

א ביסל תורה!

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ב' שבט תשפ"ה · בא

Ownership and Belonging

By Harry Davidoff '28

Before Hashem brings the last plague, He tells משה to instruct בני ישראל to ask their neighbors to “borrow” (according to several translations) valuables which they had no intention of returning: “וְיִשְׁאַלוּ אִישׁ מֵאִתּוֹ” “and each man should borrow from his neighbor, and each woman from hers” (שמות (י"א:ב). There is something very troubling about this. How were בני ישראל able to do this? How could they just lie to the Egyptians and then abscond with their stuff? The פסוק seems to have some issues that need to be resolved.

Several authorities comment on this matter. The ברכה אשר says that בני ישראל initially did aim to return the valuables they were borrowing, but after the Egyptians chased behind them and drowned in the ים סוף, they were granted ownership over the valuables. Not only does this not make sense, but, how exactly were they planning to return them? Were they just going to send them back with a messenger once they settled in ארץ ישראל? And in that case, what was the point of taking the valuables in the first place?

רב הירש gives a different explanation as to how בני ישראל were allowed to take the Egyptians' valuables: the Egyptians gave them as gifts. The way רב הירש understands it, the Jews previously had six days to rifle through the Egyptians' belongings during מכת חושך, and if they wished they could have taken what they wanted. However, they did not. When the Egyptians recovered their ability to see and found that nothing had been taken, they were grateful to the

Jews and felt guilty about the ways they had taken advantage of them all this time. Thus, the Egyptians felt obligated to repay the Jews by giving them material compensation. This does, however, contrast with opinions in later texts that the Jews were given a significant portion of the wealth of Egypt—were the Egyptians really that grateful? Compensation does not necessarily mean a significant portion of their own wealth?!

חזקוני has an alternative answer. This was simply a fair trade: the Jews had to leave behind their houses and fields, which they could not take with them, and the Egyptians gave the Jews money. According to this point of view, the Egyptians were exchanging their gold and silver for the Jews' land in ארץ גשן as part of a business deal. This does make a bit more sense, but as the תורה never explicitly says anything about a business deal, this answer lacks evidence.

Finally, the הדר זקנים says that the Egyptians gave them all of their valuables not because of any appreciation for בני ישראל's presence, it was for an entirely different reason: they wanted to be rid of the Jews as fast as possible. The הדר זקנים claims that the Egyptians hated the Jews, and would have done anything at that point to be rid of them as soon as possible. This does beg the question, however: if the Egyptians hated בני ישראל's presence, why did they chase after them in פרשת בשלח to bring them back to Egypt?

Whatever the case may be, at the end of the day, ה' constructed events so that בני ישראל would become very wealthy upon leaving Egypt. Hashem chose us,

ל, בני ישראל, to be His people, to follow His מצוות, and to carry on the legacy of our forefathers: יצחק, אברהם, and יעקב. While the true reason for this is not clear, we see that neither is the will of Hashem and sometimes we need to follow it regardless of our understanding of His will.

מה העבודה הזאת לכם?

By Yochanan Cramer '26

בא includes the last three plagues, which were the last straw in פרעה's reluctance to let the Jewish people go. After all the turmoil, the Jewish people receive their first communal commandment of ראש חודש, but we should pay special attention to what follows: the commandment of פסח and its special קרבן. In the תורה's discussion of the פסח, קרבן פסח, tells the elders of Israel: וְהָיָה כִּי-יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעֲבֹדָה לָכֶם. הַזֹּאת לָכֶם וְאַמְרָתֶם זִבְח־פֶּסַח הוּא לַה' אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל-בְּתֵי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנִגְפוֹ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-בְּתֵינוּ הִצִּיל וַיִּקַּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ "And it shall be when your children say to you: 'What is this service to you?' And you shall say 'This is the פסח offering for G-d, who passed over the houses of בני ישראל when they were in Egypt, in his smite of Egypt but who saved our houses.' And the nation bowed and paid homage" (שמות י"ב:כ"ז-כ"ח).

If the underlined phrase seems familiar, it is because this is the question asked by one of the 4 children in the מגיד section; these are the words of the Wicked Son: וְשָׁעָה מָה הוּא אֹמֵר? מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם. לָכֶם – וְלֹא לּוֹ. וְלִפִּי שְׂהוּצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכָּל כֶּפֶר בְּעֵקֶר. וְאִם אֵתָּה הַקְהָה אֶת שִׁנּוֹ וְאָמַר לּוֹ: "בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם." לִי וְלֹא-לּוֹ. אֱלֹהֵי הַזֶּה שֵׁם, לֹא הָיָה נִגְאָל "A wicked one; what would he say? 'What is this service to you?' 'To you', [as to say] not 'to him'. And since he has brought himself out of the norm, he is certainly a

heretic. And you must set his teeth on edge and say to him: 'For this reason, G-d did this for me when he took me out of Egypt' 'For me', and not 'for him'. Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed." A question that immediately comes to mind is: how could משה's special words be used as a question posed by the wicked son?

The great Sephardic, 18th century Israeli, רבי חיים יוסף, otherwise known as the חיד"א, says in his commentary on the שמחת הרגל, הגדה, that from here, the understanding is that the wicked person who asks, 'What is this service to you,' an unpleasant question, is removing himself from the community by denying the basic principles of faith. In this way, we presume that it is a wicked person who says this. Certainly, he who asks this question with wicked intentions we therefore answer him harshly, but we also say, וַיִּקַּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ "And the people bowed in homage." This implies that it is only in good tidings that children may turn out to be righteous. Rather than משה's words being used as a disgrace to the Jewish faith, they are being used for initiating the people's self-improvement. May we use this beautiful idea to understand that just as the wicked son can have the opportunity to better himself, so can we in the wrongdoings of our own lives.



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