

It was on midnight that Hashem smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh sitting on his throne to the firstborn of every captive who was in the dungeon. (12:29)

We have reached the last of the ten *makkos*, plagues. This is the end of the line. Every firstborn – *kol b'chor* – implies that any firstborn who had the misfortune to be in Egypt at the time of the *makkos bechoros*, plague of the firstborn, also died. If: he was not an Egyptian; he was a tourist visiting the country; he was a temporary resident on business; he was not an Egyptian, but rather a member of a different nation – if he had a firstborn, or if he was a firstborn, he suffered the same fate as the Egyptians. Even the unlucky fellow who was a captive relegated to spending his life in an Egyptian dungeon, he, too, had the dubious honor of being considered an honorary Egyptian. This is enigmatic. What did the captive do? He had no part in the Jews' enslavement. Why was he subjected to this plague?

Rashi enlightens us with two reasons which imply the necessity of subjecting these random people to the plague. First, as lowly as these captives were, they still rejoiced over Jewish suffering. Imagine, they were captives who were probably going to spend the rest of their wretched lives in an Egyptian dungeon, but it made them feel good that someone else had it worse. The Jews' suffering eased their own suffering. This may be perverted reasoning, but sadly, a lot of people have perverted minds. *Rashi* gives a second reason. These captives should not think that their praying to their idols engendered the punishment the Egyptians were now experiencing and spared them from it. Thus, they, too, died. The captives did not actually persecute the Jews, because they themselves were subjected to immense pain and suffering. Yet, they rejoiced over Jewish pain. Since they might have attributed the Egyptian punishment to their gods, they, too, suffered along with the Egyptians. This explains the suffering of the captives, but what about the tourists, or the temporary residents? What did they do to incur such punishment? They did nothing. They were just passing through. Yet, now they had reason to rejoice over the Jewish pain.

Horav Noach Weinberg, zl, explains that the answer should be obvious. One cannot be a tourist in a country where genocide is a way of life, where persecuting an entire nation and subjecting them to the most inhumane brutality is part of its culture. One should run from such a country. It should not be on the itinerary of any decent human being. By remaining in such a country, one is making a statement: "I condone those atrocities. I see nothing wrong with persecuting hapless Jews." Such a person deserves the same punishment as the full-time residents.

If one lives in a country where its leadership ignores atrocity, where perversion is an everyday affair, where moral bankruptcy is a way of life – then he is as reprehensible as everyone else. His silence is tantamount to acquiescence. Not taking an active stance against terror, persecution, immorality is similar to being complicit with the devil.

What about *Klal Yisrael*? It seems that they, too, had reason to fear the effects of the smiting of the firstborn. The Torah teaches that they were instructed to place the blood of the *Korban Pesach* on the two doorposts and lintel of their homes. This was in order to present a sign for the plague of destruction to pass over this home. A committed Jew lived here. What if they did not smear the blood as required? Apparently, the firstborn of the Jews would have been included in the plague. The aforementioned reasons, which applied to the tourist and captive, certainly did not apply to the Jews. What did they do wrong that necessitated a sign over their doors for their protection?

Rav Weinberg explains that when one asks Hashem to judge someone, he must realize that such a request may have dire ramifications for the petitioner. Hashem always judges the petitioner first. When one asks to have justice served, he is, in effect, asking Hashem to restrain His trait of compassion and, instead, stand in judgment. We must be prepared to be examined. Only when we are deserving can we ask that Hashem mete out justice against our enemies.

We have two ways to call out to Hashem: “Please Hashem have mercy on me”; or “Hashem look at what they/he are doing to me.” Do we want our appeal to be justice-oriented or mercy-oriented? When we criticize others, we had better be prepared for the back-lash. They might receive their due, but it may exact a costly price on us. Since justice was being carried out that day in Egypt, all were being judged – even the Jews. By smearing the blood outside their homes, they were entreating Hashem for lenience.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* applies this thought to our personal lives. Many of us take a dim view of another person’s errors. We lack compassion, tolerance; we ignore the many mitigating circumstances that give reason for a person’s behavior – however obnoxious it may be. There are people around us who are experiencing profound guilt for the errors in judgment they made in the course of their lives. Rather than try to understand why they act the way they do – we too often condemn. This is especially true when it comes to judging teenagers who do not conform to the prevalent mold of the day. We are quick to degrade. Some of us are not satisfied with disparaging the student; we take our judgment one step further: we besmirch those who devote their lives, sacrificing time, energy, money and family, because they view these children as unpolished diamonds, who have been left by the wayside by a system that rejects anyone it is not willing to try to understand.

Being judgmental not only creates a barrier between brothers, but it also causes the *Shechinah* to distance Itself from our midst. We are divided by senseless hatred, resulting from: our own insecurities; by arrogance that is the cause of endless criticism; by infighting which is the result of envy. It has gotten to the point that the friendship has been redefined. I will be friends only with those on the same social strata as I am on. Otherwise, my other friends will look askance at me. We nitpick people and organizations, because everything must fit into our myopic perception of life. Rather than being forgiving, we have become petty and mean-spirited. What we do not realize is: Hashem will judge us in the same manner that we judge others. Perhaps this might give us reason to wake up and smell the roses. Life can be great – it is great, as long as we remove our lenses of

negativity, seek compassion for those in need, and not fault those who vex us. They, too, have their personal issues with which they must contend.