



# Rabbi Dovid Hodges

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## IT ALL CENTRES AROUND FAMILY

A few years ago, a teacher I know was searching for an interesting dilemma to help him with a lesson he was preparing. Finally, he stumbled upon an article where the author asked a question which takes different forms but ultimately the same end; what is the greatest threat facing the Jewish People today? The author noted that most responses centred around anti-Semitism or intermarriage. My friend commented, after asking a number of his classes this question, that the response from the vast majority of students was always anti-Semitism or intermarriage. The author made a fascinating insight that these two responses were more likely to drive people away from Judaism rather than draw them in, especially the youth. Building Jewish identity on Anti-Semitism paints us as the perpetual victim and concentrating too much on intermarriage makes us out to be a people in danger of extinction. Two completely negative responses based on how others view us. Interestingly, the author proposed a different answer to the question explaining that a confused sense of Jewish identity and purpose is the greatest challenge the Jewish people face today.

This week's Parsha begins with the climax of the final three plagues. Beginning with the plague of locust Moshe is sent yet again to Pharaoh to demand the release of the Bnei Yisrael that they may go out and serve Hashem. Once in front of Pharaoh, Moshe paints the grim reality that awaits Mitzrayim should he fail to listen to Hashem. There will be locust swarming throughout the land so much so that people will not be able to see the ground. They will consume what is left of the crops and fill the houses of Mitzrayim. After delivering his message Moshe and Aharon leave and something very surprising happens; Pharaoh's servants for the first-time question him and begin to revolt! 'How long will this be

a snare for us? Send out the men that they may serve Hashem, their G-d! Can't you see that Mitzrayim is lost!' What is maybe even more surprising is that Pharaoh actually listens to them! Moshe and Aharon are brought back to Pharaoh's court where he tells them to go and serve Hashem but he wants to know who is going. Moshe informs him that everyone is going; men, women, children, flocks and cattle because it is a festival to Hashem. Pharaoh tells Moshe and Aaron that he will not let the women and children go rather if you seek to serve Hashem let just the men go before they are thrown out.

One has to ask where were Pharaoh's servants? Why did they not speak up and protest this time? How has Pharaoh answered his servants challenge?

The Chasam Sofer presents a novel insight into this dialogue. The essence of religion and the role people play within it is being debated by Moshe and Pharaoh. Within Mitzrayim, religion was the province of the priests and men who participated in and conducted the religious experience. So, Pharaoh's servants when challenging him are saying just give them a festival since that is all they want. Pharaoh calls Moshe and Aharon back and tells them if all you want is a festival then go and let the men serve Hashem. Rabbeinu Bachaye explains using Shemos Rabba that it was the way of young men and elders in Mitzrayim to offer sacrifices to their gods. Moshe's response is so foreign and strange to Pharaoh because in Pharaoh's way of understanding a religious festival, women and children have no place there. Pharaoh servants are equally as surprised as he is and therefore offer no challenge.

This understanding demonstrates what is at the foundation of Judaism, namely family. One need only look at Pesach to understand this idea. The Korban Pesach was brought as

## Parshah

families and groups. Furthermore, the entire seder is centred around the family and the sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim when our children show up at the table with notebooks of divrei Torah about the seder, where we use sweets and all sorts of different ideas to ensure the whole family remains a part of the festival experience. As Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch comments when Moshe tells Pharaoh that even the children are going out to celebrate this festival, 'The community is found within each one of us'.

This is not the first time the importance of family has been demonstrated in sefer Shemos. At the very beginning we are told that Yaakov and his sons came to Mitzrayim **איש וביתו באו** each man and his house; as families, they came to Mitzrayim. Rav Wolbe zt"l notes in his sefer Ben Sheshes le'asor or Olam Hayedidus that there are many important institutions in Judaism such as the monarchy, Sanhendrin, Beis Hamikdosh, synagogues and yeshivos. He explains further that Klal Yisroel has existed for 2000 thousands of years without most of them and how it is very difficult for the Jewish community to endure without a beis midrash or synagogue. Even with all their importance to and impact on the Jewish People there is one institution that if it ceased to exist so too would the Jewish people, and that is the Jewish family. It is through the family that we teach and pass on love and dedication of Torah. It is through family we teach and pass on our desire to grow in avodas Hashem. It is through family we teach and educate our children to have care and concern for others.

I don't know what the greatest challenge facing the Jewish People is today but what I do know is that the Jewish family is our greatest asset. The family is the means by which we educate and raise healthy and grounded children, and ensure the continuation of the Jewish People for generations to come.

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2. What is the new start found in Parshas Bo?