

Insights from the Meshech Chochma
רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל
פְּרֻשֵׁת בַּאֲ תִשְׁפִּי הַ

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וְכָל פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְּשֵׂה וְאִם לֹא תִפְדֶּה וְעִרְפֹתוֹ וְכָל בְּכוֹר אָדָם בְּבִנְיָה תִפְדֶּה. (פרק יג' אג)
Every first-issue donkey you shall redeem with a lamb or kid; if you do not redeem it, you shall axe the back of its neck. And you shall redeem every human first-born among your sons.

Our pasuk discusses the sanctity of the first-born son and the requirement to redeem him and simultaneously, the necessity to treat the first-born donkey in an incredibly special way-exchanging it *with a lamb or kid* which is presented to the Kohen. That the only non-kosher animal with a first-born status is the donkey certainly begs for an understanding.

Rav Meir Simcha helps us by taking us first to: בכורות ה: where there is an extensive analysis of the topic and in fact, R' Akiva (in our text we have R' Chanina) informs us that "I asked R' Eliezer in the great study hall, 'In what way are firstborn donkeys different from firstborn horses and camels i.e., other non-kosher animals, which are not redeemed?' He replied that it is a Torah edict-it does not need to be understood by us. 'And furthermore, donkeys assisted our people at the time of their exodus from *Mitzraim*, as there was not one member of the Jewish people who did not have ninety *Nubian* donkeys with him, which were of superior quality, laden with the silver and gold of the *Mitzrim*.'"

As our pasuk connects פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן with פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר פְּדִיּוֹן, Rav Meir Simcha next quotes from Yerushalmi in שקלים that "R' Berechiah and R' Levi in the name of Reish Lakish said: 'Because they sold Rachel's firstborn (Yosef) for twenty pieces of silver; each of *Klal Yisrael* shall redeem his firstborn with five *shekalim*, twenty pieces of silver.'" He firmly believes that Reish Lakish is *not* intimating that the five *shekalim* of the פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן is a sort of punishment/atonement for the sale of Yosef-as he puts it וְהוּא פֹלֵא to think this-for if so, why would *Sheivet* Yosef-"the victim"-be required to redeem *their* first-born? And furthermore, why would the money be given to the Leviim, if, as Rashi told us in ה בראשית מט' ה, Shimon and Levi instigated the sale of Yosef? He therefore explains to us that the Yerushalmi wanted a *source* for the five shekalim exchange and Reish Lakish tells us that this was established by Levi (and Shimon) at the sale of their brother and so Levi, in the future, will accept this exact amount for the פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן.

Rav Meir Simcha proceeds to propose a deeper connection between the פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן and the פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר by taking us to an enigmatic Midrash Shmos Rabba on the opening words of the עֲשֵׂרֶת הַדְּבָרוֹת 'אֶלְקִיךָ, יְהוָה אֶלְקֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד' / *I am Hashem your G-d: "That is what is written in 'ישעיהו מג' (Hashem) alone foretold the triumph and I brought it to pass; I announced it, and no stranger was among you. So, you are My witnesses-declares Hashem-and I am G-d.* The Midrash expounds the pasuk as follows:

I related to Mitzraim that you fled so that they would pursue you and drown in the sea, but I saved you. I announced to the world, that you are My people. References the giving of the Torah to Klal Yisrael when even Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, was sent away-*no stranger was among you*. Refers to Klal Yisrael, at Har Sinai, hearing Hashem say, "I am the Lord your God!" What is this Midrash's message? Rav Meir Simcha feels that it is telling us that Hashem's plans are all-comprehensive and what may appear to be a deviation is a necessary part of the design. As he puts it: *וּבְאִשְׁרָתָם תְּבוֹא צָרָה לְאָדָם וְיִנְצַל מִמֶּנָּה בְּיַשׁוּעַת ה' אֵין זֶה שִׁינוּי חֲלִילָה בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ יִתְבַּרַךְ רַק הִיא גְלוּי לָהּ שֶׁהָאָדָם צָרִיךְ לְבוֹא לְהַצָּרָה וְלִהְיוֹת מְצֻרִים מִצְרַיִם* and the nation's redemption from there. Every part of it was exquisitely planned to fulfill that which Hashem told the Avos, "Your children will be exiled there and forged into a great people who will become worthy to accept My Torah." The Midrash is telling us that Pharaoh's relentless pursuit of Klal Yisrael after they left Mitzraim was not a failure in His strategy-*au contraire*, Hashem *wanted* him to chase after His people so that the next part of His plan-Klal Yisrael becoming His *בְּנֵי חֵן*-could unfold! Continues Rav Meir Simcha: Our nation's descent into Mitzraim began with the first-born child of Rachel, Yosef, and their redemption from there will be highlighted by the special *הַשְּׂגָחָה פְּרֻטִית* we have with HKBH, culminating in the deaths of the first-born Egyptian males and animals, while not a single Jewish one was harmed! So many of the pasukim that deal with the prelude of Yaakov and his sons' arrival to Mitzraim mention donkeys e.g., *וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת נִשְׂבָּרָם עַל הַחֲמֹרִים וַיֵּלְכוּ מִשָּׁם* / *So (the brothers) loaded their donkeys with the rations and departed from (Mitzraim)* and likewise, *וַיִּשְׁלַח כְּזֹאת עֶשְׂרֵה חֲמֹרִים נִשְׂאִים מְטוֹב מִצְרַיִם* / *And to his father (Yosef) sent the following: ten donkeys laden with the best things of Egypt*. So that is not coincidental, as mentioned earlier, that *חֲמֹרִים* played a role in their leaving *Mitzraim* and that of all the non-kosher animals, only the donkey has a sanctified first-born male which requires redemption!

Rav Meir Simcha saw all this hidden in the Midrash Rabba and extended it to *הַבְּנֵי הַבָּן וְפֶטֶר* which he feels are the tools to remind us, in a very real way, of Hashem's unique and eternal bond with us and His all-encompassing knowledge. And this all began with the Avos. They were promised to become Hashem's *עַם סֶגְלָה* and that each one of their children will possess a natural *קְדוּשָׁה*, just as a firstborn is created *קְדוּשָׁה*. Our author has thus connected *וְכָל פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְּשָׂה... וְכָל בְּכוֹר אָדָם בְּבִנְיָהוּ תִּפְדֶּה* in an extremely dramatic way!

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
 לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
 לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
 ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל
 מחבר הגהות על ספר משך חכמה