

Z-mail Parshas Bo
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SEVEN THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT *PASSOVER NIGHT*

This week in synagogues and shteebles all around the world, Jews will be reading publicly the Torah portion of Bo, which deals primarily with the Exodus from Egypt on the night of Passover.

In this light, we present to you seven things you just might not know about this amazing night in history. So here goes ...

- 1) The night of the fifteenth of *Nissan* – “Passover Night” – has been an auspicious time for the Jewish people and an inauspicious time for their enemies since the beginning of time. Adam told his sons Cain and Abel that this particular night was suited for offering sacrifices to G-d because the Jewish people would one day offer the Paschal Lamb on this day. G-d chose Abel's offering over Cain's – and the rest is history. Our forefather Isaac chose to bless his son Esau – but with the help of his mother Rebecca, Jacob ended up receiving Isaac's blessings which were rightly his – and all this on Passover night. During the Period of the Judges, the nation of Midian cruelly oppressed the Jewish people. On the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, Gideon took an army of three hundred picked men and destroyed the large and powerful Midian army. Later during the Period of the Kings, the armies of Assyria under King Sancheriv besieged the city of Jerusalem. On the fifteenth of Nissan, an angel of G-d came down to the Assyrian encampment and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. During the rule of the Persian Empire, Haman came to King Achashveirosh on the fifteenth night of Nissan to convince him to wipe out the Jewish nation. That same night, the King's sleep was disturbed and a chain of events was set into motion that brought about Haman's downfall. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den on the fifteenth of Nissan and miraculously survived. The wicked Babylonian king, Belshatzar, drank from the vessels of the Holy Temple on the fifteenth of Nissan and died later that night (and there are many more examples).
- 2) The very first recorded quarantine in history to protect people from a plague was on the night of the very first Passover Seder in history over 3300 years ago! As we read in Exodus 12:22, Moses instructs the Jewish people regarding that fateful night, *“You should take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is in the basin (from the slaughtered Paschal Lamb), and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with some of the blood that is in the basin, and as for you, you shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning. G-d will pass through to smite Egypt, and He will see the blood that is on the lintel and the two doorposts, and G-d will pass over the entrance and He will not permit the ‘destroyer’*

(*plague*) to enter your homes to smite.” Our present ‘quarantine’ inside our homes to protect ourselves from the Coronavirus Disease – otherwise known as COVID-19 – is not unlike the Biblical one. For just as the Jewish people in Egypt hunkered down in their houses on that first Passover night, eating their dinner (the “Paschal Lamb”) and wondering what will happen to them during the coming plague, so, too, are all of us ‘hidden away’ in our houses, wondering what the deadly coronavirus might yet do to us.

- 3) One of the most prominent features of Passover Night – and which is now sorely lacking ever since the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 CE – is the *Korban Pesach* (Paschal Lamb). As the Torah instructs us in Exodus 12:8 regarding the lamb that each Jewish household had taken for itself in preparation for the Passover Seder night: “They shall eat the flesh on that night – roasted over the fire – and matzos; with bitter herbs shall they eat it”. [I can just imagine the Jews’ reaction upon hearing about the Paschal Lamb, one of the first commandments that G-d gave to the Jewish people after we became a nation ... “One second here! Did G-d just give us a commandment to eat roasted shawarma with lettuce?! We can do this!”] In case you were wondering ... the answer is, yes, during the Messianic Era we will *most definitely* be offering a Paschal Lamb in the Holy Temple on Passover just as we used to do.
- 4) In Exodus 19:4 G-d instructs Moses to tell the Jewish people that He has borne them “on the wings of eagles”. *Rashi* cites a *Midrash* that explains this to mean that before they left Egypt the Jewish people were scattered all across the land of Goshen, yet when they needed to leave, they miraculously came together at Ramses as if on the wings of eagles. *Targum Yonasan* offers a different interpretation. He writes that on that miracle-filled Passover night, G-d transported the entire Jewish people to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem where they offered their Paschal Lambs, and then returned to Egypt! [I guess one could say that according to this view Moses did actually enter the Land of Israel?!]
- 5) The lamb’s blood that the Jewish people were instructed by G-d to smear on the outside of their doors in full view of the Egyptians served as a sort of *vaccine*, inoculating the Jews from the deadly plague that was killing all the Egyptian firstborn. The lamb is the astrological sign of the month of Nissan, and the animal the Egyptians worshipped. By sacrificing the lamb, the Jewish people would be declaring that the Egyptian gods were powerless. And in this merit would they be saved.
- 6) The Torah tells us in Exodus 11:7: “*But against all the Children of Israel, no dog shall whet its tongue, against neither man nor beast, so that you shall know that G-d will have differentiated between Egypt and Israel*”. Some commentators explain what the barking dog is doing in this verse as follows: In the *Haggadah* that we read on Passover night it states clearly that G-d *alone* carried out the

Plague of the Firstborn, without any “help” from His angels (see Exodus 12:12). Yet we find Moses warning the Jewish people in Exodus 12:23 to stay inside their homes on the night of the fifteenth – and G-d will not permit the “destroyer” to enter your homes to smite” (see Exodus 12:23). If G-d alone was to kill the firstborn, then who is the Destroyer? We can answer this conundrum as follows: The Talmud in *Bava Kamma* 60b teaches that whenever a dog barks the Angel of Death is nearby. We can thus say that the “destroyer” that Moses mentioned was none other than the Angel of Death – who might have come to Egypt that night for his usual deaths of Jewish people whose time happened to be up that night. But if these Jews were to die, the Egyptians would have said, “See, the Jews are also dying tonight” and that would have minimized the differentiation between Egypt and Israel, which was the whole point of the plagues! So G-d didn’t allow the “Destroyer” to do his usual job, thus no Jews at all died that night and no dogs barked either.

- 7) Although Passover Night is a very joyous time, there is an element of mourning and sadness as well. In fact, many have a custom to eat eggs at the Passover Seder at the beginning of the meal, because the egg is traditionally a food for mourners. There are two reasons given by the Halachic commentators as to why we are mourning at the Seder. Some suggest that this is based on the fact that according to the Jewish calendar, whichever day of the week the first day of Passover falls out, so, too, will the Fast of *Tishah B’Av* fall out. And that connection is cause for the lessening of our joy even on Passover. Others say that on Passover we mourn the destruction of the Temple and the Paschal Lamb that we can no longer offer to G-d as in the days of old.

GOOD SHABBOS!