

## Jewish Texts on Zerizut / זריזות / Diligence; Zeal

### Shemot 12:1-11 — Parshat Bo

**12:1** The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן,  
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר.

**The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron.** Since Aaron had worked and toiled with miracles just like Moses, He accorded him this honor at the first commandment by including him with Moses in [His] speech. — [from Tanchuma Buber, Bo 8; Mechilta] In early editions of Rashi, this paragraph is part of the above paragraph, the comment on 11:10. Indeed, that is how it appears in Tanchuma Buber.

**in the land of Egypt.** [I.e.,] outside the city. Or perhaps it means only within the city? Therefore, Scripture states: "When I leave the city, [I will spread my hands to the Lord]" (Exod. 9:29). Now, if [even a] prayer, which is of minor importance, he [Moses] did not pray within the city, a divine communication, which is of major importance, how much more so [would God not deliver it to Moses within the city]? Indeed, why did He not speak with him within the city? Because it was full of idols. — [from Mechilta]

**12:2** "This month is to be your beginning of months; it will be your first month of the year.

ב הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים:  
רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם, לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה.

**This month.** Heb. הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה, lit., this renewal. He [God] showed him [Moses] the moon in its renewal and said to him, "When the moon renews itself, you will have a new month" (Mechilta). Nevertheless, [despite this rendering,] a biblical verse does not lose its simple meaning (Shab. 63a). Concerning the month of Nissan, He said to him, "This shall be the first of the order of the number of the months, so Iyar shall be called the second [month], and Sivan the third [month]."

**This.** Moses found difficulty [determining] the [precise moment of the] renewal of the moon, in what size it should appear before it is fit for sanctification. So He showed him with His finger the moon in the sky and said to him, "You must see a moon like this and sanctify [the month]." Now how did He show it to him? Did He not speak to him only by day, as it says: "Now it came to pass on the day that the Lord spoke" (Exod. 6:28); "on the day He commanded" (Lev. 7:38); "from the day that the Lord commanded and on" (Num. 15:23)? Rather, just before sunset, this chapter was said to him, and He showed him [the moon] when it became dark. — [from Mechilta]

Note: Some see this verse as God's first command to the Children of Israel. Subsequent commands follow in this parshat. These commands are given to the Children of Israel before Sinai to enable them to get to Sinai.

**12:3** Tell the whole community of Israel, 'In the tenth day of this month they each must take a lamb for themselves according to their families – a lamb for each household.

ג דַּבְּרוּ, אֶל-כָּל-עַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר,  
בַּעֲשֶׂר, לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה: וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם, אִישׁ  
שֶׁה לְבֵית-אָבִת--שֶׁה לְבֵית.

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**Speak to the entire community.** Heb. דַּבְּרוּ, [the plural form]. Now did Aaron speak? Was it not already stated [to Moses]: “You shall speak” (Exod. 7: 2) “and you speak to the children of Israel, saying” (Exod. 31:13)]? But they [Moses and Aaron] would show respect to each other and say to each other, “Teach me [what to say],” and the speech would emanate from between them [and it would sound] as if they both were speaking. — [from Mechilta]

**to the entire community of Israel, saying, “On the tenth of... month”** -. Speak today on Rosh Chodesh [the New Moon] that they should take it [the lamb] on the tenth of the month. — [From Mechilta]

**this.** The Passover sacrifice of Egypt had to be taken on the tenth, but not the Passover sacrifice of later generations. — [from Mechilta, Pes. 96a]

**a lamb for each parental home.** [I.e., a lamb] for one family. If [the family members] were numerous, I would think that one lamb would suffice for all of them. Therefore, the Torah says: “a lamb for a household.” — [from Mechilta]

**12:4** If any household is too small for a lamb, the man and his next-door neighbor are to take a lamb according to the number of people – you will make your count for the lamb according to how much each one can eat.

ד וְאִם-יִמְעַט הַבַּיִת, מִהֵיֹוֹת מִשָּׁה--וְלָקַח  
הוּא וְשִׁכְנוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ, בְּמִכְסֵת  
נִפְשֹׁת: אִישׁ לְפִי אֹכְלוֹ, תִּכְסֹוּ עַל-הַשָּׂה.

**But if the household is too small for a lamb.** And if they are too few to have one lamb, for they cannot eat it [all], and it will become left over (see verse 10), “then he and his neighbor... shall take.” This is the apparent meaning according to its simple interpretation. There is, however, also a midrashic interpretation, [namely that this verse comes] to teach us that after they were counted on it, [i.e., after they registered for a certain lamb,] they may diminish their number and withdraw from it and be counted on another lamb. If, however, they wish to withdraw and diminish their number, [they must do it] מִהֵיֹוֹת מִשָּׁה [lit., from the being of the lamb]. They must diminish their number while the lamb still exists, while it is still alive, and not after it has been slaughtered. — [from Mechilta, Pes. 98a] according to the number of-Heb. בְּמִכְסֵת, amount, and so “the amount of (מִכְסֵת) your valuation: (Lev. 27:23).

**according to one’s ability to eat.** [This indicates that only] one who is fit to eat-which excludes the sick and aged-who cannot eat an olive-sized portion [can be counted among the group for whom the sacrifice is killed]. — [from Mechilta]

**shall you be counted.** Heb. תִּכְסֹוּ [Onkelos renders:] תִּתְמַנְנוּ, you shall be counted.

**12:5** Your lamb must be perfect, a male, one year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

ה שֶׁה תָּמִים זָכָר בֶּן-שָׁנָה, יְהִיָה לָכֶם;  
מִן-הַכֹּבָשִׁים וּמִן-הָעִזִּים, תִּקְחוּ.

**perfect.** without a blemish. — [from Mechilta]

**in its [first] year.** Heb. בֶּן-שָׁנָה For its entire first year it is called בֶּן-שָׁנָה, meaning that it

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was born during this year. — [from Mechilta]

**either from the sheep or from the goats.** Either from this [species] or from that [species], for a goat is also called *שָׂה*, as it is written: “and a kid (*שָׂה עֲזִים*)” (Deut. 14:4). — [from Mechilta]

**12:6** You must care for [the lamb]<sup>1</sup> until the fourteenth day of this month, and then the whole community of Israel will kill it around sundown.

וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת, עַד אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה; וְשַׁחֲטוּ אֹתוֹ, כָּל קְהַל עַד־תִּשְׁרָאֵל--בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים.

<sup>1</sup> The text has *וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת* (*v'yhaya lakem lymishmeret*), “and it will be for you for a keeping”). This noun stresses the activity of watching over or caring for something, probably to keep it in its proper condition for its designated use (see *Exodus* 16:23, 32-34).

**And you shall keep it for inspection.** Heb. *לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת*. This is an expression of inspection, that it [the animal] requires an inspection for a blemish four days before its slaughter. Now why was it [the designated animal] to be taken four days before its slaughter, something not required in the Passover sacrifice of later generations? Rabbi Mathia the son of Charash used to say [in response]: Behold He [God] says: “And I passed by you and saw you, and behold your time was the time of love” (Ezek. 16:8). The [time for the fulfillment of the] oath that I swore to Abraham that I would redeem his children has arrived. But they [the Children of Israel] had no commandments in their hands with which to occupy themselves in order that they be redeemed, as it is said: “but you were naked and bare” (Ezek. 16:7). So He gave them two mitzvot, the blood of the Passover and the blood of the circumcision. They circumcised themselves on that night, as it is said: “downtrodden with your blood (*בְּדַמֶיךָ*).” (ibid., verse 6), with the two [types of] blood. He [God] states also: “You, too with the blood of your covenant I have freed your prisoners from a pit in which there was no water” (Zech. 9:11). Moreover, they [the Israelites] were passionately fond of idolatry. [Moses] said to them, “Withdraw and take for yourselves” (Exod. 12:21). [He meant:] withdraw from idolatry and take for yourselves sheep for the mitzvah. — [from Mechilta, here and on verse 21] Note that on verse 21, Rashi explains that differently.

**shall slaughter it.** Now do they all slaughter [it]? Rather, from here we can deduce that a person's agent is like himself. — [from Mechilta, Kid. 41b] [Therefore, it is considered as if all the Israelites slaughtered the sacrifice.]

**the entire congregation of the community of Israel.** [This means] the congregation, the community, and Israel. From here, they [the Rabbis] said: The communal Passover sacrifices are slaughtered in three [distinct] groups, one after the other. [Once] the first group entered, the doors of the Temple court were locked [until the group finished; they were followed by the second group, etc.,] as is stated in *Pesachim* (64b).

**in the afternoon.** Heb. *בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים*. From six hours [after sunrise] and onward is called *בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים*, literally, between the two evenings, for the sun is inclined toward the place where it sets to become darkened. It seems to me that the expression *בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים* denotes those hours between the darkening of the day and the darkening of the night. The darkening of the day is at the beginning of the seventh hour, when the shadows of evening decline, and the darkening of the night at the beginning of the night. *וְעָרַב* is an expression of evening and darkness, like “all joy is darkened (*וְעָרַבָה*)” (Isa. 24:11). — [from Mechilta]

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<p><b>12:7</b> They will take some of the blood and put it on the two side posts and top of the doorframe of the houses where they will eat it.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ז וְלָקְחוּ, מִן-הַדָּם, וְנָתְנוּ עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת, וְעַל-הַמְּשְׁקוּף--עַל, הַבְּתִים, אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ, בָּהֶם.</p>
<p><b>And they shall take [some] of the blood.</b> This is the receiving of the blood [from the animal's neck immediately after the slaughtering]. I would think that it was to be received in the hand. Therefore, Scripture says: "that is in the basin" (below, verse 22), [specifying that the blood is to be received in a vessel]. — [from Mechilta]</p> <p><b>the... door posts.</b> They are the upright posts, one from this side of the entrance and one from that side. — [from Kid. 22b]</p> <p><b>the lintel.</b> Heb. הַמְּשְׁקוּף. That is the upper [beam], against which the door strikes (שׁוֹקֵף) when it is being closed, lintel in Old French. The term שְׁקִיפָה means striking, like [in the phrase] "the sound of a rattling leaf" (Lev. 26:36), [which Onkelos renders:] טְרָפָא דְּשְׁקִיפָה, "bruise" (Exod. 21:25), [which Onkelos renders:] מְשְׁקוּפִי. — [based on Jonathan]</p> <p><b>on the houses in which they will eat it.</b> But not on the lintel and the doorposts of a house [used] for [storing] straw or a house [used] for cattle, in which nobody lives. — [based on Mechilta]</p>	
<p><b>12:8</b> They will eat the meat the same night; they will eat it roasted over the fire with bread made without yeast<sup>2</sup> and with bitter herbs.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ח וְאָכְלוּ אֶת-הַבֶּשֶׂר, בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה : צְלִי-אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת, עַל-מְרָרִים יֹאכְלֵהוּ.</p>
<p><sup>2</sup> Bread made without yeast could be baked quickly, not requiring time for the use of a leavening ingredient to make the dough rise. In Deut 16:3, it is written, "You must not eat any yeast with it; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast, symbolic of affliction, for you came out of Egypt hurriedly. You must do this so you will remember for the rest of your life the day you came out of the land of Egypt." The unleavened matzah is called "the bread of affliction," which alludes to the alarm and haste of the Israelites. In later Judaism leaven came to be a symbol of evil or corruption, and so "unleavened bread" – bread made without yeast – was interpreted to be a picture of purity or freedom from corruption or defilement (S. R. Driver, <i>Exodus</i>, 90-91).</p> <p><b>the flesh.</b> but not sinews or bones. — [from Mechilta]</p> <p><b>and unleavened cakes; with bitter herbs.</b> Every bitter herb is called מְרוֹר, and He commanded them to eat bitters in commemoration of "And they embittered their lives" (Exod. 1:14). — [from Pes. 39a, 116b]</p>	
<p><b>12:9</b> Do not eat it raw or boiled in water, but roast it over the fire with its head, its legs, and its entrails.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ט אַל-תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ נָא, וּבִשָּׁל מִבֶּשֶׂל בְּמַיִם : כִּי אִם-צְלִי-אֵשׁ, רֹאשׁוֹ עַל-כַּרְעָיו וְעַל-קִרְבּוֹ.</p>
<p><b>You shall not eat it rare.</b> Heb. נָא. Something not roasted sufficiently is called נָא in Arabic. <b>or boiled.</b> All this is included in the prohibition of You shall not eat it. — [from Pes.</p>	

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**in water.** How do we know that [it is also prohibited to cook it] in other liquids? Therefore, Scripture states: וּבִשְׁל מִבְּשָׁל, [meaning boiled] in any manner. — [from Pes. 41a]

**except roasted over the fire.** Above (verse 8), He decreed upon it [the animal sacrifice] with a positive commandment, and here He added to it a negative [commandment]: “You shall not eat it except roasted over the fire.”

**12:10** You must leave nothing until morning, but you must burn with fire whatever remains of it until morning.

י וְלֹא-תוֹתִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ, עַד-בֹּקֶר ; וְהִנְתַּר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר, בְּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרֹפוּ.

**And whatever is left over of it until morning-** What is the meaning of “until morning” a second time? [This implies] adding one morning to another morning, for morning starts with sunrise, and this verse is here to make it [the prohibition] earlier, [i.e.,] that it is forbidden to eat it [the leftover flesh] from dawn. This is according to its apparent meaning. Another midrashic interpretation is that this teaches that it may not be burnt on Yom Tov but on the next day, and this is how it is to be interpreted: and what is left over from it on the first morning you shall wait until the second morning and burn it. — [from Shab. 24b]

**12:11** This is how you are to eat it – dressed to travel, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You are to eat it in haste. It is the LORD’S Passover.

יֹא וְכָכָה, תֹּאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ—מֵתְיַנְיָכֶם חֲגָרִים, נֹעֲלִיכֶם בְּרוּגְלֵיכֶם וּמִקְלָכֶם בְּיָדְכֶם ; וְאָכַלְתֶּם אֹתוֹ בְּחָפְזוֹן, פָּסַח הוּא לֵיהֹנָה.

**Your loins girded.** Ready for the way [i.e., for travel]. — [from Mechilta] **in haste.** Heb. בְּהִפְזוֹן, a term denoting haste and speed, like “and David was hastening (וַיִּהְיֶה) ” (I Sam. 23:26); that the Arameans had cast off in their haste (בְּהִפְזוֹם) (II Kings 7:15). — [from Onkelos]

**it is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord.** Heb. פָּסַח. The sacrifice is called פָּסַח because of the skipping and the jumping over, which the Holy One, blessed be He, skipped over the Israelites’ houses that were between the Egyptians houses. He jumped from one Egyptian to another Egyptian, and the Israelite in between was saved. [“To the Lord” thus implies] you shall perform all the components of its service in the name of Heaven. (Another explanation:) [You should perform the service] in the manner of skipping and jumping, [i.e., in haste] in commemoration of its name, which is called Passover (פָּסַח), and also [in old French] pasche, pasque, pasca, an expression of striding over. — [from Mishnah Pes. 116a,b; Mechilta d’Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, verse 27; Mechilta on this verse]

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### Sources

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### Speculations

1. Why are we not able to go out from *Mizraim* individually? Does your answer have implications for your mussar practice?
2. What obligations did we have to each other in preparing to go out from *Mizraim*?
3. Do these verses reveal anything about the relationship between the compulsion of the *yetzer ha-ra* and the commandedness of the *yetzer ha-tov*?
4. What does anything that is quoted above have to do with practicing the middah of diligence (זְרִיזוּת)?