

## Passover VII-Were the Egyptians Guilty? Innocent? Or Both?

### 1. Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 91a (in “Mikraot HaDorot”)

“On [one] occasion, the people of Egypt brought the Jewish people to judgment before Alexander of Macedon. They said to Alexander: ‘It says in their Torah: “And the L-rd had given the [Israelites] favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and [the Egyptians] had granted their request [to give them silver and gold as they left Egypt]” (Ex. 12:36). Compel [the Jews] to return to us the silver and gold they plundered from our ancestors!’

Geviha Ben Pesisa [of the Sages]...went and debated them. He said to them: ‘What source do you cite to prove that you are entitled to the silver and gold?’

The Egyptians responded: ‘We quote the Torah itself!’

[Geviha Ben Pesisa] responded: ‘I too will provide my rebuttal only from the Torah, as the verse says: “The Israelites had lived in Egypt for 430 years” (Ex. 12:40). Where are the wages for the work performed by the 600,000 men whom you enslaved in Egypt for 430 years?’”

### 2. Midrash Avkir (in “Book of Legends”)

“When the Holy One was about to drown the Egyptians in the sea, Uzza, heavenly prince of Egypt, rose up and prostrated himself before the Holy One.

The angel said: ‘Master of the universe, You created the world through the measure of mercy. Why then do You wish to drown my children?’

The Holy One gathered the entire heavenly household and said to them: ‘You be the judge between Me and Uzza, prince of Egypt.’

At that point, the heavenly princes of the other nations began to speak up on behalf of Egypt. When [Israel's heavenly prince] Michael perceived this, he gave the sign to [the angel] Gabriel, who in one swoop darted down to Egypt. There he pulled out a brick with its clay enclosing a dead infant, who had been trapped alive in the structure.

He then came back, stood before the Holy One, and said: ‘Master of the universe, this is how the Egyptians enslaved your children!’

At that point, the Holy One judged the Egyptians through the measure of justice, and drowned them in the sea.

In that instant, the ministering angels wished to sing a song before the Holy One, but He rebuked them, saying, ‘The works of My hands are drowning in the sea, and you would sing a song in My presence?!’”