

**Ki Tavo – Selected Shorts Number 45: Triplets and the Blessings of Curses**  
**Rabbi Eliot Malomet August 28, 2021 20 Elul 5781**

דברים כ"ו:ב' וְלִקְחֶתָּ מֵרֵאשִׁית הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּבְרֵא מֵאֲרֻצֵּי אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ וְשַׂמְתָּ בַטֶּנָּא וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל-הַמִּקְוֶה אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁכְנוֹ שָׁמוֹ שָׁם:

**Deuteronomy 26:2** *you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name.* טנא *teneh* basket, makes its first appearance here. An Egyptian loan word, the description of this ritual encodes deep symbolism: bringing first-fruits is the culmination of the liberation from Egypt. In the Mishnah the receptacle goes by the word סל *sal* (a word from Akkadian), which occurs more frequently in the Bible. This is all about the story. Liberation gives you a story; freedom is the ability to harvest first fruits and tell your story.

דברים כ"ו:ה' וְעַנִּיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲרָמִי אֲבָד אֲבִי וַיִּרְדּוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְדַּר נַחֲמָה וַיִּגְדַּר שָׁם בְּמַתִּי מֵעֶשֶׂת וַיְהִי-שֵׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל עֲצוּם רַב:

**Deuteronomy 26:5** *You shall then recite as follows before the LORD your God: "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but he became there a nation, great, mighty in number, and many.* A triple adjective, but what is encoded here? Origin and a destiny of triumph. God's original promise to Abraham was that he will be a גוי גדול ועצום *a nation great and mighty in number* (Gen. 18:18) and Pharaoh's first observation about Israel was that they were עצום *mighty in number and many more than us* (Exod. 1:9). This set of three adjectives in the pilgrim's script conflates God's original promise Israel's eventual triumph in Egypt.

דברים כ"ו:ז' וַיִּצְעַק אֶל-ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קִלְנוֹ וַיִּרְא אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹנוֹ וְאֶת-עֲמָלּוֹנוֹ וְאֶת-לִחְצוֹנוֹ:

**Deuteronomy 26:7** *We cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression.* Another triple. What's encoded in this phrase? The Burning Bush (Exod. 3:7), but there God *sees* first then *hears*: *I saw the plight of My people and I have heard their cries...I have seen their oppression* (3:9). Here, God *hears* then *sees*. עני and לחץ are terms of oppression in the

Burning Bush episode but עמל is missing; instead there you have the term מכאוב. Curiosity: both terms occur as "brackets" in the first chapter of Kohelet. Hmm...what to make of that?

דברים כ"ו:ח' וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְיָרֵעַ נְטוּיָהּ וּבְמַרְאֵה גָּדֹל וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבְמִפְתֹּיִם:

**Deuteronomy 26:8** *The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. Hand, arm, and power are another triple, modified by adjectives mighty, outstretched, and awesome.* What's encoded here? Gary Rendsburg has pointed out that *mighty hand and outstretched arm* is a creative cultural appropriation that inverts the depiction of a victorious Pharaoh.



Depiction of Rameses II in "pharaonic stance" in the Abu Simbel temple. Note the "mighty hand and outstretched arm." Perhaps the *awesome power, signs and portents* are also means of ironic inversions of

Egyptian motifs, since Egypt was all about power and magic. Conclusion: the firstfruits declaration is not only a powerful ritual moment, locating the pilgrim in a great drama, but also a remarkable compression of the Exodus story replete with a subtle subtext of God's victory over Pharaoh. The keyword וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ is the exact midpoint of the text. דברים כ"ו:ט"ו הַשְּׁקִיפָה מִמַּעַן קִדְשׁוֹ מִדֵּ-הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבִרְדּוֹ אֶת-עַמּוֹ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵת הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה לָנוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבָשׁ:

**Deuteronomy 26:15** *Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.* הַשְּׁקִיפָה is an interesting word, this is its only occurrence in the Bible. The root שקפ sounds a lot like "scope" an ocular instrument. The person says this standing in the Temple which is God's thereby linking the "heavenly abode" and the "earthly abode" while invoking God's blessings over Israel.

