

Thoughts on פרשת בא:

- ככלל ישראל and identifying as a member of ברית מילה וקרבת פסח: While חז"ל label the declaration of ראש חדש as the מצוה ראשונה, clearly in context this is all really part of the קרבת פסח. It is worth noting that this first מצוה of קרבת פסח which כלל ישראל gets has many parallels to ברית מילה the first מצוה which אברהם was given. They are each the only two מצוות עשה which have an עונש, with the punishment being כרת.

Each of these two מצוות in a very real way separates us from the world around us. In the case of ברית מילה, חז"ל describe the inner struggle of אברהם, that maybe now after this מצוה is part of what it means to be a believer he will have more trouble gaining followers. Later in the time of the יוונים clearly this מצוה and its symbolism served as the dividing line between us and the Greek world. When a certain other religion wished to gain many followers in the pagan world, it dropped the need for מילה.

Similarly, the קרבת פסח is a dividing line between us and the מצריים. As יוסף introduced his brothers to פרעה as a way of keeping them at a distance he reminded them to stress the fact that they have been shepherders as כל רועה צאן. Again when פרעה seems ready to let the Jews bring their זבחים following the מכת ערוב, משה again says that this would not be good as 'לא נכון לעשות כן כי תועבת מצרים נזבח לה'. When they brought the קרבת פסח in Egypt, unlike any time in the future, it was necessary to put the blood on the מזוזות הבית as a statement that they are identifying publicly as Jews, not afraid to show the Egyptians what they are willing to do for ה'. Were a Jew to have offered the קרבת פסח and not put the blood in that public spot he would not have been part of מצרים גאולת.

The fact that these two מצוות serve to separate us from the world around us is really not the issue, the issue is that they are the ways that we do identify as Jews and with ה', and we are not so concerned how this will affect our dealings with the outside world. It is for this reason that there is a consequence for refusal to participate in each of these two מצוות, namely מעמיה ונכרתה. It seems almost natural that one who does not want to be part of his people should be cut off from his people. It also is understood why a person who refuses to have a ברית מילה, or a parent who refuses to give one to their son cannot participate in the קרבת פסח. Perfection as a Jew is not expected for any מצוה, there is no such thing as one being a prerequisite for others, including participation in the קרבת פסח, but one must fully identify as one; refusal to be part of ברית מילה means one is refusing to be a fully identifying Jew.

Perhaps it is for this same reason that even Jews who are far from tradition do participate in these two מצוות in overwhelming percentages; they too wish to identify

and be part of the Jewish people [and while they may not be done in all of their details כדת וכדין, and the סדר של פסח is in place of the קרבן פסח, still the idea is fully valid].

The role of these two מצוות as the symbols of identification is further highlighted by the process of גירות. To become a member of כלל ישראל means having a ברית מילה. Lacking this one cannot be deemed a member of the זרע אברהם. [Perhaps it is for this reason that even a נכרי מהול must have ברית דם.]

A similar idea is found for קרבן פסח as well. In פרשת בהעלותך following the laws of פסח רמב"ן says וכי יגור אתכם גר ועשה פסח לה' כחוקת הפסח וכמשפטו כן יעשה שני. The פרשת בא, one might think that in בא it is speaking to the ערב רב and others who may have joined בני ישראל as they left Egypt, but it would not apply to future גרים. So the idea is repeated in בהעלותך to teach that throughout history anyone who wishes to join with קרבן פסח must identify with our history and our becoming a nation through פסח. The role of קרבן פסח as a sign of identity for the גר is seen even more strongly in the words of רש"י who writes ת"ל וגו' יעשה פסח מיד, teaching that had the תורה not told us otherwise we might have thought that this would be an immediate requirement following his גירות since the new Jew now had to take this step of public identification.

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