
פרשת בא

פרק יא פסוק ז

וְלֹכַל בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחְרֹץ-כָּלֵב לְשׁוֹנוֹ לְמֵאִישׁ וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּן אֲשֶׁר יִפְלֶה
ה' בֵּין מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל:

רש"י

לֹא יִחְרֹץ-כָּלֵב לְשׁוֹנוֹ: לְפִיכֶם אָמְרָה תּוֹרָה בְּטָרְפָה (שמות כב:ל) לְכָלֵב תִּשְׁלַכּוּן אִתּוֹ,
לְלַמְדָּהּ שְׂאִין הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְקַפֵּחַ שְׂכָר כָּל בְּרִיָּה (מכילתא משפטים פ"כ).

מושג

אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מקפח שכר כל בריה

Translation:

Hashem does not withhold reward from any creation.

Explanation:

One of the most fundamental lessons taught by the Torah is the *הכרת הטוב*, recognizing good and showing gratitude. The Torah teaches this lesson in many places; the directive to give non-Kosher meat to the dogs due to their silence during *מכת בכורות*, is one example. All dogs were rewarded for this particular silence, which was the result of them perceiving Hashem's special love for his *בני בכורי ישראל* as He passed through. Or, ¹ *מצרים*, the silence of the dogs at this time, proved their control over barking, which thus compels us to reward our guard dogs for barking to scare off predators².

Looking in the Pasuk:

The fact that the Torah informs us of the seemingly irrelevant actions of the dogs during *מכת חושך* is puzzling and requires explanation. The reward given to dogs in the future for these actions also seems difficult to justify. In addition, the Pasuk in which they are given the gift of non-Kosher meat, refers to *the* dog, instead of saying *a* dog. The above leads us to conclude that the dog being rewarded refers to a person's guard dog, who could remain silent, as the dogs did during *מכת בכורות* out of honor to the Shechina and *כלל ישראל*, but choose to bark to guard their owner's possessions.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: As a result of their silence during *מכת בכורות*, Hashem instructs us to give non-Kosher meat to our dogs. This teaches us an important lesson in rewarding all those whose actions benefit us.

Understand: *הכרת הטוב*, recognizing good done for us, extends to every creation. Even dogs who did not bark during *מכת בכורות* as a sign of respect for Hashem and the Jewish people deserve to be rewarded for such. In addition, one should feel compelled to reward the dogs who guard his possessions as a sign of gratitude.

Think: It is important to remember that all information provided by the Torah, even as part of a story, is significant and must be examined. Many times these seemingly unimportant facts provide depth of understanding that would otherwise be missed.

1 See note #1

2 See note #2

NOTES

1. It would seem that the simplest way to understand the intent of the Pasuk is that Hashem is informing Moshe that the Jewish first born will not be harmed in *any* fashion during מכת בכורות. Even the slight fear that might result from the barking of a dog will not be directed against them or their animals³. However, this is difficult to understand for why would this detail interest Moshe? Would it not be sufficient to tell him that the Jewish first born will be saved from death⁴? The אור החיים הקדוש provides a novel answer. He quotes a גמרא in (ס:) בבא קמא which teaches that when dogs are barking it is a sign that the מלאך המות has come to the city⁵. Therefore, he reasons, telling Moshe that the dogs would not bark was simply a way of informing him that the מלאך המות would not harm them. Here too, one might ask, was this not already inferred by Hashem telling Moshe that only the first born of the Egyptians would be killed?⁶

Perhaps we might offer the following explanation:

The Gemoroh in (ח:) מסכת נדרים teaches:

דר"ש בן לקיש, דאמר: אין גיהנם לעולם הבא, אלא הקב"ה מוציא חמה מנרתיקה, צדיקים מתרפאין בה ורשעים נידונין בה. Reish Lakish tells us that in Hashem will not directly reward the righteous and punish the wicked, rather He will simply remove the sun⁷ from its covering and the righteous will be healed by it while the wicked will be judged by it.

We might propose that מכת בכורות happened in a similar fashion. That is to say that Hashem did not directly kill the first born. Rather, he simply intensified His presence in Mitzrayim, a presence which broadcast the following message: בני בכורי ישראל. The power of this message did not allow for any other בכור to live, no matter where it was, no matter who it was, no matter human or animal! A close inspection of פסוקים ד' וה' seems to support this idea.

ד ויאמר משה פה אומר ה' פקצת הלילה אני יוצא בתוך מצרים: ה ומת כל-בכור בארץ מצרים מבכור פרעה הישב על-כסא עד בכור השפחה אשר אחר הרחיים וכל בכור בהמה:

The words יוצא בתוך מצרים seem to inform us that the מכה was effected simply by Hashem 'going out' in the land of Egypt! The Divine presence in Egypt is what led to the deaths of any type of בכור. It was this presence that the dogs perceived and they remained silent in deference to it. They realized the honor being afforded the Jewish people, the בכורים of Hashem, and dared not open their mouths to in any way degrade this holy nation. This idea is supported in the commentary of R' R.S. Hirsch who writes:

In our verse the meaning is; not a dog will move its otherwise active tongue. Not only will no one do harm to Israel, to man or beast, but no hostile movement - though perfectly harmless, like the barking

3 This is the approach of the רשב"ם.

4 The fact that while the Egyptians were being punished the Jews would be completely spared is not new to מכת בכורות. In many of the מכות this phenomena is recorded without the need to express an extreme absence of any type of harm to the Jews. Here as well it seems the Torah could have sufficed by telling us that not a single Jewish בכור would die, why is it necessary for the dogs to not bark at them?

5 כלבים בוכים מלאך המות בא לעיר

6 Perhaps we might answer this question by analyzing a Pasuk in the next Perek (יב:יג). The Pasuk tells us:

והיה הדם לכם לאת על הבתים אשר אתם שם וראיתי את-הדם ופסקתי עלכם ולא-יהיה בכם נגף למשחית בהבתי בארץ מצרים: The Pasuk begins by telling us that Hashem will pass over the houses. This is consistent with the חז"ל which teaches that Hashem himself killed the first born of Egypt; אני ולא מלאך וכו'. But the Pasuk continues and tells us that Hashem will not allow the משחית, i.e. the מלאך המות to harm the Jews. Who, we might ask, brought the plague, Hashem himself or the משחית? The Vilna Gaon answers that indeed Hashem was active in the killing of the Egyptians, and He himself passed over the Jewish homes. However, what was to happen to Jews who were to die that night by natural causes? If they would die, simply because their time was up, the Egyptians would claim that the Jews were also effected by the plague! In order to silence this claim, Hashem did not allow the מלאך המות to harm any Jew, even those who normally would have died by natural causes. This is what Hashem is telling Moshe by informing him that no dog would bark; the מלאך המות will not take any Jew! According to this answer the continuation of the Pasuk makes perfect sense; למען תדעון, no dog will bark thus informing you that no Jew will die this night so that there will be a clear differentiation between the Jews and Egyptians.

7 Reish Lakish is referring to the sum Hashem created at the beginning of time which was hidden away due the world not being ready for its spiritual power.

of a dog - will stir against them. All - even the animals - will be filled with respect and will remain silent before the Jewish people.

2. This Midrash seems to be conveying an incredible lesson. The Jewish people are commanded (שמות כב:ל) to throw non kosher meat to the dogs, לא תאכלו לְכֶלֶב, and תִּשְׁלַכּוּן אֹתוֹ. The Midrash comes to explain why the dogs merited such a gift and answers that this was a reward to the dogs for not barking at the time of בכורות! This teaches us that Hashem does not hold back the just reward due to any of His creations. While Rashi here does not mention the Midrash, in פרק כב he does:

אם פן מה תלמוד לומר "לְכֶלֶב", לְלַמְדָּה שֶׁהַכֶּלֶב נִכְבָּד מִמֶּנּוּ. וְלַמְדָּה הַפְּתוּב שֶׁאֵין הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְקַפֵּחַ שְׂכָר כָּל בְּרִיָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וּלְכֹל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחַרֵץ כֶּלֶב לְשָׁנוֹ, אֲמַר הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא תָּנּוּ לוֹ שְׂכָרוֹ.

There are, however, several difficulties with the above understanding. Firstly, why should dogs living thousands of years after the Jews were in Egypt receive reward for something they have absolutely no hand in? Secondly, why not reward the frogs who jumped into the ovens of the Egyptians? And, finally, why does the Pasuk read לְכֶלֶב תִּשְׁלַכּוּן, to *the* dog, seemingly referring to a specific dog (as in להכלב) instead לְכֶלֶב תִּשְׁלַכּוּן, to a dog, referring to dogs in general?

To address these questions, the אבן עזרא explains that the dog we seek to reward is the dog that guards the cattle. You are not requested to throw the טרפה to just any dog, but rather only to לְכֹלֵב, to the deserving dog, to who you owe a debt of gratitude. Hashem is thus teaching us the importance of recognizing good⁸.

While it is completely possible that the אבן עזרא is not explaining the Pasuk according to the Midrash, it is interesting to examine whether the two may be reconciled. Perhaps we might suggest that the Midrash quotes the Pasuk of לא יחרץ לא not as the reason we reward the dog, but rather to explain why one should reward the dogs guarding cattle for something over which they have no control. Dogs bark naturally at perceived threats and do not have to be trained to do so⁹. So why reward the dogs at all? However, teaches the Midrash, this is not necessarily true. For in Egypt, out of deference to the Shechina and to the Jewish people, the dogs were able to remain silent. Their silence in Egypt proved dogs do not possess an uncontrollable urge to bark, rather they do so out of choice. If so, they should receive reward for barking to guard one's cattle as it is their choice whether to bark or refrain from barking.

3. Questions for further discussion:

- a. Can you think of other examples in the Torah in which the central message is one of הכרת הטוב?
- b. Why do you think this particular מכה required the presence of Hashem's Shechina?

8 A beautiful idea may thus be developed using the אבן עזרא's comments. The Pasuk in Mispatim seems to be quite scattered in that it begins with the lofty ideal of being אנשי קודש and ends with the command to give food to dogs. See my essay on (כג:א) for a further discussion of this topic.

9 To be fair, I do not know this for a fact, it is simply an assumption borne from observation. The Malbim agrees with this contention and explains that we are not, in fact, really rewarding the dogs. Rather, we are using the rewarding of the dogs as a model of correct behavior, hoping all will realize that if we 'repay' a dog, who acts out of nature, we should certainly reward humans who act with full volition. According to the Malbim the message here is very similar to the lesson taught previously (פרק ז פסוק יט) regarding Moshe not striking the Nile. Our conclusions here, however, will disagree with the Malbim and contend that dogs do indeed have a choice whether to bark or not.