

There shall be a great outcry in the entire land of Egypt, such as there has never been and such as there shall never be again. But against Bnei Yisrael, no dog shall whet his tongue. (11:6,7)

There was a remarkable contrast of sound that fateful night in Egypt. The Egyptian firstborn were dying amid a cacophony of weeping throughout the land. In contrast, not a sound was heard in the Jewish ghetto of Goshen. While under most circumstances one can hear sounds even during the dead of night, on the night the firstborn died, it was silent in the area of the Jews: no dog barked; the crickets were silent; no noise whatsoever; total silence.

This was all part of Hashem's plan. It was His demonstration, a lesson to remember for all time: a fundamental difference exists between Jew and gentile. *L'maan teidun asher yafleh Hashem bein Mitzrayim u'bein Yisrael*; "So that you shall know that Hashem will distinguish between Egypt and Yisrael" (Ibid 11:7). We must hammer the lesson that we learned that night into our psyche, so that we never forget and never lose sight of the fact that there is absolutely no connection, on any level, between Jew and gentile. The contrast between the unrestrained, tumultuous noise that reigned in Egypt that night, and the extreme silence that prevailed in the area of the Jews, rendered this distinction translucent.

Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita, delineates the three *mitzvos*, which, in order to be properly executed, require a person to contemplate the intended message of the *mitzvah*. In other words, Hashem gave us these three *mitzvos* for a specific reason: that we cogitate and apply their message. They are: the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis*; the *mitzvah* of *Tefillin*; and the *mitzvah* of *Succah*. "So that you remember and perform all My commandments, and be holy to your G-d" (*Bamidbar* 15:40). To wear *Tzitzis* and not "remember" their meaning, such that we concentrate on their message to carry out Hashem's other *mitzvos*, undermines the very essence of the *mitzvah*. Likewise, we find that the *mitzvah* of *Tefillin* directs us towards Torah study. "So that the Torah of Hashem might be in your mouth" (*Shemos* 13:9). Intrinsic to the *mitzvah* of *Tefillin* is the follow-up of Torah study. Last, we find the *mitzvah* of *Succah*, "So that your generations may know that I caused *Bnei Yisrael* to dwell in *Succos* when I took them out of the land of Egypt" (*Vayikra* 23:24). *Succah* catalyzes remembrance, perpetuating Hashem's care for us in the Wilderness following the exodus from Egypt. Each of these *mitzvos* is followed by a phrase that reveals its purpose, beginning with the word *l'maan*, "so that."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* extends this idea of a *mitzvah*, through a message that must be internalized, to the utter silence that prevailed and surrounded the Jewish People on the night of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the Exodus. The Torah also qualifies the silence, which is personified by *Lo yecheratz kelev leshono*, "No dog shall whet its tongue," with *L'maan teidun*, "So that you may know that Hashem shall distinguish between Egypt and Yisrael." We must acknowledge and remember that the

distinction between Jew and gentile which occurred that night was not intended to be for that night alone. It is here permanently. It was intended to demonstrate for all time that *Klal Yisrael*, the Jewish nation, is a people apart from all other nations. We are a nation that must distinguish itself in our exclusiveness. We are different, and the only way we will continue to remain so is if we take pride in our heritage by transmitting it to our children.

The Jew who forgets this lesson opens himself up to accepting the base level of conduct that characterizes contemporary society. While it is primarily endemic to the gentile world, it is creeping in to our world via those who have sold their Jewish birthright for a bowl of red lentils. The Torah admonishes us to shun the practices of the Canaanite nations who inhabited the Holy Land before we returned there. The Torah warns us not to go in their ways. Regrettably, when we do not take pride in “our” ways, in the glorious Jewish culture with religion as its centerpiece, we are left with very little with which to maintain our fidelity to Judaism.

The only way to elevate oneself above the pitfalls of the baseness which surrounds him at every turn is to constantly remind himself of the lofty nature of the Jew. Thus, *Rav Belsky* notes, the lessons of the Exodus are as significant for us today as they were when the redemption took place. Never – never – should a Jew think that he has anything whatsoever in common with the gentile. This does not countenance elitism; rather, it encourages the Jew to take pride in his heritage.