



לעילוי נשמת לע"נ החזן הרב בן ציון ב"ר אהרן דניאל ע"ה

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First-Born Resurrection

On the final night of the Egyptian exile, Hashem instructs Klal Yisrael in their obligations and teaches them the laws of the Egyptian korban Pesach. He then declares the momentous promise: “And I will pass through the land of Egypt on this night, and I will strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt” (*Shemos* 12:12).

R' Nissim Avraham Ashkenazi cites his father, who was troubled by a seeming redundancy in the *passuk*. Why does the Torah twice emphasize “the land of Egypt”?

To resolve this, his father cites a penetrating insight of Harav Hagadol Yisrael Benyamin, author of *Tehillim Na'eh Lihodos*. Rav Yisrael Benyamin notes a similar phrase in *Tehillim*: “And He struck every firstborn in the land” (*Tehillim* 105:36). What, he asks, is added by the words “in the land”?

He answers that the Torah is teaching that even Egyptian firstborns who had already died and were buried were not spared. Those who were literally in the land—beneath the ground—were resurrected, only to die again during *Makkas Bechoros*. There was, he suggests, a mass resurrection that night, intensifying the terror and totality of the plague.

Returning to our parashah, R' Nissim Avraham's father explains that this is why the Torah repeats “the land of Egypt.” The plague extended to all firstborns—those above ground and those below it. (This idea is also cited by Harav Moshe ibn Chaviv,

the Maharam Chaviv, in his commentary on the parashah.)

HASHEM WAS PART OF THE MAKKA

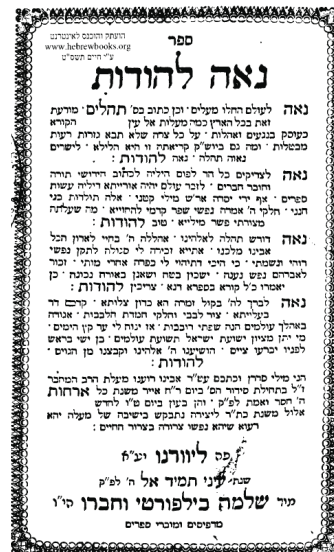
This approach sheds light on another well-known question. We emphasize that Hashem Himself—not an angel—killed the Egyptian firstborns. Why was this plague different from the others?

If *Makkas Bechoros* included a resurrection, the answer is clear. Chazal teach that there are three “keys” that Hashem does not entrust to any messenger, one of them being *techiyas hameisim*—the power to revive the dead (*Taanis* 2a). Since resurrection was an integral component of this *makkah*, Hashem Himself had to be directly involved.

FIRST-BORN JEWS RESURRECTED

As radical as this idea sounds, some take it a step further.

According to several explanations, it was not only



ר' ניסים אברהם אשכנזי

R' Nissim Avraham Ashkenazi (1790-15 Elul 1860) was part of a distinguished family of rabbis from Izmir. His father, R' Rafael was a talmid chacham too, who authored *Mareh Hanegah* and *Mareh Hagadol*. He was a *dayan* together with R' Chaim Palagi. Some of his many *sefarim* were published by his nephews.

Egyptian firstborns who were revived during Makkas Bechoros. Since Hashem Himself was involved in this plague, its effects were felt—briefly—even among the Jewish people.

Rav Azriel Yehudah Leibowitz (*Bo*, p. 179) raises a series of questions. The first one cites the Abarbanel. Why was it necessary for Hashem to carry out this plague personally? After all, Hashem destroyed Sancherev’s army of 185,000 through an angel, as the Navi records: “That night an angel of Hashem went out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp” (*Melachim II 19:35*).

Additionally, the Torah emphasizes “*Ani Hashem*”—Hashem Himself—using the Divine Name associated with mercy. Shouldn’t the attribute of judgment, Elokim, have been invoked when smiting the Egyptian firstborns?

The Abarbanel also asks: if the Egyptian firstborns were punished because Egypt enslaved Hashem’s “firstborn,” why do we celebrate that the Jewish firstborns were spared? Why should they have been at risk at all? They were not the oppressors.

Rav Leibowitz answers by citing the Sha”ch (*Devarim 7:15*) (other commentators write similarly). The *passuk* states: “Hashem will remove from you all sickness; He will not place upon you any of the evil diseases of Egypt that you know, but He will place them upon your enemies.” What does “that you know” mean? What special familiarity did Klal Yisrael have with these plagues?

The Sha”ch explains that each *makkah* touched the Jewish people for a fleeting moment. This allowed them to grasp what they were being spared

from—even though, spiritually, many were not far removed from the Egyptians.

Rav Leibowitz elaborates that this idea works for the first nine plagues. Frogs for a moment, boils for an instant, darkness briefly. But how could this apply to Makkas Bechoros? If a Jewish firstborn died even momentarily, how was that reversed?

Rav Leibowitz suggests that this, too, occurred and was rectified. The Jewish firstborns experienced death for an instant—and then were revived. That revival required special Divine intervention. Once again, the “key” of reviving the dead belongs only to Hashem. Thus, Hashem Himself, acting with the attribute of mercy, was necessary to restore life to the Jewish firstborns.

Accordingly, the celebration is not merely that the Jewish firstborns were not killed—but that they did not remain dead. They were brought back to life through the great Mercy of Hashem.

We can relate the miracles of our lives, but we must first acknowledge them. We are to try to remember the constant miracles that we do not dwell on. After we recognize them, we will appreciate our lives, and create more Kiddush Hashem.



RAV AZRIEL YEHUDAH
LEIBOWITZ

ר' עזריאל יהודה ליבוביץ

Rav Azriel Yehudah Leibowitz (Nisan 1910-Rosh Hashanah 1991). Born in Paks, Hungary, he was a student of R' Mordechai Winkler (1844-1932) of Mád (Levushei Mordechai) and R' Eliezer David Grunwald of Satmar. R' Leibowitz married Sheindel Rivka Rosenberg (1905-2005), daughter of R' Yitzchak (1860-1944), Rav of Hadhaz. During the Holocaust, his father-in-law R' Yitzchak Rosenberg perished from deprivation, but R' Azriel Yehudah survived Theresienstadt, returned to Hadhaz, and re-opened the yeshiva for about 30-35 talmidim. In the Summer of 1946, he left Hungary, traveled to Tangier, Morocco, and then settled in the U.S. in 1961. Following the passing of Rabbi Yonasan Steiff (1877-1958), he was asked to lead the Viener Kehillah in New York, which he faithfully served for close to 30 years.



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This issue has been dedicated as a zechus for the *aliyas neshamah* of Chazzan Benzion Miller a”h, who passed away on שבט ה' one year ago. Chazzan Benzion Miller a”h, who served as chazzan of Cong. Young Israel Beth-El of Boro Park for over four decades, was world renowned for his *hartzige tefilos* and uplifting *chazzonis*, which inspired myriads of people the world over, from the full spectrum of Jews. Although he was world famous, he remained humble and connected with all people, from the greatest Rabbonim, politicians, world renowned singers and musicians, and even young children. He was a true *sheliach tzibbur*. May he be a meilitz yosher for his wife, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and all of *klal yisroel*.