

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Bo
January 1, 2022 *** 28 Tevet, 5782

[Bo in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3250/jewish/Bo-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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The last three of the Ten Plagues are visited on Egypt: a swarm of locusts devours all the crops and greenery; a thick, palpable darkness envelops the land; and all the firstborn of Egypt are killed at the stroke of midnight of the 15th of the month of Nissan. G-d commands the first mitzvah to be given to the people of Israel: to establish a calendar based on the monthly rebirth of the moon. The Israelites are also instructed to bring a “Passover offering” to G-d: a lamb or kid goat is to be slaughtered, and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of every Israelite home, so that G-d should pass over these homes when He comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn. The roasted meat of the offering is to be eaten that night together with matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs. The death of the firstborn finally breaks Pharaoh’s resistance, and he literally drives the children of Israel from his land. So hastily do they depart that there is no time for their dough to rise, and the only provisions they take along are unleavened. Before they go, they ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and garments—fulfilling the promise made to Abraham that his descendants would leave Egypt with great wealth. The children of Israel are commanded to consecrate all firstborn, and to observe the anniversary of the Exodus each year by removing all leaven from their possession for seven days, eating matzah, and telling the story of their redemption to their children. They are also commanded to wear tefillin on the arm and head as a reminder of the Exodus and their resultant commitment to G-d.

[Haftarah in a Nutshell:Jeremiah 46:13 - 46:28](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/619493/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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In this week’s Torah reading, we read of the devastation of the Egyptian nation through the final three of the Ten Plagues. In the haftarah we read of the punishment G-d visited upon Egypt centuries later, through the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. G-d reveals Egypt’s fate to Jeremiah: “Proclaim it in Egypt and let it be heard in Migdol, and let it be heard in Noph and in Tahpanhes. Say, ‘Stand fast and prepare yourself, for the sword has devoured round about you.’” The prophet then goes on to describe Egypt’s helplessness and the

destruction that it will incur at the hands of the Babylonians. The haftorah ends with G-d's assurance to the Jewish people not to fear, for though they too will be punished and exiled, ultimately they will be redeemed: "You fear not, O Jacob My servant, and be not dismayed, O Israel! for behold, I will redeem you from afar, and your children from the land of their captivity, and Jacob shall return and be quiet and at ease, and there shall be none who disturb his rest. You fear not, My servant Jacob, says the L-rd, for I am with you, for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Telling the Story (Bo) by The Rabbi Sacks z"l Legacy Trust

<https://rabbisacks.org/telling-the-story-bo/>

Go to Washington and take a tour of the memorials and you will make a fascinating discovery. Begin at the Lincoln Memorial with its giant statue of the man who braved civil war and presided over the ending of slavery. On one side you will see the Gettysburg Address, that masterpiece of brevity with its invocation of "a new birth of freedom." On the other is the great Second Inaugural with its message of healing: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right..." Walk down to the Potomac basin and you see the Martin Luther King Memorial with its sixteen quotes from the great fighter for civil rights, among them his 1963 statement, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." And giving its name to the monument as a whole, a sentence from the I Have a Dream speech, "Out of the Mountain of Despair, a Stone of Hope."

Continue along the tree-lined avenue bordering the water and you arrive at the Roosevelt Memorial, constructed as a series of six spaces, one for each decade of his public career, each with a passage from one of the defining speeches of the time, most famously, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

Lastly, bordering the Basin at its southern edge, is a Greek temple dedicated to the author of the American Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson. Around the dome are the words he wrote to Benjamin Rush: "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." Defining the circular space are four panels, each with lengthy quotations from Jefferson's writings, one from the Declaration itself, another beginning, "Almighty God hath created the mind free," and a third "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?"

Each of these four monuments is built around texts, and each tells a story. Now compare the monuments in London, most conspicuously those in Parliament Square. The memorial to former Prime Minister David Lloyd George contains three words: David Lloyd George. The one to Nelson Mandela has two: Nelson Mandela, and the Winston Churchill memorial just one: Churchill. Winston Churchill was a man of words, in his early life a journalist, later a historian, author of almost fifty books. He won the Nobel Prize not for Peace but for Literature. He delivered as many speeches and coined as many unforgettable sentences as Jefferson or Lincoln, Roosevelt or Martin Luther King Jr., but none of his utterances is engraved on the plinth beneath his statue. He is memorialised only by his name.

The difference between the American and British monuments is unmistakable, and the reason is that Britain and the United States have a quite different political and moral culture. England is, or was until recently, a tradition-based society. In such societies, things are as they are because that is how they were “since time immemorial.” It is unnecessary to ask why. Those who belong, know. Those who need to ask, show thereby that they don’t belong.

American society is different because from the Pilgrim Fathers onward it was based on the concept of covenant as set out in Tanach, especially in Exodus and Deuteronomy. The early settlers were Puritans, in the Calvinist tradition, the closest Christianity came to basing its politics on the Hebrew Bible. Covenantal societies are not based on tradition. The Puritans, like the Israelites three thousand years earlier, were revolutionaries, attempting to create a new type of society, one unlike Egypt or, in the case of America, England. Michael Walzer called his book on the politics of the seventeenth century Puritans, *The Revolution of the Saints*.^[1] They were trying to overthrow the tradition that gave absolute power to kings and maintained established hierarchies of class.

Covenantal societies always represent a conscious new beginning by a group of people dedicated to an ideal. The story of the founders, the journey they made, the obstacles they had to overcome and the vision that drove them are essential elements of a covenantal culture. Retelling the story, handing it onto one’s children, and dedicating oneself to continuing the work that earlier generations began, are fundamental to the ethos of such a society. A covenanted nation is not simply there because it is there. It is there to fulfil a moral vision. That is what led G. K.

Chesterton to call the United States a nation “with the soul of a church,”^[2] the only one in the world “founded on a creed”^[3] (Chesterton’s antisemitism prevented him from crediting the true source of America’s political philosophy, the Hebrew Bible). The history of storytelling as an essential part of moral education begins in this week’s parsha. It is quite extraordinary how, on the brink of the Exodus, Moses

three times turns to the future and to the duty of parents to educate their children about the story that was shortly to unfold: “When your children ask you, ‘What is this service to you?’ you shall answer, ‘It is the Passover service to God. He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, sparing our homes” (Ex. 12:25-27). “On that day, you shall tell your child, ‘It is because of this that God acted for me when I left Egypt” (Ex. 13:8). “Your child may later ask you, ‘What is this?’ You shall answer them, ‘With a show of power, God brought us out of Egypt, the place of slavery’ (Ex. 13:14).

This is truly extraordinary. The Israelites have not yet emerged into the dazzling light of freedom. They are still slaves. Yet already Moses is directing their minds to the far horizon of the future and giving them the responsibility of passing on their story to succeeding generations. It is as if Moses were saying: Forget where you came from and why, and you will eventually lose your identity, your continuity and your *raison d’être*. You will come to think of yourself as the mere member of a nation among nations, one ethnicity among many. Forget the story of freedom and you will eventually lose freedom itself.

Rarely indeed have philosophers written on the importance of storytelling for the moral life. Yet that is how we become the people we are. The great exception among modern philosophers has been Alasdair MacIntyre, who wrote, in his classic *After Virtue*, “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” Deprive children of stories, says MacIntyre, and you leave them “anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.”[4]

No one understood this more clearly than Moses, who knew that without a specific identity it is almost impossible not to lapse into whatever is the current idolatry of the age – rationalism, idealism, nationalism, fascism, communism, postmodernism, relativism, individualism, hedonism, or consumerism, to name only the most recent. The alternative, a society based on tradition alone, crumbles as soon as respect for tradition dies, which it always does at some stage or another.

Identity, which is always particular, is based on story, the narrative that links me to the past, guides me in the present, and places on me responsibility for the future. And no story, at least in the West, was more influential than that of the Exodus, the memory that the Supreme Power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless, together with the covenant that followed whereby the Israelites bound themselves to God in a promise to create a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, where individuals were respected as the image of God, where one day in seven all hierarchies of power were suspended, and where dignity and justice were

accessible to all. We never quite reached that ideal state, but we never ceased to travel toward it and believed it was there at journey's end.

“The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us,” said the BBC’s political correspondent, Andrew Marr.[5] God created man, Elie Wiesel once wrote, because God loves stories.[6] What other cultures have done through systems, Jews have done through stories. And in Judaism, the stories are not engraved in stone on memorials, magnificent though that is. They are told at home, around the table, from parents to children as the gift of the past to the future. That is how storytelling in Judaism was devolved, domesticated, and democratised.

Only the most basic elements of morality are universal: “thin” abstractions like justice or liberty tend to mean different things to different people in different places and different times. But if we want our children and our society to be moral, we need a collective story that tells us where we came from and what our task is in the world. The story of the Exodus, especially as told on Pesach at the Seder table, is always the same yet ever-changing, an almost infinite set of variations on a single set of themes that we all internalise in ways that are unique to us, yet we all share as members of the same historically extended community.

There are stories that ennoble, and others that stultify, leaving us prisoners of ancient grievances or impossible ambitions. The Jewish story is in its way the oldest of all, yet ever young, and we are each a part of it. It tells us who we are and who our ancestors hoped we would be. Storytelling is the great vehicle of moral education. It was the Torah’s insight that a people who told their children the story of freedom and its responsibilities would stay free for as long as humankind lives and breathes and hopes. [1] *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). [2] *What I Saw in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922), p. 10. [3] *Ibid.*, 7. [4] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 216. [5] Andrew Marr, *The Observer*, Sunday, 14th May 2000. [6] *The Gates of the Forest* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston), preface.

[Redemptive Relationship, Part I: When Nothing Seems to Change – Bo 5782](#)

[by Rabbi Aviva Richman](#)

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/redemptive-relationship-part-1>

As we read the story of the Exodus in Parashat Bo, our tradition invites us to explore the nature of redemptive relationship. Instead of reading the Exodus as primarily historical or mythic, a prominent strand among our sages interprets the Exodus intimately and poetically, through the lens of the Song of Songs. The narrative becomes the origin story of our covenantal relationship with God—or, one

might say, the story of how we fell in love. Our sages offer not one story of the “moment” when our relationship crystallized, but multiple stories that hinge on different moments in the Exodus, offering a dynamic picture of what redemptive relationship looks like. When we study this rich theology of love and read it back onto the interpersonal, we can understand our own relationships in a more dynamic, powerful, and maybe even redemptive way.

This week we see that the earliest moment of when we “fell in love” with God brings us to a scene when Israel is still stuck in Egypt. Our relationship takes shape even before the apparent act of redemption (leaving Egypt) occurs. Parashat Bo teaches us that formative and redemptive relationships can blossom in the very midst of difficult circumstances, even when it feels like our reality has not—and may never—change.

Playing off of the imagery of the “rose of Sharon” and the “lily of the valleys,” (Song of Songs 2:1), midrash tells of the Exodus journey as being “hidden in shadow” and then coming into “good deeds” and “song.” Redemptive divine love inspires a transformation into full self-expression, in deed and in voice. While we might think that the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15) is the most natural setting for this eruption into song,¹ the first iteration of this arc occurs while we are still in Egypt:

שיר השירים רבה ב:א

"אני חבצלת השרון", אני היא וחביבה אני, אני היא שהייתי חבויה בצלן של מצרים, ולשעה קלה כנסני הקדוש ברוך הוא לרעמסס, והרטבתי מעשים טובים כשושנה, ואמרת לי לפניו את השירה, ... "שנאמר (ישעיה ל:כט) "השיר יהיה לכם כליל התקדש חג

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:1

“I am a rose (havatzet) of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” I am she, and beloved (havivah) am I; I am she who was beloved in the shadow (tzilan) of Egypt, and in a short time the Holy Blessed One gathered me to Raamses and I bloomed with good deeds like “a lily” and I said before [God] a song (shirah), as it is said: “You will have song on the night of the sanctified feast” (Isaiah 30:29).

In this passage, the formative moment of our love story with God is in Egypt, on the eve of the pesah sacrifice, singing a song hoping for redemption, but not having experienced it yet (the first instance of our custom to sing Hallel on Seder night).² From being “hidden in the shadow of Egypt,” we make it only so far as Raamses, still within Egypt’s borders and a concrete image of our slavery.³ This is a relationship in its earliest moments, when circumstances have not fully changed—after all, we are still in Egypt—and there is still much uncertainty about where the

relationship is going and how it will get there. Raamses represents a subtler kind of transformation when realities on the ground still reflect an unredeemed state. In the continuation of the midrash, there are two very different readings of how a transformative relationship with God interfaces with the depths of oppression, relevant for our understanding of this transformation still in the very site of slavery. One interpretation sees an act of full salvation; we were in great distress and God saved us:

רבי אבא בר כהנא אמר, אמרה כנסת ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, אני היא וחביבה אני, שנתונה בעמקי הצרות, וכשידלני הקדוש ברוך הוא מהצרות אני מרטבת מעשים טובים כשושנה ואומרת שירה לפניו, הדא הוא דכתיב (ישעיה כו:טז) "ה' בצר פקדוך"

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: The Assembly of Israel said before the Holy Blessed One, "I am she and beloved am I, for I am given over in the depths of troubles. And when the Holy Blessed One draws me out from the troubles, I bloom with good deeds like a lily and say before [God] a song (shirah)." That is why it is written, "In their distress they sought You..." (Isaiah 26:16).

We are in the depths of troubles, and then God draws us out from the troubles. This is the prototypical way we think of redemptive relationship: being saved from difficult circumstances.⁴ In a more radical interpretation, later the midrash imagines God not only leading us out of "the depths" but eviscerates these depths altogether: אמר ר' אחא אמרה כנסת ישראל, בשעה שאת מעמיק עיניך בי אני מרטבת מעשים טובים כשושנה ואומרת שירה, הה"ד (תהלים קל:א) "שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה'".

Said Rabbi Aḥa: The Assembly of Israel said, "At the time your eyes gaze deeply at me, I bloomed with good deeds like a lily and said a song." That is why it is written "A song of ascents from the depths I called to you God" (Psalm 130:1).

This midrash takes the same components—the depths, our transformation and adornment with "good deeds," and an eruption in song. Yet, in this interpretation, the depths are not depths of troubles but rather God gazing deeply at us. Instead of crying out to God from the depths of trouble (as in Psalm 130, the intertext), the image is that the depths of God's love, staring deeply into our eyes, as it were, transforms us to be able to "call out" and express ourselves in song. Short and sweet, this interpretation actually gives us pause to reconsider the whole story of the Exodus, where God's dramatic plagues loom large. Instead, it suggests, the real root of redemption is not a miraculous and ostentatious rescue, but the sheer intensity of love.

In stark contrast to the interpretations we've seen so far, where our redemptive relationship leaves us without woes, the continuation of the midrash offers an alternative picture of what redemptive relationship looks like. Rather than emerging out of the depths of our troubles, this version amplifies that troubled experience. The midrash does not mince words. "I am in hell" it says, and then imagines being redeemed from the depths of hell at the end of days. Yet when it goes on to expand this scene, we don't find God taking us out of hell but rather going to hell with us, just as all nations are doomed to hell with their gods due to misdeeds and failures. The midrash closes with the famous verse from Psalm 23: "As I walk in the valley of the shadow of death I will not fear evil, for You are with me."⁵ The trajectory of relationship here is not God taking us out of our troubles, but God coming to accompany us where we are, as we suffer like all of humanity suffers. The theme of God suffering with us is not unfamiliar in Jewish theology—particularly in understanding the destruction of the Temple and years of exile—but is surprising to see juxtaposed with an image about the Exodus. The Exodus is a story of God rescuing God's special people from their suffering. This passage retells "redemption" as God being with a not-so-special people, as undeserving as everyone else, as we remain in the midst of suffering.

This final scene of God joining us in our woes may seem totally different than the previous interpretations we saw, but perhaps it is not entirely at odds. The idea that the origins of our relationship with God began in Raamses, still in Egypt, makes room for a picture of redemption that grows in the very midst of an unredeemed context. The second interpretation we saw may actually reinforce this picture, as it is solely focused on God gazing deeply at us. We learn that redemption comes by virtue of being in a relationship grounded in a deeply loving gaze that brings us to fuller self-expression, even without any conclusive shift in our circumstances.

To the extent that our lives or our world feel stuck at times, the "Raamses" version of the origins of redemptive relationship resonates strongly. The theological love of Raamses translates into the love we express when we take the leap to be with someone in pain, even when we know we can't make it go away. It is the love of day-in, day-out presence in relationships with children, parents, loved ones, or friends navigating chronic conditions. It is the love that carries us through a global pandemic. God and Israel in this formative stage teach us the force of a loving presence as we weather the storms that we cannot control. From inside the storm, this mutual love powers a sense of expression and agency, in action and voice ("good deeds" and "song"). Even as circumstances may be slow to change, or not change at all, we can all hope to build these kinds of relationships that are the root of any redemption.

Shabbat Shalom.

¹ And for this, see next week.

² For more on the origins of Hallel, see my essay “Finding Our Song in an Unredeemed World: Three Troubled Origins of Hallel,” in Hadar’s Pesah Reader from 5781, Tzafun: Hidden in the Haggadah, available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/pesah-reader-5781>

³ Raamses is mentioned in Exodus 12:37. According to some commentaries, God first gathered all of Israel from their dispersed dwelling places to Raamses before crossing the border, out of Egypt. See e.g. Mekhilta Massekhta de-Vahodesh 2: ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים. ר' אליעזר אומר, זה יום רעמסס, לפי שנתקבצו כולם ובאו רעמסס לשעה קלה leading up to the next moment described in Exodus 19:4 which Mekhilta interprets as Sinai. This seems to be a reference to the city Israel built as slaves. Some commentaries assert that this is a different Raamses, a fortress rather than a city (for example Ibn Ezra to Exodus 12:37). Either way, it is within Egypt.

⁴ Note that the prooftext is somewhat ironic, referring to a chapter in Isaiah that at face value has people crying out to God with no response. This is either actually meant ironically, or the midrash is based on Isaiah 26:19 and reads ורננו as the people of Israel in times of trouble—as good as “dead”—revived through God’s salvation and singing in praise.

⁵ רבנן אמרין כנסת ישראל אמרתהו, אמרה כנסת ישראל אני היא וחביבה אני, שאני נתונה בעמקי גיהנם, וכשיגאלני הקדוש ברוך הוא ממעמקיה, הה"ד (תהלים מ) ויעלני מבור שאון אני מרטבת מעשים טובים ואומרת לפניו שירה, הה"ד (תהלים מ) ויתן בפי שיר חדש, אתיא דרבנן כההיא דאמר ר' אלעזר המודעי, עתידים שרי אומות העולם לעתיד לבא, שיבואו לקטרג את ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, ואומרים רבש"ע אלו עבדת כוכבים ואלו עבדת עבודת כוכבים אלו גלו עריות ואלו גלו עריות, אלו שפכו דמים ואלו שפכו דמים, מפני מה אלו יורדין לגיהנם ואלו אין יורדין, והקב"ה משיב להם ואומר, אם כן הוא ירדו כל העמים עם אלהיהם לגיהנם, הה"ד (מיכה ד) כי כל העמים ילכו איש בשם אלהיו, אמר ר' ראובן אלו לא היה הדבר כתוב אי אפשר לאומרו כביכול (ישעיהו סו) כי באש ה' נשפט, ה' שופט אין כתיב כאן אלא נשפט, הוא שאמר דוד ברוח הקדש (תהלים כג) גם כי אלך בגיא צלמות לא אירע רע כי אתה עמדי.

Parashat Bo. Justice or Mercy by Eitan Cooper

https://schechter.edu/theory-of-justice/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAw9qOBhC-ARIsAG-rdn4BQUVcpZx6O0qootUUgX0smmh3-vG3zC2uUHLXVAeNckKopIMuA4waArAyEALw_wcB

In his book “A Theory of Justice” published in the 1970s, Prof. John Rawls of Harvard University set out an elaborate principle of “justice as fairness”, a win-win way of thinking about the distribution of goods in society that influenced a generation of liberal students and leaders. A just public policy should be designed to achieve an outcome in which the starting position of everyone is improved. Even students like me who had fundamental differences with Rawls still had to learn to articulate his way of thinking to get an “A” in political science.

Yet justice is not just distribution, it is retribution. One problem with A Theory of Justice was that it required that all sectors accept at the starting point in time a “Veil of Ignorance” that hides all that came before. For Rawl’s distributive formula to

work, people had to agree to ignore past injustice, and make their present situation their only reference.

One of the limitations in Rawls, similar to a long line of liberal philosophers before him, was in ignoring the role of memory. He invented the veil of ignorance in order to convince many of the best and brightest that it is actually possible to forget the past. He tried to reinvent justice, but justice by definition must try to account for the past. That is why it is indeed so difficult to impose, and retribution is at the heart of the ethical dilemmas in the Exodus, found in this week's Torah Portion, "Bo".

The Torah states that Moses, after turning their water into blood, filling their hair with lice, killing their cattle and crops, and doing a variety of other nasty things, not surprisingly became a very big man in the eyes of the Egyptians. By the time he sent the Israelite women to "borrow" gold and jewelry from their Egyptian neighbors, all they really had to say was "Moses sent me" and they were happy just to give it all away. In the end, the payoff didn't even help them. Their first-born was killed anyway. Retribution was complete.

But doesn't justice still have to be fair? The Egyptians were guilty of enslaving the Jews and murdering male Jewish children, but why kill their first-born? What did they do? How can we explain slaughtering innocent babies or the sons of handmaidens? That suffering is endemic to the world or that there is always collateral damage? I wish it were that simple. The Bible itself provides contradictory answers. While in several places (found in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) it is taught that God punishes descendants to the third and fourth generations, in other places in the Book of Deuteronomy and then the Book of Ezekiel there are explicit teachings NOT to punish children for the sins of their parents, as God did to the Egyptians.

Similarly, suffering caused in the name of justice bothered many rabbis throughout the ages. The ancient custom until today is to sing an incomplete "Hallel" (Psalms of Praise) on the last six days of Pesah, because the joy is not be complete if Egyptians suffered as a result of our being freed. "Do not rejoice at the downfall of your enemy." (Proverbs 24). When drops of wine are spilled at the Seder, one common explanation is that it is to remind participants that the cup is never full and so they should moderate their joy just a bit. In the real world, just outcomes often cause suffering, and not everyone who suffers is evil. That may be why the Sages had to divide God's transcendent justice into two parts: retribution and mercy.

The inherent tension between Justice and Good can be observed in the founders of the Jewish nation: Abraham argued with God against the killing of the just along with the wicked when informed of the impending destruction of Sodom and

Gemorrhah. Moses, on the other hand, used force and collective punishment to succeed in his mission of creating a Holy nation.

How can we negotiate this ethical tension in modern Israel? There have been many attempts, but here I'll provide just one inspiring example. In 1956 another Moshe, Moshe Dayan, eulogized Roi Rotberg, an IDF reserve officer ambushed by terrorists in the fields of his Kibbutz near the Gaza Strip. You can read this iconic and short eulogy at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_and_eulogy_of_Roi_Rotberg

Dayan, commander of the IDF, empathized with the Gazans across the border. He could not blame them for their hatred of the Jews who had displaced them. The response to the terror from Gaza over 60 years ago that Dayan offered his generation of Israelis was to demand continued vigilance and sacrifice in defending their homes, without losing their humanity.

This response represents Dayan's search for resolution of the ethical tension found already in Torah, so challenging to realize, and as relevant for Israelis today as it was at the funeral of Roi Rotberg in 1956. *(Eitan Cooper is the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of The Schechter Institutes. Since coming to Schechter in 2000, he has served in various capacities, including TALI Outreach Coordinator and Vice President for Development. Mr. Cooper holds a BA from the University of Chicago and an MA from the Hebrew University. He is a graduate of the Mandel School for Educational Leadership and a licensed Israeli tour guide.)*

[Teach Your Children Well by Dov Kahane](http://www.jtsa.edu/torah/teach-your-children-well/)

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In Parashat Bo, we read about “Pesah Mitzrayim”—God’s instructions to the Israelites for the eve of their exodus—including slaughtering the lamb and placing its blood on the doorposts as a marker of divine protection. In Exodus 12:21–28, Moshe conveys these rites, including the need to explain them to children. Many of these passages are most familiar to us from the Passover Haggadah. What can we learn from the way they have been incorporated there? What was their historical significance for the ancient rabbis? And how can they help us understand the significance of ritual to a meaningful Jewish life?

Let's start by examining three of these verses:

And when you enter the land that the Lord will give you, as God has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you, “What do you mean by this rite?” You shall say, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord because God passed

over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when God smote the Egyptians but saved our houses.” The people then bowed low.

Exod. 25–27

It is clear that the phrase that opens verse 27, “וַאֲמַרְתֶּם—You shall say,” is a response to previous verses. That is, the answer you are to give to your children when they inquire about the ritual they are witnessing is, “It is the Passover sacrifice because God passed over the houses of the Israelites . . .” Moshe is envisioning a future time—after the people are settled in their land—when this ritual will be unknown and remarkable to the children and will need “unpacking.”

But what ritual will these children be asking about? The simple answer is the ritual described in the immediate antecedent to their question, verses 22–24, which speak about dipping the hyssop branch in the Paschal lamb’s blood and smearing it as a sign on the doorframe. The plain meaning of the text is that future generations of children will ask about the unusual doorpost-daubing they are witnessing. The only problem is that the ritual of placing blood on the doorpost is, according to our tradition, limited to that first Passover in Egypt.^[1] As medieval commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain, 11th-c.) wrote:

This interpretation [that the children’s question is about the placing of the blood on the doorposts] would be correct from a logical point of view were it not for the true tradition which states otherwise . . . The [correct] meaning of the children’s question is: when your children will see their family in a group eating an entire lamb . . . they will question you.

We limit our engagement with the blood ritual to mere remembrance. In fact, it has been suggested that the multiple “dippings” of the seder are a nod to this central rite of the Passover of Egypt. Thus, according to rabbinic tradition, it is the eating of the Pesah offering that will provoke the curiosity of the children. It is this act that we are instructed to explain and frame in the context of our covenantal connection with God. Of course, food in our tradition, as in many other cultures, is more than just nutrition; it has rich semiotic significance. Naming that significance is one way we pass on our tradition and values.

But eating the Paschal lamb is—post-Temple—also just a remembrance; a remembrance that is reified in Rabban Gamliel’s famous dictum in the Haggadah: Rabban Gamliel would say: Anyone who has not said these three things on Pesah has not fulfilled their obligation. And these are them: the Pesah sacrifice, matzah, and marror. The Pesah sacrifice that our ancestors were accustomed to eating when the Temple existed, for the sake of what [was it]? For the sake [to commemorate] that the Holy One, blessed be God, passed over the homes of our

ancestors in Egypt, as it is stated (Exod. 12:27) “And you shall say: “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord . . . “

The Haggadah’s version is, in fact, an embellishment of Mishnah Pesachim 10:5, which reads[2]:

Rabban Gamliel says: Anyone who did not say these three things on Passover has not fulfilled their obligation: The Paschal lamb, matza, and bitter herbs. The Paschal lamb [is brought] because the Omnipresent passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. Matza [is brought] . . .

There are numerous subtle differences between the Haggadah and the Mishnah. One obvious difference is the Mishnah’s lack of prooftexts.[3] Nevertheless, it seems evident that the intertext that Rabban Gamliel of the Mishnah is referencing is our verse, Exod. 12:27. Furthermore, Rabban Gamliel frames the passage in typical Mishnaic legal style: Anyone who did not say these three matters on Passover has not fulfilled their obligation. This exemplifies the Rabbis’ proclivity to crystalize, legalize, and institutionalize the ethos of more amorphous Torah mandates. Ultimately, the idea is that we must make our actions clear and meaningful to our children.

There is also a historical context for this Mishnah. Who is Rabban Gamliel? Most scholars are in agreement that he is Gamliel II of Yavneh, the great-great-grandson of Hillel the Elder, who lived at the end of the first century CE. This means that Rabban Gamliel lived after the Temple was destroyed and the sacrifices had fallen to desuetude. Rabban Gamliel is, then, asserting that despite the absence of the actual ritual of the Passover sacrifice, the act of ascribing meaning is, in and of itself, essential.

The historical context makes Rabban Gamliel’s statement contemporaneous with the writing of the Gospels, where foods are also ascribed symbolic meaning, most famously in the Last Supper:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them.

Mark 14:22–24

The fact that this Last Supper was most likely a Passover celebration makes it all the more intriguing. The notion that Jesus’s words might reflect a transformation of an extant Jewish ritual has been explored by a number of scholars.[4]

We know that consuming ritual foods and explaining their meaning are significant practices in many cultures. Ultimately, it may be our human need to make meaning

out of the actions of our lives—to live with intention, as it were—that informs both instances as well as the Torah’s instructions to explain our actions to our children.

(Dov Kahane is a PhD candidate in Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS)

[1] It is interesting to note that the Samaritan community of Israel continues to practice this lamb-slaughtering, blood-dipping ceremony using a hyssop branch. [2] Kaufman manuscript

[3] This should not surprise us given the generally terse style of the Mishnah and its tendency to not cite explicitly exegetical material, leaving that job to the classical Midrashim.

[4] An alternate approach cited by some scholars goes in the opposite direction. They read Rabban Gamliel’s dictum as an anti-Christian polemic, a heresiology. Aware of the Gospel’s account of Jesus’s Passover seder, Rabban Gamliel’s injunction to declare the historical significance of these symbols in their Exodus narrative context is a means to assert that correct Jewish belief precludes any other understanding. As the anthropologist J. Z. Smith notes, “Ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference.”

Parashat Bo by Rav Fischel Schacter

(provided by Erwin Mevorah)

The Rabbi began his class by explaining that he recently learned about a company that is hired to “scare other people “. What one does is, says the Rabbi of they doesn’t feel they have enough excitement in their lives is hire this company , pay them good money and they will come up with a plan where that person will have a very frightful experience . Says the Rabbi maybe the point is to re live a time where we became frightened and we want to re live that experience - re live that trauma . Maybe they think that by going back to that point what’s called exposure therapy .

Says the Rabbi this therapy is really not needed for us today - if we look around at what is happening in the world - it’s very easy to become frightened .

The Rabbi told over a Gemara that says if one has 40 consecutive days - where everything is going perfect , where there are no problems or stressful situations - this person should be concerned that he is using up his share of olam ha ba .

Life, says the Rabbi is not about everything going our way all the time - there are ups and downs and HASHEM knows exactly what we need at each different times in our lives . He knows when to scare us and he knows how much we are able to handle . The Rabbi tells us that usually HASHEM makes it that when ever we are about to have a time where we become elevated , first comes the time where we will be tested and based on how we react to that test - determines if we will become uplifted or not . We decide our outcome . The Rabbi told over about this man that had a very bad temper . This man came over

to a certain Rabbi for help . The Rabbi that he went to said he is able to help him - just wait in the next room and he will return . As he was waiting he overheard the Rabbi talking to his assistant - with instructions to make sure that when this man comes back spill a cup of coffee on him . Then say something that will make his blood boil . The man heard what the Rabbi had planned and he was up for the challenge . What ever happened to this man he didn't have any anger whatsoever . The Rabbi told the man - see you are cured from your anger . The man had a smile on his face and said - Rabbi I overheard your plan - I was ready for your test - I knew what to expect . The Rabbi looked back at this man and said - that's exactly what I wanted you to say . HASHEM tests us - when we know that , we can react much differently . If we know the test is coming we will be able to handle it much better . We will be able to control ourselves because we know what to expect . We all have the ability to pass tests , if we know it's coming . Living life today is one test after another .

HASHEM takes care of us and he knows what we can handle .

Says the Rabbi maybe the reason why we don't grow is because we get stuck on one level and we hold ourselves back from growing based on how we react to tests . We can make it and we can grow - anticipate the test - know that it's coming .

HASHEM tells Moshe - know that it's me that is controlling parohah . According to the Sefet Emet Hashem gave over the lesson to Moshe to make sure that the people know that they too have the ability to be in control of themselves . In every situation in life we have to know that we have the ability to be in control . HASHEM knows when we are stressed - he then sees how we are able to continue to serve him at that time . Our learning and our prayers during difficult periods in our lives, in the eyes of HASHEM are so powerful . One amida that we are able to say - when we are in the middle of a very challenging situation - can be as powerful as a thousand amidas in normal circumstances .

HASHEM tells Moshe the story of Egypt will be told over to you and your children and your children's children forever . At that moment Am Yisrael bowed in praise of HASHEM. Reb Moshe says they bowed down at that time because now everything made sense . They realized that all that they went through in the past had a purpose . We have to know this lesson is for us as well . We have to know , every scare , every stressful time that we have serves a purpose . It's being given to us by HASHEM - he loves us more then we can ever imagine. He knows what is best .

He wants us to grow - from his tests .

Shabbat shalom

Yahrtzeits

Linda Chandross remembers her husband Robert Chandross on Sat. Jan. 8 (Shevat 6)
Rich Cohen remembers his mother Ida Cohen on Sat. Jan. 8 (Shevat 6)
Blossom Primer remembers Irwin's sister Ethel Schockett on Tues. Jan. 11 (Shevat 9)
Alice Solomon remembers her father Leo Blitzer on Tues. Jan. 11 (Shevat 9)
Fran Nelson remembers her husband Fred Nelson on Wed. Jan. 12 (Shevat 10)
Elaine Berkenwald remembers her husband Stanley Klughaupt on Fri. Jan. 14 (Shevat 12)

Coming Up at Kol Rina

The Joys of Yiddish, a class for beginners

Taught by master teacher Ellen Muraskin on Zoom,
10 sessions, Tuesday evenings 7:30-8:45 pm, starting on Feb. 1

Want to learn/relearn/resuscitate your Yiddish? In this class, you will learn to understand and read the mamaloschen and even to speak a bissel, and have some fun in the process.

The course is sponsored by the Susan Marx Fund for Adult Education at Kol Rina and is offered to the public free of charge.

Prerequisites: Know the Hebrew letter sounds and purchase the textbook Colloquial Yiddish by Lily Kahn, available on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Colloquial-Yiddish-Lily-Kahn/dp/0415580196>

or on Abebooks:

https://www.abebooks.com/servlet/SearchResults?sts=t&cm_sp=SearchF-_-home-_-Results&tn=colloquial%20yiddish&an=kahn

Registration: Contact Treasure Cohen at treasurehope65@gmail.com

Space is limited; preference will be given to Kol Rina members until January 18, 2022.

Our Spring lineup: A sneak preview!

The following courses are in the planning stages for the coming months. We

anticipate that most, if not all, of these programs will be offered on Zoom and that all will be free of charge. Stay tuned for further information.

BEGINNING HEBREW (10 sessions) with Natasha Cooper-Benisty. Continuation of our first series which is drawing to a close soon.

BRUNCH AND LEARN on February 6: Eliana Saks will speak on the Nigerian Jewish community.

ART HISTORY LECTURES by Janet Mandel, Thursday evenings, February 10 and 17.

PRAYER, a two-part series presented by Elie Kaunfer of Machon Hadar, Sunday mornings, February 27 and March 6.

PRISONER REHABILITATION presented by Rabbi Hilly Haber, April 3, director of social justice programs at the Central Synagogue in NYC. Rabbi Haber likens prisoner rehabilitation to the Jews leaving their slavery in Egypt.

SUNDAY MORNING COOKING CLASS on May 1, with Chef Noam ben Osher, live from Israel.

BRUNCH AND LEARN on May 22: Henry Sapoznik, musician, Yiddishist and performer, will speak on Jews and Jazz.

Join us for these awesome programs! Details to come.