

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת בא

ולמען תספר באזני בנך ובן בנך את אשר התעללתי במצרים ואת אתתי אשר שמתני בם וידעתם כי אני ה'

“And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I have amused Myself with Egypt and My signs that I placed among them - that you may know that I am Hashem” (10:2)

Why would one first teach his child and only then become aware of the greatness of Hashem? Is it not necessary to have knowledge of Hashem before teaching about Him to his children? The answer is that many parents come to grow through teaching their children. Teaching children increases their appreciation and knowledge of Hashem. This is similar to the statement of the Gemara that a teacher learns more from his students than from his teachers or his peers.

When someone teaches another person who knows less, not only will he be imparting valuable knowledge to his student but he himself will grow as well. His Avodas Hashem will become more meaningful as he will have gained a greater appreciation for how he conducts his daily life.

ויאמר משה בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך בבנינו ובבנותנו בצאננו ובבקרנו נלך כי חג ה' לנו
“Moshe said: With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters, with our flock and with our cattle we shall go, because it is a festival of Hashem for us” (10:9)

Why did Moshe mention the youth before the elders? Is it not more respectful to give precedence to the elders? The Ksav Sofer answers that the slavery in Mitzrayim was a lot harder for the youth than for the elders. The elders had experienced what it meant to live as a Jew in easier times with more freedom to serve Hashem. However, the youth were in great spiritual danger because they had no understanding of what it meant to serve Hashem in peace. Therefore, it was the youth who had to get out first. The Mesillas Yesharim explains that Pharaoh's plan to keep the Jews at bay was to keep them busy and increase their workload. The Yetzer Hara works in a similar fashion and works to distract us and keep us busy so that we do not take the time to think about our spiritual pursuits. These youths had never had the ability to focus on their Avodas Hashem and their need to leave Egypt was more urgent than that of the elders.

R' Moshe MiKoznitz gives a homiletic interpretation. “Binareinu u'vizkeneinu” can be understood to mean that what we are in our youth is how we are in our old age. He says that when one is young, one sets the tone that he will follow for the remainder of his life. The habits and behaviors that a younger person develops will stick with him for the rest of his life.

**החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה
“This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year” (12:2)**

Why is Rosh Chodesh the first mitzvah of the Torah? We must remember that this mitzvah was given to slaves. One of the hallmarks of slaves is that time means nothing to them. They cannot determine what they do and how they spend their time. A free person is the master of his own time. He can do what he wants with it. By first giving them the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh, Hashem indicated to the Jews that they were now a free nation.

In order to be free, Hashem had to remove the marks of slavery from them, namely, the lack of control over time and money. That is why Hashem also instructed them to take money from the Egyptians. Although the Torah was the true goal of the exodus, it was not enough of a lure for the people to get up and leave. They had to be persuaded through freedom, as symbolized by their newly acquired

time and money, two things that they had not possessed in many years. This was meant as an initial progression out of slavery and ultimately to Torah and finally to Eretz Yisrael, the land which is provided in order to fulfill the Torah to the highest degree.

והיה הדם לכם לאת על הבתים אשר אתם שם וראיתי את הדם ופסחתי עלכם ולא יהיה בכם נגף למשחית בהכתי בארץ מצרים

“The blood will be a sign for you upon the houses where you are; and I will see the blood and I shall pass over you; there will not be a plague among you, to destroy, when I strike in the land of Egypt” (12:13)

Upon inspection of the pesukim that describe the plague of the firstborn, there seem to be some inconsistencies in the narrative. Hashem says "I will smite the firstborn of Egypt, but I will not allow the destroying plague to enter the houses." What is the source of the plague, Hashem Himself or a terrible plague? If Hashem is carrying out the judgment Himself, why is there a need for special protection for the Jews? Hashem knows who to kill and who to spare?! Additionally, the posuk in Tehillim says, "To smite Egypt with their firstborn." What does it mean that Egypt was punished "with their firstborn?" Also, how could it possibly be that there was "no house without a dead person?" Not every household necessarily had a firstborn male child?

Rabbi Meir Fulda of Yeshiva University quotes the answer of the Bais HaLevi who says that there were two different things that happened. First, Hashem smote every firstborn Himself. Then, Hashem caused every corpse to miraculously putrify instantaneously and that triggered a natural plague that was highly contagious, similar to the bubonic plague from the Middle Ages. This plague was indiscriminate and spread like wildfire. This was the plague that the Bnei Yisrael had to be protected from because the plague naturally affected whomever it encountered. Hashem was indeed precise, but the plague was unpredictable and thus the Jews required Hashem's miraculous protection so that the plague should pass over them.

Now we can also answer the other two questions. The Egyptians were smitten with their firstborn because their corpses set off widespread death throughout Egypt. Furthermore, there was indeed no house without a dead person. Even in those houses that had no firstborn male child contained someone who fell victim to the natural plague. This also explains why the Egyptians drove the Jews out of Egypt saying, "we will all die." They were not afraid of the supernatural death with which Hashem slew the firstborn. They were afraid that the plague would get to them and they knew that the plague would stop once the Jews had left them.

ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה' אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל במצרים בנגפו את מצרים ואת בתינו הציל ויקד העם וישתחו

“You shall say: It is a pesach feast-offering to Hashem, Who passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but He saved our households; and the people vowed and prostrated themselves” (12:27)

Rashi says that the Jews were literally between the Egyptians, with an Egyptian house on the right and one on the left. Hashem had to skip over the Jews in order to avoid them while killing the Egyptians. This Rashi teaches us what caused the Jews to sink to such a low level of impurity. Although they had originally kept to themselves in Goshen, they eventually went out and became neighbors with the Egyptians and associated with them. They were literally surrounded by the Egyptians in all aspects of their lives. This was a major part of the spiritual problem that affected the Jews in Egypt.

והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים

“And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: It is on account of this that Hashem did for me

when I left Egypt” (13:8)

Rashi says that "Hashem took us out because of this" means that Hashem took us out "in order to fulfill His will, such as these mitzvos of Pesach, matza and maror." R' Yerucham Levovitz, former mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva in Europe, writes that Rashi gives us an insight into the connection between the exodus and the mitzvos. Matza and maror were not given to remind us of the exodus, but the exodus happened to allow for the fulfillment of mitzvos such as matza and maror. "This" refers to the ability to do all mitzvos. The reason behind the mitzvos is not the exodus. The exodus provided the ability to do the mitzvos.

Similarly, we can say that when blessings are bestowed upon us today, it might not be because of what we have done in the past to earn the blessings. It may be given to us because of what we will make with the gift, what will do with it in the future. We must view the blessings that Hashem provides us with in terms of the future and think about what we can use the blessings for.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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