

And He (Hashem) will see the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts. (12:23)

We have two contrasting reasons for our nation's redemption from Egypt. *Rashi* (*Shemos* 12:6) cites the *Mechilta* which attributes their release to their involvement in the *mitzvos* of: *Korban Pesach*, the *Pesach* offering; and *Bris Milah*, when they circumcised themselves. They smeared the mingled blood on the doorposts and entrances of their homes as a sign of their unwavering commitment to Hashem. In the same *Mechilta*, *Rav Huna* quotes *Bar Kappara*, who asserts that *Klal Yisrael* merited the Exodus due to their adherence to four staples of Judaism: they kept their Jewish names; they maintained their language; they did not engage in immoral relationships; they distanced themselves from *lashon hora*, evil speech. Which was the dominant factor: their commitment to *mitzvos*; or their refusal to assimilate with Egyptian culture?

Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita, explains that not only are these reasons not contradictions with one another, but, in fact, they complement one another in underscoring the Jews' merit for redemption. Identity plays a crucial role in life, both on the personal and national levels. *Klal Yisrael* was confronted with a serious identity crisis. On the one hand, they were *Bnei Avraham*, *Yitzchak* and *Yaakov*. As descendants of the Patriarchs, they should have (and did) develop a continued self-image that remained constant, even as new aspects of their national self were competing on the horizon. They were Jews living in Egypt, exposed to and bombarded by a counter culture that undermined their past and eroded their future. They questioned their values, spiritual beliefs, role in society and even purpose in life. The identity crisis was almost a roll of the dice in terms of predicting how they would swing.

Baruch Hashem, their early upbringing saved the day by maintaining their national character and identity through their commitment to a glorious past founded by the Patriarchs. They were anchored in Judaism, despite their weakness toward temptation resulting from their lack of pride, due to their being subject to the cruel enslavement. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that had we not asserted our national individuality and exclusivity, had we not remained distinct, nothing would distinguish us from our Egyptian "hosts." The Jewish nation would simply not have existed – period! This may be likened to a drop of milk that spilled into a pot of meat (which is 60 times more), so that the milk is *bateil*, nullified, has no distinct presence (i.e. it is not noticeable).

We did not adopt Egyptian values and culture. Their mode of speech was an anathema; their behavior even more so. We retained our moral values and our Jewish names. Our ethical character was not impaired by *lashon hora*. By successfully retaining our Jewish persona, we could then turn toward *mitzvah* observance which ultimately engendered the merit through which we became worthy of redemption.