your Passover seder, but you can invite him *this* year, to inspire him with love and warmth and bring out his *essence*, his inner core, the part of him that is always connected to G-d.

Roasting: How To Perform A Mitzvah

Exodus 12:9

אַל תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ נֶאֱוָבֶשֶׁל מִבֶּשֶׁל בַּמַּיִם כִּי אִם צְלִי אֵשׁ רֹאשׁוֹ עַל כְּרַעְיוֹ וְעַל קָרְבּוֹ

You shall not eat it rare or boiled in water, except roasted over the fire its head with its legs and with its innards.

Rambam's Negative Commandment #125

The Rambam writes that we are not allowed to eat the Pascal offering raw or cooked with water – the only way we are allowed to eat it is roasted. Why?

1) *Da'as Zekeinim- Ba'alei Tosafos* says: the Jews were commanded to sacrifice a lamb in Egypt as a public renouncement of the worship of sheep, Egypt's main

idol. Until then, many Jews had also engaged in the idolatrous deification of sheep. By killing the Egyptians' "god", the Jews made a strong statement that their allegiance now lies only with the One True G-d, Creator of Heaven and Earth. This was an act of self-sacrifice, as they put themselves at risk of retaliation from their Egyptian neighbors. They reached an even higher level of self-sacrifice by **roasting** the meat of the lambs – everyone around could smell the aroma of Egypt's gods roasting on the Jews' spits!

2) The *Sefer HaChinuch* stresses our royal status on Passover, explaining that only kings eat roasted meat; cooking or frying is for peasants. Since they need to get the most out of the meat, they add to it vegetables and stuffing.

3) Another reason given by the *Sefer HaChinuch*: Roasting meat readies it for consumption much faster than cooking. This commemorates the haste with which we left Egypt.

Since we are today without the Pascal offering, what lesson does all this hold for us?

1) Our Mitzvot must have an **aroma** – we should never be embarrassed or afraid to publicly practice our Judaism and demonstrate our allegiance to G-d. We must live our Judaism with zest, with aroma! Just as the Jews in Egypt were not afraid of the Egyptians catching them roasting their gods, so we must not be afraid to proudly wear our *kippahs*, to have our *tzitits* out, to refuse to work on Shabbos. On Pesach, G-d takes us out of our personal bondage and gives us the strength to truly roast the lamb, to proudly live our Judaism outwardly.

2) We must perform the Mitzvot like **kings**, not looking to skimp on the expense (i.e. instead of buying the cheapest pair of Tefillin, we should spend more money on a nicer pair). Do the Mitzvah in the most royal and meaningful way.

3) The quickness with which roasting meats prepares it for the meal teaches us that we must do Mitzvot with **alacrity** and with joy. When the opportunity to do a mitzvah comes your way, don't wait to do it!

A Story*

In the summer of 1956, the Lubavitcher Rebbe traveled upstate to visit Camp Emunah and Camp Gan Yisroel, the girls' and boys' summer camps he had established. Once the Rebbe arrived at the boys' camp, he announced that he was going to distribute matzah to all the boys. The boys lined up, and the Rebbe began handing out matzah, the holy bread. Suddenly, the Rebbe took a piece of matzah, broke it into several pieces, put the pieces in a napkin, and tucked it in his pocket. He then resumed distributing matzah to the boys.

A little while later, the camp director ran in to the Rebbe, exclaiming that a van full of boys on their way to see the Rebbe at the camp had been in an accident and flipped over three times. The Rebbe smiled and said, "What? THREE times?!" He then took the matzah pieces out of his pocket and instructed that it be given to the boys in the accident, reassuring the camp director that all would be well with them. The number of pieces the Rebbe broke off was exactly the number of boys in the van, and later it was confirmed that the moment the Rebbe had broken the matzah was the exact moment that the accident occurred.

* I heard this from Rabbi Yisroel Shemtov.