

But against all Bnei Yisrael, no dog shall whet (“sharpen”) its tongue. (11:7)

Simply, this means that Egypt will be engulfed with death and grief. The Jews, however, will enjoy complete respite and tranquility; not even a dog will bark (utter a sharp cry – *Rashi*) at them. What is the significance of the dogs barking, or not barking? Does it really make a difference? Everything that is recorded in the Torah has a message. What then is the message of the dog's restraint from barking? The *Bais HaLevi, zl*, explains with the following anecdote: A terrible dispute erupted in the city of Brisk. Two groups took sides against one another, and the fires of controversy were being fanned throughout the community. As *Rav* of the city, the *Bais HaLevi* sought a way to extinguish the flames of hatred and put an end to the *machlokes*, dispute.

The *Rav* called in the most influential lay leaders of the community and enjoined them to speak with both sides to end the strife that was rapidly splintering the community.

Regrettably, their response was one that has become quite common: The leaders refused to get involved, lest it be inferred that they were taking sides. They felt that by remaining neutral and aboveboard with everyone, they would maintain their standing in the community.

Rav Yosheh Ber viewed their response as obsequious, shirking their responsibility as communal leaders. He told them, “Your neutral attitude has a precedent among the dogs who lived in Egypt during the Exodus. In the *Talmud Bava Kamma* 60b, *Chazal* teach that when the *Malach Ha'mavess*, Angel of Death, comes to a city, the dogs begin to cry – they whine mournfully in response to the impending death that visits the city. In contrast, when the dogs sense the presence of *Eliyahu HaNavi* they laugh, their barking is a playful sound. In Egypt, on the night of the Redemption, both *Eliyahu HaNavi*, who heralded the Exodus, and the Angel of Death, who slayed the Egyptian firstborn, came to town. What is a dog to do? Should he recognize *Eliyahu* and bark playfully, or give precedence to the Angel of Death and bark mournfully? The dogs decided to keep their collective mouths shut. They remained neutral – not wishing to take a stand by getting involved.”

The lay leadership took the hint and immediately addressed the issues, which were soon resolved.