



Are Women Obligated to Eat Matzah and Meat During the Pesach Seder?

The Meat Misunderstanding

Most *ba'alei teshuva* (returnees to Judaism) have been vegetarian at some point of their lives, and some still are. This spiritual yearning and compassion for every living being has saved us from eating unkosher meat in our 'past lives.' It also expresses our yearning for living ascetic lives without taking more from the world than what our essential needs require. Although the Torah permits taking the lives of kosher animals for human consumption, there is a great concern about the way animals are treated in the modern, industrial world. We often have vegetarian, gluten-intolerant students at Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin and when Pesach comes around, certain questions arise. I recall, about 40 years ago, to have been told that everyone must eat at least a *kezayit* of meat on the Seder night, in commemoration of the Pascal sacrifice. With hindsight, I believe that I probably misunderstood this. Although a *kezayit* of meat (about 28 gram), is the minimum portion necessary for fulfilling the commandment to eat the Korban Pesach, ever since our Holy Temple was destroyed, we have been unable to reinstate the Pesach sacrifice. Sadly, today, all there is left of the Korban Pesach is the 'shank-bone,' often in the form of a chicken wing – which no-one eats – placed on the upper right-hand corner of the Seder plate. In addition, at the end of the Seder, we eat the afikoman – a *kezayit* of matzah – to commemorate the mitzvah of eating the meat of the Korban Pesach. Thus, today no one – be it men or women – are obligated to eat actual meat on the Seder night.

The Matzah Mitzvah from the Torah Today

Yet, gluten intolerant or not, we all have a Torah command (*d'oraita*), to eat a *kezayit* of matzah at the Seder. Although eating matzah at the Pesach Seder is a time-bound, positive mitzvah, from which women are generally exempt, "Women are obligated in [the mitzvah of] eating matzah by Torah law...Whoever is subject to "You shall eat no chametz (leavened bread)" is subject to the [mitzvah of] eating matzah. This pertains to women... (*Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim* 43b). The Gemara establishes that there is a connection between the prohibition of chametz and the obligation to eat matzah. Since women are forbidden to eat chametz, they must also eat matzah on the night of the seder. The prohibition of chametz and the commandment to eat matzah constitute a single unit. Luckily, it is possible to obtain gluten-free, oat matzah, so that we all have the ability to fulfill this Torah mitzvah – pertaining to all times – of eating matzah on Seder night!

Soon Every Man and Woman Must Eat Meat

Yet, there will come a day, and it could be tomorrow, when even the most vegetarian, vegan woman must eat meat! As soon as we reinstate the Pesach Offering, women too, will have a Torah obligation to partake of it. According to Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yose, we slaughter a Paschal offering for a woman separately, whereas according to Rabbi Shimon we do not – she can join a group of men and participate in their Paschal offering. We learn that a woman is obligated to bring a Paschal offering from the verse, "And if the household be too little for a lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the souls; according to every man's eating shall you make your count for the lamb" (*Shemot* 12:4). The neutral term "souls" includes both men and women (*Pesachim* 91b). Indeed, the Rambam rules that women are obligated in the Paschal offering just like men (*Hilchot Korban Pesach* 1:1).

Let's Offer the Pesach Sacrifice This Year!

If you think we must wait until the Temple is rebuilt to offer the Pesach Sacrifice, you are mistaken. All the meat sacrifices were done in the courtyard of the Temple Mount, outside the actual Temple.

Since 1967, the Temple Mount was theoretically returned to Jewish hands, so what are we waiting for? According to the Rambam, we don't need to wait for the Temple to be rebuilt before offering the Korban Pesach:

רמב"ם יד החזקה הלכות קרבן פסח פרק א מצות עשה לשחוט את הפסח בארבעה עשר לחדש ניסן אחר חצות ואין שוחטין אלא מן הכבשים או מן העזים בלבד זכר בן שנה ואחד האיש ואחד האשה חייבין במצוה זו.
It is a positive commandment to offer the Pesach sacrifice on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan after midday. This offering is brought only from lambs or goats, a male in its first year. Both men and women are obligated in this mitzvah (Rambam, *Laws of Pesach Sacrifice* 1:1).

Historically, the Pesach sacrifice was offered even after we no longer had a Temple: Rabban Gamliel who lived a hundred years after the destruction, commanded his servant to roast the Korban Pesach (*Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim* 87b). Caesar Yostaninos issued an edict forbidding the Jews from sacrificing the Korban Pesach as late as the Sixth Century of the Common Era. This shows that Jews were still offering the Korban Pesach long after the destruction of the Temple. The reason we have not yet been able to reinstate the Pesach Offering is more political than halachic. Part of our people believe that we must passively await redemption to drop down from heaven, whereas an increasing number of Jews believe that redemption comes in stages as a teamwork between Hashem and His people, who make active preparations. Through archaeological discoveries, we can now determine the areas that can be visited by Jews even in a state of impurity, and which areas remain off limits. Through modern technology, such as laser cutting instruments, we can construct an altar today without metallic tools. The mitzvah to offer up and partake in the Korban Pesach is obligatory for men, women and children. It is even possible for groups of women to perform the mitzvah together. (Based on http://www.thesanhedrin.org/vaad/KorbanPesach/En/korban/pesach_now.htm).

Raising Up the Sparks from the Material Meat

ספר שמות פרק יב פסוק ח ואָכְלוּ אֶת הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּלֵּילָה הַזֶּה צְלִי אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל מַרְרִים יֹאכְלוּהוּ:

"And on this night, they shall eat the flesh, roasted over the fire, and matzah with bitter herbs they shall eat it" (*Shemot* 12:8).

The three different eating mitzvot during Seder Night correspond to three different ways of partaking of the material. Matzah – Poor Man's Bread – corresponds to the bare essentials. Everybody needs to eat in order to survive, unless you are a breatharian! The dry humble bread of matzah represents this basic need, as it states, "Such is the way [of a life] of Torah: you shall eat bread with salt, and rationed water shall you drink; you shall sleep on the ground, your life will be one of privation, and in Torah shall you labor" (*Pirkei Avot* 6:4). The bitter herbs, although they are bitter, represent a way of living that supplies a little extra in life. Vegetables add color and zest, not to talk about vitamins, to our diet. Greens were not always obtainable in every land at every season, so it can be considered something a little special. (I call it green gold!) Meat, however, represents absolute luxury, without which we can easily survive, and even thrive! Before Noach's Ark, meat used to be off limits to humans, and when we had a Temple or Tabernacle, we were only permitted to eat in those holy places as part of our sacrifices. Thus, in the Torah, consuming meat is reserved for special occasions, such as the partaking of the Pesach sacrifice. Every physical item has a spark of G-dliness that can be uplifted by using that item for a positive action or in the service of Hashem. Whichever material items Hashem sends on our path, offers us the opportunity to elevate their sparks. Certain material matters are at home in our daily lives, while others are occasional guests. Our calling to elevate sparks, manifests most distinctly through eating in general, but particularly during Pesach. This mitzvah pertains equally to men and women. Perhaps women have an even greater affinity for elevating the sparks of food, since it is our task to rectify Chava's eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which caused the divine sparks to be scattered in the first place. Thus, it makes sense that women are obligated, no less than men, in all the mitzvot pertaining to eating on the Seder night!