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## פרשת בא

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### פרק יב פסוק כב-כג

וּלְקַחְתֶּם אֶגְדָּת אֲזוּב וּטְבַלְתֶּם בָּדָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּסֶף וְהִגַּעְתֶּם אֶל-הַמְּשַׁקּוֹף וְאֶל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת  
מִן-הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר בְּסֶף וְאַתֶּם לֹא תֵצְאוּ אִישׁ מִפֶּתַח-בֵּיתוֹ עַד-בֹּקֶר:  
וְעָבַר יְהוָה לַלַּיְלָה אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְרָאָה אֶת-הַדָּם עַל-הַמְּשַׁקּוֹף וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וּפָסַח יְהוָה  
עַל-הַפֶּתַח וְלֹא יָתֵן הַמְּשַׁחֵת לָבֹא אֶל-בְּתִיכֶם לַלַּיְלָה:

רש"י

וְאַתֶּם לֹא תֵצְאוּ וְגו': מִגִּיד שְׁמַחֵר שְׁנִתְּנָה רְשׁוּת לַמְּשַׁחֵת לְחַבֵּל אֵינוּ מִבְּחִין בֵּין צַדִּיק  
לְרָשָׁע. וְלִילָה רְשׁוּת לְמַחְבְּלִים הוּא, שְׁנֵאָמַר "בּו תִּרְמוֹשׁ כָּל חֵיתוֹ יָעַר" (תהלים קד)

מושג

מֵאֲחֵר שְׁנִתְּנָה רְשׁוּת לַמְּשַׁחֵת לְחַבֵּל אֵינוּ מִבְּחִין בֵּין צַדִּיק לְרָשָׁע.

**Translation:** Once permission is given to the destroyer to destroy he does not differentiate between the righteous and the wicked.

**Explanation:** On the surface the Musag seems very difficult to understand. Can Hashem not restrict the permission given to an angel who is tasked with destroying the wicked? Did we not find in the other מכות that only the Egyptians were affected and not the Jews? Additionally, was not Hashem Himself the one who brought מכת בכורות? Who is this destroyer?

Rashi, based on the Mechilta, answers that the destroyer referred to here are the wild animals and other dangerous things that come out at night. These 'destroyers' are part of nature and indeed do not differentiate between the righteous and the wicked, in the same fashion in which a storm destroys indiscriminately. For this reason even the righteous are commanded to live healthy lives and to refrain from placing themselves in dangerous situations.

According to the above, the command to stay indoors the entire night has nothing to do with the blood placed on the doorposts and lintel. The blood from the קרבן פסח was a way in which the Jews displayed their allegiance to Hashem and were thus saved from the plague with which Hashem struck the Egyptians. Therefore, even though God's passing through Egypt occurred exactly at midnight, the Jews were instructed to remain indoors the entire night.

**Looking in the Pasuk:** The Pesukim above mention Moshe's command for the Jews not to leave their homes at night and the instructions to place the blood on their doors. However, when Hashem had commanded Moshe regarding placing the blood on the doors no mention is made of staying indoors. This is because staying indoors was not connected to the plague, but rather to the need to steer clear of the natural dangers of the nighttime.

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## NOTES

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Our Musag teaches that once Hashem gives the 'green light' to the forces of destruction to act, those forces do not differentiate between a righteous person and a wicked one. This concept is found in the (בבא קמא ס:) which teaches:

תאני רב יוסף, מאי דכתיב: ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר? כיון שניתן רשות למשחית אינו מבחין בין צדיקים לרשעים.

The first question that must be answered is that we found by the previous plagues that only the Egyptians were harmed and the Jews and their possessions were not touched. Obviously the force of destruction was able to differentiate quite effectively between Jew and Egyptian; why are we told all of a sudden here that the משחית is unable to differentiate between the righteous and the wicked? Also puzzling is: Why would this be so? Why is the destructive force allowed to harm the righteous?

In order to answer the second question we may recall a similar Musag which appears in פרשת מקץ (פרק מב פסוק לח) in which we are taught that השטן מקטרג בשעת הסכנה. The fashion in which we explained the Musag there<sup>1</sup> may be applied here as well. When entering a dangerous environment one who might otherwise not be harmed will find themselves at odds with the dangerous forces and thereby require special Divine assistance to be saved. Except in the case of perfect צדיקים such assistance will not necessarily be forthcoming, as special merit is needed to deserve Divine intervention. For this very reason we are commanded to live healthy lives and to never place ourselves in physical danger. Therefore, the Jews were commanded to remain indoors lest they place themselves in the path of the destructive force.

The major issue which is debated by the commentaries is what destructive force is at play in these Pesukim. While I would have thought that we are referring to the משחית who is carrying out the plague, a close look at Rashi's commentary tells us differently. After quoting our Musag, Rashi adds the following words: ולילה רשות למחבלים הוא. Rashi is of the opinion that the reason they are being told to stay indoors throughout the night is because the nighttime in general is a time of danger. As usual, Rashi does not come to such conclusions on his own, but rather is quoting the מכילתא which teaches:

ואתם לא תצאו: מגיד משנתנה רשות למשחית לחבל אינו מבחין בין צדיק לרשע שנאמר לך עמי בא בחדריך וסגור דלתך בעדך וגו' (ישעיה כו) ואומר הנני אליך הוצאתי חרבי מתערה והכרתי ממך צדיק ורשע וגו' (יחזקאל כא) ואומר והיה בעבור כבודי (שמות לג). ואתם לא תצאו וגו'. ללמדך כשתצא לדרך הכנס בכי טוב וצא בכי טוב. וכן אתה מוצא באבות הראשונים נהגו בדרך ארץ. וישכם אברהם בבקר (בראשית כב) וישכם יעקב בבקר (שם כה) וישכם משה בבקר (שמות לד) וישכם יהושע בבקר (יהושע ג) וישכם שמואל לקראת שאול בבקר (שמואל א' טו). והלא דברים קל וחומר והלא אבות ונביאים שהלכו לעשות רצונו של מי שאמר והיה העולם נהגו בדרך ארץ, שאר בני אדם על אחת כמה וכמה. וכן הוא אומר תשת חשך ויהי לילה (תהלים קד) ואומר תזרח השמש יאספון וגו', מכאן ואילך יצא אדם לפעלו ולעבודתו עדי ערב.

There are a number of rather obvious problems with the מכילתא. First, as asked above on Rashi, why did the מכילתא see a need to bring in the issue of the danger of the nighttime, when it could have simply explained that the danger was due to the משחית who was carrying out the בכורות? Also, if the danger was due to the nighttime, why were the people first warned now and not on every other night?

To answer the first question, the commentaries explain that in reality the concept of כיון שניתנה רשות does not apply here. This is because מכת בכורות was not like any other plague. While all other plagues were carried out by non-discriminating destructive angels, this plague was carried out by Hashem himself, as Rashi (פסוק יב) teaches: אני בעצמי ולא על ידי שליח. Therefore, there was no need for the righteous to fear that Hashem would harm them as well. The only fear was that of the general danger of nighttime, for which they were commanded not to go outside. (This would help explain why they were told not to go outside the entire night, while the firstborn all died at midnight.)

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<sup>1</sup> Please see there for a full explanation.

To answer the second question, the commentaries explain<sup>2</sup> that while it is true that one should be careful every night, there is no need to specifically command people to stay indoors, as the danger is fairly evident the need to be careful obvious to all. However, on this night Hashem goes out of His way to warn the people. This is because if any Jews would have died as a result of the nighttime danger, the Egyptians would claim that the deaths of the Egyptian firstborn had nothing to do with Moshe's warning, the proof being that even Jews had died that night! To ensure that only Egyptians would die that night, Hashem warns the people to be extra careful because the dangers of the night pertain to the righteous as well as the wicked.

With this understanding the question with which we began is now answered. With every plague, even those carried out by Hashem's messengers, clear parameters were given to the messenger regarding when, where and who he was to strike. There was no allowance for wanton destruction. However, this only applies to extra-natural forces of destruction; the dangers of the night are different. As the Pasuk in תהילים, quoted by the מכילתא and by Rashi, teaches:

תְּשֻׁת חֲשָׁף וַיְהִי לְלֵקָה בּוֹ-תִרְמַשׁ כָּל-חַיִּיתוֹ-יָעַר:

The dangers of the night are natural, a time when beasts of all kinds are given free reign. It is these forces of destruction of which our Musag speaks. As explained previously, it is these natural forces that are indiscriminate. We might even explain that this is why the wording of the Musag is 'once permission is given to the משחית to destroy' and not 'once the משחית is commanded to destroy'. For we are not referring to the forces commanded to bring the plague, but rather to the common natural forces that are not commanded to destroy but are given permission to do so.

However, there is still one issue that must be resolved. According to the above understanding how are we to explain the return of the משחית in the following Pasuk: ולא יתן המשחית לבא אל בתיכם? Which משחית are we referring to here? Why would we think that the wild beasts would be allowed into their homes?

In the ספר קול אליהו, attributed to the Vilna Gaon, he deals with this question and answers that the משחית mentioned here refers to the מלאך המות himself. He explains that there were some Jews whose time had come to die a natural death that night. As above, if they were to die that night the Egyptians would claim that even Jews were affected by the plague. Therefore, Hashem promised that even *the* destroyer, המשחית, the Angel of Death himself, would not be allowed into the home of the Jew. Thus, we separate כג פסוק into two statements: The first is that Hashem promises that the blood on the door would act as a sign for Him to pass over the home; the second part of the Pasuk teaches that He would not allow any harm to come to the Jewish people even due to natural causes.

In summation, according to Rashi's understanding of the Pesukim, there were three separate issues to be addressed.

1. First and foremost was the plague itself, carried out by Hashem. To gain protection from this plague the Jews had to show themselves busy and committed to מצות to gain Divine favor. The placing of the blood on the doorposts and lintel, was to be this sign of commitment to Hashem and His commandments<sup>3</sup>. In effect it was not a sign for Hashem,

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<sup>2</sup> שפתי חכמים brought in the ר"א מזרחי

<sup>3</sup> There is a beautiful thought found in the writings of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch which explains the significance of placing the blood on the doorposts and on the lintel:

The idea of a house is a double one, firstly to shut the inhabitants in, against the human elements, i.e., privacy, to protect them against intrusion; and secondly, shutting the inhabitants in against physical elements, protecting them against the intrusion of rain etc; the one represented by the walls, the other by the roof. The two door posts, the מזוזות, represent shutting out the social element, the lintel, משקוף (from פ.ק.ש, to look down from above), represents the protection against the physical elements... This is what was to be expressed by the placing of the blood of the slaughtered lamb on the doorposts and lintel of

but a proof of our commitment. For this reason the Torah says, לכם לאות (פסוק יג), and Rashi comments<sup>4</sup>: וראיתי לכם לאות ולא לאחרים לאות, מכאן שלא נתנו הדם אלא מבפנים. And, on the words אמר הקב"ה נותן אני את עיני לראות שאתם עסוקים במצותי ופוסח אני עליכם. את הדם. In truth, in order to gain this protection the Jew did not need to be in his house at the time of the plague. As long as he had brought the sacrifice and boldly exhibited his commitment to Hashem, he would be protected anywhere he happened to be. This is confirmed by the continuation of the Pasuk which states: ולא יהיה בכם נגף למשחית, which translates as there will be no destructive blow upon you. Rashi comments: הרי שהיה ישראל בביתו של מצרי שומע אני ילקה כמותו, תלמוד לומר ולא יהיה בכם נגף. This protection was only needed at midnight when Hashem was bringing the plague on the Egyptian first born.

2. Second was the issue of any Jew being outside his home during the nighttime hours. During the hours of darkness it is always more dangerous to be outside, as wild animals and other dangerous forces use the cover of darkness to cause harm. Hashem thus instructed Moshe to warn the Jews of this danger – that actually exists every night - lest they be harmed, thus providing the Egyptians with the excuse that even Jews died that night. For this reason they were instructed to remain indoors the entire night.
3. Finally, the Jews would need a pass that night from death by natural causes as well, for the very same reason mentioned above<sup>5</sup>.

A close examination of the Pesukim shows that the second issue was dealt with at the end of פסוק כב – ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בוקר, the first issue was dealt with at the beginning of פסוק כג – ולא יתן – וראה את הדם... ופסח המשחית לבא. Interestingly, even though they are all written after the commandment to put the blood on the doorposts and lintel, only the first issue required the blood, the other two issues were more of a public relations challenge. This explains why in Hashem's original command to Moshe we find no mention of not going out at night or of the משחית,<sup>6</sup> only the first issue is mentioned. Only when Moshe speaks to the people are the other issues mentioned, as they are of much less importance.

The Ramban, however, does not agree with Rashi's understanding of the Mechilta. His basic objection is, as asked above, is one to learn from this prohibition that it is forbidden to travel at night? And, if so, why is this prohibition first mentioned now? At the same time the Ramban realizes that the danger could not have come directly as a result of the plague, as the plague was carried out by Hashem and not by a destroying angel.

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the houses in which the offering itself was to be eaten. It is not the walls that will protect him against the unfriendly forces of fellow man, nor the roof against the unfriendly forces of nature. Within the walls and under the roofs, it is God that protects those who are ready to give themselves to Him.

<sup>4</sup> The comments of Rashi on this Pasuk are all based on his reading of the Mechilta.

<sup>5</sup> One might ask, if Hashem had to provide supernatural protection from the מלאך המות, why could He not provide the same supernatural protection from the nighttime dangers. If He could stop the מלאך המות, He could certainly stop the wild animals and מזיקים of the night! We might answer that we always look to minimize the need for Hashem's direct intervention as each intervention deducts from our merits, as אפילו עושים לו נס מנכין לו מזכותיו teach: ה"ל. Therefore, since the problem of nighttime dangers could be avoided by simply staying indoors, they were commanded to do so.

<sup>6</sup> As explained above the word למשחית in פסוק יג, is not a noun, but rather an adjective connected to the word נגף, meaning there would be no destruction as a result of the plague. However, the word המשחית in פסוק כג, is a noun, referring to some destructive force not necessarily connected to the plague.

The Ramban answers that the משהית being discussed here in our Musag is the very same משהית talked about in פסוק כג. While true that Hashem was the One who carried out the plague, even so there are other angels who are present at the time of any plague<sup>7</sup>. The Ramban writes<sup>8</sup>:

שהקב"ה עובר במצרים כמלך שעובר ממקום למקום וספקלטורים לפניו שלא יפגע בו אדם ולא יסתכל בו ...because הקב"ה was going to pass through Egypt like a king who passes from place to place with his executioners before him, so that no person should approach him or gaze upon him as he passes by.

The Ramban explains that it was these accompanying angels who posed a threat to the Jews. (In order to explain the Mechilta - which seems to explicitly connect the warning to stay indoors to the danger that exists every night – the Ramban writes that the intent of the Mechilta is that we are meant to infer the following: Since the people were warned to stay indoors due to the threat of the accompanying destroying angels, who do not differentiate between the righteous and the wicked, so too every person should be extra careful every night due to the danger of wild beasts and various dangers of the night. According to the way the Ramban understands the Mechilta being careful every evening was not the reason the Jews were commanded to remain indoors, it was simply a lesson gleaned from that command.)

While the Ramban's opinion regarding the משהית answers why they were only commanded on this night, he must deal with the initial question we asked: Why could these destructive angels not differentiate between righteous and wicked in the same way they did during every other plague? Also, we might ask, according to the Ramban why were the Jews commanded to remain indoors? Why would they only be protected when they were in their homes? After all, we have already been taught that even if a Jewish firstborn was in the house of an Egyptian he would not be affected!

I believe that the Ramban addresses these questions in the passage we have quoted above. As the Ramban has explained, these accompanying angels have nothing to do with the plague itself. The Ramban compared these angels to the executioners who accompany a king and whose purpose is to ensure that no human gazes upon the king as he passes by. So too, we may assume that the intent of the Ramban is that these משהיתים had a similar mission. Since Hashem Himself was to pass through Egypt on this night, the mission of these angels was to ensure that no one, Jew or Egyptian, gaze upon the שכונה during the plague. To ensure that they would not be struck by these angels they are told to remain indoors<sup>9</sup>.

In summary, while Rashi and the Ramban disagree as to why the Jews were commanded to remain indoors the night of מכת בכורות, they do agree regarding the lesson to be learned from the prohibition. One must be careful not to come into conflict with the forces of nature as they do not differentiate between righteous and wicked. Even during a שימורים, ליל שימורים, when the Jewish people merited a special level of protection from Hashem, this lesson held true. Just as even the most

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<sup>7</sup> A different possibility is that we read in the Haggadah that each and every plague carried with it a number of different plagues:

רבי עקיבא אומר: מניין שכל מכה ומכה שהביא הקדוש ברוך הוא על המצרים במצרים היתה של חמש מכות? שנאמר: ישלח בם חרון אפו, עברה וזעם וצרה, משלחת מלאכי רעים. חרון אפו - אהת, עברה - שמים, וזעם - שלש, וצרה - ארבע, משלחת מלאכי רעים - חמש. אמור מעתה: במצרים לקו חמשים מכות ועל הים לקו חמשים ומאתים מכות.

It is therefore possible that the protection that was needed against the משהית referred to one of these 5 different types of destruction. See ספורנו.

<sup>8</sup> ArtScroll translation.

<sup>9</sup> Hashem could have specifically commanded the angels not to harm any Jew, however, as stated above (footnote #4), since they could gain protection by simply staying indoors, they are commanded to do so and thus not require an additional miracle. The only remaining question not addressed by the Ramban is why they were commanded to remain indoors the entire night when Hashem passed through only at midnight. Perhaps it was a type of גזירה to ensure the Jews were not outside at midnight.

righteous of our forefathers, even on a Divine mission, made sure to travel only by day and not chance risky travel, so too must we be careful not to engage in risky behavior.

**Questions for Further Thought:**

- a. Does this Musag conflict with our value of בטחון בה' ? Where does trust in G-d end and cautious behavior begin?
- b. Can you think of other instances when even righteous people feared danger and did not simply depend on Hashem to help them?