

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

יג' ניסן תשפ"א

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**EXCITING NEWS:** I am happy to announce that the book **Incredible Insights** is available for purchase and delivery at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/Bo8VCH8Z7T> where you can also see the reviews. It can also be bought from the author by sending an email to [yalt3285@gmail.com](mailto:yalt3285@gmail.com). The essays contained in this book, written from a Torah outlook, deal with a wide array of assorted topics that are unique, inspiring, interesting, thought-provoking, encouraging, enlightening, and transformational. The book includes Haskamos from R' Shmuel Kamenetsky, R' Yisroel Reisman, R' Moshe Wolfson, R' Yitzchak Breitowitz, R' Zev Leff and R' Yitzchak Scheiner. Over the last number of years these insights have inspired thousands around the world, in more than forty countries. This read is for all ages. It has something for everyone, for beginners and scholars, and students and teachers. It makes a great gift for friends, relatives, business associates, and learning partners. *Please spread the word about it.*

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## Pesach Greetings

Before Purim, we wish others "Freilichin Purim" and prior to Pesach, we tell others to have a Kosher Pesach. R' Dovid Cohen (born in 1932) related that in Ukraine, where his parents were from, they would say "Have a Kosher Purim" since many get drunk. Wishing a Freilichin Purim wasn't necessary since it will be Freilich as everyone is in good spirits on Purim. On the other hand, when it comes to Pesach, the way people work to prepare for it, they don't have to worry about it being Kosher. However, they need to make sure that it will also be Freilich. Consequently, they would wish each other a Kosher Purim and a Freilichin Pesach. In the greeting Chag Kosher V'Sameach,<sup>1</sup> many need to emphasize the

Sameach part, as preparing for Pesach can be more stressful than usual due to the quest of cleaning for Chametz.

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## Taanis Bechorim

We know that on Erev Pesach, there is a Taanis Bechorim<sup>2</sup> because the Jewish firstborns were saved from Makkas Bechoros—זכר לנס שנצולו.<sup>3</sup>

1) The Be'er Yosef<sup>4</sup> is bothered why a Bechor nowadays fasts since it should be the descendants of those Bechorim who fast, not other Bechorim who descended from people who weren't Bechorim at the time of Makkas Bechoros? Future Bechorim wouldn't have been affected by the fact that the Bechorim were spared

prohibited to consume (non-Kosher). Food which is Kosher is always Kosher and those which aren't Kosher are not to be eaten anytime. As a result, it is easy to be careful with the observance of Kashrus. But Pesach is different than other Yomim Tovim since foods which are Kosher all year, like bread and cake, are prohibited on Pesach. In fact, the prohibition of eating Chametz on Pesach is much stricter than the prohibition of eating pork! In addition to eating, possession of Chametz is prohibited on Pesach. Because these items are Kosher all year long, yet prohibited during Pesach, we need to be extra careful and make a special effort to make sure we don't come in contact with it during Pesach. Therefore, we add to the regular wish of "Chag Sameach" the word "Kosher"—wishing each other that the holidays should pass in a most Kosher way.

<sup>2</sup> Can a Bechor eat at a Seudas Bris that takes place on Erev Pesach? The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim, 470, s.v. כתב) in the name of the Maharash Halevi (Orach Chaim 3) says that a Bechor can eat at the Seudas Bris but one who is stringent תבוא עליו ברכה. The Magen Avraham then says that in our countries, we are accustomed to fast even if there is a Bris. The Mishna Brura (470:10) writes that eating at a Bris on Erev Pesach would require Hataras Nedarim, annulling of a vow (in places where they are stringent), since a Minhag is considered like a vow—except for the Mohel, Sandek and father of the son who can eat without Hataras Nedarim. However, even they must compensate for the fast after Pesach. We are accustomed today to be lenient and eat also by a Seudas Siyum Mesachta and even if the Bechor himself didn't learn the Mesachta.

<sup>3</sup> Tur, Orach Chaim, 470. The Meiri (1249-1315) writes (Pesachim 107, s.v. אע"פ) that the Talmud Yerushalmi and Mesachta Sofrim require Bechorim to fast on Erev Pesach. This is how they are accustomed in some places in France and Germany but it's not necessary at all. The Noda B'Yehuda of Prague (1713-1793) was very particular that one not make a Siyum on Erev Pesach to get out of the firstborn fast. The Beis Din of Prague even posted a sign saying from the Beis Din that one who makes a Siyum on Erev Pesach to break the firstborn fast is not acting in accordance with the sages. R' Yehoshua Aharon Zvi Weinberger known as the Maharitz writes that he fasted for his firstborn son for 13 years—until he was Bar Mitzva—and he wasn't lenient to rely on a Siyum Mesachta. He adds that his Rebbe, the Chassam Sofer (1762-1839), fasted all his life because he himself was a Bechor. However, when the Chassam Sofer was old and weak, in order to eat, he waited for a Bris because he was a Mohel.

<sup>4</sup> This was authored by R' Yosef Salant who lived from 1885 until 1981.

<sup>1</sup> The traditional good wishes before and on a Yom Tov is Chag Sameach. But Pesach we wish each other, Chag Kosher V'Sameach. Why do we add the word Kosher in the Pesach wishes? Throughout the year there are certain foods which we are permitted to eat (Kosher foods) and those which we are

unless their ancestors were Bechorim at the time of Makkas Bechoros. Furthermore, those who are descendants of those Bechorim may not be fasting (if they are not Bechorim)?

2) If the purpose of a fast is to publicize the miracle of the firstborns being saved, then why do we fast? It should be done in a happy way, just as we see with other miracles which are commemorated with a Seuda.

3) R' Shlomo Zalman Aurbach asks that if we fast because the Jewish firstborns were saved from Makkas Bechoros, then why do we fast on Erev Pesach, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan? Makkas Bechoros occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, the first night of Pesach.<sup>5</sup>

Taanis Bechorim is not to publicize the miracle of being saved rather it's a commemoration (זכר). This is just like we see with Taanis Esther where we fast as it is a commemoration to the original fast—since they fasted, we fast. The Zichron Yehuda<sup>6</sup> says the same is by Taanis Bechorim as the Jewish Bechorim by Makkas Bechoros fasted because they knew the Bechorim were in danger. That is, despite a divine guarantee of safety against Makkas Bechoros. This is because in a time of trouble, one needs heavenly mercy.<sup>7</sup>

The Jewish firstborns surely fasted to be saved, although they were promised since they needed heavenly mercy. Rabbeinu Yonah<sup>8</sup> writes that when Hashem was ready to destroy Mitzrayim, the Jews were in fear and davened to Hashem that He should fulfill what He said—that the plague of Makkas Bechoros not affect them—because the way of Tzadikim is not to be confident with their righteousness, because שמא יגרום החטא. If the Bechorim davened, then they fasted, as the two go together as in דברי הצומות וזעקתם, the matter of the fasts and their lamentations.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, we too today fast as a commemoration to the firstborns fasting in Mitzrayim.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, we don't make it a Simcha rather a fast since that is what it is a commemoration for. With this we can explain why Taanis Bechorim is on the 14<sup>th</sup> although

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Sefer Taanis Bechorim, p. 22. The reason we commemorate it on the 14<sup>th</sup> can't merely be because the 15<sup>th</sup> is Yom Tov causing them to move it to the 14<sup>th</sup> because then the fast should have been moved to the 13<sup>th</sup>, since the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan is also somewhat of a Yom Tov, as it is Erev Yom Tov and the day that the Korban Pesach was brought. There are even restrictions against doing various forms of Melacha on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Furthermore, when Purim is on Sunday, Taanis Esther is moved back to Thursday and not to Friday (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 686:2) and when Erev Pesach comes out on Shabbos, Taanis Bechorim is moved back to Thursday (470:2). The Aruch Hashulchan (470:4) and Mishna Brura (470:6) explain that the reason Taanis Bechorim is shifted back to Thursday instead of Friday is because since it's anyway not in the proper time, it is preferable to distance it from Shabbos so that the Bechorim don't enter into Shabbos while fasting. Based on that, if Erev Pesach isn't the real time for the fast, it would seem inappropriate to reschedule the fast to Erev Pesach thereby causing the Bechorim to enter into Pesach while fasting.

<sup>6</sup> Zichron Yehuda, volume 1, 133. This was authored by R' Yehuda Greenwald (1845-1920), who was a student of the Kesav Sofer. He became the Rav of the city of Satmar.

<sup>7</sup> This can be because of שמא יגרום החטא (Sanhedrin 98b), where if someone sins, then the promise may be annulled.

<sup>8</sup> To Mesachta Brachos.

<sup>9</sup> Esther 9:31.

<sup>10</sup> See the Tur, Orach Chaim, 686. When the Tur says שנוצלו זכר, it can be understood as, we fast as a commemoration to what brought the miracle—Tefila and fasting—and not that it is to publicize the miracle.

Makkas Bechoros was on the 15<sup>th</sup> at night—because the Jews fasted on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

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### Historic Languages

The Midrash teaches that one of the reasons that the Jewish People merited to be redeemed from Mitzrayim was because we didn't change our language to speaking Egyptian.<sup>11</sup> The Jewish people also spoke Egyptian. However, they altered the language to make a uniquely Jewish dialect.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout history, Jewish communities scattered around the world have made their own distinctive languages, separating themselves somewhat from the larger non-Jewish communities surrounding them. At times these “Jewish” languages were very similar to the dominant language around them. However, Jewish forms of languages contain clearly distinct elements such as the Hebrew words, quotes from Tefilos and elements from other languages picked up in the Jewish exile.

As a way of preserving their communities through the years, there were distinct languages spoken amongst the Jews. These include Yiddish, Ladino, Bucharian and Judeo-Italian.

One of these languages was Judeo-Arabic which some famous works were written in. The Kuzari by R' Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141), was written in Judeo-Arabic. Similarly, the Rambam (1135-1204) wrote the Moreh Nevuchim in Judeo-Arabic while he was living in the late 1100s.

Another example of this was the Jews living in the northern regions of Greece who developed their own language called Yevanic. This term derives from the word for Yavan, Greece. In northern Greece, there were about 10,000 Yevanic speakers just prior to World War Two. However, only 149 Yevanic speakers survived the Holocaust. Today, only a few hundred people speak Yevanic. This language is kept alive by a few families in Yerushalayim and New York, and by scholars who continue to research Yevanic and other small Jewish languages. Nowadays, most of these Jewish languages are considered endangered as their native speakers are aging and dwindling.<sup>13</sup>

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes, and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

<sup>11</sup> Vayikra Rabba 32:5.

<sup>12</sup> See שו"ת חתם סופר, Even Ha'ezer, 2:11, s.v. שוב תמהתי.

<sup>13</sup> Part of the abandonment of traditional Jewish languages is because Israel is the homeland of the many of the world's Jewish communities. As Jews have moved to Israel from around the world, their children grew up conversing in Hebrew.