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Shemot/Exodus 10:1 – 13:16

Our parasha begins:

Shemot/Exodus 10:1 Now יהוה said to Moshe, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, ² "and **that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt**, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I *am* יהוה."

Notice that יהוה is telling Moshe that the plan He has had in delivering the Israelites from Egypt is also for the purpose of creating a historical record which will be an important part of the heritage of the generations to follow. To quote Elie Weisel – “Being Jewish is having a memory four thousand years long. When we lose this ‘memory,’ we risk losing our identity as Jews.”

The plagues end with the death of the “**firstborn of Egypt**.” Moshe had announced this threat early on to Pharaoh as a consequence of his not allowing the Israelites to “**serve Him**”:

Shemot 4:22 "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says יהוה: "Israel *is* My son, **My firstborn**."²³ "So I say to you, **let My son go that he may serve Me**. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed **I will kill your son, your firstborn**.'" "

יהוה declared Israel to be His “**firstborn son**” who will live and “**serve Him**” while the “**firstborn of Egypt**” will die. One “**firstborn**” will become the adopted son, while the “**firstborn**” of Egypt will be rejected. Egypt’s firstborn were the price of Israel’s redemption. From this we learn that the idea of redemption is associated with substitutes. An old, powerful civilization, the “**firstborn of Egypt**” will begin its decline, and a seemingly insignificant people, the “**firstborn of יהוה**,” will begin its ascent to center stage, guided and sustained by the Almighty.

The Creator of the Universe owns all things, and He put in place some commandments to remind His chosen people of the very fact of being “**set apart/sanctified/made holy/consecrated**.” First of all, every “**firstborn**” male creature must be somehow **recognized** as being “**sanctified**” to Him:

Shemot 13:1 Then יהוה spoke to Moshe, saying, ² "**Sanctify to Me all the firstborn**, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, *both* **of man and beast**; it is Mine."

What is the process for something to be “**sanctified**?” Animals that were declared “**clean**” by their inherent nature (cattle, sheep, goats), were offered for sacrifice. The blood of the ritually “**clean**” animal was sprinkled on the altar at the tabernacle; the fat of the animal was burned to יהוה; the meat was given to the priests and their families for food. The “**firstborn**” of a “**clean**” animal was claimed

by יהוה. Notice that “clean” animals were “not redeemed” because by their nature, they are already “sanctified/holy.” They were therefore sacrificed as a “sweet aroma to יהוה:

Bemidbar/Numbers 18:17 "But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to יהוה.

How are “unclean” animals “sanctified/made holy?” “Donkeys” fell into the “unclean” category and this made them unsuitable for sacrifice. The “firstborn donkey” still, however, belonged to the Almighty. Instead of being sacrificed or eaten, they had to be “redeemed” or “bought back” from Elohim. An exchange was made, a “lamb” was offered instead, and thus the “firstborn donkey” was considered “redeemed.” But if the owner did not sufficiently value the donkey to substitute with a lamb, the donkey’s “neck was broken” and the animal was destroyed:

Shemot 13:12 "that you shall set apart to יהוה all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be יהוה's. ¹³ "But every firstborn of a donkey (chamor – חֲמֹר) you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.

The matter of the “firstborn donkey” is puzzling. Jewish commentaries, mostly silent on the passage, offer only a small number of explanations for the matter. One explanation proposed by the Sages is that donkeys helped facilitate the Exodus, as they hauled the treasures of Egyptian gold and silver for the Hebrew slaves. The Israelites could have used some other pack animal, but it would appear that there is something special about the donkey, perhaps that it symbolizes an inner truth about the redemption of the children of Israel, both in Egypt and in the future national rebirth of the Messianic Era.

To sidetrack slightly, Jewish sages have noted that the prophets used conflicting metaphors to describe the coming of Messiah. In **Daniel's** vision, the Messianic king arrives “on the clouds of heaven,” while **Zechariah** spoke of a righteous king who makes his appearance “riding on a donkey.” As believers in Yeshua, we see Messiah entering the stage of humanity in His first and second comings:

Daniel 7:13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

Zechariah 9:9 " Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.

Back to our parasha...why is the “donkey” disqualified from being a “clean” animal? Donkeys are disqualified because of two physical attributes of impurity:

Vayikra/Leviticus 11:4 'Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves...it is unclean to you

Yet though the donkey is not by nature holy, it has the potential to be “**redeemed**” into the service of “**holiness**.” At the time of the Exodus, the donkey was possibly the only “**unclean**” animal domesticated among the Israelites. Neither the horse nor the camel was among their possessions in the wilderness. This is substantiated by Egyptian monuments, by which the camel appears to have been rare in Egypt and with the horse mainly used for war and by nobles.

We do see later that the “**redemption**” of “**unclean**” domesticated animals was extended to include other beasts. And take note, that once again (see **Shemot 13:13**) “**man**” is thrown into the same category as the “**unclean animals**” in need of “**redemption**”:

Bemidbar 18:15 "Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to יהוה, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless, the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem.

Let's zero in on the “**donkey**” of our Torah parasha. In a quick search, I noted that there were four different Hebrew words translated one way or another as “**donkey**.” Two words, specifically describe a “**male**” or a “**female**” donkey. “**Pere (פָּרָא)**” describes a particularly stubborn, “**wild donkey**” and is first used to describe **Ishmael**:



Bereshith 16:11 The angel of יהוה also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for יהוה has heard of your misery. ¹² He will be a wild donkey (pere פָּרָא) of a man; **his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.**"

Later, the First Temple period prophet **Jeremiah** described the wild **donkey's** (pere פָּרָא) uncontrollable, fleshly appetites. Clearly, we are dealing with the sort of beast that refuses to recognize any laws, and especially the commandments of the Torah:

Jeremiah 2:23 "How can you say, 'I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Baals'? See your way in the valley; Know what you have done: *You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways,* ²⁴ A wild donkey (pere פָּרָא) used to the wilderness, *That sniffs at the wind in her desire*; In her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; In her month they will find her.

But, the Hebrew word in our Torah parasha, describing the “**donkey**” in need of redemption is “**chamor – חַמּוֹר**.” The references to a “**chamor**” are restricted to a beast which is useful for bearing

burdens or for plowing fields. Avram was the first to be mentioned as owning a “**chamor**.” In fact, in **Bereshith 22**, this type of “**donkey**” (**chamor** – חֲמֹר) plays a key part in the binding of **Yitzchak**:



Bereshith 22:3 So Avraham rose early in the morning and saddled his **donkey** (**chamor** – חֲמֹר), and took two of his young men with him, and Yitzchak his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which Elohim had told him. ⁴ Then on the third day Avraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. ⁵ And Avraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the **donkey** (**chamor** – חֲמֹר); the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

The “**donkey**” (**chamor** – חֲמֹר) and the two men are left behind (an unclean animal is not allowed in the Presence of יהוה) as Yitzchak is taken to the Mount and placed on the altar. Yitzchak is mercifully spared due to the **substitution** of the sacrificial ram. Something similar occurs again when Moshe rode into Egypt setting his sons on a **donkey** (**chamor** – חֲמֹר) and riding to the place of the execution of the firstborn of Egypt, while Israel is spared by the blood of the Passover lamb. Both accounts foreshadowed Messiah’s substitutionary atonement for us, and the “**donkey**” (**chamor** – חֲמֹר) was the means of transport.

Shemot 4:20 Then Moshe took his wife and his sons and set them on a **donkey** (**chamor** – חֲמֹר), and he returned to the land of Egypt.

We also know that it was on a “**donkey**” (**chamor** – חֲמֹר) that Yeshua rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling prophecy:

Matthew 21:5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a **donkey** (**chamor** – חֲמֹר), A colt, the foal of a donkey.' " ⁶ So the disciples went and did as Yeshua commanded them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set *Him* on them.

Zechariah 9:9 " Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He *is* just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a **donkey** (**chamor** – חֲמֹר), A colt, the foal of a donkey.

Now, we are ready to go back to **Shemot 13** to see how this all connects together concerning the law of the “**firstborn**” animals (clean and unclean) and “**firstborn**” male sons. Here’s a review of what we already know:

- Of the “**clean**” animals, the “**firstborn**” belong to יהוה as an “**offering**” (**Bemidbar 18:17**)
- “**Firstborn, unclean**” animals must be “**redeemed**” (**Bemidbar 18:15**)

- The “**firstborn of man**” is also “**unclean**” and must be “**redeemed**” (**Bemidbar 18:15**)
- A pure “**lamb redeems**” both the “**donkey**” and the “**firstborn**” son

Shemot 13:12 "that you shall set apart to יהוה all that open the womb, that is, **every firstborn that comes from an animal** which you have; the males *shall be* יהוה's'.¹³ "But every firstborn of a donkey you shall **redeem with a lamb**; and if you will not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. And **all the firstborn of man** among your sons **you shall redeem**."

There are just two choices with “**firstborn donkeys**”: **redeem them or kill them**. And that is the same for man. יהוה could not accept an unclean, firstborn donkey as a sacrifice, just as “**unclean man**” does not qualify as a “**sacrifice**.” When the substitute of the lamb was made, the family that owned the donkey could keep it for their service for the rest of its life, thus fulfilling its God-ordained purpose. Through the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of Elohim, Yeshua qualifies us to live a set-apart life, a life which is “**holy and pleasing unto Him**”:

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of Yah’s mercy, to **offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to Yah**-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

However, there is another choice. If the owner of the donkey is mean-spirited enough, he may deny יהוה His portion by refusing to substitute the lamb. In doing so, he denies himself the use of the donkey, and he denies the donkey of its life. Likewise, man can refuse to accept the sacrifice of the Lamb. Sadly, in doing so, he condemns his own life.

If the donkey is not redeemed, he would be axed from the back of the neck. This symbolizes that wicked people are “**stiff-necked**.” Stiff necks get broken:

Shemot 33:3 "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for **you are a stiff-necked people**."

In the **Gospels**, Yeshua sends “**two disciples**” to unleash a “**donkey**.” The donkey is one on which “**no one has ever sat**”, as **Luke** records, most likely indicating that it was a “**redeemed donkey**” according to the law of the firstborn. This “**set-apart donkey**” is now ready for its Holy purpose in life – the **donkey’s burden** is to carry the **Burden-Bearer, Messiah Yeshua**:

Luke 19:29 And it came to pass, when He came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, *that* He sent **two of His disciples**,³⁰ saying, "Go into the village opposite *you*, where as you enter you will find a **donkey** tied, **on which no one has ever sat**. Loose it and bring *it here*.³¹ "And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing *it*?' thus you shall say to him, 'Because Adonai has need of it.' "³² So those who were sent went their way and found *it* just as He had said to them.³³ But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?"³⁴ And they said, "Adonai has need of him."³⁵ Then they brought him to Yeshua. And **they threw their own garments on the colt**, and they **set Yeshua on him**."

The disciples then cast their “**garments on the donkey**” to illustrate exactly what **Shemot 13** taught in the law of the firstborn, namely, that they as sinners identify with the uncleanness of the donkey, and are in need of redemption by a pure and spotless lamb. Messiah is then “**set**” on this donkey, a graphic presentation of the true **Lamb of יהוה** who as the “**burden bearer**,” takes away the sin of the world.

Psalm 55:22 Cast your burden on יהוה, And He shall sustain you...

Our substitute “**Lamb**” gives us **lamb status**, that is – **set apart and holy to Him**. We can, through **Yeshua**, exchange our “**uncleanness**” for “**clean**.” This is the message of Peter’s trance:

Acts 10:9 ... Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. ¹⁰ Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹² In it were **all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air**. ¹³ And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "Not so, Adonai! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." ¹⁵ And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "**What Yah has cleansed you must not call common**." ¹⁶ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. ¹⁷ Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. ¹⁸ And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. ¹⁹ While **Peter thought about the vision**, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. ²⁰ "Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." ²¹ Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" ²² And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears Yah and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." ²³ Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. ²⁸ Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But **Yah has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean**."

John 10:7 Then Yeshua said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, **I am the door of the sheep**."

Shabbat Shalom!

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