

# INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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Arnold Meyer. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

1 SHEVAT

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BO

## Seeing is Believing

**And Bnei Yisroel went and did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did (12:28).**

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly repetitious conclusion of the *posuk*. In other words, the beginning of the verse clearly states that Bnei Yisroel did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon; so why did the Torah find it necessary to conclude with the words "so they did"? Rashi explains that the words "so they did" is referring to Moshe and Aharon: they too, did the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*.

Maharal in the Gur Aryeh (*Shemos* 12:28) wonders; why is it assumed that Moshe and Aharon would not have had to bring a *Korban Pesach* that the Torah had to tell us otherwise?

Additionally, if the Torah meant to tell us that "so they did" is referring to Moshe and Aharon, why doesn't the Torah state it expressly and leave no room for confusion?

Very often, when telling our children to do something that we feel will improve their lives greatly (e.g. they should commit to studying Torah an hour a night), they silently wonder (and sometimes not so silently) why we ourselves are not modeling that very same behavior?

Of course they don't realize all the obligations that we are under (work, business meetings, school board meetings, home repairs etc.), so how can they possibly understand why we aren't able to make that very same commitment to Torah study?

But in fact, our kids are actually right.

Certainly, there are myriads of excuses we can make as to why we ourselves don't do what we are asking our kids to do, but that's exactly what they are – excuses. When one has many responsibilities there are conflicts which cannot be avoided. But our kids aren't fooled, they know when we are serious about an ideal and when we are merely paying lip service to an ideal. Our kids also know that we have unavoidable conflicts, but they will absolutely judge what we consider to be important in our lives, by how we choose to spend our free time.

Leadership follows some of the same rules. Obviously, a leader has many responsibilities and obligations, after all, that is what leadership is all about – taking responsibility to get things done. Yet some leaders see themselves as above following certain laws that everyone else must adhere to. They forget that they too have a responsibility to follow the rules.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about what kind of leaders Moshe and Aharon were. On the night that Bnei Yisroel left Egypt, undoubtedly, there was a multitude of things to do and Moshe and Aharon could easily be forgiven for not fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*. But that's not the type of leaders they were; they led by example and did exactly what everyone else was supposed to do. That's what the Torah is telling us by not mentioning their names: They fulfilled the *Korban Pesach* like everyone else – as ordinary members of Bnei Yisroel about to leave Egypt.



### Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha* the final plague is performed: *Makos Bechoros*. Unlike the others, this one is performed by Hashem Himself, without a messenger. The Torah teaches that the plague caused the deaths of all the Egyptian firstborns, but that the Jews who put the blood on their doorways survived. However, here are some details from Chazal that you might not have known:

1. Hashem killed all the firstborns of Egypt, including visiting foreigners, non Jewish slaves, and animals. The Egyptian firstborns were killed no matter where in the world they were hiding (*Me'am lo'ez Shemos* 2, chapter 7).
2. Hashem killed the firstborn animals, to show that there was no difference between the Egyptians and their animals. The firstborn captives were also killed because, when asked about freedom, they would say that they preferred staying as slaves rather than being with the Jews who were freed (*Shemos Rabbah* 18:10).



# Contend or Pretend?

*And you shall guard the matzos... (12:17)*

Rashi (ad loc) explains that guarding the matzos entails being very meticulous in their preparation in order to prevent them from becoming *chometz* (leavened). Rashi goes on to quote the Mechilta (*Bo*, parsha 9), “R’ Yoshia says – Do not read the word ‘matzos’ rather read it ‘mitzvos’ (although vowelized differently, the word matzos is spelled exactly the same as *mitzvos*) – just as people do not allow the matzos to become *chometz* (by delaying the process to completion), so to they shouldn’t allow *mitzvos* to become “leavened.” Rather, if an opportunity to do a *mitzvah* presents itself, do it immediately.”

In other words, just as we have to be meticulous in our process preparing dough to become matzo (eliminating all unnecessary delay), so too we must have the same attitude of immediacy toward fulfilling *mitzvos*.

Yet the analogy seems flawed; if one delays doing a *mitzvah*, he can do it a little later or, at the very worst, he lost an opportunity. But if one fails to prepare the dough for matzos properly, he has created a far worse situation: he now has *chometz* on his hands, which on Pesach is a serious transgression. How are these two ideas analogous?

Generally, people delay or push off doing things they wish to avoid doing. Procrastination is usually not a problem of time management or of planning. People simply delay doing things they don’t want to do. If we ask our children to clean up their room, even if they finally acquiesce, getting them to actually do it is often a battle. Imagine if after finally getting them to pick up their room we now ask them

to set the table, and then clear and wash the dishes. Pretty soon they will begin to resent doing things we make them do and begin to object.

Unfortunately, doing *mitzvos* can fall into the same rut. If one doesn’t perceive *mitzvos* as opportunities, but rather as onerous obligations, he will soon begin to resent doing them. Pretty soon one will delay and push off fulfilling them. Eventually, those delays will become noncompliance, which leads to nonobservance. When we force our children to get up, wash their hands, daven, make *brachos*, and the like, we are actually well on our way of getting them to resent doing *mitzvos*. In other words we are on the *derech* of getting them “off the *derech*.”

We must slowly educate our children that *mitzvos* are really opportunities. Chazal tell us exactly how to do this; give them incentives every step of the way. Show them that learning Torah and doing *mitzvos* can be rewarding. When it comes to doing things like studying Torah and *mitzvos* the Gemara (*Pesachim* 50b) teaches, “*Metoch shelo lishma ba lishma* – if one begins by doing things for a selfish reason he will eventually come to do it for the proper reason.”

After a while a person begins to realize how meaningful it is to begin the day off with a conversation with Hashem, or how intellectually stimulating and enjoyable studying Torah can be. There are very few *mitzvos* that aren’t accessible to the emotions or intellect.

This is what Chazal mean we should not delay fulfilling *mitzvos*. We should perceive every *mitzvah* as an opportunity for ourselves; not merely as something we have to do.

## Did You Know Continued

3. Interestingly, if a Jew was supposed to die that night, Hashem extended his life. But if an Egyptian was supposed to die he died anyway, even if he wasn't a firstborn. Hashem wasn't concerned that people would say that even non-firstborns died, because Hashem only performs miracles (extending one's life) for Bnei Yisroel (*Me'am lo'ez ibid*).
4. Although all the previous plagues were performed with various messengers, Hashem had to do this one alone because not even angels could tell who was a first born. Even in the case of twins, Hashem would kill the one conceived first (*Me'am lo'ez ibid*).
5. The blood on the doors obviously wasn't a sign for Hashem, but for the people to publicly do what Hashem said and repent. In other words, putting blood on the doors was a way of expressing one's desire to be with the Jewish people. This commitment also protected the Jewish firstborn who were in Egyptian houses (*Me'am lo'ez ibid*).
6. Hashem also destroyed all of their idols. Silver and gold melted, stone shattered, clay was pulverized, and wood was decayed. He destroyed them all, except the one called Baal-Zephon, to make the Egyptians think that He wasn't powerful enough (*Shemos Rabbah* 15:15). This mistake is what caused them to pursue the Jews and ultimately be destroyed (*Eitz Yosef*).
7. Additionally, that night Hashem burned all of their sacred sheep, and the smell of the objects of their worship burning caused the Egyptians as much pain as all the plagues (*Me'am lo'ez ibid*).



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