"ASKING THEIR EGYPTIAN FRIENDS FOR SILVER AND GOLD": TWO INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bo

"Asking Their Egyptian Friends For Silver and Gold": Two Insights

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 710, Checking Teffillin by Computer. Good Shabbos!

This week's parsha contains the following pasukim: "...Yet one more plague will I bring upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here...Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his friend and every woman of her friend, jewels of silver and jewels of gold." [Shemos 11:1-2].

The Gerer Rebbe focuses in on the use of the word "v'yishalu" [let them ask]. Usually, the word yishalu connotes borrowing. We all know that in this situation the Jews did not intend to return the items for which they were asking. Why then does the Torah use the word "v'yishalu"? The Gerer Rebbe explains that this is the first time that the Jewish people as a nation were "coming into money". Money, as we know, is a powerful force. On the occasion of the first time that they came into money, G-d instructed the people that it can make people or break them. Therefore, whenever one acquires wealth like this, it they should always consider it "borrowed money". G-d may allow us to become rich, but we should view ourselves as merely the guardians of the money. We are only the trustees. It is not really ours. We cannot take it with us. It is not permanent.

Thus, from the Egyptian perspective, "you shall ask" (v'yishalu) "for money" is not really asking. The Jews were clearly TAKING the money from the Egyptians. However, they were instructed to consider it BORROWED money in relationship to themselves!

The Netziv (Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin) focuses in on the words "from their friends" (m'es rei-ay-hu; me'es re-u-sah). The Netziv points out that we have a very similar pasuk in Parshas Shemos. However, there we read "Let every woman borrow from her neighbor (isha m'shechenta) ...jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment..." [Shemos 3:22]. The Netziv asks why the Torah changes its language. Why is it that in Parshas Shemos, the Torah speaks of borrowing from a neighbor and here

in Parshas Bo, the Torah speaks of borrowing from a friend?

The Netziv makes a startling comment. Parshas Shemos was before the plagues began. Who would the Jews go to ask "Could I have that silver tea set that I see in the breakfront?" One can only ask that from someone who is at best, an acquaintance. They did not have any "friends" to ask that from, because there was no friendship between the Egyptians and the Jews. However, in Parshas Bo, something profound happened. Suddenly, the Egyptians are indeed our friends.

What happened? The answer is that the plague of Choshech [Darkness] had just occured. This plague lasted at least 3 days. This was more than just a "blackout" with the lights turned off. This was a tangible darkness (v'yamesh choshech), such that people were afraid to move. They could not get out of their chairs. They could not get out of their beds.

How then, asks the Netziv, did the Egyptians eat during this period? How did they drink? If people could not move then they could not even "fumble around and find some food in the house". If people would not eat or drink for 3 days, they would die. How is it that there was a whole nation who survived to tell the tale? It must be, says the Netziv, that during this plague, which only affected the Egyptins not the Jews, the Jews went and gave food and water to their Egyptian "friends".

The Netziv is saying that "a friend in need is a friend indeed." Thst is what changed. In Parshas Shemos, there was no way they could find a friend to go ask for gold and silver. However, in Parshas Bo, it was a different relationship. The Egyptian neighbors now recognized that these Jewish neighbors saved their lives during the time of the Plague of Darkness. Now they considered themselves "friends".

The fact that the Jews saved the lives of the Egyptians - who after all, were their tormentors, speaks to the unbelievable compassion of the Jewish people. Once they made that gesture, they had an entirely different relationship with the Egyptians. They could now approach them not as "neighbors" but as "friends".

The Priorities In Life Are Never Placed In The Checked Baggage

The Jewish people are about to leave Egypt. Pharaoh is finally willing and indeed anxious to send out everyone - men, women, children, flocks, and cattle. Everyone and everything the Jews wanted to take out of Egypt could now leave with them. The pasuk tells us: "The people picked up their dough when it had not yet become leavened, their leftovers bound up in their garments upon their shoulders" [Shemos 12:34]. Rashi says the term "leftovers" refers to the matzah and marror left over from the previous night's meal. It was this that they carried in their little knapsacks on their shoulders as they left Egypt.

We are all familiar with what our dining room floor looks like after the Seder. It looks like a Matzah factory with pieces of lettuce spread all over the place! What do we do? We sweep it up and throw it out.

The Jews at that "first Seder" in Egypt did not sweep the leftovers up and throw them out. They swept them up, wrapped them together, and put them in knapsacks, which they carried out of Egypt on their shoulders! Rashi adds that even though they had many animals on which they could have placed these packages, they purposely carried them themselves to show their love of the mitzvos.

A person does not throw the most precious item into the donkey's saddlebag. It can fall out. It can get lost. If something is very special, you take it with you in your "hand luggage". No one ever places valuables into their "checked baggage" on airplanes. People carry their most precious items on themselves.

Rav Simcha Zissel asks: The pasuk just stated that they borrowed gold and silver vessels. Where did they put them? Apparently, they put the gold and the silver on the donkeys but the leftover pieces of matzo and marror they carried on their own shoulders.

Klal Yisrael understood what is important and what is not important; what must be a priority in life and what is not a priority in life. The gold and silver was "replaceable". The matzo and marror, which represented the miraculous redemption from Egypt, and which represented their relationship with the Almighty, was "irreplaceable." That was not something that could be entrusted to the donkeys. They carried it on their shoulders.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Bo are provided below:

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