

Emor - Rabbi Lerner - May 1, 2011

The Episode of the Blasphemer

24:10-12: *A son of a Jewish mother and Egyptian father goes out into the midst of the camp, a fight erupts between he and a full Jew; his mother was Shlomis from the tribe of Dan. He then curses the name of God; he is arrested and placed in jail while they then sought out Moshe and God's direction what should be done with him. He is ultimately stoned by the people.*

When did this story happen and why is it placed here after the discussion of the chagim, the oil of the menorah, and the lechem hapanim? **Mizrachi**: it would appear that this event happened in the second year of their exodus from Egypt - this particular parsha in the Torah occurs after the Mishkan is built, and the Mishkan was set up Rosh Chodesh Nissan after the exodus; so it is the second year. **Rashi**: they placed him in jail *by himself* - there is only one other incarcerated person, the one who was caught violating Shabbos - the Mekoshesh Eitzim - he too was locked up and they weren't sure what to do with him; both stories of these sinners happened at the same time. They were the only occurrences of individual sins of Jews in the desert that the Torah records. They knew that the mekoshahish was chayiv misah, liable for death, but it wasn't spelled out what to do with him, which type of death penalty; but with the blasphemer, they did not know whether he was to be killed or not. The violator of Shabbos was during the first year, so that would make this story during the first year as well. **Sifsey Chachamim**: if you learn like Rashi, then you are forced to say that it was the lechem hapanim that caused him to blaspheme - he poked fun of the idea of the bread staying a whole nine days before it is eaten, that it is silly to keep the breads on the pans for a full week without eating them; he ridiculed it, and said it was foolishness, and this then led to his cursing the name of God; it can be the first year, with this story happening after they were commanded to make the breads.

Abarbanel: in this parsha, prior to the mention of the holidays, the parsha in 22:31-2 says *we should guard Hashem's commandments and should not desecrate God's name, that God's name should be sanctified*. The desecration of Hashem's name is a major sin that can only be forgiven with the person's death. The description of the festivals and details of the Mishkan is all about bringing glory to God's name - this story then follows this command to glorify God's name - he is a sinner who curses the name, doing just the opposite of the mitzvah of glorification; that is the link to this parsha, and he is then stoned - the worst punishment for the worst sin.

Who was this man? **Rashi**: he was the son of the Egyptian that Moshe killed when he saw him beating a Jew; he is the only Egyptian that we hear of in the Torah (other than Pharaoh). Why was that Egyptian beating the Jew? He had something going on with that Jewish slave's wife, Shlomis bas Dibri. When he discovered what the Egyptian was doing with his wife, the Egyptian started to beat him mercilessly, and Moshe slays him. She became pregnant from this affair; this is the only child who had a Jewish mother and Egyptian father during the Egyptian exile. **Rashi** says in Shmos that the Egyptian was attracted to Shlomis, and at night he came to their home and sent her husband out to work; the Egyptian then came into the house at night while her husband was at work and had intimate relations with her, with Shlomis thinking it was her husband. When her husband returned, he figured out what happened. When the Egyptian realized the Jew knew about it, he started to beat him. This version of the story says that she was innocent. **Ohr Hachayim** and **Sforno** agree that she was innocent, and that is why the Torah equates the two of the people fighting in this story, that they were both children of Jewish

women who were both righteous. **Rabbeinu Bachya**: Why doesn't the Torah mention her name until the middle of the story, initially not identifying the man? It is because she was the cause of the sin; she herself was not a good person; she willingly had an affair with the Egyptian; she was the guilty person. Normally, fetal development takes place in a woman's body, and then after the baby is born, she nurses the child for many months; the baby is very attached to its mother, and the mother's influence on a child is therefore much greater than the father; his father might have been righteous, but the mother was not. Most meforshim assume like this, that she was the only Jewish woman who consorted with Egyptians; all other women remained pure and righteous.

What was this child's status? The **Sifra (Medrish Halachah)** is quoted by **Rashi** - this blasphemer had converted, had wanted to become a full Jew. But why would he have to convert if he were the son of a Jewish mother? **Ramban**: the Sifra doesn't mean literally that he needed conversion; he underwent the same conversion that every Jew did at Har Sinai, when all Jews became Jews when they accepted the Torah and its commandments. He converted along with the rest of the Jews. So why single him out here that he converted? When the Jews left Egypt, he could have chosen to stay with his father's family or go with his mother's people; he chose to go with his mother and be a Jew; he did not need any process different from other Jews who all converted at Har Sinai. He was lauded for choosing to be a Jew when he could have stayed in Egypt. The **Ramban** further says that the French (**Ba'alei Tosefos**) disagree with him, and say that there was an actual conversion here; prior to the Torah being given, there was patrilineal descent, that your nationality went after the father; that is why he needed a real conversion. So he was considered a full-fledged goy and needed a real conversion. The **Ramban** rejects this opinion because from the time Avraham entered into the bris, there was a different concept of matrilineal descent. **Rav Yaacov Kaminetsky**: which Bris was the Ramban referring to - Bris Bein Habesarim or Bris Milah? Which one connects a Jew to the mother's status? It must be Bris Milah, because Hashem held back the birth of Yitzchak because he did not want his conception until it would come in a holy way, after Bris Milah - the reproductive organ had to become holy first with Bris Milah, so that his children can be holy seed; so it was Bris Milah that changed the holiness of conception, and it was after that point that matrilineal descent began.

So this child is totally Jewish and did not need a special conversion. So what is this fight about? **Abarbanel**: he was going out from being a boy to being a man, and involving himself in adult matters prematurely; that's why he got into a fight. Others say he was trying to plant his tent in the tribe of his mother who was from Dan; the other man told him no, that he had to follow the father; he did not have a right of inheritance from Dan. Who was the man fighting with the blasphemer? **Oznayim LaTorah**: both of these men were evil, fighting in public. Who was the Jewish man fighting with the blasphemer? He was the son of her husband who had divorced her and married another woman - they were "half brothers."

Why is he blaspheming God? **Sifsav Chachamim**: he wanted to plant his flag there, but the other person said he wasn't entitled. He first discovers now that he had an Egyptian father who was killed by Moshe by invoking the holy name of God. Since the name of God left him without a father, that what makes him invoke the same name - he is bitter at Moshe and at God when he discovers this story now, and that what leads him to curse God's name. The only time one is guilty of cursing God's name is when the holy name of God is used; he is cursing God's name, and Moshe has to wait until God tells them what to do with him. All who heard the sin are involved with the punishment - all who were present in the camp who heard him curse God were to be part of the punishment and carried out the sentence.