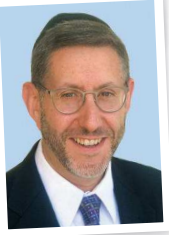


FROM THE EDITOR

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The story of Purim is one of the most famous episodes in the annals of anti-Semitism, playing out the same classic script that has become all too familiar: one minute, we're beloved and respected citizens of a country, and, the next minute, we're so hated and despised that they want to exterminate every last one of us. As anti-Semitic incidents continue to rise around the world, it's worth taking a moment to consider a Torah perspective on the roots of anti-Semitism, learning a timeless lesson from what transpired in Egypt.

When Hashem told Avraham that his children would be strangers in a land that was not theirs and that they would be oppressed, He promised that He would judge their oppressors and send them out from that place with great wealth.¹ Hundreds of years later, when it got close to the time that we would go out from the nation that oppressed us, Egypt, in order to keep His promise, Hashem told Moshe to tell the *Bnei Yisrael* (the children of Israel, aka Yaakov) to ask the Egyptians to lend the *Bnei Yisrael* their silver and gold vessels.

The *Bnei Yisrael* did as Hashem had instructed, and the Torah tells us that they "found favour in the eyes of the Egyptians", who, quite astoundingly, acceded to the requests of the *Bnei Yisrael*, willingly lending their precious objects. Considering that Hashem could have given the Egyptians' wealth to the *Bnei Yisrael* by any means – even forcing the Egyptians to do it despite their hatred for us – so why did Hashem choose to do it in such a strange way?

We can explain this episode based on the commentary of the *Beis HaLevi*². Our Sages teach that Hashem gave us Torah and mitzvos in order that they will cause us to be separate and distinct from the other nations, as the verse³ says, "I have set you apart from the nations." If the Jewish people draw close, chas v'shalom, to non-Jews, then Hashem will renew this separation and distinction by creating hatred in the hearts of the non-Jews. And, lest we think otherwise, all of this is actually for the good of the Jewish people, in order that we not mix with other nations and assimilate.

At the time that we were in Egypt, we had one mitzvah: *bris milah* (circumcision). But, after Yoseph passed away, the *Bnei Yisrael* were afraid and reasoned that their impending suffering and slavery would be diminished if they drew close to the Egyptians, becoming more like them. So, the *Bnei Yisrael* sought to hide the differences that Hashem had placed between them and the Egyptians, including even nullifying their *bris milah*.

In response to the attempt by the *Bnei Yisrael* to draw close to the Egyptians, Hashem caused them, instead, to be separate and distinct by renewing and adding to the hatred in the hearts of the Egyptians, as the verse⁴ says, "The Egyptians came to loathe the *Bnei Yisrael*," becoming disgusting in the eyes of the Egyptians to the point that, when an Egyptian saw a Jew, he would get sick, like when someone sees something that he finds repulsive. Hashem created this hatred and revulsion towards the *Bnei Yisrael* to prevent them from mixing with the Egyptians.

To be clear, the hatred of the Egyptians for the *Bnei Yisrael* was from Hashem; it was entirely unnatural. And it had a purpose: to create distance and division between the Jewish people and their non-Jewish neighbours.

In order to show the *Bnei Yisrael* that the heart of the Egyptians was completely in the hand of Hashem, and that, consequently, their hatred and their love was entirely from Hashem, He commanded that the *Bnei Yisrael* ask to borrow these precious items from the Egyptians, and then made it so that the *Bnei Yisrael* found favour in their eyes in the most miraculous way: the Egyptians willingly lent their precious objects to the *Bnei Yisrael* despite their knowing that the *Bnei Yisrael* were about to leave Egypt. From this, the *Bnei Yisrael* came to understand that, just as Hashem had previously caused the hearts of the Egyptians to hate them, He had now transformed the hearts of the Egyptians to show favour towards them.

And we see this also by Moshe. After Moshe brought the incredibly devastating *makkos* (plagues) on the Egyptians, it would only be logical that the Egyptians would hate and despise him, and yet we see⁵ rather remarkably that just the opposite occurred: "...the man, Moshe, was very great in the land of Egypt and in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and in the eyes of the nation", in order to teach us that the love and hate which the Egyptians felt was entirely from Hashem.

We call it anti-Semitism, but its purpose is really anti-assimilation. We say that anti-Semitism defies logic, but that doesn't mean Hashem brings it about without reason.

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

Based on the Sifsei Chaim on Parshas Bo

¹Bereishis 15:13-14

²Peirush on parshas Shemos

³Vayikra 20:26

⁴Shemos 1:12

⁵Shemos 11:3

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ON THE COVER:

It is customary to wear disguises on Purim, like the mask on our cover. There are various reasons for this custom including that we see "disguises" used in the *megilla* (eg. Esther did not say what nation she was from; Mordechai put on sackcloth and later wore the king's robe; Eliyahu Hanavi disguised himself as Charvona; etc.) and that Hashem's presence in the story is hidden.

