

Ha Lachma Anya: The Passage that Holds the Seder's Soul

Rachel Sharansky Danziger * Torah in Motion * Pesach program 2025

1: Proclaiming generosity

Pesach Haggadah, Magid, Ha Lachma Anya 3

This is the bread of destitution that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Anyone who is famished should come and eat, anyone who is in need should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice. Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people.

הגדה של פסח, מגיד, הא לחמא עניא

ג

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא
בארעא דמצרים. כל דכפין ייתי ויכל,
כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח. השתא הכא,
לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל. השתא
עבדי, לשנה הבאה בני חורין.

2: Abraham's model

Genesis 18:1-14

(1) ה' appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. (2) Looking up, he saw three figures standing near him. Perceiving this, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, (3) he said, "My lords! If it please you, do not go on past your servant. (4) Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. (5) And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said." (6) Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three *seahs* of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" (7) Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. (8) He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate. (9) They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the tent." (10) Then one said, "I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him. (11) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having her periods. (12) And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I've lost the ability, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?" (13) Then ה' said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'" (14) Is anything too wondrous for ה'? I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

בראשית י"ח:א'-י"ד

(א) וירא אליו ה' באלני ממרא והוא ישב
פתח-האהל כותם היום. (ב) וישא עיניו וירא
והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא
לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה. (ג)
ויאמר אדושם אם-נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל-נא
תעבר מעל עבדי. (ד) יקח-נא מעט-מלים ורחצו
רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ. (ה) ואקחה פת-
לחם וסעדו לבכם אחר תעברו כיעל-כן
עברתם על-עבדכם ויאמרו: כן תעשה פאשר
דברת. (ו) וימהר אברהם האהלה אל-שרה
ויאמר מהר שלש סאים קמח סלת לוישי ועשי
עגות. (ז) ואל-הבקר רץ אברהם ויקח בן-בקר
רה וטוב ויתן אל-הנער וימהר לעשות אתו.
(ח) ויקח חמאה וחלב ובן-הבקר אשר עשה
ויתן לפניהם והוא-עמד עליהם תחת העץ
ויאכלו. (ט) ויאמרו אליו איה שרה אשתך
ויאמר הנה באהל. (י) ויאמר שוב אשוב אליך
כעת חיה והנה-כן לשרה אשתך ושרה שמעת
פתח האהל והוא אחריו. (יא) ואברהם ושרה
זקנים באים בימים חדל להיות לשרה אר-
כנשים. (יב) ונצתק שרה בקרבה לאמר אחר
בלתי היתה-לי עדנה ואדני זקן. (יג) ויאמר ה'
אל-אברהם למה זה צחקך שרה לאמר האף
אמנם אלד ואני זקנתי. (יד) היפלא מה דבר
למועד אשוב אליך כעת חיה ולשרה בן.

3: The parting of the ways

Genesis 13:10-17

(10) Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before ה' had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—all the way to Zoar, like the garden of ה', like the land of Egypt. (11) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other; (12) Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom. (13) Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against ה'. (14) And ה' said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, “Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west, (15) for I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever. (16) I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted. (17) Up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you.”

Genesis 19:1-11

(1) The two messengers arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground, (2) he said, “Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant’s house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you may be on your way early.” But they said, “No, we will spend the night in the square.” (3) But he urged them strongly, so they turned his way and entered his house. He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. (4) They had not yet lain down, when the town council [and] the militia of Sodom —insignificant and influential alike, the whole assembly without exception—gathered about the house. (5) And they shouted to Lot and said to him, “Where are the ones who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them.” (6) So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him, (7) and said, “I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. (8) Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to the others, since they have come under the shelter of my roof.” (9) But they said, “Stand back! The fellow,” they said, “came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” And they pressed hard against that householder —against Lot—and moved forward to break the door. (10) But the agents stretched out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. (11) And the people who were at the entrance of the house, low and high alike, they struck with blinding light, so that they were helpless to find the entrance.

בראשית י"ג-י"ז

(י) וישאל לוט את עיניו וירא את כל כפר הירדן כי כלה משקה לפניו ו שחת ה' את סדום ואת עמרה כגודה' כארץ מצרים באכה צערי. (יא) ויבחר לו לוט את כל כפר הירדן ויסע לוט מקדם ויפרדו איש מעל אחיו. (יב) אברם ישב בארץ כנען ולוט ישב בערי הכפר ויאהל עדי סדום. (יג) ואנשי סדם רעים וחטאים לה' מאד. (יד) וה' אמר אל אברם אחרי הפרד לוט מעמו שנא נא עיניך וראה מן המקום אשר אתה שם צפנה ונגבה וקדמה וימה. (טו) כי את כל הארץ אשר אתה ראה לה אתנגה ולרעה עד עולם. (טז) ושמתי את רועה כעפר הארץ אשר ו אס יוכל איש למנות את עפר הארץ גם זרעה ימנה. (יז) קום התהלך בארץ לארצה ולרחבה כי לה אתנגה.

בראשית י"ט-א' י"א

(א) ויבאו שני המלאכים סדמה בערב ולוט ישב בשער סדום וירא לוט ויקם לקראתם וישתחו אפים ארצה. (ב) ויאמר הנה נא אדושם סורו נא אל בית עבדכם ולינו ורחצו רגליכם והשכמתם והלכתם לדרךכם ויאמרו לא כי ברחוב גליו. (ג) ויפצרו בם מאד ויסרו אליו ויבאו אל ביתו ויעש להם משתה ומצות אפה ויאכלו. (ד) טרם ישכבו ואנשי העיר אנשי סדם נסבו עליה בית מנער ועד זקן כלה העם מקצה. (ה) ויקראו אל לוט ויאמרו לו איה האנשים אשר באו אליה הלילה הוציאם אלינו ונדעה אתם. (ו) ויצא אליהם לוט הפתחה והדלת סגר אחריו. (ז) ויאמר אל נא אחי תרעו. (ח) הנה נא לי שתי בנות אשר לא ידעו איש אוציה נא אתהן אליכם ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם רק לאנשים האל אל תעשו דבר כיעל-כן באו בצל קרתי. (ט) ויאמרו ו גשה הלאה ויאמרו האחד בא לגור וישפט שפוט עתה נרע לה מהם ויפצרו באיש בלוט מאד ויגשו לשבר הדלת. (י) וישלחו האנשים את ידם ויביאו את לוט אליהם הביתה ואת הדלת סגרו. (יא) ואת האנשים אשר פתח הבית הכו בפסגורים מקטן ועד גדול וילאו למצא הפתח.

4: Lot's children

Deuteronomy 23:4-5

(4) No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of ה'; no descendants of such, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of ה', (5) because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you.—..

דברים כ"ג:ד-ה'

(ד) לֹא־יָבֹא עִמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי בְּקִהְלֵה ה' גַּם הַדּוֹר עֲשִׂירֵי לֹא־יָבֹא לָהֶם בְּקִהְלֵה ה' עַד־עוֹלָם. (ה) עַל־דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־קָדְמוּ אִתְּכֶם בְּלַחֵם וּבִמְלִים בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם וְאֲשֶׁר שָׂכַר עֲלֵיךְ אֶת־בְּלַעַם בֶּן־בְּעֹזַר מִפְּתוֹר אֲרָם נִהְרַם לְקַלְלֶךָ..

5: Sodom in Gibeah

Judges 19:11-25

(11) Since they were close to Jebus, and the day was very far spent, the attendant said to his master, "Let us turn aside to this town of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." (12) But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside to a town of aliens who are not of Israel, but will continue to Gibeah...(15) They turned off there and went in to spend the night in Gibeah. He went and sat down in the town square, but nobody took them indoors to spend the night. (16) In the evening, an old man came along from his property outside the town.^c (This man hailed from the hill country of Ephraim and resided at Gibeah, where the townspeople were Benjaminites.) (17) He happened to see the wayfarer in the town square. "Where," the old man inquired, "are you going to, and where do you come from?" (18) He replied, "We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to the other end of the hill country of Ephraim. That is where I live. I made a journey to Bethlehem of Judah, and now I am on my way to the House of the LORD,^d and nobody has taken me indoors. (19) We have both bruised straw and feed for our donkeys, and bread and wine for me and your handmaid, and for the attendant with your servants.^f We lack nothing." (20) "Rest easy," said the old man. "Let me take care of all your needs. Do not on any account spend the night in the square." (21) And he took him into his house. He mixed fodder for the donkeys; then they bathed their feet and ate and drank. (22) While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the town, a depraved lot, had gathered about the house and were pounding on the door. They called to the aged owner of the house, "Bring out the man who has come into your house, so that we can be intimate with him." (23) The owner of the house went out and said to them, "Please, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. Since this man has entered my house, do not perpetrate this outrage. (24) Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them, do what you like with them; but don't do that outrageous thing to this man." (25) But the men would not listen to him, so the man seized his concubine and pushed her out to them. They raped her and abused her all night long until morning; and they let her go when dawn broke.

שופטים י"ט:א-כ"ה

(יא) הֵם עִם־יְבוּס וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה מֵאֶד וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּעִיר אֶל־אֲדָנָיו לְכֹה־נָא וְנִסְוֹרָה אֶל־עִירֵי הַיְבוּסִי הַזֹּאת וְנָלִין בָּהּ. (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלָיו אֲדָנָיו לֹא נִסְוֹרָה אֶל־עִיר נְכָרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנֵּה וְעָבְרָנוּ עַד־גִּבְעָה.. (טז) וַיִּסְרוּ שָׁם לְבוֹא לָלִין בַּגִּבְעָה וַיָּבֹא וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּרַחֲבֵי הָעִיר וְאִין אִישׁ מֵאִסְפָּה־אוֹתָם הַבְּיָתָה לָלִין. (טז) וְהַגֵּה וְאִישׁ זָקֵן בָּא מִדֶּרֶךְ מִצְּשֵׁהוּ מִדֶּרֶךְ הַשָּׂדֶה בְּעָרֵב וְהָאִישׁ מֵהַר אֶפְרָיִם וְהוּא־גַר בַּגִּבְעָה וְאִנְשֵׁי הַמְּקוֹם בְּנֵי יְמִינֵי. (יז) וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַאֲרֻחַ בְּרַחֲבֵי הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ הֵיכָן אָנָּה תֵּלֵךְ וּמֵאֵינָן תָּבוֹא. (יח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלָיו עֲבָרִים אֲנִי וְנָחְנוּ מִבֵּית לָחֶם הַיְהוּדָה עַד־יְרֵכָה הַר־אֶפְרָיִם מִשָּׁם אֲנִכִי וְאֵלַי עַד־בֵּית לָחֶם הַיְהוּדָה וְאֶת־בֵּית ה' אֲנִי הֹלֵךְ וְאִין אִישׁ מֵאִסְפָּה אוֹתִי הַבְּיָתָה. (יט) וְגַם־תָּבֹן גַּם־מִסְפּוֹאֵי גֶשֶׁת לְחִמּוֹרֵינוּ וְגַם לָחֶם וְיֵין וְשֵׁלִי וְלֶאֱמֹתָי וְלַנְּעִיר עִם־עַבְדֵּיךְ אִין מִחֶסֶר כֹּל־דָּבָר. (כ) וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ הַזָּקֵן שְׁלוֹם לָךְ רַק כֹּל־מִחֶסֶרְךָ עָלַי רַק בְּרַחֲבֵי אֶל־תֵּלֵן. (כא) וַיְבִיאָהוּ לְבֵיתוֹ (וַיְבֹל) [וַיִּבֹל] לְחִמּוֹרִים וַיַּחְצוּ רִגְלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ. (כב) הִמָּה־מִיִּטְיָבִים אֶת־לִבָּם וְהִגֵּה אִנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אִנְשֵׁי בְנֵי־בְלִיעַל נִסְבּוּ אֶת־הַבַּיִת מִתְּדַפְּקִים עַל־הַדֶּלֶת וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ בְּעַל הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה לֹא־מֹד הוֹצֵא אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־בָּא אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ וְנִדְעֵנוּ. (כג) וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵיהֶם הָאִישׁ בְּעַל הַבַּיִת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אֵלֵי־אֲחֵי אֶל־תִּרְעוּ נָא אֶחָדִי אֲשֶׁר־בָּא הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה אֶל־בֵּיתִי אֶל־תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַנְּבִלָה הַזֹּאת. (כד) הִנֵּה בְּתִי הַבְּתוּלָה וּפְלִגְשָׁהּוּ אוֹצִיאָהּ נָא אוֹתָם וְעֵנּוּ אוֹתָם וְעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְלֹאִישׁ הַזֶּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ דָבָר הַנְּבִלָה הַזֹּאת. (כה) וְלֹא־אָבּוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשִׁמְעַן לוֹ וַיַּחֲזֹק הָאִישׁ בְּפְלִגְשָׁהּ וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵיהֶם הַחֹזֵן וַיִּדְעוּ אוֹתָהּ וַיַּתְעַלְלוּ־בָּהּ כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וַיִּשְׁלַחוּהָ (בַּעֲלוֹת) [כַּעֲלוֹת] הַשָּׁחַר.

6: Sodom in Beth Lechem and Lot's great-granddaughter

Ruth 1:1-2

(1) In the days when the chieftains ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. (2) The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there.

Ruth 1:19-22

(19) and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, "Can this be Naomi?" (20) "Do not call me Naomi," she replied. "Call me Mara, for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter. (21) I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. How can you call me Naomi, when the LORD has dealt harshly with me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me!" (22) Thus Naomi returned from the country of Moab; she returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

רות א' א'-ב'

(א) ויהי בימי שפט השפטים ויהי רעב בארץ וילך איש מבית לחם יהודה לגור בשדני מואב הוא ואשתו ושני בָּנָיו. (ב) ושם האיש אלימֶלֶךְ ושם אשתו נְעֹמִי ושם שני בָּנָיו מחִלּוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה ויבאו שְׂדֵי-מוֹאָב ויהיו-שָׁם.

רות א' י"ט-כ"ב

(יט) ותלכנה שתיהם עד-בואנה בית לחם ויהי כבואנה בית לחם ותהם כל-העיר עליהן ותאמרנה הֲזֹאת נְעֹמִי. (כ) ותאמר אליהן אלי-תקראנה לי נְעֹמִי קראן לי מָרָא כִּי-הֵמֶר שְׂדֵי לִי מָאֵד. (כא) אֲנִי מְלֹאָה הַלֶּכְתִּי וְרִיקָם הִשִּׁיבֵנִי ה' לָמָּה תקראנה לי נְעֹמִי וְה' עָנָה בִּי וְשְׂדֵי תָרַע לִי. (כב) ותשב נְעֹמִי וְרוּת הַמוֹאֲבִיָּה כָּל-תֵּה עִמָּה הִשָּׁבָה מִשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב וְהָמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית לָחֶם בְּתַחֲלַת קִצִּיר שְׁעָרִים.

7: Exceeding expectations

Ruth 2:8-18

(8) Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen to me, daughter. Don't go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. (9) Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of [the water] that the men have drawn." (10) She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?" (11) Boaz said in reply, "I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. (12) May the LORD reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!" ..(14) At mealtime, Boaz said to her, "Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar." So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over...(18) and carried it back with her to the town. When her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, and when she also took out and gave her what she had left over after eating her fill,

רות ב' ח'-י"ח

(ח) ויאמר בעוז אל-רוּת הלוא שמעת בתי אל-תלכי ללקט בשדה אחר וגם לא תעבורי מזה וכה תדבקין עם-נערתי. (ט) עיניך בשדה אשר-יִקְצְרוּן וְהִלַּכְתְּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן הֲלוֹא צִוִּיתִי אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים לְבִלְתִּי נִגְעָה וְצִמְתֹּת וְהִלַּכְתְּ אֶל-הַכְּלָיִם וְשָׁתִית מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאֲבוּן הַנְּעָרִים. (י) ותפל על-פְּנֵיהָ ותשתחו ארצה ותאמר אליו מדוע מצאתי חן בעיניך להפירני ואנכי נכריה. (יא) ויעז בעוז ויאמר לה הגד הגד לי כל אשר-עשית את-חַמּוֹתֶיךָ אַחֲרַי מוֹת אִישׁךָ וְתַעֲזְבִי אֲבִיךָ וְאִמֶּךָ וְאַרְצְךָ מוֹלְדֶתְךָ וְתִלְכִי אֶל-עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִדְעַת תְּמוּל שְׁלֹשׁוֹם. (יב) ישלם ה' פְּעֻלָּתְךָ וְתִהְיֶה מִשְׁכַּרְתְּךָ שְׁלֹמָה מֵעַם ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-בָּאת לְחַסוֹת תַּחַת-כְּנָפָיו... (יג) ויאמר לה בעז לעת האכל גשי הלם ואכלת מוֹת-הַלֶּחֶם וְטַבַּלְת פִּתֶיךָ בַחֲמִץ וְתִשָּׁב מֵצֵד הַקִּצְרִים וְיִצְבֹּט-לָּהּ קִלְי וְתֹאכַל וְתִשְׁבַּע וְתִתְרֵי... (יד) ותשא ותבוא העיר ותרא חַמּוֹתֶיהָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לִקְטָה וְתוֹצֵא וְתִתְּנָהּ לָּהּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-הִוְתֶרָה מִשְׁבְּעָה.

8: Sodom in Egypt

Exodus 1:9-10

(9) And he said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. (10) Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.”

שמות א':ט-י

(ט) ויאמר אל-עמו הנה עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו: (י) הבה נתחכמה לו פן-ירבה והלה כיתקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם-הוא על-שנאינו ונלחם-בנו ועלה מזה-ארץ:

Exodus 2:24-25

(24) God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. (25) God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

שמות ב':כ"ד-כ"ה

(כד) וישמע אלקים את-נאקתם ויזכר אלקים את-בריתו את-אברהם את-יצחק ואת-יעקב: (כה) וירא אלקים את-בני ישראל וידע אלקים: {ס}

Genesis 18:20-21

(20) Then ה' said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! (21) I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note.”

בראשית י"ח:כ'-כ"א

(כ) ויאמר ה' ועצת סדם ועמרה כירבה והטאתם כי כבדה מאד: (כא) ארדה-נא ואראה הכצעקתה הבאה אלי עשו וכלה ואם-לא אדעה:

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Ceremony and Celebration: Introduction to the Holidays*:

The journey to the Promised Land has to pass through Egypt because Israel was to construct a society that would be the antithesis of Egypt. Therefore they had to know Egypt, experience Egypt, feel it in their bones, carry it with them as an indelible memory that they would hand on to all future generations. They had to experience what it was like to be on the wrong side of power... The taste of that affliction was never to be forgotten. (173)

To the extent that the Torah is a deliberately contrarian work, a protest against and conscious alternative to the great civilizations of its day, it is worth reflecting more fully on who Ramses was and what he represented... No one in history constructed more monuments to his glory than Ramses II... It is clear that when Pharaoh responds angrily to Moses' request in God's name to let the Israelites go, saying, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let the Israelites go? I do not know the Lord,” what he means is, “Here, I am God.”..The wealth of the royal court was astonishing...At the same time the population as a whole lived a wretched experience.” (179-182)

Moses – in the form Mose, Mses or Messes – is in fact an Egyptian word. It figures in the names of several Pharaohs... most significantly Ramses himself. The word means “child.” Understanding this we stand before one of the Torah's boldest and most revolutionary strokes. years later, two men are to be involved in a monumental confrontation: Ramses and Moses. Their names tell us what is at stake. Ramses means “child of the sun god Ra.” Ramses...saw himself as a god... Moses was simply, anonymously, “a child”... It is not one man, a supreme ruler, who is in the image of God, but every man, woman and child on the face of the earth. (187)

8: Lot and the Exodus

Genesis 19:29

(29) Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

בראשית י"ט:כ"ט

(כט) וַיְהִי בַשַּׁחַת אֱלֹקִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכְּפֹר וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהִפְכָּה בַּהִפְךָ אֶת־הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשָׁב בְּהֵן לוֹט:

Exodus 2:23-25

(23) A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. (24) God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. (25) God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

שמות ב':כ"ג-כ"ה

(כג) וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֲבָדָה וַיִּזְעֻקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹקִים מִן־הָעֲבָדָה: (כד) וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב: (כה) וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּדַּע אֱלֹקִים: {ס}

Deuteronomy 4:34

(34) Or has any deity ventured to go and take one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts, by signs and portents, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and awesome power, as your God ה' did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

דברים ד':ל"ד

(לד) אִן הִנְסָה אֱלֹקִים לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לָן גּוֹי־מִקְרֹב גּוֹי־בְּמַסַּת בְּאֵתֶת וּבְמוֹפְתִים וּבְמִלְחָמָה וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדֹלִים כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לָכֶם ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵיכֶם: