



# Ohr Yerushalayim News

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## News This Week

### מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Shua and Freyda Chaya Dansky on the occasion of Shana's wedding to Eliyahu Sternbuch on Wednesday. The Chupa will take place in Stenecourt at 3.30 and the Simchas Choson v'Kallah in Beis Yaakov Hall from 10.30

### Chaim Aruchim

We wish Chaim Aruchim to the following who have Yahrzeit this week:  
 Mon, 8th Shevat - Bayla Brandeis and Penina Wieder for their mother  
 Thurs, 11th Shevat - Zev Davis for his father

## What Is Normal Life?

Mordechai Dixler (Torah.org)

The current global upheaval due to the raging pandemic, combined with political upheaval, has made us all unsettled; many are even broken and in despair. We all ask, "When will life return to normal?" The Exodus story, which we read about in the Torah portion this week, teaches us a fundamental lesson to help us frame these events and cope with the unexpected twists and turns.

The ten plagues were an attack on the Egyptian nation and the natural world order. They demonstrated G-d's authority and control over all elements of nature. Ultimately, they forced the leader of the civilized world, Pharaoh, a man who made himself a god, into submission. The Al-mighty stripped Pharaoh of his false sense of control over his world, to the point that he begged his Jewish slaves to leave Egypt after the final plague, the Plague of the Firstborn.

The Torah portion ends with a selection of Commandments: donning Tefillin, the recounting of the Exodus on Passover, and redeeming the firstborn – all reminders for future generations of the Exodus. The Mitzvos of keeping the Sabbath and observing the Jewish holidays also serve as a reminder of the Exodus, as is reflected in the liturgy recited on those days. The Exodus demonstrated G-d's dominion over the world, and these Mitzvos, many of them daily, and weekly, would ensure the Jewish people never forget.

The message of the Exodus is simple but easily forgotten. Whatever your opinion is of mass media, there's one thing we can all agree on – its failure to express the hand of G-d of world events. Yet, the fact remains – He is in charge.

With the current rollout of the vaccine, and governmental changes, there's the potential for our own Exodus from this upheaval and a return to normalcy. But times of upheaval, times when G-d's presence is more obvious, remind us that "normal life" must still have that same awareness of G-d's constant involvement in public and private affairs. Adam, the first man, was fully aware of G-d in his life, and the actions of man that followed muddled that reality through the generations that would follow. The lessons of the Exodus were a "reset" for the world, allowing all to see the reality of G-d's involvement once again. That's what a return to normalcy looks like – a return to the normalcy of Adam's freshly minted world.

We all crave the return to the comfort of how things used to be, but our souls will only find true comfort with the knowledge of our Creator's constant presence in our lives. I do hope life returns to normal soon. It is also my hope and prayer, that we listen to the lessons of the

Exodus, and the feelings of our soul, to recognize "normal life" as it was meant to be. (Based on Ramban Ex. 13:16).

## Choshech: Warning or a Punishment?

Rabbi Yissocher Frand (Torah.org)

Parshas Bo contains the end of the Makos—the Ten Plagues—the ninth of which was Makas Choshech, the Plague of Darkness. I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Milchamos Yehuda from Rav Yehuda Lubart, z"l. He points out an anomaly that exists with this plague. With virtually all the other makkos, Moshe first warned the Egyptians and then the plague started. However, there was no warning prior to the Plague of Darkness. Why did Makas Choshech break the pattern?

The Milchamos Yehuda suggests a fundamental difference between Makas Choshech and all the other plagues. The other nine plagues from Dam (#1 – Blood) through Makas Bechoros (#10 – Death of the Firstborn) were punishments. These were Divine "slaps" to break the will of Pharaoh. When punishing, there is a well-established principle: Punishments are not administered without prior warning (Yoma 81a; Sanhedrin 56b; Zevachim 107a). Even before punishing our children, we first warn them: "If you do this one more time, you are going to suffer the consequences!"

Makas Choshech was not the punishment. It was the warning! The warning was, "Pharaoh, you are blind! You cannot see what is happening before your very eyes. You should wake up and open your eyes and see what is happening to you and your people." The Plague of Darkness, unlike the other plagues, was a symbolic message. There are none so blind as those who will not see. How does the Almighty convey this symbolic message to the King of Egypt? He does so by making Choshech. That was the warning for what was coming next – Makas Bechoros. Makas Choshech did not need any warning of its own. It was the warning.

With this idea, Rav Lubart provides new insight into two Medrashim. The pasuk in Tehillim [105:28] says, "He sent darkness and made it dark and they did not defy his words." The Medrash comments on this pasuk as follows. The Almighty asked the Angels: Are the Egyptians deserving to be smitten by Darkness? There was no objection from

## Davening Times

### פרשת בא

Zman Shabbos	3.52pm
Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	3.57pm
Hashkomo	7.25am
Shacharis	9.15am
סוף זמן ק"ש	10.19am
Mincha	1.30pm / 3.47pm
Motzei Shabbos	5.07pm
Ovos uBonim	6.07pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am / 9.30am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	4.00pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

any of the Angels to such a punishment. They all agreed that it would be appropriate.

What is the psbat in this Medrash? Why did HaKadosh Baruch Hu need to ask the Angels in the first place whether they agreed with Him regarding this plague? The answer is that we know this is the custom of the Almighty “to consult with His Heavenly Court” before taking dramatic action. Apparently, by the other plagues there was a difference of opinion in the Heavenly Court. Some argued that certain punishments were too harsh; the Egyptians are not deserving of such. There was at least a discussion in the “Palmalya shel Ma’alah” about the matter. The pasuk in Tehillim takes note of the fact that regarding Makas Choshech, there was no rebuttal whatsoever from any of the Angels in the Heavenly Court.

Why not? Why were there suddenly no “defense attorneys” arguing for the Egyptians in the Heavenly Court? The answer is that this was not going to be a punishment, it was only a warning. If it was not a punishment, there was no justification for weighing the issue of whether it was or was not a fair punishment.

Then Rav Lubart interprets another Medrash, using a homiletic, but very beautiful drush. The Medrash states that the Darkness of the Ninth Plague was as thick as a dinar (a certain kind of coin). But what does this comparison indicate? Darkness is not “thick” – it is the absence of light. If we turn off the lights in a room, it will simply be dark. There is nothing to feel. So what does the Medrash mean?

Rav Lubart explains that the Medrash is alluding to the fact that a dinar (money) can also cause blindness. People do crazy things – not only for money per se, but for all types of materialistic matters. People are blinded by the tremendous ambition to make money and accumulate wealth, possessions, or any physical pleasure. We always hear about executives that somewhere along the line get burned out. They have been spending 18 hours a day at the office for decades and then suddenly, at some point in their sixties, they suddenly regret how they have spent their years. They resign from their position and say, “I want to spend more time with my family.” What family? They grew up without you and moved on during those 40+ years when you were blinded by your ambitions and busy accumulating dinars.

Just like Pharaoh was blinded, and the Almighty tried to show him that he was blinded, so too are we also blinded by our drive to accumulate more and more material possessions and physical pleasures. Maybe we are not as obtuse as Pharaoh, but we are also blinded – blinded by the dinar.

### **What's the Big Simcha of a Pidyon HaBen?**

I have quoted the following thought many times on the occasion of a Pidyon HaBen.

The end of Parshas Bo contains the mitzvah of the Redemption of the First Born. The Sforno on this mitzvah says an incredible idea: the Sforno defines the mitzvah as one which enables the child to engage in “secular work” (Avodas Chol). According to him, until the Pidyon HaBen ceremony is completed, the child is holy (kadosh). Just like we may not work with a first-born kosher animal because it is the property of the Kohen, so too, a human first-born child may not work. Now if truth be told, when a child is four weeks old, there is not much work that he can do. It is the other way around—he forces his parents to do the work for him! But, theoretically, the Sforno seems to be saying that if a child was, for whatever reason, never redeemed when he was thirty days old, he would retain the status of Kedushas Bechor (first born sanctity), and would be forbidden to do any non-sacred work. It is apparently a wild Sforno!

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks a simple question. It is not that common to have a Pidyon HaBen today. There are many situations which rule out such a scenario. First of all, it only applies to a son. That knocks off 50% of the population. Then, it only applies to a first-born, so there is a maximum of one first born per mother. Furthermore, it only applies to natural deliveries and not to Caesarian deliveries. If a woman has a miscarriage prior to giving birth to her first live child, again there is no Pidyon HaBen. On top of that, if either the father is a Kohen or Levi or the maternal grandfather is a Kohen or Levi, again, there is no Pidyon

HaBen.

So, it is a rare occurrence, but it is a beautiful Simcha. At a Bris, everyone is worried. The mother is still in pain from the delivery, the child is certainly in pain from the circumcision, and the father is nervous. Everyone is uptight. A Pidyon HaBen is a wonderfully joyous occasion. There is time to plan, it is not rushed. It is a beautiful thing. They bring in the baby on a silver platter with the sugar and with the garlic. Beautiful!

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks – what is this big Simcha all about? Why are we not mourning? The child changes from being holy (kadosh) to being profaned (chullin). Yesterday he was holy; now he becomes just another baby boy! Furthermore, Rav Yaakov asks, the text recited at a Pidyon HaBen is “...Let this son enter a good life, one of Torah and Fear of Heaven. May it be Thy Will that just as he entered the Pidyon (redemption), so too may he enter to Torah, Chuppah (wedding canopy), and Ma’asim Tovim (good deeds). Now we are familiar with this last phrase, which is also said at a Bris Milah. But what about the first part of this Tefillah: Let this son enter a good life, one of Torah and Fear of Heaven. Where does that come from? Why don't we say that by a Bris?

Rav Yaakov formulates a principle he repeats many times in his sefer. There is a fundamental difference between Judaism and other religions (especially the Christian religion). Christianity has a dichotomy between the holy and the mundane. There is a perpetual conflict between body and soul. They believe that man has both body and soul but they feel that “never the twain shall meet.” They feel it is impossible to have a blend of holiness and the mundane. This is part of the reason that their priests are celibate. They have to live a life that has nothing to do with the physicality, which marriage entails.

By Judaism, it is just the opposite. The highest level of spirituality—the reason a person was put on this earth—is to blend body and soul. The goal is not that the body and soul should negate one another, but that the soul should influence the body and make us into holy beings. “Men of holiness shall you be for Me.” [Shemos 22:30]. Human holiness is the name of the game. That is our purpose.

Ideally, a person should reach the level where his eating is for the Sake of Heaven and his sleeping is for the Sake of Heaven, and all his other physical activities are for the Sake of Heaven as well. This is the power of the soul, to rule over the body. It is a challenge. It is difficult. This is why the only korban a non-Jew can bring is the Olah sacrifice, which is entirely burnt on the Mizbayach. Neither the Kohanim nor the person who brings the offering eat any part of it. It is entirely for G-d. A Jew, on the other hand, can bring a Korban Shlomim (“Peace Offering”). This is a sacrifice, but the person who brings it sits down and eats the steak from this animal. We eat the lamb chops! The lamb chops have a status of kodshim (holy sacrificial meat), but this consumption becomes a mitzvah because there is no contradiction between being engaged in holy and elevated spiritual activities and the body experiencing physical pleasure.

The highest spiritual goal in life for the Jew is not to rid himself of physicality but to sanctify the physicality in his life, to infuse it with holiness.

This is the simcha of the Pidyon HaBen. This child was holy until now. But remaining holy is no trick. The challenge now is to redeem the child, make him into chullin, and now challenge him to sanctify this non-sacred entity he has become. Despite the fact that he was holy before and now he is not, the game is not over. Life is just beginning for him.

With this idea, Rav Yaakov interprets the above cited text of the Pidyon HaBen prayer. To achieve this goal in life requires a lot of Yiras Shamayim (fear of Heaven). For a person to confront and engage in activities of physicality and elevate them requires Yiras Shamayim – a focus that I want to be a Servant of G-d (Eved HaShem). Therefore, this prayer invokes the hope that this young child should enter into a life of Torah and Yiras Shamayim. Only through Torah and Yiras Shamayim can a person elevate physicality and make it into holiness.