



על פדות נפשינו

INTERNAL REDEMPTION

פסח תשפ"ד • Pesah 5784

על פדות נפשינו

INTERNAL REDEMPTION

WE OFTEN THINK of slavery and oppression in physical terms. The Torah certainly emphasizes the physical experience of suffering in Egypt. As with all suffering, however, slavery took a spiritual toll as well. This is why it was hard for Benei Yisrael to listen to Moshe: because of a “restriction of spirit” (Exodus 6:9).

As our enslavement includes both physical and spiritual qualities, then, the same must be true of our salvation. God broke our physical bonds and extricated us bodily from the land of Egypt. But that physical deliverance from bondage was only part of the story. Ultimately, it served as a prerequisite for a great spiritual emancipation at Har Sinai when we received the Torah. We quote God’s articulation of this in the Shema every day: “I took you out of the land of Egypt to be to you a God” (Numbers 15:41). The result and purpose of the physical Exodus was to free our bodies, but also to bring us into relationship with God.

Indeed, in the concluding *berakhah* of Maggid in the Haggadah—the last words of our telling the story of redemption—we praise God “עַל גְּאֻלְתֵּנוּ וְעַל פְּדוּת נַפְשֵׁנוּ” - for our redemption, and for the deliverance of our souls.” This doubling indicates that there were two kinds of redemption: one for the body and one for the soul. Both were necessary, and both are part of the story.

This double need also implies that it is possible to have either kind of freedom without the other. Stone walls and iron bars cannot completely imprison people as long as they have freedom in their souls; we might experience profound inner freedom irrespective of the external threats we face. At the same time, corporeal redemption may not be all we need: no matter what earthly freedoms we might enjoy, our souls may remain susceptible to the inner darkness of Egypt. So even when we recline in comfort, the ultimate Exodus—the story of complete and total redemption—is not yet finished.

When we look around the world, and certainly back upon the last few months, we know how true this is. We have seen with our own eyes Jews returned to captivity. And we have felt grieved and trammled by the spiritual bonds in which our unredeemed world is still imprisoned. With that in mind, we hope that studying the essays in this reader will help us all to take meaningful steps forward toward a greater spiritual redemption, and that we might be able to recite a *berakhah* upon the conclusion of the world’s salvation story, speedily in our days.

Wishing you a festival of spiritual redemption,
The Hadar Team

THE HADAR INSTITUTE

Hadar empowers Jews to create and sustain vibrant, practicing, egalitarian communities of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed. Hadar offers learning opportunities for people from all walks of Jewish life, including online courses, public lectures, week-long immersive experiences, and our online Torah and Tefillah library.

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Rabbi Shai Held, President and Dean
Rabbi Avital Hochstein, President of Hadar in Israel
Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, President and CEO
Rabbi Avi Killip, Executive Vice President
Rabbi Aviva Richman, Rosh Yeshiva
Rabbi Ethan Tucker, President and Rosh Yeshiva

EDITORIAL TEAM

Sam Greenberg, Senior Director of Communications
Mikhael Reuven Keshet, Editor
Dr. Jeremy Tabick, Content Manager
Rabbi Effy Unterman, Senior Director of Content
Elisheva Urbas, Editorial Director

Design by Rachel Jackson, www.binahdesign.com

This reader contains words of Torah, so please treat it with appropriate reverence.

Copyright © 2024 by Hadar

Internal Redemption: Pesah Reader 2024 by Hadar is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



THE HADAR INSTITUTE

210 West 93rd St, New York, NY 10025
info@hadar.org
646.770.1468

To donate or sponsor future publications, please contact Jeffrey Stein at stein@hadar.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 THE OPEN DOOR
R. Avi Killip
- 3 WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART
R. Micha'el Rosenberg
- 8 QUESTIONS: PESAH'S ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT
R. Devin Maimon Villarreal, Pedagogy of Partnership
- 11 THE EXODUS THAT CONTINUES
Dena Weiss
- 15 SWEETENING THE BITTER: SPENDING TIME WITH MAROR
R. Elie Lehmann
- 19 THE "OBLIGATION" TO SING AFTER MIRACLES
Joey Weisenberg, Rising Song Institute
- 23 LIVING IN THE DOUBLE EXPOSURE
R. Tali Adler
- 26 CHILDREN OF BELIEVERS
R. Avi Strausberg
- 28 A SEDER OF RETELLINGS
R. Miriam-Simma Walfish
- 31 "לחם עוני": על תסכולים והזדמנויות בליל הסדר
הרב אלעזר סימון
- 33 THE EXODUS AS ORIENTING EVENT
R. Yitz Greenberg
- 36 STORYTELLING AT THE SEDER
An extract from a Project Zug course by Dena Weiss
- 41 FORTY-NINE PORTALS TO TRANSFORMATION
R. Goldie Guy
- 44 OD HA-YOM BE-NOV: HAFTARAH FOR EIGHTH DAY OF PESAH
Chana Kupetz, Children & Families
- 46 BETWEEN GRIEF AND ANTICIPATION: COUNTING THE OMER
R. Shai Held
- 51 COUNT THE OMER
Children & Families Division

WHO WE ARE



RABBI TALİ ADLER

is a member of the Hadar faculty. A *musmekhet* of Yeshivat Maharat and alumna of Stern College for Women, R. Adler has studied at a number of institutions including Hadar, Drisha, and Midreshet HaRova.



RABBI YITZ GREENBERG

serves as the President of the J.J. Greenberg Institute for the Advancement of Jewish Life and as Senior Scholar in Residence at Hadar. R. Greenberg was ordained by Beth Joseph Rabbinical Seminary of Brooklyn, New York, and has a doctorate in history from Harvard University. His book, *The Triumph of Life*, is forthcoming from JPS.



RABBI GOLDIE GUY

is Director of Hadar Chicago. She was ordained in 2017 by Yeshivat Maharat, where she was also a Talmud instructor and a UJA fellow. She previously served as Director of Religious Engagement at Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation in Chicago.



RABBI SHAI HELD

is President, Dean, and Chair in Jewish Thought at Hadar. His most recent book, *Judaism is About Love*, was just published and is available to purchase.



RABBI AVI KILLIP

is Executive Vice President of Hadar. A graduate of Hebrew College Rabbinical School, R. Killip was a Wexner Graduate Fellow and a Schusterman Fellow. She is the host of Hadar's podcasts *Responsa Radio*, *Ta Shma*, and *On Sacred Ground*.



CHANA KUPETZ

is Children and Families Educator at Hadar. Chana taught Hebrew and Judaic Studies at Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School in Washington, DC and at Heilicher Jewish Day School in Minneapolis. Originally from Israel, Chana was a fellow in Hadar's first full-year beit midrash.



RABBI ELIE LEHMANN

is Director of Hadar Boston. He has served as Campus Rabbi and University Chaplain at Boston University Hillel. A Wexner Graduate Fellow and an American Jewish World Service Rabbinical Fellow, Elie graduated from Hebrew College Rabbinical School in 2017.



RABBI DEVIN MAIMON VILLARREAL

is a Senior Coach and Program Manager with Pedagogy of Partnership. Devin received ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, as well as from Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo. A graduate of UCLA in the Study of Religion, he also holds a Master's Degree in Teaching from the American Jewish University and was awarded the Covenant Foundation's Pomegranate Prize for emerging Jewish educators.



RABBI MICHA'EL ROSENBERG

is a member of the Hadar faculty. He holds rabbinic ordination from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and has a doctorate in Talmud and Rabbinics from the Jewish Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Signs of Virginity: Testing Virgins and Making Men in Late Antiquity* (2018), and, with Rabbi Ethan Tucker, of *Gender Equality and Prayer in Jewish Law* (2017), recently translated into Hebrew and published in Israel.



RABBI AVI STRAUSBERG

is Senior Director of National Learning Initiatives at Hadar, and is based in Washington, D.C. She received her rabbinic ordination from Hebrew College in Boston, and was a Wexner Graduate Fellow.



RABBI ELAZAR SYMON

is Beit Midrash Community Coordinator for Hadar Israel. He taught and studied in Yeshivat Otniel. Elazar previously served as the campus rabbi at Cambridge University in the UK, and was ordained by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. He is a regular guest on Hadar's podcast, *On Sacred Ground*.



RABBI MIRIAM-SIMMA WALFISH

is faculty at Hadar and a Senior Coach for Pedagogy of Partnership. She holds a PhD in Rabbinics from Harvard University and has published several articles, including, "Upending the Curse of Eve: Reframing Maternal Breastfeeding in BT Ketubot" (2017).



JOEY WEISENBERG

is Founder and Director of Hadar's Rising Song Institute. He has released eight albums of original music, most recently *Leila*. Joey is also the author of *Building Singing Communities*, a practical guide to bringing people together in song, as well as *The Torah of Music*, a treasury of Jewish teachings and insights about the spiritual nature of music, which received the National Jewish Book Award in 2017.



DENA WEISS

is Rosh Beit Midrash and Senior Faculty at Hadar where she teaches Talmud, Midrash, and Hasidut. Dena earned an MA in Theology from Harvard Divinity School. She has studied and taught in a variety of Jewish educational settings including Drisha, Midreshet Lindenbaum, and Pardes.

CONTRIBUTING HADAR DIVISIONS



CHILDREN & FAMILIES

is building a network of families and young adults aspiring to a shared religious vision. Through ongoing classes and meaningful resources, we are investing in the next generation and building a world animated by our core values of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed.



PEDAGOGY OF PARTNERSHIP

is a relationship-centered approach to Jewish learning that enables learners of all ages to develop the habits of wonder, empathy, and responsibility toward others and Torah. PoP conducts professional development and provides ready-to-use materials for educators, leaders, and families.



PROJECT ZUG

empowers Jews to take ownership over their learning through one-on-one *havruta* learning. We supply curated, high-quality Torah resources and a guided learning framework that enables people of all Jewish learning backgrounds to build deep connections to each other and to our tradition. Combining facilitation and flexibility, Project Zug provides participants with the resources to learn on their own schedule from anywhere in the world.



RISING SONG INSTITUTE

cultivates Jewish spiritual life through song. It is a meeting place and incubator for creative musicians and prayer leaders who hope to reinvent the future of music as a communal Jewish spiritual practice.

THE OPEN DOOR

R. Avi Killip

WHEN I WAS a child, my mother would announce at each Pesah Seder that she had made a donation to a food bank in honor of each guest. She explained that she began this annual practice since today we cannot open our doors directly to the poor. I always understood this to be a wonderful example of caring for the wider world, never once questioning the underlying assumption—and the lesson I was

learning—that we cannot actually open our doors directly. Why not? Why couldn't we invite someone hungry to come and eat at our table with us?

It turns out that resistance to opening the door is as ancient as the mandate itself. We learn both within two lines of each other in the same page of Talmud on Ta'anit 20b-21a. A recounting of the wonderful behaviors of Rav Huna ends with a description of his practice to open the door for the hungry:

פי הנה כרד ריפתא, הנה פתח לבביה, ואמר:
כל מאן דצריך לייתי וליכול.

When [Rav Huna] would eat bread, he would open the doors saying: Whoever needs, let them come in and eat.

Rav Huna's behavior is presented as a model for us. The Haggadah features his invitation almost word for word as we open our Seders: "This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat." We are meant to imitate Rav Huna, and invite the hungry into our homes.

We encounter resistance to this idea, however, in the very next line of the Talmud:

אמר רבא: כולהו מציינא מקיימנא, לבר מהא
דלא מציינא למיעבד, משום דנפישו בני חילא
דמחוזא.

Rava said: I can fulfill all these [customs of Rav Huna] except for this one, which I cannot do, due to the many soldiers in Mahoza.

Rashi explains Rava's concern: there are so many poor people that they would eat all the food. No sooner



Subscribe to Ta Shma

A podcast
where you get to listen in
on Hadar's Beit Midrash



**Ta
Shma**
A HADAR  PODCAST

does the Talmud present us with the open-door model than someone explains that it cannot really be done.

Our fear of opening our homes to the hungry is not new. The impulse to keep the door closed is ancient, and it comes even from a great sage like Rava. Today there are many reasons we might share Rava's feeling that we cannot open our doors to welcome anyone who wishes to join our tables. According to the Food Bank for New York City, 1.1 million city residents—or 12.5 percent of its population—are food insecure.¹ The number of hungry people is overwhelming. Like Rava in *Maḥoza*, I cannot invite them all to dinner.

At today's Seder, we customarily don't open our doors while reciting the invitation to the hungry, but we do open the door at a different point in the evening: near the end when we pour a cup for Elijah. Why open the door to welcome the prophet Elijah so long after the plates have been cleared? A commentary from the *Ma'aseh Rokei'ah*² offers a different reason to keep an open door: "This is our custom: that the doors of the house should remain open, so that when Elijah comes, we will speedily go out to meet him without any delay, for on *Pesah* Israel will be redeemed in the future."³

The *Ma'aseh Rokei'ah* is preparing for another moment of redemption, one that is coming soon, maybe even tonight. We know from the biblical book of Malachi—the passage from the prophets read on the Shabbat before *Pesah* (3:4-24)—that Elijah is the prophet who will come to announce the final redemption. The *Ma'aseh Rokei'ah* keeps the door open on Seder night, not to let others in, but to ensure that the people inside can get out. His custom imagines that when Elijah comes to announce the redemption, there will be no time to waste. The open doors remind us—and the prophet—that we are ready and eager to be redeemed.

Taken together, these two customs have an important lesson to teach: the closed door that keeps out the hungry may also be holding us back from redemption. The Seder traditions teach us that *Pesah* is a time for open doors. Only when we are ready to open our doors to the hungry—when we have addressed the systemic hunger outside to a point where all who are hungry really do have a seat at the table—will we really be open to redemption. May it come speedily in our days. ♦

1 <https://www.foodbanknyc.org/research-reports/>, accessed August 2023.

2 18th century, Amsterdam.

3 For more on these questions and this source, see the teaching of my colleague R. Elie Kaunfer, available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=valjq_VQWAI.

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

R. Micha'el Rosenberg

FOR MANY OF US, the worst eating day of the year is the day before Pesah, the 14th of Nisan. Though the holiday has not yet begun, after a third of the daylight hours have passed we are prohibited from eating any more *hameitz*. Challenging our attempts to have a filling meal further, on Erev Pesah we are also forbidden to have *matzah*:

תלמוד ירושלמי פסחים י:א, דף לז טור ב
אמר רבי לוי: האוכל מצה בערב הפסח כבא
על ארוסתו בבית חמיו והבא על ארוסתו בבית
חמיו לוקה.

Talmud Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:1, 37b

R. Levi said: One who eats matzah on Erev Pesah is like one who has sex with their betrothed in their father-in-law's house—and one who has sex with their betrothed in their father-in-law's house is lashed.

We do not receive any details about this provocatively phrased prohibition. Medieval and early modern authorities therefore disagree about exactly when it goes into effect. Many commentators take

the language of “*erev ha-pesah*” in a straightforward way and accordingly rule that the prohibition goes into effect at dawn on the 14th.¹ R. Zerahyah ha-Levi (the Razah),² however, argues that it only begins halfway through the day:



1 See, for example, Rema Orach Hayyim 471:2. Commentators do not take seriously the possibility that the prohibition would go into effect at sundown the night before, even though that is also, technically, *erev ha-pesah*. Though the Yerushalmi prohibits *matzah* only on the day before Pesah, customs extending the prohibition back further develop later; see, for example, Mishnah Berurah 471:12.

2 12th century, Spain and France.

המאור הקטון טו:

ואע"ג דגרסינן בירושלמי: האוכל מצה בערב הפסח כבועל ארוסתו בבית חמיו. ה"מ משש שעות ולמעלה. אבל עד שש שעות מותר ודיקא נמי דמדמי ליה לארוסה.

Ha-Ma'or ha-Katon 15b.

Even though we read in the Yerushalmi: "One who eats matzah on Erev Pesah is like one who has sex with their betrothed in their father-in-law's house," these words apply [only] from six hours onward. But until six hours, it is permitted. And it is precise, for [R. Levi] compares it to a betrothed.

The Razah does not fully explain his reasoning, but he connects this lenient view to the metaphor, taking it seriously and not as a mere rhetorical flourish. His reasoning seems to be based on the idea that the prohibition on sexual relations with one's betrothed is exactly that—a prohibition on relations after betrothal, the first step in the halakhic marriage process, has already taken place. Likewise, the Razah contends, the prohibition on *matzah* goes into effect only once the Jewish people are "engaged" to *matzah*, that is, once we have a formal halakhic relationship to it. The prohibition on *matzah* therefore goes into effect only when the related prohibition on *hameitz* does, namely, halfway through the day.³

Irrespective of **when** the prohibition on *matzah* goes into effect, **why** should it be forbidden in the lead-up to Pesah? The Rambam provides two different ways of thinking about the reasoning behind the ban, though he presents them as if they are one:

משנה תורה הלכות חמץ ומצה ויב
אסרו חכמים לאכול מצה בערב הפסח כדי
שיהיה הכר לאכילתה בערב. ...
וכן אסור לאכול ערב הפסח מקודם המנחה
כמעט, כדי שיכנס לאכילת מצה בתאווה.

**Mishneh Torah,
Laws of Hameitz and Matzah 6:12**

*The Sages forbade eating matzah on Erev Pesah so that there would be a distinction (heker) to its being eaten at night. ...
And so too a bit before [mid-afternoon] it is forbidden to eat, so that one will go into the eating of matzah with appetite.*

The Rambam begins by saying that we want a clear difference between any mundane eating of *matzah* that might take place at some earlier time before Pesah, and our *mitzvah*-eating of *matzah* on the night of the Seder. He compares this ("and so too") to a similar but distinct ruling that one should not eat anything at all, *matzah* or otherwise, on the afternoon leading into the Seder.⁴ The Rambam describes the reason for this second ruling as "so that one will go into the eating of *matzah* with appetite."⁵ This reason overlaps with the first, but it is not identical: one could mark the difference between mundane *matzah* eating and ritually mandated eating without having to enter the holiday hungry. The Rambam's connecting these two rulings by means of the word *ve-khein* ("and so too") implies that we should take both seriously as explaining our required abstention from *matzah* on the 14th of Nisan.

Eating *matzah* at the Seder, then, requires two things according to the Rambam. First, it must be clear that this is no ordinary eating, but rather, that we are doing it to fulfill a purpose other than sustenance. We must realize, and make clear to anyone observing us, that now we are eating the obligatory *matzah*, the bread of both our oppression and our redemption, to remember our enslavement and mark our emancipation.

Secondly, we must also desire the *matzah*—we must be hungry for it. We can understand this requirement in a number of ways, but however we do, we should not ignore the fact that it fundamentally requires us to relate to the *matzah* as exactly what it is in the here and now: physical food that feeds our bodies. Even as our eating of *matzah* must be clearly other than the fulfillment of bodily needs, it must be eaten with physical hunger!

How are we to understand this tension—that the *matzah* we eat must serve both physical and spiritual

3 Although, as I mentioned above, practical *halakhah* requires abstinence from leavened products after four halakhic hours, this standard reflects Rabbinic stringency; as (some of) the Rabbis understand it, one is biblically prohibited from eating *hameitz* only from halakhic noon onwards. See Bavli Pesahim 28b.

4 Mishnah Pesahim 10:1; the *mishnah's* ruling is adapted in the Bavli so as to allow for light snacking at that point in the day.

5 Based on Bavli Pesahim 99b.

needs? One thing we should learn from this perhaps surprising juxtaposition is that our spiritual lives and our physical needs are not in fact distinct: they go hand in hand. This reality is perhaps nowhere clearer than on the Seder night, when we fulfill the obligation to tell our story not only with words and ideas, but with the tangible foods we ingest.

We can understand the desire to try to separate these two aspects of our lives one from the other. We live in a culture that tends to suggest that there's something unholy about our physical bodies. This idea manifests in Jewish thinking at times as well. Consider the take of R. Moshe Yisrael, an 18th-century rabbi in Rhodes:

שארית ישראל, שבת הגדול ג

דמנהגו של הדיוט הלהוט אחר אכילה אין לו סבלנות וחטיף ואכיל ולא בריך, וכענין שאמר בירושלמי [פסחים יא:]: האוכל מצה בערב פסח כאילו בועל ארוסתו בבית חמיו, והמשל דומה לנמשל דכל המצות שיש בהם הנאת הגוף יש עושים אותם דוקא לשם מצוה ואין תכלית כונתם להנאתן, ויש מהם עושים אותם להנאת גופם דוקא, ומפני זה המשיל האוכל מצה בערב פסח כבועל ארוסתו בבית חמיו. לומר דזה האוכל מצה בערב פסח אף על פי שאחר כך בליל הפסח אוכל מצה, מכל מקום לא שלט בעצמו לסבול עד הלילה לאכול המצה לתיאבון, וזה מורה שעושה להנאת גופו.

She'eirit Yisrael, Shabbat ha-Gadol #3

For the way of a commoner, desirous for food, is to have no patience, and they grab and eat and do not bless, as they said in the Yerusahmi [Pesahim 10:1], "One who eats matzah on Erev Pesah is like one who has sex with their betrothed in their father-in-law's house."

The metaphor resembles the described, for any mitzvah in which there is bodily benefit, some do it specifically for the sake of the mitzvah, and their purpose is not their own benefit. But others do them specifically for the benefit of their own body. Therefore, it compared the one who eats matzah on Erev Pesah to one who has sex with their betrothed in their father-in-law's house, to say that the one who eats matzah on Erev Pesah, even though they later eat matzah on Seder night, nonetheless they

Responsa Radio

A podcast where you ask and we answer questions of Jewish law in modern times



failed to control themselves, to suffer until the night to eat matzah with appetite. And this teaches that they did it for the benefit of their body.

This approach not only distinguishes between actions performed to serve our own physical needs and those performed for some higher spiritual end, but actively denigrates the former as negating the possibility of the latter. I understand the sentiment; personal, physical enjoyment appears to undercut the sincerity of our desire to serve God and fulfill a mission in the world. At the same time, I'm increasingly wary of excessively body-negative theologies such as that expressed here. In this case, the talmudic insistence, codified by the Rambam, that we actually be hungry when we eat the *matzah* at the Seder suggests that physical satisfaction is not an alternative to spiritual service, but a piece of it.

R. Tzvi Elimelekh Spira, the Benei Yissaskhar, understands the relationship between physicality and spirituality differently:

בני יששכר, ניסן ח

המצוה הראשונה (היינו מצות פריה ורביה)...
הוא בנין אב לכל המצות שהן צריכות שימור
והזדמנות רב כמו שהיה מכריז שלמה המלך
ע"ה:

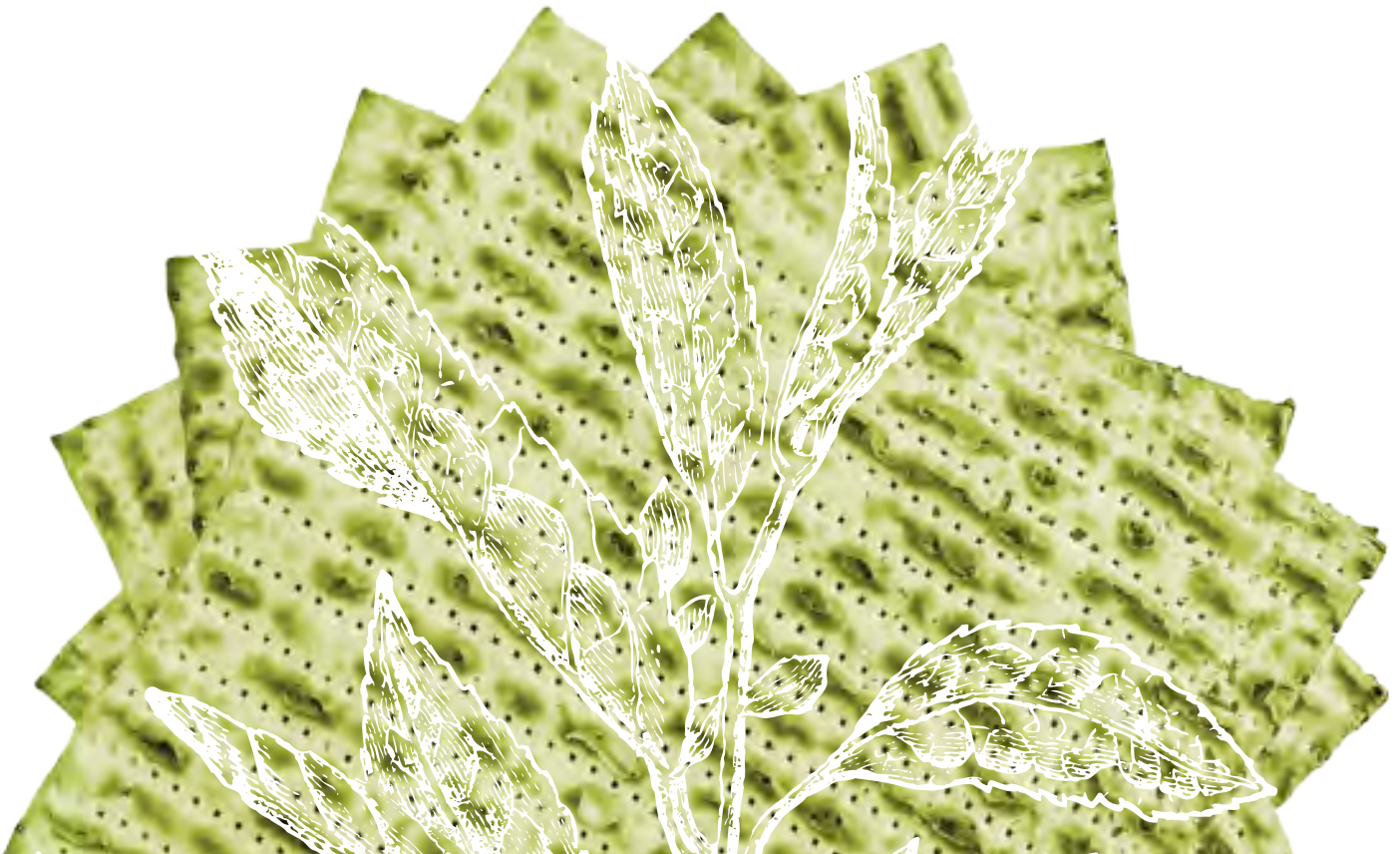
שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע (קהלת ח:ה)
עיי"ש, לפי"ז הכוונה שומר מצוה, היינו שעושה
המצוה במתינות (ע"ד: ואביו שמר את הדבר
[בראשית לז:יא]),

לא ידע דבר רע, דאם עושה שלא במתינות
יכול להתערב בתוכו רע ח"ו... משא"כ
כשעושה המצוה במתינות וישוב הדעת אזי
לא יתערב בהדעת רע רק טוב, וזהו שנצטוינו
בתורה במצות לא תעשה איסור אכילת
חמץ....

והנה נצטוינו: ושמרתם את המצות (שמות
יב:יז) (קרי ביה גם כן מצוות כמו שאמרו רז"ל
[מכילתא פ' בא ט']) היינו שתעשו המצוות
במתינות ושמירה וישוב הדעת בכדי שיהיה
כולו טוב, (על כן אמרו רז"ל: [ירושלמי פסחים
יא:] כל האוכל מצה בערב פסח כאילו בועל
ארוסתו בבית חמיו.)

Benei Yissaskhar, Nisan #8

The first mitzvah (i.e. the mitzvah of reproduction)... is a paradigm for all mitzvot, namely, that they require care (shimur) and great timing, as King Shlomo, peace be upon him, announced: "One who keeps the commandments will not know any bad thing" (Kohélet 8:5). According to this, the meaning of



“keeps the commandments” (shomeir mitzvah) is that one does the mitzvah with appropriate caution (metinut) (like the verse: “His father kept the matter in mind [shamar et ha-davar]” [Bereishit 37:11]). “Will not know any bad thing”—for if one does it without appropriate caution, evil could become intermixed with it, God forbid... which is not the case when one does the mitzvah with appropriate caution and a settled mind. In that case, no evil will be intermixed in one’s mind, only goodness. And this is why we are commanded in the Torah with the prohibition on eating hameitz....

And behold, we are commanded: “Protect (u-shmartem) the matzot” (Shemot 12:17) (which we also read as mitzvot, as our Sages of blessed memory said [Mekhilta Massekhta de-Pisha 9]), i.e., that you should perform mitzvot with appropriate caution and care (shemirah) and a settled mind, so that it will be entirely goodness.⁶ (Therefore, our Sages of blessed memory said: “One who eats matzah on Erev Pesah is like one who has sex with their betrothed in their father-in-law’s house” [Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:1].)

The Benei Yissaskhar understands the prohibition on eating matzah on Erev Pesah as reflective of a general injunction: even with regard to religiously-praiseworthy actions, one must wait for the right moment, and until one is in the right of state of mind, rather than jumping feverishly into them without thought and reflection.

In some sense this is in tension with the second reason given by the Rambam. For the Rambam, we wait to eat the matzah both to mark it as distinctive, but also so as to eat it with hunger. Generating and building up bodily desire is the reason we wait, and therefore

is in some sense essential to the mitzvah. This way of thinking about matzah conjures an image of eating it, if not ravenously, then at least with excitement and zeal.

The Benei Yissaskhar paints a very different picture. Instead of digging in hungrily, in a way that highlights our bodily appetite for the religiously mandated matzah, our waiting highlights our patience and ability to make thoughtful, considered choices, rather than rash, impulsive ones. The Benei Yissaskhar’s vision also steers clear of the explicit body-negativity that we find in R. Moshe Yisrael’s explanation. We are not denying that we get bodily pleasure from the matzah; we are simply doing so in a way that is considered and contemplative.⁷ The Benei Yissaskhar in this particular passage is not so much expressing disdain for the body as recognizing that, when we listen only to our bodily instincts, we move too fast. Observing mitzvot calls for us to slow down, to get into a state of mindfulness whereby we not only make good choices, but perform those good choices with a settled mind, so that we can fully appreciate what we are doing. The waiting, the delaying—these are essential to the performance of the mitzvah.

The length of the Seder—and especially of the part before we begin our meal with our eating of the matzah—have understandably become an object of some derision. Why, we ask, is this taking so long? Whether we are motivated by our hunger or our desire to observe the mitzvot of the night (which, to be sure, include the Maggid section that takes up the bulk of the time until we eat the matzah), it’s tempting to want to get on with it. We know what we need to do, so let’s do it. The prohibition on eating matzah on Erev Pesah reminds us that simply **doing** the mitzvah can be an impediment to actually **observing** it. Without taking the time to think about what we’re doing and why we’re doing it, our mitzvot become mere actions. As Tom Petty said, the waiting is the hardest part. The Benei Yissaskhar tells us: it’s also the most important. ♦

6 The Benei Yissaskhar’s use of this midrash is in fact surprising, since the point there is that just as matzah should not be left to linger, so too mitzvot should not be left to linger, but rather performed immediately—nearly the opposite of the Benei Yissaskhar’s claim!

7 To be sure, the Benei Yissaskhar’s understanding of this prohibition could be read in a more body-disparaging sense, both because the “intermixing of evil” could be read as referring to bodily desires, and because the text on which he bases himself indeed takes it in that direction. See R. Menahem Azaryah mi-Pano, Asarah Ma’amarot, Hakor Din 3.11. I nonetheless take seriously the Benei Yissaskhar’s choice not to center this sort of degradation of bodily desire, focusing instead on seriousness rather than asceticism.

ACTIVITY

- ★ Split into pairs.
- ★ Turn to your partner and greet them. Decide who will be Partner A and Partner B.
- ★ Read a chosen text together out loud (see suggested texts on the next page).
- ★ Pause and consider silently to yourself: "What questions does this text bring up for me?"

PARTNER A

Share a question that came up for you.

PARTNER B

Respond to the question, thinking out loud without worrying about whether your ideas are fully formed. Try to make your thinking as clear as possible, based on the text or on other knowledge you have.

PARTNER A

Listen and ask clarifying questions, using prompts like:

Can you tell me more about what you mean?
(draws out Partner B's ideas)

So, are you saying X?
(checks for understanding)

I don't really understand.
Could you say that another way?
(asks for clarification)

- ★ Then continue by building on Partner B's ideas, or by offering one in contrast.
- ★ Switch roles and repeat!
- ★ Reflect:
 - ◆ What is a question your partner asked that you really liked?
 - ◆ What is something your partner helped you understand about the text?

SUGGESTED TEXTS FOR LEARNING

The following passages are from the Mishnah and the Haggadah. They may be new to you, or you may have read them many times. This is a chance to slow down and really get into conversation with them by using the routine above for one or all of them. Feel free to use the routine for any other piece of text you're interested in as well!



משנה פסחים יד

מָזְגוּ לוֹ כּוֹס שֵׁנִי, וְכֵאן הֵבִן שׂוֹאֵל
אָבִיו, וְאִם אֵין דַּעַת בְּבֶן, אָבִיו
מְלַמְדוֹ.

MISHNAH PESAḤIM 10:4

They poured him a second cup, and here the child asks their parent. And if the child does not have knowledge, their parent teaches them.

הגדה של פסח

הָא לְחֶמְא עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבֹתָהֶן
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכִפִּיּוּ יִיְתִי
וְיִיבֵל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יִיְתִי וְיִפְסֹח.

HAGGADAH

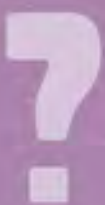
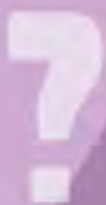
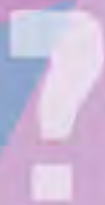
This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need come and celebrate Pesah.

משנה פסחים יה

בְּכֹל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת
אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יֵצֵא
מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׁנֹאמֵר, "וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעֵבֹר זֶה
עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם"
(שמות יג:ח).

MISHNAH PESAḤIM 10:5

In each and every generation a person must view themselves as though they personally left Egypt, as it is stated: "And you shall tell your child on that day, saying: It is because of this which God did for me when I came forth out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8).



דברים ה:טו

וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצִיאֲךָ ה'
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְרָעָה נְטוּיָה; עַל כֵּן צִוְּךָ
 ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת.

Devarim 5:15

And You should remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and HaShem your God took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore HaShem your God commands you to observe the Shabbat day.

And he asks our question: Why is keeping Shabbat linked to the Exodus?

R. Tzadok explains what he thinks is the true nature of this relationship by framing the Exodus from Egypt in spiritual, rather than physical, terms. He refers to the Zohar, which characterizes Egypt as a source of impurity. Accordingly, *yetzi'at mitzrayim*, leaving Egypt, should actually be seen as a process of purification. When God took us out of this physical land, He was simultaneously extracting the people of Israel from their own place of spiritual darkness and distance. According to this Kabbalistically-influenced framing, the emergence from Egypt is not only, or even primarily, a process of physical emancipation; rather it is also a process of spiritual growth and reconciliation with one's original, pure self.

God's saving us from slavery and taking us out of Egypt does not merely create the material conditions for us to be able to serve God—for we now have the free time to do so—but also creates the spiritual conditions for us to serve God correctly and to fear God. Now that we are no longer sunk in the depths of impurity, we are capable of embodying and performing holiness. According to R. Tzadok, the connection between emerging from Egypt and serving God is not that we serve God in order to pay off a debt of gratitude. The reason they are linked is that the Exodus enabled us to serve God. Being pure enough to serve God was impossible before we went through the growth process of being extracted from the depths of Egypt. Remembering the Exodus is our acknowledgment of that transformation.

R. Tzadok further explains that the constant reminders that we have about God's taking us out of Egypt are not a way for God to needle us about something that we already know; they aren't plaintive and insistent reminders that we ought to do what's right. Rather they are the Torah's way of reminding us of who we are now that we have left Egypt. Now that we are free, now that we are pure, we are capable of doing what is holy and what is right:



פרי צדיק, ואתחנן

וענין של זכרון יציאת מצרים שהוזהרו עליה כמה פעמים - הוא כדי שלא יפול האדם בעצמו אחרי שיחשוב וידע נגעי לבבו ושלא יתייאש חס ושלום. ... לזה נזכר יציאת מצרים להורות - שאף מי שמשוקע חס ושלום - בכל מקום שהוא מכל מקום זרע ישראל - לא ידה ממנו נדה - מאחר שקשורים בשורש בה' יתברך - ואם אך ירצה לשוב לה' ולדבקה בו יעזרהו ה' יתברך כימי צאתנו מארץ מצרים.

Peri Tzaddik, Va'Ethanan

And the idea of remembering the Exodus from Egypt about which we were warned numerous times is so that a person should not fall within himself after he thinks and knows the influences of his heart, and he shouldn't despair, God forbid. ... This is why the Exodus from Egypt is mentioned, to demonstrate that even one who is sunk, God forbid, in whatever place he is, he is nevertheless the seed of Israel [who] will not be entirely pushed aside,² because they are tied into the source in the Blessed God.

And if a person wants to return to God and to cleave to Him, Blessed God will help him, just like the days of our departure from the land of Egypt.

R. Tzadok understands that the constant reminders around the Exodus are not guilt trips, they are encouragements. They are designed to help us see how far we've come. God does not need to tell us that we are indebted, to nag us and make us feel guilty and obligated. Rather, remembering that God took us out of Egypt reminds us that God is there to support us and help us grow.

Because R. Tzadok views Egypt in spiritual terms, he also believes it is an emotional place—or mindset—to which we are at constant risk of returning. And because he views the Exodus as a spiritual process of internal redemption, he also sees the healthy emergence from the low state that Egypt represents as something that we can experience for ourselves if only we need it, want it, and work towards it. The Torah needs to remind us of the Exodus precisely because it is not a singular historical event, but because it is a constant, recurrent possibility.

Yes, we do *mitzvot* because we were redeemed, but we also **can** do *mitzvot* only because we were redeemed. And whenever we feel that we have fallen, whenever we feel unredeemable, we are called upon to remember that Egypt is not a permanent state of being. If we left Egypt once, we can emerge from it again. ♦



² See 2 Samuel 14:14.



New and Forthcoming Books from Hadar



Order at hadar.org/books

"Incisive close readings and a bold moral imagination."

Ilana Kurshan, author of *If All the Seas Were Ink*

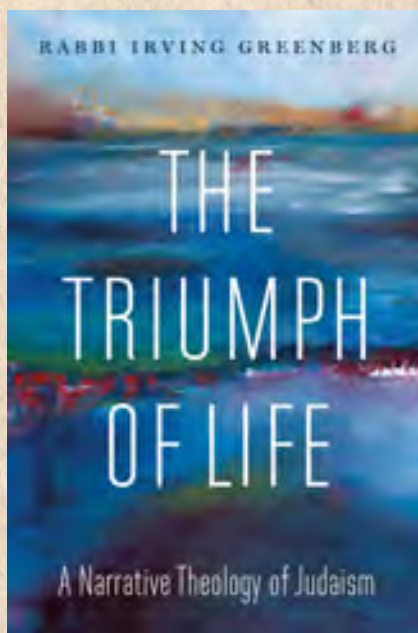


"A model for presenting Jewish texts in an aesthetically pleasing manner and with genuine depth."

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, author of *Jewish Literacy*

"Destined to exert a massive and enduring influence upon Jewish life and thought."

Rabbi David Ellenson z"l, author of *Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice*



"Dazzling in its breadth and sweep."

Lawrence Kaplan, McGill University



SWEETENING THE BITTER: SPENDING TIME WITH MAROR

R. Elie Lehmann

I CAN STILL TASTE it in my mind: white sticks, freshly cut from the whole horseradish root, and stacked like a Lincoln Log tower on the Seder plate. This is the *maror*, the bitter herb (the real stuff; not the stuff from the jar) of my childhood. I remember watching my father chew several pieces slowly and carefully before, inevitably, getting red in the face and coughing. Every year the question would arise in my mind: why is he doing this to himself?

Eating *maror* has always been part of the Seder ritual, going back to the Mishnah itself.¹ In the final chapter of Massekhet Pesahim, which describes our earliest outline of the Seder, Rabban Gamliel lists *maror* as one of only three core elements that must be present and discussed at the Seder. The other two—the *pesah* sacrifice and the *matzah*—seem to be obvious inclusions in remembering the Exodus from Egypt. But why must the *maror* be part of our remembrance? What does its placement in the Seder ritual teach us?

Rabban Gamliel explains that we eat bitter herbs because the Egyptians embittered our ancestors' lives in Egypt, as it is stated in the Torah: "And they embittered their lives with hard labor, in mortar and in brick; in all manner of labor in the field, all the labor that they made them labor was with rigor" (Exodus 1:14). The dehumanizing, bitter treatment of the Egyptian taskmasters is tasted in our mouths, passed

down through the millennia, and remembered on Seder night.

As an aid to remind us, generations later, this makes sense. But why then was eating bitter herbs part of the

1 Mishnah Pesahim 10:5, a *mishnah* that is also a central piece of the Maggid in our Haggadot.



Hadar's Torah & Tefillah Library

Thousands of Divrei Torah,
class recordings, source sheets,
nusah recordings, and melodies



original Pesah itself? In Exodus 12, as God instructs Moses and Aaron regarding how the Israelites are to prepare for the auspicious night and their subsequent exodus from Egypt, the people are told to “eat the flesh [of the lamb] that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and **with bitter herbs** (*merorim*)” (12:8). If the purpose of the *maror* is to remind us of the bitterness of slavery, this instruction adds insult to injury. Enslaved people need no external reminder of their lived degradation and suffering!

The commentator Hizkuni, perhaps with this concern in mind, explains the command to eat the sacrifice that night with *maror* as intended, instead, to show contempt for the animal that the ancient Egyptians venerated as an idol.

חזקוני שמות יב:ח

כל זה דרך בזיון שיאכלוהו עם דבר רע ומר
ולא עם דבר חשוב ומתוק.

Hizkuni to Exodus 12:8

All of this is to make it worse, that they should eat [the sacrifice] with something bad and bitter, and not with something nice and sweet.

This does help reframe the meaning of eating the *maror*. However, it does so at the cost of making the ritual about what the Egyptians would think, shifting the focus away from the enslaved people and back to the oppressors. This detracts from the agency and attention that the slaves deserve on the eve of their liberation.

The *maror*'s placement in our Seder may offer another perspective on its central role on the original Pesah. We eat the *maror*, along with the other symbolic foods, only after the end of Maggid—not only after the prolonged discussion of the misery of slavery, but also after reading the myriad *midrashim* of God's miraculous redemption of the Israelites. By the time we finish telling the story and move into the eating section, we're already free. The *matzah* we bless and eat right before the *maror* is not the *matzah* of *lehem oni*, the bread of affliction, which we recall at the beginning of the Maggid section. Rather, it is the *matzah* that symbolizes our freedom, the Israelites leaving Egypt in haste when the dough did not have



time to rise.² Only after we eat this *matzah* do we then eat the *maror*. If eating the *maror* were meant to remind us of the bitterness our ancestors experienced as slaves, then its placement in the Seder seems out of order. We should eat it much earlier than the *matzah*, when speaking about slavery in the early part of the Maggid section, not after crossing the sea, singing Dayyeinu and the psalms of Hallel. To make sense of its placement, we need a way to understand the *maror* that applies not only to our suffering in slavery, but also to our experience of freedom.

One way, then, that we can understand the Israelites eating the *pesah* lamb with *merorim*, and our own eating of the *maror* each year after tasting the *matzah* of liberation, is to recognize that *maror* is a fundamental part of life. Being human—not only being a slave— involves pain and suffering. When we take time to recognize and accept that reality, we can then learn to approach life with greater honesty, and a fuller set of tools to face the tougher moments.³

Furthermore, *maror* represents not only suffering, but also death itself. The gematria of *maror* (מרור) equals 446, the same as the word “*mavet* - death” (מות). Escaping slavery—or any other existential challenge or hardship—does not mean that our life will break

the bounds of what it is to be human. Everything continues to be transient. Life will have more moments of fragility. Change, weakness, and even death still lie ahead, even after an experience of liberation. This may sound sobering or feel painful in itself. However, it may also lead to a deeper appreciation of life’s moments of peacefulness, success, and joy.

The Shulhan Arukh, following the view of Rava (in Pesaḥim 115b) and many Rishonim, codifies that one must chew the *maror* before swallowing it.⁴ In fact, one who swallows the *maror* without first chewing it has not fulfilled their obligation. To most of us, this sounds like insisting on a fuller measure of suffering rather than minimizing it. Some commentators, however, especially those with mystic orientations, have seen it quite differently. For example, R. Hayyim Vital,⁵ the great student of R. Isaac Luria, describes this process of chewing the *maror* as “sweetening the harsh decree.”⁶ R. Yeshayahu Horowitz⁷ says that our teeth represent 32 levels of wisdom, and chewing the *maror* sweetens it by going through these stages of contemplation and understanding.⁸ Chewing the *maror* asks us not to ignore that which causes us discomfort and challenges us, but to take a few moments to focus on it as a whole, discover its root, then break it down into more digestible pieces.

Many of us have had the experience of tears welling up in our eyes as we eat the *maror*. Tears generally recall feelings of sadness, but the Alter Rebbe, Shneur Zalman of Liadi, suggests there is a difference between sadness (*atzvut*) and bitterness (*merirut*). *Atzvut* implies that the heart is “dull like a stone and is devoid of vitality,” while *merirut* stems from an agitated heart, bitter in its desire for change.⁹ The current reality is far from ideal, and our hearts do strive to reach their highest potential for loving engagement with the world. Just as the choreography of the Seder can help us understand that

2 See Exodus 12:39.

3 With appreciation to R. Joey Rosenfeld for opening this framing to me.

4 Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 475:3. See also the Tur there, and Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Hameitz u-Matzah 6:2.

5 16th-17th century, Eretz Yisrael.

6 Peri Eitz Hayyim, Sha’ar Hag ha-Matzot 3:3.

7 16th-17th century, Eastern Europe and Eretz Yisrael; also known as the Holy Shela”h or the Shenei Luhot ha-Berit.

8 See his commentary on the Haggadah: “One needs to chew it with 32 teeth that correspond to 32 levels of wisdom, and while chewing them the bitterness that is in them becomes sweet.”

9 Tanya, Part I; Likkutei Amarim 31:6.

maror is a part of life even after liberation, it can also awaken within us a desire to reach for life's sweetness.

After eating the *maror* on its own, the Seder continues with *Koreikh*, which the later Kabbalists describe as *mamtikin*, sweetening that which is bitter. We bring the *maror* together with the sweet *haroset* and *matzah* of liberation. After this we move into the grand feast of *Shulhan Oreikh*. Through the combination of patience and perseverance, we still hold out hope for a more fully realized salvation, when all bitterness may be sweetened. Our feast is followed by opening the door for Elijah, the mythic harbinger of such an era.

This year, may we allow ourselves to spend a little more time at the Seder with the *maror*. May we have the courage, patience, and awareness to chew through the bitterness a bit longer, understanding that, though *maror* is present in many different moments of life, it also does not define life. May we live with the right

dose of anticipation of a time beyond all bitterness, while knowing that for the time being we have the tools to break it down in size. Perhaps we'll cough, or even shed a tear, but who knows what inner awareness and understanding may awaken in our hearts as we chew the *maror* between our teeth. ♦



THE “OBLIGATION” TO SING AFTER MIRACLES¹

Joey Weisenberg, Rising Song Institute

SINGING IS THE ultimate expression of freedom, an essential rejoicing at the end of a cycle of suffering. Music is a recognition of the miracles of life.

The most famous freedom song of our tradition is the Song of the Sea. It begins, “And thus Moses sang, with all of the Children of Israel, this song to God.”² This song recounts the stunning moment when Moses and the Israelites escaped the slavery of Egypt by walking through the Sea of Reeds on dry land. It was sung by Moses, Miriam, the dancing women, and the entire Jewish people,³ and has become the most important song of freedom in our tradition, reminding us of the birth of our nation. According to one *midrash*, even the fetuses in their mothers’ bellies sang along.⁴

But the Song of the Sea was only one of many songs of freedom sung by our ancestors. Almost all of the war heroes and righteous leaders of the Tanakh immediately sang songs and praises upon averting tragedy, or upon bringing their people from suffering to freedom, as can be seen in this “top ten” list of songs from the Tanakh, as described in the Mekhilta:⁵

מכילתא מסכתא דשירה א
 "את השירה הזאת" (שמות טו:א) וכי שירה
 אחת היא והלא עשר שירות הן?
 הראשונה שנאמרה במצרים שני' "השיר יהיה
 לכם כליל התקדש חג וגו'" (ישעיה ל:כט),
 השנייה שנאמרה על הים שני' "אז ישיר משה"
 (שמות טו:א),
 השלישית שנאמרה על הבאר שני' "אז ישיר
 ישראל" (במדבר כא:יז),
 הרביעית שאמר משה שני' "ויהי ככלות משה
 לכתוב את דברי השירה הזאת" (דברים
 לא:כד),
 החמישית שאמר יהושע שני' "אז ידבר יהושע
 לה' ביום תת ה' וגו'" (יהושע י:יב),
 הששית שאמרה דבורה וברק שני' "ותשר
 דבורה וברק בן אבינועם" (שופטים ה:א),
 השביעית שאמר דוד שני' "וידבר דוד לה' את
 דברי השירה הזאת" (שמואל ב כב:א),
 השמינית שאמר שלמה שנאמר "מזמור שיר
 חנוכת הבית לדוד" (תהילים ל:א)...

1 Adapted from Weisenberg’s essay, “Freedom and Miracles” in *The Torah of Music: Reflections on a Tradition of Singing and Song* (2017), pg. 107. Translations by Joshua Schwartz. Full texts for the sources referenced in this essay can be found in *The Torah of Music*. See parentheses in the following footnotes (e.g. ToM #83).

2 Exodus 15:1-21.

3 The Talmud discusses various ways in which Moses traded verses with the people. Talmud Bavli Sotah 30b (see ToM #58).

4 Talmud Bavli Sotah 30b-31a (ToM #58).

5 ToM #83. For other lists of the “Top Ten Songs of the Tanakh,” see also Tanhuma BeShallah 10, Midrash Zuta Shir ha-Shirim 1:1, Ba’al ha-Turim on Exodus 15:1 (ToM #107).



התשיעית שאמר יהושפט שני' "ויועץ יהושפט ויעמד משוררים לה' מהללים בהדרת קדש בצאת לפני החלוץ אומר הודו לה' כי לעולם חסדו" (דברי הימים ב כ:כא) ...
העשירית לעתיד לבא שני' "שירו לה' שיר חדש תהלתו מקצה הארץ" (ישעיה מבי:י).

Mekhilta Massekhta de-Shirah 1

"This song" (Exodus 15:1)—But is it really just one song? Are there not ten songs?

The first was sung in Egypt, as it was said, "You will have a song as on a night a feast is made holy..." (Isaiah 30:29).

The second was at the [Reed] Sea, as it was said, "Then Moses sang" (Exodus 15:1).

The third was at the well [in the desert], as it was said, "Then Israel sang" (Numbers 21:17).

The fourth was sung by Moses [near the end of his life], as it was said, "Moses concluded writing all the words of this song" (Deuteronomy 31:24).

The fifth was sung by Joshua, as it was said, "Then Joshua spoke before God on the day God delivered..." (Joshua 10:12).

The sixth was sung by Deborah and Barak, as it was said, "Then sang Deborah and Barak ben Avinoam" (Judges 5:1).

The seventh was sung by David, as it was said, "David spoke to God the words of this song" (2 Samuel 22:1).

The eighth was sung by Solomon, as it was said, "A Psalm, a song for the dedication of David's house" (Psalm 30:1).

...

The ninth was sung by Jehoshaphat, as it was said, "Jehoshaphat counseled with the people and stationed those to sing for God and praise the beauty of the Holy One, as they exited before the army, saying 'Praise God, Whose love is eternal'" (2 Chronicles 20:21). ...

The tenth will be in the coming future, as it was said, "Sing to God a new song, and praise to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 42:10).

Perhaps we can even say that, after a miracle, you must sing. The Haggadah, for example, obligates us to sing after recounting the story of the miraculous Exodus from Egypt:

הגדה של פסח

לְפִיכֶם אֲנִיחֵנו חַיִּיבִים לְהוֹדוֹת, לְהַלֵּל, לְשַׁבַּח,
לְפָאֵר, לְרוֹמֵם, לְהַדְרָה, לְבָרֵךְ, לְעַלֵּה וּלְקַלֵּס לְמִי
שֶׁעָשָׂה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַנִּסִּים הָאֵלֶּה:
הוֹצִיאָנוּ מֵעֲבָדוֹת לְחֵרוֹת מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׁמְחָה, וּמֵאֲבָל
לְיוֹם טוֹב, וּמֵאֲפֵלָה לְאוֹר גְּדוֹל, וּמִשְׁעָבוֹד
לְגִאֲלָה. וְנֹאמֵר לְפָנָיו שִׁירָה חֲדָשָׁה: הַלְלוּ־הּ.

Haggadah

Therefore we are obligated to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, lavish, bless, raise high, and celebrate the One Who made all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: Who brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to this good day, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption. And let us sing before God a new song, Halleluyah!

Consider the story of one who forgot to sing, with dire consequences: A great miracle happened for the righteous Jewish king, Hezekiah.⁶ The Assyrian army of Sennacherib had razed dozens of smaller cities and was

6 The 13th king of Judah, who was known for instituting monotheistic reforms and ruled the southern kingdom in the time the Assyrians conquered the north, in 722 BCE. The Assyrians later marched on Jerusalem, but it and the south were spared.

perched outside of Jerusalem, ready to invade, when the whole army was destroyed overnight by divine intervention. Hezekiah, who was known for his great righteousness and piety, unfortunately neglected to sing a song of praise to the Holy One after this miracle. According to the Talmud, had he only sung a song of praise, Hezekiah would have become the messiah!⁷

תלמוד בבלי סנהדרין צד.

ביקש הקדוש ברוך הוא לעשות חזקיהו משיח... אמרה מדת הדין לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונו של עולם! ומה דוד מלך ישראל שאמר כמה שירות ותשבחות לפניך לא עשיתו משיח, חזקיה ששעית לו כל הנסים הללו ולא אמר שירה לפניך תעשהו משיח!?

Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 94a

The Holy Blessed One wanted to make [King] Hezekiah the messiah... The attribute of judgment came before the Holy Blessed One and said, "Master of the universe! If David, King of Israel, who sang so many songs and praises before You, You did not make messiah, Hezekiah, for whom You performed all these miracles but sang before You not one song, You'll make him messiah?!"

Later in the story, the Earth tries to rescue Hezekiah's chance at becoming the messiah by singing for him, but it didn't work. He needed to sing, himself! We all must sing the songs of our own miracles.

According to the Yalkut Shimoni, the transformation that might follow a miracle is predicated upon taking the time to sing a song to the Divine One:

ילקוט שמעוני רנ"ד

כל מי שנעשה לו נס ואומר שירה בידוע שמוחלין לו על כל עונותיו ונעשה בריה חדשה.

Yalkut Shimoni #254

It is well known that everyone for whom a miracle has been performed and who subsequently sings a song will be forgiven

*all their sins and will become a new creature.*⁸

If we don't sing after each miracle that we experience, we may miss tremendous opportunities for personal and global transformation. Since each day, each moment, is a miracle, perhaps those are reasons to sing, even without awaiting a special miracle.

Singing is not limited to the already free, to the post-miracle existence. Indeed, we sing songs while yet enslaved to remind ourselves of our humanity, to recognize our path towards freedom. We sing to create freedom, to generate the very miracles that we hope for. As shown above in the Mekhilta's "top ten" list, the first song that was sung by Jews was sung while still in Egypt, and only the second upon its emancipation.



7 Hezekiah did sing the first time (Isaiah 38:10), but not the second time after Sennacherib's army was destroyed.

8 ToM #95.

Virtual Classes at Hadar

Online learning that fits your schedule - morning, midday, or evening!

hadar.org/virtual



In the depths of slavery, the Israelites cry out, they make noise; they sing the blues. It goes up to God and activates God.⁹

Min ha-meitzar,¹⁰ the verse from Psalms that we sing on festivals and before sounding the *shofar*, reminds us that if we sing, or call out, while we're still caught in a state of narrowness, of constricted consciousness, then we may find our freedom and experience a divine expansiveness:

תהילים קיח:ה

מִן־הַמֵּצָר קָרָאתִי יְיָ־הֵ עָנְנִי בְּמִרְחָב יְיָ־הֵ:

Psalms 118:5

*From the narrow place I called out to God;
I was answered with Divine Expansiveness.*

Given that no one is entirely free or entirely enslaved, and that we're all on a continuum between servitude and self-determination, there's no reason to wait to sing. Freedom is expressed through song, but yet our songs themselves may very well lead to freedom. At the moment that we open our mouths, are we not already free?

What's more, the end of the struggles of this world will be brought about by singing. As the Zohar declares:

תיקוני זוהר, הקדמה, ג.

ישראל סלקין מגו גלותא בנגונא.

Tikkunei Zohar, Introduction, 3a

Israel will arise from exile in song.

Through the process of composing divine songs, we will build the worlds we dream of, we will transcend our trapped situations, and we will yet emerge from our exiles, where we will then sing again! And now, as we gather at the Seder, let's sing Hallel. Halleluyah! ♦

9 Exodus 2:23-24; conversation with R. Aryeh Bernstein, 2016. See also my colleague R. Aviva Richman's essay, "Finding Our Song in an Unredeemed World: Three Troubled Origins of Hallel," available here: <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/finding-our-song-unredeemed-world-three-troubled-origins-hallel>.

10 Listen to two different melodies for this verse from Hadar's Rising Song Records: <https://joeyweisenberg.bandcamp.com/track/min-hameitzar> and <https://deborahsacksmintz.bandcamp.com/track/min-hameitzar>.

LIVING IN THE DOUBLE EXPOSURE

R. Tali Adler

I WAS EIGHT YEARS old in Basel, Switzerland the day I learned about the way places have layers.

It was a chilly, autumn *shabbos*, and my father and I were on a walk by the river. My father pointed out different sights as we walked: there is the house where his elementary school friend lived, there is the gate they walked through to get to school, there is the shop run by the woman rumored to be a witch. And there, he said, pointing to a small, shady area, is the place where they burned the Jews in the 14th century.

The rest of the afternoon was like a double exposure: there are the roasted chestnuts, there is the witch, and there is the place where they burned the Jews. For the first time, I began to understand what it is like when something so beautiful becomes, while retaining all its magic, something terrible as well.

Egypt, in the book of Shemot, is a place caught in a double exposure. For the Jews, Egypt has long been a nightmare, a place of slavery and oppression, of beatings and cold-blooded murder. One imagines that for the Jews in Egypt, every place must have a secret meaning: beautiful houses as places of servitude, cool bathing spots in the river as places where baby boys drown.

The first two plagues do the work of making that double exposure visible to the rest of the population. Both begin in the Nile, the site of the crimes against those Jewish boys. The first, blood, makes it clear that the Nile, the source of life for the Egyptian people—the place where even Bat Par’oh, the woman who saved Moshe, bathed—is actually a site of mass murder. All of Egypt, suddenly, is forced to confront the truth that what is life-giving and sustaining for them has been

the locus of unbearable suffering for the people they oppress.

The second plague, frogs, exposes a new layer of horror. The frogs, we are told, emerge from the Nile itself—still, perhaps, filled with blood. In picturing the frogs starting to emerge—small, slimy creatures crawling out of the river used as a mass infant grave—it is easy to imagine that people thought that they were seeing thousands of ghosts emerge from their watery graves.

In picturing the frogs as they emerged, it becomes easy to read the first two plagues as a reminder to the Egyptians of their crimes. The first two plagues are a way of exposing the hidden underbelly of Israelite suffering to the Egyptians, of making explicit and raw what denial and callousness may have disguised. They are a way of bringing the Egyptians out of their day-to-day understanding of their country and of making the other, blurry side of the double exposure unbearably clear.

But as the Egyptians begin to see the Egypt that the Jews have experienced for so many years, we are given a glimpse, in Rashi’s reading, of a different perspective on the Nile. Rashi notices that for the first three plagues Moshe is commanded to inform Aharon to perform the action that will begin the plague rather than being told to do it himself. Rashi explains the reason for the first two plagues as follows:

רש"י שמות ז:יט

לפי שהגין היאור על משה כשנשלך לתוכו,
לפיכך לא לקה על ידו לא בדם ולא בצפרדעים,
ולקה על ידי אהרן.

Rashi on Shemot 7:19

Since the Nile protected Moshe when he was cast into it, it therefore was not struck by him, neither with blood nor with frogs, but was struck by Aharon.

While we, the readers, have identified with the Jewish people's vision of Egypt—the Egypt of violence, of oppression, and of cruelty—in this moment, Rashi reminds us that there is another Egypt that exists, one in which the Nile is life-giving and protective. This other Egypt, this other Nile, Rashi reminds us, should not feel completely foreign to us: it is the Egypt and the Nile that Moshe, our redeemer, has experienced, and the one to which he still owes divinely-affirmed gratitude.

With Rashi's comment, the tables are turned: while until now this story was one in which the Egyptians are made to see the truth about their land, in this moment, we, the readers and inheritors of the Torah and the narrative of slavery, are forced into the dizziness of double exposure. In this moment, however briefly, we are forced to recognize that there are aspects of Egypt to which Moshe Rabbeinu himself owed gratitude. In this moment, it is we who are forced to learn that

the multivalence of places does not allow us to neatly cordon off the beautiful and ugly: we are touched by the meanings of other people and groups. It is impossible, in this reading, to fully separate the memory of nightmarish tragedy from miraculous safety.

While in Shemot this realization is fleeting, hidden in a Rashi, later, in Devarim, it becomes glaringly apparent. In Devarim 23:8, we are commanded: "You may not hate an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." In memory of the time we spent there as strangers, we are commanded never to hate them, and to allow Egyptians, after several generations, to join the Jewish people.

Most of our associations with Egypt and the Jewish people are images of suffering. Rashi, in his comment on this *pasuk*, highlights this suffering in the starkest possible terms: "you may not hate an Egyptian"—even though they threw your babies into the Nile—even though you endured terrible suffering there, even though it is the paradigm for persecution. Why? Because you were a stranger in Egypt's land. Because, Rashi explains, they hosted you and fed you in a time of dire need. Once, generations earlier, Egypt was a place of safety for Ya'akov and his family in a time of famine. And so, despite the subsequent years of persecution, we are commanded to remember that initial hospitality. We are commanded to remember the good beginning of what became the darkest story we know, and we are commanded to let that memory guide our treatment of Egyptians in the future.

The Torah resists the temptation to tell a single story about Egypt. It is not the place of dreams we might have expected from Yosef's brief reign, but the Torah is still unwilling to overwrite those parts of our story in order to create a single narrative. In Rashi's reading in Shemot and in this *mitzvah* in Devarim, we are reminded that our story is one of beauty mixed with pain, gratitude mixed with deep resentment. We are commanded to give room to both, to treat our stories with the integrity and nuance they deserve.



We are commanded, in this *mitzvah*, to remember the past in all its complexity: not to forget the suffering that we endured but, at the same time, not to allow our memories to become exclusively dark. We are commanded to remember honestly. We are commanded to remember moments of beauty and kindness even as we remember suffering, persecution, and darkness. We are commanded to live in the only truly honest way: in the double exposure. ♦



Hadar's July Learning Seminar

JULY 14-17 | NYC

All learning backgrounds welcome
for a week of dynamic, inspiring Torah

 hadar.org/july 



CHILDREN OF BELIEVERS

R. Avi Strausberg

I CONFESS I AM not much of a believer. If God had told me to jump into the Reed Sea, I would have asked, “Can You part it for me first?” If God asked me to march out of Egypt to some strange and far-off land, I would’ve said, “But at least this land, I know.” I am a person that likes clarity and answers. You want me to go on a journey? Show me the roadmap. You want me to enter a land full of giants? Tell me the step-by-step plan. I am not a leap-of-faith kind of person.

Moshe, for all of his great leadership, also seems to be full of doubts when God approaches him by the Burning Bush and charges him with leading the Israelites out of Egypt. He asks question after question, wanting to know, “Who am I to do this?” “Whom should I say sent me?” and perhaps most importantly, his greatest fear, “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me?”¹ Moshe, with all of his doubts, believes the Israelites will be like him, similarly lacking faith, unwilling to follow a strange man and his strange god out into the wilderness.

In *Shemot Rabbah*, God responds to Moshe’s doubts with anger. Moshe may think that the Israelites won’t trust in God but God knows His children better.

שמות רבה ג:יב

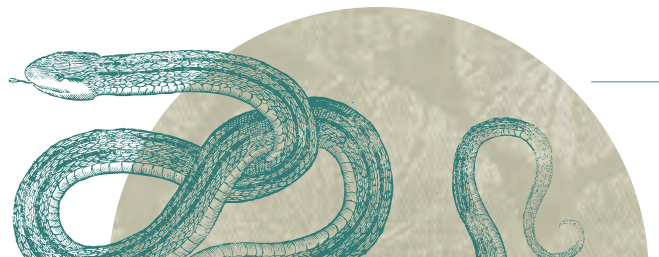
"וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהֵן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי" (שמות ד:א), אוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה שְׁלֹא פִּהְגֹּן, הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אָמַר לוֹ: "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלְךָ" (ג:יח), וְהוּא אָמַר: "וְהֵן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי" (ד:א). מִיַּד הִשְׁבִּיבוּ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּשִׁטְתּוֹ, נִתֵּן לוֹ אוֹתוֹת לְפִי דְבָרָיו. רָאָה מֶה פְּתִיב אֲתָרִיו: "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהֵי מֹזֶה בִּינְדֹף וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה" (ד:ב), כְּלוּמַר מֹזֶה שֶׁבִּינְדֹף אֶתְּהָ צָרִיף לְלִקּוֹת, שְׁאֵתְהָ מוֹצִיא שֵׁם רַע עַל בְּנֵי הַם מֵאֱמִינִים בְּנֵי מֵאֱמִינִים, מֵאֱמִינִים, שְׁנֹאֲמַר: "וַיֹּאמֶן הָעָם"

(ד:לא). בְּנֵי מֵאֱמִינִים, שְׁנֹאֲמַר: "וְהֵאֱמִן בִּה'" (בראשית טו:ו).

Shemot Rabbah 3:12

"But Moshe spoke up and said, 'What if they do not believe me?' (Exodus 4:1). At that moment, Moshe spoke inappropriately. The Holy One said to him: 'They will listen to you,' (3:18), and Moshe said: 'They won't believe me' (4:1). The Holy One immediately answered in God's way, God gave him signs corresponding to his words. See what is written afterward: 'God said to him: What is that in your hand? And he said: A rod' (4:2). Meaning from that which is in your hand you need to be struck, because you are speaking ill of My children. They are believers and children of believers. They are believers, as it is said, 'The people believed' (4:31). They are the children of believers, as it is said, 'And he [Avraham] trusted in God' (Genesis 15:6).

According to the *midrash*, God chose to deploy Moshe’s rod as a miraculous sign, not only because it was conveniently in his hand and would make for a nice snake, but because Moshe deserved to be hit by that very same rod for speaking poorly of the Israelites. God defends the Israelites and says, “My children are believers and children of believers.” Using verses as prooftexts, God attests to the faith of the Israelites and claims that not only does this present generation, living enslaved among the Egyptians, believe in God, their ancestors were believers as well. If anyone is



¹ Exodus 3:11, 3:13, 4:1.

lacking faith in this scenario, it is not the Israelites, but Moshe himself.

I wonder: would God defend me today in the same way that He defended the Israelites? What if the Israelites really did possess a unique faith in God despite the newness of God in their lives and the path of uncertainty that lay ahead of them? What if, instead of possessing the confidence that God claims the Israelites had, I am more like Moshe, full of doubts and questions? Would God say about me that I too am a believer, a child of believers?

R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Eish Kodesh, wrote during a time when, for many, belief in God was difficult, if not impossible. Teaching Torah from the Warsaw Ghetto, R. Shapira saw that people who had once lived observant, religious lives were losing faith in a God Who could allow the atrocities of the Holocaust to happen. People for whom belief was once a surety no longer had the capacity to believe.

R. Shapira writes that our *midrash* from Shemot Rabbah teaches that “the faith of Jews is an inherited faith, passed down from their ancestors, because they are all the children of believers.” Our faith is not ours alone, nor is it dependent only upon us; rather, our faith is passed down to us from ancestors.

ר' קלונימוס קלמן שפירא, אש קודש,
פרשת החדש, תש"ב

וכנראה ב' בחינות באמונה ישנן באיש. כשהוא
בהתחזקות ומכל שכן גם בשמחה אז גם
מרגיש את האמונה בודאות משא"כ כשהוא
בעצבות ומכל שכן כשחש וחלילה כולו נשבר
יש שאינו מרגישה... אבל גם אז אין לומר
וח"ו אינו מאמין, מאמין הוא גם אז רק שאינו
מרגישה.

**R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira,
Eish Kodesh, Parashat ha-Hodesh,
March 14, 1942**

It seems that there are two types of faith in a person. When he is feeling strong, and especially when he is joyful, then he also feels faith with a sense of certainty. But if she is depressed, and especially if she is utterly broken, God forbid, it is possible for her not to feel faith... Even then, though, it could not be said, God forbid, that he does not believe. She is a believer even then! She just doesn't feel it.

R. Shapira teaches that there are two kinds of faith. There is the faith we feel in times of joy; this faith comes easier to us. Without obstacles distancing us from God, we experience this faith with certainty. And then, he acknowledges, there are times when a person is so broken they don't experience faith at all. This person might even testify about themselves: “I'm not a believer.” God forbid, R. Shapira says, that a person should say this. He assures us that even when we are broken, even when we don't believe, we are still believers. Why? Because our faith does not depend only on us. Even if we are not believers, we are children of believers.

In Shemot Rabbah, God defends the Israelites to Moshe and attests that the Israelites are not only believers themselves but they are children of believers. R. Shapira seems to go even further, assuring us that even in moments in which we don't see ourselves as believers, somewhere deep inside we really are still believers. It's a spiritual reality inherited from our ancestors—because we are children of believers.

I experience this teaching as a comfort. First, R. Shapira acknowledges that we may not always have access to the certainty of belief that God claims of the Israelites in Egypt. There may be moments in our lives in which we feel unsure, we are lost without anchor, left with questions and doubt. But even in these moments, he teaches, we can trust that we are never entirely unanchored. The faith that we inherit from ancestors serves to tether us to God, even when our own ability to believe is in question.

I wish for us all this *Pesah* the certainty of the Israelites who were willing to take a leap of faith and follow a strange man and an unfamiliar god out of Egypt, without a map, without a plan. But should we not have their kind of faith, I want to offer us the gift of R. Shapira's Torah: a chain of belief that goes beyond ourselves, connecting us back to our ancestors, and bringing us closer to God. ♦



A SEDER OF RETELLINGS

R. Miriam-Simma Walfish

UNLIKE MOST HOLIDAYS in our liturgical year, which ask us to connect to God through *tefillah* or a festive meal, the Pesah Seder invites us into a different sort of experience, one centered on how we see ourselves. A succinct formulation of this goal appears in our Seder script: “בְּכֹל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיֵּב אָדָם לְרַאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם” - In every generation a person is obligated to see themselves as though they left Egypt.” The goal of the Seder is to see ourselves into an experience that happened in our distant past. This statement seems to imply that we’re supposed to imagine ourselves in a story in which we were not, literally speaking, characters. How do we get ourselves inside an experience that happened to our spiritual ancestors thousands of years ago?

The Haggadah answers this question in a way I find surprising. Rather than including some suggested passages from the book of Shemot, which chronicles the events of the Exodus itself “in real time,” our Haggadah text is a compilation of many texts, each

recounting earlier generations’ own retellings of the Exodus story. Sprinkled throughout are a few moments of personal reenactment, but much of the story we tell on Seder night is not about a moment in time, but rather a story about storytelling. We find Rabbis telling the Exodus story in Benei Berak, parents telling the story four different ways to four different children, a recounting of a prophecy in which God foretells to Avraham what will happen, and then the core text of the Haggadah: a retelling of the Exodus story that Moshe commands the Israelites to recite as they offer their first fruits in the Temple (Devarim 26:3-8). Why does the Haggadah offer all of these retellings and foretellings of the story, rather than the story itself?

In an interview, Rachel Sharansky Danziger compares the Seder to the way her parents spoke about their own flight from the Soviet Union; she says that the authors of the Haggadah “force us not to go away from our life to somebody else’s story, but rather to bring ourselves, our detective ability, our emotions, our memories into the story we’re looking at and thus

bring the story into our life where we are.”¹ Danziger picks up on an important feature of the Haggadah, that we “bring the story into our life where we are.” The Haggadah does this by having us recite stories of people who have done so in the past. Reciting these texts connects us not only to our ancestors in their moment of redemption from Egypt, but also to the span of people connecting to that story. These stories each model different ways in; they offer us different paths for bringing ourselves into the story of the Exodus.

The most striking example of this is the passage from Devarim 26:

דברים כו:ג-ח

וּבָאתָ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַיָּמִים הָהֵם וְאָמַרְתָּ
 אֵלָיו הַגְּדַתִּי הַיּוֹם לַה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ כִּי-בָאתִי אֶל-
 הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאֲבוֹתַי לֵאמֹר לְנֹכַח
 הַכֹּהֵן הַטָּנָא מִיַּדְךָ וְהִנִּיחוּ לִפְנֵי מִזְבֵּחַ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ:
 וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ
 אֲרָמִי אֲבֹד אָבִי וַיֵּרֵד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגֶר שָׁם בְּמַתִּי
 מֵעֵט וַיְהִי-שָׁם לְגוֹי גָדוֹל עָצוּם וָרֹב: וַיִּרְעוּ
 אֶתְנֹו הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲנֹנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:
 וַיִּנְצַעַק אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלֵנוּ
 וַיִּרְא אֶת-עֲנִיָנוּ וְאֶת-עֲמָלְנוּ וְאֶת-לַחֲצוֹנוּ: וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ
 ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה וּבְמַרְא גָדֹל
 וּבְאֵתוֹת וּבְמִפְתִּיּוֹת:

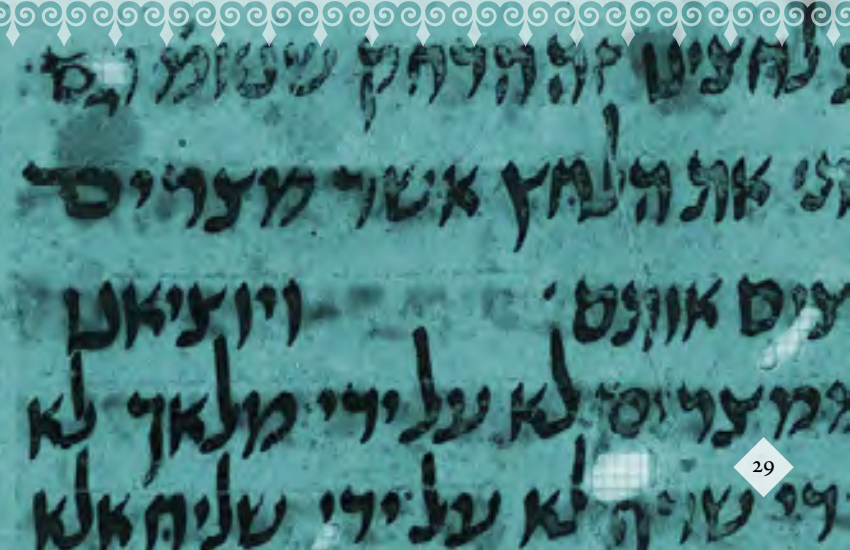
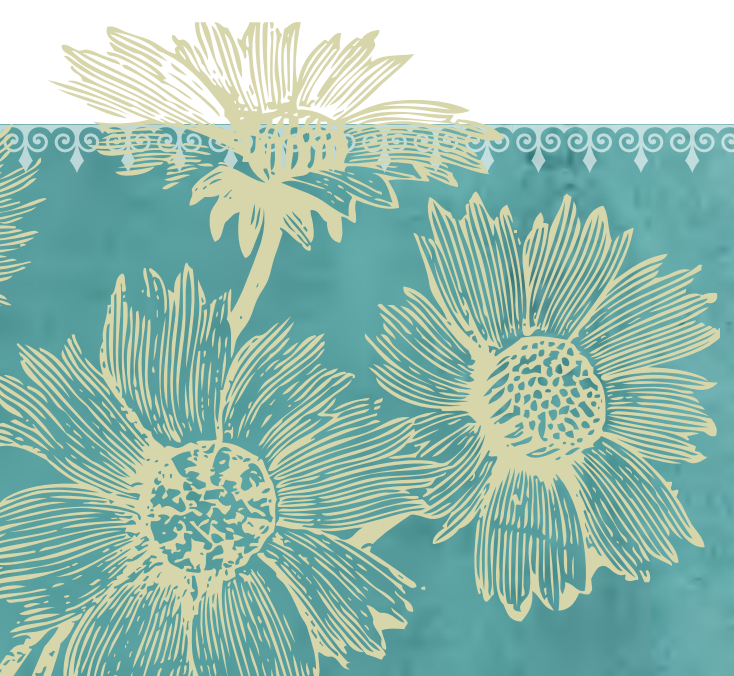
Devarim 26:3-8

³You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, “I acknowledge this day before your God YHVH that I have entered the land that YHVH swore to our fathers to assign us.” ⁴The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of your God YHVH. ⁵You shall then recite as follows before your God YHVH:

“My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. ⁶The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. ⁷We cried to YHVH, the God of our ancestors, and YHVH heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. ⁸YHVH freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents.”

R. David Silber in his Haggadah, *Go Forth and Learn*, points out that something remarkable happens here, something true of the book of Devarim more generally: the person offering their first fruits to God recites this formula in the first person plural—“we”—despite the fact that there is no way that they themselves in fact experienced the Exodus. R. Silber connects this passage to another in Devarim doing

1 <https://jwa.org/podcasts/canwetalk/episode-40-rachel-sharansky-danziger-let-my-story-go/transcript>.



similar work. At the beginning of the book, recounting the story of revelation on Mount Sinai, Moshe says to the people:

דברים ה:ב-ד

ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּרַת עִמָּנוּ בְּרִית בְּחֹרֵב: ³לֹא אֶת־
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ כָּרַת ה' אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת כִּי אֲתָנוּ
אֲנַחְנוּ אֵלֶּה פֶּה הַיּוֹם כָּלְנוּ חַיִּים: ⁴פְּנִים בְּפָנִים
דִּבֶּר ה' עִמָּכֶם בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ:

Devarim 5:2-4

²Our God YHVH made a covenant with us at Horev [Sinai]. ³It was not with our ancestors that YHVH made this covenant, but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today. ⁴Face to face YHVH spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire.

In this remarkable passage, Moshe asks the Israelites not to reenact the experience of revelation, but to remember themselves into it. We are not imagining a fictional universe in which we were at Sinai, but rather, asserting that we were, in fact, there.

This same dynamic is present in Devarim 26. The first person plural mode invites the religious pilgrim to remember themselves into the story of the Exodus. This provides a model for how we, too, can enter the story of the Exodus despite not having, in a historical sense, experienced it ourselves. In R. Silber's words: "Deuteronomy is the book that addresses the Jew who, despite the historical divide, is able to say: 'The Egyptians did evil to us and abused us' (Deut. 26:6); but 'I have come into the land' (Deut. 26:3)."²

For many of us, accessing the experience of the Exodus itself is challenging. We might live in North America, or Israel, or somewhere else in the world—but almost certainly not in Egypt. We may love or hate our jobs, but thankfully, nearly all of us do not experience anything like enslavement. Imagining ourselves into the story is nearly impossible. By offering us Devarim 26 as the core model for how to do this, the Haggadah provides us with a template: we see ourselves as though we are the generations who recently entered the land, who themselves are trying to imagine themselves back in the story of the Exodus. In so doing, we connect ourselves to generations of people who, each in their own way, are trying to manage the same divide as we are. By connecting with this generation, we

acknowledge that seeing ourselves in the story requires a paradigm shift. We are not the first ones to make this shift. Filling the Haggadah with examples of retellings allows us to connect with countless generations who also made this shift, suspending their current reality to remember themselves into the story of slavery and freedom that is the Pesah story.

The idea that the Haggadah is a chronicle of earlier engagements with the Pesah story explains a core piece of Pesah choreography that I have long found perplexing. The Mishnah tells us that everyone, even the poorest of us, is required to recline at the Seder (Mishnah Pesahim 10:1). Reclining at the Seder derives from the late antique dining habits of aristocratic Romans. For our Rabbis, dining like the aristocracy was the ultimate expression of freedom. For us, nowadays, this significance is absent. Some medieval Ashkenazi authorities therefore ruled that, in our time, it is not essential to recline as a symbol of freedom (Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim 472:7). So why do we nonetheless do so when it is neither a feature of the Exodus story itself, nor an expression of freedom that we find resonant today?

By reclining, we connect ourselves not to the experience of the Exodus itself, but rather to the experience of those Rabbis in Benei Berak retelling the Exodus story. By leaning, we imagine ourselves into the Seders of generations past, including those that took place in a time when this gesture held its own cultural meaning.

This brings us back to the idea that we all need to see ourselves as if we left Egypt. The Haggadah tells us that we bring the story of the Exodus into our own lives, in whatever way makes sense for us in that moment. Ironically, we do that by remembering that this is how Jews have always remembered our escape from Egypt—not by imagining ourselves as ancient Israelites leaving Egypt, but by imagining ancient Israelites as rabbis reclining in Benei Berak, or medieval Jews running from persecution in Spain, or even as Jews in New York or Tel Aviv in 2024, fearful for the future of our world. We recline because this is how our Rabbis at the time of the Mishnah reenacted redemption. "in every generation - בכל דור ודור" we see ourselves into the experience of the Exodus by literally leaning into the rich traditions of retelling in our Haggadah, accepting the invitation to ourselves become re-tellers of redemption. ♦

2 A Passover Haggadah: Go Forth and Learn, p. 15.

"לחם עוני": על תסכולים והזדמנויות בליל הסדר

הרב אלעזר סימון

כלפי נקודת המוצא שלי: אולי הקדושה האמיתית והתכלית האמיתית נמצאת בחינוך הילדים, בקיום במצוות מעשיות, ולא בחיפוש חוויות רוחניות אליטיסטיות.

אולם אפילו אם מקבלים את ההסברים הללו, ניתן לשאול: מדוע מאפיינים אלו קיימים דווקא בליל הסדר? האם יש סיבה שדווקא הציון של יציאת מצרים נעשה דווקא בדרך זו? אומרת התורה בספר דברים (טז, ג):

לא תאכל עֲלֵיו חֶמֶץ שְׁבַע יָמִים תֹּאכַל עָלָיו
מִצּוֹת לַחֶם עֲנִי...

המצה מתוארת כ"לחם עני". מדובר בתיאור פיזי של המצה – לחם פשוט ללא נפח ועובי. מדוע אוכלים בפסח לחם עוני? פרש רש"י "לחם שמזכיר את העוני שנתענו במצרים". כלומר, המצה היא זיכרון לקושי בתקופת השעבוד במצרים. טעם זה של מצוות אכילת מצה שונה מהטעם המוכר יותר שמופיע בהגדה שלנו:

מִצָּה זוּ שְׂאֵנוּ אוֹכְלִים, עַל שׁוֹם מָה? עַל שׁוֹם
שֶׁלֹּא הִסְפִּיק בְּצֶקֶם שֶׁל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְהַחֲמִיץ, עַד
שֶׁנִּגְלָה עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוא וּגְאֹלָם.

על פי הצעת רש"י, המצה אמנם מזכירה לנו את הגאולה ממצרים, אבל היא גם מזכירה לנו את שעבוד מצרים עצמו. במובן זה יש צד במצה שהיא דומה למרוו, והדבר הולם את הופעתם ביחד בציווי על אכילת קרבן "צֵלֵי אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל מְרִירִים יֵאָכְלֵהוּ" (שמות יב, ח).

אולם, ספר הזוהר מסביר את משמעותו של הקשר בין "לחם עני" ליציאת מצרים באופן אחר.

במשך שנים רבות הרגשתי בסוף ליל הסדר תחושת תסכול, ולא רק כי אני לא אוהב מצה. ליל הסדר אמור להיות אחד מהשיאים, אם לא ה-שיא, של מעגל השנה היהודי. יציאת מצרים היא האירוע המכונן של עם ישראל, והסיפור המסופר בה הוא שיא ההשגחה האלוקית. אנחנו משקיעים כמות עצומה של זמן ומשאבים בהכנה לפסח בכלל וליל הסדר בפרט, ומקפידים לחגוג אותו עם האנשים היקרים לנו מכל.

לכן, הייתי מצפה לחוות בליל הסדר חוויה דתית ורוחנית משמעותית. אבל רבים מאיתנו מגיעים אל ליל הסדר מותשים ורעבים. אנחנו מדקלמים טקסטים ששמענו כבר אלף פעמים, יושבים סביב שולחן ארוך מדי שמקשה לנהל שיח משמעותי, ומנהלים מעין מאבק סמוי בין אלו שרוצים להאריך ולהתפלפל במגיד לאלו המבקשים לקצר. השירים שאנחנו שרים הם מעין שירי פולקלור חביבים ומשעשעים, ולא ניגונים מרוממי נפש.

היכן מרגישים בליל הסדר קשר עם הקב"ה? מדוע הוא אינו דומה יותר לתפילה המרוממת ביום כיפור, קול השופר הבוקע את הדממה בראש השנה, לימוד כל הלילה ועמידה בעשרת הדיברות בשבועות, או אפילו עונג שבת בדיבוק חברים? הסדר הוא אמנם לילה משמעותי ברמה המשפחתית והתרבותית, אבל הוא מרגיש פעמים רבות חסר עומק רוחני ונטול משמעות דתית, ומבחינה זו אני מסיים אותו מאוכזב.

ניתן להסביר תופעה זו באופנים פשוטים. למשל, ניתן לומר שריבוי המצוות המעשיות בליל הסדר שעוסקות באכילה ושתיה, משאיר את המיקוד בעצם הסעודה ולא מאפשר להפליג ברוחניות. הציווי "וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ" (שמות יג, ח) מורה לנו לשים את הילדים במרכזו של ליל הסדר, וממילא הערב בנוי כדי ליצור חוויה עבורם ולא עבור המבוגרים (האם באמת מצליחים לתת לילדים חוויה? זו כבר שאלה אחרת...). ניתן גם לצאת מכאן אל ביקורת מהותית

לכאורה, מדובר בתפיסה פסימית לגבי ימי הפסח, כזו ששמה אותם במקום נמוך ביחס לשבועות, ומדגישה שלצד הגאולה יש בהם גם חסרון ועוני. רבי יהודה אריה ליב אלתר מגור התייחס לכך בספרו "שפת אמת":

שפת אמת, ויקרא, פסח תרנ"ה-תרנ"ו
באמת בני ישראל נכנסו במדרגות גדולות
אחר יציאת מצרים בקבלת התורה ובמשכן
ומקדשות. ויציאת מצרים הוא התחלה וכמובא
בזוהר שלכן מצה היא לחם עני... ומכל מקום
צריך להיות חביב יציאת מצרים יותר מכל
המדרגות. והתורה והמצות הכל תלוי ביציאת
מצרים... כי הוא יסוד שעל ידי זה באנו אחר
כך לכל המעלות. לכן אין מפטירין אחר הפסח
אפיקומן. שאין דבר חביב מזה.

נכון, אומר השפת אמת, דווקא אחרי פסח עולים בני ישראל למעלות גבוהות הרבה יותר. אולם בכל זאת יציאת מצרים היא ה"חביבה" ביותר, מכיוון שהיא נקודת הפתיחה שבה תלוי הבניין היהודי כולו. כמו בכל התחלה, יש בה קושי, אבל יש בה גם חירות ובחירה, וגילוי של רצון ושל אהבה. לפי פרשנותו, זוהי הסיבה שסעודת הסדר חייבת להסתיים באכילת מצת האפיקומן: הסעודה התחילה באכילת מצה, ולמרות שאחריה אנחנו אוכלים מאכלים טעימים הרבה יותר, בסופה אנחנו חוזרים בכל זאת ואוכלים את המצה.

מתוך התבוננות זו, אבקש להציע לכל מי שחש תסכול מהאופי של ליל הסדר, או לכל מי שסתם שונא מצה, לחבק ולאמץ את התסכול הזה ולהבין שהרגשות האלה הם תחילת הדרך בדרכנו למעלה. תחושת החוסר הזאת, הבקשה לנפח, השאיפה למשמעות וקירבת אלוקים – היא זו שדוחפת אותנו להמשיך המסע שבו עוד נגיע לרגעים משמעותיים ומרוממים, וללחמים אווריריים ושמנים. ♦

זהר חלק א קנז.

כתוב: שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצות לחם עני
(דברים טז, ג) ... קשהו ישראל במצרים,
היו ברשות אחרת. קשרצה הקדוש ברוך הוא
לקרב אותם אליו, נתן להם מקום של לחם
עני, לחם עני... ולחם עני הזה נקרא מצה...
התקרבו למצה בהתחלה. כיון שקרבו אותם
יותר, הכניס אותם הקדוש ברוך הוא בדרגות
אחרות....

בעולמו המיסטי של הזוהר, האירוע המרכזי שמתרחש ביציאת מצרים אינו השחרור מהשעבוד הגופני של מצרים, אלא שחרור משעבוד רוחני. עם ישראל שהיה מקושר ל"סטרא אחרא" (הצד האחר), כוחות הטומאה, משתחרר מכבליהם ומתחיל לכוון מערכת יחסים עם הקב"ה. והנה, אומר הזוהר, פתח הכניסה שנותן הקב"ה לעם ישראל, ה"מקום" הראשון שאליו הוא מוזמן אותם, הוא מקום של "לחם עני".

נשים לב לדבר המעניין שקורה כאן: בניגוד לפירוש רש"י לפיו בני ישראל היו עניים לפני גאולת מצרים (זה הפירוש היותר פשוט ומסתבר) הרי שלפי הזוהר הם היו עניים מיד אחריה. מהו אותו מקום עני שהיה נחלתם של בני ישראל מיד אחרי יציאת מצרים? נדמה שמדובר בדימוי למצב רוחני דל, שטוח, ריק. הקשר עם הקב"ה מיד עם יציאת מצרים בעצם אינו מכיל כלום, מלבד עצם ההצלה מהשעבוד. עוד אין תורה, אין מצוות, אין קורבנות ואין ערכים.

פרשנות הזוהר אולי מפתיעה במבט ראשון, אבל יש בה היגיון רב. בכל כניסה אל עולם חדש – יהא זה עולם רוחני, תחום לימודי או מקצועי, או מערכת יחסים – ראשית הדרך חסרה ובלתי מספקת. בדייט ראשון שני הצדדים מרגישים מבוכה ומחפשים על מה לדבר. האבחנה של הזוהר אומרת שלמרות האירוע העצום, המרגש ומלא האהבה של יציאת מצרים, עם ישראל ואלוקיו נמצאים בתחילת דרכם המשותפת. ותחילת הדרך, מה לעשות, היא ענייה.

רק בהמשך הדרך, בימי ספירת העומר, תתרחש צמיחה רוחנית שבה הקשר יתפתח, ייתעמק ויתמלא בתוכן, עד שיגיע לשיאו במתן תורה. ע"פ הזוהר, הביטוי הסימבולי לתהליך הצמיחה הזה הוא הלחם – תחילת הדרך היא במצה שהוא לחם עוני, בימי ספירת העומר מתרחשת תפיחה שמסתיימת בהבאת "קורבן שתי הלחם" בחג השבועות.

אם להתחבר בחזרה ל"תלונות" שלי על ליל הסדר, לפי הזוהר ישנו קשר הדוק בין חוסר שביעות הרצון שלי מהמצה לחוסר שביעות הרצון שלי מהחוויה הדתית בליל הסדר. הראשון מסמל את השני. קיבלנו כאן הסבר בעל אופי היסטורי-תיאולוגי, לתופעה שאותה תיארתי: פסח הוא באופן עמוק ראשית והתחלה, והתחלה זה קשה. בעקבות הזוהר, במקום להיות מאוכזבים שליל הסדר שלנו לא המריא לשחקים, אפשר לחשוב עליו כהזמנה לקיום דתי עני. הזדמנות לחוות מקום ראשוני, בתולי, דל, כזה שאינו עמוס עוד בכל המשמעותיות הכבדות שהעולם הדתי שלנו עמוס בהם. כזה שאין בו עוד תורה, אין בו עוד תודעה מפותחת, אין בו אינטנסיביות רוחנית.

THE EXODUS AS ORIENTING EVENT¹

R. Yitz Greenberg

IF THE BOOK of Genesis is dominated by the theme of covenant, the Book of Exodus is focused on the second great motif that runs through Jewish history and religion: the journey toward redemption—that is, realization of the covenantal task of bringing about a world of dignity and freedom. In this book, the Israelites start under slavery and genocidal persecution. With the help of God, they go out on a journey through the desert toward a home and future independence in the land of Canaan.

The Exodus is the core event of Jewish history and religion. In this event, a group of Hebrew slaves were liberated. Moses, called by God, initiates the request that the Hebrew slaves be given a temporary release to go and worship in the desert. Step by step, the power of Pharaoh is broken and the request for a three-day break escalates into a demand for permanent freedom. This intervention in history by God to free the Hebrew slaves is a revelation of the human right to freedom. The Divine Presence contradicts the claims of absolute human power and foreshadows the end of its abusive application. The Exodus is not a brief respite from enslavement, but an open-ended journey to liberation.

The Exodus itinerary is not really a geographic passage through trackless wastes, past hostile or threatening nations, toward the Promised Land of Israel. The journey is much more difficult because it is a psychological odyssey from slavery, and a sense of worthlessness, toward freedom, maturity, and taking



responsibility as free adults. The Israelites must gain a sense of self-worth that is not self-centered or achieved at the expense of others. Their ultimate goal—not necessarily grasped at first—is to reach the level of loving one’s self, but then extending the feeling and to love one’s neighbor as one’s self.²

It turned out that the people who were actually liberated were too broken internally and too infantilized by enslavement to ever fully grow up. Only the next generation—raised under difficult circumstances, and with parents making halting steps toward maturity—was able to attain the level of understanding and

¹ This essay was originally written for Parashat Shemot 5781, available here: <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/exodus-orienting-event>.

² Leviticus 19:18.

responsibility that equipped them to live a free life with all its challenges. Only the later generations had the inner fortitude to carve out a homeland and strive for an ideal society.

The Torah's account of the Exodus journey was not intended to be just a generational portrait of the Children of Israel. The prophetic understanding is that what happened to the Israelites is the first stage—a divine down payment, as it were—on the journey that all humanity will someday take.³ This is a model, a demonstration that all nations should learn from and take up. Some day, all people will go out from slavery, or widespread deprivation, or inequality and exploitation—the general human condition in ancient times—and attain full dignity.

All people will learn to be free and to treat each other as images of God are meant to be treated. God, who has lovingly singled out Israel and started their process of emancipation, loves all humans. They too

will be liberated. They too will find their homelands where they live by right, where their dignities are not dependent on the good will or tolerance of others. The final, universal Exodus will outstrip the initial Exodus.⁴ Then the whole world will be free of war and oppression, of enervating sickness and crushing poverty.⁵ Prophetic messianism, the promise that the whole world will be liberated and provided for, is the Exodus writ large for all humanity.

Once we widen our lens to encompass all humanity, we realize that the image of being on a journey covers a vast period, even before the emergence of humanity. In this way, the grand narrative of the Exodus also includes Creation. Life itself, grounded in God and sustained by the Divine Presence, has been a journey from its initial one-celled forms toward the ever richer phenomena of complex and capable life. With the emergence of *homo sapiens*, the human being with a fully developed frontal cortex, we have a form of life so developed and so Godlike as to be able to understand the natural process and the laws of nature instilled by God into reality. Then, God recruits human beings to join in the evolutionary process and focus development on the completion and perfection of nature and of human societies to the end that we achieve paradise on earth.

Of course, this process, still unfinished, has taken eons. Moreover, history is full of contradictory evidence to this vision. Slavery is an extreme version of the reality that most people endured in past history; outright oppression and widespread deprivation are not that dissimilar. If our ancestors as slaves internalized their servitude and inferiority, there is a great danger that people living in poverty, hunger, and sickness today will be crushed into acceptance and passivity. The Torah and Jewish religion hold up the Exodus, not as a one-time event, but as a norm by which life should be judged and guided. The Exodus is an “orienting event”—an event which sets in motion and guides the Jewish way (and humanity's way) toward a Promised Land—i.e. an entire planet set free and perfected.⁶

3 See especially the Book of Isaiah, chapters 40-66.

4 See Isaiah 52:11-12 and Jeremiah 23:7-8.

5 See Isaiah, especially such examples as chapters 11, 55, 56, 65.

6 The ethical and ritual implications of Exodus are treated more expansively in the chapter on Pesah in my book, *The Jewish Way*, “Judaism as an Exodus religion.”

SUBSCRIBE
TO DEVASH

Hadar's weekly
parashah magazine
for kids!



HADAR
Children & Families



Subscribe at
hadar.org/devash

Since the Exodus from Egypt, humanity has gone through ancient, medieval, modern—and now into postmodern—civilization. As the geographic coordinates and the cultural consensus is transformed, it is easy to lose the way: which is the right path toward freedom and dignity? People also become uncertain of which values are true and permanent. The Torah holds up the Exodus and its norms so that people can chart their behaviors along the way by this event. The Exodus serves as a kind of navigational star by which to measure whether we are heading on the right path.

The Exodus norms are concretized in specific laws in Jewish tradition. The ethical actions are guided by the memory of being oppressed, as well as how the state of subjugation and mistreatment was then overthrown by the Exodus experience. These laws include not oppressing the stranger (Exodus 23:9), but rather treating them right and loving them as yourself (Leviticus 19:33-34); acting justly by using honest weights and measures (19:35-36); helping the poor and not taking interest on loans to the poor (25:35-38); taking care of the widow, orphan, and Levite, and rejoicing with your family (Deuteronomy 16:11-12); leaving part of the crops in the field for the vulnerable—stranger, orphan, and widow (23:21-23).

To ensure that the Exodus and its norms drive our behavior, the ritual life of Jewry is structured so that we relive and reenact the Exodus. Thus, each generation experiences the full power of the Exodus and lives by its implications, no matter what culture it is in.⁷

The Book of Exodus starts by having us taste the bitterness of servitude, genocide, and despair. Week by week, the Torah portion takes us through the process of breaking the slave masters' power and undermining the fixity and authority of their moral-cultural regime. Thus the Torah brings the past into the present to guide our behavior. The Exodus account orients us away from absolutizing the local norms, but instead upgrading our behaviors to meet the standards of the ultimate Exodus and the messianic norms of the future. ♦

7 The rituals of Pesah (Seder, *matzah*, retelling), Shabbat, Sukkot, daily prayers, and many holiday liturgies make the Exodus ever-present in our lives.





WWW.PROJECTZUG.ORG

◆ Mishnah Pesahim 10:5-6

The text produced here is found in our printed editions of the Mishnah. These modern editions broadly reflect what we find in our Haggadah today, but differ significantly from the versions found in medieval manuscripts. Nonetheless, these differences are not crucial here—but for the interested reader to track down! A good place to start is the commentary by Joshua Kulp found at the back of *The Schechter Haggadah*.

Storytelling at the Seder

An Excerpt of a Project Zug course from Dena Weiss

The Haggadah teaches us that it is a *mitzvah* to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt and that the more we tell the story, the more worthy of praise we become. However, the original paschal sacrifice happened in Egypt, before there was a redemptive story to tell. And even some later sources indicate that storytelling wasn't the primary form of teaching and discussing at the Seder. In this session, we'll look a little bit at one of the alternatives to storytelling and examine what we think we are gaining and what we might be losing when we move the conversation around the Seder to this different mode.

I. THE SEDER IN THE MISHNAH

The Seder as we know it is modeled after the guidelines presented by the Mishnah in the 10th chapter of Pesahim, though the Haggadah that we use now has gone through much modification and expansion throughout the years. In this text we are going to look for the kernel of the obligation to tell the story of the Exodus on Passover. As you are reading the text, try to figure out how the different sections relate to each other.

Often in the Mishnah, there will be a disagreement without any language that says explicitly “I disagree.” When different opinions are offered it is up to us as the learners of this text to figure out how those opinions relate to each other. Is opinion 2 restating opinion 1? Expanding on opinion 1? Uninterested in opinion 1? Rejecting opinion 1?

SOURCE #1

משנה פסחים י:ה-ו

מְזַגּוּ לוֹ כּוּס שְׁנִי, וְכֵאן הַבֵּן
שׁוֹאֵל אָבִיו, וְאִם אֵין דַּעַת
בְּבֶן, אָבִיו מְלַמְּדוֹ, מֵה
נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל
הַלַּיְלוֹת, שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת
אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֶמֶץ וּמֵצָה,
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ מֵצָה.
שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין
שָׂר וְיִרְקוֹת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה
מְרוּר. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ
אוֹכְלִין בֶּשָׂר צְלִי, שְׁלוֹק,

Mishnah Pesahim 10:5-6◆

The second cup is poured and here the son asks his father—and if the son is not cognitively capable, his father trains him to ask—“*Mah Nishtanah Halayla Haze?*” How is this night different from all other nights? For on all other nights we eat either leavened bread or *matzah*, but on this night we eat only *matzah*. For on all other nights we eat other vegetables, but on this night we eat only *maror*. For on all

◆ **roasted**

Since we are no longer participating in and eating the paschal sacrifice, the text in our Haggadah replaces the question about preparing the meat with a question about reclining. (In earlier versions of the Mishnah also, the line about *maror* was missing and there were only a total of three questions).

ומבשול, הלילה הזה
כלו צלי. שבכל הלילות
אנו מטבילין פעם אחת,
הלילה הזה שתי פעמים.
ולפי דעתו של בן, אביו
מלמדו.

מתחיל בגנות ומסיים
בשבח, ודורש מארמי
אובד אבי, עד שיגמר כל
הפרשה כלה:

רבן גמליאל היה אומר,
כל שלא אמר שלשה
דברים אלו בפסח, לא יצא
ידי חובתו, ואלו הן, פסח,
מצה, ומרור. פסח, על שום
שפסח המקום על בתי
אבותינו במצרים. מצה,
על שום שנגאלו אבותינו
במצרים. מרור, על שום
שמררו המצרים את חיי
אבותינו במצרים.

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם
לראות את עצמו כאילו
הוא יצא ממצרים, שנאמר
(שמות יג:ח) "והגדת
לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר,
בעבור זה עשה ה' לי
בצאתי ממצרים". לפיכך
אנחנו חייבין להודות,
להלל, לשבח, לפאר,
לרומם, להדר, לברך,
לעלה, ולקלס, למי שעשה
לאבותינו ולנו את כל
הנסים האלו, הוציאנו

other nights we eat meat roasted, stewed, or cooked, but on this night we eat only roasted. ◆ For on all other nights we only dip once, but tonight we dip twice. And according to the cognitive abilities of the son, his father teaches him.

He (= the father) begins with the negative and ends with the positive, and he teaches the passage from “My father was a wandering Aramean” (Devarim 26:5) until he finishes the whole section.

Rabban Gamliel would say: Whoever didn't say these three things on Passover does not fulfill their obligation. And these are they: *pesah* (paschal offering), *matzah*, and *maror*. *Pesah*—because the Omnipresent jumped over (*pasah*) the houses of our forefathers in Egypt. *Matzah*—because our forefathers were redeemed in Egypt. *Maror*—because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our forefathers in Egypt.

In each and every generation a person must view himself as though he left Egypt himself, as it says: “And you shall tell your son on that day saying, because of this which God did for me when I left Egypt” (Shemot 13:8). Therefore we are obligated to acknowledge, praise, glorify, extol, exalt, honor, bless, revere, and laud the One who performed all of these miracles for our ancestors and for us: He took us out from slavery to freedom, from anguish to joy, from mourning to a Festival, from darkness

◆ Tosefta's

The Tosefta is a collection of oral tradition that runs parallel to the Mishnah. It comes from roughly the same time and place (3rd century Eretz Yisrael) and features many of the same Sages. The precise relationship between the Mishnah and the Tosefta is a hot topic of modern scholarship!

מעבדות לחרות, מיגון
 לשמחה, ומאכל ליום
 טוב, ומאפלה לאור גדול,
 ומשעבוד לגאולה. ונאמר
 לפניו, הללויה-ה:

to a great light, and from enslavement to redemption. And we will say before Him: *Halleluyah!*

Questions from Dena Weiss

1. In the Mishnah we see the questions of the Mah Nishtanah. Do these questions ever get answered? If so, how? If not, how do we understand the role of asking these questions?!
2. These two *mishnayot* can be divided into four sections: a) the four questions, b) the obligation to tell the story with a negative to positive arc based on the biblical passage of “My father was a wandering Aramean,” c) Rabban Gamliel’s three things one needs to say, and d) the obligation to look at oneself as if we were redeemed from Egypt and are therefore obligated to praise God.

Let’s look at b, c, and d as three different possible responses to the child’s four questions.

- » Why would the response to these questions be the story?
 - » Why would the response to these questions be explaining the three items: *pesah*, *matzah*, *maror*?
 - » Why would the response to these questions be our obligation to praise?
 - » Are these three options in tension or in harmony with one another?
 - » What do you think the right approach is?
3. In the Mishnah, there appears to be a scripted, if not word for word, sense of which questions to ask and options for responses. Does it make sense to have a scripted question and answer? What are the benefits of having these guidelines? What are the downsides?

II. ANOTHER MODEL OF THE SEDER

What is the obligation for storytelling as we see it in the Haggadah? What is it an alternative to? In this section we are going to look at the Tosefta’s ◆ understanding of what is supposed to happen at the Passover meal. In the Tosefta, we will see a different version of a familiar story from the Haggadah. We’ll read them both and then try to tease out the significant difference between them.

◆ **They**

It is not clear who the “they” are who are coming into the story. It appears that “they” cannot be Rabban Gamliel and his associates, because it says “from in front of them”—meaning that a third party came in and removed something from in front of them. Probably, it means servants or their students.

◆ **plate**

In the Hebrew it merely says that they raised “it” from in front of Rabban Gamliel and the Elders, but does not say what they raised. Most likely, “they” are taking the tray or plate from before them, signifying that the meal is over.

SOURCE #2

תוספתא פסחים י:ח

אין מפטירין אחר הפסח
[אפיקומן] כגון [אגוזים]
תמרים [וקליות] חייב
אדם [לעסוק בהלכות
הפסח] כל הלילה אפילו
בינו לבין בנו אפילו בינו
לבין עצמו אפילו בינו לבין
תלמידו.

מעשה ברבן גמליאל
וזקנים שהיו מסובין בבית
ביתוס בן זונין בלוד והיו
[עסוקין בהלכות הפסח]
כל הלילה עד קרות
הגבר הגביהו מלפניהם
ונועדו והלכו [להן] לבית
המדרש...

Tosefta Pesahim 10:8

We do not follow the paschal offering with an *afikoman* like nuts, dates, and toasted wheat. A person is obligated to engage with the laws of Passover the whole night, even if it [is only a discussion] between him and his son, even just between him and himself, even if it is just between him and his student.

It happened that Rabban Gamliel and the Elders were having the meal in the house of Beitos ben Zunin in Lod, and they were engaging with the laws of Passover all night until the cock’s crow. They raised the [plate] from in front of them, and they [then] convened and went to the house of study...

SOURCE #3

הגדה של פסח

וְאִפִּילוּ בְּלָנוּ חֲכָמִים בְּלָנוּ
נְבוֹנִים בְּלָנוּ זְקֵנִים בְּלָנוּ
יֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִצְוָה
עָלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם.
וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת
מִצְרָיִם הָרִי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח.

מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה
וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן
שֶׁהָיוּ מְסֻבִּין בְּבֵנֵי בֵּרַק וְהָיוּ
מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם

Passover Haggadah

And even if we are all wise and all understanding and all elders and all knowledgeable in the Torah, it is a *mitzvah* for us to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. And anyone who tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt at length is praised.

It happened that R. Eliezer, R. Yehoshua, R. Elazar ben Azaria, R. Akiva, and R. Tarfon were all eating together in Benei Berak and were telling the story of the Exodus from

◆ **morning Shema**

Though we generally think of saying the Shema as part of the morning and evening prayers, reciting Shema twice a day is an independent obligation with different timing. One is permitted to say the morning Shema when light just peeks through the horizon, while reciting the full Shaḥarit prayers can only happen after sunrise.

◆ **in the Haggadah**

On this transition, see David Henshke, *Mah Nishtanah: The Passover Night in the Sages' Discourse* (in Hebrew).

כָּל אוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה, עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ
תַּלְמִידֵיהֶם וְאָמְרוּ לָהֶם
רַבּוֹתֵינוּ הִגִּיעַ זְמַן קְרִיאַת
שְׁמַע שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית.

Egypt that whole night. Until their students came and said to them, “Our teachers! The time has come to recite the morning Shema.”◆

Questions from Dena Weiss

1. In these texts we have two stories about rabbis staying up all night. Rabban Gamliel and his colleagues (“the Elders”) appear in the Tosefta, while R. Eliezer *et al* appear in the Haggadah. What are the rabbis studying in each of these stories? In each story, how do they know that it’s morning? What do these rabbis do when they realize it is morning in each of the stories?
2. It seems that we have a transition between the standard scholarly activity of studying laws in the Tosefta to a more innovative decision to imagine the rabbis as telling the story in the Haggadah.◆ And this story comes to “prove” that, no matter how scholarly you are, you also need to tell the story. Why is this an important part? Why isn’t it the case that we just tell the story to children, but not to adults or scholars?
3. The Haggadah not only says that everyone is obligated to tell the story, but it also says that the more one elaborates and the more they tell, the more praiseworthy they are. Why is telling stories considered to be such a good thing in the context of the Seder?



FORTY-NINE PORTALS TO TRANSFORMATION

R. Goldie Guy

WHAT ARE WE counting towards? In Parashat Emor, God commands us to bring the *omer*, a grain sacrifice of barley, on Pesah to the *mishkan*. From that day, God commands us to count seven complete weeks until the holiday of Shavuot, when we are commanded to bring another offering, this time of new grain (of wheat).¹

Our tradition sees significance in the 49 days we count from the *omer* offering until we can offer new grain, which also mark the 49 days from the Exodus until we received the Torah at Har Sinai. The Zohar teaches that during our servitude in Egypt, Benei Yisrael descended to the 49th level of spiritual impurity—and had we descended further to the 50th level, that would have been a spiritual point of no return.² Hasidic masters teach, therefore, that each of the 49 days we count during the Omer parallels our emergence through those 49 levels of impurity, serving to gradually elevate us from *tum'ah* (impurity) to *kedushah* (sanctity). The Maggid of Kozhnitz³ teaches:

עבודת ישראל לפסח

בליל פסח האירו כל התיקונים והגדלות ברגע
אחד כדי להוציא עמו בני"מ כור הברזל ממ"ט
שערי טומאה למ"ט שערי קדושה. ... אחר
יצ"מ הוצרכו לברר המדות מעט מעט עפ"י
עבודתם עד חג השבועות.

1 Vayikra 23:15-16.

2 Zohar *Hadash*, *Yitro*, 39a.

3 R. Yisrael Hopstein, 18th-19th century Poland, was a student of the Maggid of Mezritch and R. Elimelekh of Lizhensk.



Avodat Yisrael on Pesah⁴

On the [first] night of Pesah, all of the repairs and grandeurs were illuminated in one moment, in order to take out the Israelites from the “iron furnace” of the 49 levels of impurity to the 49 levels of sanctity. ... After yetzi’at mitzrayim, they needed to purify their character traits little by little through their spiritual work, until Shavuot.

According to this understanding, the transformation we had to undergo as a people, from slavery to freedom, and from Egypt to Har Sinai, needed to be gradual. As in any transformation we undertake as individuals, change doesn’t happen overnight. If we desire change in ourselves, in our communities, and in the broader world, we know it will be a product of many small steps to get there. For Benei Yisrael to transform from a nation of slaves to a nation of God, we needed to do critical spiritual work on each of the 49 days. Each day brought us one step closer to being able to receive the Torah, and become vessels for translating divine will into the world.

R. Hayyim Vital⁵ teaches that, just as the Jewish people as a whole underwent a gradual process of transformation during these 49 days, the Omer also presents a unique opportunity for each of us to embark on journeys of transformation on an individual level. Echoing teachings of the Arizal, R. Vital understands that each day of the Omer corresponds to specific divine attributes (*sefirot*), and so each day contains unique potential for us to practice self-refinement in those areas of our lives:

שער הכוונות, דרושי הפסח יא
 טוב לאדם לכוין במ"ט ימים אלו לתקן כל
 אשר חטא בכל הז' ספירות והמשל בזה
 בהיותו בשבוע א' יכוין לתקן את אשר חטא
 ופגם בספי' החסד ובשבוע הב' יכוין לתקן את
 אשר חטא ופגם בספי' הגבורה וכעד"ז בד'
 השבועות.

Sha'ar ha-Kavanot, Pesah 11

During these 49 days it is good for a person to intend to repair any missteps in relation to the seven [lower] sefirot. For example, during the first week they should intend to repair where they have missed the mark in relation to the attribute of *hesed*. In the second week they should intend to repair where they have missed the mark in relation to the attribute of *gevurah* (strength), and so on through the seven weeks.

In this way, throughout the Omer, there is a heightened sense of potential inherent in each day. Every day of the seven-week count represents another portal to greater introspection and self-knowledge. The Omer lays out 49 days of intention and mindful action, resulting in a seven-week-long path to walk toward personal transformation. Each day, each action, each step along the path is critical to the effectiveness of the process.

The Omer is a *mitzvah* that orients us toward greater awareness of time and of the potential inherent in each day. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his essay “Sacred and Profane,” argues that the *mitzvah* was given to Benei Yisrael after the Exodus because being conscious of time and in control of one’s own time is fundamental to the experience of freedom.⁶ Counting the Omer was thus an initial expression of our freedom: we could not miss a day of counting (“seven complete weeks”), and so had to develop an appreciation for each day, and all seven weeks in their accumulation. A person who can sense the power of their days is a free person, a person who is ready to choose a life of commitment to Torah.

The spiritual journey—from slavery to freedom and from the Exodus to receiving the Torah—that is built into the seven weeks of the Omer is also reflected in the offerings that bookend the Omer count. The *omer* offering, which marks the start of the Omer period, is made of ground barley flour. Barley is seen as the simplest and roughest of grains, and flour is a simple, unbaked product. We offer this gift to God at the start of the Omer because it represents where we are in the

4 Translated by R. Daniel Raphael Silverstein.

5 R. Hayyim Vital, 16th-17th century Safed and Damascus, was the leading disciple of the Arizal, R. Isaac Luria (a founding figure of Kabbalah).

6 *Gesher* 3:1 (1966), p.16. See also the essay of R. Michael Rosensweig, “Reflections on Sefirat ha-Omer,” available here: http://torahweb.org/torah/1999/moadim/rros_sefira.html.

process of liberation: at the very beginning, having only basic ingredients in our hands. Over the course of the Omer and our journey from Egypt to Sinai, we evolve. We make the choice each day to develop ourselves a little more, to dedicate ourselves to making mindful choices and taking mindful action in the world. When we arrive at Shavuot at the end of the seven weeks, we are able to offer the two loaves of bread baked from our harvested wheat. That *korban* is a complex product born of human investment and ingenuity, one that wouldn't have been possible without the process of evolution over the Omer, the daily introspection and growth of 49 days.⁷

The Omer is a 49-day story of our daily choices. After we had fallen to the 49th level of spiritual opacity, God still redeemed us from Egypt, granting us an unearned chance at a new start. Then God told us to count the Omer, offering us with this *mitzvah* an invitation to begin a new story. If at the Seder we tell a story of unearned liberation, counting the Omer is a story of what we choose to do with each day, and the power to craft our own narrative by committing to growth, and to giving back to God and to the world.

On Pesah, God granted us the gift of freedom, and through the Omer we make a statement of what we intend to do with our freedom. In this journey of transformation, we see the potential each day holds. Each day is a door to open, a threshold to cross, a chance to make mindful choices and take chances. The liminal space of the Omer offers us a space to transform. What will we make of the gift God has given us? Who will we be in seven weeks? What kind of world do we want to shape? ♦

7 This framing of the *korbanot* is based on the writing of R. Rebecca Blady, <https://rebeccablady.wordpress.com/category/the-omer/>.



Od ha-Yom be-Nov

Haftarah for Eighth Day of Pesah

HADAR
Children & Families

On the eighth day of Pesah, we read the Haftarah from the book of Yeshayahu. In it, Yeshayahu the prophet describes a time in the future when life will be better for Benei Yisrael and for all people who live in the world.

Yeshayahu promises that these things will happen:

- There will be a new leader from the family of King David. This leader will have the spirit of God, and will judge all people fairly and with justice (Yeshayahu 11:1-2).
- There won't be any jealousy within Benei Yisrael about the leader, and the rivalry that Efrayim and Yehudah used to have will no longer exist (11:13).
- God will gather all of Benei Yisrael from the four corners of the earth and return them to Eretz Yisrael (11:12).
- Animals will all live in peace with one another, even animals like the wolf and the lamb (11:6-8).
- Benei Yisrael will thank God for comforting them and will praise God to all of the world (12:1-6).

How is this connected to the eighth day of Pesah?

The Pesah story is about Benei Yisrael experiencing גְּאוּלָּה (*ge'ulah*, redemption). This means that God saves them and changes their reality to one that is much, much better. Though our ancestors experienced redemption when leaving מִצְרַיִם (Mitzrayim, Egypt), we live in a world where there is still slavery, jealousy, violence, and fear. Yeshayahu's prophecy promises an ultimate redemption sometime in the future, when all of these problems will be repaired and all creatures will live in peace with one another. (Some communities also read this Haftarah on Yom ha-Atzma'ut, Israel's Independence Day, because they understand that day to be a celebration of another kind of redemption.)

Check it out!

ישעיהו יא:ו-ח Yeshayahu 11:6-8

וְגַר זֶאֵב עִם כֶּבֶשׂ	The wolf will live with the lamb,
וְנֹמֵר עִם גְּדֵי יִרְבֵּץ	the leopard will lie down with the baby goat;
וְעֵגֶל וְכַפִּיר וּמְרִיא יִחְדָּו	the calf, the young lion, and the fat sheep will be together,
וְנֶעֱר קֹטֵן נִהְגָּ בָם:	with a little child to herd them.
וּפָרָה וְדֹב תִרְעִינָה	The cow and the bear will graze,
יִחְדָּו יִרְבְּצוּ יִלְדֵיהֶן	their young will lie down together;
וְאַרְיֵה כִבְקָר יֹאכֵל תֵּבֵן:	and the lion, like the ox, will eat straw.
וְשִׁעֲשַׁע יוֹנֵק עַל חֹר פִּתְוֹן	A baby will play over a cobra's hole,
וְעַל מְאוֹרֵת צִפְעוֹנֵי נְמוּל	and an infant will pass their hand over
יְדֵי הַדָּהָה:	a poisonous snake's den.

Questions:

1. What do you notice? What are you wondering about?
2. What kinds of animals do these pesukim pair together? What's unusual about saying that these animals will be together? Why is this part of redemption?
3. Do you think Yeshayahu is describing something that literally will happen, or are the animals a metaphor that represents some bigger ideas? If they're a metaphor, what ideas do they represent? What does it mean that the lion will eat straw, like the ox? What is this saying about meat-eaters?
4. Where are children mentioned in these pesukim? What are their roles? Are these surprising activities for kids? Why or why not?
5. We don't yet live in a world of complete peace and harmony. Can you think of some things you can do to help make Yeshayahu's vision of redemption a reality?
 - Try playing with a friend who is different from you and getting to know them better. What holidays do they celebrate? Who is part of their family? Where does their family come from?
 - Practice listening to someone that has different opinions than you. What's it like to see the world from their perspective?

BETWEEN GRIEF AND ANTICIPATION: COUNTING THE OMER¹

R. Shai Held

OVER THE COURSE of Jewish history, a time of breathless anticipation becomes simultaneously a period of profound grief. To understand why is to discover Judaism's deepest yearnings as well as its greatest disappointments.

Parashat Emor describes a period of anticipation leading up to Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, so called because it takes place seven full weeks after the offering of the first fruits of the barley harvest.² The Israelites are instructed: "And you shall count off seven weeks from the day after the sabbath,³ from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation⁴; they shall be complete. You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to God" (Leviticus 23:15-16). On Pesah, the Israelites celebrate having been redeemed from a foreign, oppressive land (23:4-8); on Shavuot, they celebrate what God has bestowed upon them in

the new, promised land (23:15-22). The biblical holiday of Shavuot is purely agricultural, "a celebration of [God's] provision in the harvest."⁵

But for our Sages, Shavuot takes on another, historical dimension: if Pesah commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, Shavuot commemorates the revelation on Mount Sinai (Talmud Bavli Pesahim 68b); *Hag ha-Shavuot*, the Festival of Weeks, becomes, in Rabbinic idiom, *z'man matan torateinu*, the season of the giving of our Torah. Though the association of Shavuot with Sinai lacks any explicit biblical basis, there is something theologically profound about it. On Pesah the Israelites were liberated from slavery—but for what purpose? God does not demand simply that Pharaoh "let My people go," but rather that the king "let My people go that they may serve Me" (Exodus 7:26). For Jewish tradition, so committed to the ideal of freedom for a sacred purpose as opposed to mere

-
- 1 Originally published for Parashat Emor 5775, available here: <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/between-grief-and-anticipation-counting-omer>, and published in *The Heart of Torah*.
 - 2 Actually, the festival in question is not named in Leviticus, but is referred to as *Hag ha-Shavuot* in Exodus 34:22 and Deuteronomy 16:10. Elsewhere it is called the Feast of Harvest (*Hag ha-Katzir*, Exodus 23:16), and the Day of First Fruits (*Yom ha-Bikkurim*, Numbers 28:26).
 - 3 "The sabbath" is understood by Jewish tradition to refer, in this context, to the first day of the holiday.
 - 4 The *omer ha-tenufah*, or "sheaf of elevation," is an offering consisting of two loaves of leavened bread from the new wheat crop. They are "elevated" before God in order to sanctify them (cf. Leviticus 23:11).
 - 5 Jay Sklar, *Leviticus* (2014), p. 283. Scholars disagree over whether the festival actually celebrates the end of the harvest or the beginning. See, e.g., Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, p. 265 and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27* (2001), pp. 1991-1992. Rabbinic tradition seems to side with Milgrom.

freedom **from** external constraint,⁶ Pesah needs to lead somewhere, and Sinai-Shavuot is that destination. Counting the 49 days of the Omer thus becomes an exercise in anticipating revelation.

This idea is beautifully expressed in the medieval Sefer ha-Hinnukh:⁷ “The very essence of the Jewish people is only the Torah... and it is the essence of why they were redeemed from Egypt—so that they would receive the Torah at Sinai and fulfill it.” Receiving the Torah, the author insists, is an even greater good for the Jewish people than freedom from slavery; the purpose of the latter is to lead on to the former. We count 49 days in order to demonstrate the immense yearning we feel for the great day when we will receive the Torah, “because counting shows a person that all of his longing and all of his yearning are focused on getting to that day” (Mitzvah #306). In counting these days each year, in other words, the Jewish people re-experience the excitement and anticipation that the

6 Regarding positive and negative freedom (including the political dangers of invoking the former) see my essay on Parashat VaYakhel, “Whom Do We Serve? The Exodus Toward Dignified Work,” published in *The Heart of Torah* and available here: <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/whom-do-we-serve>.

7 An anonymous work from 13th century Spain.



first generation of liberated Israelites felt: we are no longer slaves, and soon we will receive the Torah, the greatest gift imaginable.

Over time, however, these days of anticipation became mingled with sadness, and even mourning. Beginning in the Geonic period, marriages were discouraged, then haircutting, and eventually, the use of musical instruments.⁸ Tradition associates the sadness of the Omer with the death of the students of R. Akiva. As recounted in the Talmud, R. Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of disciples, “all of whom died at the same time It was taught: All of them died between Pesah and Shavuot. Rav Hama bar Abba, and some say R. Hiyya bar Avin said: All of them died a cruel death. What was it? Rav Nahman said: Diphtheria” (Yevamot 62b). Historians have long struggled to reconstruct just what might have taken place to cause the death of so many students in such a short time. One common view was that, in a veiled way, the Talmud is describing the fact that R. Akiva’s students followed his guidance and joined Bar Kokhba’s revolt against the Romans (132-136 CE). The revolt was unsuccessful, and thousands of students died.⁹ More recent scholarship casts doubt on the connection of this story to the Bar Kokhba revolt—and, more fundamentally, questions whether literary sources can be reliably mined for historical information.¹⁰ Historically accurate or not, the idea that R. Akiva’s disciples died in a revolt against Roman oppressors, and the suggestion that they began to die on Pesah, are enormously powerful and instructive.

They offer a window into the promise and peril, the hope and the tragedy, of Exodus theology.

When God creates the world, God separates water from water (Genesis 1:6) so that life may emerge. Strikingly, when God redeems the Israelite slaves from Egypt, God again separates water from water, establishing a piece of dry land so that life may emerge from the hands of its enemies (Exodus 14:21-22). This enormously significant (yet easy-to-miss) parallel offers a crucial window into biblical theology. The Exodus from Egypt is not a fleeting moment in history; it is, rather, part of God’s struggle to have cosmos prevail over chaos, to have life triumph over death, and to have goodness overcome cruelty and tyranny. Creation in Tanakh does not mean that God creates something out of nothing, but rather that God subdues the forces of chaos, enabling order to emerge and life to flourish.¹¹ In Tanakh, Pharaoh is seen as both a historical figure and a mythological one: the cruel tyrant’s arrogance and murderousness represent an assault on creation itself.¹² The prophet Ezekiel imagines Pharaoh brazenly announcing, “My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.” Tellingly, God refers to Pharaoh, whom God is about to slay, as “the mighty sea monster (*ha-tannim ha-gadol*)” (Ezekiel 29:3; cf. 32:2).¹³

The Israelites refer to themselves in the Song of the Sea as “*am zu kanita*,” this people You have *k-n-h*. Some translations render: “ransomed” (JPS), others: “acquired” (NRSV), still others: “made yours” (Alter). But in biblical Hebrew, the root *k-n-h* can also mean to create. In the Song of the Sea, then, the Israelites

-
- 8 Cf. B. M. Levin, ed., *Otzar ha-Geonim*, vol. 7 (1936), pp. 140-41; Arba’ah Turim, Orah Hayyim 493; Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 493:1-4.
- 9 For a classic example of this interpretation, cf. Shmuel Safrai, *R. Akiva ben Yosef: Hayyav u-Mishnato* (1970), pp. 27-28. For a summary presentation of the historiographical debate, cf. Haim Licht, “Al Motam shel Talmidei R. Akiva,” *Tura* 1 (1989), pp. 119-134.
- 10 Cf., most importantly, Aaron Amit, “The Death of Rabbi Akiva’s Disciples: A Literary History,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 56 (2005), pp. 265-284.
- 11 See my essay on Parashat Vayikra, “Order Amidst Chaos: Connecting to Leviticus,” published in *The Heart of Torah* and available here: <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/order-amidst-chaos-connecting-leviticus>; and cf. also Jon Levenson’s magisterial exploration of creation in Tanakh, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (1988), pp. 3-127.
- 12 Terence E. Fretheim, “The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110/3 (1991), pp. 385-396. See especially p. 385, n.4.
- 13 For a fuller discussion, see my essay on Parashat Bo, “Pharaoh: Consumed by the Chaos He Sows,” published in *The Heart of Torah* and available here: <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/pharaoh-consumed-chaos-he-sows>.

jubilantly proclaim that, in scoring this massive victory for life over death, and for cosmos over chaos, God has **created** them.¹⁴ The prophet Isaiah explicitly ties God's splitting of the sea to God's defeat of primal, cosmic forces of chaos. "Was it not You who hacked Rahab [a primeval monster] into pieces, who pierced the Dragon? Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to walk?" (Isaiah 51:9-10). The redemption of the Israelites thus represents an epic victory for creation.¹⁵

For Isaiah in this passage, the Exodus is not an episode lost in the mists of a long-ago past; it is, rather, a recurrent possibility. It has happened before, and it—or its equivalent—will happen again.¹⁶ If anything, what will yet come to pass will far transcend what transpired in the past. The prophet proclaims: "Thus said God, Who made a road through the sea and a path through mighty waters, Who destroyed chariots and horses.... Do not remember what happened of old, or ponder what happened of yore! I am about to do something new.... I will make a road through the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (43:16-19). In the past God made a road through the sea; in the future God will make one through the wilderness. But what matters most is that, just as despotic Egypt was defeated, so, too, will oppressive Babylon be subdued. Here again, creation language is employed: God refers to the people as "*am zu yatzarti li*," "this people I created for Myself" (43:21).¹⁷

-
- 14** Everett Fox translates "this people You fashioned," and Richard Elliot Friedman, "the people you created." Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes* (1995), p. 338, and Richard Elliot Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah: With a New English Translation of the Hebrew Text* (2001), p. 220.
- 15** Michael Fishbane writes that "the historical representation of past and future in terms of cosmogonic paradigms discloses the deep biblical presentiment that all historical renewal is fundamentally a species of world renewal." Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (1979), p. 136.
- 16** That Exodus was understood to have happened more than once already is evident from a close reading of Joshua 3-5.
- 17** Fishbane goes so far as to label Isaiah's choice of words a "pointed allusion" to Exodus 15. Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, pp. 133-134.

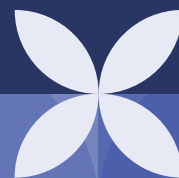


Hadar's Halakhah Intensive

A deep dive into halakhic texts
for experienced learners

May 19-23 | NYC

hadar.org/halakhah



Dreaming of the people's departure from Babylon, the prophet again invokes Exodus imagery: "Go forth (*tze'u*) from Babylon.... Declare with loud shouting, announce this, bring out the word to the ends of the Earth! Say, 'God has redeemed (*ga'al*) God's servant Jacob!'" The terms *yetzi'ah* (going out) and *ge'ulah* (redemption) are unmistakably associated with the Exodus. But Isaiah pushes the connection further: "They have known no thirst, though [God] led them through parched places; [God] made water flow for them from the rock; [God] cleaved the rock and water gushed forth" (48:20-21; cf. Exodus 17:1-6). Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann nicely captures the intent of Isaiah's words: "*This event is that event. The journey of the wilderness sojourn is from Egypt/ from Babylon.... As Israel remembers the gushing of the rock, so the exiles are now assured of gushing, life-giving waters on the way (see 41:18).*"¹⁸ The past, in other words, is not really past at all; it is, also, imminent future.

It should be obvious in light of all this that, in reciting the Song of the Sea each morning, Jews do not merely recall a long-past event, buried in an unrecoverable past. Rather, we summon the past into the present, and implicitly ask God to act in the same way again.¹⁹ What I am suggesting, in other words, is that, in Jewish liturgy, the Song of the Sea functions at once as a hymn

and as a not-quite-spoken petition. What is implicit in reading the Song is made explicit during the repetition of the Musaf Amidah, when we affirm that God, "in God's mercy, will let us hear a second time [God's promise] 'To be your God.'" The allusion is probably to the verse that concludes the liturgical recitation of the Shema: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God" (Numbers 15:41). We recall the Exodus, we tell God, but we also yearn to re-experience it.

So why do Jews mourn when we count the Omer? As we've seen, for Jewish theology the Exodus is, in a sense, built into the universe. At any rate, the fact that God has risen up to liberate God's people instills the hope—and the confidence—that God will do so again. No claim could be more comforting to a people downtrodden by implacable foes. But now imagine R. Akiva's students: afflicted by a merciless enemy (Rome), they take God's promise into their own hands and attempt to cast off the yoke of oppression. And they fail spectacularly. God is silent, seemingly unmoved either by their suffering or by their longing. The Exodus may be a paradigm for how Jewish history is supposed (indeed, destined) to look, but for now—tragically, inexplicably—history makes a mockery of that paradigm. Rome is triumphant; a renewed Exodus remains but a dim hope.

And so we mourn. We mourn because our experience falls so unbearably short of the redemption we have been promised and assured will come. There is a stunning degree of audacity—and honesty—in starting to grieve as *Pesah* begins, because in fundamental respects, *Pesah* resides in the future rather than the present. And yet grief does not have the final—or even the loudest—word, because we affirm that the God who redeemed us once will, despite all evidence to the contrary, redeem us "a second time." ♦



18 Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (1998), p. 108.

19 In a similar vein, Fishbane writes of biblical prayers that appeal to the Exodus that "the same prayer which requests divine action at once reminds God of [God's] former deeds, and so gives the people strength in their abyss of historical despair." Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 139. Reuven Kimelman writes in the same terms about the third blessing of the Shema (*ga'al yisrael*). Kimelman, "The Shema' Liturgy: From Covenant Ceremony to Coronation," in *Kenishta: Studies of the Synagogue World* (2001), pp. 9-105; relevant passage is on pp. 52-53.

COUNT THE OMER

We count the Omer after nightfall (preferably when the stars come out), starting with the second night of Pesah. The *berakhah* is recited first, and then the days and weeks are counted.

If you forget to count all night long, but remember the next day, you should count without a *berakhah* during that day, and then continue to count with a *berakhah* on subsequent nights. But if that whole day passes without counting as well, then you should no longer count with a *berakhah*. Just keep counting without a *berakhah* until Shavuot.

On this counting sheet, the secular date tells you which night you should count. So, on the **night** of 4/23/24, you should count Day 1. Check each night off above the number after you count. Happy counting!

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר:**

Blessed are You, God our Lord, Ruler of the world, Who sanctified us with God's mitzvot, and commanded us about counting the Omer.



- **1**
- **2**
- **3**
- **4**
- **5**
- **6**
- **7**

שמע ישראל
ה' אלוהינו
ה' אחד



Hear, Israel,
God is our
Lord, God is 1.
DEVARIM 6:4

טובים השניים
מו האחד

2 are better
than one.
KOHELET 4:9



רבו שמעון בן
גמליאל אומר, על
שלושה דברים
העולם עומד: על
הדין, ועל האמת,
ועל השלום

Rabban Shimon
ben Gamliel says,
"The world stands
on 3 things:
justice, truth,
and peace."
MISHNAH AVOT 1:18



There are 4
questions in the
מה נשתנה
(mah nishtanah)

בן חמש שנים
למקרא



A child should
start learning
Tanakh by the
age of 5.

MISHNAH
AVOT 5:21

The Torah
was given
(and Shavuot is
celebrated) on
the 6th day of
Sivan.



SHABBAT 88A

יום
השביעי שבת
לה' אלוהיך

The 7th day is
Shabbat for
God,

SHEMOT 20:9



TUESDAY 4/23
היום יום אחד לעמר

Today is day 1
of the Omer.

WEDNESDAY 4/24
היום שני ימים לעמר

Today is 2 days
of the Omer.

THURSDAY 4/25
היום שלושה ימים
לעמר

Today is 3 days
of the Omer.

FRIDAY 4/26
היום ארבעה ימים
לעמר

Today is 4 days
of the Omer.

AFTER SHABBAT
4/27
היום חמשה ימים
לעמר

Today is 5 days
of the Omer.

SUNDAY 4/28
היום ששה ימים לעמר

Today is 6 days
of the Omer.

MONDAY 4/29
היום שבעה ימים שהם
שבוע אחד לעמר

Today is 7 days—
which is 1 week—
of the Omer.



8

What's your favorite outfit? The Kohen Gadol had 8 special garments to wear! SHEMOT 28



9

The bed of Og, the giant, was 9 אמות (amot, cubits) long—about 13.5 feet! DEVARIM 3:11



10

The 10 "commandments" given at Har Sinai were actually 10 דברות (dibrot, utterances). SHEMOT 34:28



11



The Ketoret (ketoret, incense offering) in the Beit HaMikdash contained 11 spices. KERITOT 6A

KERITOT 6A



12

There are 12 שבטים (shevatim, tribes) of Israel.



13

There are 13 letters in the names of the אמהות (imahot, mothers), and 13 letters in the names of the אבות (avot, fathers):

אברהם (4)-רבקה (4)-
ישראל (3)-לאה (3)-
יצחק (4)-יעקב (4)-13



R. Eliezer says the goal is to eat 14 meals in the sukkah over the holiday of Sukkot.

MISHNAH SUKKAH 2:6



15

There were 15 steps leading from one courtyard to the other in the Beit HaMikdash. MISHNAH SUKKAH 5:4



16



A רשות הרבים (reshut harabim, public domain) on Shabbat must be at least 16 אמות (amot, cubits) wide—about 24 feet.



17



On the 17th day of Tammuz, the luhot (tablets) were broken, the daily sacrifice was ended, the walls of the city were breached, Apostomos burned the Torah, and he put up an idol in the Temple.

MISHNAH TA'ANIT 4:6



18

שמונה עשר ימים שהיחיד גומר בקהות ההלל

There are 18 days in the year when the full Hallel is said.

ARAKHIN 10A



19

There are actually 19 blessings in the weekday עמידה (amidah, central prayer service), even though it is often called the שמונה עשרה (shemonah esreih), which means 18!



20

The actual age of full adulthood in Judaism is 20 (not 12 or 13). According to Avot 5:21, that is when a person should start working.



21



A Torah reading on Shabbat morning must have at least 21 פסוקים (pesukim, verses). And the same is true for the Haftarah. MEGILLAH 23A

TUESDAY 4/30 היום שמונה ימים שהם שבוע אחד יום אחד לעמר

Today is 8 days—which is 1 week and 1 day—of the Omer.

WEDNESDAY 5/1 היום תשעה ימים שהם שבוע אחד ושני ימים לעמר

Today is 9 days—which is 1 week and 2 days—of the Omer.

THURSDAY 5/2 היום עשרה ימים שהם שבוע אחד ושלושה ימים לעמר

Today is 10 days—which is 1 week and 3 days—of the Omer.

FRIDAY 5/3 היום אחד עשר יום שהם שבוע אחד וארבעה ימים לעמר

Today is 11 days—which is 1 week and 4 days—of the Omer.

AFTER SHABBAT 5/4 היום שנים עשר יום שהם שבוע אחד וחמשה ימים לעמר

Today is 12 days—which is 1 week and 5 days—of the Omer.

SUNDAY 5/5 היום שלשה עשר יום שהם שבוע אחד וששה ימים לעמר

Today is 13 days—which is 1 week and 6 days—of the Omer.

MONDAY 5/6 היום ארבעה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות לעמר

Today is 14 days—which is 2 weeks—of the Omer.

TUESDAY 5/7 היום חמשה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות יום אחד לעמר

Today is 15 days—which is 2 weeks and 1 day—of the Omer.

WEDNESDAY 5/8 היום ששה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות ושני ימים לעמר

Today is 16 days—which is 2 weeks and 2 days—of the Omer.

THURSDAY 5/9 היום שבעה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות ושלושה ימים לעמר

Today is 17 days—which is 2 weeks and 3 days—of the Omer.

FRIDAY 5/10 היום שמונה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות וארבעה ימים לעמר

Today is 18 days—which is 2 weeks and 4 days—of the Omer.

AFTER SHABBAT 5/11 היום תשעה עשר יום שהם שני שבועות וחמשה ימים לעמר

Today is 19 days—which is 2 weeks and 5 days—of the Omer.

SUNDAY 5/12 היום עשרים יום שהם שני שבועות וששה ימים לעמר

Today is 20 days—which is 2 weeks and 6 days—of the Omer.

MONDAY 5/13 היום אחד ועשרים יום שהם שלשה שבועות לעמר

Today is 21 days—which is 3 weeks—of the Omer.

22

There are 22 letters in the Aleph Bet.



23

A Jewish court of law needs 23 judges to carry out some of the most serious cases.



MISHNAH SANHEDRIN 1:1

24

There are 24 books in the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible).



25



According to the Gemara, there should not be more than 25 students per teacher in the classroom!
BAVA BATRA 25A

26

The **מספרים** (gematria, numerical value) of God's four-letter Name, the Tetragrammaton, is 26.

י	10
ה	5
ו	6
ה	5
<hr/>	
	26

27

בחדש השני בשבעה ועשרים יום לחדש יבשה הארץ

In the second month on the 27th day, the land dried up (from the Flood).

BEREISHIT 8:14



28



R. Elazar ben Hyrcanos was 28 years old when he began learning Torah. So even if you didn't start learning Torah by 5 (like Avot 5:21 says), it's not too late!

PIRKEI DERABBI ELIEZAR

TUESDAY 5/14

היום **שנים ועשרים** יום שהם שלשה שבועות ויום אחד לעמר.

Today is 22 days—which is 3 weeks and 1 day—of the Omer.

WEDNESDAY 5/15

היום **שלושה ועשרים** יום שהם שלשה שבועות ושני ימים לעמר.

Today is 23 days—which is 3 weeks and 2 days—of the Omer.

THURSDAY 5/16

היום **ארבעה ועשרים** יום שהם שלשה שבועות ושלשה ימים לעמר.

Today is 24 days—which is 3 weeks and 3 days—of the Omer.

FRIDAY 5/17

היום **חמשה ועשרים** יום שהם שלשה שבועות וארבעה ימים לעמר.

Today is 25 days—which is 3 weeks and 4 days—of the Omer.

AFTER SHABBAT 5/18

היום **ששה ועשרים** יום שהם שלשה שבועות וחמשה ימים לעמר.

Today is 26 days—which is 3 weeks and 5 days—of the Omer.

SUNDAY 5/19

היום **שבעה ועשרים** יום שהם שלשה שבועות וששה ימים לעמר.

Today is 27 days—which is 3 weeks and 6 days—of the Omer.

MONDAY 5/20

היום **שמונה ועשרים** יום שהם ארבעה שבועות לעמר.

Today is 28 days—which is 4 weeks—of the Omer.

29

29 days is the shortest a Jewish calendar month can be.



We start learning the laws of a holiday 30 days prior. (There are only 20 days until Shavuot, so we better get going!)

BASED ON PESAHIM 6A



31



The Israelites ate the matzah they took out of Egypt for 31 days.

MEKHILTA MASSEKHTA DEVARAYA 1

32

In the Tanakh (Bible), dogs are mentioned 32 times!



We've reached Lag BaOmer, day 33 of the Omer! Did you know that the 33rd word in the Torah is טוב (tov, good)? Keep up the good work counting!



34

Shabbat is mentioned in 34 פסוקים (pesukim, verses) in the Torah.

השבת למדשו בן צדקה אלוקה: שני מים תעבד ועשית ל-מלאכתך: ויום אביעי שבת

35

The numerical value of יהודי (Yehudi, Jew)



is 35.

TUESDAY 5/21

היום **תשעה ועשרים** יום שהם ארבעה שבועות ויום אחד לעמר.

Today is 29 days—which is 4 weeks and 1 day—of the Omer.

WEDNESDAY 5/22

היום **שלשים** יום שהם ארבעה שבועות ושני ימים לעמר.

Today is 30 days—which is 4 weeks and 2 days—of the Omer.

THURSDAY 5/23

היום **אחד ושלשים** יום שהם ארבעה שבועות ושלשה ימים לעמר.

Today is 31 days—which is 4 weeks and 3 days—of the Omer.

FRIDAY 5/24

היום **שנים ושלשים** יום שהם ארבעה שבועות וארבעה ימים לעמר.

Today is 32 days—which is 4 weeks and 4 days—of the Omer.

AFTER SHABBAT 5/25

היום **שלושה ושלשים** יום שהם ארבעה שבועות וחמשה ימים לעמר.

Today is 33 days—which is 4 weeks and 5 days—of the Omer.

SUNDAY 5/26

היום **ארבעה ושלשים** יום שהם ארבעה שבועות וששה ימים לעמר.

Today is 34 days—which is 4 weeks and 6 days—of the Omer.

MONDAY 5/27

היום **חמשה ושלשים** יום שהם חמשה שבועות לעמר.

Today is 35 days—which is 5 weeks—of the Omer.

36

According to R. Yehudah bar R. Ilai, the Kohen Gadol had **36** bells on the hem of his robe.
VAYIKRA RABBAH 21:7



37



The Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud) contains **37** מַסְכְּתוֹת (masekhtot, sections).

Yehoshua led Benel Yisrael for **38** years.
YALKUT SHIMONI YEHOSHUA 35



39

There are **39** אבות מלאכה (avot melakhah, categories of work) that we refrain from on Shabbat. Those same categories were the types of work used in building the מִשְׁכַּן (mishkan).



40

וַיְהִי שָׁם עִם ה' אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתָה



Moshe was up on Har Sinai with God for **40** days and **40** nights, not eating bread and not drinking water.
SHEMOT 34:28

41

There are **41** פסוקים (pesukim, verses) in the last parashah of the Torah (VeZot HaBerakhah).
MASORETIC NOTE ON THE TORAH



42

Are we there yet?



Benel Yisrael's journey in the wilderness had **42** stops along the way from Egypt to the Land of Israel.
BEMIDBAR 33

TUESDAY 5/28
היום ששה ושלושים יום שהם חמשה שבועות ויום אחד לעקר:

Today is **36** days— which is 5 weeks and 1 day—of the Omer.

WEDNESDAY 5/29
היום שבעה ושלושים יום שהם חמשה שבועות ושני ימים לעקר:

Today is **37** days— which is 5 weeks and 2 days—of the Omer.

THURSDAY 5/30
היום שמונה ושלושים יום שהם חמשה שבועות ושלושה ימים לעקר:

Today is **38** days— which is 5 weeks and 3 days—of the Omer.

FRIDAY 5/31
היום תשעה ושלושים יום שהם חמשה שבועות וארבעה ימים לעקר:

Today is **39** days— which is 5 weeks and 4 days—of the Omer.

AFTER SHABBAT 6/1
היום ארבעים יום שהם חמשה שבועות וחמשה ימים לעקר:

Today is **40** days— which is 5 weeks and 5 days—of the Omer.

SUNDAY 6/2
היום אחד וארבעים יום שהם חמשה שבועות וששה ימים לעקר:

Today is **41** days— which is 5 weeks and 6 days—of the Omer.

MONDAY 6/3
היום שנים וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות לעקר:

Today is **42** days— which is 6 weeks— of the Omer.

43



There is a mitzvah to separate some of your bread dough for kohanim if your dough has a volume of **43%** (beitzim, eggs - about 5 lbs of flour) or more.
ZEVAHIM 42A

44

After **44** days of being stuck on Mount Ararat, the waters of the Flood dropped enough for Noah to see the mountaintops.
MIDRASH LEKAH TOV, NOAH 8:5



45

Shimon HaTzaddik was the Kohen Gadol for **45** years. That's a long time to have one job!



VAYIKRA RABBAH 21:9

46



The Torah stresses to treat גֵּרִים (gerim, strangers) with kindness **46** times!

BAVA METZIA 59B

47

כִּשְׁבָאוֹ אֶל ה' סִיני חֲזוּ בָלֵם נֶגְדֵי הַקֶּהר בְּלֵב אֶחָד

When Benel Yisrael came to Har Sinai, they all camped by the mountain with one heart (בְּלֵב אֶחָד)—the numerical value of this phrase is **47!**

TANNA DEVI ELIYAHU, PIRKEI YERIDOT, 3

48

There are **48** words in the first paragraph of Shema.
DEVARIM 6:4-9



Hooray! You've just counted **49** days of the Omer!

49

TUESDAY 6/4
היום שלשה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות ויום אחד לעקר:

Today is **43** days— which is 6 weeks and 1 day—of the Omer.

WEDNESDAY 6/5
היום ארבעה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות ושני ימים לעקר:

Today is **44** days— which is 6 weeks and 2 days—of the Omer.

THURSDAY 6/6
היום חמשה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות ושלושה ימים לעקר:

Today is **45** days— which is 6 weeks and 3 days—of the Omer.

FRIDAY 6/7
היום ששה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות וארבעה ימים לעקר:

Today is **46** days— which is 6 weeks and 4 days—of the Omer.

AFTER SHABBAT 6/8
היום שבעה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות וחמשה ימים לעקר:

Today is **47** days— which is 6 weeks and 5 days—of the Omer.

SUNDAY 6/9
היום שמונה וארבעים יום שהם ששה שבועות וששה ימים לעקר:

Today is **48** days— which is 6 weeks and 6 days—of the Omer.

MONDAY 6/10
היום תשעה וארבעים יום שהם שבעה שבועות לעקר:

Today is **49** days— which is 7 weeks— of the Omer.