

TORAH STUDY FOR CHRISTIANS

Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center, March 15, 2017

THE FOUR PORTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Leading up to Pesach (Passover), certainly one of the most important of all of the Jewish holidays, are four special Shabbatot (sabbaths), each with its own Torah portion that is read in addition to the morning's regular reading. Called *arbah parashiyot* (the four portions), two precede Purim (a much more minor holiday), and two follow Purim, and each has its own theme, but all lead into a deeper understanding of different aspects of the far more important holiday (Passover).

THE FIRST PORTION: SHABBAT SHEKALIM

The first of the special sabbaths falls on the last sabbath before the the beginning of the new month of Adar (or on the first day of the month) in which Purim is celebrated. The money that the Torah portion discusses was given as a census (used to count able-bodied men 20 years and older) — one counts things, not people, so each man giving the same half-shekel yields the number of men. Offered as an expiation for their souls, since they would be going into battle and knew they would therefore have to kill others, the donated money was used to support the sanctuary and after the destruction of the Temples to support the poor, and doing the latter is one of the *mitzvot* (commandments) of Purim. Another tie-in of the half-shekel to Purim is that it commemorates the 10,000 talents of silver the evil Haman used to bribe King Achashveirosh to put out the edict of destruction against the Jews (Esther 3:9) — by donating on or before Purim, we redeem ourselves through giving *tzedakah* (charity).

Exodus 30:11-16

יא וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר: יב כי תשא את-ראש בני-ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו ליהוה בפקד אתם ולא-יהיה בהם נגף בפקד אתם: יג זה | יתנו כל-העבר על-הפקדים מחצית השקל בשקל הקדש עשרים גרה השקל מחצית השקל תרומה ליהוה: יד כל העבר על-הפקדים מבו עשרים שנה ומעלה יתן תרומת יהוה: טו העשיר לא-ירבה והדל לא ימעט ממחצית השקל לתת את-תרומת יהוה לכפר על-נפשתיכם: טז ולקחת את-כסף הכפרים מאת בני ישראל ונתת אתו על-עבדת אהל מועד והיה לבני ישראל לזכרון לפני יהוה לכפר על-נפשתיכם:

11 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: **12** 'When you take the sum of the children of Israel, according to their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when you number them; that there be no plague among them, when you number them.

13 This they shall give, every one that passes among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary—the shekel is twenty gerahs—half a shekel for an offering to the LORD. **14** Every one that passes among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the offering of the LORD. **15** The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when they give the offering of the LORD, to make atonement for your souls. **16** And you shall take the atonement money from the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for your souls.'

DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS:

1. The half-shekel “tax” had to be given by each man - why could no one pay for anyone else?
2. Why do you think the Torah sees counting people directly as something to be avoided?

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THE SECOND PORTION: SHABBAT ZACHOR

On the second of the special sabbaths, a small additional portion from Deuteronomy is read, reminding us to blot out the memory of Amalek. This portion is read on the sabbath immediately preceding Purim, and the connection is obvious — Jews must remain vigilant about their enemies and strive to vanquish them in every generation. We read this portion last Shabbat as Purim began Saturday night.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם: יַחַד אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדַרְךָ וַיִּזְנֶב בְּךָ כָּל-הַנְּחֻשִׁים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאִתָּה עָנָף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים: יֵט וְהָיָה בְּהַנִּיחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ | לְךָ מִכָּל-אֲבִיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחְלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת-זָכְר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:

17 Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey after you left Egypt; **18** how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. **19** Therefore, when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS:

1. This reading presents a paradox: are we to forget (blot out the memory of) or not forget Amalek?
2. The “blotting out” is symbolically done by making noise whenever the name “Haman” is read in the public reading of Megillat Esther (the scroll of Esther) on Purim. In reality, if we never read this scroll, he, along with his ancestral people the Amalekites, would have been forgotten long ago! Why do you think Jews continue to remember/blot out Amalek?

THE THIRD PORTION: SHABBAT PARAH

On the third of the four special sabbaths, we read as the additional reading one of the oddest passages in the Hebrew Bible, the ritual of the *parah adumah* — the red heifer. This portion is read on the Shabbat following Purim, thus approximately three weeks before Pesach.

Numbers 19:1-22

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: בְּזֹאת תַּחַת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה לֵאמֹר דַּבֵּר | אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ פָּרָה אֲדָמָה תְּמִימָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין-בָּהּ מוֹם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָלָה עָלֶיהָ עַל: ג וַנִּתְּתֶם אֹתָהּ אֶל-אֱלֹעֶזֶר הַכֹּהֵן וְהוֹצִיא אֹתָהּ אֶל-מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְשִׁחַת אֹתָהּ לִפְנֵינוּ: ד וְלָקַח אֱלֹעֶזֶר הַכֹּהֵן מִדְּמָהּ בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְהִזָּה אֶל-נֶחֱכַח פִּנֵּי אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד מִדְּמָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים: ה וְשָׂרַף אֶת-הַפָּרָה לְעֵינָיו אֶת-עֵרָהּ וְאֶת-בִּשְׂרָהּ וְאֶת-דְּמָהּ עַל-פְּרֹשֶׁה יִשְׂרָף: ו וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן עֵץ אֲרָז וְאִזּוֹב וְשֵׁנִי תוֹלַעַת וְהִשְׁלִיךְ אֶל-תּוֹךְ שַׂרְפַת הַפָּרָה: ז וְכִבֶּס בְּגָדָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְרִחַץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְאַחַר יָבִיא אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה וְטָמְא הַכֹּהֵן עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ח וְהִשְׂרַף אֹתָהּ יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו בַּמַּיִם וְרִחַץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמְא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ט וְאָסַף | אִישׁ טְהוֹר אֶת אֶפְרַת הַפָּרָה וְהָנִיחַ מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה בְּמִקּוֹם טְהוֹר וְהִיטָה לְעֹדֶת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ לְמִי נֹדָה חַטָּאת הוּא: י וְכִבֶּס הָאִסּוֹף אֶת-אֶפְרַת הַפָּרָה אֶת-בְּגָדָיו וְטָמְא עַד-הָעֶרֶב וְהִיטָה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִגְרָ וְלִגְרָ הֶגֶר בְּתוֹכָם לַחֲקֹת עוֹלָם: יא הִנֵּגַע בְּמַת לְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם וְטָמְא שְׁבַעַת יָמִים: יב הוּא יִתְחַטֵּא-בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִטְהַר וְאִם-לֹא יִתְחַטֵּא בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לֹא יִטְהַר: יג כָּל-הַנֵּגַע בְּמַת בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר-זָמּוּת וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא אֶת-מִשְׁכָּנוֹ יְהוָה טָמְא וּנְכַרְתָּה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל כִּי מִי נֹדָה לֹא-זָרַק עָלָיו טָמְא יְהוָה עוֹד טָמְאָתוֹ בּוֹ: יד זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲדָם כִּי-זָמּוּת בְּאֹהֶל כָּל-הַבָּיִת אֶל-הָאֹהֶל וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹהֶל יִטְמָא שְׁבַעַת יָמִים: טו וְכָל כְּלֵי פְתוּחַ אֲשֶׁר אֵין-צֶמֶד פְּתִיל עָלָיו טָמְא הוּא: טז וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-נִגַע עַל-פְּנֵי הַשִּׁדָּה בְּחַל-חֶרֶב אִוּ בְּמַת אִוּ-בְעֵצִים אָדָם אִוּ בְּקֶבֶר יִטְמָא שְׁבַעַת יָמִים: יז וְלָקַחוּ לְטָמְא מֵעַפֵּר שַׂרְפַת חַטָּאת וְנָתַן עָלָיו מִיִּם חַיִּים אֶל-כָּל: יח וְלָקַח אִזּוֹב וְטָבַל בַּמַּיִם אִישׁ טְהוֹר וְהִזָּה עַל-הָאֹהֶל וְעַל-כָּל-הַכֵּלִים וְעַל-הַנֶּפֶשׁוֹת אֲשֶׁר

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הַיְיָ שָׁם וְעַל-הַנִּגְלַע בַּעֲצָם אֹו בְחָלָל אֹו בַמָּוֶת אֹו בַקֶּבֶר: יֵט וְהִזָּה הַטְּהוֹר עַל-הַטְּמֵא בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְחֻטְאוֹ בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָהַר בְּעָרְב: כ וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִטְמָא וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִתּוֹךְ הַקְּהָל כִּי אֶת-מִקְדָּשׁ יְהוָה טְמָא מִי נִדָּה לֹא-זָרַק עָלָיו טְמֵא הוּא: כֹּא וְהִזִּיתָ לָהֶם לְחֻקֹּת עוֹלָם וּמִזָּה מִי-הַנִּדָּה יִכַּבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְהִנְגַּע בְּמִי הַנִּדָּה יִטְמָא עַד-הָעָרֶב: כב וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יִגַּע-בּוֹ הַטְּמֵא יִטְמָא וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ הַנִּגְעַת תִּטְמָא עַד-הָעָרֶב:

1 The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

2 This is the statute of the Torah which the Lord commanded, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow, upon which no yoke was laid.

3 And you shall give it to Eleazar the kohen, and he shall take it outside the camp and slaughter it in his presence.

4 Eleazar the kohen shall take from its blood with his finger and sprinkle it toward the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times.

5 The cow shall then be burned in his presence; its hide, its flesh, its blood, with its dung he shall burn it.

6 The kohen shall take a piece of cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson wool, and cast them into the burning of the cow.

7 The kohen shall wash his garments and bathe his flesh in water, and then he may enter the camp, and the kohen shall be unclean until evening.

8 The one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water and cleanse his body in water, and he shall be unclean until evening.

9 A ritually clean person shall gather the cow's ashes and place them outside the camp in a clean place, and it shall be as a keepsake for the congregation of the children of Israel for sprinkling water, [used] for cleansing.

10 The one who gathers the cow's ashes shall wash his clothes, and he shall be unclean until evening. It shall be an everlasting statute for the children of Israel and for the proselyte who resides in their midst.

11 Anyone touching the corpse of a human soul shall become unclean for seven days.

12 On the third and seventh days, he shall cleanse himself with it, so that he can become clean. But if he does not sprinkle himself with it on the third and seventh days, he shall not become clean.

13 Whoever touches the corpse of a human soul which dies, and he does not cleanse himself, he has defiled the Mishkan of the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from Israel. For the sprinkling water was not sprinkled on him, so he remains unclean, and his uncleanness remains upon him.

14 This is the law: if a man dies in a tent, anyone entering the tent and anything in the tent shall be unclean for seven days.

15 Any open vessel which has no seal fastened around it becomes unclean.

16 Anyone who touches one slain by the sword, or a corpse, or a human bone or a grave, in an open field, he shall be unclean for seven days.

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17 They shall take for that unclean person from the ashes of the burnt purification offering, and it shall be placed in a vessel [filled] with spring water.

18 A ritually clean person shall take the hyssop and dip it into the water and sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, and on the people who were in it, and on anyone who touched the bone, the slain person, the corpse, or the grave.

19 The ritually clean person shall sprinkle on the unclean person on the third day and on the seventh day, and he shall cleanse him on the seventh day, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and he shall become ritually clean in the evening.

20 If a person becomes unclean and does not cleanse himself, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation, for he has defiled the Sanctuary of the Lord; the sprinkling waters were not sprinkled upon him. He is unclean.

21 This shall be for them as a perpetual statute, and the one who sprinkles the sprinkling waters shall wash his clothes, and one who touches the sprinkling waters shall be unclean until evening.

22 Whatever the unclean one touches shall become unclean, and anyone touching him shall be unclean until evening.

DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think the cow had to be *perfectly* red (some read it as “brown” - at any rate, it was not to have two white hairs on its entire body)? Why must it never have been yoked?
2. Why do you think ritual purity was such an important issue at this point in the calendar?
3. There are people (both ultra-Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Christians) who are trying to breed a red heifer. What might be the danger in doing so?
4. How can the ashes of a dead cow bring cleansing from contamination caused by contact with a corpse?
5. Why do you think there were so many “costume changes” and bathing before and after offering sacrifices? What higher purpose did they serve?
6. What else, if anything, strikes you as odd about this portion?

THE FOURTH PORTION: SHABBAT HACHODESH

The last of the portions is read on the sabbath on or immediately before the beginning of the month of Nisan, the month in which we celebrate Pesach (Passover). In the Torah, however, that month is called Chodesh HaAviv - “the month (or season) of spring,” and it is called the first of months (i.e., the first of Aviv is therefore the new year). Chapter 12 of Exodus, verses 1 through 20, is the special additional reading. Let’s read it and figure out why it was selected.

Exodus 12:1-20

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַל־אַהֲרֹן בְּאַרְצָךְ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: ב הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֹאשׁ חֹדְשֵׁי רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה: ג דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־כָּל־עַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּעֶשֶׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׁה לְבַיִת־אֲבֹתָהּ לְבַיִת: ד וְאִם־יִמְעָט הַבַּיִת מִהַיּוֹת מִשֶּׁה וְלִקַּח הוּא וְשִׁכְנוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסֵת נֹפֶשֶׁת אִישׁ לִפִּי אֲכָלוּ תִּכְסּוּ עַל־הַשֶּׁה: ה שֶׁה תָּמִים זָכָר בֶּן־שָׁנָה יְהִי לָכֶם מִן־הַכֹּבְשֵׁי וּמִן־הָעִזִּים תִּקְחוּ: ו וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת עַד אַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וְשִׁחֲטוּ אוֹתוֹ כָּל קָהָל עַדְתֵּי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים: ז וְלִקְחוּ מִן־הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוֹזוֹת וְעַל־הַמִּשְׁקוֹף עַל הַבַּתִּים אֲשֶׁר־אֲכָלוּ אוֹתוֹ בָּהֶם: ח וְאֲכָלוּ אֶת־הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי־אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל־מִרְרִים אֲכָלֶהָ: ט אֶל־תִּאֲכָלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ נָא וּבִשְׁל מְבֹשֶׁל בַּמַּיִם

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כִּי אִם-צִלִי-אֱשֶׁן עַל-כְּרַעְיוֹ וְעַל-קֶרְבּוֹ: י וְלֹא-תוֹתִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר וְהִנְתֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר בְּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרְפוּ: יא וְזָכְרָה תֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ מִתְּנִיכֶם חֲגוּרִים נְעִלְיֶכֶם בְּרִגְלֵיכֶם וּמְקַלְכֶם בְּיַדְכֶם וְאֶחְלַתֶּם אֹתוֹ בַּחֲפֹזוֹן פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה: יב וְעִבְרַתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה וְהִפִּיתִי כָל-בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׂפָטִים אֲנִי יְהוָה: יג וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם לְאֹת עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שָׂם וְרֵאִיתִל אֶת-יְהוָה וּפִסַּחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא-יְהִיֶה בְּכֶם נֶגֶף לְמִשְׁחַת בְּהַפְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: יד וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לָכֶם לְזָכוֹן וְחַגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חֵג לַיהוָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם תִּקַּח עוֹלָם תִּחְגַּה: טו שְׁבַעַת יָמִים מִצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ אֹד בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן תִּשְׁבִּיתוּ שְׂאֵר מִבְּתֵיכֶם כִּי | כָּל-אֹכֵל חֲמֵץ וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן עַד-יוֹם הַשְּׁבַעִי: טז וּבַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יְהִיֶה לָכֶם כָּל-מְלֶאכֶה לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶם אֹד אֲשֶׁר יֹאכֵל לְכָל-זֶפֶשׁ הוּא לְבָדוּ יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם: יז וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם אֶת-הַמִּצְוֹת כִּי בְעֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת-צְבָאוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם אֶת-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם תִּקַּח עוֹלָם: יח בְּרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב תֹּאכְלוּ מִצֹּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֵשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב: יט שְׁבַעַת יָמִים שְׂאֵר לֹא יִמְצָא בְּבֵתֵיכֶם כִּי | כָּל-אֹכֵל מִחֲמֻצָּת וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאִזְרַח הָאֶרֶץ: כ כָּל-מִחֲמֻצָּת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ מִצּוֹת:

¹The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶and you shall keep it until the ⁷fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

⁷“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord’s Passover. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. ¹⁵Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. ¹⁷And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. ¹⁸In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. ²⁰You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

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DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS:

1. A close reading of the text involves not only looking at the overall meaning of the words but even examining the number of times words are used. For instance, in this passage, the word month is used seven times. The "Seven Code" in expositing Torah texts teaches that it is very significant when a word (in any of its forms – that is, singular or plural, with prefixes, suffixes, etc.) appears seven (or multiples of seven) times in a passage; sometimes the repetition seems to emphasize the main theme of the passage, while at other times it seems to be for aesthetic reasons.
2. How much of this instruction was meant to be observed only on that first Passover and how much was intended to be an observance for all time? How can you tell? (See verses 14 through 17 – how can you tell that they are a single unit?)
3. Why could there be no "leftovers" from the sacrificed lamb? Why must what remained be burnt?
4. What would be the punishment for someone who did not observe this commandment of refraining from leavened bread? (Note that this included "resident aliens" as well as Israelites.) Why would "deleting that soul from the database" (by G-d) be a fitting punishment?
5. What emerges from the text as the most dominant reason for observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread?
6. Eating matzah remains the most recognizable part of the observance of Passover, but many Jews will no longer have lamb at the seder. Why do you think that is?
7. Refraining from work is an important part of the commandments concerning Passover – why do you think that is? What kind of work is excluded from that prohibition? Why?

DISCUSSION: THE BIG PICTURE

Seen as a unit, can we see any pattern or a larger lesson conveyed by this assemblage of four portions? How might you briefly summarize them:

- a) be counted/give charity
- b) remember your enemies so that you can defeat them
- c) keep the rituals and seek purity
- d) do your part to prepare for liberation - be ready for when it comes.

How do these very different portions with their unique messages combine to prepare us for Pesach?

- While giving charity is important on Purim, how much more so it is on Passover! At the seder, we chant from the haggadah (the Passover seder book): Let all who are hungry, come in and eat! Before the holiday, we are to give *ma'ot chittin* - wheat money, to make sure that all have the money they need for matza and other Passover supplies.
- There were enemies on Purim (Haman and his followers) and enemies on Passover (Pharaoh and his armies), but not all are the same. The Amalekites from whom Haman was said to have been descended were irredeemable, while midrash tells us that Pharaoh himself later repented. And we spill a drop of wine from our cups at the seder for each of the ten

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plagues visited upon Egypt; neither are we allowed to rejoice on the deaths of the drowned Egyptian soldiers, despite our being rescued because of that.

- Ritual, although at times not rational, has power. It, in fact, often outlasts belief, which means it bears our attention if we intend to continue as a religious people. During Pesach, in particular, ritual becomes heightened, demonstrated through the ceremonial foods and teaching at the seder table. Ritual on Passover helps us, in at least a small way, to relive our ancient and ancestral traditions, to reenact the story of our liberation, and to change the story from one that is merely intellectual into one in which we actually participate.
- And finally, as we prepare for the liberation that comes with Pesach, we cannot afford to forget those who are still in slavery, those who await liberation. We must help to free them as well. Just as Exodus 12 instructs us to take deliberate and positive actions, to take positive, dramatic steps (daubing blood on our doorposts was surely a powerful act of defiance in addition to warding off the Angel of Death!), to include ourselves among the whole people (symbolized by eating matzah/not having leavened products) or else, and to be ready to not only arise ourselves, but to bring the “mixed multitude” along with us.