

# Foxy Wardrobe

PARSHA INSIGHTS - SHMOS (5760)

## IS THIS HOW WE EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN?

“I shall grant this people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and it will be when you go, you shall not go empty; but every woman shall ask of her neighbor and of her that lives in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and garments. **And you shall put (them) upon your sons, and upon your daughters, and you shall empty out Egypt**” (3:20-22). Hashem is predicting to Moshe that He will eventually strike Egypt with the plagues, and *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] will be delivered. At that time, the Jews will carry out with them all of Egypt’s treasures. The precious wardrobes taken from the Egyptians will be worn even by the children of *Bnai Yisroel*.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin wonders: are we not worried about the negative impression this will make on the youngsters? Even corrupt individuals generally want their children to walk in a straight path. Although parents are supposed to model proper conduct, there are times they “feel the need” to divert from appropriate behavior. When the *yaitzer hora* [evil inclination] overpowers them to transgress, or even when they are about to do a righteous deed that may appear sinful to a child, they do their utmost to conceal the action. Parents are generally cautious about what their children will think. If so, what would go through the minds of the children when they would see their parents “emptying out” the entire land of Egypt of its valuables? What kind of morality is this? Even if it was the proper course of action for the adults, would it not have a detrimental effect on the values of the children?

The answer is that Hashem Himself demanded these actions in this particular situation. The “*bizas Mitzraim*” [loot taken from the Egyptians in Egypt] was of paramount importance. Not only was there no need to hide it; the fancy garments were to be placed on the backs of the children! These youth had witnessed unimaginable horrors during their bondage. Their brothers had been tossed into the Nile and drowned to fulfill Paroh’s evil decree. Their siblings had been plastered into the brick walls of Pisom and Ramses, and slaughtered to provide blood for Paroh’s therapeutic baths, as explained by the Torah throughout these *parshiyos* [Torah portions]. At those trying times, wouldn’t they wonder where Hashem is? Where is the G-d of justice?

For this reason, explains Rav Sorotzkin, it was imperative for the children to wear the clothes and jewels of their persecuting nation upon their departure. The prediction was told to Moshe in our *parsha* [Torah portion], before the plagues even began. Hashem was foretelling that ultimately, the death of the firstborn would prompt Paroh to break down and release *Bnai Yisroel*. Finally, the children would see justice meted out to their oppressors. How fitting it would be for them to parade victoriously out of that cursed land displaying the glimmering gems and exquisite garments of their foes, following the demise of all the *bechoros* [firstborn]. Hashem’s hand would finally be manifest! The blood of their brothers would be avenged.

This same apparel had been worn by the “little foxes” of Egypt. Rav Sorotzkin is alluding to a *pasuk* [verse] in *Shir Hashirim* [Song of Songs] 2:15. Hashem and His Heavenly Court told the waters of the Reed Sea (or Red Sea) to “seize for us the Egyptian foxes, even the small foxes who had spoiled the vineyards, while our vineyards had just begun to develop.” This refers to the drowning of the Egyptian army in the *Yam Suf* [Reed Sea] seven days after we left the land of Egypt. Our “underdeveloped vineyard” hints to the *Bnai Yisroel* at a stage when we had not yet matured into a nation, during the *Golus Mitzraim* [Egyptian exile]. At that time, the Egyptian “foxes” had abused us mercilessly. *Rashi* on *Shir Hashirim* cites the *Chazal* [Sages], that Jewish women would hide their newborn males so they would not be captured and cast into the Nile River. In order to search for them, even the “little foxes”, the Egyptian children, were employed. How so? The Egyptians would enter the home, looking for the one or two year old boy. An Egyptian child the same age would be brought, and he would begin talking his baby language. The Jewish child would reply, as is the nature of babies. In this way, the Egyptians located the Jewish baby and threw him into the river.



The reason they are referred to as foxes is also clarified by *Rashi* on *Shir Hashirim* 2:15. When a fox escapes from danger, it looks back over its shoulder to see if the pursuer is catching up or not. The Egyptians acted in a like fashion when they fled from Hashem’s disciplinary measures at the *Yam Suf*.

When Hashem summoned the seawaters to sweep away the Egyptian army, He included these “little foxes”, the young ones who had aided their parents in locating Jewish babies. By the time of *Kriyas* [splitting of the] *Yam Suf*,

they had grown up, and they participated in their army's pursuit of *Bnai Yisroel*. Some of the clothes worn by these individuals when much younger were later put on by the Jewish children at their emancipation from the land of *Mitzraim* [Egypt].

We see that there was a specific reason for the Jewish children to don their new ornaments and outfits as they left the land of Egypt. They needed to clothe themselves in Hashem's justice and retribution. He "evened out the score" by slaying the firstborn and seizing all of the Egyptians' wealth. "Every woman shall ask of her neighbor jewels and garments." The *Midrash Hagadol*, quoted by Rav Sorotzkin, classifies this as a "*mitzvas asai*" [a positive commandment]! (Of course, the connotation is NOT that it is listed among the 613 *mitzvos* [commandments]. It is not a precept that applies to all generations.) The *Midrash* means that Hashem INSISTED that the possessions of *Mitzraim* be taken by the Jews, to compensate them for their years of slave labor and affliction. If so, observes Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, the directive to **place the clothes and jewelry on the children** was part of this *mitzvah* [commandment] of draining Egypt of its material wealth. The hands-on lesson to the young people was that there IS a true Judge in the world.

It has been stated before (in the *d'var Torah* [lesson] on *Nitzavim Vayailech* 5759) that tangible demonstrations work much better than verbal transmission of information.

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Today we have seen another example. Hashem's command that the children march out of Egypt wearing their former oppressors' wardrobes was a remarkable way of conveying an essential idea. There IS fairness and justice in the world. Sometimes, however, we must be patient; all the pieces do not immediately appear to fit together. After 210 years in *Mitzraim*, we finally witnessed Hashem's conspicuous involvement in our affairs. May we be *zocheh* [meritorious] to notice such Divine providence each and every day.

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