

Pooch Procures Pact to be Pampered by People

PARSHA INSIGHTS - BO (5758)

DOGS ON THEIR BEST BEHAVIOR DESERVE A HEFTY REWARD

“Around midnight, I will go out in the midst of Egypt. Every first born in Egypt will die, from the first born of Paroh sitting on his throne, to the first born of the slave girl behind the millstones, plus every first born animal. There will be a great cry of anguish throughout all Egypt. Never before has there been anything like it, and never again will there be the like. **But among the *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel], a dog will not even sharpen its tongue at man or animal.** You will then realize that G-d is making a miraculous distinction between Egypt and Israel” (11:4-7).

First of all, what is the meaning of this promise Moshe told Paroh in Hashem’s name, that no dog will do a certain action (*lo yecheratz*) with its tongue? Several interpretations exist. We followed *Rashi’s* explanation above, that it will not even sharpen its tongue. This can be clarified by the *Ibn Ezra’s* comments, that dogs will not frighten *Bnai Yisroel* in any way at all, through barking or biting. As the *Oznaim L’Torah* on our *pasuk* [verse] puts it, barking is a kind of preparation for biting. It comes to sharpen the tongue and teeth for this purpose. None of this menacing behavior will be exhibited by the dogs in *Mitzraim* [Egypt] on the night of *makas bechoros* [plague of the firstborn].

What is so miraculous about the fact that no dogs would intimidate the Jews that night? The *Da’as Zekainim* cites the *Gemara Bava Kama* 60B, near the middle of the *amud* [page], that howling dogs indicate the presence of the *Malach Hamoves* [the Angel of Death] in a city. If so, the night of the slaying of the first born was the most likely time for dogs to be barking! Despite this, they did not utter a sound at *Bnai Yisroel*.

However, the *Oznaim L’Torah* wonders why this was such a miracle. Goshen, the region where *Bnai Yisroel* lived, was not even visited by the *Malach Hamoves*. The plague of killing the first born did not strike the Jews at all. So what is so noteworthy about the fact that dogs did not bark? Of course they did not bark - the Angel of Death was not even in the vicinity! *Oznaim L’Torah* suggests that a *Gemara Brachos* 3A can help us understand this. We are taught there that Rabbi Eliezer holds that the night can be divided into three parts. In Heaven, angels sing praises to Hashem in three different groups during these three time periods, as *Rashi* remarks. On earth, certain occurrences indicate the onset of these “*mishmaros*” [portions of the night]. We will just mention two now. Donkeys bray at the first, and DOGS HOWL AT THE SECOND.

After seeing this *Gemara*, says Rav Sorotzkin, we can appreciate the extraordinary treatment the Jewish people received on the night of *makas bechoros*. Our *pasuk* (11:7) guarantees that no dogs would sharpen their tongues at *Bnai Yisroel* that night. This was a spectacular wonder, since the normal behavior of dogs is to howl every night at the second time period. Why did Hashem see fit to perform this miracle for us? We know that the Jews stayed in their houses the entire night, as we were commanded in 12:22. If dogs would have barked, we would have surely heard them. Maybe the *Bnai Yisroel* would get the wrong impression and think that the destructive force had come to Goshen as well. From inside their homes, they might assume the worst if the howling of dogs would be audible. As we quoted from the *Gemara Bava Kama* 60B, such noise shows that the Angel of Death is nearby. Consequently, the Master of the Universe demanded silence from the local dogs on that entire night.

As you might be aware, we find something fascinating in *Chazal* [our Sages] regarding the exemplary conduct of the dogs in Egypt. They are rewarded bountifully for their deed. “You shall be holy men unto me. Therefore, any meat that is torn of beasts in the field, you must not eat. YOU SHALL CAST IT TO THE DOGS” (*Parshas Mishpatim*, 22:30). The meat spoken about in this *pasuk* is “*traifa*” [non-kosher, literally torn], which signifies an animal that was ripped apart by beasts of prey. We are forbidden to consume meat of a *traifa*; instead, we are told to send it to the dogs. The words of the *Mechilta* in number 195, on this *pasuk*, are crucial for our discussion.

It can easily be learned from other parts of the Torah that a *traifa* is “*mutar b’hana’a*” [we are allowed to benefit] (for example, monetarily) from such meat. In other words, it is without a doubt that *traifa* can be sold to a non-Jew (as long as we do not make an occupation out of this business), and it certainly may be given to him for

free. In addition, it is obvious, EVEN WITHOUT OUR *PASUK* SAYING SO, that it may be fed to one's pet. If so, what message is being sent to us in the words "you shall cast it to the dogs"? The *Mechilta* comments that the dog receives preference over the non-Jew in his rights to *traifa* meat. The dog has it coming to him - the meat of the *traifa* has been awarded to him by the Torah! This teaches a fundamental lesson. Hashem does not withhold the reward of ANY creature, human or otherwise. Since Moshe had predicted to Paroh that on the night of the slaying of the *bechoros* [firstborn], no dog would harass a Jew, and surely this came true, the dogs deserve a reward. "Hashem said, give him his reward."

The *Mechilta* remarks that we have something tremendous to learn from this. If an animal such as a dog is thus remembered and rewarded, all the more so a PERSON'S reward will not be held back from him. But you might be bothered by something which the *Malbim* addresses. Do animals possess free will, that they should deserve compensation for their deeds? Do they not act based on instinct and predestined courses of action, guided totally by the will of Hashem? *Malbim* points out that this itself is what the *Mechilta* is teaching. **EVEN THOUGH an animal does not make choices, he is STILL rewarded for his righteous deeds. All the more so, this is true regarding a human being, who decides which path to follow in life.** *Malbim* takes for granted that animals do not make their own choices. Even so, Hashem rewarded the dogs, which HE decreed should remain silent on the night of *makas bechoros*. Consequently, there is no question that people can anticipate recognition and commendation from Hashem for performing His will.

Besides the *traifa* meat, is there any other reward for these dogs? The *Yalkut Shimoni* 187 on our *parsha* discusses the issue. One matter mentioned is that in general, animal hides such as those of cows are tanned to be made into parchment using various methods. One procedure for preparing hides for the writing of *sifrai Torah* [Torah scrolls], *tefillin* [phylacteries], and *mezuzos* [verses hung on the doorposts] is to treat them with waste products of certain animals. Remember, this is in the earlier stages of production; this will not affect the *klaf* [parchment] in a negative way. Just the opposite - it is a legitimate way to condition them for writing. The *Yalkut Shimoni* mentions that sometimes, the waste product of dogs is used for this. What a privilege for them! And what is the reason? Naturally, because they did not sharpen their tongues at us on the night the Egyptian firstborn were killed.

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