

Bo

Public Jews, Private Jews and the Lintel

In the *Torah* portion *Bo* we learn how the Jewish people were forcibly expelled from Egypt. We learn about the exodus from Egypt. We also learn how the *tephillin* are a sign of our exodus from Egypt. The rabbis say that there are three signs of our exodus from Egypt: one is the *tephillin*; the second is *Shabbos*; the third one is the *seder* that we make on *Pesach*. We all know that in Jewish law a slave has three disabilities. A slave cannot be a witness because a slave cannot tell the truth. If he tells the truth against his master's wishes, he could be beaten to death. The rabbis say that the *tephillin* stands for truth. We put the *tephillin* on our hand and our head to proclaim that we are willing to tell the truth. The *Shabbos* speaks about the second disability of the slave. A slave has no time. All the slave's time is taken up doing what his master wants him to do. The *Shabbos* declares that we can do with our time what we want. We can desist from labor and observe the *Shabbos*. Only a free man can observe the *Shabbos*. A slave also cannot have a family because he is subject to the whims of his master. The master can take his wife and children away and sell them, etc. The *seder* stands for family. It stands for the fact that we are free people because we can form permanent relationships.

Rabbi Akiva teaches something very interesting. He teaches us that the reason why we do not wear *tephillin* on *Shabbos* is because *Shabbos* itself is a sign of the exodus, and we don't need another sign of the exodus on *Shabbos*. But this does not seem to be logical. We know that the Halacha follows Rabbi Akiva because we are sitting here today on *Shabbos* and not one of the men is wearing *tephillin*, but why should the Halacha follow Rabbi Akiva? After all, when the first night of *Pesach* falls on Friday night, we still have a *seder*. We do not say that because it is *Shabbos*, we do not need to have a *seder*, so why don't we also wear *tephillin* on *Shabbos*?

Also, when the Jewish people were commanded to put the blood on the door before the plague of the slaying of the first-born, they were commanded by G-d to put the blood on the doorposts first and then to put it on the lintel. The *Torah* says, "And they should take from the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel." But when Moshe Rabbeinu tells the Jewish people to perform this *mitzvah*, he reverses this command. He

tells them that they should put the blood on the lintel and then the two doorposts. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu reverse what G-d had told him and tell the people to put the blood on the lintel first and then put it on the doorposts?

I believe that the answers to these two questions are found in what it means to be Jewish. We all know that there are two elements to being Jewish. There is a nationalistic element, and there is a religious element. There are many Jews who are public Jews but in their private life, they do not keep any Jewish rituals at all. These Jews are very dedicated and devoted and fight for every Jewish cause and give a lot of money to help Jewish causes, but in their own home, they do not keep any Jewish rituals. On the other hand, there are many Jews who keep many Jewish rituals in their own homes but who are not active in the community in any way and who do not participate in the causes that are important to the Jewish people. Our *tephillin* is an outward sign of our being Jewish. In the olden days we used to wear *tephillin* all the time, not just when we prayed, and even today, we use *tephillin* in a public way. The *tephillin* was a sign of the public Jew. *Shabbos*, on the other hand, was the sign of the private Jew. *Shabbos* is a time when we gather together with our family. It is a day in which we review ourselves and gain the personal strength to overcome our problems.

We need both types of Jews. The two types of Jews represent the two pillars of Judaism, the two doorposts. One represents those Jews who are proud to be Jewish and who work for Jewish causes. The other represents the Jews who know that Judaism is content, is the very basis of their life. They know that it is this content that makes them a better person (gives them hope and allows them to obtain the strength to overcome his vicissitudes. In Israel today we find even in a more personal way these two types of Jews. We find a deeply nationalistic Jew who fights for the Jewish people, who works hard for the Jewish people but, in his own private life, does not observe many of the *mitzvahs*. We also find Jews in Israel who observe many *mitzvahs* but who are not interested in fighting for Jewish causes.

In America today we are finding that these Jews who are only publicly Jews are losing their children. Their children are assimilating. It's not enough just to be a public Jew. The same is holding true in Israel. The

children of only nationalistic Jews are beginning to doubt whether it is right at all for Jews to have a state. Therefore, each individual Jew needs to be concerned about both pillars. We need to be both publicly Jews and privately Jews.

When the Jews were given their first commandments as Jews before they could leave Egypt, they were given both a public commandment and a private commandment. They were told to declare a calendar. This calendar was to be a public statement of what the Jews is and what the Jew will be. Every Jew, no matter how secular or religious, was to observe this particular calendar. They were also told to take a lamb, which was a symbol of Egyptian idolatry and slaughter it as a public sign of the Jewish people's willingness to fight for Judaism. They were to put the lamb's blood on the door, also a public statement that they were going to stand up for Jewish principles, no matter what this cost. The lamb also served a second purpose. It was to be eaten at the *seder*. The *seder* was and is the bridge between the public Jew and the private Jew. The lamb has to be eaten within the family, according to all the mitzvahs of the *Torah* to stress that not only did we have to be willing to fight for Judaism; we also have to be willing to observe the rituals of Judaism. In America Jews are disappearing because even though there are many very good Jews who work very hard for this Jewish community, who give large sums of money for Jewish causes, they don't do *mitzvot* with their children. They even send their own children to private church schools. They don't give them a Jewish education at all. It is doubtful whether those children will stay Jewish. Most certainly their grandchildren will not be Jewish. Jewish continuity demands that we be both public Jews and private Jews.

Jews who are only concerned about their private observances are also deficient. Unless the Jews fight for Judaism within an organized group then, of course, the enemies of Judaism will sweep down and destroy us as they did in eastern Europe before Hitler and as Hitler did in western Europe and eastern later. Jews have to be aware of what is going on in the world, and they have to organize and combat the evils of this world; otherwise, the evils of the world will crush us. Therefore, it is important that we honor Jews who are public Jews. After all, in America we do not have any government support. In America we cannot exist without Jews who are

willing to work for Jewish institutions, who are willing to work for Jewish education, who are willing to give large sums to public causes. Without them to give large sums, Judaism cannot survive. It is important that we honor them, but we should also honor Jews who are privately Jews. We should also honor Jews who keep the *mitzvahs*, and we most certainly should honor Jews who are both public and private Jews. Unfortunately, in our day many times we have overlooked the private Jews.

When G-d told Moshe to put the blood on the door, He told him first to put it on the doorposts, to put it on the doorpost, which stands for the public Jew and one which stands for the private Jew, and then put it on the lintel, but Moshe knew the Jewish people. He knew that if he would stress the doorposts first, then the Jewish people would divide up the work, as they have done in America while there would be many Jews who are public Jews and a few Jews who are private Jew. Moshe, therefore, put the blood first on the lintel, the connecting support between the two doorposts. Moshe wanted to show that we have to be both. We have to be both a public Jew and a private Jew if Judaism is to survive. That's why, too, Rabbi Akiva taught us that we were not to put *tephillin* on on *Shabbos*. Rabbi Akiva taught us that on *Shabbos* we have to be concerned about being a private Jew. He knew that the greatest danger to Jewish continuity is that Jews will forget about being private Jews and will, instead, put all those energies in only being a public Jew. Rabbi Akiva taught us, "Be a public Jew all week but on *Shabbos* be a private Jew. On *Shabbos* nurture those things which make us Jewish, which makes us unique. Unless we are willing in this country especially to be private Jews as well as public Jews, then Judaism does not have a future, but if you are willing to be private Jews as well as public Jews, then Judaism will have a great future even in America.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who applied for a job as an accountant. He had a CPA and then he applied to this prestigious firm, everything went well except for the last question. They asked him how much was 3 times 7. He answered quickly 22. Then when he left the interview, he quickly made a calculation on his calculator and realized he was wrong, that his answer should have been 21. He forgot about that job, but two weeks later, he was called and told he had the job. He asked why

he got the job. The guy said, "Well, your answer was the closest." Unfortunately, in America today there are all sorts of answers as to how the Jewish people can survive and continue in America, but there really is only one answer, and that answer is that Jews must be both public Jews and private Jews. If Jews in America only want to be public Jews or only private Jews, we will not continue. We will cease to exist in America, but if we all determine that they are going to be both public Jews and private Jews, then Judaism will thrive and grow in America until the coming of the *Mashiach*. May He come soon.