

Weekly Words of Torah

Publicize Your Solidarity: Parshat Bo

Framing

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Bo, includes the last three plagues. With the final plague - Makat Bechorot (the Death of the Firstborn) - the Israelites are told to slaughter a sheep, and paint its blood on their doorposts as a sign of their Jewishness, so that their firstborns will not be killed along with the Egyptians. During the previous nine plagues, the Israelites were not asked to do anything to avoid harm, but in this case, they must take action. And the action they are told to take is not a simple one! They must slaughter a sheep, an animal that their enslavers, the Egyptians, worshipped as a god (see Maimonides, Moreh Nevuchim, Book 3, Chapter 46), and outwardly place its blood on the doorposts of their homes - a move that would be seen by the Egyptians as extremely antagonistic. But the Israelites took this action together, even when it was intimidating to do so, and publicized their solidarity with God and with Moshe. And perhaps that was what opened the gates to their ultimate freedom.

Access Points

- **Just like the Israelites needed to take public action, so too do we need to take public action in solidarity with those held in captivity in Gaza and with their families.** In all the previous plagues, God acted through Moses and/or Aaron. In this final plague, the Israelites are told that they too must take action. In essence, they need to serve as partners with God and their leaders in achieving the goals. Just like the Israelites, we too must be willing to take public action, to make our solidarity visible. (Perhaps we feel that our taking action won't actually do anything... that it is only people in positions of power who are going to effect change. But it is clear from our parsha that God and Moses weren't willing to finalize the ten plagues without the partnership of the "regular" people.)
- **The Israelites publicly slaughtered sheep, a dangerous act to take in Egypt.** We too might be afraid to show solidarity with the hostages, because it feels dangerous to do so. Friends on social media might disagree with your beliefs, and might not tell you that they disagree in caring and kind ways. However, like the Israelites, we have to consider doing it anyway as a sign of our solidarity. Because it is right. Because they need us to.
- **The Israelites put blood on their doorposts as a sign for both those outside their homes, and for themselves.** Verse 12:13 states that, "And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." The famous medieval French commentator, Rashi (Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki), comments on the first clause of that verse ("And the blood... shall be a sign for you") that in fact, the Israelites painted the blood on the *inside* of their doorposts, and not on the outside! He is playing off of the words, *for you* - pointing out that the sign was for themselves, rather than for God or the Egyptians. Sometimes the signs that we wear, or even those that we show the outside world, are actually *for us*. They are meant to help remind us, ourselves, of what we believe, and to strengthen our *own* morale, while also showing solidarity with others.

Call to Action

This week, wear the number of days the hostages have been in captivity on your shirt. Wear it for yourself, and for those around you. Wear it even though you might be afraid, because we are all in this together. None of us are free until all of us are free.

Closing Intention

At the beginning of the parsha (10:2), God tells Moses that part of the process of the ten plagues is for the Israelites to tell their children and grandchildren - their future generations - about what God did to save the Israelites, so that they never forget how God has taken care of them. Similarly, consider: showing your solidarity with the hostages and their families is something you will want to tell your grandchildren one day. Do not stand idly by at this moment.