

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Plague of Darkness

RABBI JEREMIE LEDERER
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

AT THE END OF *MAKAS CHOSHECH* (10:29), Paroah warns Moshe "Don't ever come here again, for on the day you come, I will have you killed." Moshe Rabeinu replies, "You're right, I shall never see your face again." However, several *passukim* later (11:4) we find Moshe in a meeting with Paroah, warning him about *Makas Bechoros*. How can this be? Didn't Moshe said they wouldn't see each other again? Rashi explains that this all happened at the same meeting. After Moshe warned Paroah that he would never see him again, Hashem appeared to Moshe in a *nevuah* and told him to warn Paroah about a new *maka* called *Makas Bechoros*. The *Sifsei Chachamim* explains that the reason Hashem made a special *nevuah* appearance in Paroah's palace, the seat of *tumah* (impurity), is because he didn't want Moshe to appear as if he was lying by saying "I shall never see your face again" and then have to appear one more time just to deliver the warning of *Makas Bechoros*. So *Makas Choshech* and *Makas Bechoros* were mentioned during the same visit to Paroah. This implies that Moshe wasn't planning on warning Paroah about *Makas Bechoros*. Why? The Abarbanel says that in fact Moshe had already warned Paroah about *Makas Bechoros* back in *Parshas Shemos* (4:23) when he said "I will even kill your firstborn," which is an allusion to *Makas Bechoros* (see Rashi there). But even according to the Abarbanel it's still a very weak warning that was said almost in passing, nothing as clear and prepared as the other warnings. Why was the warning for *Makas Bechoros* different than all the other warnings?


Makas Bechoros was the only plague where the Jews had to actively protect themselves by putting the blood of the *Korban Pesach* on their doorposts. Had they not done this, they too

would have perished. What was the purpose of this? Furthermore, we know that 80% of Bnei Yisrael died during *Makas Choshech* because they weren't worthy of the *geula* (redemption). What would be the purpose of killing even more Jews during *Makas Bechoros*? How was this decree different than *Makas Choshech*?

Makas Bechoros was a rite of passage for Bnei Yisrael. They had to decide if, after 210 years of living in Egypt as Egyptians, they were ready to shed their identities and redefine themselves as *ovdei Hashem*. That's why they were instructed to slaughter a lamb and put its blood on their doors. The lamb was worshiped by the Egyptians. By slaughtering it they were affirming their willingness to forgo their former Egyptian identities and serve Hashem instead. That was the message of *Makas Bechoros*.

Makas Choshech, on the other hand, was used to weed out the Jews that had stooped so low in their *tumah* that they just couldn't be redeemed. *Makas Bechoros* was used as a rallying cry of "*Mi L'Hashem Elai*" (*Asei Tov*).

What follows from this is that *Makas Bechoros* wasn't used just to punish the Mitzrim. It was used primarily to rally Klal Yisrael under the banner of Hashem and to turn them into *ovdei Hashem*. That was the main purpose of *Makas Bechoros*. This is why Moshe Rabeinu didn't feel the need to warn Paroah about the impending *maka*. It wasn't for them, it was for us.

The *Baalei Musar* speak of the need to let the Torah penetrate our essence and change us from within. We live in a country where it is all too easy to get lost in our jobs and absorb the non-Jewish values that surround us. May we remember the lesson of our ancestors who threw away their Egyptian identities and chose the path of the Torah. 

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER FROM
ME'AH SHE'ARIM BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

Rivka once went with her baby to visit her mother. Later that evening, she returned home and put her baby to bed. Soon after, the baby began crying. Rivka looked for the baby's pacifier to calm him down, but she couldn't find it. She then called her mother who told her that indeed it was in her house on the kitchen counter.

Rivka found herself in a quandary. The time was 10 o'clock at night, and she could not go to a store to buy a new one because they were closed. Returning to her mother's house wasn't an option, because it was far away. Her mother relieved her and said, "Just wait a few minutes, and you will receive your pacifier."

Her mother proceeded to go to the closest bus station and scotch-taped the pacifier to the back of a bus. She went back inside, called her daughter, and told her to go immediately to the bus station near her house and retrieve the pacifier from the back of the bus when it arrives. Rivka complied, and a few minutes later, the baby was happily asleep with his pacifier.

Rivka began wondering if it was okay to use the bus to deliver her "package."

Q Was it permitted to do so? Also, are they required to pay the bus company?

A It would appear that they would not be liable to pay. This can be compared to a scenario where one takes his friend's boat without permission, and does work with it. The *Shulchan Aruch* (C.M. 363:5) rules that if the owner of the boat wasn't

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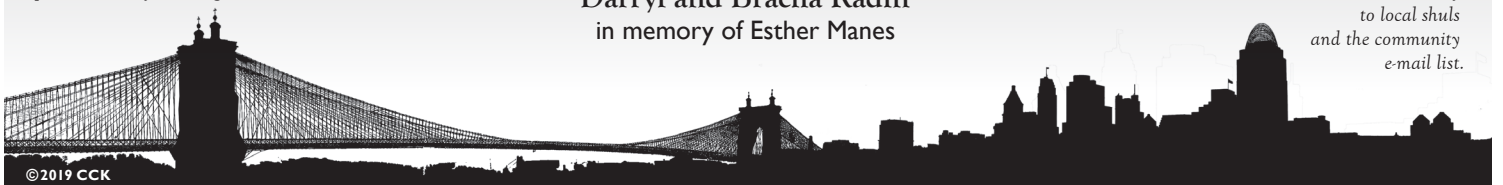
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GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

BEN AND YAAKOV HAD BEEN CLOSE FRIENDS SINCE childhood. Through elementary school, yeshiva, marriage, and raising children, Ben and Yaakov had been as close as brothers. Now it appeared to be over. Ben was terribly upset at how he hurt Yaakov but was too embarrassed to look Yaakov in the face and so he avoided him. Yaakov also found it hard to forgive Ben, and Yaakov eventually moved to a different neighborhood to get away from Ben. Several years later, Yaakov fell deathly ill. Checking himself into a hospital, Yaakov found out he had complete kidney failure and unless he found a kidney donor soon, would not live much longer. To complicate matters more, Yaakov had a rare blood type which precluded many potential donors, as they were not compatible. Much to their surprise, though, a donor was soon found. The operation was successful and Yaakov was on his way to recovery. As he recovered, thoughts of his friend Ben and how he had treated him began to busy his mind. He decided to start by calling a mutual friend and inquiring after how Ben had been doing. The answer was a surprise. “Ben is recuperating from donating his kidney to someone.” “What!” exclaimed Yaakov. This was too fishy. He knew where Ben’s kidney went. He called his rabbi. “Do you think you could invite Ben to come meet with me?” asked Yaakov. “Sure,” responded the rabbi. The day came and Ben and Yaakov

were to meet at a nearby hotel. One look into Ben’s eyes confirmed what Yaakov already knew. He was now carrying Ben’s kidney inside of him. As the two men embraced, tears of relief and happiness flowed down their cheeks and beautiful friendship was rekindled. 🥂

GLIMPSES OF THE KOLLEL

Night Seder Chaburah

Night Seder Chaburah [NSC] refers to both an ambitious nightly learning program and the dedicated group of men who commit to the time and pace of this dynamic program. NSC is about to complete the Masechta [tractate] Avodah Zara after 29 months of intensive learning and deserves much credit for this collective achievement. They will now be beginning maseches Moed Katan. To join please speak to Rabbi Fishman.



A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

How many non-kosher animals are mentioned in this week’s parasha?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer! 🥂

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

renting out the boat, the “borrower” would only be responsible to pay if he caused a loss of value to the boat, not for the actual usage.

Here too, since the outside of the bus is not intended for paid usage, and there

was no loss in value to the bus company, there is no responsibility to pay.

Specifically, this is a scenario of *ze nehene vize lo chaser*, namely, “A” benefits from the possessions or property of “B” at no expense to him. The Talmud rules

that “A” is not obligated to pay “B” for his benefitting. We may also assume that the Jewish people would always be happy to act kindly and do *mitzvos* with their possessions. 🥂

CONTINUED

BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

In the mid-1800s, slaughterhouses began a practice of blood-letting prior to slaughter to improve the quality of meat. When some kosher slaughterhouses began to adopt this practice, rabbis in several cities (including Cincinnati) banned it in slaughterhouses under their jurisdiction because it was considered to render the animal a *treifa*, unfit for kosher consumption. However, in larger cities such as New York, where rabbis had less authority, the practice was still somewhat widespread. Rabbi Moshe Aaronson, then a rabbi in New York, was an outspoken opponent of this practice and wrote a lengthy treatise on the subject, discussing why it should be forbidden and lamenting the use of it. One of his reasons to ban such practice was actually not because of the fact that it would render the animal a *treifa*, but rather because he was afraid that, due to the ignorance of the general Jewish populace, people would begin to mistake the letting of blood with the ritual slaughter of animals mandated by the Torah. 🥂

SOURCE: Glogower, Rod, *The Impact of the American Experience Upon Responsa Literature*, Johns Hopkins University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23881835>.

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