

the same guise as when He nurtured the boys in their underground nursery. And it was those boys who pointed to Hashem and sang, “This is my God and I shall exalt Him.”⁶²

These young men came into Eretz Yisrael with Yehoshua, not having reached their twentieth birthday before the Exodus. Moreover, they — and youngsters like them — formed the majority of the nation that entered the Holy Land.

≡ *Merit or Promise?* ≡

וְאַתָּה עָרֵם וְעָרִיָּה: וְאָעֵבֶר עָלֶיךָ וְאָרָאךָ מִתְבּוֹסֶסֶת בְּדַמֶּיךָ וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי
“Yet you were naked and bare.” “And I passed over you, and I saw you rolling in your blood. And I said to you, ‘Through your blood you shall live!’”

The verses quoted here are from *Yechezkel* 16:6–7, but the Haggadah reverses their original order:

(6) And I passed over you and I saw you rolling in your blood, and I said to you [that although it might appear that you are bleeding and injured and that your life is in danger, nevertheless it is to the contrary], “Through your blood you shall live!” and I said to you, “Through your blood you shall live!”
(7) Numerous as the plants of the field have I made you; you increased and you grew; you were adorned with ornaments; you were fully developed and your hair had grown long, yet you were naked and bare.

The reason the order was switched in the Haggadah can be understood from the reason the Midrash⁶³ changes the order.

62. *Shemos* 15:2.

63. *Mechilta*, *Shemos* 12:2.

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The Midrash does so when it uses these *pesukim* to explain why Hashem commanded the Jews to set aside an animal for the *Korban Pesach* four days before they were to offer it.⁶⁴ (After all, if it was only to allow time for the owner to examine the lamb for disqualifying blemishes, one day should have sufficed.) The Midrash, however, goes backwards starting from verse 8 of the passage, not verse 7:⁶⁵

“And I passed over you and I saw you and, behold, it was your time, a time of love” (16:8). This teaches that the time had arrived for the fulfillment of Hashem’s promise to Avraham Avinu that He would redeem Avraham’s offspring. But, although “you were fully developed and your hair had grown long,” you were nevertheless “naked and bare” (16:7), that is, you were naked and bare of mitzvos. The people were not engaged in any mitzvos that would justify their redemption. So Hashem said to them, “Through your blood you shall live!” and repeated, “Through your blood you shall live” (16:6). That is, Hashem ordained two mitzvos, each of which involved blood, by which the Jewish people would earn their freedom: the blood of the *Korban Pesach* and the blood of *bris milah* [circumcision]. Therefore Hashem commanded them to set aside the *Korban Pesach* four days before they were to offer it, for reward can only be earned through deeds — intention alone does not suffice.

64. Hashem told Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael, “On the tenth of this month [Nisan] each of you shall take a lamb or kid... It shall be yours to guard until the fourteenth of this month, then slaughter...it in the afternoon” (*Shemos* 12:2, 6). Thus the animal was set aside four days before it was offered as a *korban*.

65. Although the text of the Haggadah is taken from the *Mechilta*, this verse is not quoted in the Haggadah.

Let us consider the following questions:

1. Why is it necessary for the Midrash to cite the verses from *Yechezkel* in reverse order (i.e., first verse 8, then verse 7, and finally verse 6)?
2. If the time for the fulfillment of Hashem's promise had arrived, why was it necessary for Avraham's descendants to *earn* their delivery from bondage?
3. If it is true that the people had to earn their freedom, why did they require two mitzvos? According to a Mishnah, "When someone performs even a single mitzvah, they [the Heavenly Tribunal] reward him with good, his life is lengthened, and he inherits the land."⁶⁶ If so, one mitzvah should have been enough!
4. Even if two mitzvos were needed, why did Hashem choose *Korban Pesach* and *bris milah* in particular?
5. How does the fact that "reward can only be earned through deeds" explain why the lamb had to be set aside four days before it would be offered?

To explain why the Midrash changes the sequence of the verses, we must first demonstrate that changing their order also changes the meaning of the passage. We must also bear in mind that the actual redemption comprised two distinct parts: (a) the liberation of Bnei Yisrael from Egyptian slavery; and (b) the deliverance of the *bechoros*, the firstborn Jewish males, from the fate suffered by their Egyptian counterparts. Let us see whether these two salvations correspond to the two mitzvos, *Korban Pesach* and *bris milah*.

66. *Kiddushin* 1:10. The translation of the Mishnah is based on the Alshich's question. According to Rashi, the Mishnah means, "When someone performs a single mitzvah, they reward him with good *in this world*...and he inherits *the World to Come*."

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At first glance, the blood of the *Pesach* offering corresponds to the saving of the firstborn sons, for it was to be placed on the doorposts and lintels of the Jewish homes to serve “as a sign on the houses in which you are; I shall see the blood and pass over you, and no destructive plague will afflict you when I strike [the firstborns of] the land of Egypt.”⁶⁷

But the Torah also connects circumcision to the *Korban Pesach*, for it prescribes *milah* as a prerequisite for bringing the *Pesach* offering, and prohibits an uncircumcised male from eating its meat.⁶⁸ Accordingly, both mitzvos seem to be linked to the deliverance of the *bechoros*, while neither is connected to the liberation from Egypt itself. If so, Bnei Yisrael did not merit to be redeemed and the Exodus did not come about as a result of either the *korban* or the *milah*. Rather, it can be attributed only to Hashem’s promise to the *Avos*.

This interpretation of the events fits the order of the verses as they appear in *Yechezkel*: When verse 6 says, “And I passed over you and I saw you rolling in your blood, and I said to you, ‘Through your blood you shall live!’ and I said to you, ‘Through your blood you shall live!’” it implies that the two mitzvos involving blood, the *Pesach* offering and circumcision, were both needed to save the Jewish *bechoros* from the plague that decimated the firstborn sons of Egypt.

Verse 7 then turns from the firstborns to the redemption: “Numerous as the plants of the field have I made you; you increased and you grew; you were adorned with ornaments; you were fully developed and your hair had grown long, yet you were naked and bare” — that is, “naked and bare” of mitzvos

67. *Shemos* 12:13.

68. See *Shemos* 12:44, 48.

that could earn you your liberation from bondage. Therefore only one thing could guarantee your redemption: Hashem's promise to the Patriarchs.

Verse 8 verifies this: "And I passed over you and I saw you and, behold, it was your time, a time of love." That is, you will be redeemed because Hashem, in His love for the *Avos*, promised Avraham that his offspring will be delivered from slavery at a particular time. Now their time had come — the time to fulfill Hashem's promise to display His love for their forefathers by redeeming their offspring and taking them out of Egypt.

But this order of the verses runs counter to the teaching of the Midrash, which uses the opposite chronology to make the point that the *redemption* occurred in the merit of those two mitzvos.⁶⁹ Verse 8 states, "I saw you and, behold, it was your time, a time of love." That is, their time had come, the time for Hashem to redeem them from slavery, as He had promised their forefathers.

Verse 7, however, states that the Jews were devoid of mitzvos, "naked and bare." They had no merits powerful enough to initiate their redemption.

So verse 6 tells us that they did indeed have the necessary merits to earn their liberation, as Hashem says twice, "Through your blood you shall live!" "Through your blood you shall live!" I gave you two mitzvos that involve blood, the *Korban Pesach* and *bris milah*, so that you will leave Egypt through your own merit and not only because of My promise to your forefathers.

69. The Midrash doesn't discuss these mitzvos in relation to the protection of the firstborn at all.

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But the Midrash had a more profound reason for quoting the prophet's proclamations in backward order. It was not just to ascribe the immediate cause of the Exodus to the efforts of the nation itself rather than to Hashem's promise alone. It was to emphasize the vast difference between earned salvation and salvation brought about to fulfill a promise made to earlier generations. The difference can best be understood with a parable:

A king's closest friend and confidant died. The king brought his friend's two newly orphaned sons into his palace and became their adoptive father. One son was wayward and did not deserve a royal upbringing, yet the king took him in because of his love for his deceased father. The second son was of a completely different nature. He exuded nobility: He was loyal to his father's training and heritage; respectful to everyone he met, especially to the king; forever seeking ways to help others. In short, he deserved to be raised as a prince, even if his father had not been the king's top confidant.

At first, the king treated both brothers in the same way, in tribute to his dear departed friend. But he soon recognized the difference in their characters. He began to treat the better-behaved boy like his own son, because he grew to love that son. But his love for the wayward son diminished more and more with each wrongdoing that he committed. Eventually, the king banished him from his palace and his land.

Similarly, if Hashem were to deliver the Jews from slavery only because of the promise He had made to the *Avos* whom He loved so much, the people could easily fall out of favor if they acted in a manner not befitting the nation of Hashem. But if Bnei Yisrael would prove worthy of the Exodus on their own account, it would demonstrate that their essence was a true reflection of their heritage. Then, if they were to lapse, Heaven

וַיִּרְעוּ אֶת־נֹוֹ הַמִּצְרִים וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

forbid, Hashem would nevertheless continue to shine His countenance upon them.

Thus, to underscore the idea that Hashem desired to have the people leave Egypt on the merit of their personal deeds, and not just because of His love for their *Avos*, the Midrash reversed the order of the verses. [This answers Questions 1 and 2.]

As mentioned earlier, many of the Jews in Egypt had adopted the idolatrous ways of the Egyptians among whom they lived. To earn their freedom, they would have to rid themselves of that lifestyle through a two-step cleansing. The two steps are, in the words of the Psalmist, “Turn away from evil and do good.”⁷⁰ First they had to move away from their misdeeds, and that would enable them to do good. Two mitzvos were therefore required of them: one to turn from the evil, the other to do the good. [This answers Question 3.]

So Hashem first commanded them to show that they had truly abandoned their Egyptian sheep-worship by slaughtering lambs and offering them to Him. After they rid themselves of the contamination of idolatry, He commanded that they sanctify themselves by impressing the seal of the holy covenant of *milah* into their flesh as an eternal sign that they had become true servants of Hashem. [This answers Question 4.]

This exposition works with the order in which verses 6–8 appear in *Yechezkel*: The repeated phrase, “Through your blood

70. *Tehillim* 34:15.

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“The Egyptians were evil to us, they afflicted us, and they imposed hard labor upon us” (*Devarim* 26:6).

you shall live!” implies that “you will be redeemed on the strength of your fulfillment of these two blood-related mitzvos.” And why did you need these mitzvos? Because “you were naked and bare” of mitzvos that could earn you your liberation without having to rely on the ancestral promise. If you wonder why Hashem commanded these mitzvos at that particular time, know that “it was your time, a time of love,” the time at which He had promised to redeem you. But Hashem wanted the redemption to come through the nation’s deeds, rather than through His promise.

The twice-mentioned statement, “Through your blood you shall live!” means that only through rejecting their idolatrous ways, by fulfilling both *Korban Pesach* and *bris milah*, could the merits of Bnei Yisrael help to extricate them from Egypt. But since it takes three days for the circumcision to heal properly, the males would not be fit for travel unless it would be performed no fewer than four days before they were freed from bondage. On the other hand, following the rule of “Turn away from evil and do good” to gain merit, Bnei Yisrael would have to offer the *Korban Pesach*, and only then perform the circumcision! Therefore, Hashem commanded that the lamb be set aside four days before it would be slaughtered, thereby initiating the fulfillment of the “turn away from evil” mitzvah of *Korban Pesach*. Once they began to turn away from evil by setting an animal aside, they would be able to carry out the “and do good” mitzvah of circumcision. This would still leave them three days to recuperate from the *bris milah* before traveling the road to freedom. [\[This answers Question 5.\]](#)