

BO (EXODUS 10:1-13:16)

Just Desserts

2009 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

It was the eve of our redemption. G-d was preparing us for our departure from Egypt. On the tenth of the month of Nissan every family was to designate a lamb for slaughter. On the afternoon of the fourteenth of the month, the lambs would be slaughtered in preparation for our first Seder meal. We were to take matzah, bitter herbs, and roasted lamb, and eat them in celebration of the fact that G-d was about to take us out of Egypt.

Why lamb?

It was pay-back time.

G-d is the ultimate arbiter of fairness.

A scale and just balances are G-d's; His deeds are like weights in a pouch. (Proverbs, 16:11)

Rashi explains this verse as saying that G-d carefully weighs out punishment for sins. When you weigh something on a balance scale, there are different sized weights that are placed on the opposite side of the scale to determine the exact weight. Just as every item that goes on the scale is measured with a different combination of weights, so too does every person receive a different punishment, depending upon his actions. *A scale and just balances are G-d's* -- every measurement by G-d is done with absolute precision.

The Egyptians had it coming. They mistreated us. They persecuted us. They enslaved us. They made life miserable for us. G-d insured that not one bit of the pain that they inflicted upon us would go unpunished.

Midrash Rabbah (16:4) describes how the Egyptians made life so unbearable. They would cook meat in our presence and not allow us to eat it. We had to satisfy our hunger with bread while they enjoyed their freshly-killed and -cooked venison.

G-d saw this as intolerable. His children were being deprived of eating a decent meal while being forced to watch the Egyptians enjoy theirs. They suffered while watching others eat what they couldn't have. G-d decided to pay back in kind. He would force the Egyptians to watch eating that they wouldn't enjoy.

The lamb was sacred to the ancient Egyptians. (See Exodus, 8:22) The Israelites were told to gather in all the lambs they would need for the Passover Seder. For four days before Passover, the Egyptians helplessly looked on as their god was prepared for slaughter.

The Egyptians had forced their slaves watch them eat meat that was off-limits to the Israelites. Now the Egyptians would suffer the anguish of seeing their god made into a schwarma sandwich.

“I am a True Judge,” said G-d. You caused My children to suffer. Therefore you shall suffer as well.”

A scale and just balances are G-d's; His deeds are like weights in a pouch.

This is difficult to understand. Our People were enslaved. We were beaten. Jewish children were murdered so the Pharaoh could bathe in their blood. In the major scheme of things, not getting the beef seems to be an almost insignificant addition of insult to injury. G-d brought ten plagues against the Egyptians. He devastated their country. He shattered their economy. The god-roasting of the Passover Lamb seems to be an inconsequential supplementary slap at an already chastised sinner.

However, as King Solomon wrote, *a scale and just balances are G-d's*. No act of treachery goes unpunished. If you add an ounce of weight to one of the sides of a scale, you will need another ounce on the opposite side to balance it out. Had the Egyptians done all the evil acts that they did, but allowed our People to eat well, they still would have been punished. However, since they sinned a little more, they deserved a little more punishment. Had they not treated us this way, there might, perhaps, be no Passover Offering. Or, at least, there might not have been an in-your-face collection of lambs that so offended our idolatrous taskmasters. Egyptians would not have been forced to endure the indignity of seeing their god being eaten.

It is not always easy to be a Jew. We are hated and resented. We are persecuted. There are two points that we must always keep in mind.

- 1) G-d is a fair Judge. We do not possess the wisdom to fathom the reasons for His actions. But we know that those reasons are there. If something happens to us, major or minor, it is because it was meant to happen.
 - 2) Those who hurt us will, in the end, receive their just punishment.
-

Another thought. There is a general rule that whatever applies to the negative applies all the more so to the positive. G-d does not ignore the slightest misdeed. If someone does something wrong, there is, eventually, a punishment. (Unless that person repents.) If that were not the case, that G-d would not be a True Judge.

That being so, it is certainly the case that G-d rewards every good deed.

We should never despair of receiving G-d's reward for every Mitzvah. Every action, so matter how small, is recorded and measured on G-d's scale.

Never ignore the opportunity to perform a Mitzvah, regardless of how small and insignificant it MAY seem to be. There is a reward that comes with every Mitzvah.

G-d has a very long memory.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

© 2009 Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz. Reprint permitted for non-commercial use with attribution to torahtalk.org.