

# PART 14: THE EXODUS [TRACTATE BERACHOS: 9A-B]

*by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Rosenfeld*

R. Abba said, all agree that Israel's redemption from Egypt began in the evening (1), as it says: "G-d took you out of Egypt at night" (Deut.16:1), but they left Egypt by day, as it says: "On the day after the Passover [sacrifice], the children of Israel went out" (Num. 33:3). Where is there a difference of opinion? Regarding the time of "haste" (referred to in Ex.12:11); according to R. Elazar b. Azariah, it refers to the time of the Egyptians' haste (to send out the Israelites after the firstborn had died at midnight; see Ex.12:33); but according to R. Akiva, it refers to the Israelites' haste (to leave at dawn) (2).

G-d said to Moses: "Please speak to the people, so that each man will request of his fellow, and each woman from her fellow, silver vessels and gold vessels " (Ex.11:2). They said in the house of R. Yannai: G-d was saying to Moses, "Please say the following to the Jewish people: 'please request from the Egyptians silver and gold utensils, so that the "Tzaddik" ("righteous man" - referring to Abraham) won't be able to say that the words "They will enslave them and afflict them" (Gen.15:14) were fulfilled, but the words "and afterwards they will go out with great wealth" (ibid.) weren't fulfilled (3)."

The Jews replied: "If only we could go free ourselves (that is, even empty-handed)!" This can be compared to a man in prison who is told: "Tomorrow you will be allowed to leave, and will be given a lot of money", who replies: "Please let me leave immediately, and I will ask for nothing!"

The verse states: "G-d made the (Jewish) People attractive in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they granted their request" (Ex.12:36): this (4) teaches us that [some aspect of] the transaction was compulsory. Some say that the Egyptians were compelled to grant the request, as it says "She who stays at home divides the spoils" (Psalms 68:13) (5), and some say that taking the items was against the will of the Israelites, because they felt the items would be a burden to carry with them.

The verse states: "They drained Egypt [of its wealth]" (Ex.12:36). Some say that they left Egypt like a [bird] trap without grain, others say like the depths of the sea without fish.

[Moses told G-d that the Israelites will ask to know His Name; G-d told him to tell them that His Name is]: "I will be who I will be" ("EHYEH ASHER EHYEH": Ex.3:14). G-d was telling Moses to tell the Jews: "I was with you in this enslavement, and I will be with you in the enslavements of your future exiles". Moses protested, "Master of the World, it is enough for one affliction to be mentioned in its own time!" He was therefore told to tell them "EHYEH ("I will be") sent me to you" (ibid) (6).

Elijah prayed "Answer me, G-d, answer me" (1 Kings 18:37). R. Avho said, why did Elijah call "answer

me" twice? He was saying: answer me that fire come down from heaven and consume everything on the altar, and answer me and divert their attention, so they don't think of saying that it (the fire from the sky) was magic (and not from G-d), as it says "You will turn their hearts back [to You]" (ibid) (7).

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

(1) That is, they were given permission to leave at night.

(2) There is a dispute between R.Elazar b.Azariah and R.Akiva, as to the time frame within which one may eat the Korban Pesach (Passover sacrifice); R.Elazar rules that the time limit is midnight on the 15th of Nissan, whereas R.Akiva rules that one may eat the meat of the sacrifice until dawn. Their dispute is based on the interpretation of the following verse: "...and you will eat [the meat of the sacrifice] IN HASTE ("be'chipazon")..." (Ex.12:11); according to R.Elazar b.Azariah, the "haste" of the verse refers to the Egyptians' haste to send out the Israelites after the firstborn had died at midnight; according to R.Akiva, it refers to the Israelites' haste to leave at dawn (note the irony of the fact that the Egyptians were begging the Jews to leave at midnight, but the Jews refused to budge until daybreak).

(3) G-d made a covenant with Abraham to give the Land of Israel to his descendants as an inheritance. As part of that covenant, called "Bris Bein HaBesarim" (lit: "covenant between the pieces"), G-d says to Avraham: "...your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not their own, for four hundred years. THEY WILL ENSLAVE THEM AND OPPRESS THEM, but I will bring judgement against the nation who enslaves them, AND THEY WILL LEAVE WITH GREAT WEALTH...the fourth generation will return here..." (Genesis, chapter 15).

(4) The way the Hebrew word for "and they granted their request" ("Va'yashilum") is written, implies that some aspect of the interaction was not voluntary.

(5) This particular psalm is referring to the exodus from Egypt. Since the verse calls the items which the Egyptians handed over, "spoils," it implies that they were handed over against the will of the Egyptians.

(6) Implying that G-d was with them during the Egyptian enslavement, without any allusion to future exiles.

(7) This occurs during the famous "contest" between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel. Elijah wished to prove to the Jews that Hashem was the only power, and so he set up a test in which there would be two altars, one for the prophets of Baal and the other for him; people would see who's prayers for fire to burn up the sacrifice are answered (See Kings I 18:19-46).

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