

On the day I struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified every firstborn in Yisrael for Myself. (3:13)

The Torah teaches that, on that fateful *Pesach* night when the Egyptian firstborn were slain by Hashem, the Jewish firstborn were consecrated to Hashem, to serve Him in the Temple. Should Jewish firstborns be singled out for a life of consecrated service just because their Egyptian counterparts were designated for death? The *Alter, zl, m'Slabodka, Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel*, explains that the night of *makkas bechoros* – when the Egyptian firstborn died during the tenth plague to strike Egypt – it was a night of severe anxiety and tension for the Jewish firstborn. Wherever they went, they saw the bodies of Egyptian firstborns either dead or dying. Can one imagine the screams that were heard throughout the land? These screams stuck a personal note in the hearts and minds of the Jewish firstborn. “There, if not for the grace of G-d – go I” must have coursed through their minds. The image, pain, screams, anxiety, remained with the Jewish firstborn all of that night until the light of day, when all was quiet and it was clear that the Jewish firstborn had been spared. All of this anxiety was taken into account and added to the merits of *b'chorei Yisrael*, the Jewish firstborn.

One pressing question, however, must be addressed. Why were the *bechorim* anxious? Had not Hashem promised them that nary a hair on their heads would be touched; that they would not be harmed in any way? Why were they so filled with anxiety? Was Hashem's assurance insufficient? Human nature hears screams; human nature knows firstborn are dying; human nature naturally reacts negatively, regardless of its awareness that it will not happen to them. Human beings believe and have complete faith, but, when the quiet night is pierced with screams of pain and death, human beings become anxious.

Hashem took all of this into account and rewarded the firstborn with consecrated status. The Almighty wants nothing but good to be experienced by His creations. Thus, when the balance of good is impugned due to troubles, then the stakes must be altered and the human being who suffered will be reimbursed for his trouble. No pain goes unrequited.

It is all part of a system of balances. The life of the fellow who must work very hard for a livelihood will be balanced in other ways, while the one for whom money is not a problem might have to “pay” for this convenience somehow.

The *Brisker Rav, zl*, quoted a well-known story, which he heard from his father. His father emphasized that this story was a tradition in their family, heralding back to *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, primary disciple of the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*. Apparently, the *Rebbetzin* of the *Gaon* would go soliciting for the poor, together with another woman. On a daily basis, they would walk all over the cobblestone streets of Vilna, knocking on doors, asking for whatever charity they could receive in order to ease the plight of the city's poor. These two holy women were very close friends, and they made up with one another that whoever left this world first would appear to the

other one and relate about her experience in the *Olam HaEmes*, World of Truth.

The *Rebbetzin's* friend was summoned first to her rightful reward. Understandably, the *Rebbetzin* waited longingly to hear how her good friend was faring in *Olam Habba*. It took a while, but she appeared to her, saying that she was not permitted to reveal anything about her experience in Heaven. Since she had given her word, however, and in Heaven a word is also respected, she was permitted to reveal one thing.

The *Rebbetzin* was waiting with bated breath to hear what her friend had to say. "Do you remember the time (a while ago) that we visited the home of a certain woman, for the purpose of soliciting her for a charitable endeavor? Unfortunately, she was not home at the time. We left the home and began to walk down the street, when we saw her walking across the street. You raised your hand and pointed with your finger to show that she was walking on the opposite side of the street. We then both crossed the street and spoke with her.

The woman was quite generous in her contribution toward our cause. Concerning the actual donation, we both received Heavenly credit for the steps that we took to go to her house and when we continued along the street: all of this is shared equally by both of us. The fact that you raised your hand, however, and pointed with your finger in her direction – that, too, is recorded in Heaven to your individual merit!"

The lesson is clear: Nothing – absolutely nothing – is overlooked by Heaven. Every action, every endeavor, every bit of labor, travail, pain – it is all recorded in our behalf. Hashem takes everything into consideration. No one receives one iota of punishment more than he deserves. Indeed, as *Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl*, observes, Hashem delayed the *Mabul*, Flood, which was to destroy the entire world humanity for seven days, out of respect for Mesushelach, so that the seven days of mourning could be properly observed. The greatest tragedy in the history of mankind was held up, so that Mesushelach could receive his due honor. In other words, in factoring the decision concerning the collective punishment for the whole world, Hashem considered the honor of one person.

I do not think many of us are prepared to declare our gratitude to Hashem for the many *yesurim*, troubles/pain, that we suffer (although we should), but, if we would think about it, our *yesurim* are rarely isolated cases. They usually arrive in tandem with honors, rewards, *nachas*. This prevents the honor from going to our heads or makes sure that the honor comes to us in a "balanced" manner. Honor is a good thing, but, if we only receive honor, it will not be good for long.