

The Generosity of the Shank Bone **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

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Pesah

The lamb shank on the Seder Plate – what does it signify?

According to the teachings of the Holy Ari, Rabbi Isaac Luria, the shank bone (which, traditionally, recalls the Pesah offering) is identified with the *Sefirah* of *Hesed* and hence with our father Abraham, whose life typified *Hesed* (traditionally, albeit inadequately, rendered into English as *lovingkindness*).

Abraham's *hesed* is demonstrated in a *midrash* (legend) that his tent had an entrance on each of its four sides, so that a traveler – regardless of the direction from which the traveler might come – would immediately encounter an entrance and not need to make his or her way to the other side of the tent before entering.

But how is Abraham related to the shank bone? How is *Hesed* related to the shank bone? How is the Pesah offering related to *Hesed*?

In the "Tree of Life" configuration of the *Sefirot*, *Hesed* heads the right pillar. (Yes; *Hochmah* stands above *Hesed* atop the right pillar, but the three uppermost *Sefirot* – *Keter*, *Hochmah*, and *Binah* – are so lofty that They do not enter into the discussion; *Hesed* is the topmost "accessible" *Sefirah* in the right pillar.) The right pillar represents the *Yetzer Ha'Tov*, the Desire to Share; the left pillar represents the *Yetzer ha'Ra*, the Desire to Receive; the middle pillar mediates between them and reconciles them. The shank bone recalls for us the sacrifices, the offerings, which we brought when the Temple stood. Only through the Desire to Share is it possible to bring offerings; the Desire to Receive wishes to keep all that it has. And Abraham, in his hospitality, in his *Hesed*-directed life, personifies the Desire to Share. And – wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles – we find that Abraham was very wealthy and that his generosity did not reduce his wealth a bit!

Pesah falls during the month of Nisan, which, *Sefer Yetzirah* tells us, is the month of Aries, the Ram. Aries is ruled by Mars, the personification of war, the ultimate expression of the Desire to Receive, the Desire to Keep, and the shank bone, representing sacrifice and offering, is a vessel for the redemption of the month of Nisan. By roasting the shank bone (which, as a lamb bone, is a material representation of Aries, the Ram), we burn it and take control over it, thus symbolizing our taking control of our *Yetzer ha'Ra*, our Desire to Receive.

May the roasting/burning of the shank bone lead us this Pesah to converting our wishes to control others into a control of self and of our Desire to Receive.

Hag Same'ah.