

# **PESACH, TRUTH and PARSHAS VAYIKRO**

**By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach**

Parshas Vayikro, very often coincides with the week before Pesach. It is certainly a time when minds are occupied with the beautiful and meaningful holiday, which requires much planning and preparation. It should be fascinating to find in the Parsha a vital Pesach element to put us in the right frame of mind.

The Seforim divide the word Pesach, into “Peh-Soch”, a mouth that speaks. In Egypt one was not allowed to speak up for human rights. When Moshe came to Pharaoh to complain about the heavy labor forced on his brethren, Pharaoh's response was “Tichbad... let the work be still heavier...” and not pay attention to “false words”. “Moshe Emes V'Toroso Emes”, Moshe's true pleas to ease the burden of his brethren were greeted with alarming penalty, accusing it being false.

Exodus from Mitzraim is thus related to the concept of truth. The third chapter of Shema concludes “I am Hashem your G-d Who has removed you from the land of Egypt... I am Hashem your G-d”. To this verse the word “Emes” is added, based on the passage “Hashem Elokim Emes” (Jeremiah 10:10). The Exodus serves, in addition to freedom from slavery, to elevate us to become the “seed of Truth”, “Zera Emes” (Jeremiah 2:21).

Remarkably, the Torah connects the obligation of honest weights and measures with the Exodus. “You shall have correct scales and honest weights and measures... I am Hashem your G-d Who brought you forth from the land of Egypt” (Vayikra 19:36). Truth is the fundamental principle upon which the Exodus from Egypt should be celebrated.

The very basis of Moshe's mission to redeem the Israelites is the "Emes" of the Al-mighty. "I appeared to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob, but with my name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them" (Shemos 6:3); "I did not identify Myself with the attribute of "Emes", upon which my name Hashem is based, because my promise of redemption, as yet has not been fulfilled" (see Rashi ibid). And now is the time for that promise to be fulfilled. For that mission Moshe is now entrusted.

The Halacha requires the morning Shemona Esra to follow the Bracha of redemption, which begins with "Emes Veyatziv", (in connection with the Exodus mentioned in the third chapter of Shema) and concludes with "Go'ol Yisroel". No interruption is allowed in between; a complete chapter (Simon III) is focused on this law. Apparently the principle of Emes, mentioned six times in that Bracha, eight times in Nusach Sefard, is a basic introduction to our Shemona Esra.

This centrality of Emes may be the reason for the additional prayer "Elokai Netzor, guard my tongue... and my lips from speaking deceitfully". By speaking only the truth we have reason to hope that our prayers will come true.

When we refer to Pe-soch, as a mouth that speaks, we have in mind speaking words of Torah. "Emes means words of Torah" (Brochos 5b) Tehilim describes that "Torah mouth" most eloquently. "I am Hashem your G-d Who raised you from the land of Egypt, open wide your mouth and I will fill it" (81:11). The Targum adds "with words of Torah".

Going back, now, to our Parsha Vayikroh, we may see it as a harbinger to the above.

Three sins are mentioned in the Parsha for which one should repent and confess plus bring a sin offering on the altar. The cost of this Korbon varies according to what the sinner can afford. One is the sin of swearing falsely in denying knowledge of a case, refusing to give testimony. The second is the sin of contamination of the sanctuary, i.e. he entered the sanctuary or ate the

meat of a Korbon in a state of contamination, which is forbidden. The third sin is swearing falsely that he will or will not do something, or something did or did not occur.

Now the order in which these three sins are mentioned is unintelligible. The first and the third, both dealing with false oaths, should be mentioned next to each other. The third, dealing with entering the sanctuary or eating a Korbon in a state of contamination, should be mentioned separately, either before or after the other two.

One conjectures that the Chumosh teaches us here a very vital principle regarding purity of speech. To speak falsehood, especially in the form of an oath, is tantamount to bringing in contamination into the sanctuary, or to a sacred vessel used in the sanctuary. A Jewish mouth, designated and given the opportunity to speak Torah, is considered a holy vessel. See Or Hachaim (Bamidbor 26:23) who writes that “the mouth of learners of Torah” is equivalent to a “Kli Shorais” the holy vessel used in the Beth Hamikdosh.

The order of the three sins is, accordingly, profoundly accurate. The sin of contamination into the sanctuary is sandwiched between the two types of false oaths, because a false oath **is** contamination of a sanctuary.

Parshas Vayikro is indeed a most felicitous introduction to the upcoming holiday Pesach, PEH SOCH, inspiring to speak the truth, the meaningful truth of Torah.

The very Bracha of Pesach in the Shemona Esra, as well as every other Yom Tov and Shabbos, includes the phrase “V'Tahair Libainu Leovdecho beEmes” Oh purify our hearts to serve you in truth. Wherein lies the connection between Tahara (purity) and truth? Just as false speech is “Tuma” a contamination, by the same token one needs purity for the sake of truth.

