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76-01 147 St | Flushing, NY



(718) 544-5213
JEPQueens@gmail.com

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

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PARSHAS BESHALACH

When Rav Shmuel Auerbach eulogized his father, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l, he quoted one of his father's favorite stories. Rav Baruch Frankel-Te'omim (1760-1828), was a gadol (great Torah scholar) in Europe. His son became engaged to a girl from a very wealthy and prominent family. The families got together before the wedding to discuss the details of the marriage. The future mother-in-law saw that Rav Baruch was distressed. She asked him why he seemed so distressed. She wondered if he felt that there was something wrong with the shidduch. Rav Baruch told her that he was upset because the water carrier in his city was very sick. The mother of the *kallah* was shocked by this answer. A water carrier was not considered a distinguished person. She could not understand why Rav Baruch would allow the water carrier's illness to dampen his mood at his family *simcha*. As soon as he heard this, Rav Baruch announced that the *shidduch* was off! He would not let his son marry into a family that didn't feel empathy for the misfortune of another Jew. That showed a lack of sensitivity required of a Jew.

In this week's parsha, Pharaoh finally agreed to let the Jewish People leave Egypt. The *pasuk* (Shemos 14:3) says, "Pharaoh said **to** the Children of Israel, they are confounded in the land, the Wilderness has closed in upon them." **Rashi** wonders how the *pasuk* could say that Pharaoh was speaking **to** the Children of Israel since there were no Jews left in Egypt at that time. All the Jews had already left Egypt! **Rashi** interprets the the *pasuk* to mean that Pharaoh spoke ABOUT the Children of Israel rather than **TO** them.

Targum Yonosan ben Uziel has a different interpretation. He says that Pharaoh was speaking **to** Dasan and Aviram, two members of *Bnei Yisrael* who remained in Egypt.

The **Maharal Diskin** says that according to one interpretation in **Rashi** (Shmos 13:18) 80% of the Jewish community perished during the 3 days of Darkness! They were considered wicked and unworthy of experiencing the Exodus. Dasan and Aviram were very wicked people. They informed on Moshe Rabbeinu to Pharaoh telling Pharaoh that

*"Pharaoh said **to** the Children of Israel, they are confounded in the land, the Wilderness has closed in upon them." (Shemos 14:3)*

Moshe had killed an Egyptian (the Egyptian who had been beating a Jew). Had Hashem not miraculously saved Moshe, he would have been killed. Dasan and Aviram did not even want to leave when Bnei Yisrael were given permission to leave the country. If so,

asks **Maharal Diskin**, why were they still alive? How did they survive the plague of Darkness if they were such wicked people? Did they have a special merit?

The **Maharil Diskin** answers that indeed, Dasan and Aviram did have a special merit. The Egyptians had appointed them to be two of the taskmasters over the Jewish slaves. They were told that they had to make sure that the Jews met their daily quota of producing bricks. Otherwise, they, themselves, would be beaten. When the Jews could not complete their quota, the Jewish taskmasters did not oppress them or whip them. Instead, Dasan and Aviram, and the other Jewish taskmasters, allowed themselves to be beaten by the Egyptians. Dasan and Aviram took the punishment of their fellow Jews. **It was this z'chus of suffering on behalf of other Jews that saved Dasan and Aviram.**

Rav Yosef Salant (1885-1981) gives a beautiful explanation of a similar theme from a different pasuk. The pasuk in the beginning of the parsha says that when the Jewish people left Egypt, they were “chamushim” (Shemos 13:18). There are different interpretations of what that means. **Targum Yonasan ben Uziel** explains that “chamushim” means that all the Jews went out with 5 children.

Does that mean that everyone had the same number of children, which was 5? Didn't the rabbis teach us that the Jewish women gave birth to 6 babies at a time?

The Be'er Yosef by **Rav Yosef Salant** gives a beautiful answer. When it says that four-fifths of the Jewish people died during the Plague of Darkness, that

probably just referred to the adults. Most likely, the young children did not die. That means that four-fifths of the Jewish children at the time of the Exodus were orphans! Who was going to take care of them? The answer is that every one of the remaining Jewish families agreed to take care of the orphans. Thus, every remaining family adopted the orphaned children of four families. Therefore, when the **Targum Yonasan ben Uziel** says “five children”, he does not mean that everyone went out with 5 children. He means that everyone went out with 5 families worth of children. They went with their own children as well as the children of four other families whose parents had died during the Plague of Darkness!

What a beautiful act of selflessness exhibited by the Jewish People! They took care of so many Jewish children who were not their own! These acts of kindness was a source of extraordinary merit for the Jewish People.

When we show how much we care about our fellow Jews, it brings nachas to Hashem!
We receive great merit for doing so!

(dvar Torah by Rabbi Yissocher Frand from Torah.org)

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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