



## Parsha Perspectives RABBI YOAV DRUYAN

...ייה חושך אפילה בכל ארץ מצריים שלושת ימים...  
לא ראו איש את אחיו ולא קמו איש מתחתיו שלושת ימים...

"Let there be darkness in the land of Egypt, a palpable darkness ... No man saw his fellow and no man rose from his place for three days..." (Deuteronomy 8:7)

**D**uring the plague of darkness, Egypt was plunged into blackness for three days and nights. While this plague was a fitting punishment for enslaving the Jewish nation, Rashi teaches us that it served another purpose as well. There were those amongst the Jewish people who were wicked and did not deserve to be redeemed. Under the cover of darkness, G-d killed them, giving them their just due while denying the Egyptians the satisfaction of seeing that not all the Jews would be leaving.

We may think, then, that all the Jews who left Egypt were righteous. Yet our sages teach us that this was hardly the case.

When Pharaoh gave the Jews permission to leave, they dropped everything and fled; they wanted to be far away before Pharaoh could change his mind. He did, in fact, change his mind and sent his army after them in hot pursuit, trapping the Jews between the Egyptian army and the shores of the Red Sea. At that moment, a prosecuting angel declared, "[The fleeing Israelites] are idol worshippers and [the Egyptians] are also idol worshippers!" (Midrash Mechilta Beshalach p. 4). While they were not entirely without merit, the Jews who left Egypt were actually considered wicked!

If the Jews who left Egypt were also wicked, why were some Jews killed during the plague of darkness in Egypt?! What was the difference between them?

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky suggests that the difference between them wasn't the level of wickedness. After all, idol worship is pretty much the bottom spiritual rung. A closer reading of Rashi reveals that the Jews who perished in Egypt weren't simply wicked; they desired to prevent their

brothers' departure from Egypt. They were unsatisfied with their own abandonment of G-d's laws and sought to coerce their fellow Jews into similar destructive behaviors. This was a sin that G-d would not forgive.

A smoker all his life, Jonathan can barely walk up a flight of stairs. He knows cigarettes are bad for him — in fact, he's tried several times to quit — but he hasn't yet been able to kick the habit. The most Jonathan has been able to do is to try to prevent his children from taking up smoking.

Lucas, on the other hand, laughs at anyone who tells him that smoking is unhealthy. He's sure that all the anti-smoking hype is simply bad politics. To prove his point, he hands out free cigarettes to others, hoping that if enough people object, the ridiculous anti-smoking laws will be repealed.

Jonathan and Lucas are engaged in the same behavior, but there is a world of difference between them! While Jonathan tries to keep others from following his example, Lucas attempts to draw others into his destructive ways, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience. He builds for himself a false sense of righteousness at the expense of others.

As responsible people, we try to avoid

behaviors that aren't good for us, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually. Sometimes however, we veer off course. The lesson from those who perished in Egypt is that if we do find ourselves involved in questionable activities, we must avoid the temptation to rationalize our behavior, or worse, to bring others along for the ride. If we're honest with ourselves and acknowledge that we're heading in the wrong direction, we'll have a much easier time getting back on track — with a little help from G-d.

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### WORD of the WEEK מזוזות

The Jews were commanded to place the blood of the Passover lamb on their מזוזות — *mezuzot* and on their *mashkof* — doorposts and lintel. The word *mezuzah* here means "doorpost." Later in history (already during the time of the Mishnah), the word *mezuzah* was used to refer to the parchment that we place on our doorpost, even though strictly speaking it means doorpost. Some explain that the word comes from the root זז — *zaz* — move (*Haktav Vehakabalah*) because the doorpost is the place where people move in and out of the house, and it's the place around which the door itself moves. The Zohar explains the word as an acronym for מות זז — *zaz mavet* — death is removed, because just as the blood on the doorposts of the Jewish homes in Egypt protected Jews from the plague of the firstborn and from death, so too every *mezuzah* also gives protection to the house (*Tikunei Zohar, Tikuna 10, 25a*).

## Table Talk FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

Prior to the last of the ten plagues, death of the firstborn, the Jews were given specific instructions to spare them from the fate that awaited the Egyptians: Prepare the Pesach offering; daub its blood on your doorposts; do not leave your homes until morning. They were told that during the night, when G-d would pass through Egypt to smite the firstborn, He would see the blood and prevent the avenging angel from entering their homes (Exodus 12: 21-23).

- נ) The avenging angel surely wasn't stymied by a simple door lock. If it were, the Egyptians would have been safe as well! Why might the Jews have been told to stay home for their own protection?
- ב) The verse says that G-d would "see" the blood upon the doorpost. Since G-d is not a physical being and does not need eyes in order to see, why doesn't the verse simply say that G-d will *know* who has fulfilled this commandment?

### A QUESTION FOR THE RABBIS

Rabbi Dov Berish Weidenfield (*Doveiv Meisharim* 3:73) was asked about a case in which two Jewish business partners were involved in a bitter dispute. In the midst of the argument, one swore an oath that "he would no longer see" the other's face. They had to face a government investigation and needed to meet each other to discuss their defense. Given the oath that one made, are they permitted to meet? Rabbi Weidenfield quotes the verse in our *parsha* in which Moses said to Pharaoh, "I will no longer see your face" (Exodus 10:29). Nevertheless, we find that Moses and Pharaoh did meet after that statement. Nachmanides, citing the Midrash, writes that when Moses said he would not see Pharaoh's face, his intention was that he would not come to meet Pharaoh; however, he was not excluding the possibility that Pharaoh would seek him out and come to meet him. Rabbi Weidenfield suggests that in order to avoid transgressing the oath, his partner should come to him, but he should not go to his partner, and he added that they should meet in the dark, as indeed Moses met Pharaoh later, at night (Exodus 12:31).

### HEY, I NEVER KNEW THAT

When Moses warned Pharaoh about the plague of the firstborn, he said that it would strike at "about midnight." Why does Moses express the time in an inexact way? Some commentaries (Rashi) explain that since time measurement then was not precise, had Moses said "exactly midnight" and the Egyptians measured the time incorrectly, they would have had an excuse to ignore the plague because it didn't happen at the time Moses predicted. So Moses said "about midnight" to prevent this. However, some explain that for human beings there is, in fact, no point of midnight. Divide an hour into 2 parts, you have 30 minutes in one half, 30 in the other, but nothing in between. The same is true for a minute and the same is true for the day. So really, from our perspective, the firstborn were alive before midnight and after midnight they were dead, and Moses had to say "about" because from a human perspective, time is continuously in flux, moving from past to present to future, and that exact point really doesn't exist (*Tzaphenat Paaneach*, Rogatchover Gaon).



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