

PARSHAT BO, YEAR 3

EXODUS 12:29 And it came to pass at midnight that ADONAI 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, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great 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 ADONAI as you said! Take also your flocks and your herds, as you said, and begone! And bless me also!”* The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country, for they said, “We shall all be dead.” So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders. The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing. And ADONAI had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they despoiled Egypt.

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. Moreover, a mixed multitude† went up with them, and flocks and herds, a weight of livestock. And they baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt into *matzot*, for it had not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years; at the end of the four hundred and thirtieth year, to the very day, all the ranks of ADONAI departed from the land of Egypt. A night of keeping watch‡ it was for ADONAI, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; this night is ADONAI’s, keeping watch for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

ADONAI said to Moses and Aaron: This is the law of the *pesach*§: No foreigner shall eat of it. But any slave a man has bought may eat of it once he has been circumcised. No bound or hired laborer shall eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house: you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house; nor shall you break a bone of it. The whole community of Israel shall offer it. If a stranger who sojourns with you would offer the *pesach* to ADONAI, all his males must be circumcised; then he may draw near to do it; he shall then be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you. And all the Israelites did so; as ADONAI had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. That very day ADONAI freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop.

* i.e., when you pray to your God in the wilderness, put in a good word for me as well (so Rashi, Ibn Ezra)

† Or “motley crew”; it may be that the *rav* in the Hebrew *’erev rav* does not mean “multitude” but simply duplicates the preceding syllable to create a pejorative. (The English “riffraff” comes close.)

‡ “keeping watch” *shimurim*, root שמר *shamar*, “to guard, observe”

§ the Passover offering

13 1 ADONAI spoke further to Moses, saying, 2“Consecrate to Me every first-born: whatever opens the womb among the Israelites, man and beast, is Mine.”

3And Moses said to the people, “Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how ADONAI freed you from it with a mighty hand: no fermentation shall be eaten. 4You go free on this day, in the month of Abib. 5So, when ADONAI has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall observe in this month the following service: 6Seven days you shall eat *matzot*, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to ADONAI. 7Throughout the seven days *matzot* shall be eaten; nothing fermented shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory. 8And you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what ADONAI did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.’ 9And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, in order that the *torah* of ADONAI may be in your mouth, that with a mighty hand ADONAI freed you from Egypt. 10You shall keep this statute at its set time from year to year.

11“ And when ADONAI has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and has given it to you, 12you shall set apart for ADONAI whatever opens the womb: every male firstling that your cattle bear shall be ADONAI ‘s. 13But every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And you must redeem every first-born male among your children. 14And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘It was with a mighty hand that ADONAI brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage. 15When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, ADONAI slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of both man and beast. Therefore I sacrifice to ADONAI every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons.’ 16And so it shall be as a sign upon your hand and as a headband around your forehead that with a mighty hand ADONAI freed us from Egypt.”