

Echoes of the Ages

In a village near the town of Pranzev, Poland, lived the G-d fearing Jew R' Raphael Duvshinsky. His livelihood came from his pub, which he rented from the local landowner, and his only trouble was a lack of children.

One ערב פסח, R' Raphael was unable to find a non-Jew to buy his חמץ. Having no other option, he declared "Let anyone come and take what they want!" removing the חמץ from his responsibility, and went home to prepare for פסח.

R' Raphael decided not to tell his wife of the happenings until after פסח because he did not want her to worry. That פסח was particularly joyous for he realised that he had been tested by Hashem, and passed.

After פסח, R' Raphael returned to his business, expecting to find nothing but empty kegs and bottles. However, he was greeted not by bare shelves, but by two big black dogs, which sniffed him and then ran off. The tavern was exactly as it had been left.

Amazed at this miracle R' Raphael consulted a Rabbi as to what must be done with the alcohol. He

was told that clearly G-d had intervened, and he could keep the חמץ. However, he decided that he would not use חמץ with any doubt involved, and so would get rid of it all. And so he let it run out on to the ground.

Distraught, his wife agreed with her husband's decision, but still wept when she heard the news. She ran to the Rabbi, crying how, not only did they have no children, but now no means to support themselves either.

"Don't cry," soothed the Rabbi. "Return to your home and remove the worry from your heart. In the merit of the מצוה you and your husband have fulfilled, you will embrace a son who will light up the world with his righteousness."

The next year, the couple had a son. He grew up to be the great צדיק R' Avrema'le of Chekhenov, about whom the Kotzke Rebbe said "Who can compare to this man, whose every limb is תורה and holiness?"

This week's and last week's story adapted from "Stories my Grandfather told me, Shemos"

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THE LIVING TORAH

FROM HASMONEAN HIGH SCHOOL

לעלוי נשמת ר' אליהו רחמים בן מאיר דוד ע"ה ואחיו ר' עבדאללה פרג בן מאיר דוד ע"ה
No. 249 Parshas Bo 5767 פרשת בא תשס"ז מס' רמט

This is the bread of affliction – הַאֲלֵמָה עֵינֵא

We say in the הגדה, "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat". The Chief Rabbi asks, is this not a strange invitation? What hospitality is it to offer the hungry food that represents suffering? To answer this, one must understand that the מצוה represents two things: one, the food of slaves, and two, the bread eaten by בני ישראל as they left Egypt as free people. This same bread that was food for slaves was transformed into the bread of freedom through the 'willingness' to share with others.

Primo Levi was a survivor of Auschwitz. He wrote in his book that in 1945, when the Nazis abandoned the camps and took the prisoners on "death marches", those who were left behind were those who were too ill to move. They were left alone with only scraps of food and fuel. Levi describes how he and two fellow comrades worked to light a fire and bring warmth to his fellow prisoners, many of them dying. He then writes that when he and his fellow workers finished repairing the broken windows and the stove

was spreading its heat, everyone seemed to relax, at which point one of the sick prisoners proposed that each of them should offer some bread to the three who had been working. Levi writes that only one day before, such an event would have been inconceivable, for it was the law of the camp that one should eat his bread and if possible eat that of his neighbour; this left no room for sharing. This act meant the law of the camp was dead and marked a transformation, where prisoners became men again.

Sharing is the first act through which slaves become free human beings. One who divides his food with a stranger has shown himself capable of fellowship and faith, two important things from which hope is born. That is why we invite others to share the same bread which has been transformed from bread of affliction into the bread which is shared and symbolises our freedom. By reaching out to those who are in need and comforting those who are alone we bring freedom, and with freedom we bring G-d.

By Yishai Schimmel

Hashem's Hand in the Penultimate Plagues

"והיה הדם לכם לאת על הבתים אשר אתם שם וראיתי אתיהם ופסחתי עלכם ולא־יהיה בכם נגף למשחית בהכתי בארץ מצרים" - שמות יב : יג

There appears to be a problem with this פסוק, with the phrase "and there will be no plague for your destruction" seeming redundant. There is a second difficulty with a פסוק a few פסוקים later. The problem is that we learn from our Sages in the הגדה that it was Hashem Himself that delivered the plague of the death of the first-born. This is learnt out from the repeated use of "I" in פרק יב פסוק יב. However, the תורה states "and He will see the blood... and Hashem will pass over that door and He will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike" - שמות- יב : כג. What, then, is this 'destroyer' described here if Hashem was the one to cause the plague Himself, without the use of an agent?

The answers both בית הלווי questions together as follows: In פרק יב פסוק כג the two clauses could be interpreted to be referring to two different plagues. The first part of the פסוק is referring to the plague of itself, wrought by G-d, and the second, apparently superfluous phrase is referring to a separate calamity resulting from the

first. After the death of the first-born of Egypt there were many dead bodies around, which led to disease spreading and even more death as a result.

The פסוק can therefore be explained like this: "I will see the blood and pass over you (and not strike you with the plague of death of the first-born) and there will be no (resulting) plague of destruction among you when I strike in the land of Egypt (by causing an epidemic to spread due to the dead bodies)." The destroyer in פסוק כג is therefore the angel of death which Hashem did not permit to kill the בני ישראל בני.

With this brilliant explanation, the בית הלווי goes on to shed some light on another previously perplexing פסוק. In תהלים קלו : יג we read "(Give thanks) to Him Who struck the Egyptians through the first-born." We can now understand why the word "through" is used instead of the פסוק reading "...Who struck the Egyptian first-born." Here it is referring to the epidemic that followed the plague, which was the secondary knock-on effect of the plague of death of the first-born, which G-d performed Himself.

By Shane Lefkowitz

Riddle of the Week

For which sin can a person be punished by a בית דין without having first been warned?

Last weeks' riddle: Which people in Tanach are called after their mother's name i.e. So and So ben (his mother's name)?

Answer: שאול and בתואל בן מלכה (one of Dovid's sons), אדוניהו בן חגית. בן כנענית

Marrow and Mannerisms

The קרבן פסח comes with precise instructions of how it should be prepared and eaten. One of the הלכות is : "ועצם לא תשברו בו" : none of its bones may be broken. The ספר החנוך (מצוה טז) explains one of the reasons for this seemingly strange law using the principle of "אדם נפעל כפי פעולתיו" - "a person can change his behaviour by changing his actions." Someone may be a very kind and good hearted person, yet if his profession forces him to regularly be tough and cruel to people, after a while it will have a deep effect on his personality and he will lose his kind-heartedness. The opposite is true as well. A person may have a nasty and stingy personality but if he pushes himself to regularly involve himself in acts of giving and kindness he will soon find that his character will change and he will become a generous person who wants to give.

For example, people sometimes wonder why so much stress is put on school uniform being worn correctly and neatly, but that is exactly the point - when a person dresses in a neat and dignified

manner, it will affect his whole demeanour; if he dresses like a mentch he will become a mentch! It may seem like a trivial and superficial detail, but our outward actions can have a profound effect on our personality.

This also applies with the קרבן פסח. You would not catch the president of the USA cracking open a bone to suck out the marrow, it is beneath his dignity. And so it is with us on סדר night, a time when we commemorate the birth of our nation. We need to be aware once again of our exalted status as a royal people and ensure that our actions are fitting for royalty. This is not just a superficial act, but something that can actually influence our conduct and personality.

By Rabbi M Cohen

Quote of the Week

"Man is compared to a bird. A bird can fly upward and upward so long as it moves its wings" - Rav Yisroel Salanter

Standing out of Respect

One must stand up in the presence of an elderly person (above 70) or a תלמוד חכם . If one doesn't know the elderly person's exact age, he must stand in accordance with the rule "ספיקא דאורייתא לחומרא", a "doubtful Torah prohibition is always upheld on the stricter side". Most פוסקים say that if the elderly person remains in the room for an extended period of time, one can sit when they are sitting but must stand when they are standing. Based on the major authorities, one is not permitted to sit on a crowded bus or train unless all elderly people and תלמידי חכמים are already seated and hence it is obvious that one must also give up his seat for them.