

Stollen Moments – Bo – January 28, 2023

PARASHA SUMMARY FROM WWW. REFORMJUDAISM.ORG

- God sends the plagues of locusts and darkness upon Egypt and forewarns Moses about the final plague, the death of every Egyptian firstborn. Pharaoh still does not let the Israelites leave Egypt. (10:1-11:10)
- God commands Moses and Aaron regarding the Passover festival. (12:1-27)
- God enacts the final plague, striking down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt except those of the House of Israel. Pharaoh now allows the Israelites to leave. (12:29-42)
- Speaking to Moses and Aaron, God repeats the commandments about Passover. (12:43-13:16)

Exodus Chapter 10

1 Then the Eternal said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display these My signs among them, 2 and that you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons’ sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them — in order that you may know that I am the Eternal.” 3 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the Eternal, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go that they may worship Me.

4 For if you refuse to let My people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts on your territory. 5 They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They shall devour the surviving remnant that was left to you after the hail; and they shall eat away all your trees that grow in the field. 6 Moreover, they shall fill your palaces and the houses of all your courtiers and of all the Egyptians — something that neither your fathers nor fathers’ fathers have seen from the day they appeared on earth to this day.” With that he turned and left Pharaoh’s presence.

7 Pharaoh’s courtiers said to him, “How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the Eternal their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?” 8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh and he said to them, “Go, worship the Eternal your God! Who are the ones to go?” 9 Moses replied, “We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the Eternal’s festival.” 10 But he said to them, “The Eternal be with you the same as I mean to let your children go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief. 11 No! You menfolk go and worship the Eternal, since that is what you want.” And they were expelled from Pharaoh’s presence.

12 Then the Eternal said to Moses, “Hold out your arm over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat up all the grasses in the land, whatever the hail has left.” 13 So Moses held out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Eternal drove an east wind over the land all that day and all night; and when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. 14 Locusts invaded all the land of Egypt and settled within all the territory of Egypt in a thick mass; never before had there been so many, nor will there ever be so many again. 15 They hid all the land from view, and the land was darkened; and they ate up all the grasses of the field and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left, so that nothing green was left, of tree or grass of the field, in all the land of Egypt.

16 Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “I stand guilty before the Eternal your God and before you. 17 Forgive my offense just this once, and plead with the Eternal your God that He but remove this death from me.” 18 So he left Pharaoh’s presence and pleaded with the Eternal. 19 The Eternal caused a shift to a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and hurled them into the Sea of Reeds; not a single locust remained in all the territory of Egypt. 20 But the Eternal stiffened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

21 Then the Eternal said to Moses, “Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched.” 22 Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days. 23 People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings.

24 Pharaoh then summoned Moses and said, “Go, worship the Eternal! Only your flocks and your herds shall be left behind; even your children may go with you.” 25 But Moses said, “You yourself must provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to the Eternal our God; 26 our own livestock, too, shall go along with us — not a hoof shall remain behind: for we must select from it for the worship of the Eternal our God; and we shall not know with what we are to worship the Eternal until we arrive there.” 27 But the Eternal stiffened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not agree to let them go. 28 Pharaoh said to him, “Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die.” 29 And Moses replied, “You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again!”

Chapter 11

1 And the Eternal said to Moses, “I will bring but one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that he shall let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you out of here one and all. 2 Tell the people to borrow, each man from his neighbor and each woman from hers, objects of silver and gold.” 3 The Eternal disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people. Moreover, Moses himself was much esteemed in the land of Egypt, among Pharaoh’s courtiers and among the people.

4 Moses said, “Thus says the Eternal: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians, 5 and every first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle. 6 And there shall be a loud cry in all the land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again; 7 but not a dog shall snarl at any of the Israelites, at man or beast — in order that you may know that the Eternal makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

8 Then all these courtiers of yours shall come down to me and bow low to me, saying, ‘Depart, you and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will depart.” And he left Pharaoh’s presence in hot anger. 9 Now the Eternal had said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not heed you, in order that My marvels may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.” 10 Moses and Aaron had performed all these marvels before Pharaoh, but the Eternal had stiffened the heart of Pharaoh so that he would not let the Israelites go from his land.

Mishneh Torah, Repentance 5:1 (Rambam)

Free will is granted to all people: If one wanted to turn oneself to a good path and to be righteous he has free will, and if one wanted to turn oneself to an evil path and be wicked he has free will, as it is written in the Torah, Behold, the man is become like one of us, to know good and evil (Genesis 3:22), that is, this species of human is unique in the world and there is no other species like it in this matter, that it of its own initiative and will and thought knows Good and Evil and will do whatever it pleases, and there is no one to prevent its hand from doing Good or Evil.

Mishneh Torah, Repentance 6:1 (Rambam)

There are many verses in the Torah and the words of the Prophets that appear to contradict this principle, and most people stumble on these ideas: that the Holy Blessed One decrees for a person to do evil or good, and that one’s heart is not turned over for one to incline it toward whatever one might want. But I will now clarify an important principle, from which you will know the explanation of all those verses: At the moment when a particular person [sins] or the citizens of a particular province sin, and the sinner commits the sin with awareness and intention, as we have explained – it is appropriate that they should be punished. The Holy Blessed One knows how to punish: There is a sin for which the judgment renders punishment for the sinner in This World physically or financially, or through the sinner’s minor children – since a person’s minor children who lack awareness and have not taken on any mitzvot are like one’s property, and it is written, Each man shall be put to death for his own sin (Deut. 24:16) – once he becomes a man. And there is a sin for which the judgment renders punishment for the sinner in the World to Come, but no damage will be done to the sinner in This World. And there is a sin for which the sinner is punished in This World and in the World to Come.

Mishneh Torah, Repentance 6:3 (Rambam)

Therefore it is written in the Torah: I will harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 14:4) – since he initially sinned of his own initiative and abused Israel, who were living in his land, as it says, Come, let us deal cleverly with them (Ex. 1:10), judgment was rendered to deny Pharaoh's judgement until [God] punished him – therefore the Holy Blessed One hardened [Pharaoh's] heart. So why did [God] send Moses with the message: "Release [the Israelites], and repent," ... In order to inform humanity that when the Holy Blessed One denies repentance to a sinner, the sinner can not repent – rather the sinner will die in the wickedness that the sinner initially committed intentionally.

Shaarei Teshuvah 1:5 (Yonah of Gerondi)

Additionally, repentance is more difficult for one who repeats his sin; for the sin becomes as if it were permitted to him. And his sin is very weighty with regards to this, as it is stated (Jeremiah 3:5), "that is how you spoke; you did wrong, and you were able." The meaning of, "you were able," is that the evil deeds have become like that which is permitted to you, and like something within your ability and your authority - like the usage (in Deuteronomy 12:17), "You are not able to eat in your gates," for which the translation [of Onkelos] is, "you do not have authority." And our Rabbis, may their memory be blessed, said (Yoma 86b), "When a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes to him as if it were permitted. [Additionally,] our Rabbis, may their memory be blessed, said about a man who commits a transgression and repeats it - that from now on, if he thinks about doing that sin but is prevented from doing it by duress, his bad thought is joined with the act (it is counted as if he did it). And about him is it stated (Jeremiah 6:19), "I am going to bring disaster upon this people, the outcome of their own thoughts."