

# Thank You for the Donkeys In My Life

פרשת בא

We will consider appreciation as it relates to the things that we like and the things that we need-but don't necessarily like-in our lives.

## ברכה ראשונה

- How do you say thank you to someone?
- What is one thing that happened today that you are grateful for?

## לימוד ועבודה פנימית

This learning can be done independently, as a *במה בו*..., or together

### שמות פרק י"ג פסוקים ב, י"א-י"ג

2- "Sanctify every male first-born for Me; human and animal, the first born from Bnei Yisrael is Mine."  
11- "And when Hashem Brings you into the land of the Canaanim, as He Swore to you and your ancestors, and Gives it to you,  
12- set apart every first born for Hashem: every male firstborn that your animals have shall be Hashem's.  
13- But redeem each firstborn donkey with a sheep; if you don't redeem it,

ב-קדש־שִׁלִי כָל־בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל־רֶחֶם בְּבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
בְּאָדָם וּבְבִהֵמָה לִי הוּא:  
י"א- וְהָיָה כִּי־יָבֹאָה ה' אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי כַּאֲשֶׁר  
נִשְׁבַּע לָךְ וְלֹא־בִתִּיךָ וּנְתַנָּה לָךְ:  
י"ב- וְהֶעֱבַרְתָּ כָל־פֶּטֶר־רֶחֶם לֵה' וְכָל־פֶּטֶר שֶׁגָר  
בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לָךְ הַזְּכָרִים לֵה':  
י"ג- וְכָל־פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְשֵׂה וְאִם־לֹא תִפְדֶּה  
וְעִרְפָתוֹ וְכָל בְּכוֹר אָדָם בְּבָנֶיךָ תִּפְדֶּה:

break its neck. And redeem every male firstborn from your children.

- Why do we have this Mitzvah?
- What strikes you as odd in this Mitzvah? What parts seem clear?
- Why are donkeys included? (the only not Kosher animal included)
- If donkeys are included, why do we have to redeem them with a sheep?
- Why do we have to break the donkey's neck if we don't redeem them?

## רש"י שם

פטר חמור Firstborn donkey— but not the first offspring of other טמא or not Kosher animals. The Torah Tells us to do this because the firstborn of Mitzrayim are compared to donkeys; another reason for this exception is because donkeys helped the Bnei Yisrael when they left Mitzrayim, as all of them took several donkeys carrying the silver and gold of Mitzrayim.

פטר חמור. ולא פטר שאר בהמה טמאה; וגזרת הכתוב היא לפי שנמשלו בכורי מצרים לחמורים; ועוד, נסיענו את ישראל ביציאתן, שאין לה אחד מישראל שלא נטל הרבה חמורים ממצרים טעונים מכספם ומזהבם של מצרים:

- Which reason resonates with you the most?
- What is the difference between the two reasons?
- Do either of these seem like the real reason?
- Do these reasons explain why we need to redeem the animal on a sheep?

## מסכת ברכות ס' עמוד ב

Rabbi Akiva was once traveling and needed a place to stay overnight. He knocked on everyone in a town's door, but no one would invite him in. He did not get upset, and said, "Everything G-d Does is for the good."

Having no other option, he camped in woods outside of town. He was traveling with a donkey to carry his things, a rooster to wake him up, and a lamp to learn with at night. Early that night, a lion ate his donkey, his rooster was killed by another predator, and the wind blew out his lamp. After each of these things, Rabbi Akiva said, "Everything G-d Does is for the good."

The next morning, he realized that, overnight, a Roman army had attacked the town and taken its people captive. Had he been staying there, he would also be taken captive.

Had his donkey or rooster stayed alive, their braying and crowing would have alerted the army's attention. Had his candle been burning, they would have seen him in the forest. "Everything that happened was for the good."

- Can you relate to Rabbi Akiva's reaction, either during or after the story?
- How do you think Rabbi Akiva kept his demeanor while the story was happening?
- Are you able to recognize how things that seem bad are really good?
- Is everything bad that happens really good?

## עבודה פנימית

(15 minutes)

The Mitzvah of redeeming a firstborn donkey is one of the only Mitzvot, and certainly the only Korban, involving a non Kosher animal. The Mitzvah is an extension of the general Mitzvah to redeem the firstborn animals and humans, reminding us that our firstborns were spared during מכות בכורות. The truth is that all of us, firstborn and others like, only made it out of Mitzrayim and exist because of the Kindness of Hashem. Sometimes Hashem's Kindness is obvious- we have a great thing happen, a spiritual experience or clear Berachot in our lives. Whether we appreciate it or not, these are things it is easy to say "Thank You Hashem" for. Other times, things seem more difficult, negative or bad, and even unwanted. This too, however, is Hashem's Kindness. Do we always see it? Can we say "Thank You Hashem" for these things? It can be hard, even if we recognize that it is for our own good. So we redeem these things with a sheep, saying, "I recognize this is Your Kindness, Hashem;

but it is hard for me to say 'Thank You' directly. Let me exchange it for a sheep, and say 'Thank You' with that."

The word for donkey is "חמר", the same root as the word "חומר", physical or chemical. The Mitzvah of redeeming a firstborn donkey says that even those things that seem lowly, unwanted or bad ARE from Hashem, and we need to elevate those things, too.

1. What are some things in your life that seem negative, but are really good for you?
2. What is one way you can learn to recognize these things as Hashem's Kindness?
3. How can you elevate difficult things or experiences in your life?

## ברכה אחרונה

(5 minutes)

- What is one 'donkey' (thing that looks bad but is really good) in your life?
- What is one thing you need to appreciate more?

### Notes to the teacher

- Be sensitive to students who may have significant or serious challenges in their lives. Perhaps give a caveat of sorts that we are not expected to have this attitude for everything in life.
- Any section of the learning can be done in multiple ways, though it may be helpful to separate the Pasukim and the story.

## עבודת המורה

- Do you have students or classes that seem difficult, but really have the potential to bring something out in you as a person or educator?
- How often is your reaction to difficulties one of appreciation?
- Do you have strategies to channel students' struggles toward growth?
- What are some of your 'donkeys' in your life?

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ב-קדש-שלי כל-בכור פטר כל-רחם בבני ישראל באדם ובבהמה לי הוא:  
 י"א- והיה פייבאך ה' אל-ארץ הפנעני כאשר נשבע לך ולאבותיך ונתנה לך:  
 י"ב- והעברת כל-פטר-רחם לה' וכל-פטר שגר בהמה אשר יהיה לך הזכרים לה':  
 י"ג- וכל-פטר חמר תפדה בשה ואם לא תפדה וערפתו וכל בכור אדם בבניך תפדה:

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