

וּבֵרַכְתֶּם גַּם אֹתִי (Ex; 12; 33) **And you shall bless me also**¹

It is the middle of the night. He who will be known down the ages for his hardened heart, is now heart broken. His heir who had been the guarantor of his, Pharaohs own divine status, is now dead in his arms² The supreme ruler of the upper and lower kingdom, embodiment of Ra and of Horus, the gods of Egypt, his divine dynasty brought to its knees, defeated in the battle as to who the living God really is, is abjectly doing what he must do. Having summoned Moses and Aaron, he is sending them and their people on their way. Letting go of a work force, he frets for his failure in failing to guarantee Egypt's future, a solemn duty with which he has been charged. And as he presses them to leave with no further delay, in an act that is either chutzpah, stupidity, pitiful or all of the these, asks to be blessed.

וּבֵרַכְתֶּם גַּם אֹתִי Bless me also, Pharaoh asks of Moses, guardian of the teaching and of Aaron, master of the cult, the plenipotentiaries of the living God, the very people who have brought this dreadful night to be.

If בָּרַךְ, (Bless), as we have seen, is an attribute descriptive of the God who shares His bounty and goodness with all His creation of whom does Pharaoh ask this blessing? What is the bounty/blessing Pharaoh seeks?

The careful reader will duly note what follows;

וּשְׂאֵלוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּלֵי כֶסֶף וְכֵלֵי זָהָב וְשִׁמְלוֹת
וַיִּנְתְּנוּ אֶת חֵן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׂאֲלוּם

The children of Israel had done according to Moshe's words; they had asked of the Egyptians objects of silver and objects of gold, and clothing. God had given the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they let themselves be asked of. (Ex;12; 35-36)

And the self same astute reader will note the careful use of the words;

¹ This commentary is also used as Epilogue to Chapter, Witnessing. Naming and Blessing, in *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar, By the Power Vested in Me*; The Haworth Press, Binghamton New York 2002.

² Charles David Isbell; YHWH and the Gods of Egypt; *CCAR Journal* Winter 1999

וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת מִצְרַיִם So did they *exploit* the Egyptians *ibid*; v 36

The Egyptians, despite their great anguish that night, are able to see beyond the Israelites as enemy. They respond to what they are asked for. They share their bounty.

From Moses and Aaron, no blessing is forthcoming. Pharaoh's plea goes unheard and unheeded. No blessing/bounty is forthcoming. There is no salve for his wound. There is no blessing that Egypt will survive. He is not promised that his torn heart will heal. He is not reassured that there is a future worth having for the humbled representative of Ra and Horus.

Perhaps the silence came from anger over centuries of slavery; perhaps from an understandable feeling of wanting the whole thing over with; perhaps from the haste duly recorded in scripture of getting out; or perhaps more crucially from not being aware that it was in their power and even perhaps their duty as representatives of the living God to bless even Pharaoh.

What was the overflowing bounty Moses and Aaron, God's plenipotentiaries and indeed all Israel had in full measure that wondrous/appalling night. It was in the reality of the contact with the living God, who had heard their cry and come to redeem them. That God, whose bounty could include even Egypt, as it indeed had in the days of Joseph. The Baal HaRachamim (master of mercy) whose compassion is over all. Now Pharaoh and his people are those who suffer and are deeply wounded. But even though we understand the feelings of Moses and Aaron, nonetheless there is no bounty of the living God shared with Pharaoh,

And so we note (Ex; 14; 5), that inevitably, the unblessed suffering heart flips back, hardens this time with no record of divine intervention. Dare we say because it was not witnessed or blessed at the propitious moment. And so pursuit and enmity, the desire to subjugate resumes. Without blessing of the suffering and pain, and that which is noble in Pharaoh, the hardened heart reasserts itself. And though the story inexorably leading to the covenant at Sinai must include the redemption of God's

people, nonetheless, a mighty horde is destroyed. And it is told that God's joy in His own triumph could not be complete.³

Because Rabbis are God's Exemplars, blessing others is incumbent upon us. Blessing others, sharing God's bounty is a truly crucial and inviolable part of being a rabbi. As Symbolic Exemplars of God, we can do no less.

Our people and the world call out to us in their pain.

וּבְרַכְתֶּם גַּם אֶתִּי

³ Megillah 10b and Sanhedrin 39b