

15 — Bo: G-d Has Needs Too!!!

Content notes: *this episode is filled with references to slavery, and contains multiple mentions of deaths of humans and animals. There is a (non-graphic) discussion of the deaths of innocent children around 22 minutes in. There's a genital mention around 36 minutes, and a discussion of genocide from around minutes 43-46.*

[Brivele intro music]

Lulav: Welcome to Kosher Queers, a podcast with at least two Jews and generally more than three opinions! Each week we bring you queer takes on Torah. They're Jaz.

Jaz: And she's Lulav.

Lulav: And they're Khesed! And today we're gonna talk about Bo.

Jaz: Yeah!

Lulav: So, we have a special guest for you today. Khesed is one human in the minyan of metropolitan Minnesotan queer Jews and a rising davening leader at Shir Tikvah and as the token Jew in some inter-faith spaces (*Khesed chuckles*) They are also a medical laboratory technician student at St Paul College. They will steal your vital fluids, but —

Khesed: With consent

Lulav: With consent, so —

Khesed: It's not stealing if you have consent.

Lulav: So I guess it's not stealing. They will borrow your vital fluid. (*Khesed laughs*)

Jaz: Much like the Jews do in this week's parsha? Sorry.

Lulav: Ooh, okay. Blood libel time.

Jaz: They don't steal blood! They just borrow things and don't give them back. Anyway, continue.

Lulav: And, lastly but not leastly, they love joyful direct action.

Khesed: Yes.

Jaz: Aw. Welcome!

Khesed: Thank you. I'm so glad to be here.

Lulav: Yeah! Khesed goes to my shul. They're a cool kid.

Khesed: Yes, I am also a baby.

Lulav: Yeah. I met them when they were 17.

Khesed: Mm hmm.

Jaz: What?

Khesed: Yes, I'm only 20.

Lulav: Yeah. So, yeah, we've known each other for several years now.

Khesed: Yes.

Lulav: Which is fun.

Khesed: It's great.

Lulav: Jaz, how many seconds would you like?

Jaz: I'm going to give it a try in 60.

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: I did not time this beforehand, so we'll see how it goes.

Lulav: (*snorts*) No! Oh G-d. Okay. On your mark, get set, go.

Jaz: G-d says Ze's preventing Pharaoh from letting them go on purpose, to show off. Moshe and Aharon go to Pharaoh and demand a break in the wilderness, threatening more

plagues, and Pharaoh's advisers say, "let the leaders go already!" But Moses and Aharon chant, "none of us are free until all of us are free!" (*Lulav laughs*) and Pharaoh is like, "uh uh, I can't listen to that kind of radical nonsense." Then locusts eat everything, and Pharaoh is like, "scram," but G-d blows the locusts away like the house in the Wizard of Oz. Then Pharaoh changes his mind again, so G-d turns out the light, and no one can see anything except the Israelites, because apparently they don't have candles or anything in the whole country. (*Lulav laughs*) So Pharaoh's like, "this sucks and everyone's going to get Seasonal Affective Disorder, get out of here, all of you, and bring all your stuff," but Moshe is like, "no we want your stuff too, and Pharaoh says no. (*Lulav chuckles*) So G-d's like, okay, this will be the last plague, tell people to "borrow" (*Lulav laughs*) gold and silver and stuff, and they mysteriously do get it. Then before they even leave, we hear a long description of how to celebrate Pesach in future years, which includes a sacrificial lamb and mandatory matzah. So Israelites put lamb's blood on the doors like a mezuzah, and in every home that didn't have that (*ringer goes off*). Noooo!

Lulav: (*laughs*) keep going.

Jaz: The eldest child was killed overnight, so Pharaoh was finally like, these people gotta get out of here, and so they leave, all thousands of them, with lots of money from Egyptians, and we get a reminder about Pesach and teaching it to your children and also tefillin.

Lulav: Fair! (*Jaz laughs*) So nice, I think that was only like eight seconds over.

Jaz: Great.

Lulav: There's a lot happening.

Jaz: There's a lot happening!

Lulav: Honestly, you did it in 68 instead of 75, so like —

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Yeah I love that there was exactly the right amount of editorializing there. (*all laugh*)

Khesed: You kind of stole my Perchik Corner but we're good. (*Jaz laughs*)

Lulav: (*laughs*) I think we're maybe all bringing that. (*all laugh*)

Khesed: I actually wrote it out though!

Jaz: Excellent.

Lulav: Oh, I love that! So yeah, you're welcome to go off.

Khesed: Okay.

Jaz: Let us know when you need to call one.

Khesed: Okay.

Lulav: So does that mean that I'm leading us through bit by bit?

Jaz: Yes please.

Lulav: Okay! And Khesed, you are welcome to chime in —

Khesed: I have so many questions. SO I got 10 verses in and I realized I had about 10 questions, (*Jaz and Lulav laugh*) so then I just stuck to one big question per aliyah.

Jaz: Great.

Khesed: Which your Bible probably is not split up into, but —

Lulav: No, but I'm glad yours is!

Khesed: I have Sefaria open, so I'll stop you.

Jaz: Rad.

Lulav: Can you tell us a little bit about what aliyah are?

Khesed: Oh yeah, so aliyah are how the Torah portion are split up when you're chanting, like if it's a bar mitzvah or a bat mitzvah, the child has to do all of it (*Lulav laughs*) but if it's like a regular Shabbat morning or a regular Monday or Thursday different people kind of chant each portion of the portion.

Lulav: Okay.

Khesed: So there's usually about seven aliyot and it's just an easy way to split up the Torah portion

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: That's really fun!

Jaz: Yeah. And depending on how you're doing it, if you read it on Sefaria or on Chabad or whatever, they will break it up for you and most of the physical written copies won't.

Lulav: I just like how it makes it so that people chanting the parsha aren't like I was in 6th grade and just try to read every single section (*Khesed laughs*) when called on. (*laughs*)

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: So that's good. So Hashem in a nice pickup form last chapter is like, (*voice echoing dramatically*) "Hey, I've hardened Pharaoh's heart. There's signs. They're going to see what fools you've made of them and they will know that I am —" (*regular voice*) is this Adonai or the Tetragrammaton or —

Khesed: That's like, the legit name, yeah.

Jaz: Yeah, it's the first time we get the yod-hay-vav-hay as like, the real name.

Khesed: Is it? Cuz it's also in verse one.

Lulav: Yeah there's a bunch of Tetragrammaton all over the place (*page flipping noises*)

Jaz: Oh, I'm sorry. Last parsha is the first time we get it. (*Khesed laughs*)

Lulav: Yeah. Also, sorry to use a Greek word. I am very adamant about not saying synagogue because it's Greek, but —

Khesed: Mm.

Jaz: Really?

Lulav: Yeah! Cuz it's like, a place of coming together, but that's Greek.

Jaz: Well, what do you use instead?

Lulav and Khesed, simultaneously: Shul.

Lulav: Which is Yiddish.

Khesed: Or temple if you're nasty.

Jaz: But, being that shul is a Yiddish word, that seems exclusionary of — like, I wouldn't call a Sephardic place a shul.

Khesed: True.

Lulav: That's very fair.

Khesed: There's probably like, a Ladino word that's —

Jaz: There probably is, but I don't know it. (*Laughs*)

Lulav: (*laughing*) Oh no! Now I'm having a crisis. Anyway! Back to the point. It's basically like, I'm flexing and will continue to flex. And then Moshe and Aharon go to Pharaoh and are like, hey, we've had some pretty reasonable demands, we think, but if you don't want to accede to those demands, we are going to go on strike again, which in this case looks like locusts all over the country. Your crops were already destroyed by hail and they're just going to get eaten too. Get dunked on.

Jaz: Yes.

Lulav: And so Pharaoh is like, this guy... let's just placate him with cool work spaces, I mean, um, give him everything he wants. So they come back. They're like, okay, Pharaoh's ready to bargain. And Pharaoh says, "okay, you can go. But wait, who's going to go?" And Moshe's like, "we're going to go with our young people and with our old people, everybody's going, and so are our livestock."

Jaz: Yours says, "our young people and our old people?"

Lulav: "We will go with our young and our old —

Jaz: Huh.

Lulav: "we will go with our sons and daughters. We will go with our flocks and herds because we have the Lord's festival to celebrate."

Khesed: Yeah, that's pretty much what the JPS says too.

Jaz: Huh, fascinating.

Lulav: Remind me what translation are you primarily reading from, Jaz?

Jaz: I was looking at my Reform translation, which does not use young and old specifically, but translated that line specifically as "we will all go, regardless of social station."

Lulav: I love that.

Jaz: Yeah.

Khesed: Alright! Little bit of editorializing.

Jaz: It's a little bit of editorializing, but I love it. *(laughs)*

Lulav: Yeah I think that this part is doing the merism that we see with "He made them male and female"

Jaz: Right.

Lulav: It's like, we will go with our young *and* our old, just like all of them, and so that translation is um, Jaz you're the linguist — it's like the gist, rather than the exact thing?

Jaz: Yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: Translation is an art. There's a person who I follow whose name is Ártemis López I think, who talks a lot about how queer translation is an art in and of itself to try and get the nuance and that's the feeling I have here.

Jaz: Good.

Lulav: Pharaoh's like, "yeah, that doesn't sound right, you don't need to bring your kids. Plainly you have some evil purpose in mind."

Khesed: Does it say evil purpose?

Lulav: In this transaction, yeah.

Khesed: Okay. In the JPS it says, You are meant on mischief. *(Lulav laughs)*

Jaz: Mine too, yeah.

Lulav: I love that, yeah. Clearly, you're mischief makers, you social justice warriors. And so, only your men! Nobody else.

Jaz: Yeah

Khesed: And that's the first aliyah.

08:47

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: So I have big questions.

Lulav: Big questions.

Khesed: Big questions. I have lots of little questions, but I'm gonna start with the big question.

Lulav: I love it.

Khesed: Which, what the heck is going on here? *(Jaz laughs, then Khesed laughs)* Like, starting with the very first verse, it's like, hey G-d? Hey G-d, what's up? Why you makin it so Pharaoh won't let your people go?

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: And also, why are you so intent on getting so much attention?

Jaz: Yeah. I think that's kind of the big theological question of this whole area, is why is G-d doing that? And the commentary that I read a little bit said even though we recognize this introduces kind of a theological problem, the text itself was probably more concerned with establishing how powerful G-d was in terms of saying that nothing happened that could be ultimately opposed to G-d's wishes, so if Pharaoh was being really stubborn and annoying, that must have somehow also been part of the plan. *(Lulav sighs dramatically)* And so they were focused on that instead. I feel like we can do better in interpreting, but that was the one that they offered to me.

Lulav: Yeah. I like that as a Doylist interpretation.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: My Watsonian is that —

Jaz: Please.

Lulav: Like you said in the short summary, none of us until all of us are free.

Jaz: Mm hmm.

Lulav: If they just went with the first offer that they got, it wouldn't set a precedent. It wouldn't mean that they're gone. And so, like we've talked about it previous episodes, this shows us that it's a long process to get permanent gains

Khesed: Mm.

Jaz: Mm hmm.

Lulav: And so I think insofar as it is explicitly part of G-d's plan, it's like, okay I'm going to make sure that you demonstrate your power and My power and get your people free forever.

Jaz: Yeah. I was listening to another commentary. Rabbi Sandra Lawson has these like one minute Torah analysis and like she calls it "minute lessons from the Torah" and she has a little podcast that does that too and this was her take away from the whole parsha. And she said it as "we ain't leaving anybody behind."

Lulav: Good.

Khesed: Yeah

Lulav: Do you have further questions, Khesed?

Khesed: Well I want to bring one teaching that I learned from my rabbi, Rabbi Arielle Lekach-Rosenberg

Lulav: Whoo!

Khesed: Yeah, she's great.

Lulav: *(whispering)* Also really pretty.

Khesed: She's so beautiful. *(all laugh)* So I brought this up to her, like, hey, why does G-d value getting attention over the liberation of people and her response was basically like, G-d has needs too. *(Lulav and Jaz burst out laughing)* Like, G-d wants to be loved just like everyone else, okay? *(Lulav laughs harder)* Let G-d have friends.

Jaz: Oh my G-d. Alright Lulav, can you keep us moving?

Lulav: Yes, I can keep you moving. Then the Lord said to Moshe, stretch out your hand, do the locust thing, so he did. There was an east wind that brought the locusts and they covered everything just like was said. Pharaohs was like, "oh I have trespassed against Hashem! Do forgive my sin just this once and pray to the Lord your G-d that at the least he remove this deadly thing from me." So it's basically like, as soon as the union starts agitating about like, we're definitely going to go on strike, the boss is like, oh, oh no I'll give you one extra day of paid time off.

Jaz: Uh huh.

Lulav: On top of the zero that you already have.

Jaz: Uh huh.

Lulav: So Moshe is like okay, "I'm going to take you at your word" and he prayed to relieve the locusts. And then as soon as the locusts are gone, as soon as that pressure

is gone, Pharaoh is like, "nah, you're not going. I'm good, nothing bad has ever happened here." And so Moshe does a plague of darkness, just dense darkness is all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another. And this is well within the wheelhouse of Hashem, as we have seen from — I do not remember the name of the parsha, but it's the one where Lot is partying down and just everyone is like, "oh I can't see anything suddenly."

Jaz: Uh huh.

Lulav: I don't know. Does anybody have questions so far?

13:03

Khesed: Uh —

Lulav: Or should I finish this part?

Khesed: Go ahead and finish the aliyah.

Lulav: Pharaoh summons Moshe and says "okay, now you can go just please leave your livestock, even your children can go," and Moshe's like, "no, that's not enough. We also have to have maternity leave," which in this case is livestock for sacrifices, because that's the point of the quote "festival" end-quote. So Pharaoh's like, "ugh, this is just too much! Women in the workplace?" (*Jaz chuckles*) "And take care that you not see my face again, for on the day you see my face, you shall die."

Khesed: Yup.

Lulav: And Moshe's like, "okay, bye forever, I guess."

Khesed: That's the end of the chapter and you went over a little bit on the aliyah, but that's fine.

Lulav: Okay.

Khesed: So I'm really curious about this whole festival thing.

Lulav: Mm hmm.

Khesed: What does Pharaoh think is happening? Does he think that the Israelites are gonna come back after the festival?

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: That's what they're promising him. I don't know that he thinks that they're coming but they would like him to think that they're coming back. Isn't that the implication?

Lulav: Yeah, I think that fits — oh, did you have something?

Khesed: No, I'm just like, this is a part of the narrative that you don't get in like, *Prince of Egypt*.

Lulav: *(laughs)* Yeah. It's all contained in one song.

Khesed: *(laughs)* You know, I don't actually read Torah as much as I should —

Lulav: *(snorts)* Mood.

Khesed: And I kind of forget that there's this stuff that I forget about, so.

Lulav: So I think that this fits really well into the schema that I was talking about where you have to agitate for permanent gains. If Pharaoh had just been like, aah you can go do a festival, then there probably would just have been an annual festival with a bunch of sacrifices where everybody went. But because there's such an arduous process and there are — what's the liberal saying — deep rifts, it ends with the Israelites just leaving forever, because there is no way to be slaves and also worship the G-d of freedom.

Jaz: There is a note also that I was reading in my commentary that said also these plagues — I always envision them taking place, you know, very very close to each other, but that they're actually supposed to have taken place over the course of a year.

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: So people have a long time to be really fed up with stuff and organize and whatever.

Lulav: Mm. And I was going to high school when Scott Walker was just elected in Wisconsin.

Jaz: There's a plague.

Lulav: Right? So I definitely lived through some very drawn-out teachers contract negotiations and yeah, it takes a while to demand and be rewarded with what you need.

Khesed: Right. Which I mean, there's a lot to wrestle with here in our modern time of incremental progress versus revolution. *(Lulav laughs)* This is revolution, where they refuse to accept the incremental progress.

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: And it's like okay, what does this have to tell us about now?

Lulav: I think where we are — what's the word? Progressives, socialists... whatever is relevant in this case —

Khesed: I don't know.

Lulav: Where we do not accept incremental change is where that incremental change is the end of it.

Khesed: Right.

Lulav: We need a festival where we have our young ones and our livestock. You can't just like, let trans people in the military and call it a day. *(Khesed laughs)*

Jaz: Yeah.

Khesed: Right.

Jaz: This may be tangential, but I have this quote rattling around in my head, which is one of those famous Assata Shakur that goes *(more intense and louder voice)* "It's our duty to fight for our freedom! It is our duty to win! We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains."

Khesed: Oh that's cute.

Lulav: Thank you ma'am. Not you — the quote —

Jaz: No, I understood (*laugh*)

Lulav: Yeah, the Lord said to Moshe, "I will bring one more plague and then afterwards he's going to let you go. In fact, he'll just going to let you go to the festival, he's going to drive you out. Tell the people that everyone is just going to ask for some gold, just silver and gold. Gimme necklaces." And there's this bit about how Moshe is important, that doesn't seem to relate to anything.

Khesed: Well, okay, so I think it does, because —

Lulav: Okay

Khesed: The JPS in that same verse says "and Hashem disposed the Egyptians favorably towards the people"

Lulav: Right.

Khesed: And Moses was much esteemed in the land of Egypt. So this guy, who was bringing all these plagues on behalf of G-d —

Lulav: Oh!

Khesed: as still somehow liked by the Egyptians, I am just blown away but he is verse because i'm like, how do the Egyptians still like the Israelites after all of this has gone down?

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: I think this points to, regardless of popular support, the bosses won't give in.

Khesed: Mm. Okay.

Lulav: So like it can be comically obvious that Pharaoh's actions are bad for Egypt as a whole and the Egyptian people can be like, "yeah, just let them go man, this isn't worth it," and they can care a lot about that, but it doesn't matter because Pharaoh's the one giving orders and the military and stuff are the ones following the orders.

Khesed: I like that Perchik Corner, thank you.

Lulav: *(laughs)* Thanks. This entire episode is just a Perchik Corner.

Khesed: And that is also the end of the third aliyah.

18:25

Lulav: Oh fun! Number 4: Moshe lays out the plague of the first born. Humans of great station, of low station, livestock, they're all just going to die and that's going to be so injurious to the entire land of Egypt, but it's not that they're going to attack the Israelites as a result, not even a dog shall growl at any of them. The officials are just going to be like, please leave us, please take everyone, and we'll leave. So Hashem says to Moshe, *(voice echoing)* "hey dude, Pharaoh's not going to listen to you, in order that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt" *(normal voice)* so I guess the tone of voice that I had there was more of a personal reading than what's actually in the text but yeah, They did all these wonders and basically Hashem is like, *(voice echoing)* "this is going to be bad, but We've got a way to protect you. Make sure that you sacrifice some lambs. They can be sheep, they can be goats, both are lambs I guess. You keep the lamb until the 14th day of this month and then the whole assembled congregation shall slaughter it together and then paint the blood on the lintel of their houses." *(interjected cough, and then an obviously added aside, Lulav says, weakly, "keep going." The echo fades)* "They'll eat it and burn any leftovers to a crisp and they will eat it fully dressed as though they're running away. This is the Passover of the Lord, for I will pass through the land of Egypt that night and will strike down every first born but when I see the blood I will pass over you and no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. Any questions?

Khesed: Oh my gosh. This was a long aliyah. I have a lot of questions.

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: First and foremost, this is the peak of the G-d, hey whatcha going moment? *(Lulav laughs)* Because G-d is literally killing everyone regardless of status —

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: Or you know, complicity in slavery or power —

Lulav: Mm hmm.

Khesed: to make the slavery happen, just to be a show off, which is extremely problematic. Like it literally says in the JPS, "and every first born in the land of Egypt shall die from the first born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones."

Lulav: Mm hmm.

Khesed: So are there just also Egyptian slaves?

Lulav: Yes! As established two parashot ago.

Khesed: Okay.

Lulav: That Yosef was overseeing — yeah.

Jaz: Although they don't fully talk about those people as slaves in the exact same way, I don't think?

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: We talked about that as more akin to serfs or indentured servitude.

Khesed: Okay.

Jaz: But definitely there are Egyptians who have nothing.

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: And also the cows. Like, the cows didn't do this. (*Lulav chuckles*) Why are the cows dying? Why are the serfs dying? Like, also, why is Pharaoh's kid dying? Like, Pharaoh's kid didn't do this.

Lulav: Right.

Khesed: Like, G-d is supposed to love justice. (*page turning noise*) Why is G-d intentionally escalating this to the point where people who aren't necessarily for this are dying?

Lulav: I think that's been true since the very beginning. Like, blood in the river Nile messes with everybody in Egypt.

Khesed: That's true. But it's not like, death.

Lulav: It's just this is more direct.

Khesed: Yeah.

Lulav: And it might be a thing of like, people don't notice when it's just stuff that's affecting their bottom line but when there is direct action taken against their person, then they're like, oh, whoops.

Khesed: There was not a house in the land that did not know death.

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: Right. but also, I mean, this one's supposed to be, as I understood it, a direct parallel to the thing that Pharaoh was demanding happen to all the Israelites. Like when it says they passed over all of their houses, that also assumes that all of the Israelites didn't lose a first born, but contextually, they probably all mostly have already.

Khesed: Mm.

Lulav: Mm. *(laughs, then sighs)* Oh boy. True.

Jaz: Because you know, Moshe's life is saved, but you know, it's been a generation. He's an adult, which means it's been a generation since Pharaoh's order went through of kill all of the first born of the Israelites, so contextually, it seems like the ultimate suffering is for them to suffer as we have suffered.

Lulav: Yeah. *(pause)* That's so much.

Khesed: Yeah.

Jaz: It is. It's a lot.

Khesed: Went digging in the commentary, and I found this guy, Akeidat Yitzchak, which, I don't know if he's like big and important. He was the only guy who had English translation so *(laugh)* that's who I read.

Lulav: Baruch Hashem.

Khesed: And I found some really upsetting stuff about punishment. The reason why the plagues escalated this far was because they say the incentive for repentance is fear and terror, which is not what we lefty people like to think about, like —

Lulav: Depends on the lefty. *(laughs)*

Khesed: That's true. That's very very true. It's not what crunchy people like.

Lulav: Yeah. *(Jaz laughs)*

Khesed: It's definitely not what we like to think about how we make meaningful and cultural change.

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: We like to reach out to people and like, have people's needs met and this commentary is like, no, in order to make meaningful change you need to make people terrified and make an example out of them, basically, which is — that makes me uncomfortable, but it's in there.

Lulav: I don't know that that's wrong when talking about like what is realistically in people's power. Like, it would be wonderful if you could just sit down with everybody and be like, hey, why are you complicit in this situation that keeps all of us held down? Just let us go.

Khesed: Yeah.

Lulav: That would be the ideal, but you can't do that, and so, big violent action in this case is not directly taking out the people who are impediments, but — I don't know.

Jaz: We do have the concept that people in power do not just willingly give up power.

Lulav: Right? There's literally nothing that you could say to probably any Republican elected official in America that would get them to not be — this is a good Jewish podcast — a jerk.

Jaz: *(laughs)* Can we keep moving? I —

Lulav: Yes! Sorry. Okay. So Moshe called all the elders of Israel and said, "This is a big deal. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a desirable to the Lord throughout all generations. This is a forever festival. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day, you'll remove the leaven for whoever eats it shall be excommunicated. On the first day, you shall hold a solemn assembly and on the 7th day a solemn assembly. No work shall be done on those day, so it's like a special Shabbat. Only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt, which is like, a restatement of previous stuff.

Jaz: Yeah. Just to be clear, when it says you shall do this because on this day I brought you out of the land of Egypt —

Lulav: Mm hmm.

Jaz: We are saying this before we've left Egypt, yeah?

Khesed: Yes.

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: Which is wild. Just in the middle of the big dramatic thing, we get these lists of rules. *(Lulav giggles)* It's kind of like an interlude. Imagine if in the *Prince of Egypt*, right before the final, somebody coming up, like here's what you're going to do, for forever. *(Jaz laughs)* You're going to have all these rules. You're going to cook a lamb but you can't cook more of it than you need because we don't like food waste. *(Jaz and Lulav laugh)* Why is this here? Why isn't this at the end?

Jaz: I have a partial explanation.

Khesed: Okay.

Jaz: Which is, I do not think, the technical religious version of the explanation, but my version of the explanation is you have to imagine you're telling this story and you're telling it as kind of a didactic story and you're telling it to an audience that already celebrates Pesach and also in that audience is children, *(Lulav chuckles)* and if you tell the moral bit about here's the rituals at the very end, the children are all like, I'm leaving, I'm out of here, *(Lulav laughs)* you have bored me, I already finished the story part, but if you do it in the middle, where you're like, we were in this dramatic thing and then, guess how that connects to what we do now, Shlomo?

Khesed: Okay

Jaz: And then they're like, but — but the story! And then they're like, uh huh, so when are you supposed to eat matzah? *(Lulav laughs)* And they're like, but — but, the story! *(Lulav laughs)* So you insert your didactic thing in the middle and then you go back to the story. *(laughs)*

Khesed: Okay, that does make sense. and it is kind of wild because I knew that Pesach was a Torah holiday but also we literally do the Seder and it's in the Torah *(Jaz laughs)* and I'm like, y'all, it's right there! What!

Lulav: *(laughs)* Yeah, I'm looking at a Seder plate right now. It's in the Torah!

Jaz: It's in the Torah! Except for the lambs stuff. We don't do the lamb stuff like that anymore because we don't have a temple.

Khesed: Also we have leftovers. *(laughs)*

Lulav: Also, I mean the guess is plate is not — I think the plate stuff is made up.

Khesed: It's all made up but...

Jaz: Well, we're supposed to have bitter herbs —

Lulav: Yeah!

Jaz: We're supposed to have matzah... yeah.

Khesed: We're supposed to have bitter herbs and matzah and the lamb, like we eat —

Lulav: Cool, I love that.

Jaz: I think the eggs are a little bit more made up (*Khesed laughs*). Anyway, let's keep going.

Lulav: Okay, sorry, right, where were we? In the first month from the evening of the fourteenth day to the evening of the twenty first day, you shall you eat unleavened bread. For seven days — okay we're still talking about matzah (*Khesed laughs*) Then Moshe called all the elders of Israel and said, "Okay, get those lambs for your families and... slaughter them. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood in the basin and touch the lintel on the door two posts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning for the Lord shall pass through to strike down the Egyptians. When he sees the blood on the lintel on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the (*dramatic emphasis*) DESTROYER to pass through your houses to strike you down. You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children," which is interesting. I guess that's what you were talking about how we don't do the like paschal sacrifice exactly because we don't have a Temple?

Jaz: Yeah, but basically, like Khesed was saying, we just do exactly this forever.

Lulav: Yeah.

Khesed: Yeah.

Lulav: Technically, we should be painting blood on our mezuzah (*Khesed laughs*) with like hyssop.

Jaz: I think that's why we have a mezuzah instead. It's fine.

Lulav: Oh, yeah, so you can shma, that sounds great. I love that.

Khesed: I don't recognize this word that it has for destroyer.

Lulav: Oh yeah?

Khesed: Yeah, I think the word is ha-mashchit.¹

Jaz: Hmm

Khesed: Which is a feminine word, so girl power I guess!

Lulav: *(laughs)* Do you have “Destroyer” in your text, Jaz?

Jaz: Um, yes I do have it as destroyer.

Lulav: Cool, so that’s a universal translation.

Khesed: And it’s capitalized.

Jaz: Yeah, it sure is.

Lulav: Oh, it’s not for me. *(Khesed laughs)*

Lulav: I love that.

Jaz: It definitely is for me, and I’m checking it’s not in the Chabad version, it is just, yeah. I have two translations. As usual.

Lulav: Cool. I love that for you.

Khesed: I have two translations, but one is in a book and one’s on my phone.

Lulav: “You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. And when you come to the land the Lord will give you as He has promised, you shall keep this observance, and when the children ask, ‘Uh..what does this mean?’, you’ll say, “It is the Passover sacrifice for the Lord for He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he struck down the Egyptians, but spared our houses.” And everybody clapped.

Jaz: Just have the four children start right here.

¹ Exodus 12:23

Khesed: Or we pour out our entire booze.

Lulav: What?

Khesed: Or we pour out our entire booze because of that, because people died.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Yeah, pour one out for ... everyone.

Jaz: I actually do love that, kind of.

Lulav: So...the Israelites went and did just as the Lord had commanded Moshe and Aaron. At midnight, the Lord struck down everyone, Pharaoh woke up and was like, “Oh, my son was carrying a vase and then he dropped it,” and now he’s on his lap. Sorry that’s Prince of Egypt.

Khesed: That’s not in here...

Lulav: No... so yeah, he was very sad because his son died and there was a loud cry in Egypt for there was not a house without someone dead. So...he summons Moshe and Aaron immediately in the night and says, get outta here. Go worship the Lord, I don’t care anymore. Bring a blessing on me too..

Jaz: Yeah...

Lulav: And so the Egyptians, you know, urged them to leave. So the people took the dough before it was leavened, with kneading bowls wrapped up in cloaks on their shoulders (*laughs*), thanks for the foreshadowing, Bible. This is why we have a festival of unleavened bread.

Khesed: How I interpreted it was like the Israelites were literally receiving that knowledge of the laws of Pesach before they knew they were — before they were leaving. So it’s like they didn’t leaven their bread on purpose —

Jaz: Oh, my G-d.

Khesed: And then, yeah —

(Jaz laughs)

Khesed: So that's just a fun little headcanon.

Lulav: Which is what we do now!

Khesed: Yeah, so —

(Jaz laughs)

Khesed: And I'm also imagining them. They're cleaning their entire house —

(Lulav laughs)

Lulav: Good. So here's the wild thing. The Israelites had previously asked the Egyptians for jewelry and for clothing, and — um — they just gave it. So this copy says, "They plundered the Egyptians."

Khesed: Oh mine says they "stripped" the Egyptians.

Jaz: Mine does, too.

Lulav: Hot.

(Jaz laughs)

Khesed: Kind of like ... Joseph.

Jaz: Ooooooh.

Khesed: How he got stripped of his technicolor dream coat

Lulav: Okay...

Khesed: That happened! That happened! And then he went to Egypt and got stripped again.

Lulav: So they're like bringing upon themselves the title of bechor because it was...abused by Egyptians, I guess is what DiCo might say if he were here?

Jaz: Maybe, and also the bechor is supposed to be the firstborn son, yeah?

Lulav: Hmmmm.

Khesed: And all of them are dead so it's up for grabs.

Lulav: Whoa. Thanks for bringing that up — that's like we're vibing.

Jaz: Wow. Real intense. I have two pieces of commentary.

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: The first one is just re: the word borrow, since they're definitely not borrowing it. The first time this comes up a little bit earlier when G-d said tell the Israelites to borrow it, there's a bit here — Sforno says they needed to be encouraged to ask for this as they might have worried about the Egyptians pursuing them in order to retrieve their riches. It worked in reverse. In fact, the very fact that — spoilers — the Egyptians chased after the Israelites was the immediate reason G-d came to the Israelites' assistance and drowned their pursuers. That was what made them absolutely free.

Lulav: Hmm...

Khesed: Oh... okay. So this is like a tactical thing.

Jaz: But the other one — this one doesn't have attribution, it doesn't say where it came from, but re: stripped, my commentary notes that the people of Israel here seem to have been in the legal position of a slave wife who, upon being expelled from the house, was owed compensation.

Lulav: Alright.

Jaz: So... they were enslaved but if you're getting rid of a person who has been enslaved and living in your home, you owe them, like to pay them.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And —

Jaz: My copy notes in parenthesis —

(Someone whispers slowly, "Reparations...") -

Jaz: Yeah! In our time, some have similarly proposed that "restitution" — i.e., reparations — "be made to the United States to Black Americans as the descendants of slaves."

Lulav: Yeah, so the Israelites journey from Ramses to Succuoth about..six hundred thousand men on foot besides children.

Khesed: What?

Lulav: Um, a mixed crowd also went up with them and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. They baked unleavened cakes out of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt. It was not leavened because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was 430 years, which explains why there are 600,000 Israelites.

Jaz: The, uh, counting thing is actually a little ambiguous, but, yeah.

Lulav: What do you mean — counting thing?

Jaz: Uh, so it does say very specifically 600, 000 men, like they're specific about the men —

Lulav: Mmm

Jaz: But they note that that that figure, like if you're also supposed to have another then huge thousands of women and then also children and whatever, that seems to be too large of a number.

Khesed: Well it also says a mixed multitude went up with them, so maybe the 600,000 also includes some Egyptians defectors.

Jaz: Oh that's interesting.

Lulav: Which it definitely does according to tradition, and possibly according to the text.

Jaz: That's super cool.

Khesed: I mean, like I know that our people does, but I think maybe that number does as well.

Jaz: Hmm. I just mean that even if you say that it includes Egyptian defectors, the one thing the text is really clear about there is gender, in a way that it isn't always, that that's only counting the men, and if you also count in women, you're just like, you have over a million people.

(Lulav laughs)

Jaz: It's just too large of a number, so they think that maybe the word that we're translating as thousands, which in more modern traditions definitely is thousand, here did not mean thousand. That it meant like a contingent.

Lulav: Oh, like 600 contingents. Okay.

Jaz: Right. And those might have been smaller than a thousand.

Lulav: Oh and that makes sense because 600 is divisible by 12 evenly, so.

Jaz: Oh cool.

Lulav: Yeah. 430 years! All the companies of the Lord went up from the land of Egypt. That was for the Lord a night of vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt. Uh...So

Hashem is working overtime. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the Lord *by* all the Israelites, throughout their generations. So the Lord said to Moshe and Aaron, (*voice echoing*) “This is the ordinance of the Passover. No foreigner shall eat of it, but any slave who has been purchased —” (*normal voice*) ugh (*voice echoing*) “ — may eat of it after he has been circumcised. No bound or hired servant may eat of it. If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the Passover of the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised. Then, he shall draw near to celebrate it. He shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.”

Khesed: Why are they so obsessed with penises?

(*Jaz laughs*)

Lulav: Yes. Unfortunately. So the thing about circumcision is that — I don’t know if I’ve talked about this already — but it hearkens from the practice of when you’re making a covenant between people, you sacrifice something. Usually it’s like you circumcise - like cut around the neck of a livestock animal -

Khesed: Oh.

Lulav: But when it comes to a covenant with God, what you sacrifice is part of your own flesh, that isn’t actually necessary (*laughs*) so it’s like you cut around — you cut the covenant — wink wink is how I say it.

Khesed: So — you’re sacrificing your foreskin?

Lulav: Yes — and also women aren’t people.

Khesed: Ugh...

Lulav: But yeah. When we talk about circumcision here, we are talking about wholeheartedly participating in these celebrations.

37:30

Khesed: Mmmm...

Lulav: So basically it's saying don't just let randos at Pesach with you, make sure it's people who like, actually care about your family's traditions.

Khesed: Mmm.

Lulav: And are celebrating it as like, a solemn and joyful festival with you.

Khesed: Okay, I'm in to that.

Lulav: Does that jive with you, Jaz?

Jaz: Um, yes, I will say that I like the interpretation and I don't like the full way that the text reads.

Lulav: Very fair.

Jaz: Such that if it were up to me, and maybe a suggestion for the future I guess, I would rather hear your summary rather than what the text says as we go through our summaries and stuff

Khesed: Mmm.

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: Because the literal quotes are —

Lulav: Pretty nasty.

Jaz: Grating. Yeah, um. But I will say that the thing it is reminding me of as you say only have people who value it there is how sometimes there are Christian seders that just have no Jews at them (*Lulav sighs*) and just say we're going to do Jewish things and I don't like those.

Lulav: No...

Khesed: Makes me want to do a punch.

Lulav: *(laughs)* Yeah and there was an NPR story about Jews inviting goyim to their seders, which, like —

Jaz: I do that. I feel fine about that.

Khesed: Isn't that like a custom? Because like you're supposed to invite people to eat with you.

Lulav: Right, so on the one hand, I love the general idea of like, hey friends! Come learn about our Jewish tradition and have fun with us at this solemn festival where we feed you. On the other hand, it being on NPR just like in a very public location without the nuance of, don't invite people who don't take this seriously - don't love that

Jaz: Mmm... but I've always had non Jews at seders, and especially as you're part of communities that have interfaith couples and stuff. What are you going to do — like invite somebody and not invite their partners? That's so rude.

Lulav: Oh G-d, yeah. And like when I was a kid and wasn't being actively Jewish but still doing Pesach, it was very important to me — like we didn't have our own Passover meals at home. We went to like, the Goldstein's. Is that their last name?

Khesed: I don't know, I don't know those people.

Lulav: You don't know these people. Anyway point is like we went to other Jewish families who we were family friends with and had a big communal meal.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: And read out of their haggadot.

Jaz: Yeah, okay are we done? Almost done.

Lulav: There is a lot of repetition that you're going to keep it forever. So Pesach is —

Khesed: Big deal.

Lulav: big deal. More about leavened and unleavened bread. And you shall tell you children on that day it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt. And I think the amount of restatement here about telling the children is like, very much in keeping with you thing about okay, now what do we do on Pesach?

(Khesed and Jaz laugh)

Lulav: But yeah it shall serve for you as a sign on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of the Lord may be on your lips, for with a strong hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt. And there's a note about like, the meaning of this being uncertain in my text and I think it's just like you rhand and your forehead are both very important places to your selfhood.

Jaz: Mm.

Lulav: So like marking a reminder there confess with your hand that the Lord brought you out of Egypt, mark upon your forehead that the Lord did it.

Khesed: This is also just like tefillin.

Jaz: Mm-hmm.

Lulav: Yeah, absolutely. So yeah, there is a thing about setting aside the firstborn livestock, just forever.

Khesed: The issue of every womb.

Lulav: The first issue of every womb.

(Khesed laughs)

Lulav: And when children are like, hey, what does this mean? You shall answer: by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt from the house of salvery when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all of the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord every male that first opens the womb but every firstborn of my sons I redeem. So like it's following from the plague of the firstborn. We're not sacrificing our own firstborn

first off, very important, don't do that, but like we are taking the stuff that we eat, we're like putting a damper on the growth of our fortunes, as a memory of what happened when we were brought out of Egypt.

Khesed: Also we wear tefillin

Lulav: Yes, also wear tefillin is restated the second time. That's the end.

Khesed: That's the end!

Lulav: We did it!

Khesed: Are we allowed to have one more big question at the end?

Lulav: Absolutely!

Khesed: So... I want to complicate this.

Lulav: Uh-oh.

Khesed: Is this a story of exile? Is this a story where we are being kicked out of a country because they're being anti-Semitic and this may or may not work, but I want to try to tie it in to like currently there's rising anti-Semitism and it sucks.

Jaz: Hmm-mm.

Khesed: And this is a story of leaving a place that was oppressive. At what point do we leave because like, obviously we're not enslaved, so we're not to this point yet, where we have to be freed by God. But also like a lot of people are saying in response to people being like well, I'm scared, we should free, no you have to stay and fix it.

Lulav: Hmm.

Khesed: It's like the Israelites didn't have to stay and fix Egyptian culture. They just left. At what point do you leave and when do you stay?

Jaz: And where do you go? Right?

Khesed: Right.

Jaz: Because the thing they do is like they're saying I will bring you into this land of milk and honey, where all of these other people already live, and so what does that mean?

Lulav: So, like, Khesed, when you say at what point do you leave, at what point do you stay? I think you're using the general you?

Khesed: Yes.

Lulav: But like I think it is a personal question for every single person. At what point do you decide we can't live here and I need to bring all the people I care about somewhere else? And there's also the question of to what extent is wherever I live my homeland, and I will protect the people around me, and build a brighter future where I am. And that's just something everybody has to answer.

Jaz: Although here they make a collective decision

Khesed: Like here no one leaves until everyone leaves.

Jaz: Yeah, yeah there is that aspect to it too. Like is it an individual decision or do we all need to stick together?

Lulav: I mean my midrash on this is that there are people who stayed. There are people who didn't mark their lintel with the blood of the firstborn. And they're still Israelites, they just don't go onto become Jews.

Jaz: Hmmm...

Lulav: But like they still live where they were, they are the descendants of Israel and like they keep on living.

Jaz: Hm. Yeah.

Lulav: Because there will never be a complete exodus from a land. Like you can never leave with every single person.

Jaz: Well except that there's like, precious few Jews in Hungary these days. So like you can if the population is willing to kill you.

Lulav: Right.

Khesed: It's like we have these conflicting ancestries where at one point we have this amazing liberation story where we stuck to our guns even though they didn't have guns back then (*chuckles*) and they stuck together and they didn't leave until everyone was liberated, and they stuck through it together. Also the historical reality of we are the descendants of the people who did what they had to do in order to survive. And for a lot of our ancestors, that meant fleeing countries by themselves or with just a few people, and not with everyone, who were left behind and died.

Lulav: Like my great-grandparents ran from pogroms. I would like to think that I die on a barricade.

Jaz: Hmm.

Lulav: So like it varies for everyone.

Jaz: Yeah, yeah. Oooh. Thank you for that question and complication, Khesed. (*Jaz and Lulav laugh*)

Khesed: Thank you, and I'm sorry.

Lulav: It's never okay.

Jaz: Can we do light hearted ratings before we end?

Lulav: Absolutely!

Jaz: Khesed, out of ten plagues — sorry to take the easy one — (*Lulav and Khesed laugh*)

Lulav: How dare you!

Jaz: How many plagues would you give this parsha?

Khesed: Ooh... I would give it ten whole plagues with the entirety of the suffering those plagues have.

Jaz: Ooooh.

Lulav: I love that.

Khesed: So it's like this is a full rich parsha, and it's not pleasant. That's why I love it.

Jaz: Hmm..

Lulav: Khesed, do you have a rating yet?

Khesed: Yeah, how many men were there? 600,000?

Lulav: Yeah, 600,000 men.

Khesed: Alright.

Lulav: Besides children.

Khesed: Lulav, out of 600,000 men and several women —

(Jaz and Lulav laugh)

Khesed: What would you rate this parsha?

Jaz: You gotta stop giving Lulav scales with men.

(all laugh)

Khesed: At least I included several women.

Lulav: I would rate this parasha 545,732 men.

Khesed: Alright, cool.

Lulav: Besides children. Yeah, it's really good. I mean, this is kind of a middle parsha. It's continuing the story. There isn't any of the really close familial drama that we've had in the rest of the Moshe arc or like in the Genesis stuff.

(Khesed laughs)

Lulav: But like it's a solid portion and there's a lot to think about here. So year, 545, 732 — is that what I said?

Khesed: Yeah, I'd say that sounds right. And no women?

Lulav: Well, we just don't talk about them.

Lulav: Jaz, out of seven days, the first and seventh of which are solemn assemblies, what would you rate this parsha?

Jaz: I would rate it six days, but including both of the solemn ones. There's like a day in the middle that's like maybe a half day. But yeah so I really like it, I think it's really intense, and I appreciate that. That it gives us a lot to wrestle with. I love Passover. Passover's my favorite holiday.

(Khesed and Lulav laugh)

Lulav: You can't even challah on it so, it's not even a challah-day!

Jaz: Yeah, but so I love Pesach. And I love how much this one causes us to struggle with ideas of liberation of what is it, what could it be, and I really do struggle with some of the death and stuff that is entailed in that. I don't know if we come back to it, but if we don't, if we don't talk about it again before Passover, I just want to say that it is really important to me, and I really love that we have as part of our official liturgy, that we mourn what happened with the firstborn and with all of the plagues, that we're not supposed to be taking joy in their pain, even as we're celebrating our freedom

Lulav: Jaz?

Jaz: Yeah?

Lulav: Can you take us to the close?

Jaz: Yeah. I sure can. Thank so much for listening to Kosher Queers, If you like what you've heard, you can support us on Patreon at patreon.com/kosherqueers, which will give you bonus content and help us keep making this for you. You can also follow us on Twitter @kosherqueers or like us on Facebook at Kosher Queers, or email us your questions, comments, and concerns at kosherqueers@gmail.com and please spread the word about our podcast! Our artwork is by the talented Lior Gross. Our music is courtesy of the fabulous band Brivele, whose work you can find on Bandcamp. Go buy their album, they're great. Our sound production this week is done by my lovely co-host Lulav Arnow.

Lulav: *(sings in "Thus says the Lord" melody from Prince of Egypt song)* Thus says my co-host!

Jaz: I'm Jaz Twersky and you can find me @WordNerdKnitter on Twitter. I recorded this audio on the traditional lands of the Lenape people.

Lulav: I'm Lulav Arnow and you can find me @spacetrucksix on Twitter, or yell at me @palmliker! I recorded this audio on the traditional lands of the Wahpékute and Anishinaabeg, as did our good friend Khesed. Khesed, where can we find you on the internet?

Khesed: You can find me on Twitter @KhesedBein, but I'm much better in real life.

Lulav: They are. They're an absolute joy. Have a lovely queer Jewish day.

[Brivele outro music]

Jaz: This week's gender is: firstborn.

Lulav: This week's pronouns are: redeem, redeemed, redemption.