

²⁹In the middle of the night the LORD struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. ³⁰And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians—because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead. ³¹He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, “Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you! Go, worship the LORD as you said! ³²Take also your flocks and your herds, as you said, and begone! And may you bring a blessing upon me also!”

³³The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country, for they said, “We shall all be dead.” ³⁴So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders. ³⁵The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects

שִׁי ²⁹ וַיְהִי | בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה וַיַּהֲרֹג ה' כָּל-
בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכֹר פַּרְעֹה הַיֹּשֵׁב
עַל-פֶּסֶאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשְּׂבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית
הַבּוֹר וְכָל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: ³⁰ וַיָּקָם פַּרְעֹה
לַיְלָה הוּא וְכָל-עַבְדָּיו וְכָל-מִצְרַיִם וַתְּהִי
צָעָקָה גְדֹלָה בְּמִצְרַיִם כִּי-אֵין בֵּית אֲשֶׁר
אֵין-שָׁם מָת: ³¹ וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן
לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צֵאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי גַם-
אַתֶּם גַּם-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת-
יְהוָה כְּדַבְּרֵכֶם: ³² גַּם-צֹאנְכֶם גַּם-בְּקָרְכֶם
קְחוּ פֶּאֶשֶׁר דְּבַרְתֶּם וּלְכוּ וּבִרְכַּתֶּם גַּם-
אֹתִי:

³³ וַתַּחֲזֹק מִצְרַיִם עַל-הָעָם לְמַהֵר
לְשַׁלְּחָם מִן-הָאָרֶץ כִּי אָמְרוּ כָלֵנוּ מָתִים:
³⁴ וַיִּשָּׂא הָעָם אֶת-בָּצֵקוֹ טָרֵם יַחְמֹץ
מִשְׁאֲרֵתָם צָרִית בְּשִׁמְלָתָם עַל-שִׁבְמָם:
³⁵ וּבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כְּדִבְרֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ
מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּלִי-כֶסֶף וְכָלִי זָהָב וּשְׁמֵלֹת:

TENTH PLAGUE (*makkat b'khorot*) (vv. 29–36)

All the preparations have been completed. The stage is set for the climactic plague, which will secure the release of the Israelites from bondage. The Torah recognizes that the entire Egyptian people is subject to judgment for having tolerated the perverse will of Pharaoh.

PHARAOH SURRENDERS (vv. 30–32)

The king himself has to rise during the night, thereby adding to his humiliation at having to surrender unconditionally to Moses’ demands. By summoning Moses and Aaron, he must retract the arrogant threat made at their last meet-

ing (10:28). He asks for their blessing, an ultimate humbling act.

31. Israelites Pharaoh uses this term for the first time, thereby at last granting recognition to the Israelites as a national entity. The narrative of the oppression opened with this term (1:1), and now closes with it.

34. before it was leavened In verse 39 this note is amplified in such a way as to provide a clear explanation for the eating of *matzot* on Passover. A similar reason is given in Deut. 16:3. Because the eating of the *matzot* was ordained and presumably carried out before the 10th plague struck (v. 8), the present rationale must be a reinterpretation of a pre-existing practice.

35. The silver and gold given (not lent) by the Egyptians constituted a protest against the policies of the royal tyrant. They demonstrated a renewal of public conscience. Similar gifts were given to the Jews leaving Babylonia to return to Judea (Ezra 1:4). Had the Israelites left Egypt with nothing after so many years of suffering, the hatred in their hearts toward the Egyptians would have been never ending. The

Torah wanted the Egyptian people to send them off with gifts, so that it would be easier for the Israelites to fulfill the *mitzvah* “you shall not abhor an Egyptian” (Deut. 23:8). (This comment is by Benno Jacob, who was born and grew up in Germany and had to escape to England after the Nazis came to power. He understood that the purpose of the commandment was to cleanse our memory of bitterness and hatred.)