

Some Comments on Parashat Bo
Rabbi Eliot Malomet 6 Shvat 5782 January 8, 2022

שמות י"א:א' ויאמר ה' אל-משה עוד נגוע אחד אביא על-
פרעה ועל-מצרים אחר-יכן ישלח אתכם מזה כשלהו פלה
גדש יגרש אתכם מזה:

Exodus 11:1 *And the LORD said to Moses, "I will cause one more blow to come upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterward he will send you free from here; when he sends you free, it is finished, he will drive, yes drive you out from here. Here, God is preparing Moses for the last blow (note the unusual word נגוע). As leader, Moses now has the challenge to prepare the people. Great leaders at epoch making moments, (think Churchill's Blood, Sweat, Toil and Tears, or FDR's Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself), prepare their nations for the grave challenges that lie ahead. Moses must do the same here.*

י"א:ב' דבר-נא באזני העם וישאלו איש מאת רעהו ואשה
מאת רעותה פלי-כסף וכלי זהב: ויתן ה' את-תן העם בעיני
מצרים גם ה' איש משה גדול מאד בארץ מצרים בעיני עבדי-
פרעה ובעיני העם:

11:2 *Pray, speak to the ears of the people, they shall ask, each man of his neighbor, each woman of her neighbor, objects of silver and objects of gold." And God gave the people favor in the eyes of Egypt, while the man Moses was considered exceedingly great in the land of Egypt in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and in the eyes of the people. A puzzling detail of the Exodus. This was not an act of despoiling. It is a solicitation of grace, perhaps even a kind of compensation. But why are they instructed to do this, and why does God move the Egyptian public to be benevolent towards the Israelites? 1. The Exodus was not a conflict between Israel and Egypt as much it was between God and Pharaoh. As difficult as it is to imagine, these verses suggest that the populations lived next to one another, and at the very least, there was no enmity between them. If there had been, we would expect to find some lingering animosity against the Egyptians in the Torah. But the opposite is the case! We have injunctions against Ammonites and Moabites because of their cruelty to Israel in the desert but regarding Egyptians we have this commandment: *You are not to abominate an Egyptian for you were a sojourner in his land.* (Deut. 23:8). The Egyptians were disposed favorably to Israel at the end. Albeit, because God moved them to be that way.*

2. Later in Exodus we read about the making of the Golden Calf and the Sanctuary. Readers always ask the same question: where did they get the materials? Answer: from the Egyptians themselves. As slaves they had no property or movable wealth. Nothing. The gifting of gold and silver from the Egyptians solves the problem of what they used. The Bible regards looted possessions with disdain and embargoes their entry into sacred domains. It would make no sense for the Sanctuary to be fabricated from stolen or looted materials. The solution: the Egyptians gave them to the Israelites freely. 3. Going back all the way to God's promise to Abraham in Genesis at the *Covenant of the Pieces*, God says: *But the nation to which they are in servitude - I will bring judgment on them, and after that they will go out with great property.* (Gen. 15:14). This moment is a fulfilment of a divine promise.

י"ב:ז' ולקחו מן-הדם ונתנו על-שתי המזוזות ועל-המשקוף
על הבתים אשר-יאכלו אתו בהם:

12:7 *They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat. The purpose of the blood is delineated in verse 12:13 על ויהיה לכם לאת על הבתים אשר אתם שם וראיתי את-הדם ופסקתי עליכם ולא יהיה לכם לאת על הבתים ויהיה לכם לאת. Now the blood will be a sign for you upon the houses where you are: when I see the blood I will pass over you, the blow will not become a bringer-of-ruin to you, when I strike down the land of Egypt. This is another puzzling detail. Did God really need to "see" the blood on the doorposts to pass over their homes? Rabbinic tradition focuses on the phrase, ויהיה לכם לאת the blood will be a sign for you meaning that the primary purpose of the blood was to communicate something to the inhabitants of the house and not to God. Rashi: לכם לאות ולא לאחרים לאות. מכאן שלא נתנו הדם אלא לכם לאות. A sign for you and not for others. From this we learn that the blood was placed on the inside of the home. 1. As we know, blood is a powerful multi-vocal symbol. It represents life, purification, power, holiness, covenant, and more. In this instance, a slaughter takes place. The head of household who performs the slaughter functions in a priestly role because sacrificial slaughter is something that is only performed by priests.*

When slaughter for sacrifice takes place, the crucial moment that sanctifies the sacrifice, and the altar, is the pouring of the sacrificial blood on the 'horns' of the altar. But here, there is no altar! Here, the quasi-priestly head of household places the blood on the most prominent 'edge' of the household, namely the entrance. By doing so he sanctifies and purifies the household and, in so doing, purifies and sanctifies the individuals inside it. Thus, the inhabitants will eat the Passover sacrifice in a state of purity and holiness. 2. Blood represents life. All around them is death. The blood functions as a barrier between the life force that will sustain Israel as it is about to be set free and the death force that is rampaging throughout Egypt leaving *no house in which there is not a dead person*. What does God "see" while *passing over*? Holiness, purity, life! The placing of blood on the doorposts and the lintels demarcates the zone of life from the zone of death. 3. We might add another layer of meaning here. Ezekiel (45:19), speaks of the cleansing of the Temple. *The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and apply it to the doorposts of the Temple, to the four corners of the of the altar, and to the doorposts of the gate of the inner court.* On the night of liberation, the head of household transforms his home into a Temple. Thus, at the moment of the people's liberation, it is as if the entire Household of Israel dwells in the Temple. The only other moment where this happens is at Mount Sinai. While not in individual homes, the people are configured all at once in a set of sacred zones corresponding to those in the Temple.

י"ב:ח' וְאָכְלוּ אֶת-הַבָּשָׂר בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה צֶלִי-אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עֲלֵי-מַרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ:

12:8 *They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs.* No reason is given here for the selection of these foods, or for this method of preparation. Only later are we told that unleavened bread is associated with the hasty Exodus and the bitter herbs with the "bitterness" of slavery. It's fascinating that roasted lamb with herbs and flatbreads is found in numerous traditional cuisines. Lamb is a savory meat that goes well with sharp tasting herbs. Middle Eastern Shawarma consists of lamb with spice and herb blends; Mexican Barbacoa is a roasted lamb prepared with is prepared with bitter leaves. Sabzi from Azerbaijan is roasted lamb made with a herb

mixture of dill, parsley, cilantro leek shoots and chives. Hearty, savory, festive and filling, these dishes are nutritious, and relatively easy to make. The Passover meal was probably a version of something familiar to the Israelites, but the eve of the Exodus provided a unique context. Having been crushed by slavery, the people reconstitute themselves in their family units in a covenantal bond with God. The meal is an expression of freedom.

י"ב:כ"ה-כ"ו וְהָיָה כִּי-תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן ה' לָכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-הַעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת: וְהָיָה כִּי-יִאמְרוּ אֵלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הַעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם:

12:25-26 *And when you enter the land that the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?'* The rite they are referring to is the placing of blood on the doorposts. There is every indication here that the ritual of placing the blood on the doorposts was to be performed annually even when they lived in the land. Disconnected from its context, it would have provoked curiosity and confusion.

י"ב:כ"ט-ל"א וַיְהִי אִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וְה' הִנֵּה כָל-בְּכוֹרֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם מִבְּכֹר פְּרֹעֹה הַיָּשֵׁב עַל-כִּסְאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשְּׂבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית הַבּוֹר וְכֹל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: וַיָּקָם פְּרֹעֹה לַיְלָה הוּא וְכָל-עַבְדָּיו וְכָל-מִצְרָיִם וַתִּהְיֶי צַעֲקָה גְדֹלָה בְּמִצְרָיִם כִּי-אֵין בֵּית אֲשֶׁר אֵין-שָׁם מֵת: וַיִּקְרָא לַמִּשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צִאֵל מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי גַם-אַתֶּם גַּם-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת-ה' כַּדְּבַרְכֶם:

12:29-31 *In the middle of the night the LORD struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians—because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead. He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, "Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you! Go, worship the LORD as you said! Read the story closely and this is not exactly what Moses envisioned. It's quite plausible that when Pharaoh is awakened by the sounds of screams in the middle of the night, and then summons Moses and Aaron to tell them to leave, the Israelites were still in their homes, their lambs are still roasting, their dough not yet baked into matzot. In other words, they had not yet eaten! But amazingly, there is no tumult, no distress, no disarray, and no confusion. They are ready. They are quiet (as they will be at Sinai as well). And they go without complaining. That's the great miracle of the Exodus!*

HEY, WHY NOT SPONSOR A PARASHA SHEET?
SHABBAT SHALOM!