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First Things Second?
A Second Look at the Second Passover[1]

The institution of *Pesah Sheni* – the "Second Passover," introduced in Numbers 9 as a divine provision allowing for a delayed paschal offering on the fourteenth of Iyyar – presents a series of notable interpretive difficulties, both ritual and narrative.

> The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, on the first new moon of the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, saying: Let the Israelite people offer the Passover sacrifice at its set time: you shall offer it on the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, at its set time; you shall offer it in accordance with all its rules and rites. Moses instructed the Israelites to offer the Passover sacrifice; and they offered the Passover sacrifice in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses, so the Israelites did. But there were some householders who were impure by reason of a corpse and could not offer the Passover sacrifice on that day. Appearing that same day before Moses and Aaron, those householders said to them, "Impure though we are by reason of a corpse, why must we be debarred from presenting the Lord's offering at its set time with the rest of the Israelites?" Moses said to them, "Stand by, and let me hear what instructions the Lord gives about you." And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people, saying: When any party – whether you or your posterity – who is defiled by a corpse or is on a long journey would offer a Passover sacrifice to the Lord, they shall offer it in the second month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and they shall not leave any of it over until morning. They shall not break a bone of it. They shall offer it in strict accord with the law of the Passover sacrifice. But if any party who is pure and not on a journey refrains from offering the Passover sacrifice, that person shall be cut off from kin, for

1 I am grateful to Prof. Yonatan Grossman, Dr. Hillel Mali and Michal Kaufman-Gulko for their comments and insights, and to the anonymous editor at Megadim for their outstanding, painstaking work to make the article accessible.

> the Lord's offering was not presented at its set time; that party shall bear the guilt. And when a stranger who resides with you would offer a Passover sacrifice to the Lord, it must be offered in accordance with the rules and rites of the Passover sacrifice. There shall be one law for you, whether stranger or citizen of the country (Num 9:1–14, NJPS).

From a ritual perspective, *Pesah Sheni* is unique. It represents the only instance in the biblical sacrificial system of a time-bound offering that may be performed after its designated date. This exception stands in direct contradiction to the prevailing halakhic principle that "once its day has passed, the offering is nullified" (*avar yomo, batel korbano*; see Berakhot 26a). The Mishnah (Temurah 2:1) further qualifies this rule by applying it specifically to communal offerings, suggesting that private offerings are not subject to the same stringency. At first glance, the Passover sacrifice would appear to fall within the category of private offerings (see Pesahim 62b).

Yet, the status of the *korban pesah* is subject to conflicting classification in rabbinic literature. The Tosefta mentions the paschal offering in two places: R. Yaakov lists it matter-of-factly among private offerings (Tosefta Temurah 1:7), while Hillel the Elder explicitly categorizes it as a communal offering (Tosefta Pesahim 4:11). Both opinions are cited without resolution in the Talmud.

Substantively, the paschal offering exhibits several features that align it more closely with communal offerings – albeit ones performed by individuals.[2] Aside from its fixed calendrical date, it (1) may be offered on Shabbat, (2) is brought in a state of impurity when the majority of the community is defiled – a condition explicitly linked in the Talmud to its communal status (Pesahim 77a), (3) is not suspended in a case of communal impurity – even when only a majority of the community is impure, all bring the sacrifice (Pesahim 79a), and (4) is accompanied by trumpet blasts, as are communal offerings (see Tosafot Rid on Pesahim 64b, s.v. *nin'alu*). These five characteristics collectively distinguish the *korban pesah* from other offerings initiated by individuals.

Indeed, even offerings that share some communal features – such as the High Priest's daily griddle-cake offering (*ḥavitin*) or his Yom Kippur bull – do not allow for remediation if they are missed (Mishnah Temurah 2:1). In this regard, the *korban pesah*, particularly in its *sheni* iteration, appears to deviate sharply from the halakhic framework governing sacrificial law.

2 See extended discussion in Meir Spiegelman, "Korban ha-Pesah," *Alon Shevut* 100 (December 1982), 75-94.

From a narrative standpoint, *Pesah Sheni* raises difficulties in both its immediate and broader textual contexts. Locally, one wonders why it is specifically the paschal offering that elicits a protest from those disqualified due to corpse impurity. Numerous Temple rites exclude individuals who are ritually impure, yet no other such exclusion results in a similar appeal or legislative response.[3] The complaint *lamah nigara* ("why should we be excluded?") resonates intertextually with the claims of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27:4) and the family heads of the Manassite clan (Num. 36:3–4), both of which concern inheritance rights and land allocation. While the rhetorical parallel is striking – and the appeal in each case prompts divine consultation – the thematic connection between these episodes and the institution of *Pesah Sheni* remains obscure.

More broadly, the rescheduling of the paschal offering to the fourteenth of Iyyar appears perplexing. If the intent is to enable those who were ritually impure during the original date to participate, a more logical alternative would be the twenty-first of Nisan. By that date, the seven-day purification period required after contact with the dead (see Num. 19:11–12) would have elapsed, allowing for timely observance during the ongoing Festival of Matzot. That day, traditionally associated with the crossing of the Red Sea, retains clear thematic relevance to the Exodus and is already marked as a sacred occasion. The assignment of the make-up offering to an entirely separate month thus invites further exploration.

Indeed, the question of *Pesah Sheni* deepens upon closer inspection, revealing layers of textual and theological complexity. To borrow Churchill's phrase, the matter becomes "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." Remarkably, it appears that the *first* "Second Passover" – that is, the Passover observed in the wilderness in the second year after the Exodus – should not have taken place at all, at least according to a straightforward reading of the biblical text. This disquieting implication is acknowledged, albeit obliquely, by Nahmanides.

In his commentary to Numbers 9:1, Nahmanides responds to the apparent inconsistency between the command to observe the Passover in the wilderness and the earlier stipulation in Exodus that the rite is to be observed only upon entry into the Land of Israel:

> …It is possible that this [specific] command [to bring the Passover] was necessary because at first they were only commanded about making the Passover-offering in future generations after [entering] the Land of Israel, as

3 Spiegelman enumerates the examples of the individual's festival *re'iyah* burnt-offerings, or priestly consumption of the showbreads during their *mishmar*-watch.

> it is written: "And when you enter the land that the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite" (Exod. 12:25). And it is further stated there; "So, when the Lord has brought you into the land…you shall observe in this month the following practice" (Exod. 13:5). And now the Holy One, blessed be He, desired and commanded that they should make it [the Passover-offering] in order that the memory of their redemption and of the miracles which were done for them and their fathers should be transmitted from the fathers who saw them to their children, and their children to another generation. Thus He had said at first, "So, when the Lord has brought you into the land," meaning to say that this commandment [to bring the Passover-offering] does not apply outside the Land in future generations; therefore now He commanded that they should fulfill it in the desert. (Numbers 9:1, Chavel translation)

Nahmanides here attempts to reconcile the apparent contradiction by distinguishing between a permanent obligation to bring the Passover offering – which he limits to the Land of Israel – and a one-time divine command to observe it in the wilderness for the sake of memory transmission. Yet his explanation skirts the deeper difficulty: the original legislation in Exodus explicitly ties the obligation to the Land, suggesting that no observance was required, or even permitted, during the Israelites' wilderness wanderings.

The textual data supports this view. After the wilderness observance in Numbers 9, there is no further record of the Passover being celebrated during the Israelites' forty years in the desert. Indeed, early rabbinic sources explicitly affirm its absence: the *Sifre* to *Beha'alotekha* (67) maintains that the Passover was not observed again until the Israelites entered the land. This raises pressing theological questions. If the Passover is intended to serve as a vehicle for commemorating the Exodus, why limit its observance to the land of Israel? Conversely, if its significance is actualized only upon settlement, what purpose is served by its observance in the wilderness?

Following Nahmanides' reasoning – that the first anniversary is critical to preserve "living memory" – we encounter a broader and more fundamental enigma: What, in fact, is the Passover offering commemorating?

Contemporary scholarship has noted that several elements of the original Passover instructions in Exodus 12 appear incongruous with the narrative circumstances. While some features – such as the smearing of blood on the doorposts and the command to remain inside the house – correlate directly with the events of that night, others seem to lack immediate narrative justification. The age, sex, species, and state of the animal killed (v. 5), the warning not to leave over any of the meat (v. 10)

and watching over the animal until the fourteenth (v. 6a)[4] do not arise organically from the story's context. These prescriptions seem to reflect ritual norms projected backward from a later liturgical or sacrificial frameworks. To source-critical scholars, this suggests editorial layering – a retrospective reworking in which the Exodus ritual is cast as a commemoration of a commemorative practice, so to speak. The result is that the foundational event itself appears already shaped by the logic of future ritual observance.

Thus, both textually and theologically, the wilderness observance of Passover – and by extension, the institution of *Pesah Sheni* – poses profound questions about the relationship between historical event, ritual commemoration, and the construction of sacred memory.

Numbers 1–10: Altared Reality

The key to understanding the institution of *Pesah Sheni* lies in its narrative context within the Book of Numbers. The structure of Numbers 1–10 has long presented exegetical difficulties, particularly the chronological disjunction between the census conducted on the first of Iyyar (Num. 1:1) and the Passover offering described in chapter 9, which is explicitly dated to the first month – Nisan – of the same year.

Nahmanides directly addresses this chronological inconsistency in his commentary to Numbers 9:1:

> From here the Rabbis have deduced the principle: "There is no [strict] chronological order in the narrative of the Torah" [for the census mentioned at the beginning of this Book of Numbers was on the first day of 'the second' month in the second year, and the present chapter about the Passover was in the 'first month' of the same year]! Now the reason for this delay [in mentioning the section concerning the Passover] was that since this fourth book [of the Torah] comes to mention the commandments which Israel was given in the wilderness of Sinai for that particular time, He wanted [first] to complete everything related to the Tent of Meeting and its functioning during all the time [that Israel was] in the wilderness. Therefore He mentioned first the [commandments about the four] standards, and the place of the Tent [of

4 Mira Balberg and Simeon Chavel, "The Polymorphous Pesaḥ: Ritual Between Origins and Reenactment," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 8:3 (2017), 292-343, p. 302. Regarding the matter of watching over the animal, see however John Tracy Thames Jr, "Keeping the paschal lamb: Exodus 12.6 and the question of sacrifice in the Passover-of-Egypt," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44:1 (2019), 3-18.

> Meeting], and the position of its ministers, and the ordinance concerning the divisions [of the Levites] when carrying [the Tabernacle whilst travelling, and] all services of the Tent. Then He mentioned the dedication-offerings of the princes, who brought the wagons in which they would carry it [the Tent] as long as they were to be in the wilderness, and He finished [the account of] their offerings at the dedication of the altar, which began on the first of Nisan or afterwards. After all this He returned and mentioned the admonition that He had given them not to forget the commandment of the Passover. (Chavel translation)

Notably, the Passover narrative in chapter 9 is not the beginning of this chronological digression. Numbers 1–6, dated to the first day of the second month (later known as Iyyar), detail the census, the arrangement of the Israelite tribes around the Tabernacle, and various laws resulting from the Tabernacle's presence within the camp. These include: the expulsion of the impure; the empowerment of the "on-call" priests to enable atonement by accepting stolen goods on behalf of an heirless victim; the use of a Tabernacle procedure (and 'ground substance') to adjudicate suspected marital infidelity; and, by contrast to the exclusion of the impure, the aspirational movement of the *nazir*, the layperson who voluntarily draws near to the sanctuary.

Chapters 7–10 then shift to events in the first month – Nisan – and center around the sanctification and integration of the altar into the broader encampment structure. These events correspond to the "eighth day" of the priestly ordination (*milu'im*), which is detailed across Exodus 40, Leviticus 9–10, and Numbers 7–8.[5] The theme of the organization and mechanics of camp movement is resumed in 9:15.

Janson Condren[6] offers a structural analysis that synthesizes prior scholarship and identifies two parallel narrative panels within Numbers 1–10, each composed of three thematic units:

Panel 1 (Chapters 1–6)	**Panel 2 (Chapters 7–10)**
A: 1:1–2:34 – Lay tribes organized around the Tabernacle	A': 7:1–89 – Lay tribes offer gifts to the Tabernacle

5 Regarding the discrepant lenses through which each book perceives this date see, e.g., Yochanan Zweig, "The Dedication of the Tabernacle," *Tradition* 25:1 (1989), 11-16.

6 Janson C. Condren, "Is the Account of the Organization of the Camp Devoid of Organization? A Proposal for the Literary Structure of Numbers 1.1–10.10," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37.4 (2013): 423-452.

Panel 1 (Chapters 1–6)	**Panel 2 (Chapters 7–10)**
B: 3:1–4:49 – Levites designated for service	B': 8:1–26 – Levites inducted into service
C: 5:1–6:27 – Communal legislation	C': 9:1–10:10 – Communal legislation

Jonathan Grossman adopts Condren's schema but emphasizes a chronological and thematic distinction between the two panels. He identifies the first unit (chapters 1–6) as reflecting the month of Iyyar with the second unit (chapters 7–10), corresponding to Nisan: "The month of Nisan, the second part of the division before us, is related to the tabernacle experience, and it describes a movement that leaves the camp and comes to the tabernacle, while the month of Iyyar, the first part of the division, is related to the construction of the entire camp and the design of a holy camp."[7]

This distinction may be sharpened further. The chronological digression, I propose, begins with the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:22–27. This passage links intertextually to Leviticus 9:22–23, the only point in the inauguration narrative where the people are actively engaged. That moment precedes the divine theophany – and the subsequent tragedy involving Nadav and Avihu – which shifts the legal focus toward ritual defilement and away from the ordination process. Thus, Numbers 6:22 marks a pivot toward themes of divine presence, priestly mediation, and communal sanctity.

Within this structure, the four major components of the "Nisan unit" (Numbers 7–9) form a coherent and progressive sequence. Together, they map the expansion of holiness outward from the altar, integrating the sanctuary, the Levites, and finally the Israelite laity into a unified sacred complex. The altar becomes the linchpin – the "glue," so to speak – binding the concentric zones of the encampment: *maḥaneh Shekhinah* (divine presence), *maḥaneh Leviyah* (Levites), and *maḥaneh Yisrael* (the general population), as described in *Sifre* Bemidbar 1 and Tosefta Kelim 1:10 and in all subsequent Rabbinic sources.

Because these four components form a tightly interlinked unit, the narrative prioritizes thematic development over strict chronology. The episode of the Second Passover at the end of this unit (Num. 9:1–14) completes the sanctification process by formally integrating the lay Israelite camp. It is thus fitting that this occurs on the fourteenth of Iyyar – after the events of Numbers 1–6 (dated to the first of Iyyar) but

7 Jonathan Grossman, "Is There Some Order in the Desert?" (Hebrew) *Daf Shevu'i* 1269 (2018).

before the departure from Sinai on the twentieth (Num. 10:11). Thus, the apparent chronological disruption of chapters 7-9 is resolved.[8]

1. The Sanctification of the Altar

The narrative opens with the completion of the altar's sanctification through the offerings of the tribal leaders (*ḥanukkat ha-mizbeaḥ*). The Talmud (Yoma 12b; Shevu'ot 15a) notes that sacred vessels may be consecrated either by anointing or by use. In the Tabernacle inauguration, both methods are employed: Moses anoints the vessels (Exod. 40) and uses them in sacrificial service; similarly, he anoints and vests the priests (Lev. 8). The tribal offerings encompass nearly[9] every category of sacrificial item: silver vessels with meal offerings, gold vessels with incense, and animals of various species for burnt, sin, and peace offerings. Through this expansive act of presentation, the tribal leaders effectively "activate" the altar and establish a formal connection between the people and the cultic center.

2. The Sanctum and the Kindling of the *Menorah*

Next in the text is the extension of the altar to a new domain, the *mahane shekhina* - the sanctum. For completeness' sake, first, the sanctum sanctorum, which remains an exclusively divine domain, off-limits (at least until Leviticus 16), is briefly referenced: "When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he would hear the Voice addressing him from above the cover that was on top of the Ark of the Pact between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him" (Num. 7:89).

The sanctum is readied for function by means of the *kohen*-priests. This takes the form of the command that Aaron light the tabernacle *menorah*-candelabrum (8:1-4).

Rashi, citing *Midrash Tanḥuma* (*Beha'alotekha* 5), connects the *menorah*'s kindling to Aaron's disappointment at being excluded from the tribal leaders' offerings. God assures him that his role in kindling the *menorah* is "greater" than theirs. At first glance, this seems puzzling – why should a routine priestly duty compensate for the absence of a tribal offering?

8 This point is noted by Sjoerd H. van der Wielen, "The Passover as inauguration of Israel's departure from Sinai: interpretive potential of analysing narrative technique for discerning literary structure in Numbers 1–10," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 47:1 (2022), 3-22, p. 20.

9 Except for birds, since Scripture regards these as an inferior substitute associated with poverty (Lev. 5:7, 12:8).

Meir Spiegelman[10] clarifies the issue by distinguishing between the daily lighting of the *ner tamid* – already mandated in Exodus 27:20 and Leviticus 24:2 – and the inaugural kindling of the *menorah*'s seven lamps. He argues that the latter constitutes a distinct act of consecration, paralleling the initial activation of the altar. This reading is supported by rabbinic traditions that include this passage in the Torah reading for Hanukkah – a celebration of rededication.[11]

Leviticus 8 records the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests and establishes their relationship to the altar – as an "additional horn of the altar," so to speak, daubed in blood and consuming sacrificial meats[12] – in the Temple courtyard. This Numbers passage thus describes Aaron's inauguration of the *menorah* – in the domain of the sanctum, which was off-limits throughout the seven days of ordination. The Mishnah in Tamid (6:1) clarifies that the kindling for the *menorah* when it is dark is drawn from the fire of the 'altar of the *olah* (burnt)-offering', and the text itself seems to suggest the link by the unusual root *olah* for kindling. Thus, in effect, the kohen as "horn of the altar"' extends its fire to a new domain.

With regard to the *menorah*, Scripture atypically commands that the oil be provided by the people, and even repeats this twice (Exod. 27:20-21, Lev. 24:1-4) – in the first case emphasizing "It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time, throughout the ages."[13] Only once the link between the altar and the people was established by the tribal princes was Aaron, as the altar's extension, empowered to enter and kindle *their* oil in God's sanctum.

3. The Levites and the Sanctification of the *Maḥaneh Levi'ah*

The third unit, Numbers 8:5–26, turns to the consecration of the Levites, establishing their formal relationship to the altar. In contrast with the designation of the Levites in chapter 3, the section here details the *ordination* of the Levites, that aspect of their

10 Meir Spiegelman, "Regarding Matters of Sanctity, We Ascend," May 31, 2016, archived at https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/chanuka/regarding-matters-sanctity-we-ascend and accessed November 10, 2024.

11 Meir Spiegelman, "Kamah Menorot Hayu," archived at https://www.ybm.org.il/list?catId=54 and accessed on November 7, 2020.

12 Jonathan Grossman and Eliezer Hadad, "The Ram of Ordination and Qualifying the Priests to Eat Sacrifices." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45:4 (2021), 476-492, p. 490.

13 The unique association is noted by Gad Eldad, "And You Shall Make a Menora of Pure Gold," February 28, 2017, archived at https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-teruma/teruma-%E2%80%9Cand-you-shall-make-menora-pure-gold%E2%80%9D and accessed on November 10, 2024.

consecration which establishes their unique relationship to the *altar*. They are purified with *hatat*-water sprinkling, render offerings and are consecrated as an 'offering' – given to the altar, and its kohanic 'extensions' – by *tenufah*-raising, just as with portions of offerings that are assigned to the altar for subsequent distribution, either to incineration on the altar or to become a priestly perquisite.[14]

4. The Israelites and the Sanctification of the *Maḥaneh Yisrael*

Finally, Numbers 9:1–14 completes the sanctification of the encampment by incorporating the Israelites themselves. This is accomplished through the observance of the Passover offering – the only sacrificial rite in which the laity are obliged to process and consume sanctified meat in their own homes.

Jonathan Grossman argues that the ordination of the priests to be able to consume offerings – as an extension of the altar – is accomplished by means of the *ayl milu'im,* the ram of ordination.

> If all this is so – that the main function of the days of ordination is connected to qualifying the priests to eat of the offerings – we may compare this ritual to the Mesopotamian ritual of "opening the mouth of the gods." In various texts from the ancient Near East we find a complex ritual that enables the mouth of a new idol to eat of the offerings that are brought before it and qualifies it to begin to function as a god: "They had … to transform the lifeless matter into presence. During these nocturnal ceremonies they were endowed with 'life', their eyes and mouths were 'opened' so that the images could see and eat, and they were subject to the 'washing of the mouth', a ritual thought to impart special sanctity." The essence of the ritual focused on opening the mouth of the god so that it could eat. The two main spells used in this connection were the 'rinsing of the mouth' (*mīs pî*) and the 'opening of the mouth' (*pīt pî*), which together enabled the statue to eat the foodstuffs and drink the liquids that were presented to it as a meal.

If the role of the ram was to consecrate the priests so that they would be able to eat of the sacrifices brought to the altar, we may read the biblical ritual against the background of these rituals, since the two steps in question can also be found in the days of ordination: First, Moses (as king or viceroy of the Lord?) washes the priests and purifies them; then he robes them in vestments of glorious adornment to serve

14 Naphtali S. Meshel, *The 'Grammar' of Sacrifice: A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly Writings with A 'Grammar' of Σ* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

as priests; and finally he carries out the instructions that accompany the ram of ordination to fill their hands. Filling their hands comprises the consecration of their mouths, which permits them to eat of the sacrificial offerings.[15]

The ram is offered and eaten in the Temple courtyard, at the "entrance (*petah*) to the tent of meeting," for seven days, at once designating both those who consume and the locus of consumption as an annex of the altar. The priests are also daubed with its blood, reinforcing their status as altar-extensions.

The ordination ram, accompanied by three types of unleavened bread, stands in typological relationship to other offerings that are consumed by their owners. As noted in Mishnah Menahot 6:1–2, the *todah* (thanksgiving offering) – or, according to Grossman, all *shelamim* offerings[16] – is accompanied by all three varieties of unleavened bread (*matza*-bread, wafers brushed with oil and soaked cakes) as well as *hametz*, leavened bread, which is consumed by Israelites in the home; and the nazirite-offering,[17] which includes only two varieties of unleavened bread, is cooked in the sanctuary but eaten in the home.

These typologies raise a crucial question: what authorizes the ordinary Israelite to consume sacred offerings, to "sup with God," and in his own home no less? For this, there exists an ordination-offering for all Israelites, on the *shelamim*-continuum – in fact, as Mishnah Shekalim (2:5) teaches, unused animals consecrated for this offering revert to *shelamim*-status – but with only one unleavened bread variety.

This offering – the culmination of the encampment's formation and the capstone of the ordination process – is designated a *pesah*, a term conventionally translated as "pass over" but which may more accurately connote "covering" or "hovering,"[18] signifying the extension of divine presence into the domestic sphere. In the wilderness context, this rite is performed a single time, serving as the final integrative act in the creation of the sanctuary-camp complex. The offering is slaughtered within the

15 Grossman and Hadad, "The Ram of Ordination," 490-491.

16 Jonathan Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service: Gestures of Flesh and Spirit* (Heb.) (Maggid, 2021), 483-484.

17 This offering seems to "ordain" the nazirite as a gift to the altar upon the conclusion of his term; in contrast to the Levite, who is pressed into service for the priests, for the ordinary Israelite this translates into the burning of his or her hair in the sanctuary as symbol of the self even as the erstwhile nazirite consumes the offering in her home, thus adding consecration to that space. See Eliezer Diamond, "An Israelite self-offering in the priestly code: A new perspective on the Nazirite," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (1997), 1-18.

18 See e.g., Meredith G. Kline, "The Feast of Cover-over," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 (1994), 497-497; Raymond Apple, "Is Pesah Passover?," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 46:1 (2018), 33-40.

sanctified precincts but roasted and consumed within the home, which thereby functions as an extension of the altar's domain. As with the *ayl milu'im* – the ram of ordination – the primary focus of the *pesah* is its consumption (see Pesahim 62b, 76b), a fact reflected in several of its distinctive legal features.[19] By partaking of the offering, Israelite households are symbolically incorporated into the cultic system and authorized for sacred consumption, much like the priests who are inaugurated by ritual daubing and shared sacrificial meals. The sprinkling of blood upon the people at Sinai (Exod. 24:5–8)[20] anticipates this transformation. With the communal eating of the *pesah*, the Israelites themselves undergo a form of ordination. Consequently, exclusion from the rite entails exclusion from the sacred complex as a whole: the individual – and by extension, their household – is "cut off" from the people.

Once the sanctuary-encampment transitions from the desolate wilderness to settled habitation, however, new conditions emerge. Each spring, as barren landscapes yield to verdant growth and homes begin to fill with agricultural abundance, the *pesah* is re-enacted to preserve the primacy of sacred order. At this liminal moment – coinciding with the outset of the harvest – the rite is renewed, now embedded within a seven-day period of domestic transformation. In a ritual echo of the *milu'im*, each household is temporarily converted into a precinct of the sanctuary by removing *ḥametz*, leavened bread. This substance, typically cultivated through heirloom sourdough starters passed down through generations, serves as a marker of continuity, tradition, and civilizational rootedness. By abstaining from *ḥametz*, the Israelite home reverts to a state of cultivated wilderness – a "desert dwelling" mirroring the primordial conditions of divine presence (*tohu va-bohu*).[21] As long as the sacred *precedes* human constructs – of power, permanence, and productivity – the reintroduction of *ḥametz* following the festival affirms its subordination to, rather than dominance over, the sanctified domain. In this manner, civilization is ritually re-admitted into the sacred home, alongside the *matzah* of the *todah* and *shelamim* offerings.

Timing is Everything

If the *korban pesah* functions as the culmination of the Israelite encampment's sanctification, its timing raises a significant question: Why was it deferred until

19 See Spiegelman, "Korban ha-Pesah," for a full exposition.

20 Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, p. 625 n. 51 takes note of this with regard to ordination of the Israelites, in a distinct but related context.

21 See Aton M. Holzer, "Blood, Ash, and Goats in the Möbius Mikdash," *Tradition* 56:1 (2024), 50-62.

the fourteenth of Nisan? Why not perform it immediately following the final tribal offering of the princes on the twelfth or thirteenth?[22]

In the ancient Near East, the inauguration of temple precincts was typically marked by the placement of a cult statue into the inner sanctum.[23] This is obviously not workable for the Israelite context; it would seem that the text resists even the use of the divine quasi-divine representative[24] Ark of the Covenant for this purpose – reporting its inclusion in the tabernacle structure first among its furniture rather than last, with no particular fanfare (40:21) – even as the ark does seem to have accomplished this function in Solomon's temple. This textual resistance to anthropomorphized divine representation suggests a fundamentally different conception of sacred space. To extend Grossman's application of the Mesopotamian *mīs pî* and *pīt pî* proposal, it seems that the acts of "rinsing" and "feeding" associated with the consecration of vessels and personnel also apply – metaphorically – to the activation of sacred spaces.

In rabbinic tradition, the ideal moment for consecration – whether of offerings by vessels or vessels by offerings – is when the process achieves maximal saturation (Zevahim 88a). Solomon's dedication of the First Temple reflects this principle: not only the altar, but the entire courtyard was sanctified through a massive influx of sacrifices which were slaughtered on every inch of the courtyard floor (1 Kgs. 8:64). For the Holy of Holies, the medium of suffusion was not sacrifice but the divine presence itself, represented by a cloud that filled the entire space (Exod. 40:34; 1 Kgs. 8:11). On a regular basis, this saturation was recreated via the incense cloud of the Yom Kippur rite (Lev. 16:2).[25]

Within this conceptual framework, Aaron's kindling of the *menorah* (Num. 8:1–4) can be understood as inaugurating not merely the candelabrum but the *kodesh* – the

22 Jonathan Grossman pointed out that the requirement of taking the *pesah* four days earlier (ostensibly for *bikur mumin*, checking for defects, as per Rashi Pesahim 96a s.v. *le-mishmeret*), as operative in the first *pesah* (Exodus 12:3), would place the preparatory phases in closer proximity to the end of the inauguration, at least according to the view that it was concluded on 8 Nisan.

23 Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Inauguration of Palaces and Temples in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," *Orient* 49 (2014), 89-105.

24 With regard to the diverse and apparently ambivalent treatments of the Ark in scripture and Biblical aniconism, see Benjamin D. Sommer, *The bodies of God and the world of ancient Israel*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 80-108, and a contrary, synchronic approach in Mark Enemali, "Divine Presence in the Ark of the Covenant in 1 Samuel 4:1b–7:1," in Corrine Carvalho and John McLaughlin, eds. *God and gods in the Deuteronomistic History* (Wipf and Stock, 2024) 104-126.

25 Meir Spiegelman, "Ha-Kohanim, ha-Mishkan ve-Ohel Mo'ed be-Yom ha-Kippurim," in Amnon Bazak, et al., eds., *U-Ve-Yom Tzom Kippur Yehatemun: Studies on Yom Ha-Kippurim* (Heb.), (Tevunot, 2005), 43-72.

sanctum itself – by illuminating it fully. If the incense cloud "filled" the Holy of Holies, then light served to fill the adjacent sacred space.

Unlike the *kodesh*, the Temple courtyard was naturally filled each day by sunlight. The priest does not kindle the sun, of course, but the morning *tamid* offering was synchronized with sunrise in ways that suggest deliberate liturgical alignment. According to Mishnah Tamid 3:2, the *tamid* procedure begins at daybreak, and the animal is slaughtered the moment the sun rises and the sanctuary doors are opened (3:7). R. Yoel Bin-Nun interprets this precise timing as ritually joining the sun's emergence to Israel's worship, a liturgical enactment of Psalm 72:5 – "let them fear you *with* the sun."[26] The orientation of the *tamid* sacrifice mirrors this astronomical cycle: in the morning, the animal is positioned on the northwest side of the altar, and in the afternoon, on the northeast (Mishnah Tamid 4:1).[27] In this way, the *tamid* offerings bracket the Temple day, serving as its sunrise and sunset, and all other offerings must occur between them. The blessing of *Yotzer Or* that praises God for creating the heavenly bodies was recited in the Temple alongside the sacrificial rites (Mishnah Tamid 5:1) either immediately in the morning or with the rise of the sun (Berakhot 11b-12a), allaying any concerns of sun worship.

If light filled the sanctum and sunlight filled the courtyard, what filled the *maḥaneh Yisrael* – the Israelite camp, sanctified through the *pesah*? The answer is: moonlight.

Jonathan Grossman, in discussing the longstanding debate over whether the biblical day begins at sunset or sunrise,[28] proposes a striking conclusion: night is not counted in and of itself. It is not a period of human or divine activity, and its status – whether preceding or following the day – depends on context.[29] Yet, Grossman's analysis may be further nuanced. While the night may not "count" as active time in a calendrical sense, it does have distinct symbolic content: it is the time of divine indwelling, of *tohu* and *ḥoshekh*, the chaos and darkness in which sacred transformation occurs. It is the time of the *deshen* – the leftover ashes removed from the altar – and of the *ḥatat*, whose final disposition takes place in this liminal period.

26 Yoel Bin-Nun, *Zakhor VeShamor: The Meeting of Nature and History in the Sabbath and the Festival Calendar* (Heb.) (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2015), 253.

27 See discussion of this and mysteries surrounding the afternoon Tamid in Peter Trudinger, *The Psalms of the Tamid Service: A Liturgical Text from the Second Temple* (Brill, 2003), p. 18, n. 17.

28 See a comprehensive analysis of sources in J. Amanda McGuire, "Evening or Morning: When Does the Biblical Day Begin?," *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 46:2 (2008), 201-214.

29 Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, 505-506.

It is the silent phase of the sanctuary, paired with the daylight tabernacle of human activity.[30]

The *pesah* offering extends the altar's domain spatially – into Israelite homes rendered leaven-free, desert-like sanctuaries. Logically, it also extends the domain temporally, into the night. To fully consecrate the lay encampment, that extension must occur when nighttime reaches its most luminous fullness – under the light of the full moon, the fifteenth of the lunar month.[31] Thus, the *korban pesah* is unique among offerings in that its ritual action begins only after the afternoon *tamid* has been completed, and its consumption is strictly nocturnal (Mishnah Pesahim 5:1). The offering must be eaten indoors after nightfall and consumed entirely by morning.

Though eaten within the home, the ritual may have reached outward. According to the Talmud (Pesahim 86a), the *Hallel* may have been recited from the rooftops, timed to the full moon's zenith at midnight.[32] In this ritual moment, Psalms 113–118 are recited along with *Hallel ha-Gadol* (Psalm 136), which explicitly praises God for creating the moon (vv. 7, 9) – the very verses quoted in the *Yotzer Or* blessing. This alignment suggests a deliberate liturgical counterpoint to ancient Mesopotamian *šapattu* moon rituals, reaffirming that celestial bodies are not gods but creations of the one God.[33]

Josephus offers a remarkable parallel. In *Antiquities* 18.2.2, he reports that during the Passover in the early first century CE, the Temple gates were opened just after midnight – mirroring the sunrise gate-opening for the *tamid* sacrifice. This striking symmetry reinforces the conceptualization of night and day as ritual complements:

30 Or, more precisely, it is the time of activity of a 'shadow sanctuary' that lies in the desert beyond the mikdash. See Holzer, "Blood, Ash and Goats," 56.

31 Echoes of a moon-sanctification ritual appear to be reflected in the monthly outdoor nighttime liturgy performed only until the full moon; it is known colloquially as *kiddush levana*, 'sanctification of the moon,' long thought to be a late misnomer (see, e.g., Menachem Raab, "Kiddush ha-Hodesh, Kiddush ha-Levanah and Birkat ha-Hodesh," *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 27 (2005) 1-10, p. 5) but actually reflected in some earlier sources. See Yaakov Shmuel Spiegel, "On the Terms 'Kiddush Hodesh', 'Birkat Levana' and 'Kiddush Levana'" (Heb.) *Sidra* 22 (2007), 185–200.

32 Ari Zivotofsky suggests that this may be the source of the contemporary practice, first cited in the mid-fifteenth century, of opening the door 'for Elijah' before reciting *hallel* at the Passover *seder*. See his "What's the Truth about . . . Eliyahu HaNavi at the Seder?," *Jewish Action* (Spring 2012), archived at https://jewishaction.com/religion/shabbat-holidays/passover/whats-the-truth-about-eliyahu-hanavi-at-the-seder/ and accessed on November 12, 2024.

33 For a full discussion see Markham J Geller, "šapattu," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 12 (DeGruyter, 2009), 25–27.

the lunar fullness of *pesah* serving as nocturnal counterpart to the solar rhythms of the *tamid*.

If the full moon of the first month – Nisan – is missed, only one lunar cycle remains before the harvest concludes and leavened bread returns to Israelite homes. The next – and final – full moon of opportunity is the fourteenth of Iyyar. It is precisely this moon that is designated for *Pesah Sheni*. The timing thus serves a dual purpose: it offers a second chance for individual inclusion and reopens the ritual window to admit the divine presence into Israelite homes before the altar is crowned with leavened loaves on *Yom ha-Bikkurim*, the festival of first fruits.

In this light, *Pesah Sheni* is not merely a pragmatic rescheduling. It is a theological extension of the original rite – spatially, temporally, and symbolically – ensuring that no household is left unillumined, no Israelite camp left unconsecrated.

Terraform Movement

In the closing sections of Numbers 9 and 10, the sanctuary-encampment complex, now fully constituted and ritually consecrated – including the trumpet system for ritual and martial coordination (Num. 10:1–10) – is poised to set out for the Promised Land. The narrative anticipates an idealized forward momentum: the divine presence, now mobile, will lead the Israelites into Canaan, scattering their enemies and guiding the Ark and Tabernacle to their permanent resting places. The camp is imagined not merely as a traveling collective but as a sanctified formation capable of "terraforming" the land through its presence.

This vision is encapsulated in the liturgical formula attributed to Moses:

> When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say: "Advance, O Lord! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!" And when it halted, he would say: "Return, O Lord, [You who are] Israel's myriads of thousands!" (Num. 10:35–36).

Baruch Levine interprets the verb "return" (*shuv*) in this context as invoking *shav shevut* – the safe return and settlement of the divine presence within Israel's midst, now envisioned as established within their territorial allotments.[34]

Yet this ideal scenario is immediately subverted. The subsequent verse inaugurates a narrative collapse: "The people took to complaining bitterly before the Lord. The Lord heard and was incensed: a fire of the Lord broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp" (Num. 11:1). The very momentum of the sanctified camp is

34 Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible 4) (Doubleday, 1993), 319.

arrested by internal breakdown. The redemptive movement toward the land is stalled, much like the earlier disruption of the priestly ordination narrative in Leviticus 10, where the deaths of Nadab and Abihu derail the consecration sequence. In both cases, premature transgression follows closely upon ritual inauguration, producing disorientation and halting the forward progression of the sacred project.

Rabbinic tradition is acutely aware of this rupture. *Sifre Bemidbar* 4 already flags the so-called "Song of the Ark" (Num. 10:35–36) as anomalous – a liturgical fragment detached from historical fulfillment. The expected conquest of the land by the sanctified camp, led by the Ark, does not occur in the seamless, triumphant manner anticipated. Instead, the community is immediately ensnared by complaint, punishment, and delay.

Nonetheless, a compelling recent reading[35] has underscored that the vision articulated in Numbers 10 does, in a qualified form, find partial realization in the Book of Joshua. A close reading of Joshua 3–8 reveals that the Ark assumes a structuring, almost ritual role in the conquest narrative. It leads the Israelites across the Jordan, encircles Jericho, and marks the site of covenant renewal at Mount Ebal. While the conquest falls short of the automatic, totalizing vision of Numbers 10:35, the Ark's function as the spiritual and spatial axis of the Israelite encampment remains intact. The sanctified camp does enter the land; it does encounter enemies; and it does, in a real if limited way, effect transformation. The utopia envisioned in Numbers 10 is thus deferred, but not entirely negated.

This interpretive framework also clarifies the narrative and rhetorical parallels between the complaints of the ritually impure householders in Numbers 9 and those of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27) and the clan leaders of Gilead (Num. 36). All three episodes center on anxieties over exclusion from the land's inheritance. The Gileadite leaders fear that the land apportioned to their tribe will be transferred to other tribes through intermarriage. Zelophehad's daughters worry that their father's inheritance will be lost due to the absence of male heirs. Similarly, the impure householders fear that failure to participate in the *pesah* offering – a rite that, as argued above, completes Israelite incorporation into the sanctified camp – will result in their exclusion from the communal complex that will enter and settle the land. In each case, the complaint prompts divine consultation and produces new legislation aimed at ensuring inclusion.

35 Thomas B. Dozeman, "'El, the Living': Divinity and Holy War in the Book of Joshua," in *God and Gods in the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Corrine Carvalho and John McLaughlin (Wipf and Stock, 2024), 1-29.

Taken together, these episodes reinforce the narrative logic by which ritual participation – especially in the context of the *korban pesah* – is directly linked to eligibility for territorial inheritance. The *pesah*, as the rite that completes the sanctification of the Israelite encampment, becomes a prerequisite not merely for ritual participation, but for full inclusion in the covenantal polity poised to possess the land.

The Impossibility and Necessity of a *Pesah* in Egypt

By the time a reader has followed the intricate process of sanctifying the Israelite camp and its concentric domains, the revelation that a *pesah* offering was conducted before the construction of the Tabernacle – indeed, while the Israelites were still in Egypt – may come as a surprise. This seeming anomaly prompts a fundamental reconsideration of the relationship between ritual structure, narrative logic, and theological intent.

On one level, the *korban pesah* is best understood as the culmination of the sanctification process: it extends the reach of the altar from the sacred center to the periphery, enabling divine presence to dwell not only in the sanctuary but in the homes of the Israelites. It follows the construction of the Tabernacle, aligning with the final stage of the *milu'im* sequence. On the other hand, the *pesah* offering also functions as a prerequisite for Israelite incorporation into the ritual system. Just as the Aaronide priests consumed offerings before their full ordination (e.g., the *ayl milu'im*), and the tribal leaders presented offerings that participated in the altar's sanctification, so too the Israelite laity required a rite that prepared them for sacred consumption and inclusion. Thus, the *pesah* is both foundational and climactic: it is at once the "chicken" and the "egg" of the sanctuary-encampment complex.

From this perspective, the Tabernacle's construction required a kind of "*pesah* sandwich": first, the homes and individuals of Israel must be ritually consecrated; then the sanctuary, with its concentric spheres of sanctity, is built from within this ordained community; and finally, the sanctity radiates back outward, reaffirming the incorporation of the laity into the ritual order.

At the conclusion of the divinely preordained period of Israelite servitude (Gen. 15:13), the time had come for their departure from Egypt and for the worship of God at Sinai – where the Tabernacle would be erected. Ideally, this moment would have coincided with the celebration of the *pesah* in the wilderness. However, Moses encountered resistance from Pharaoh, who offered only partial release – suggesting, for instance, that only the men might depart (Exod. 10:11). Such a limited exodus would not suffice, as the *pesah* presupposes full communal participation, including

women, children, and all who will share in the inheritance of the land, such as the daughters of Zelophehad.

Given Pharaoh's refusal, the plan was modified: the *pesah* would be performed in Egypt. Yet this required a transformation of the Egyptian landscape itself. God effectively "deconstructed" Egyptian civilization, reducing it to a wilderness-like state. The plagues successively disrupted water systems, devastated agriculture, and unleashed environmental chaos – marine life, insects, disease, and fire. By the time of the locusts and the plague of darkness, Egypt's infrastructure and agrarian economy had collapsed, its cultural stability undone.

That which the ancient world considered the oldest, and certainly the preeminent, civilization was no match for the deity who "turns the rivers into a wilderness, springs of water into thirsty land, fruitful land into a salt marsh" (Ps. 107:33–34). By the time of the final plague, barley had already been destroyed and wheat had not yet ripened (Exod. 9:31–32), making *ḥametz* rare. The conditions were now suitable for a *pesah* offering in a non-urban, non-civilizational context. Lastly, the thick cloud of darkness descended upon Egypt, as it later did in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34), in advance of Divine indwelling.

In the absence of an altar, the offering had to be adapted to a domestic setting. The doorway of each house became a makeshift *petah ohel mo'ed* – the entrance to the sanctuary. Rather than smearing blood on the altar, the Israelites daubed it on the doorposts, the architectural threshold marking sacred transition. If the door was the entrance to the sanctuary, then the space beyond was transformed into a sanctum. And like the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle during the *milu'im* period – before the kindling of the *menorah* – the space was off-limits, a dangerous zone of divine immanence.

This configuration reflects the theology of sacred risk. As Isaiah declares: "For the Lord of Hosts has a day against all that is proud and arrogant... and human haughtiness shall be humbled... None but the Lord shall be exalted on that day" (Isa. 2:12–17). Divine proximity exposes pretenders to authority to existential danger. Scripture confirms that the first victims of sacred encounter gone awry are not commoners but elites: Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2), Korah's assembly of princes (Num. 16:2), unauthorized Temple functionaries like Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:7) and Uzziah (2 Chr. 26:19), and ultimately, Egypt's firstborn. As Exodus 12:36 suggests, this divine incursion extended to all human and divine presences occupying sacred space, culminating in the symbolic annihilation of Egyptian gods (cf. Isa. 2:18).

In this context, only Moses – "the most humble man on earth" (Num. 12:3) – could safely traverse zones of holiness. Lacking priestly or royal pretensions,

he required no special purification or mediating rites. Similarly, only a king who voluntarily abased himself – such as David, dancing before the Ark (2 Sam. 6:20) – could facilitate the Ark's relocation. It is thus unsurprising that, a month later, it was precisely Israel's newly designated leaders – priests, Levites, and tribal princes – who were required to bring *ḥatat* offerings before the *pesah* of the second year, which reaffirmed the sanctity of the newly formed camp and its institutions.

In the first month, then, Egypt is transformed into a wilderness. In the second, God provides an initial form of indwelling over the desert camp: the daily manna. Like the *pesah*, the manna is first consumed on the fifteenth of the month (Exod. 16). It is gathered in discrete portions, one per household, and may not be left over until morning – rules that echo the Passover ritual.[36] The night of the full moon in Iyyar thus becomes a proto-*Pesah Sheni*, a sign of God's continuing presence even before the formal sanctification of the Tabernacle.

In the years to come, the memory of the *pesah* in Egypt would become essential to maintaining the integrity of the sacred complex. It would provide a paradigm for resisting the encroachments of settled life and for reasserting the wilderness ideal. The annual ritual would thus be coupled with pedagogical narration: "And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me [or, more precisely, 'it is because of this (the *pesah*) that the Lord did for me'] when I went free from Egypt.'" (Exod. 13:8). The *pesah*, as reconsecration of the sacred desert encampment, becomes both commemoration and condition – an act that justifies divine redemption and perpetuates covenantal identity.

The Philosophy of *Pesah*: Altarity and Alterity

A profound ethical vision emerges from the architecture and ritual dynamics of the Israelite sacred complex – one that stands in stark contrast to the dominant religious ideologies of the ancient Near East.

The cults of the surrounding civilizations tended to sacralize existing political hierarchies.[37] Divine authority mirrored terrestrial power structures: as in heaven, so on earth. The pantheon typically reproduced royal and aristocratic configurations,

36 These regulatory and linguistic parallels are explored by Jonathan Grossman, "The Manna and the Paschal Sacrifice," archived at https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-beshalach/beshalach-manna-and-paschal-sacrifice and accessed on November 12, 2024.

37 A full discussion of this can be found in the late American sociologist Robert N. Bellah's magnum opus, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Harvard University Press, 2017); see especially 212–246 with regard to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian contexts.

with a chief god reigning as monarch, and earthly kings acquiring divine or semi-divine status in turn. Gender roles were likewise inscribed into the divine order, with deities representing essentialized masculine and feminine archetypes. Religion thus legitimated inherited office, fixed class stratification, and an inviolable social order.[38]

Against this backdrop, the Israelite *pesah* ritual and its accompanying sanctuary-encampment complex express a radically different theology – one that anticipates what scholars have termed the "Axial Age." Between the eighth and second centuries BCE, "we meet with the most deepcut dividing line in history."[39] Multiple civilizations across the ancient world (from Greece and Persia to India and China) witnessed the emergence of new moral and philosophical frameworks. These developments, broadly classified under the term "Axial religion," are characterized by a turn toward transcendence, abstraction, and ethical universality. In these traditions, prophetic figures, sages, and ascetics challenged the legitimacy of entrenched power, deconstructed traditional cosmologies, and affirmed the dignity and equality of all persons. The period marks the emergence of Axial religion, in which "moral upstarts" such as prophets, renunciators and wisdom teachers read texts, challenged societal power structures and reality itself, and broke through to the theoretical, to transcendence – to "universal ethics, the reassertion of fundamental human equality, and the necessity of respect for all humans, indeed for all sentient beings."[40] The origins of this axial transformation remain debated, but its moral trajectory is unmistakable: a redefinition of religion as critique rather than sanction of power.

The ideology implicit in *pesah* and the wilderness sanctuary suggests a similarly subversive vision. The God of Israel is wholly other – *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* – radically separate from the structures of civilization. He is not enthroned within the machinery of empire but inhabits desolation. He is not flattered by hierarchy or impressed by might. Kings, priests, and chieftains are not automatically welcome in His presence; they must first acknowledge the provisional nature of their authority and atone for their proximity to power. Even the celestial "rulers" – sun and moon – are subordinated to His service. As Isaiah affirms, this God "dwells on high, in holiness," yet paradoxically chooses to dwell "with the contrite and lowly in spirit" (Isa. 57:15).

38 For a full exposition of this point and its contrast with the Hebrew Bible, see Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddesses: Women, culture, and the biblical transformation of pagan myth* (Free Press, 1992); idem., *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* (Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 187-188.

39 Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History (Routledge Revivals)* (Routledge, 2014), 2.

40 Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution,* 606.

And, Emmanuel Levinas argues, the Israelite God invites us to find Him in the face of the other, which "orders and ordains" us.[41]

This theological posture reframes the meaning of Israelite civilization itself. Though Israel would ultimately settle the land, build cities, and cultivate agriculture, these structures are not absolute. They are contingent, built atop a memory of wandering. Even when inviting God to a festive bread-laden table, the Israelite must remember the *milu'im* rituals of the desert. At the core of Israel's national existence lies the barren *kodesh ha-kodashim*, the Holy of Holies – a space inaccessible, unadorned, and radically removed from human constructs.

This is symbolized in the ritual rejection of leaven. No *ḥametz* is permitted on the altar. One week each year, Israelites renounce the permanence and plenitude of leavened bread – its fermentation processes, its cultural inheritance, its association with settled life. They return, temporarily, to a nomadic existence, transforming their homes into desert sanctuaries.[42] On the night of the full moon, they re-enact their ordination by recalling the original *pesah*, which shattered a civilization that had become too deeply entrenched, too powerful, too enslaving. This ritual serves as a permanent warning: the very structures that provide stability and abundance can become instruments of oppression if not regularly destabilized by sacred memory.

Thus, the *pesah* is not merely a commemoration of past redemption; it is a theological and moral recalibration. It reminds Israel not only of what God has done but of what Israel must never become.

41 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and infinity* (Duquesne University Press, 1985), 97.

42 This individualistic intuition is perhaps sensed and reflected in Rabbinic law, such as that the paschal offering, atypically, may only be slaughtered for (Pesahim 5:3) or consumed by (Zevahim 5:8) those registered in advance. For an interesting modern correlate, see sources in Yona Reiss, "The Minhag of '*not mishing*' – not eating out over Pesach," *cRc Pesach Guide* (2019), 35-37.