

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Tzivyah *bas* Menachem Mendel *a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## Sheep Shortage

## PARSHAS BO 5778

(The following exposition regarding an aspect of the Korban Pesach [Pesach Sacrifice] is based largely on its treatment in the sefer K’motzei Shalal Rav, parshas Bo.)

Last week’s discussion centered around the halachic issue of the effects of idolatry – namely, how an item worshipped by an idolater becomes prohibited for usage. We will yet see, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, how this same issue is manifest in this week’s *parshah*.

### The Heart of the Matter

One of the primary features of this week’s *parshah* is the mitzvah commanded to B’nei Yisrael to be performed prior to their long-awaited departure from Egypt. This is the mitzvah for which the Pesach festival is named – the Korban Pesach. The *passuk* states: קָחוּ לָכֶם צֹאן – “Take for yourselves a sheep per family and slaughter the Pesach (sacrifice)” (*Shemos 12:21*). Now, the word “*kechu*,” in addition to its literal meaning of “take,” also connotes “purchase.” Thus, Rashi interprets this directive: “One who doesn’t own (a sheep) should buy one from the marketplace.”

This is where the issue alluded to above comes in. The Egyptian marketplaces obviously stocked Egyptian livestock. Thus, the commentators wonder: how could a sheep purchased from an Egyptian possibly be suitable for the Korban Pesach? After all, as was stated last week, the sheep was the deity of Mitzrayim; and any animal that is worshipped becomes disqualified for sacrifice, as the Mishnah states (*Temurah 6:1*):

הַאֲסוּרִין עַל גְּבֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ... הַמְקֻצָּה וְהַנְעֻבָד... אֵיזָה הוּא מְקֻצָּה, הַמְקֻצָּה לְעֹבֵדָה זָרָה... אֵיזָהוּ נְעֻבָד, כֹּל שְׁעֹבָדִין אוֹתוֹ.

“Those (animals) that are forbidden (to be offered) on the altar (include the following): ...the “*muktzeh*” and the “*ne’evad*”... What is considered “*muktzeh*”? (An animal that has been designated for idolatrous usage... What is a “*ne’evad*”? Any (animal) that has been worshipped.”

In short, we see that animals that have been worshipped may not be offered as sacrifices to Hashem; and presumably, those owned by Egyptians fall into this category. How, then, could it be that Yisrael was directed to buy sheep from them to use for the Korban Pesach; weren’t these animals disqualified?

This issue may be resolved by examining the essence of the mitzvah of the Korban Pesach. It is no accident that the animal mandated for use in this particular offering is the sheep. That is, it is quite pertinent that Klal Yisrael was commanded to sacrifice to Hashem the very animal that the Egyptians deified. The act of slaughtering and offering this animal to Hashem constituted, in effect, a complete nullification of the Egyptian deity; for in so doing, Klal Yisrael demonstrated, *en masse* and in a very public fashion, their total rejection of ascribing any form of divinity to this item.

As such, explains the Shelah Hakadosh (*Maseches Pesachim*), while *ne’evad* (worshipped item) is usually a disqualifying factor, *Korban Pesach* would be the exception. In fact, using for this *korban* an animal that had previously been worshipped actually goes right to the heart

of the matter. The whole essence of this mitzvah is to demonstrate the folly and futility of this supposed “god” of the Egyptians by slaughtering it and offering it up on the altar to Hashem. What better way to do so than by using just such an animal – one that had been idolized, which was instead being killed and burned on an altar for Hashem.

### Reclamation

This approach, to be sure, seems to be quite a novelty, as it actually allows for the use of a *ne'evad* in the case of this *Korban Pesach*. Thus, the *Ginzei Yosef* (*She'eilos U'teshuvos* § 59) offers a different explanation, showing that there was no actual issue of *ne'evad* here to begin with. He addresses this by touching on another issue – a practical matter – related to the purchase of sheep from the Mitzrim. After all, they had just recently endured the plague of *dever* (pestilence), in which: וַיָּמָת כָּל מִקְנֵה מִצְרַיִם – “All of the livestock of Mitzrayim died” (*Shemos* 9:6). How was it, then, that the Mitzrim had any sheep to sell in the first place?

Another question that arises in connection with this plague involves the phenomenon of Pharaoh's obstinacy. The *passuk* states that Pharaoh actually went out of his way to make inquiries in the wake of the loss of his country's livestock: וַיִּשְׁלַח פְּרָעָה וְהִנֵּה לֹא־יָמָת מִמִּקְנֵהוּ – “And Pharaoh sent, and behold – not a single animal of Yisrael had died (in the plague); and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not release the nation” (*Ibid.* v. 7). Here Pharaoh was shown clear evidence of Hashem's Providence over Yisrael; how did that result in his refusal to recognize this clear sign and his insistence on retaining B'nei Yisrael as slaves?

The *Ginzei Yosef* thus understands that Pharaoh must have taken some action to blunt the devastating effects of the plague: namely, when discovering the survival of the Jews' animals in contrast to the loss of the Egyptians', he *appropriated them for himself*. This would explain, then, where the Mitzrim got their supply of sheep to sell to Yisrael for the *Korban Pesach*: they were stolen goods from the Jews themselves.

Based on this development, the *Ginzei Yosef* resolves the original issue regarding the problem of *ne'evad*. We wondered how B'nei Yisrael could use sheep purchased on the Egyptian market for this offering; after all, Egyptian-owned sheep had presumably been worshipped, and as such, were categorized as “*ne'evad*” and thus disqualified for the *Pesach* sacrifice. But as we have just learned, the sheep were not the legal property of the Egyptians, who had “lifted” them from the Jews themselves. As such, there comes into play another pertinent *halachic* principle, which states: “*Ein adam oser davar she'eino shelo* – A person cannot cause an item to become prohibited if it does not belong to him” (*Pesachim* 90a). That being the case, it emerges that the prohibition of “*ne'evad*” never came into effect in this instance, and these sheep were perfectly qualified candidates for the *Korban Pesach*.

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