



Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

Today's Torah

Jews have always been a community drawn together by virtue of Torah. No matter where you may be, we welcome you to the Ziegler community through Today's Torah e-mail.

To view this email online, please visit:

<https://www.aju.edu/ziegler-school-rabbinic-studies/our-torah>.

Shabbat Parashat Bo
January 12, 2018 - 6 Shevat 5779



By: Rabbi Gail Labovitz
Professor, Rabbinic Studies
Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies
American Jewish University

“All My Bags are Packed and I’m Ready to Go (?)”

Torah Reading: Exodus 10:1 - 13:16

Haftarah Reading: Jeremiah 46:13 - 28

I do not really have time to be writing this drash. As I sit at my computer this morning, there are many other things I could and should be doing – including packing. I will be spending this week in Maryland, teaching for my rabbinic colleagues at an annual educational retreat humorously know among us rabbi-types as “rabbi camp.” Nor is this unpacked, unprepared state of affairs an anomaly for me. I describe my personal organizational style as being a “triage-er” – everything is done eventually, but only when it becomes the most pressing emergency on my to-do list. I love travel, but I hate preparing for it. I’ve usually got some project that needs finishing before I go (I’m in the midst of writing an article too at the moment...), I never quite know what to pack or how to fit it all into the suitcase, I’m often worried (and often correct) that I’ve forgotten something, and – as an inevitable result – I’m always thoroughly stressed out by the time we get to the airport.

Oh, and did I mention that I am married to a yekke, a planner, an organizer? So of course, my way of doing everything at the last minute, or beyond, makes him a bit crazy... It is utterly miraculous that we have been traveling together for thirty plus years without causing a major international incident between us!

Therefore, as I read the parashah for the Shabbat after I return home, parashat Bo, I have some real sympathy for the Israelites as they (finally!) leave Egypt. As Ex. 12:39 tells us:

“And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.”

In fact, an early Midrash in *Mekhilta deRebbe Shimon bar Yohai* adds a detail. Emphasizing what might be seen as an unnecessary word in the Hebrew, “*v’gam*” – what Etz Hayim (the translation I’ve cited here) renders as “nor,” but which more literally means “and also...” – it says: “It teaches that they hadn’t even taken parched grains or nuts for the children for the journey.” They didn’t even bring the kids’ snacks?! *But Aaaaabbbbaaa, Eeeemmmmaaaa, I am huuuunngrrrryyy!!!!*

Wow.

As Etz Hayim notes, quite bluntly (388): “They had two weeks to prepare for the Exodus.” So why aren’t they ready? Which leads to these further questions: “Does this suggest a certain lack of confidence that God would in fact redeem them? Or does it reflect the slaves’ mentality of living day to day and not planning for the future?”

However, these seem inadequate explanations, and the initial problem stands, in that earlier parts of the chapter suggest they *had* been preparing over those two weeks. They have offered a sacrifice and put blood on their doorposts. Already in Chap. 11 (2-3) the people have been told to collect objects of silver and gold from the Egyptians, whom God has “disposed favorably toward the people,” and just a few verses above 12:39, this is reiterated, along with a mention of the Israelites’ success in this task (12:35-36): “The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and requested from the Egyptians... and they let them have their request; thus they stripped the Egyptians.” Next week in parashat Bo, after the miraculous crossing of the Reed Sea, we will learn that the Israelite women have brought timbrels with them for dancing and celebrating (15:20) – that they packed in advance...

Etz Hayim allows for one additional possibility: “Perhaps it testifies to their faith, willing to march into the desert without having prepared food in advance.” This in turn comes from another Midrash (which is also subsequently cited by Rashi). The *Mekhilta deRebbe Yishmael* has this to say on our verse:

This is to make known the praise of Israel, for they did not say to Moses: how will we go out into the wilderness when we have no provisions for the journey in our hands; rather, they had faith in him (or perhaps: Him, i.e., God) and followed Moses. Moreover, about them it is explained in the (prophetic) tradition: “Go proclaim to Jerusalem: [Thus said the Lord: I

accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth...How you followed me in the wilderness..."] (Jer. 2:2).

But I rather doubt that telling my husband "I'm sure God will work things out" or "Look how much I trust and appreciate you and your planning skills" – which, by the way, I absolutely do – would result in any other response than: "Great. Now would you go finish packing already?!"

I find a better answer – one that might explain the Israelites' lack of readiness if not my own on-going struggles in travel preparation – actually in reference to another verse elsewhere in Torah, which looks back on the moment of the Exodus from the perspective of the forty years of journeying that followed. In Deut. 16, Moses recounts the holiday cycle for the Israelites, beginning with Passover, and in explaining the obligation to eat only unleavened bread during the festival, he reminds the people of the (or a) reason for this command (16:3): "...for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress—for you departed the land of Egypt in haste—so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live." Again, Midrash steps in to help explain. *Sifrei Devarim*, parashah 130, asks, whose "haste" is Moses talking about?

Might it be the haste of (both) Israel and Egypt? Therefore, Scripture teaches: "*but not a dog shall snarl at any of the Israelites...*" (Ex. 11:7). Say now that it was the Egyptians were in haste (to make the Israelites leave), but the Israelites were not in haste.

That is, it was the Egyptians who hurried the Israelites out of Egypt sooner than they otherwise expected they would have to depart, thus leaving this crucial detail (but not all or even most of their preparation) undone. This may in fact fit with the telling in Ex. 12, as there we are told, "The Egyptian urged the people on, and impatient to have them leave the country..." (12:33) – and recall that even in 12:39, the verse states that the Israelites "were *driven* out of Egypt," rather than departing once they themselves had determined they were fully ready.

Nevertheless, even more intriguing is another midrashic take on this question from *Midrash Tannaim*, which allows for more ambivalence:

"For you departed the land of Egypt in haste": This is the haste of Egypt. You say it is the haste of Egypt, but maybe it is actually the haste of Israel? When it says, "since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay" the haste of Israel has (already) been mentioned; hence what must Scripture teach (by saying) "in haste" (in Deut.)? This is the haste of Egypt.

Rabbi Joshua ben Korha says: this is the haste of Israel.

That is, in either explanation, the Israelites were in haste, and caught unprepared, not ready as perhaps they should have been – either we have already been told so in Ex., or we are told so here in Deut.

Then – the Midrash takes a more radical turn:

Abba Hanun said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: This is the haste of the Shekinah (God's manifestation of immanence in the world). Though there is no proof of this, there is a hint towards it (in Scripture): "Hark, my beloved (Beloved) knocks" (Song of Songs, 5:2); "There he (He) stands behind our wall" (Song of Songs 2:9).

The Israelites were not fully ready when, indeed because, God Godself came to hurry them along. God could not, would not wait for them any longer.

In addition, what of me, still unpacked to go to rabbi camp? Far more importantly, what of all of us, waiting for the moment when we will be called again to Divine redemption? Can we possible hope to be prepared, to have our provisions ready to go at the time they are needed? The Midrash concludes, and I will leave you, with this note of hope:

Could it be thus also for the future (redemption) to come? Thus, Scripture teaches: “For you will not depart in haste, nor will you leave in flight [; For the Lord is marching before you, the God of Israel is your rear guard]” (Isa. 52:12).

May a new redemption, a new Exodus, come soon – and may we all be ready, and see it together in our lifetimes. Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Gail Labovitz, PhD, is Professor of Rabbinic Literature and former Chair of the Department of Rabbinics for the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies. She also enjoys serving as the Ziegler School’s faculty advisor for “InterSem,” a dialogue program for students training for religious leadership at Jewish and Christian seminaries around the Los Angeles area. Dr. Labovitz formerly taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) and the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York. Prior to joining the faculty at AJU, Dr. Labovitz worked as the Senior Research Analyst in Judaism for the Feminist Sexual Ethics Project at Brandeis University, and as the Coordinator for the Jewish Women’s Research Group, a project of the Women’s Studies Program at JTS. Rabbi Labovitz is also preparing a teshuva (rabbinic responsum) for consideration by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly on whether a person who is unable to fast for medical reasons may nonetheless serve as a leader of communal prayer on Yom Kippur.



Ziegler School of
Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies
American Jewish University
15600 Mulholland Drive
Bel Air, CA 90077
310-440-1218
www.aju.edu/ziegler

Share this email:



emma[®]

[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt out](#) using TrueRemove[®]

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

View this email [online](#).

15600 Mulholland Dr.
Bel Air, CA | 90077 US

This email was sent to michelle.starkman@aju.edu.
To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.