

## **Bo - Rabbi Lerner - January 2, 2011**

### The Mitzvah of Pidyan Habechor

13:1-10: *Hashem tells Moshe to sanctify every firstborn, human or animal - they all belong to Hashem. Moshe then tells the people to remember this day they left Egypt, from the house of slavery; Hashem took them out so they shouldn't eat Chametz; they are leaving in the springtime and when they arrive in the land they should eat matzah for seven days; they should tell their children that because of this that Hashem did this; it should be a sign on your arm and between your eyes.*

Where is the mitzvah that Hashem commands Moshe? Moshe seems to totally digress and talk to the people about everything else. It is only in the next paragraph in pasuk 13:12 when the details of the mitzvah are presented - why this digression or long introduction that seems to have no relevance to this mitzvah? **Abarbanel**: Moshe was concerned that if he just gave this mitzvah, the people would make a major mistake - they will think that the essence of remembering Egypt would just be the redemption of the firstborn - that action would be the reminder of the time in Egypt, and all of issues involved with matzah, destroying chametz, etc - they would think that this one mitzvah was the only perpetual mitzvah to remember mitzrayim, and matzah and chametz laws were just for the one year. Therefore, Moshe reminded them all of the mitzvos of matzah, burning chametz, the details about entering the land. There would be three mitzvos for them to remember - bringing the korban pesach on the first night to remember that fateful night when God took us out of Egypt; eating matzah and burning the chametz; and the third mitzvah of redeeming the firstborn to remind us of the final plague.

13:3: *Moshe tells the people to remember this day when God took them out of Egyptian slavery with a strong hand.* **Rashi**: quotes the Mechilta that says we must remember the Exodus from Egypt every day; Rashi says this pasuk is the source of this mitzvah, not what Ben Zomah says in the Hagaddah where he learned it from Kol Yemai Chayechah - that pasuk is not a commandment, while this one is - Zachor es Hayom Haze; just like the commands of Zachor es Yom Hashabas and Zachor Asher Asah Lechah Amaleik. If you hold like the Abarbanel though, it is a problem since this pasuk with the speech to Benai Yisrael was Moshe's idea, not Hashem's, so it would not be a mitzvah. The **Rambam** says this pasuk is the special pesach mitzvah to remember the exodus on the one day of pesach, not the daily one mitzvah of remembering the Exodus.

**Rabbeinu Bachya**: this pasuk is the first Vayedaber Hashem el Moshe Laimor - why have the word Laimor added? It means to tell it over to the people - that is his real role, to be the transmitter of the mitzvos to the Jews. However, the more subtle meaning is that Moshe is to tell over the kabalistic aspects of the Torah - part of the Torah is revealed and rational - this is the simple peshat of the mitzvos; the other part is the inside core, the nistar, that is buried within; this is not for the masses of Jews, only for those on a higher spiritual level. The pasuk means that God spoke one and Moshe heard two - he understood the second, higher level of the Torah, and that is what he transmitted to those at a higher spiritual level who can understand these subtleties.

Did Hashem want to sanctify all firstborns immediately? In 13:11 **Rashi** says that there are those who learn that the bechoros born in the desert did not become sanctified. But if Hashem gave this mitzvah here, why didn't they sanctify this generation?

**Ramban:** it applies immediately, as soon as this mitzvah was given. What Rashi however meant is that they did not sanctify those born in the desert - but all those who were in Egypt and survived that dreadful night, they owed God an immediate sense of gratitude and had to be sanctified immediately. While this is a mitzvah for all generations, it will only be activated in the future when they enter the land. So there was a pidyan bechoros of those who came out of Egypt, and then it will resume in the future, beginning when they enter the land of Israel.

11:8: *Vehigadeta Lebinchah* - this is the mitzvah of telling over the story of the Exodus to one's children. *Ba'avur Zeh Asah Hashem Li Betzaisi Mimitzrayim* - *It is because of this that God acted towards us to take us out of Egypt.* What is the zeh in this pasuk? **Ramban:** it should be read as if there was a shin before the Asah - it means because of this (all of the miracles) that Hashem did for me when I left Mitzrayim that I am performing this Pesach service. It is saying that we are obligated to do all of these mitzvos because this is how we commemorate all of what God did for us - as if it says *Baavur Zeh She'asah Hashem Li.* **Rashi:** no - the zeh refers to what was said in the previous pasukim - that because of all of these mitzvos of pesach, matzah and marror that we kept - that is why Hashem did this for me, taking us out of Egypt. **Ibn Ezra:** quotes the opinion that was put forth later by the Ramban - many said that there is an extra shin in this pasuk, and it means that because of all that God did for us in Egypt is why we do all of these things; but this is all wrong - the mitzvah of eating matzah and avoiding chametz was the reason that God took us out of Egypt - because we did all of these things, that is why God redeemed us - God wants us to continue doing these mitzvos. **Da'as Torah:** We make a big mistake in our thinking, that because of the great events and miracles we have mitzvos - it is the reverse - it is because we did these mitzvos, that is why we earned the great events; Torah teaches us *Derech Eretz* and there is the phrase that we don't have any Torah if we have no *Derech Eretz*; but **Rav Embden** says it means something different - we plant, we sleep, we drink, we eat - these are the ways of the world - this is the meaning of *Derech Eretz*, the ways of the world - what the phrase means is that the entire world only exists because of the torah - God made the world only because of the Torah which preceded the world - if the Torah has these mitzvos, you need the world to actualize them; the world was created to conform to the Torah - the world was created for us to be able to live the life of the Torah; the mitzvos in the Torah drive the world; God wanted us to perform the mitzvos of pesach: of matzah and of Korban Pesach, and that is why he did all of these mitzvos.

**Meshech Chachmah** - the pasukim seem to indicate that this mitzvah of pidyan habein is tied to the entry into the land of Israel, as indicated in 13:5. 13:8 follows what preceded it, that we tell our children about all of what God did. What this means is that even though God commanded all of these mitzvos of pesach and matzah to be done annually, the Jews immediately entered into a miraculous life in the desert, a totally supernatural life. Here God is taking care of all our food and health needs in an open manner; this is not the real goal of Judaism where we eat manna and have a traveling well of water and are carried on the wings of eagles - this was a transitional phase of the nation's life. It is this month, as it says in 13:5, the month of spring - Aviv - Av of the yud bet, the first month of the year as **Rabbeinu Bachya** says - we must maintain the holidays in the right season. The optimum is to do all of these mitzvos beginning in the spring - then we would understand the miracles of Egypt. Because of this, *baavur zeh*,

God did all of the miracles - it is not because all of what God did for us in Egypt or for the sake of the mitzvos themselves - it is for the sake of living a normal life in the land - sowing and reaping, etc - that is why God took us out of Egypt - we are to elevate the normal life of reaping and sowing - God did all of this for us not so that we would live a miraculous life, but to superimpose upon the regular life a spirituality. Our wise sages said that the derasha on the words Baavur Zeh tell us that we cannot tell over the story of yetzias mitzrayim when matzah and marror are not in front of us. But what about the korban pesach? Chazal meant by telling us this that when there is only matzah and marror - when the temple was destroyed and we are in galus, being persecuted because we do things differently as Jews, and there is no korban pesach in front of us - and despite the antisemitism, we still persevere and keep all of the mitzvos. It is **baavur zeh**, because of our tenacity that even when we don't have eretz yisrael we still keep the mitzvos - that is why God did all of these things for us. We live a normal life, even with tremendous hardship, and that is why God did all of these things for us.

**Rav Yaacov Kaminetzky**: the **Sforno** says that all of the firstborn require redemption, as we do with all holy things - otherwise they could not do mundane things - without redemption they would be holy and could only work in the bais hamikdash; if you did not do a pidyan habein, the child could not be involved in secular activities - he would be holy like a korban. Rav Yaacov says this is difficult to understand - do we really want to be redeemed and not want to live in a world of kedusha? Yes - the ideal mitzvah is to live in the real world and live a life of kedusha in the real world, we should imbue the world with spirituality. We should be kodesh with one foot in the real world; that is what Hashem wants.