Points to Ponder

Vaera 5780

***Rav Schachter Shlita*** *would note to us that Makkas Bechoros is the only one of the ten plagues that we have miztvos to remember. It was on the night that Makkas Bechoros occurred that Pharoh made the official government declaration freeing the Jews. The Mitzvos that recall Makkas Bechoros (Pidyon Haben, etc.) are not so much intended to recall the miracle involved in the makkah but rather to celebrate our gaining independence. Our independence enables us to commit ourselves to total and absolute subservience to God.The Baal Hatanya writes (in Likutei Torah) that it is well known that it was during the period of the Second Temple that the rabbis instituted many Gezeiros and Harchokos, as opposed to the period of the First Temple. He suggested (based on Kabbalah sources) that at the time of the First Temple, since the Jewish people had independence, they were able to be totally committed to Hashem, and therefore the yetzer hara had less control over them. But during the period of the Second Temple, since they lacked independence, their commitment to Hashem suffered (by definition), and therefore there was a much greater need for gezeiros, because the yetzer hara had a stronger hold on the people.*

*Still, the other Makkos give us a chance to see and appreciate Yad Hashem and our Yiras Shomayim. As this week’s Parasha presents 7 Makkos, let us present 7 ideas related to each of the Maakos listed in the Parasha):*

**דם Dam** - Why was Dam the first of the Makos that Hashem sent? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl** explained that when a person has jealousy, desire or a penchant for Kavod, it destroys him (see Pirkei Avos). When a person quenches the penchant toward these Middos through the Torah and Mussar, all is well. However, if the internal mechanisms do not apply, then external means to handle the jealousy, desire and Kavod will be employed. Rav Moshe noted that this happens in governments especially -- where the motives of war and of unrest are most often jealousy, desire and honor and the result is most often, death and theft.  In order to change their middos here, Hashem first sent the Egyptians the Makkah of blood to show them that they were people who had blood on their hands all the time -- not just when actively killing. Their actions were based on their jealousy, desire and honor and these actions left blood on their hands -- and throughout their land.

 **צפרדע Tzefardeiya** - **Rav Lamm Shlita** noted that the early Makkos highlighted that which was most important to the Egyptians that became the source of their travail and woe. The frogs were a sign of fertility and here, the frogs had so much fertility that it threatened the comfort of the Egyptians and their lives. Rav Lamm expanded the message -- noting that in our own lives we have our idols --science, technology etc. The expansion of each to an extreme has brought us a world of anarchy in extreme freedom, pornography in the extreme of free love, technology and enslavement to it -- etc. There is divine irony in all of it.

**כינים Kinim** - The Kinim were on man and beast (Shemos 8;14) - Why couldn’t the magicians replicate this Makka? **Rashi** explains that they had no power on something that was smaller than a barleycorn. **Daas Zekanim** offers a different interpretation. They note that unless a magician’s foot is on the ground, he has no ability to conduct his wizardry. **Rav Mattisyahu Solomon Shlita** notes that the severity of this Makkah went so far that the Magician couldn’t place his foot on the ground because of the Kinim.

**ערוב Arov - Rashi (8:17)** notes that it was all types of wild animals mixed together. Why is it important to know that they came together? **Rav Nosson Gestetner ztl.** explained that different wild animals become scared of different things. Some are afraid of fire, tossed stones, water etc. But, what scares one wild animal might embolden a different specie. Thus, that they came in a group meant that the Egyptians were more helpless in deterring them since no one proven method of chasing them was a possibility.

**דבר Dever - Rav Soloveitchik ztl.** noted that Dever was unique among the Makkos insofar as it was the first that shattered the economic and military foundations of the Egyptian empire. The other Makkos made the Egyptians uncomfortable. This Makka made it so that their economy could not and would not recover. Pharaoh considered the Jews his property. Hashem showed him that even that which he DID own he could not control. Thus, this makka is the one of Yad HaChazaka -- it is the outstretched arm that exposes danger and the suddenness of catastrophe that is about to strike. It was now that Pharaoh would see the power of Hashem in a more intense, more damaging way.

**שחין Shechin - Rav Mordechai Eliyahu ztl**. noted the possuk (Devarim 7:15) that reminds us that if we follow the Mitzvos than the plagues of Mitzrayim that we knew will not be upon us. Rav Mordechai Eliyahu wanted to know what was added with the words “Asher Yadata” that you know? Don’t we know of all of the Makkos? Rav Eliyahu answers that in order to make sure that we really understood the intensity of each of the Makkos, Hashem allowed us to experience them in Mitzrayim but for a brief moment. Otherwise, we might look at a Shechin and recommend a talc or a salve or a cream for it, out of our ignorance. Therefore Hashem gave us a moment’s experience of the Makkah that would stay with the Egyptian so that we would know what they were going through and know that if we follow the Mitzvos, we will never experience the same fate.

**ברד Barad** - The one who feared the word of Hashem (Shemos 9:20) - Note that it does not say, “the one who feared Hashem” because Yiras Shomayim does not come as a result of shock and awe in a Makka. It comes from someone listening to the word of Hashem and His Torah. **Rav Yechiel Perr Shlita** would also note the contrast is to “he who did not pay attention”. Rav Perr explained that not having belief comes from not being open to having it. The opportunities to see Hashem in so many different ways abound us. We just need to allow ourselves to be open to it.