

Pesach Hagadah
In the Merit of the Righteous Women of the Generation
Melton Geshler at Shearith Israel, March 26, 2012
JSI at Akiba Academy, March 27, 2012

A) Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesachim page 108a – 108b

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: Women are subject to [the law of] these four cups because they too were included in that miracle.

Rashi on the passage

For the merit of the righteous women in that generation were the Israelites redeemed.

B) Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesachim page 116a

HAROSETH IS NOT A RELIGIOUS REQUIREMENT R. ELEAZAR SON OF R. ZADOK SAID: IT IS A RELIGIOUS REQUIREMENT. Why is it a religious requirement? R. Levi said: In memory of the apple-tree;⁶ R. Johanan said: In memory of the clay.⁷ Abaye observed: Therefore one must make it tart and thicken it: make it tart, in memory of the apple-tree; and thicken it, in memory of the clay. It was taught in accordance with R. Johanan: The condiments⁸ are in memory of the straw;⁹ [and] the haroseth [itself] is a reminder of the clay. R. Eleazar son of R. Zadok said: Thus did the grocers¹⁰ cry, Come and buy ingredients for your religious requirements.

(6) Under which the Israelitish women in Egypt gave birth to their children; v. Sot., 11b.

(7) Wit which they made bricks.

(8) Which are mixed in the haroseth.

(9) Just as the straw was kneaded into the clay.

(10) Lit., parched grain merchants such would sell spices etc. too.

C) Pesach Hagada, Mitzvat Magid

And we cried out to the L-rd, the G-d of our fathers, and the L-rd heard our voice and saw our affliction, our labor and our oppression."

"And we cried out to the L-rd, the G-d of our fathers," as it is said: "During that long period, the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel groaned because of the servitude, and they cried out. And their cry for help from their servitude rose up to G-d."

"And the L-rd heard our voice," as it said: "And G-d heard their groaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

"And he saw our affliction," this refers to the separation of husband and wife, as it is said: "G-d saw the children of Israel and G-d knew (Shmot 2:25)."

"Our labor," this refers to the "children," as it is said: "Every boy that is born, you shall throw into the river and every girl you shall keep alive."

"And our oppression," this refers to the pressure, as it is said: "I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them."

- 1) What might be the source of the assertion of the Hagada that "our affliction" / ענינו refers to the "separation between husband and wife"?
 - a) Shmot 21:10 – עֲוֹנָהָּ – her conjugal rights

- (I) But the meaning of the word in Shmot 21 is not even certain
 - (II) In Shmot it may mean conjugal rights but in Devarim it is taken to mean the opposite, the denial of intimacy.
 - (III) And although the words sound and look similar, they actually reflect different roots.
- b) To answer our question we must move to the beginning of Sefer Shmot, chapter 1, verses 8 – 22
- (I) The ultimate aim of all of the measures taken by Pharaoh is to limit the natural increase of the Israelites. The Egyptian authorities would very strongly prefer there to be many less Israelites than there were to begin with.
 - (II) Slavery was instituted not for any economic benefit, but simply to curtail the natural increase of the Israelites.
 - Through demoralization, so that they would not want to procreate
 - Through sapping their physical strength, so that they would have no desire for intimacy
 - By leaving them no time or opportunity to engage in intimacy
 - (III) Read verse 11 well – to oppress them / למען ענותו. It literally means in order to oppress them.
 - The phrase might appear superfluous; why could it not just say that ‘They set task masters over them to impose upon them forced labor’? – Because it wants to make clear that the forced labor was only a means “in order to oppress them”!
 - So if the purpose of the decrees is to limit procreation, and this phrase expresses the purpose of the forced labor, then the real deep meaning of the phrase in this context must be ‘oppression that limits intimacy’.
 - And the word translated as ‘oppress’ is the same root as in Devarim! So the interpretation offered by the Hagada is therefore exactly what the word does mean in context!!!
- 2) Were Pharaoh’s methods successful; was intimacy stymied?
- a) Verse 12 seems to indicate that the measures were unsuccessful
 - b) But the verse in Devarim as understood by the Hagada says that the measures were successful!?!
 - c) Look at verses 13 – 14: This is a new stage in the systematic repression of the regime, and it may very well have been successful to a large degree; the verses do not tell us.
 - d) But if it was successful, why did Pharaoh have to adopt additional measures as we find in verse 15ff. and how was Moshe born as per the beginning of chapter 2?
 - e) Two midrashim from Tractate Sota come to answer this question.

D) Midrash

1) Midrash Abkir, brought in Yalkut Shimoni 163

“Ruthlessly they made life bitter for them with hard labor at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field (Shmot 1:14)” – Were they working in the fields? Was it not in the city? Rather, the Egyptians had decreed that the Israelite men should sleep out in the fields while the women slept in the cities, in order to prevent them from multiplying further.

2) Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sota page 11b

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: They changed men's work for the women and the women's work for the men.

R. Avira expounded: As the reward for the righteous women who lived in that generation were the Israelites delivered from Egypt. When they went to draw water, the Holy One, blessed be He, arranged that small fishes should enter their pitchers, which they drew up half full of water and half full of fishes. They then set two pots on the fire, one for hot water and the other for the fish, which they carried to their husbands in the field, and washed, anointed, fed, gave them to drink and had intercourse with them among the sheepfolds, as it is said: “When ye lie among the

sheepfolds etc.”⁴ As the reward for “When ye lie among the sheepfolds”, the Israelites merited the spoliation of the Egyptians, as it is said: “As the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her pinions with yellow gold.”⁵ After the women had conceived they returned to their homes; and when the time of childbirth arrived, they went and were delivered in the field beneath the apple-tree, as it is said: “Under the apple-tree I caused thee to come forth [from thy mother's womb] etc.”⁶ The Holy One, blessed be He, sent down an emissary from the high heavens who washed and straightened the limbs [of the babes] in the same manner that a midwife straightens the limbs of a child; as it is said: “And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to cleanse thee.”⁷ He also provided for them two cakes, one of oil and one of honey, as it is said: “And He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil etc.”⁸ When the Egyptians noticed them, they went to kill them; but a miracle occurred on their behalf so that they were swallowed in the ground, and [the Egyptians] brought oxen and ploughed over them, as it is said: “The ploughers ploughed upon my back.”⁹ After they had departed, [the Israelite women with their babes] broke through [the earth] and came forth like the herbage of the field, as it is said: “I caused thee to multiply as the plants of the field”;¹⁰ and when [the babes] had grown up, they came in flocks to their homes, as it is said: “And thou didst increase and wax great and didst come with ornaments”¹¹ read not “with ornaments [ba'adi adayim]” but “in flocks [be'edre adarim]”. At the time the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself by the Red Sea, they recognized Him first, as it is said: “This is my God and I will praise Him.”¹²

(1) Ibid. 13.

(2) They induced the Israelites to work by using smooth words to them.

(3) Ibid. 14.

(4) Ps. LXVIII, 14, E.V., 13.

(5) Ps. LXVIII, 14, E.V., 13. The dove is often used by the Rabbis as a symbol of Israel.

(6) Cant. VIII, 5. That is how the verb is interpreted here.

(7) Ezek. XVI, 4. There was no midwife present to cut the navel-string, nor was ordinary water used.

(8) Deut. XXXII, 13.

(9) Ps. CXXIX, 3.

(10) Ezek. XVI, 7.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ex. XV, 2. The word this implies that He had been previously seen; therefore it must have been by the former babes.

3) Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sota page 12a

And there went a man of the house of Levi. Where did he go? R. Judah b. Zebina said that he went in the counsel of his daughter. A Tanna taught: Amram was the greatest man of his generation; when he saw that the wicked Pharaoh had decreed Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, he said: In vain do we labour. He arose and divorced his wife.¹⁹ All [the Israelites] thereupon arose and divorced their wives. His daughter said to him, Father, thy decree is more severe than Pharaoh's; because Pharaoh decreed only against the males whereas thou hast decreed against the males and females. Pharaoh only decreed concerning this world whereas thou hast decreed concerning this world and the World to Come.²⁰ In the case of the wicked Pharaoh there is a doubt whether his decree will be fulfilled or not, whereas in thy case, though thou art righteous, it is certain that thy decree will be fulfilled, as it is said: Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee!²¹ He arose and took his wife back; and they all arose and took their wives back.

And took to wife¹⁸ it should have read and took back!²² R. Judah b. Zevina said: He acted towards her as though it had been the first marriage; he seated her in a palanquin, Aaron

and Miriam danced before her, and the Ministering Angels proclaimed, A joyful mother of children.²³

(18) Ex. II, 1.

(19) Since all the male children to be born would be killed, and the primary object of marriage was the procreation of sons.

(20) The drowned babes would live again in the Hereafter; but unborn children are denied that bliss.

(21) Job XXII, 28.

(22) His wife, according to the story just related.

(23) Ps. CXIII, 9.

- 1) According to both the Jewish People were saved through the hope, faith, and perseverance of the women.
- 2) Note the non traditional roles and behaviors of the women who saved the Jewish People.
- 3) There are two different directions expressed in the midrashim respectively. Two different explanations of how the men succumbed to the Egyptian regime, and two corresponding understandings of the greatness of the women.

Note – see also the midrash about the cooper mirrors

ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת שמות [רמז קסב/קסג]

ובכל עבודה בשדה וכי בשדה היו עובדין ולא בעיר אלא שגזרו עליהן אנשים ילינו בשדה והנשים בעיר כדי למעטן בפריה ורביה, ונשיהם היו מחממין להן חמין ומביאות לבעליהם כל מאכל ומשתה ומנחמות אותן ואומרות לעולם לא משתעבדין בנו. סוף הקב"ה גואל אותנו מתוך כך באין עליהן ופרים ורבים. ומה שכן זכו לבזת מצרים ובזת הים שנאמר אם תשכבון בין שפתים כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף וכתוב גן נעול אלו נשים שהיו גדורות כגנה שאין בה פרצה, גל נעול אלו הזכרים שהיו מוטלין כגלים על השדה:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוטה דף יא עמוד ב

את כל עבודתם אשר עבדו בהם בפרך - אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: שהיו מחליפין מלאכת אנשים לנשים ומלאכת נשים לאנשים. ולמ"ד נמי התם בפה רך, הכא ודאי בפריכה. דרש רב עורא: בשכר נשים צדקניות שהיו באותו הדור - נגאלו ישראל ממצרים, בשעה שהולכות לשאוב מים, הקב"ה מזמן להם דגים קטנים בכדיהן ושואבות מחצה מים ומחצה דגים, ובאות ושופתות שתי קדירות אחת של חמין ואחת של דגים, ומוליכות אצל בעליהן לשדה, ומרחיצות אותן וסכות אותן ומאכילות אותן ומשקות אותן ונזקקות להן בין שפתים, שנאמר: +תהלים סח+ אם תשכבון בין שפתים וגו', בשכר תשכבון בין שפתים זכו ישראל לביזת מצרים, שנאמר: +תהלים סח+ כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ, וכיון שמתעברות באות לבתיהם; וכיון שמגיע זמן מולדיהן, הולכות ויולדות בשדה תחת התפוח, שנאמר: +שיר השירים ח+ תחת התפוח עוררתיך וגו', והקב"ה שולח משמי מרום מי שמנקיר ומשפיר אותן, כחיה זו שמשפרת את הולד, שנאמר: +יחזקאל טז+ ומולדותיך ביום הולדת אותך לא כרת שרך /ש' בקמץ, ר' בצירה/ ובמים לא רחצת למשעי וגו', ומלקט להן שני עגולין אחד של שמן ואחד של

דבש, שנאמר: +דברים לב+ ויניקו דבש מסלע ושמן וגו'; וכיון שמכירין בהן מצרים באין להורגן, ונעשה להם נס ונבלעין בקרקע, ומביאין שוורים וחורשין על גבן, שנאמר: +תהלים קכט+ על גבי חרשו חורשים וגו', לאחר שהולכין היו מבצבצין ויוצאין כעשב השדה, שנאמר: +יחזקאל טז+ רבבה כצמח השדה נתתיך; וכיון שמתגדלין באין עדרים עדרים לבתיהן, שנאמר: +יחזקאל טז+ ותרבי ותגדלי ותבואי בעדי עדים, אל תקרי בעדי עדים אלא בעדרי עדרים, וכשנגלה הקב"ה על הים הם הכירוהו תחלה, שנאמר: +שמות טו+ זה אלי ואנוהו. +שמות א+

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוטה דף יב עמוד א

וילך איש מבית לוי - להיכן הלך? אמר רב יהודה בר זבינא: שהלך בעצת בתו. תנא: עמרם גדול הדור היה, כיון (שראה שאמר) +מסורת הש"ס: [שגזר]+ פרעה הרשע כל הבן הילוד היאורה תשליכוהו, אמר: לשוא אנו עמלין! עמד וגירש את אשתו, עמדו כולן וגירשו את נשותיהן. אמרה לו בתו: אבא, קשה גזירתך יותר משל פרעה, שפרעה לא גזר אלא על הזכרים, ואתה גזרת על הזכרים ועל הנקיבות! פרעה לא גזר אלא בעוה"ז, ואתה בעוה"ז ולעוה"ב! פרעה הרשע, ספק מתקיימת גזירתו ספק אינה מתקיימת, אתה צדיק בודאי שגזירתך מתקיימת, שנאמר: +איוב כב+ ותגזר אומר ויקם לך! עמד והחזיר את אשתו, עמדו כולן והחזירו את נשותיהן. ויקח - ויחזור מיבעי ליה! א"ר יהודה בר זבינא: שעשה לו מעשה ליקוחין, הושיבה באפריון ואהרן ומרים מרקדין לפניה, ומלאכי השרת אמרו: +תהלים קיג+ אם הבנים שמחה.