

Not only is the Bible a fascinating book, but what increases its wonder are the commentaries on it, which create, in effect, new stories. A good example of this is in this week's Torah portion, Bo. Moses instructs the elders, "Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning" (12:21-22).

We know that at the original Passover, the Jews slaughtered a lamb and then applied the blood to the threshold of their doorposts. Was the blood on the outside of the doorpost or the inside of the doorpost?

If it is on the inside, then the sign is directed toward the Jews. Why would the Jews need this sign? The commentators suggest over and over again that the Jews assimilated deeply into Egyptian life and this included the worship of Egypt's gods. As a first step to becoming a distinct people, the Jews would have to slaughter this Egyptian god so that they themselves could recognize that he was not a deity.

If the blood is on the outside, then the sign is directed toward the Egyptians. Recall for a moment the significance of the lamb in ancient Egyptian culture. It was considered a god. The slaughtering of the lamb that is crucial to the Passover sacrifice is a way of symbolically killing the god of the Egyptians. The sign would indicate to them that their gods were powerless before the Holy One Blessed Be He. When the blood is on the outside of the door, the message to the Egyptians is clear: you are idolators, and your god is powerless to prevent what is about to happen.

That the commentators argue that the Jews assimilated is striking since we tend to think of assimilation as a contemporary problem. Apparently, it has been a problem throughout Jewish history going back to the Bible itself. Throughout modern history, the Jews have played an instrumental role in slaughtering the sacred cows of society. Whether in science, culture, or another arena, the Jews develop new ways of approaching dilemmas, challenges, and problems that expand the vista of humanity.

Assimilated Jews are more likely to destroy the idols of the majority culture rather than accede to them. This is why the Jews are looked upon as iconoclasts, renegades, and radicals. Men like Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud are only the two most famous examples of those that shattered the ideas of those that came before them and innovated a new way of looking. How do the societies around us respond when we play the role of iconoclasts, radicals, and renegades, smearing the proverbial blood on the outside of our doorposts? Occasionally, what arises is a deep resentment, as the attachment to idolatry among our persecutors is strong. One could see this resentment on display at the Capitol a week and a half ago, as participants displayed shirts bearing antisemitic messages.

The blood on the doorpost is a precursor to the ultimate liberation of the Jews from slavery. What does this teach? It teaches that the process of internal liberation precedes external liberation. Before the Jews were ready to go out of Egypt, we first had to prepare ourselves by countering our assimilation. We are always in a struggle with the peoples of this world against

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their idolatry. Therefore, as we learn this week's parsha, we must imagine the inside of our doorposts as smeared with blood for the sake of reminding us of who we actually are.

We are the bearers of an eternal message that human beings are meant to be free, that every person possesses dignity simply by being created in the divine image. That message is getting louder, but it is still not loud enough. Since it is our message, it will never gain the strength it needs until we speak with our own voice. The comforts of Egypt may tempt us. The ease with which the Egyptians lived because they lived on the backs of slaves is something that we must repudiate with every fiber of our being.

Our outside may look one way, but our insides adhere to a calling that is deeply implanted within us. Let us take the time to listen to it.