

חומש קורן מקראות הדורות
THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT

פרשת בא
PARASHAT BO



KOREN

THE ROHR FAMILY EDITION

חומש קורן מקראות הדורות
THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS EDITION OF PARASHAT BO

פרשת בא עם מפרשים
PARASHAT BO WITH COMMENTARIES



TORAH TRANSLATION BY
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks שליט"א

COMMENTARIES COLLECTED AND ABRIDGED BY
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The Rohr Family Edition of
The Koren Mikraot HaDorot
pays tribute to the memory of

Mr. Sami Rohr ז"ל
ר' שמואל ב"ר יהושע אליהו ז"ל

who served his Maker with joy
and whose far-reaching vision, warm open hand, love of Torah,
and love for every Jew were catalysts for the revival and growth of
vibrant Jewish life in the former Soviet Union
and in countless communities the world over

and to the memory of his beloved wife

Mrs. Charlotte Rohr (née Kastner) ע"ה
שרה בת ר' יקותיאל יהודה ע"ה

who survived the fires of the Shoah to become
the elegant and gracious matriarch,
first in Colombia and later in the United States,
of three generations of a family
nurtured by her love and unstinting devotion.
She found grace in the eyes of all those whose lives she touched.

Together they merited to see all their children
build lives enriched by faithful commitment
to the spreading of Torah and *Ahavat Yisrael*.

Dedicated with love by
The Rohr Family
NEW YORK, USA

עֲטֹרַת זְקִינִים בְּנֵי בָנִים
(משלי יז, ו)

*Grandchildren
are the crowning glory of the aged
(Proverbs 17:6)*

May the learning and traditions of our people
be strengthened by our future generations.
In honor of our wonderful grandchildren

Zahava and Moshael Straus

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FOR THE COMPLETE RASHI AND HAFTARAH
TURN TO THE OTHER END OF THIS VOLUME.

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The genius of Jewish commentary on the Torah is one of huge and critical import. Jewish life and law for millennia have been directed by our interpretations of the Torah, and each generation has looked to its rabbinic leadership for a deeper understanding of its teachings, its laws, its stories.

For centuries, *Mikraot Gedolot* have been a core part of understanding the Humash; the words of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rashbam, Rabbag, and other classic commentators illuminate and help us understand the Torah. But traditional editions of *Mikraot Gedolot* present only a slice in time and a small selection of the corpus of Jewish commentators. Almost every generation has produced rabbinic scholars who speak to their times, from Philo and Onkelos two thousand years ago, to Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and Nehama Leibowitz in ours.

The Koren Mikraot HaDorot – Scriptures or Interpretations for the Generations – brings two millennia of Torah commentary into the hands and homes of Jews around the world. Readers will be able not only to encounter the classic commentators, but to gain a much broader sense of the issues that scholars grappled with in their time and the inspiration they drew from the ancient texts. We see, for example, how Philo speaks to an assimilating Greek Jewish audience in first-century Alexandria, and how similar yet different it is from Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's approach to an equally assimilating nineteenth-century German readership; how the perspectives of Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Kotler differ in a post-Holocaust world; how Rav Se'adya Gaon interpreted the Torah for the Jews of Babylonia. It is an exciting journey through Jewish history via the unchanging words of the Torah.

The text of the Torah features the exceptional new translation of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, together with the celebrated and meticulously accurate Koren Hebrew text. Of course, with the exception of Rashi – for whom we present an entirely new translation in full – the commentaries are selected. We offer this anthology not to limit our reader's exploration but rather as a gateway for further learning of Torah and its commentaries on a broader and deeper level than space here permits. We discuss below how to use this book.

We must thank **Pamela and George Rohr** of New York, who recognized the unique value of *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* and its ability to communicate historical breadth and context to the reader. For my colleagues here at Koren, we thank you; for the many generations of users who will find this a continuing source of new learning, we are forever in your debt.

We also are indebted to **Zahava and Moshael Straus**, true leaders of this Jewish generation in so many fields, who have invested not only in *Parashat Bo* but the entire book of Shemot. Together, we were thus able to launch this innovative and unique project.

We are honored to acknowledge and thank **Debra and David Magerman**, whose support for the Koren Hūmash with Rabbi Sacks's exemplary translation and commentary laid the foundation for the core English text of this work.

Finally, I must personally thank **Rabbi Marvin Hier**, with whom I had a special breakfast some years ago at the King David Hotel. During the meal, he raised the problem that so few people knew the writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Aharon Kotler on the Torah; and I, who had just read some of Philo's work, had the same reaction. From that conversation came the seed for this project.

HOW TO USE *THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT*

The Koren Mikraot HaDorot will be a fifty-five-volume edition of the Hūmash (one for each *parasha* plus a companion volume). Each of the fifty-four volumes of the *parashot* can be read from right to left (Hebrew opening side), and left to right (English opening side).

Opening from the Hebrew side offers:

- ▶ the full Torah text, the translation of Rabbi Sacks, and the full commentary of Rashi in both Hebrew and the new English translation
- ▶ all *haftarot* associated with the *parasha* of the volume, including Rosh Hōdesh and special readings, both in Hebrew and English

Opening from the English side presents four sections:

- ▶ **THE TIME OF THE SAGES** – includes commentaries from the Second Temple period and the talmudic period
- ▶ **THE CLASSIC COMMENTATORS** – quotes selected explanations by Rashi as well as most of the commentators found in traditional *Mikraot Gedolot*
- ▶ **CONFRONTING MODERNITY** – selects commentaries from the eighteenth century to the close of the twentieth century
- ▶ **THE BIBLICAL IMAGINATION** – features essays surveying some of the broader conceptual ideas as a supplement to the linear, text-based commentary

The first three of these sections each feature the relevant verses, in Hebrew and English, on the page alongside their respective commentaries, in chronological order, providing the reader with a single window onto the text without excessive page turning.

In addition to being a valuable resource in a Jewish home or synagogue library, we conceived of these volumes as a weekly accompaniment in the synagogue. There is scope for the reader to study each *parasha* on a weekly basis in preparation for the reading on Shabbat. One may select a particular group of commentators for study that week, or perhaps alternate between ancient and modern viewpoints. Some readers may choose to delve into the text through verse-by-verse interpretation, while others may prefer a conceptual perspective on the *parasha* as a whole. The broad array of options for learning means this is a series which can be returned to year after year, always presenting new insights and new approaches to understanding the text.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of this book was possible only thanks to the small but exceptional team here at Koren Jerusalem. We are grateful to:

- ▶ Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, שליט"א, who conceptualized the structure of the project and provides both moral and halakhic leadership at Koren
- ▶ Rabbi Shai Finkelstein, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Torah and its interpreters is equaled only by his community leadership, formerly in Memphis and today in Jerusalem
- ▶ Rabbi Yedidya Naveh, whose knowledge, organizational skills, and superb leadership brought the disparate elements together
- ▶ Rabbi Jonathan Mishkin, translator of the commentaries, who crafted a fluent, accurate, and eloquent English translation

Our design, editing, typesetting, and proofreading staff, including Tani Bayer, Esther Be'er, Debbie Ismailoff, Estie Dishon, Tomi Mager, and Carolyn Budow Ben David, enabled an attractive, user-friendly, and accurate edition of these works.

“One silver basin” (Numbers 7:13) was brought as a symbol of the Torah, which has been likened to wine, as the verse states: “And drink of the wine which I have mingled” (Proverbs 9:5). Because it is customary to drink wine in a basin – as we see in the verse “that drink wine in basins” (Amos 6:6) – he therefore brought a basin. “Of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary” (Numbers 7:13). Why? Because just as the numerical value of “wine” [*yayin*] is seventy, so there are seventy modes of expounding the Torah. (Bemidbar Rabba 13:16)

Each generation produces exceptional rabbinic, intellectual leadership. It has been our purpose to enable all Jews to taste the wine of those generations, in the hope of expanding the breadth and depth of their knowledge. Torah is our greatest treasure, and we need the wisdom of those generations to better understand this bountiful gift from God. We hope that we at Koren can deepen that understanding for all who seek it.

Matthew Miller, Publisher
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Over the course of millennia, the Jewish people have watched while the surrounding society and its values have changed unceasingly. For the Jews, the steadfast response to an evolving world has always been the study of Torah, specifically engagement with the weekly *parasha*. Devotees of Jewish learning have always looked to the weekly Torah portion for spiritual and intellectual guidance through life's challenges. And in every generation, commentaries on the *Humash* have debated the precise interpretation of the verses therein. These scholars have continuously asked what message God is trying to convey to Israel and the world through the Torah's narratives and laws. Their explanations have struggled to identify the correct ways to apply its lessons to our daily lives.

Throughout, all these authors have approached the Torah text from their own unique perspectives, shaped in no small measure by the eras and environments they lived in. Naturally, the pantheon of commentaries present widely different styles in their writings. Occasionally the commentators will subject a particular verse to piercing scrutiny as a self-contained unit. At other times they present interpretations that seem to stray from the straightforward meaning of the text. Ultimately, all commentaries demand that a verse provide readers with theological meaning and direction for communal and social life.

Recognition of the wisdom embedded in the vast literature of commentary on the Torah spanning the various eras of Jewish history planted the seeds of the project whose fruit you now hold. We have called this publication *Mikraot HaDorot* – Readings of the Generations. This window into the world of Torah commentaries is not simply an upgrade of the classical *Mikraot Gedolot* collections, which give readers merely a handful of familiar

interpretations. *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* instead presents a plethora of exegetical contributions, with more than forty scholars spanning Jewish teachings from the past two thousand years represented on its pages.

Each volume of the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* series can be opened from both the right (Hebrew) side and left (English) side. The Hebrew opening side includes the Hebrew and a new English text of the *parasha*, translated by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, with a full, new translation of Rashi and the *haftarot*. The English opening side contains the bulk of the commentaries, and is divided into four parts: The first, **THE TIME OF THE SAGES**, comprises commentaries from antiquity – ranging from Philo to the Yalkut Shimoni. These figures lived mainly in the land of Israel, Egypt, and Babylonia. The second, **THE CLASSIC COMMENTATORS**, contains interpretations from the Middle Ages – starting from Rav Se'adya Gaon and Rashi and continuing through time to the work of Rabbi Shlomo Efrayim of Luntschitz, author of the *Keli Yakar*. The authors included here represent the rich traditions of both Sephardic (Spanish and North African) and Ashkenazic (central and eastern European) schools of exegesis. The third section, **CONFRONTING MODERNITY**, offers the work of both Old World and New World scholars who lived between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Before each of these three sections we include a time line that specifies the chronological relationships between the commentators and the places they lived.

In the final section, **THE BIBLICAL IMAGINATION**, we provide three in-depth investigations of particular ideas through the writings of the various commentaries. There are several goals to these essays. First, we aim to reveal common threads weaving across the generations of Torah scholarship. Second, we hope to illustrate how the various authors were influenced by their lives and times, and that the lessons they transmitted to their communities reflected their environments. Finally, each essay highlights for the reader some central issues that the commentaries have grappled with. We trust that this tool will facilitate the reader's understanding of the words of the commentaries themselves.

Three principles have governed the decision making in our work on *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot*:

- ▶ Chronological order: We have striven to sketch out the historical development of Torah exegesis, an enterprise that has occupied innumerable communities of Jews in far-flung lands for centuries.

- Economy of selection: In compiling the excerpts used in this work, we have gone through the authors' works and isolated those sections which most directly address the particular question, issue, or difficulty that confronted the scholar.
- Objectivity of presentation: This book presents ideas of the commentaries authentically, never censoring them or smoothing them over in light of our own positions or perspectives. We always strove to faithfully transmit the legal, conceptual, social, and ethical messages of the commentators.

The modern world constantly challenges us as individuals, as a society, and as communal leaders, teachers, and parents. The values and culture of the society that surrounds us force thinking Jews to seriously consider and reconsider their ideas and priorities on a regular basis as we struggle to find the correct path through life. Furthermore, we constantly must ask ourselves what teachings we wish to transmit to future generations. It is our hope that the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* project will help guide its readers as they grapple with these very real problems. The world of Torah commentary is wide and deep beyond measure. It contains innumerable answers to the questions that face the individual, the family, the generation, and indeed all of humanity.

Rabbi Shai Finkelstein, Editor-in-Chief
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

The terse writing style prevalent in Jewish scholarship over most of history can be difficult for the modern reader to decipher. Since our goal in the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* series is to make thousands of years of Torah commentary accessible to a modern, English-speaking audience, we have opted for a relatively loose translation style that accurately presents the content of the Hebrew commentary while not necessarily mirroring its exact syntax. We have also resorted occasionally to paraphrase in instances where a literal translation would be opaque in English. As any student of Torah exegesis will recognize, draconian insistence on a word-for-word translation would result in an English text that was unreadable and that preserved neither the clarity nor the majesty of the original Hebrew.

Many of the commentaries' discussions focus on the meanings of words and phrases that are ambiguous in the Hebrew text of the *parasha*. The beautiful new translation of the Torah by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks that we include here often dispels these ambiguities in the interest of clarity, necessarily coming down on one side or the other of a disagreement between commentators. The reader of the commentaries should therefore view the Torah translation presented here as one possible reading of the often-cryptic Hebrew original. In a similar vein, the significance of certain interpretations may seem unclear, or their points obvious, until one encounters another commentary with a starkly different read of the same verse. These contrasts, and the realization that themes and meanings we thought to be clear are actually ambiguous and multifaceted, are the essence of *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot*.

We have, as far as possible, allowed each text to speak for itself, and have left editorial comments to a minimum. Nevertheless, the commentaries

often assume the reader's knowledge of other biblical episodes, midrashim, or Hebrew grammar beyond what might be expected from the English-speaking public today. To ensure clarity, we have therefore interpolated brief editor's notes where we deemed it necessary, setting them off from the original text in square brackets.

Throughout Jewish history, the text of the Tanakh has been viewed as the apogee of the Hebrew language. For many commentators, especially those of the Middle Ages, it served as a fountain of language from which they drew numerous idioms and phrases. The result is that the Hebrew text of many commentaries is shot through with snippets of biblical prose or poetry to such an extent that almost every sentence can be viewed as a quote or allusion. Marking and citing all of these would make for a cluttered translation and would hinder rather than enhance the reader's understanding. We have therefore opted to cite only those quotes which are brought by the author as explicit evidence to further the point being made, and not those that supply only a turn of phrase.

The Hebrew side of this volume contains a complete and unabridged translation of Rashi's commentary. For those who wish to follow the *parasha* on the English side of the book, we have also reprinted many of Rashi's explanations alongside those of the other classic commentators. This will allow the reader to compare Rashi's interpretation to those of Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and others, as well as appreciate how Rashi's commentary often serves to define the issues that will be addressed by later exegetes.

The text of the commentaries is of course abridged. We have not included ellipses to mark every point where text has been omitted, to maintain a clutter-free translation. However, we have included ellipses at points where the subject of discussion would otherwise appear to have changed abruptly and inexplicably, to save the reader confusion. We have also not adhered strictly to the original heading, or *s.v.* (*dibbur hamat-hil*) of every text, changing it in instances where it would help to focus the reader on those words that are the actual subject of discussion, and adding it to texts that did not originally have it.

Most of the commentaries that we quote in this series were originally organized by chapter and verse. Therefore, anyone who wishes to consult the original Hebrew text of a given commentary can simply open to the verse in question. However, not all sources are organized this way. The midrashim in particular are often ordered loosely; an important interpretation of a verse in Exodus might be found in a midrash on Deuteronomy. For the reader's convenience in locating the original Hebrew source, we have

provided citations for those works not organized sequentially, as well as for commentaries originally composed on verses other than the one under discussion. These citations can be found outside of the final punctuation at the end of the excerpt in question.

Our translation has generally relied upon the Hebrew text found in the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project and the online compendia Sefaria and AlHatorah.org, as well as the standard printed editions of commentaries not found in any of these. The Responsa Project contains more than one edition of several midrashim (Midrash Tanḥuma, Midrash Rabba, and Avot DeRabbi Natan). For these works, our citations should be understood as referring to the standard editions published in Vilna and Warsaw unless otherwise indicated. Aside from this, please note:

- ▶ Text from Mekhilta DeRabbi Shimon is understood to be from the Epstein-Melamed edition unless otherwise indicated.
- ▶ Excerpts from Ibn Ezra are almost always taken from his Long Commentary on Exodus, and we have marked those instances where we quote from his Short Commentary.
- ▶ Passages from Philo are quoted with permission from *Torah from Alexandria: Philo as a Biblical Commentator*, edited by Rabbi Michael Leo Samuel (New York: Kodesh Press, 2015).
- ▶ Selected commentaries of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik are printed with permission from *Chumash Mesoras HaRav*, edited by Dr. Arnold Lustiger (New York: OU Press and Ohr Publishing Inc., 2017).
- ▶ The commentaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe are quoted from *The Torah, with an Interpolated Translation and Commentary Based on the Works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe*, edited by Rabbi Chaim Nochum Cunin and Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 2017).
- ▶ The commentaries of Nehama Leibowitz are translated, with generous permission, from the Hebrew *Iyyunim Hadashim BeSefer Shemot* (14th edition), published by the World Zionist Organization Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora.

While we have thus done our best to aid the reader in finding and consulting the original Hebrew text of the commentaries we have translated, we emphasize that this is not a critical edition, and the scope and readership of the series do not permit us to fully cite every allusion and internal reference

that authors make to midrashim and other commentaries. Still, we have made a supreme effort to provide citations of talmudic passages, and of course biblical verses, quoted or referred to in the material included here.

Yedidya Naveh, Managing Editor
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

1ST CENTURY BCE

1ST CENTURY CE

2ND CENTURY

3RD CENTURY

4TH CENTURY

5TH CENTURY

6TH CENTURY

7TH CENTURY

8TH CENTURY

9TH CENTURY

10TH CENTURY

11TH CENTURY

12TH CENTURY

13TH CENTURY

PHILO, 25 BCE – 50 CE

TARGUM YERUSHALMI, 3RD – 4TH CENTURY

HALAKHIC MIDRASHIM, 3RD CENTURY
(MEKHILTA, SIFRA, SIFREI)

TALMUD YERUSHALMI, 3RD – 5TH CENTURY

TALMUD BAVLI, 3RD – 6TH CENTURY

MIDRASH TANĦUMA, 5TH CENTURY

PESIKTA DERAV KAHANA,
5TH – 6TH CENTURY

AVOT DERABBI NATAN, 7TH – 9TH CENTURY

PIRKEI DERABBI ELIEZER, 8TH CENTURY

MIDRASH RABBA, 5TH – 12TH CENTURY

PESIKTA RABBATI, 9TH CENTURY

MIDRASH TEHILLIM, 10TH – 11TH CENTURY

MIDRASH LEKAĦ TOV, 11TH CENTURY

MIDRASH SEKHEL TOV, 1139

MIDRASH AGGADA, 12TH – 13TH CENTURY

YALKUT SHIMONI, 13TH CENTURY

פרשת בא

PARASHAT BO

THE **TIME**
OF THE **SAGES**

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי־אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי ז
 אֶת־לְבָבוֹ וְאֶת־לֵב עֲבָדָיו לְמַעַן שְׂתִי אֶתְנִי אֱלֹהֵי בְקָרְבּוֹ:
 וְלְמַעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנִי בְנֹךְ וּבֶן־בְּנֹךְ אֵת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלֹתִי
 בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־אֶתְנִי אֲשֶׁר־שָׂמְתִי בָם וַיִּדְעָתֶם כִּי־אֲנִי
 יְהוָה: וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאֶהְרֹן אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו כֹּה־אָמַר
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרָיִם עַד־מָתַי מֵאֲנֶתָּה לַעֲנֹת מִפְּנֵי שְׁלַח עַמִּי
 וַיַּעֲבְדֵנִי: כִּי אִם־מֵאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־עַמִּי הֲנִי מֵבִיא

CHAPTER 10, VERSE 1

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וְאֶת־לֵב עֲבָדָיו – *And his officials*: Whenever the Egyptian people softened and were prepared to release Israel, Pharaoh was stubborn and refused to yield, as when the verse states: *But I will harden Pharaoh's heart* (7:3). But when Pharaoh weakened and was willing to submit, his

compatriots rejected Moshe's demands, as the verse states: *I will strengthen the Egyptians' hearts* (14:17). And when both the king and his subjects were ready to surrender, God strengthened all their hearts, as the verse states: *I have hardened his heart and his officials*. (13:15)

SHEMOT RABBA

וְאֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת־לְבָבוֹ – *I have hardened his heart*: Rabbi Yohanan asked: Does this verse not provide an excuse for heretics to argue against divine justice? Pharaoh was clearly robbed of his ability to repent! Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish responded: May the mouths of the heretics be silenced – *surely He scorns the scorners* (Proverbs 3:34). For God gives a person a chance to turn from his sinful ways. Then He gives him a second chance, and a third. But should the individual refuse to change, God

will no longer allow him to repent, so that He may exact full retribution against the sinner. So did the Holy One, blessed be He, graciously treat Pharaoh, providing him with multiple opportunities to abandon his wickedness. But instead of taking advantage of God's generosity, Pharaoh ignored His overtures. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: You have made yourself stubborn and hardened your heart; so will I intensify your recalcitrance. (Shinan 13:2)

MIDRASH AGGADA

בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה – *Go to Pharaoh*: [Literally, “come to Pharaoh.”] The glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the entire world. When He wanted to converse with Moshe, He spoke to him in the Egyptian capital, and

when Pharaoh left the city, God instructed Moshe to “go” to him [e.g., in 7:15]. On this occasion, Pharaoh was well within the city, and hence God directed Moshe to “come to Pharaoh.”

VERSE 2

SHEMOT RABBA

וְלְמַעַן תִּסְפָּר – *So that you may tell*: The oncoming plague of locusts will be discussed for generations, as another verse states: *Tell*

your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation (Joel 1:3). (Shinan 13:4)

10 1 Then the LORD said to Moshe, “Go to Pharaoh. I have hardened his heart and his officials’ that I may display these My signs before him, and so that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I made the Egyptians a laughingstock by the signs I revealed among them; and know that I am the LORD.” Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, God of the Hebrews: How much longer will you refuse to submit to Me? Send My people forth to serve Me. For if you refuse to send My people forth, tomorrow I bring locusts to

MIDRASH TEHILLIM

וְלִמְעַן תִּסְפֹּר – *So that you may tell:* When Israel was redeemed from Egypt Moshe said to them: Know that it is not thanks to your good behavior that you have been rescued. Rather, it is *so that you may tell your children.*

The purpose of the exodus was so that subsequent generations would sing God’s praises among the nations, recounting the miracles that the Holy One, blessed be He, performed in Egypt. (44)

SEKHEL TOV

יֵאָדָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלֵהֶּנּוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם – *How I made the Egyptians a laughingstock:* The world will learn how I undertook a plan [*alila*] against them. And what plan is that? When God predicted [to Avraham]: *Know surely that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and in punishment, also*

that nation whom they shall serve, will I judge (Genesis 15:13–14). Later, God demanded that Pharaoh release Israel – *My son, My firstborn* (4:22) – and conversely threatened: *I will kill your son, your firstborn* (4:23). So too did each of the other plagues punish Egypt measure for measure for their oppression of Israel.

VERSE 3

LEKAH TOV

וַיָּבֵא – *Came:* [The Hebrew word is singular despite the plural subject to indicate that Moshe and Aharon] entered at the same time. עַד־מַתִּי מֵאֲנֵה לְעֵנֶת מִפְּנֵי – *How much longer*

will you refuse to submit to Me? You refuse to make yourself humble [*ani*] before Me, but continue to act brazenly and stubbornly in response to My demands.

VERSE 4

SHEMOT RABBA

בְּגִבְלֶיךָ – *To your land:* [Literally, “within your borders.”] But not beyond the Egyptian borders. This illustrates the verse *For when Your judgments are on the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness* (Isaiah 26:9). Any

border disputes that the Egyptians had with neighboring states were resolved by the locusts, whose devastation was limited to crops on Egyptian soil. (Shinan 13:4)

LEKAH TOV

כִּי אִם־מֵאֵן אֲתָהּ לִשְׁלַח – *For if you refuse to send My people forth:* Pharaoh was warned. הַיּוֹם מֵבִיא מַחַר אֲרֵבָה בְּגִבְלֶיךָ – *Tomorrow I*

bring locusts to your land: I am not giving you much time to repent; you have only until tomorrow. The locust is called *arbeh* in Hebrew

מִחֵר אֲרֵבָה בְּגִבְלֶךָ: וְכִסְפָּה אֶת־עֵינַי הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא יוּכַל לְרַאת
 אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאָכַל | אֶת־יֵתֵר הַפְּלִטָּה הַנִּשְׁאָרֶת לָכֶם מִן־
 הַבָּרָד וְאָכַל אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ הַצֵּמַח לָכֶם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה: וּמֵלֶאֱוִ
 בְּתִיךָ וּבְתִי כָל־עַבְדֶּיךָ וּבְתִי כָל־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לְאֲדָאוּ
 אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְאֲבוֹת אֲבֹתֶיךָ מִיּוֹם הָיוּתְם עַל־הָאָדָמָה עַד הַיּוֹם
 הַזֶּה וַיִּפֹּן וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרַעֲוָה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי פְרַעֲוָה אֵלָיו
 עַד־מָתַי יְהִיֶה זֶה לָנוּ לְמוֹקֵשׁ שְׁלַח אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲבְדוּ
 אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הַטָּרִם תִּדְרַע כִּי אֲבָדָה מִצְרַיִם: וַיֹּשֵׁב
 אֶת־מִשְׁחָה וְאֶת־אֲהֲרֹן אֶל־פְּרַעֲוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָהֶם לָכוּ עַבְדוּ
 אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִי וּמִי הַהֹלְכִים: וַיֹּאמֶר מִשְׁחָה בְּנַעֲרֵינוּ
 וּבִקְנֵינוּ גִלְךָ בְּבָנֵינוּ וּבְבָנוֹתֵנוּ בְּצִאֲנָנוּ וּבְבִקְרָנוּ גִלְךָ כִּי

LEKAH TOV (cont.)

because it travels in multitudes [*harbeh*], as the verse states: *The destroying locust... My great army which I sent among you* (Joel 2:25).

This refers to the insect which devours but is not edible. The locusts fell upon the Egyptians' faces and gouged out their eyes.

VERSE 5

KOHLELET RABBA

עֵין הָאָרֶץ – *The landscape*: [Literally, “the eye of the land.”] Rabbi Berekhya taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created man, He supplied the natural world with parallels to human body parts. For example, just like a person has a head [*rosh*], so too does the

world, as the verse states: *While as yet He had not made the earth, or the fields, or the highest part [rosh] of the dust of the world* (Proverbs 8:26). Similarly, a person has eyes [*eynayim*] and so does the earth, as the verse states: *They will cover the landscape [ein haaretz].* (1:1)

LEKAH TOV

עֵין הָאָרֶץ – *The landscape*: [Literally, “the eye of the land.”] This phrase refers to the sun, for the locust swarms would cast their shadow over the earth like a vast cloud, blocking the sun. And for lack of sunlight the Egyptians

would not be able to see the ground. וְאָכַל וְאֶת־יֵתֵר הַפְּלִטָּה – *They will eat what little remains*: The locusts will devour the wheat and the spelt which the hail did not destroy [see 9:32].

VERSE 6

SHEMOT RABBA

וַיֵּצֵא מִעַם פְּרַעֲוָה – *Turned and left Pharaoh*: Why did Moshe turn and leave Pharaoh? He saw the king exchanging glances with his advisors

and knew that they were taking him seriously. Hence, he withdrew to let the Egyptians discuss the possibility of repenting. (Shinan 13:4)

5 your land. They will cover the landscape so that you will not
 be able to see the ground. They will eat what little remains af-
 ter the hail, including all the trees that grow up from your
 6 soil. They will fill your palaces, your officials' houses and all
 the houses of Egypt. Your parents and grandparents never saw
 anything like this, from the day they arrived upon this earth
 7 until today." Then Moshe turned and left Pharaoh. Pharaoh's
 officials then said to him, "How long must we leave this man
 to ensnare us? Send the people forth to serve the LORD their
 God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is being destroyed?"
 8 Moshe and Aharon were summoned back to Pharaoh, and he
 said to them, "Go and serve the LORD your God. Who exactly
 9 will be going?" "With our youths and our elderly folk we will
 go," said Moshe, "with our sons and our daughters, our sheep
 and our cattle, we all must go, for it will be our festival of the

VERSE 7

SEKHEL TOV

עַד־מַתַּי יִהְיֶה זֶה לָנוּ לְמוֹקֵשׁ – *How long must we leave this man to ensnare us? [Literally, "how long must we leave this to ensnare us?"] The word "this" here alludes to Moshe, similar to a later verse which states: This man Moshe who brought us out of Egypt (32:1). Said Pharaoh's*

advisors to the king: "Whenever we provoke the man, he strikes back. You should yield to him and *send the people forth to serve the LORD their God*. However, restrain their women and children to ensure that the men return."

VERSE 8

SEKHEL TOV

וַיִּשָׁב אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן – *Moshe and Aharon were summoned back: Pharaoh dispatched messengers to the Israelite leaders and called them back to the palace. When they arrived,*

he said to them, "Go and serve the LORD your God." Still, he continued, I insist on knowing who exactly will be going – will it be just the clan leaders or all of the Hebrews?

VERSE 9

SEKHEL TOV

בְּנַעֲרֵינוּ וּבְקִנְיָנוּ נֵלֶךְ – *With our youths and our elderly folk we will go: Just as all of us were forced to labor under you, so will all the nation*

be required to serve our God – for it will be our festival of the LORD.

VERSE 10

SEKHEL TOV

יְהוָה בְּכֵן יִהוּה עִמָּכֶם – *The LORD be with you: Pharaoh spoke facetiously as one might say to his fellow: Yes, God will save you, just after I swallow this hundred cubit long reed! Or: Your*

God will surely rescue you, just like I can ascend to the sky or descend to hell all on my own. רָאוּ כִּי רָעָה נִגְדָה פָּנֶיכֶם – Evil is staring you in the face: You wish to do evil to me by

חַג־יְהוָה לָנוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי בֶן יְהוּדָה עִמָּכֶם כְּאִשֶּׁר
 אֲשַׁלַּח אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְכֶם רְאוּ פִי רָעָה נֶגֶד פְּנֵיכֶם: לֹא אֵין
 לְכוּ־נָא הַגְּבָרִים וְעַבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כִּי אֵתָה אַתֶּם מִבְּקָשִׁים
 וַיִּגְרַשׁ אֶתֶם מֵאֵת פְּנֵי פְרַעְזָה: ^ב
 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־^{שני}
 מֹשֶׁה נִטֵּה יָדְךָ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרְצָהּ וַיַּעַל עַל־אֶרֶץ
 מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאֶרֶץ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁאִיר
 הַבְּרָד: וַיֹּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מַטְּהוֹ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיְהוּדָה נֶהַג
 וַיִּחַקְדָּים בְּאֶרֶץ כָּל־הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְכָל־הַלַּיְלָה הַבֶּקֶר הָיָה
 וַיִּוֹחַ הַקָּדִים נִשְׂאָ אֶת־הָאֶרְצָה: וַיַּעַל הָאֶרְצָה עַל כָּל־

 SEKHEL TOV (cont.)

smuggling Israel out of my country. However, Baal Tzefon [an Egyptian deity] will face you down and prevent you from escaping. However, the straightforward meaning of the term is similar to in the verse, *Go you*

one way or other, either to the right hand, or the left, wherever your face is pointed (Ezekiel 21:21); that is, wherever you turn to go, there will be a nasty path right in front of your faces.

VERSE 11

 SEKHEL TOV

וַיִּגְרַשׁ – *Expelled*: One of Pharaoh's guards was ordered to remove Moshe and Aharon from the king's presence.

VERSE 12

 SHEMOT RABBA

נִטֵּה יָדְךָ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם – *Reach out your hand over Egypt*: What was the significance of the plague of locusts? Because the Egyptians had

forced Israel to sow wheat and barley, God sent insects as agents to devour what Israel had been compelled to plant.

 SEKHEL TOV

נִטֵּה יָדְךָ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם – *Reach out your hand over Egypt*: Presumably holding the staff. עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם – *Over Egypt*: That is, with regard to Egypt. וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאֶרֶץ – *And eat*

everything growing there: The land's grains of wheat and spelt. כָּל־אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁאִיר הַבְּרָד – *All that is left after the hail*: Everything that the hail did not destroy, namely the trees.

VERSE 13

 PHILO

רִיחַ־קָדִים – *An east wind*: The east wind has an intensity and vehemence that is by itself a great affliction. Since it is dry wind, it causes

headaches and heatstroke. This plague was intended to cause grief, terror, and perplexity in Egypt – especially since the east wind

10 LORD.” He replied, “The LORD be with you if I let you and your
 11 children go! Look – evil is staring you in the face. No! Let the
 men go and serve the LORD. That is what you are asking for.”
 Then Pharaoh had Moshe and Aharon expelled from his pres-
 12 ence. The LORD said to Moshe, “Reach out your hand
 over Egypt so that locusts swarm over the land and eat every-
 13 thing growing there; all that is left after the hail.” So Moshe
 stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the LORD caused an east
 wind to blow across the land all that day and night. By morn-
 14 ing, the east wind had brought the locusts. They invaded all of
 Egypt and settled throughout its land in a dense swarm. Never
 before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there

SHENI

PHILO (cont.)

traveled in a southern direction, scorching everything with its heat. This wind brought swarms of locusts that poured forth like an

ever-flowing stream, destroying all the land’s remaining vegetation.

MEKHILTA DERABBI YISHMAEL

רִיחַ קָדִים – *An east wind*: When God punished the builders of the Tower of Babel, He enlisted the east wind to disperse them, as the verse states: *From there the LORD scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth* (Genesis 11:9). “Scattering” is always effected with a wind from the east, as the verse states: *I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy* (Jeremiah 18:17). Similarly, we find that

in Egypt the LORD caused an east wind to blow across the land. So were the ten tribes exiled from Israel by an east wind, as the verse states: *Though he be fertile among the reed grass, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up; he shall spoil the treasure of all precious vessels* (Hosea 13:15). (Massekhta DeVayhi 4)

VRSE 14

LEKAH TOV

וַיֵּצֵא – *They invaded*: [Literally, “they arose.”] Come and witness the greatness of God’s creations. The locusts He made were concealed undetected in the land; they did not eat and they did not drink, but survived by the command of the Holy One, blessed be He. But when He ordered them into service, directing the insects to consume the agriculture of the state that had angered Him, they roused themselves and sprang into action to fulfill the will of their Creator. As the verse states: *I am aroused like the locust* (Psalms 109:23). How

different are the armies of flesh and blood whom God must ply with gifts to get them to fight His battles. Neither can they wage war on the hills, nor navigate walls that their horses cannot scale. Whereas, of locusts it is said: *The appearance of them is like the appearance of horses... Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains they leap... They run upon the wall, they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief* (Joel 2:4,5,9). Locusts are further described as *My great army which I sent among you* (Joel 2:25).

אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּנַח בְּכָל גְבוּל מִצְרַיִם כְּבַד מְאֹד לְפָנָיו לֹא־
 הָיָה בֶן אֲרֶבֶה כְּמָהוּ וְאַחֲרָיו לֹא יְהִי־בֶן: וַיִּכַּס אֶת־עֵינֵי
 כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וַתַּחֲשֹׁךְ הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ
 וְאֵת כָּל־פְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר הוֹתִיד הַבָּרָד וְלֹא־נֹתַר כָּל־יֶרֶק
 בְּעֵץ וּבְעֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּמְהַר פְּרַעֲהַ
 לְקַדֵּא לְמִשְׁחָה וְלֹא־הָרַן וַיֹּאמֶר חֲטָאתִי לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
 וְלָכֶם: וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא חֲטָאתִי אֲךָ הַפַּעַם וְהִעַתִּירוּ לִיהוָה
 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וַיִּסַּר מֵעָלַי רַק אֶת־הַמּוֹת הַזֶּה: וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרַעֲהַ
 וַיַּעֲתֶר אֶל־יְהוָה: וַיַּהֲפֹךְ יְהוָה רִוְחֵיכֶם חֲזָק מְאֹד וַיִּשְׂאֵ

SEKHEL TOV

וַיָּנַח – *Settled*: The locusts did not fly hither and thither haphazardly, but stayed put in obedience to the will of their Creator. לְפָנָיו – *Never before had there been such a plague of locusts*: Never before had this many locusts been assembled and dispatched to another place. וְאַחֲרָיו לֹא יְהִי־בֶן – *Nor will there ever be again*: The invasion

that took place in the time of Yoel ben Pe-tuel [see Joel 1–2] comprised four families of pest, namely palmer-worms, canker-worms, locusts, and caterpillars, along with four hundred varieties of grasshopper. However, the swarms that blanketed Egypt involved eight different families of pest.

VERSE 15

TANHUMA

וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ – *They ate...all the plants*: Because the Egyptians planned to stone the Israelites, the Holy One, blessed be He, pelted them with hail. Because they forced

the Hebrews to tend their vineyards, the Holy One, blessed be He, dispatched locusts to devour their trees, as the verse states: *they ate... all the plants*.

VERSE 16

SHEMOT RABBA

חֲטָאתִי לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלָכֶם – *I have sinned against the Lord your God and you*: What was Pharaoh's sin against God? He refused to let Israel go. What was his sin against Moshe and

Aharon? He threw them out of his palace and cursed them when he said: *The Lord be with you* (10:10). (Shinan 13:6)

SEKHEL TOV

חֲטָאתִי לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלָכֶם – *I have sinned against the Lord your God and you*: Pharaoh said to Moshe and Aharon: *I have sinned against the Lord* by defying His commands. I have

wronged you by speaking to you disrespectfully when I said: *Evil is staring you in the face* (10:10).

15 ever be again. They covered all the landscape until the ground was black. They ate all that was left after the hail: all the plants and all the fruit. Nothing green remained on trees or plants throughout all Egypt. In haste, Pharaoh summoned Moshe and Aharon and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God and you. Forgive my sin now, one more time. Pray to the LORD your God to take this death away from me.” Moshe left Pharaoh’s presence and prayed to the LORD. And the LORD turned the wind, westerly and very strong, and lifted the locusts and swept them into the Sea of Reeds. Not one locust remained

VERSE 17

LEKAH TOV

וְהֵעֵתִירוּ – *Pray: Just like a pitchfork [atar] flips wheat from one place to another, so too does the prayer of the righteous transform an evil decree into a good one. וְסָר מֵעָלַי רַק*

אֶת־הַמּוֹת הַזֶּה – *Take this death away from me: Pharaoh unwittingly anticipated the plague of the firstborn.*

SEKHEL TOV

רַק אֶת־הַמּוֹת הַזֶּה – *This death: The locusts consumed the crops but were never*

satiated. They also fell upon the Egyptians’ faces, gouged out their eyes and ate them.

VERSE 18

SEKHEL TOV

וַיֵּצֵא מִמֶּנּוּ פְרִיעָה – *Moshe left Pharaoh’s presence: [Moshe’s name is not explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew.] Why does the verse not name the subject of the verb and say: Moshe*

left? It hints that Moshe left quickly and issued no retort to Pharaoh’s statement as he had on earlier occasions. וַיִּעַתֵּר אֶל־יְהוָה – And prayed to the LORD: Outside of the city.

VERSE 19

SHEMOT RABBA

וַיִּהְיֶה רִיחַ הַיָּם – *And the LORD turned the wind, westerly: What does the verse imply when it states: Not one locust remained? Rabbi Yoḥanan said: When the locusts descended upon Egypt, the people rejoiced, thinking they could gather them up into barrels and eat them. But the Holy One, blessed be He, said:*

You villains! I send a plague to torment you and you celebrate! He immediately turned the wind, westerly and very strong, and lifted the locusts. Even the insects that had been caught, salted, and stored in jars and casks were lifted up and blown out to sea. But despite all this, the LORD strengthened Pharaoh’s heart (10:20). (13:7)

LEKAH TOV

וַיִּהְיֶה רִיחַ הַיָּם – *And the LORD turned the wind, westerly: The prayer of the righteous has the power to turn a negative decree of the Holy One, blessed be He, into a positive one.*

[It was an east wind that had brought the locusts; see 10:13.] לֹא נִשְׁאָר אַרְבֶּה אֶחָד בְּכָל גְבוּלָא – Not one locust remained anywhere in Egypt: Consider the difference between

אֶת־הָאֲרָבָה וַיִּתְקַעְהוּ יָמָה סוּף לֹא נִשְׂאֵר אֲרָבָה אֶחָד
 בְּכָל גְּבוּל מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּחֲזַק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פְּרָעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח
 אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כ
 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נִטְהַר יָדְךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ כא
 עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ: וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־ כב

LEKAH TOV (cont.)

two plagues. When the frogs had achieved their purpose, [the Egyptians] gathered them up into heaping piles, and the stench filled the whole land (8:10). But when the locust plague

was done, the insects did not simply die; this prevented the Egyptians from deriving any benefit by eating them.

VERSE 21

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

חֹשֶׁךְ – *Darkness so deep it can be felt:* The blackness that surrounded the Egyptians was so thick that any person who was standing when the plague of darkness struck was unable to sit, and anyone who was sitting was unable to stand. People who had been

loading their wares were unable to unload them; those who had been unloading material were similarly paralyzed. All of the Egyptians were made frenzied by efforts to feel their way as the verse states: *Darkness so deep it can be felt.* (14:20)

TANHUMA

נִטְהַר יָדְךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ – *Reach out your hand toward the sky to bring darkness:* Where was this darkness brought from? Rabbi Yehuda argued that Moshe invited it down from above, as the verse states [concerning God's heavenly abode]: *He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him* (Psalms

18:12). But Rabbi Neḥemya claimed that Moshe drew it up from below, as the verse states [of the netherworld]: *The land of darkness and the shadow of death, A land of gloom, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness* (Job 10:22).

SHEMOT RABBA

חֹשֶׁךְ – *Darkness so deep it can be felt:* How thick was the blackness? Our Rabbis claim it was as thick as a *dinar* coin. (Shinan 14:1) חֹשֶׁךְ – *Darkness:* The Holy One, blessed be He, said to His angels: The Egyptians deserve to be smitten by a plague of darkness. The angels quickly and unanimously agreed with this pronouncement. Now, how are we to interpret the verse *He sent darkness and it darkened* (Psalms 105:28)? The matter may be

compared to a master whose slave had misbehaved, prompting his owner to order that he be administered fifty lashes. Instead, his agent went and gave the slave one hundred lashes, deciding on his own to add to the punishment. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, decreed darkness against the Egyptians, but by its own agency the darkness intensified itself. (14:1)

- 20 anywhere in Egypt. But the LORD strengthened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not send the Israelites forth.
- 21 Then the LORD said to Moshe, “Reach out your hand toward the sky to bring darkness down over Egypt – darkness
- 22 so deep it can be felt.” Moshe reached out his hand toward the sky, and all across Egypt it was pitch dark for three days.

LEKAH TOV

הַטֶּשֶׁת – *Darkness: Why were the Egyptians smitten with a plague of darkness? It was recompense for the way they had treated the Israelites. For it was the practice of an Egyptian to seize a Hebrew and place a lit candle on his head, demanding that he stand still and provide light while the Egyptian dined. The Egyptian would warn: If you flinch, I’ll slice off*

your head with my sword! As punishment for that cruelty, *all across Egypt it was pitch dark for three days* (10:22). Actually, the Egyptians were unaware that three days had passed because the darkness elided the nights and the days together. The text means that they suffered so for seventy-two hours.

VERSE 22

TANHUMA

שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים – *Three days: Our Sages taught: The plague of darkness went on for seven full days. How so? For the first three days, Egyptians who had been sitting were able to get up and move around, while people who had been standing when the darkness descended were able to sit down. But those days of inconvenience were followed by three days of paralysis – people who were sitting were unable to stand up, and those who were standing could not sit down, due to the thickness of the shadow. Nor could people who were crouching straighten up. This point is derived from the structure of the next verse. The text first states: No one could see anyone else* (10:23), implying that this lasted for three days. Afterward, they could not “even move” for an additional three days, yielding a total of six days of torment. A later description of

the Egyptians’ defeat at the Sea of Reeds alludes to a seventh day of this plague when it states: *The column of cloud moved from in front of them to their rear. It came between the Egyptian and Israelite camps, as cloud and darkness for one, but lighting the night for the other, keeping the two apart all night* (14:19–20). For so it was in Egypt that the cloud provided light for Israel but darkness for the Egyptians, as the verse states: *But in the Israelites’ homes, they had light* (10:23). This supernatural light illuminated the oppressors’ garments, their gold and silver utensils, and all their valuables, revealing the Egyptians’ hidden treasures. Subsequently, when Israel asked their reluctant masters to hand over their possessions before they quit the country, the latter were unable to claim they did not own anything of worth. (Bo 3)

LEKAH TOV

הַטֶּשֶׁת אֶפְרָה... שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים – *Pitch dark for three days: The plague of blood foreshadowed all the other plagues: Just as the first punishment had endured for seven days [see 7:25], so too*

did each of the other torments. The plague of darkness however, was an exception, as it is written explicitly: *It was pitch dark for three days*. Still, it is possible that this plague also

הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ אֶפְלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים׃
 לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו וְלֹא־קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתַּחַתְּיוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת
 יָמִים וְלֹכְל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹרֶךְ בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם׃ וַיִּקְרָא פְּרֹעֶה
 אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה רַק צִאֲנֶכֶם וּבְקִרְכֵם
 יֵצֵא גַם־טַפְכֶם יַלְדְּ עִמָּכֶם׃ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה גַם־אַתָּה תִּתֵּן
 בְּיָדֵנוּ זְבָחִים וְעֹלֹת וְעֲשִׂינוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ׃ וְגַם־מִקְנֵינוּ

LEKAH TOV (cont.)

lasted a week: During the first three days, it was “pitch dark,” whereas an additional four days followed of more moderate darkness. For some authors claim that God began to visit plagues upon Egypt in the month of

Shevat – that is when He wielded His rod [*shevet*] against them. Since there are ten weeks from the start of Shevat until the fifteenth of Nisan [when the exodus occurred], this allows for one week per plague.

VERSE 23

MEKHILTA DERABBI YISHMAEL

לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו – *No one could see anyone else*: Interpreting the verse *But the Israelites were fruitful and burgeoned; they multiplied and became exceptionally strong* (1:7), the Sages argue that every Hebrew woman gave birth to six children for every pregnancy. Meanwhile, the claim has been put forth that the number of Israelites who left at the exodus represented just one five-hundredth of the total enslaved by Egypt. Now, this may not be exactly accurate, but it is true that many Israelites died

before the salvation. And when did these vast numbers of Israelites expire? During the plague of darkness, when the text states: *For three days, no one could see anyone else*. It was under cover of this plague that Israel buried its dead while thanking and praising the Holy One, blessed be He, that their enemies were unable to witness their disgrace or rejoice at their downfall. (Introduction to Massekhta DeVayhi)

LEKAH TOV

לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו – *No one could see anyone else*: If an Egyptian tried to light a candle it was immediately extinguished, as

some describe the darkness the mountains of shadow – even lights cannot be lit there, for the darkness puts them out.

SEKHEL TOV

וְלֹא־קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתַּחַתְּיוֹ – *No one could even move*: If an Egyptian tried to rise from his spot he would fall and hurt himself. – *וְלֹכְל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹרֶךְ בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם* – *But in the Israelites’ homes, they had light*: [Literally, “in their homes, the Israelites had light.”] The

land of Goshen was bathed in light – such is the straightforward meaning of the text. But our Sages expound that the Israelites could see properly even when they entered the Egyptians’ homes. This allowed them to relieve the oppressors of their possessions

23 For three days, no one could see anyone else or even move.
 24 But in the Israelites' homes, they had light. Then Pharaoh summoned Moshe and said, "Go, serve the LORD. Just leave your
 25 flocks and herds. Your children may go with you." "Then give us sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God,"
 26 said Moshe. "Our livestock must go with us. Not a hoof can be left behind. We must take them to serve the LORD our God, for until we arrive, we will not know what we must use to serve

SHELISHI

SEKHEL TOV (*cont.*)

without being detected. Thus does the verse *and the wicked shall be silent in darkness* (I Samuel 2:9) state: *He will keep the feet of His pious ones,*

VERSE 24

SEKHEL TOV

לְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה – *Go serve the LORD:* Both men and women may go. וְיָאֵנְכֶם וּבְקִרְכֶם – *Just leave your flocks and herds:* You must leave your animals with me as security that you will return.

VERSE 25

SHEMOT RABBA

גַּם־אֶתֶּה תִּתֵּן בְּיָדֶיךָ – *Then give us:* Said Moshe to Pharaoh: Do not imagine you will be able to use any of our animals [if you wish us to offer sacrifices on your behalf]. Rather, *give us sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God, and we will offer them in your name.* (Shinan 14:4)

SEKHEL TOV

גַּם־אֶתֶּה תִּתֵּן – *Then give:* [Literally, "give also."] The term "also" [*gam*] implies the precedence of Pharaoh's wife, who was also the first to summon the sorcerers [in 7:11, where the term *gam* also appears]. Hence Moshe declared that the queen would be the first to supply Israel with sacrificial animals. And then the king would be required to do so as well, such that Israel might present them to God.

VERSE 26

SEKHEL TOV

וְאֵינְנוּ לֹדְעִים – *We will not know:* Sometimes this phrase indicates the future – we will not know; but occasionally it signifies the present – we do not know. For Moshe said to Pharaoh: What we know for sure is what the Holy One, blessed be He, told me: *Having brought the people out of Egypt, you come to serve God upon this mountain* (3:12). Still, He did not inform me how this was to be done. And so as of yet *we do not know what we must use to serve the LORD.* God has yet to tell us how many sacrifices and burnt offerings He will demand of us; He will only enumerate His requirements once we arrive there. Therefore we cannot estimate the appropriate number of animals from our herds to take with us.

יִלְךְ עִמָּנוּ לֹא תִשָּׂאֵר פְּרֹסָה בֵּי מִמֵּנוּ נִקְוָה לְעִבְדֹת אֶת־
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאִנְחֵנוּ לֹא־נִדְעַ מִה־נִּעֲבֹד אֶת־יְהוָה עַד־
 בָּאֵנוּ שָׁמָּה: וַיַּחֲזֹק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פְּרָעֹה וְלֹא אָבָה לְשַׁלְּחַם: ^{כו}
 וַיֹּאמְרוּ־לוֹ פְּרָעֹה לֵךְ מֵעַלִּי הַשֹּׁמֵר לְךָ אֶל־תִּסָּף רְאוֹת פְּנֵי ^{כז}
 כִּי בָּיִם רְאוֹתָ פְּנֵי תַּמוּת: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בֵּן דְּבַרְתָּ לֹא־אֶסַף ^{כח}
 עוֹד רְאוֹת פְּנֵיךְ:

יא ^{כט} וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עוֹד נֹגַע אֶחָד אֲבִיָּא עַל־פְּרָעֹה ח
 וְעַל־מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרָיִךְ יִכּוּן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה כְּשִׁלְחוֹ פְּלֹה

VERSE 27

PHILO

וַיַּחֲזֹק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פְּרָעֹה – *The Lord strengthened Pharaoh's heart:* When a mind is devoid of the power of reasoning, when it no longer has anything left in it – not even a single seed of understanding – such a person is like a man

caught in a mist or deep darkness; he sees nothing. Like blind man, he falls without seeing the way before him. He continues to fall and suffer from one disaster after another, in spite of all his efforts to avoid falling.

VERSE 28

SEKHEL TOV

כִּי בָּיִם רְאוֹתָ פְּנֵי תַּמוּת – *Because on the day you do, that day you will die:* If I ever see you

again, I will hand you over to the people who have wanted to kill you from the start.

VERSE 29

SHEMOT RABBA

בֵּן דְּבַרְתָּ לֹא־אֶסַף עוֹד רְאוֹת פְּנֵיךְ – *As you say: I will not see your face again:* Said Moshe to Pharaoh: You speak the truth, for I will never see

your face again. So has the Holy One, blessed be He, decreed, just as you say. (Shinan 14:4)

CHAPTER 11, VERSE 1

SHEMOT RABBA

עוֹד נֹגַע אֶחָד – *One last plague:* Said Pharaoh to Moshe: how many more times will you come into my palace? *Leave my presence! Take care never to see my face again.* Moshe replied: *As you say: I will not see your face again* (10:28–29). Said the Holy One, blessed be He: All that is left for Me to do is to warn Pharaoh about one last plague. God immediately hurried into Pharaoh's palace, so to speak, to notify Moshe.

Since the Israelite leader had said he would not be seeing Pharaoh again, he had to issue his final warning before walking out for the last time. Otherwise Moshe would have to return and by so doing appear a liar. Indeed, that was the only time that the Holy One, blessed be He, conversed with Moshe inside Pharaoh's residence. For example, Moshe declared earlier: *As I leave the city, I will spread out*

27 the LORD.” But the LORD strengthened Pharaoh’s heart, and he
 28 would not agree to send the people forth. “Leave my presence,”
 said Pharaoh. “Take care never to see my face again, because on
 29 the day you do, that day you will die!” Moshe replied, “As you
 say: I will not see your face again.”
 11 1 Then the LORD said to Moshe, “One last plague will I send
 against Pharaoh, against Egypt. After that, he will send you
 forth from here, and when he does, he will drive you out com-
 2 pletely. Now tell the people, men and women, to ask of their

_____ SHEMOT RABBA (cont.) _____

my hands to the LORD (9:29). On this occasion, however, the Holy One, blessed be He, rushed to speak with Moshe where he stood, as the verse states: *One last plague will I send against Pharaoh*. When Moshe heard that he rejoiced and was exalted, as the verse states, *And the man Moshe, too, was held in high regard in the land of Egypt* (11:3). He then began to speak out loud: *This is what the LORD says: Around midnight I will move throughout Egypt* (11:4). Said Moshe to Pharaoh: you spoke true when

you commanded me never to see your face again – for I will not darken your doorstep again, but you will come to me. And so too your general and your governor who stand by your side, and all of your ministers will accompany you when you seek my audience. You will all bow to me, begging us to leave your country. Thus Moshe proclaimed: *And all these officials of yours will come and bow to me, saying, “Leave, you and all the people behind you!”* (11:8). (18:1)

_____ LEKAH TOV _____

עוֹד נִגַּע אֶחָד – *One last plague*: Usage of the term “plague” in this verse teaches that all the punishments visited upon Egypt should be considered plagues. גֵּרַשׁ יִגְרַשׁ – *He will drive you out completely*: Pharaoh will grab you and

toss you out of his house like an unwanted guest. Indeed, we read later: *The Egyptians too urged the people to make haste and leave the land* (12:33).

_____ SEKHEL TOV _____

עַל־פְּרֵעָה – *Against Pharaoh*: The plague I send will slay his firstborn son. וְעַל־מִצְרַיִם – *Against Egypt*: The punishment will be the deaths of all of Egypt’s firstborn. בְּלֵאָה – *Completely*: There will be no delay when he decides to release you, for this matter has been completely determined by Me.

גֵּרַשׁ יִגְרַשׁ אֶתְכֶם – *He will drive you out*: The Hebrew verb is doubled here to indicate that Pharaoh will ply you with money and load you down with possessions, like a homeowner trying to get rid of a trespasser and saying: “Here, you can even have my belongings – just get out of my house.”

_____ VERSE 2 _____

_____ PHILO _____

בְּלִי־כֶסֶף וּבְלִי־זָהָב – *Articles of silver and gold*: The Hebrews, thus far hunted as outcasts and

embarrassed of their own lineage, were emboldened to act as was natural to them, as free

ב גֵרֵשׁ יִגְרֹשׁ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה: דִּבְרַנָּא בְּאִזְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ
 אִישׁ ׀ מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִשָּׁה מֵאֵת רְעוּתָהּ כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וְכֵלֵי
 זָהָב: ׀ וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־חֹן הָעָם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם גִּם ׀ הָאִישׁ
 מִשָּׁה גְדוֹל מְאֹד בְּאַרְצָן מִצְרַיִם בְּעֵינֵי עַבְדֵי־פְרַעֲה וּבְעֵינֵי

PHILO (cont.)

people who were not oblivious to the injustice which malice had inflicted on them. For they took out with them much spoil. They did it not in avarice, or, as their accusers might say, in covetousness of what belonged to others. They had received only minimal wages for

all their time of service, and they were even thus being recompensed inadequately for their enslavement. The Hebrews, when the opportunity came, avenged themselves without warlike preparations, shielded by justice whose arm was extended to defend them.

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

׀ אִישׁ מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ – *Of their neighbors:* When the plan to despoil the Egyptians was revealed, the Israelites were still slaves in Egypt, as the verse states: *Every woman shall ask her neighbor, ask any woman lodging with her, [umigarat beitah] for objects of silver and gold, and clothing* (3:22). This description shows that the Israelites were considered foreigners [*gerim*] to the Egyptians [i.e., second-class citizens]. However, when the slavery was terminated, God commanded: *Now tell the people... to ask of their neighbors [re'ehu] articles of silver and*

of gold. That shows that by that point Israel were looked upon as equals [*re'im*]. And when Israel was ultimately redeemed from Egypt, the verse states, *the LORD had given the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and they had granted their request* (12:36). The Egyptians offered the Israelites material that they had not even asked for. They reluctantly handed over their possessions to Israel because they were terrified of them, like servants who tremble before their masters. (12:36)

TALMUD BAVLI

הָעָם דִּבְרַנָּא בְּאִזְנֵי הָעָם – *Now tell the people:* The students of the school of Rabbi Yannai said: The word *na* is an expression of supplication. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: I beseech you, go and tell Israel. I beseech you: borrow vessels of silver and vessels of gold from the Egyptians in order to fulfill the promise I made to Avraham in the covenant between the pieces. Let that righteous man [Avraham] not say: God fulfilled His first pronouncement – *Know surely that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years* (Genesis 15:13) – but He did not fulfill His promise in the following verse:

And afterward shall they come out with great substance. Israel said to Moshe: We would be happy just to escape Egypt with our lives! A parable speaks of a man who was incarcerated in prison. His jailers would say to him: We promise we will release you tomorrow and give you much money. Said he to them: I beseech you, release me today, and I will ask for nothing beside that. (Berakhot 9a) כְּלֵי־זָהָב וְכֵלֵי־כֶסֶף – *Articles of silver and gold:* On one occasion the people of Egypt brought the Jewish people to judgment before Alexander of Macedon. Said they to Alexander: "They must return to us the silver and gold that they plundered from our country!" Said