

# Zooms are for Egypt

*The zoom services are like the Passover we celebrated in Egypt, in lockdown. This year, let's celebrate like free men.*

## Zoom Services

Why can't we do a minyan on zoom? I've been asked this question dozens, if not hundreds of times over the past year. This was especially the case during the early months of covid when we would do the morning prayers on zoom. "Why can't we recite kaddish? Why are we skipping the repetition of the amidah?"

This year, the Seder night is on Motzaei Shabbat. It is quite a rare occurrence. Who remembers what day it was last year? Last year, the Seder night was on Wednesday. These dates are unique because they are an exact replication of the Exodus from Egypt.

The first Seder, which the Jews celebrated right before they left Egypt, was on a Wednesday night. On that night, God killed all the Egyptian firstborns, and at midday on Thursday they marched triumphantly out of the country.

The next year, the first time the Jews celebrated Passover in the desert as free people, the Seder night was held on Saturday night, just as this year.

## Similarities

When we examine the differences between those two

Passovers, we find several striking similarities to the Passovers of this year and last.

In Egypt, before the first Passover, Moses commanded the people of Israel to bring a sheep into their home on the 10th day of Nissan, and to slaughter it on the day before Passover. They were told to designate exactly who would partake in the feast, and then they were told to spread the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their home.

This was followed by the most important instruction: They were to lock the door and stay home; nobody was allowed to leave until morning. It was a total lockdown. God said that the Angel of Death would pass over any home that had blood on the doorposts; anybody outdoors would be susceptible.

It sounds familiar. You can't leave your house because a pandemic is furiously spreading outdoors. Indeed, last year, we were all on lockdown, fearful of the new virus that was spreading outside. To us, the trauma is still fresh, but the very same thing happened in Egypt.

The next year, the Jews were already in the desert, and it was an entirely different Passover. Two weeks before the holiday, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the people had celebrated the inauguration of the Tabernacle. That year, the Passover sacrifice could not be slaughtered in private courtyards as it was in the year prior. From the moment the Tabernacle was erected, all sacrifices had to be brought on the altar of the Tabernacle, alone.

That year, they brought the Passover sacrifice together, as a

nation. Although the Seders were once again held in family units, the offering of the sacrifice was done together, as one nation.

“Mah Nishtanah?” Why the difference? Why was the sacrifice in Egypt brought individually and the sacrifice in the desert brought as a nation?

The Rebbe explained that in-between those two Passovers, we received the Torah. Before the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people were like a family; we were essentially a collection of individuals. But when we stood united at Mount Sinai and received the Torah from God, we became one entity. We became a community. From the “children of Israel,” we turned into the “nation of Israel.” We became a People, who take responsibility for one another. We gained the halachic status of a tzibur, a community.

## **The Show Must Go On**

One of the significant traumatic events of covid this past year was the closure of synagogues. In Jewish communities, synagogues are open 365 days a year. Prayers are held three times every day. When renovations are necessary, the community makes sure to find alternative location in the interim. The “show” must always continue.

The reason is because the synagogue is the replacement of the Temple. The Holy Temples in Jerusalem, both the 1st and 2nd, were never shut down; sacrifices were offered every single day without fail. There were times that the Temple was desecrated by enemies, but whenever it was under the control of the Jewish

people, it functioned like clockwork. The Tamid was offered each morning and evening, and even on Shabbat, when we do not normally use fires, the Temple service continued.

However, there was a distinction between weekdays and Shabbat. On Shabbat, only communal sacrifices could be brought. If an individual wanted to bring a Thanksgiving sacrifice for a miracle or for winning the lottery, or if he wanted to bring a sacrifice to atone for a sin like accidentally eating on Yom Kippur, he was only able to bring it on a weekday. On Shabbat, only communal sacrifices were welcome.

Why then, was the Passover offering sacrificed on Shabbat (like this year)? Because it is considered a communal sacrifice. When the Jews brought the 1st Passover offering in Egypt, they were still a collection of individuals. The next year, however, when they brought the offering in the desert, they were united as a community. The sacrifices were brought in a communal setting, in one place, and therefore, it was permitted to be brought on Shabbat.

## **A True Community**

The Hebrew word for community, *tzibur*, is an acronym for *tzaddikim, benonim, Vreshaim*, “righteous people, evil people, and the people in the middle.” A synagogue is not a place for the rich or the wise; it’s a place for everyone. Every Jew who enters a synagogue can participate in a minyan; nobody will ask what he does for a living, how much money he makes or what is his religious background.

That is the wonderful nature of a community. It includes all sorts

of people, even criminals. And in order to create this togetherness, we must all come to the Temple together to bring the Passover sacrifice.

In our day, to create this sense of community, we need to physically come to a synagogue. The zoom doesn't do it.

On Zoom meetings, some people like to act like Moses, who covered the spiritual light on his face by wearing a mask. They too, shut the zoom screen so that we won't, God forbid, see their holy countenances. Even if some people are confident enough to turn on their screens, it's still only their faces. In a synagogue, you are fully present.

A synagogue is much more than just a House of prayer. It's a place where we become a community. It's a place that creates connections and friendships. You could hold private conversations that can be overheard only by your nearest seatmates. No zoom could ever create that atmosphere. When you come to synagogue, someone could say to you, "You've lost weight." That cannot happen through a computer.

For true prayer, we need to be a true community. That is why a minyan must be in person.

My friends, last Passover was like the Passover in Egypt, when we were in lockdown. This year reminds us of the first Passover in the desert; you are all invited to celebrate together, as a community.

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