

presents:

Shabbos Inspire

Project Inspire is a grassroots movement inspiring the Jewish people to share the beauty and relevance of our heritage with our fellow Jews

Dvar Torah - Saving More Than A Life

As we learn the Parshios of our freedom from the servitude in Egypt, an obvious question must be pondered: Why did Hashem exact ten plagues on the Egyptians? If Hashem executed Makkas Bechoros (slaying of the first born) as the first plague, it is probable that Paroah would have surrendered immediately, avoiding the need for the other nine Makkos.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller offers a beautiful insight. The ten plagues left an indelible impression on the hearts and minds of the Jewish people. Each plague was like an advanced course in Emunas Hashem, as every Makkah deepened their belief in G-d. Therefore, the plagues were not just intended to be retribution for the Egyptians; they were designed to be a tremendous light of G-dly revelation for the Jews.

Not all of the Jewish people were affected positively by the plagues, however. The Posuk in the beginning of Beshalach states, "The Children of Israel went up from Egypt with Chamushim (Shemos 13:18)." The Mechilta and Rashi comment on the word "Chamushim" as follows: "Only one fifth of the Jews left (Egypt). The other four fifths perished in Makkas Choshech / the plague of darkness."

Darkness always implies a lack of revelation. The great G-dly light of the Makkos was shining, but it was unable to penetrate their opaque veneer. It was like the plague of darkness itself; there was broad daylight outside yet their reality had the appearance of night. (This in many ways mirrors the unfortunate reality of our Galus. Today, people are often "in the dark" not because of a deep idealistic conviction, but because they have never experienced the true beauty and warmth of Yidishkeit. Like the plague of darkness, their darkness is not a "real," belief, it is simply that they have never had the opportunity to be exposed to the light.)

Exile throughout history has left deep scars on the Jewish body and soul. The evil and apathy of the foreign culture has, and continues to have, a seemingly indelible effect on our nation. In Egypt, even in the midst of open miracles, most Jews' defiance would not be swayed. Their end would be an eternal grave in Egypt.

The above Mechilta elaborates on the various opinions of how many Jew perished in Egypt: "Chamushim means one in five (went out). Some say it means one in fifty (went out). Some say it means (only) one in five hundred (went out)! Rav Nehorai says: (I give my word by) the temple service that it was not one in five hundred that went out."

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Inspiration For Your Shabbos Table

When I first arrived in my new Yeshiva in Queens, NY, I was given a house next to the Yeshiva to dorm in. The house shared a porch with an elderly gentleman in his eighties. He was Jewish, but harbored great resentment towards the Yeshiva. I was told emphatically that it was not wise to have anything to do with him. "Stay away from the old man," people would tell me, "He hates the Yeshiva, and he does not like the Bachurim," and "If you see him, ignore him; he does not like religious Jews."

The first time I saw him I gave him a big "Hello" and smiled wide. I continued to be friendly whenever possible, and always made sure to wish him a good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. After about 2 weeks he finally responded with a simple "hello." The relationship from that point began to blossom. After a month we were talking on a regular basis. I did whatever I could to be as pleasant and supportive as possible. There were times that I helped him with his groceries, or just went over to shmooze. Over the course of my first year in Queens we became very close.

In time, I introduced him to the Rosh HaYeshiva and the Mashgiach. I blew Shofar for him on Rosh Hashanah and we had many conversations. G-d and Emunah was a real challenge for him. He had liberated Nazi death camps, and could not reconcile the two. I tried to explain to the best of my ability, but to no avail. Throughout our time together, regardless of his beliefs, I always maintained a close and accepting relationship.

Towards the end of my second and final year in the Yeshiva my close friend and neighbour unfortunately contracted cancer. It was most upsetting to me, especially knowing that I was leaving Yeshiva. I introduced him to a few Bachurim who agreed to look after him in my absence.

I got married that summer and Baruch Hashem, to my delight, he was able to attend my wedding. His simcha could not be measured. He danced as if it was the wedding of his own grandson.

Over the course of the year I kept in close contact with him by calling him every week. We had many conversations. However, one week there was no answer. I called the Rosh HaYeshiva. He told me that my friend was admitted into the hospital. His cancer had taken a turn for the worse.

I will never forget the phone call I received on Asara B' Teves (10 of Teves) of that year. The Rosh HaYeshiva had visited him in the hospital and told me of their conversation. His words will forever ring in my ears. "Rabbi, because of Reuven Cohen, if I had to do it again, I would be religious..." He was niftar that night at the age of 87. He died with a Teshuva Gemurah.

I asked his son why I had such a profound affect on his father. I was shocked in hearing his response. "It was because you cared." From my entire experience, if there is one message I would like all that read my story to internalize it is simply that all we have to do is show that we care!

Reuven Cohen

Saving More Than A Life continued...

We have a deep tradition of "אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים" (Eruvin 13b). Both opinions are the word of the living G-d. In every dispute between great Torah sages, both opinions are correct. How, then, could these three opinions of the Mechilta all be correct at the same time? A finite number of people left Egypt. It is either 1 in 5, 1 in 50 or 1 in 500. It is apparently impossible for all three opinions to be true. Furthermore, Rav Nehorai is adamant that one of these great Torah sage's opinions is incorrect!

Rav Shimon Schwab in his Sefer Ma'ayan Beis HaShoevah offers a brilliant solution. Rashi says on the Pasuk after Kayin killed Hevel (Berishis 4:10), "The sound of your brother's bloods calls to Me from the earth." The Sages explain, "Your brother's bloods" (plural) is a reference to the blood of all of Hevel's future descendants who will never be conceived" (Sanhedrin 37a). Hevel was half of the world's second generation. Today, it is Kayin's progeny that gave birth to the world's entire population. Therefore, the Torah (on some level) is telling us that Kayin is responsible for the murder of billions of Hevel's potential descendants! In addition, Rashi comments in a similar vein that a person is measured by his potential offspring. The Pasuk says when Moshe was about to slay the Egyptian taskmaster (Shemos 2:12), "Moshe turned this way and that" before killing the Egyptian. Rashi explains that Moshe looked into future generations to determine if a meritorious descendant would emanate from him.

Rav Schwab explains that one can apply the above approach to resolve our query. He surmises that only a relatively small number of Jews perished in Egypt. From them, the ancestors of millions of people throughout the generations could have descended. Therefore, the opinions in the Mechilta are not referring to how many people actually left Egypt. They are determining whether these descendants would have amassed to numbers in the future of 49 multiplied by 600,000 (the number of males from 20 to 60 of the Exodus), or 499 multiplied by 600,000. (Perhaps the dispute is which future date in history is the calculation made to. Is it from the Exodus until the building of the Bais Hamikdash, or is it until the end of all the generations, or another time?)

Masterfully, Rav Schwab reconciles the debate by explaining that the numbers offered in the Mechilta are not in conflict. The sages are offering various time periods in the future with which to calculate what the number of descendants would have been, had all Jews left Egypt. The numbers indicate that, in potential, generations would have descended from the deceased Jews and therefore, it is as if those future descendants did not leave Egypt either.

In this notion lies a profound lesson. It is our challenge to reexamine the way we perceive our brethren everywhere. Each person's inherent significance is the greatness of his/her potential. Every Jew is the potential of future generations to come for all eternity!

"He who saves one life, it is as if he saved an entire world" (Sanhedrin 37a). I always understood this Chazal to mean the value of one life is like the value of an entire world. Seemingly, it is more literal than that. Each life is a world. In potential, one's future generations can multiply into billions of people, literally an entire world! This is what you can accomplish by reaching out to one Jew.

I cannot conjecture as to what could have saved the Jews that were left behind in Egypt despite the wonders that they experienced. One thing I do know from my experience in working in Kiruv over the years is this: A person can see clearly the evidence of an Almighty Creator, but without a warm smile, a sincere compliment, a friendly Shabbos invitation, he/she will remain tragically unaffected forever. It is up to each and every one of us to show our fellow Jews and Hashem that we care.

Statistically, it has been calculated that if we don't reach out to our brothers and sisters within twenty years, four fifths of today's Jews will disappear! Could the message for us be any clearer?

G-d has entrusted to the few Torah-motivated Jews the vital obligation to make a difference. Only together can we fight the overwhelming tide of assimilation. May we all merit to see the end of the final exile and the return of all of Hashem's children speedily and in our days.

Good Shabbos
Moshe Zionce

Please forward all comments to Rabbi Zionce
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