

A Night to Remember

"GO OUT AND LEARN" FROM PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER

Go out and learn: What did Pharaoh's daughter wish to teach the children of Israel when she felt compassion for one of the Hebrew boys and brought him up as her son?

That all who raise an orphan boy or girl in their homes is regarded by the Torah as if they gave birth to that child" (Talmud Megillah 13a).

Therefore the Holy One said to Pharaoh's daughter: "Moshé was not your son, yet you raised him, so too you are not my daughter by birth but I will call you my daughter, Bat-ya."

(Midrash Leviticus 1:3)

From this we learn that "there are righteous Gentiles who have a portion in the world-to-come" (Tosefta Sanhedrin 13:2). In every generation the Divine *Shekhina* spreads its wings over us and raises up men and women from the Jewish people and from the nations of the world whose courage and spiritual strength save us from arbitrariness, from terror and from indifference that "rise against us to annihilate us."

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וְיָדָה אֶת עַמֵּינוּ
זוּ פְּרִישׁוֹת הַדָּר אֲרָר, כְּמִה שְׂנֵאָמְרָה: "וְיָדָה
אֲלֵהֶם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָדַע אֲלֵהֶם."

וְאֵת עַמְלֵנוּ
אֵלֵינוּ הַבְּנִים,
כְּמִה שְׂנֵאָמְרָה: "עַל הַבֵּן הַלֵּוֹד הַיֵּאֱוָד
תִּשְׁלַכְתֶּהוּ וְקַל הַבַּת תִּתְּנֶינָּה."

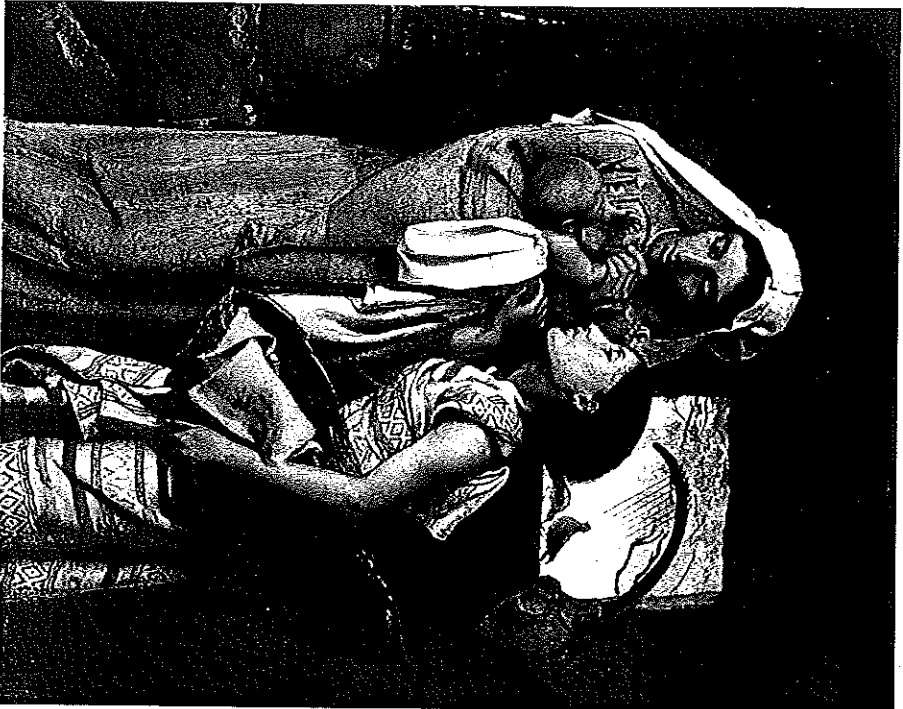
וְאֵת לַחֲצֵנוּ
יְהִי הַדְּהֵק,
כְּמִה שְׂנֵאָמְרָה: "וְגַם רְאוּתִי אֶת הַלֵּוִי
אֲשֶׁר מַעֲרִים לַחֲצִים אֲתָם."

"GOD SAW OUR PERSECUTION"
The root "oni" (persecution) is similar to "ona" (marital intimacy), thus hinting at Pharaoh's policy of enforced abstinence from "ona" (sexual intercourse).
Perhaps that is delicately intimated when it says that: "God saw the children of Israel, and God knew" (Exodus 2:25) (their marital suffering, for knowledge has sexual overtones as in "Adam knew his wife Eve" [Genesis 4:1]).

"OUR LABOR"
refers to the sons – the lost fruits of our "labor" who were drowned in Egypt.
Pharaoh proclaimed: "Every son who is born shall be cast into the Nile, while every daughter shall live" (Exodus 1:22).

"OUR OPPRESSION"
refers to "the pressure which the Egyptians applied to them" (Exodus 3:9).

Women and Liberation



Simon Solomon, *Miriam's Mission* (England, 1860).

Rushing river of days,
Cradle every parent's child in your waters.
We launch our babes in fragile baskets,
Moses multiplied by millions, released from muddy shores.
We squint to see around your bends
As our hearts are carried away.
We toss small sticks to float behind baskets, our prayers.

Meg Riley

PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER DILEMMA

Why did God give the responsibility of Moses' rearing to an Egyptian woman and the daughter of Pharaoh? Who was this woman?

I can imagine a young woman dissatisfied with the life and values bequeathed her by her father. It is a life without substance, though every physical need was filled and every material desire satisfied. She has reached that critical moment in life where dissatisfaction has become unbearable and action is required. The only problem (and it is always the problem): she doesn't know what to do. It is at such times that God presents us with an opportunity to act, if we recognize it as such. She sees a basket among the reeds beside the river. The closed basket looks like a tiny coffin. Does it contain the body of a dead Jewish boy? She does not turn and walk away from the possible horror, but orders the basket brought to her. The midrash records that one of the slave girls said: "Your Highness, it is the general rule that when a king makes a decree, his own family will obey that decree even if everyone else transgresses it. But you are flagrantly disobeying your father's command?" Yes, because her need for an identity separate from her father's was much greater.

The basket is brought to her and instead of ordering the slave girl to open it, Batya knows that she must be responsible for her act, and the text records this remarkable line: "And she opened it, and saw it, even the child." (Exodus 2:6) To open is one of the most important and difficult spiritual acts we are asked to do. Only when we open can the new present itself. But opening means forsaking the comfort of the familiar to enter the unknown.

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