

Sanctify for Me every first born, the first issue of every womb. (13:2)

Chazal (Kiddushin 29b) derive from here that the term *b'chor*, firstborn, applies only to the firstborn of the mother. A firstborn who is the first for the father, but not the mother, does not become consecrated *b'kedushas bechorah*, the sanctity of the firstborn. We wonder why this is so? The *bechorim* are sanctified due to the miracle concerning their salvation when all the heathen firstborn of Egypt were slain. The Jewish firstborn were spared. Regarding the Egyptian firstborn, no distinction was made whether it was the father's or mother's firstborn – they all died. Indeed, if no firstborn was in the house, then the oldest died. If so, then just as with regard to *yerushah*, inheritance, the firstborns right to the inheritance follows his paternal birthright, it should, likewise, apply to *pidyon haben*.

Horav Moshe Bick, zl, cites *Chazal (Sotah 11b)* who teach that the liberation from Egypt was effected in the merit of the *nashim tzidkanios*, righteous women, of that generation. They encouraged their husbands and imbued them with the requisite faith in an ultimate end to the slavery. The *Rav* asks why *Chazal* place emphasis on the women catalyzing the redemption, if, in fact, other citations in *Chazal* attribute the redemption to the performance of the *mitzvos* of *Korban Pesach* and *Bris Milah*. Furthermore, the facts that they maintained their language (*lashon ha'kodesh*), did not change their style of dress, and kept their Jewish names are all cited as merits for the Jews. Why are we ignoring those merits? We find two other Rabbinic festivals – *Purim* through Esther *haMalkah*, and *Chanukah* through Yehudis – in which *Chazal* attribute credit to the women. What happened to the contributions and *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, which came from the men?

Rav Bick explains that every *geulah*, redemption/salvation, requires the participation of both *Middas HaDin*, the attribute of Strict Justice and *Middas HaRachamim*, attribute of Mercy, working in tandem. The attribute of mercy/compassion “catalyzes” Hashem's compassion for the Jewish People. There needs, however, to be a balance, since this Heavenly compassion, if not constrained, will also reach out to our oppressors and diminish their punishment. Thus, Hashem judges with His attribute of Strict Justice, which, if it is not mitigated, will also punish the Jews who were far from perfect. Compassion plays a palliative role in assuaging the strict justice that is punishing our aggressors.

It is well-known (*Chazal Megillah 14b*) that, by nature, women are compassionate and, as such, their involvement will rouse the Heavenly attribute of Mercy. Indeed, when Yoshiahu *Hamelech* sought a “promising” prophesy, he sent his agents to Chuldah *HaNeviah*, rather than Yirmiyahu *HaNavi*, because her interpretation would be more compassionate. Thus, she would stimulate a more positive Heavenly response. Thus, when *Chazal* posit that *Klal Yisrael* was liberated in the merit of the righteous women, it does not negate the achievements and merit of the men. They, too, had many merits, as cited by *Chazal*. Our ancestors, however, required extra assistance from

Middas HaRachamim. Otherwise, *Middas HaDin* would prevail in Egypt, all firstborn would die. Therefore, *Middas HaRachamim* was roused by virtue of the *nashim tzidkanios*, thus providing a balance whereby the Egyptians received their due punishment and the Jews were spared.