

LBT's From Light to Liberation: *Hallel/Praise*

Week of March 21, 2021 / 8 Nissan 5781

Framing: The word for Egypt in Hebrew, *Mitzrayim*, is loaded with meaning. At the root of *Mitzrayim* is the word *Metzer*, which means “narrows” or “straights.” Egypt is very properly named “the narrow country,” as the ancient population lived strictly along the banks of the Nile, their source of water, food, and reprieve from the harsh Saharan desert that surrounded the civilization on all sides. For generations, this metaphor has been resonant. Our core origin story as Jews begins in the narrow place; out of the narrows, we emerge into the wide open expanse of the desert, and then into the Promised Land. And on the other side of that narrow place, passing through the Sea of Reeds, our people famously burst into song and praise -- *Hallelujah!* After a harrowing journey through the narrows, it is natural for people to spontaneously bust out singing praise and expressing pure joy. The Psalm selected below comes from the section of Jewish prayer called *Hallel*, which is sung on Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot and Hanukkah and infused with exuberance and an activated spirit. The second text is a common part of Jewish prayer, *Mi Chamocha*, and is drawn from the Song of the Sea -- the celebratory poem chanted by the Israelites on the other side of the Sea of Reeds.

תהלים קי"ח:ה'

(ה) מִן־הַמַּצַּר קָרָאתִי יְיָ עֲנֵנִי בְּמַרְחֵב יָהּ:

Psalms 118:5

(5) From the narrows, I called out to Yah (God); Yah answered me from the wide expanse of relief.

שמות ט"ו:י"א-י"ג

(יא) מִי־כַמְכָּה בְּאֵלִים יי מִי כַמְכָּה נֶאֱדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ נִרְאָה תְהִלָּת עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶא: (יב) נְטִיתִי יְמִינִךָ תִּבְלַעְמוּ אֶרֶץ: (יג) נְחִיתִי בְּחִסְדֶּךָ עַם־יִזְרָאֵל גְּאֻלְתָּ נְהַלְתָּ בְּעֲזָרְךָ אֶל־נְוֵה קְדוֹשְׁךָ:

Exodus 15:11-13

(11) Who is like You, O Eternal One, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness Awesome in splendor, working wonders! (12) You put out Your strong hand and the earth swallowed them. (13) With your *Hesed*, You lead the people that You redeemed; In Your strength You guide them to Your holiness.

Questions for Reflection:

1. You are invited to reflect on moments in your life when you emerged from something difficult or challenging. How would you articulate that feeling of expansiveness? How did you celebrate on the other side? Did you also experience the sensation of freedom in your body? If so where?
2. Mi Chamocha combines praise with wonder, awe, and joy. When you are full of gratitude, to whom or to what do you offer praise? What other emotions do you find wrapped up in your praise?
3. Do you experience or offer praise in your meditation practice? How is it similar or different to praise your experience in day-to-day living.
4. One day this week, make praise a priority. When you come across something praiseworthy, we invite you to pause and offer praise, really marking and even howling praise (internally or externally) out into the world. Feel the praise flow through you!