

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

JANUARY 20, 2024

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of
Z'ev Ben Zion, William Freiman. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 15

10 SHEVAT

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BO

The Future Begins Now

That you may tell in the ears of your son, and of your grandson, how I toyed with the Egyptians, and my signs which I have done among them; that you may know that I am Hashem [...] (10:2).

The Torah informs us that one of the purposes of the *makkos* was to provide us with a tool to explain to our children the greatness of Hashem. This, of course, is the source of the *mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim*, relating the events that unfolded in Egypt.

However, the construct of the verse is a little odd; the verse ends with the words "that you may know that I am Hashem." As the purpose of describing what occurred in Egypt is to relate the greatness of Hashem, would it not seem imperative for the narrator of the story to first know the greatness of Hashem before he tells it over to his children? Why is it only AFTER relating the story that one becomes sensitized to the greatness of Hashem?

The Torah is revealing to us a remarkable truism of life. Obviously, one must know the facts of the story before giving them over, but the lesson of the story, and what we learn to do as a result of it, is somewhat fluid. There are many people in possession of facts who make contrary life choices. Whether it's about quitting smoking, losing weight, or leaving an abusive relationship, people often choose one more cigarette, one more donut, and one more day; knowing full well that the decision is

incorrect.

We live in a culture that is often preoccupied with "*yichus*" — one's lineage, as in parents and grandparents. However, most fail to recognize that the truly defining element of one's relationship with Hashem is the *yichus* of our children and grandchildren. This is the only real *yichus* that we should be preoccupied with. Why? Because nearly everyone will follow the path their children and grandchildren have chosen — when it comes to choosing between family and religion most people choose family. In other words, if our kids become more religious we make decisions to accommodate them and if, *chalilah*, they choose otherwise we make decisions to accommodate that choice as well, even if it means compromising our own former value system.

The *possuk* is teaching us that only AFTER teaching the greatness of Hashem to your children will you "know that I am Hashem." Remarkably, your relationship with Hashem depends on how well you have taught your children because that will likely define where you end up as well.



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Who is a Jew?

[...] at midnight Hashem struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon (12:29).

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the firstborn sons of the captives were killed. After all, they weren't even citizens of Egypt and had nothing to do with the enslavement of the Jews. Rashi therefore explains it was either because they were rejoicing at how the Jews were being treated (and would have participated had they been given an opportunity — much like the Nazi soldiers who claimed "to only be following orders" but in every picture they are laughing and jeering while terrorizing and abusing the German and Polish Jews) — or so that the captives couldn't claim it was "their" God who was bringing *Makkos Bechoros* upon the Egyptians. In other words, according to Rashi, had it not been for those two reasons the children of the captives would not have died.

This is difficult to understand, especially since Moshe instructed the Jews to put the blood of the *Korban Pesach* on the door posts of their homes so that they would be

protected and not affected by the tenth plague. This means that the first born sons of the Jews would have died unless there was blood on the door posts. How is it possible that Jews would be more susceptible to the plague than the children of the captives in the dungeons?

There seems to be only one possible explanation: there was no decree of death from the plague on foreigners — *Makkos Bechoros* was only a decree on the Egyptians. That is why the children of the captives would have been excluded. But the Jews faced an existential quandary of self-definition. Are we Egyptian Jews or Jewish Egyptians?

After a year in which the Jews were relieved of their enslavement (slavery ended once the plagues began) and had started to accumulate wealth (because they weren't affected by the plagues they had economic opportunities; they sold water during the plague of blood, etc.) many Jews began to

feel like privileged Egyptian citizens. In fact, up to 80% of the Jews died during the plague of darkness (see Rashi 13:18), seemingly because they wouldn't have left Egypt even if given the opportunity to do so (quite alarmingly, in today's day and age the percentage of Jews who would choose to stay in America given similar circumstances might even be higher).

The tenth plague came to differentiate between the Jews and the Egyptians. Those Jews who felt they were Egyptian citizens first were judged as Egyptians. Moshe gave the people the sign on how to define themselves: If you're an Egyptian Jew put the blood of the *Korban Pesach* on the doorpost; if you're merely a Jewish Egyptian then you will meet the same fate as the Egyptians.



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