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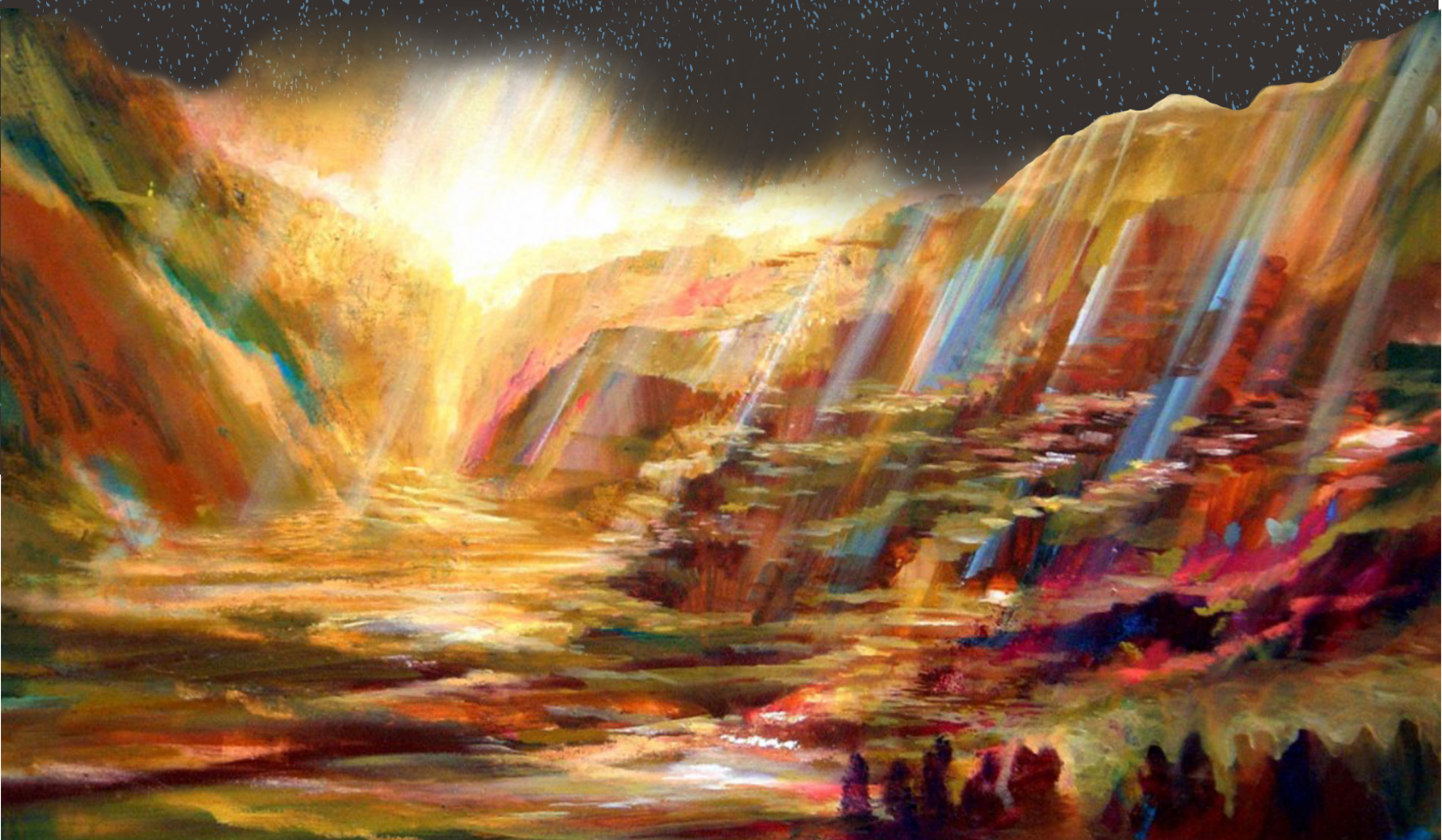
The Stories We Tell

Reflections on the Exodus

Pesah 5779 / April 2019



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THE STORIES WE TELL

The story of Pesah is our foundational story; the way we tell it on Seder night says a lot about us. In the following pages are reflections on the holiday and its traditions from Hadar's distinguished faculty, offering insights old and new on everything from the Haggadah liturgy to the story of the Exodus itself.

We hope you use this resource to enrich your experience of Pesah, prompting questions to discuss at your Seder and beyond, helping you see this central Jewish holiday in new lights.

Hag Sameah,

Jeremy Tabick, editor; and the Hadar Faculty

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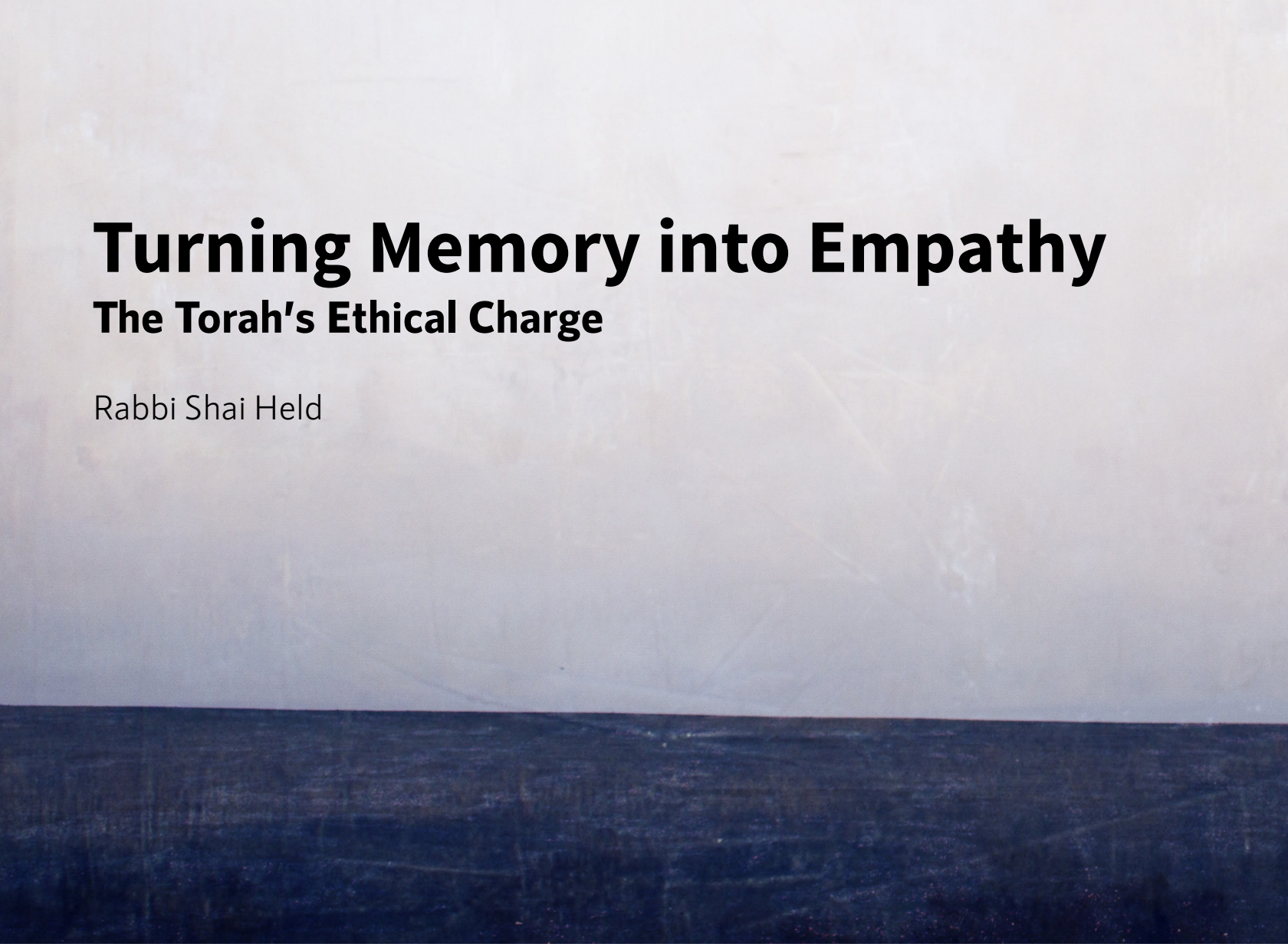

Turning Memory into Empathy

The Torah's Ethical Charge

Rabbi Shai Held

One of the Torah's central projects is to turn memory into empathy and moral responsibility. Appealing to our experience of defenselessness in Egypt, the Torah seeks to transform us into people who see those who are vulnerable and exposed rather than looking past them.

The Book of Exodus contains perhaps the most well-known articulation of this charge: "You shall not oppress a stranger (*ger*), for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9; cf. 22:20). By *ger*, the Torah means one who is an alien in the place where he lives—that is, one who is not a member of the ruling tribe or family, who is not a citizen, and who is therefore vulnerable to social and economic exploitation. The Torah appeals to our memory to intensify our ethical obligations: having tasted the suffering and degradation to which vulnerability can lead, we are bidden not to oppress the stranger. The Torah's call is not based on a rational argument, but on an urgent demand for empathy: since you know what it feels like to be a stranger, you must never abuse or mistreat the stranger.

This prohibition is so often cited that it's easy to miss just how radical and non-obvious it is. The Torah could have responded quite differently to the experience of oppression in Egypt. It could have said, Since you were tyrannized and exploited and no one did anything to help you, you don't owe anything to anyone; how dare anyone ask anything of

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you? But it chooses the opposite path: since you were exploited and oppressed, you must never be among the exploiters and degraders. You must remember *what it feels like* to be a stranger. Empathy must animate and intensify your commitment to the dignity and well-being of the weak and vulnerable. And God holds you accountable to this obligation.

On one level, of course, the Torah is appealing to the collective memory of the Jewish people: the formative story around which we orient our collective life is about our harrowing sojourn in Egypt and our eventual miraculous redemption by God. We should not oppress the stranger because we as a people remember what oppression can mean. But I would argue that we should also individually personalize the Torah's demand that we remember. Each of us is obligated, in the course of our lives, to remember times when we have been exploited or abused by those who had power over us. (Such experiences are blessedly rare for some people. Tragically, they are part of the daily bread of others.) From these experiences, the Torah tells us, we are to learn compassion and kindness.

It may be tempting to imagine a Manichean world in which the "good guys" learn compassion from experiences of vulnerability and suffering, while the "bad guys" learn only hostility and xenophobia. But it is far more honest, I think, to wrestle with the ways that each of us often has both responses at the same time. Part of us responds to the experience of suffering by wanting to make

sure that no one else has to endure what we did, but another part of us feels entitled and above reproach: if you had been through what I've been through, we can hear ourselves saying, you would understand that I don't owe anybody anything. As contemporary writer Leon Wieseltier once remarked of the Jewish people, "The Holocaust enlarged our Jewish hearts, and it shrunk them." The Torah challenges us to nurture and cultivate the compassionate response and to make sure that the raging, combative one never becomes an animating principle of our lives.

Where Exodus commands us not to oppress the stranger and ties that obligation to the ways memory can be harnessed to yield empathy, Leviticus goes further, moving from a negative commandment (*lo ta'aseh*) to a positive one (*aseh*): "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34). With these startling words, we have traveled a long distance; we are mandated to actively love the stranger. A lot can be (and has been) said about what the commandment to love the neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) does and doesn't mean in Leviticus, but one thing is clear: the love we owe to our neighbor we also owe to the stranger who resides among us. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is famously asked about the reach of the obligation to love your neighbor as yourself: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Leviticus anticipates the question and offers a stunning response: the stranger is your neighbor, and what you owe to your own kin you owe to her as well. The Torah forcefully makes clear that the poor and downtrodden, the vulnerable and oppressed, the exposed and powerless are all our neighbors. We are called to love even those who are not our kin, even those who do not share our socio-economic status, because, after all, we remember only too well what vulnerability feels like.

If you want to love God, love those whom God loves.

Deuteronomy subtly introduces still another dimension to our obligation to love the stranger. Along the way, it offers a remarkably moving lesson in theology: "For the Lord your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). The text begins by praising God as "great, mighty, and awesome." Of what does God's greatness, mightiness, and awesomeness consist? According to these verses, not of God's having created the world, and not of God's having demonstrated God's ability to smite God's enemies. No, God's grandeur is rooted in God's fairness ("who shows no favor and takes no bribe") and in God's championing the oppressed and the downtrodden. This is reminiscent of a verse from Psalms that we recite every Shabbat and holiday morning.

The verse begins, "All my bones shall say, 'Lord, who is like You?'" What is the source of God's incomparable greatness? Again, it is not raw power or might, but rather mercy and care for the vulnerable. "You save the poor from one stronger than he, the poor and needy from his despoiler" (Psalm 35:10). The God Jews worship, in other words, is a God who cares for the distressed and persecuted.

All of this helps us to understand Deuteronomy's presentation of our obligation to love the stranger. Here, loving the stranger is a form of "walking in God's ways," or what philosophers call *imitatio dei* (the imitation of God). Just as God "loves the stranger" (10:18), so also must we (10:19). The Torah here presents a radical challenge and obligation: If you want to love God, love those whom God loves. Love the fatherless, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. In other words, Deuteronomy gives us two distinct but intertwined reasons for what lies at the heart of Jewish ethics: we must love the stranger both because of who God is and because of what we ourselves have been through.

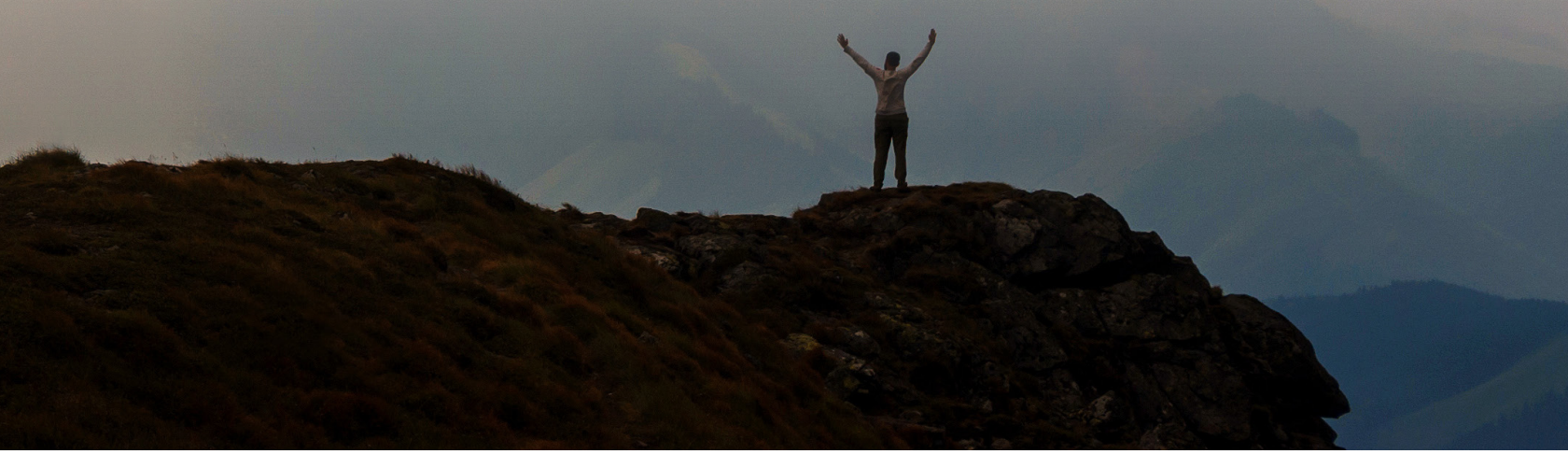
Exodus teaches us the baseline requirement: not to oppress the stranger. Leviticus magnifies the demand: not only must we not oppress the stranger, we must actively love her. And Deuteronomy raises the stakes even higher: loving the stranger is a crucial form of "walking in God's ways."

Not only must we not oppress the stranger, we must actively love her.

Literature scholar Elaine Scarry hauntingly asserts that "the human capacity to injure other people is very great precisely because our capacity to imagine other people is very small."[1] By reminding us again and again of our vulnerability in Egypt, the Torah works to help us learn to imagine others more so that we allow ourselves to hurt them less.

The obligation to love and care for the stranger and the dispossessed is a basic covenantal requirement incumbent upon us as Jews. We surely have moral obligations which are incumbent upon us because of the simple fact that we are human beings. In its recurrent appeals to memory, the Torah seeks to amplify and intensify those obligations, to remind us, even when it is difficult to hear, that the fate of the stranger is our responsibility. This mandate may seem overwhelming at times, and its concrete implications may sometimes be difficult to discern. But loving the stranger is fundamental and lies at the heart of Torah. If we wish to take the obligation to serve God seriously, and to be worthy heirs of the Jewish tradition, we have no choice but to wrestle with these words, and to seek to grow in empathy and compassion. ◇

1 Elaine Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other People," in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, edited by Martha C. Nussbaum et al. (Boston: Beacon, 1996), pp. 98-110.



What is Smart is not always What is Right

Dena Weiss

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Over the course of the ten plagues, the Torah repeatedly informs us about the condition of Pharaoh's heart, when it is reinforced or strengthened,[1] and when it is hardened.[2] The text also narrates how Pharaoh's heart changes, and who is responsible for that change. Sometimes Pharaoh is credited with toughening himself, "וַיְכַבֵּד פַּרְעֹה אֶת לִבּוֹ/Pharoh reinforced his heart", but sometimes the text attributes this strengthening and hardening to God, "כִּי אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת לִבּוֹ/For I [God] have reinforced his heart."[3] Indeed, at the very outset, when God first issues Moshe with instructions for confronting Pharaoh, God promises Moshe that He will toughen Pharaoh's resolve and harden his heart, "וַאֲנִי אַקְשֶׁה אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה... וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵכֶם פַּרְעֹה/I will harden Pharaoh's heart… and Pharaoh will not listen to you."[4] This opens up the possibility that even when the text does not explicitly ascribe the change in Pharaoh's disposition to God's involvement, it can still be traced back to God's will rather than Pharaoh's own.[5] God's taking responsibility in this way inspires the major

1 ח,ז,ק or כ,ב,ד

2 ק,ש,ה

3 Shemot 8:27, 10:1.

4 Shemot 7:3-4.

5 See Ibn Ezra, Ramban to Shemot 7:3.

commentaries to ask how God could have manipulated Pharaoh in this way. Isn't He depriving Pharaoh of his free will by making him stubborn? And, if the reason why Pharaoh doesn't free his Jewish slaves is that God has deprived him of his ability to emancipate *Benei Yisrael*, how is it fair for God to punish Pharaoh for not letting them go?

However, God is being quite fair. As Pharaoh himself exclaims, "God is the righteous and my people and I are to blame."[6] The claim that God is being unjust in manipulating Pharaoh and subjecting him and his people to the plagues on illegitimate grounds makes two unnecessary, and possibly incorrect, assumptions. First, it assumes that the plagues are coming to Pharaoh and his people on account of Pharaoh's refusal to let God's people go at the time that Moshe asks. However, it is equally, if not more, reasonable, to assume that the plagues are coming because Pharaoh had enslaved God's people in the first place and caused them to suffer for the decades prior. Pharaoh is not being indicted on this momentary refusal to emancipate his slaves, but rather on his history of abuse.

Furthermore, we see that God orchestrates Pharaoh's ability to hold onto *Benei Yisrael* in order to punish Pharaoh. God explicitly says that He wants Pharaoh to refuse to send the people in order to send the plagues. As he instructs Moshe to tell Pharaoh,

שמות י:א
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל פַּרְעֹה כִּי אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת לִבּוֹ וְאֶת לֵב עֲבָדָיו לְמַעַן שִׁתִי אֹתֹתַי אֵלֶּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ׃

Shemot 10:1
God said to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh for I have reinforced his heart and the heart of his servants in order to extend these signs of Mine in his midst."

How is it fair for God to punish Pharaoh for not letting them go?

God does not send the plagues on account of Pharaoh's refusal to free the Jews, rather God ensures that Pharaoh refuses to free the Jews so that God can display His strength. God does not create a reason to punish Pharaoh, what He helps to create are the conditions necessary to bring the punishment and thereby display His greatness. God sends the plagues as a consequence of Pharaoh's previous behavior, not as a consequence for how he is acting presently. God's manipulating of Pharaoh's will now is akin to placing Pharaoh's hands in handcuffs so that he can be disciplined. It is not the case that God is moving Pharaoh's hands or heart to commit a crime. God's acts are merely punitive and justifiably so.

God intends to send harsh retribution, which Pharaoh more than deserves, regardless of when or even if Pharaoh releases His people. The Egyptians are going to absorb at least some fraction of God's vengeance. But, what is not guaranteed without intervention is that the plagues will descend upon Egypt while *Benei Yisrael* are still there. God wants *Benei Yisrael* to be in Egypt while the plagues come for two reasons. First, the plagues are not only designed to punish and impress Pharaoh, they are also intended to impress the people of Israel. As God continues,

שמות י:ב
וּלְמַעַן תְּסַפֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי בִנְךָ וּבֶן בִּנְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלַּלְתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת אֹתֹתַי אֲשֶׁר שַׂמְתִּי בָם וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה'׃

Shemot 10:2
And in order that it be told in the ears of your child and grandchild that which I have caused to pass in Egypt and My signs that I have placed in them, and you will know that I am God.

6 Shemot 9:27.

If *Benei Yisrael* have already departed for the Promised Land and therefore do not see the plagues themselves, then the plagues will have at most served only half of their function. But perhaps more importantly, if God sent the plagues to Pharaoh after he freed *Benei Yisrael*, then Pharaoh would not know that the plagues came on account of the Jews' enslavement. He would not have known that the Hebrews' God is the one who sent the plagues. And perhaps worst of all, he might think that the plagues are a consequence not of his having enslaved these people, but on account of his having freed them.

The second assumption in the critique of God's having hardened Pharaoh's heart is that this hardening has the effect of making Pharaoh behave in a way that he was not before and would not be otherwise. It asserts that if God had left Pharaoh's heart alone, then Pharaoh would be free to do—and therefore would do—the right thing. This understanding relies on a definition of the heart as the seat of the will—a hard heart makes you obstinate and unwilling to do what is right and a soft heart makes you yielding, impressionable, good. However, when the Torah describes the Jewish people as obstinate and sinful, it refers to them not as stiff in their hearts, but rather, as stiff in their necks, קְשֵׁה עֹרֶף.[7] Biblical literature often treats the heart as the location of the intellect. As Nahum M. Sarna writes in his book on Sefer Shemot, *Exploring Exodus*, "Man's thoughts, his intellectual activity, the cognitive, conative, and affective aspects of his personality, are all regarded as issuing from the heart."[8] We see the heart as knowing and wise throughout the Torah, and perhaps most beautifully when God describes the skill and wisdom involved in the crafting of the *mishkan* and its furnishings, where He refers to the artisans as חַכַם לֵב, wise-hearted.[9]

Consequently, when God (or Pharaoh) hardens or reinforces Pharaoh's heart, what is being strengthened is Pharaoh's ability to reason. God is primarily influencing his intelligence. He makes Pharaoh strong of mind and encourages him to think that he is being clever and that he is being strategic, which masks that he is in fact merely being cruel. God doesn't make Pharoah tough, so much as He makes him sharp. Pharaoh's cruelty and propensity to sin is not what God is manipulating; God is strengthening Pharaoh's ability to rationalize this behavior. Rationalizing a behavior doesn't necessarily determine whether or not the action will take place, but rather how it should be evaluated, how one thinks about what has been done.

This approach to Pharaoh is pointedly מדה כנגד מדה, measure for measure. A

7 See Shemot 32:9, 33:5, 34:9.

8 Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (Schocken: New York, 1986), p. 64.

9 See Shemot 31:6. This is also how Mishlei uses the imagery of heart throughout its exploration of moral and life education.

deep understanding of Pharaoh and a close reading of his behavior shows that he does not make decisions based on whether they are right or wrong, but based upon whether or not they are wise. Whether or not he is correct, Pharaoh's considerations are entirely strategic. As we see when he launches his campaign against the people, Pharaoh doesn't think that killing the Israelite male children is a morally responsible choice to make; he is ostensibly aware of the fact that the children he is slaughtering are innocent. Pharaoh isn't evaluating his behavior in moral terms, in terms of what he is justified in doing, he thinks only in terms of what is the most clever course of action, "let us deal shrewdly with them." Understanding Pharaoh's character and motivation in this way enables us to understand what the process and effect is of hardening Pharaoh's heart. It is not that Pharaoh is making a moral calculus and God is taking away his ability to do what is right by making him more stubborn. Pharaoh doesn't engage in moral terms at all.

שמות י:ח-יג

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע
אֶת יוֹסֵף: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַמּוֹ הִנֵּה עַם בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ: הָבָה נִתְחַכְּמָה לוֹ
פֶּן יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרֶאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף
גַּם הוּא עַל שֹׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן
הָאָרֶץ: וַיָּשִׂימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עַנֹּתוֹ
בְּסִבְלֹתָם וַיִּבֶן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפַרְעֹה אֶת
פִּתֹם וְאֶת רַעַמְסֵס: וְכַאֲשֶׁר יְעַנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן
יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיָּקֻצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
וַיַּעֲבִדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ:

Shemot 1:8-13

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites.[10]

We see the heart as knowing and wise throughout the Torah.

Framing Pharaoh's internal debate as to whether or not to send the people as an intellectual one enables us to notice how much mental labor Pharaoh is doing in order to convince himself to hold on to the people. The first thing that Pharaoh does when he is confronted with Moshe's power is to call his wise men and magicians. When he sees that they can replicate the first few plagues, he decides not to free the Jews. Rashbam[11] (7:13) explains that when Pharaoh's heart is hardened it is, "to say that Aharon also did [his miracle] through magic." The effect of Pharaoh's hardened heart is that he rationalizes away the plagues' significance, claiming that there is no difference between Aharon and his magicians. And it is this unwillingness to recognize the power of God through the plagues that requires God to bring them again and again.

It is also clear from a close reading of the text that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart does not have the effect of preventing him from sending the people away. He actually relents and sends them away repeatedly! What his hard heart does is make him retract his decision, he talks himself out of the choice that he made. The first time we see this is when he asks Moshe to pray for the removal of the frogs, and claims that he'll send the people once the frogs are gone. But he does not keep his promise. Rather, "וַיַּרְא פַּרְעֹה כִּי הָיְתָה הָרְוָחָה וְהַכְבֵּד אֶת לִבּוֹ

10 Translation NRSV.

11 R. Shmuel ben Meir, 11th-12th c. France.

וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה׳/Pharaoh saw that there was some reprieve and he reinforced his heart and did not listen to them, like God said."[12] This pattern repeats throughout the plagues, with Pharaoh reversing his promise to send the people after the frogs, the wild animals, the hail, and the locusts. And of course, running after the people after he frees them after the death of the firstborn.

We see that in fact, Pharaoh relents after half of the plagues. He keeps on changing his mind. Yet, he retracts his promises to let the people go because he sees that his magicians can imitate the plague or that Moshe can be talked into praying them away. Pharaoh isn't being manipulated, if anything he is being manipulative. He begs Moshe to take away the plague, but as soon as he gets a reprieve, he denies his own word. If Pharoah were just stubborn, he would say, "Bring me your worst, and I don't care about the consequences." But he does not stand his ground, he cowers, and he gives in. He *has* the free will to send the people, which he exercises repeatedly. But then he changes his mind.

When the Torah demonstrates that Pharoah isn't freeing his slaves on account of a hardened heart it does so in order to show us the power of rationalization. The repetition of the same dynamic plague after plague shows that despite how overwhelmingly wrong it is and how damaging it is to his own country, Pharaoh is always able to convince himself anew to re-enslave the people. The re-hardening of the heart is a natural recreation of the conditions of his original sin. Pharaoh chooses to do what he thinks is clever over what he knows is right, because Pharaoh had initially enslaved the people by doing what he thought was clever over what he knew was right. And perhaps the deeper reason why Pharoah doesn't free his slaves is not that he still wants them in captivity, it's that he doesn't want to be seen as having made a mistake. He wants his choices to be vindicated.

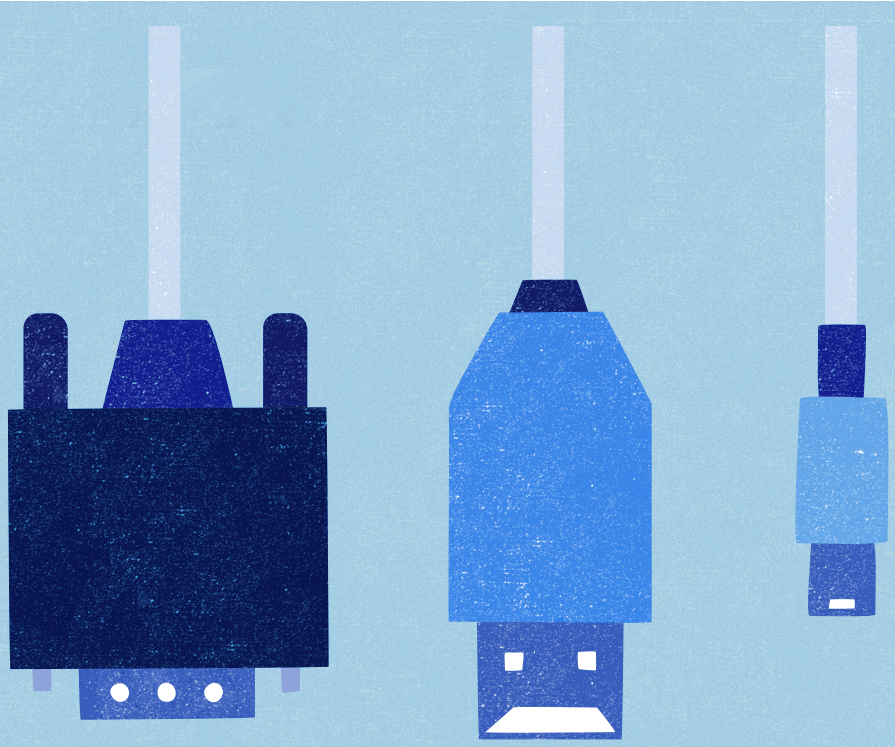
Pharaoh chooses to do what he thinks is clever over what he knows is right.

The lesson of the story of Pharaoh's heart is that what's good isn't always what seems smart or strategic, and that what is in fact most clever isn't always what is right. Often our minds are not the right place to look for moral guidance because they are too sophisticated, too able to convince us to do what is wrong. Our intellects can makes us blind to our own evil through the power of rationalization. This is why the Haggadah opens with telling us that the *mitzvah* of Retelling the Story of the Exodus, *Sippur Yetzi'at Mitzrayim,* is for everyone, even the very wise.

> וַאֲפִילוּ כֻּלָּנוּ חֲכָמִים כֻּלָּנוּ נְבוֹנִים
> כֻּלָּנוּ זְקֵנִים כֻּלָּנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה
> מִצְוָה עָלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם.
>
> Even if we are all wise, elders, sages who know the Torah, it is our obligation to tell the story of leaving Egypt.

For, perhaps it is not even the very wise, but especially the very wise who need to learn the essential lesson of the process of the Exodus and the ten plagues. We need to learn that being wise doesn't necessarily make a person good or kind or moral, and unfortunately, we can become too smart for our own good. ◈

12 Shemot 8:4



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Night of Questions!

Invite all of the guest to co-lead the Seder!

Good questions are the key to a great Seder. So, we have provided a list of questions. Some are designed to go deep, some to engage individual's interests, and others are just to be funny and lighten the mood.

Instructions: Write each question on an index card, and give each guest a handful of cards. Move through the order of the Haggadah. It is up to the guests to decide when to ask each question. So, the same question will lead to a very different discussion depending on when it is asked during the night.

Questions for any part of the Seder

1. What can the person to your left teach you about that?
2. What would our enemies think about that?
3. How would you react in that situation?
4. How is *this* different *this* year?
5. Did your grandparents have a tradition about this?
6. Can you act that out?
7. Does this conflict with a value you hold?
8. What would the twitter # be for this?
9. Who in this room would rather this part were not in the Seder? & why?
10. How might this part be different if it were written by a woman?
11. Does this remind you of an article you read recently?
12. How does the food we are eating now reflect the meaning of this part of the Seder?
13. Is this the main point of the Seder?
14. What is God's role in this?
15. Would anyone else like to move to the couch?
16. Who in this room would say this is their favorite part of the Seder? & why?
17. Does this represent a Jewish value?
18. What song does this remind you of?
19. Do you think this concept is universal?
20. Is this what you imagine "Redemption" looks like?
21. How is this like your career field/area of expertise?
22. Is anyone else hungry?
23. What part of this is human nature and what is heroism?
24. Who here do you most identify with?
25. Does anyone else think it is time to move on to another question?
26. What musical does this remind you of?
27. Does that feel spiritual?
28. What is this a metaphor for?
29. Give an adjective to describe that!
30. Does anyone have a good story about this from a previous Seder?
31. What was God's role in that?
32. What would be a different perspective on this?
33. How would you translate this to modern day?
34. Does this make anyone feel angry?
35. What does this teach about "Freedom"?

Can You Start the Seder Early?

An Analysis of the Halakhic Sources

Rabbi Ethan Tucker

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The Torah preserves a somewhat complex account of the timing of the Exodus from Egypt. According to Exodus 12:29-34, as the final plague hits in the middle of the night, striking down the Egyptian firstborn, the people are thrown out of Egypt immediately.[1] No date is given here, but Deuteronomy 16:1 similarly recalls a nighttime Exodus and identifies the date of the Exodus as חדש האביב/*ḥodesh ha-aviv* or the new moon of Aviv, the month we know of as Nisan.[2] In accordance with this memory, Deuteronomy 16:4,6 specifies that the פסח/*pesaḥ* sacrifice must be offered בערב/*ba-erev*, once the sun has set,so as to coincide with the time of day when the Exodus happened.[3]

Exodus 12:1-28 describes the Israelites as slaughtering a special lamb on the 14th of the first month (again, Nisan), at the time of day described as

1 This confirms the prediction offered by Moshe in Exodus 11:4-8.

2 This date is also supplied by Exodus 13:4, 23:15 and 34:18.

3 It seems that the point is not that this sacrifice must be offered or eaten at midnight, but that it is sufficient to do so sometime after the sun has set, thus locating the ritual in the night as opposed to the day.

בין הערבים/*bein ha-arbayim* —which is understood in Rabbinic tradition to refer to the afternoon. They are then to remain indoors all night, waiting for the Egyptian firstborn to be smitten so that they can leave triumphantly in the morning.[4] This passage also specifies that the lamb to be eaten as part of the night-long vigil must be eaten at night, though the term בערב is also used to describe the time when *matzah* should be eaten by future generations.

This complex narrative evoked several Rabbinic attempts at harmonization.[5] Most importantly, however, all of the above passages agree that the Egyptian firstborn were killed at night and that the sacrificial meal commemorating this event had to take place בערב/*ba-erev* (in the evening) or בלילה/*ba-layla* (in the night), as opposed to during the day.[6] Since matzah and maror are linked to the *pesaḥ* offering by Exodus 12:8, they also may not be eaten until it is nighttime. Tosefta Pesaḥim 2:22 confirms this point.[7]

A separate consideration from the eating of these ritual foods is the retelling of the Exodus that rabbinic sources assume to be a core part of the observance of Pesaḥ. The *pesaḥ* sacrifice was not only a celebratory family meal, it was also meant to be a reaffirmation of the national story. For *Ḥazal*, this part of the ritual was anchored in Exodus 13:8, which imagines a parent explaining to a child that the annual *pesaḥ* sacrifice is on account of the fact that God "took me out of Egypt." This verse becomes the basis for the idea of the obligation to tell the story once a year. But since Exodus 13 speaks of the Exodus as happening on the new month of Aviv, this begs the question of when it is acceptable to tell this story.

The פסח sacrifice must be offered בערב, once the sun has set, so as to coincide with the time of day when the Exodus happened.

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael Bo Pisha 17 entertains the possibility that this obligation to tell the story would be valid starting with Rosh Ḥodesh Nisan, in accordance with the plain sense of Exodus 13, but creatively resorting to the phrase ביום ההוא (on that day) in Exodus 13:8—which probably originally meant "at that future time"—the Mekhilta rejects any telling before the 14th of Nisan, which is the Rabbinically accepted day for offering the *pesaḥ* sacrifice. The Mekhilta then asks whether one could tell the story on the day of the 14th of Nisan, rather than waiting for nightfall. The conclusion: The phrase בעבור זה (on account of this) demands that the telling be done when one can point to the full complement of ritual foods—the *matzah* and *maror*. Since these are only to be eaten at night—following Exodus 12:8's description—the accompanying narrative ritual must happen at night as well.

We thus get a fairly uniform picture of a Seder ritual that must include the telling of the story along with the ritual of eating *matzah* and *maror* after nightfall. Since Rabbinic

4 This account of a triumphant morning departure on the 15th as opposed to a midnight escape is also supplied by Exodus 14:8 and Numbers 33:3-4.

5 For one example, see Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 9b.

6 See Mishnah Zevaḥim 5:8

7 Interestingly, that text also emphasizes that one should eat those foods as soon after nightfall as possible

tradition always deals stringently with twilight in the context of biblical *mitzvot*, this would seem to translate into waiting until the stars come out to begin the telling of the story.

Nonetheless, in the middle ages, an important question arises: Can one start Yom Tov early, treating the time before nightfall as the 15th of Nisan for ritual purposes and thereby eat matzah before nightfall? Indeed, Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 27a reports that Rav used to pray Shabbat Arvit (evening service) on Friday afternoon, well before nightfall (and seemingly even before sunset). This suggests that Shabbat can be begun early and the subsequent daylight hours can count as Shabbat. Can one do the same for Pesah?

R. Ya'akov of Corbeil (12th-13th c., in Tosafot Pesahim 99b s.v. *ad*) argues that even though on most Shabbat and Yom Tov evenings one is permitted to begin the festive meal earlier, while there is still daylight, on Pesah the meal is tied to the *pesah* offering, which means that the *matzah* and *maror* eaten at the start of the meal may not be consumed until nightfall. He cites Tosefta Pesahim 2:22 as proof of this position.[8] R. Yehudah Sirleon (12th-13th c., see his Tosafot on Berakhot 27a) rejects this proof: It might be that the Tosefta is only clarifying that the *pesah* offering is not to be consumed on the 14th, but rather on the 15th.[9] In other words, the Tosefta's stipulation of משתחשך for the time to consume *pesah*, *matzah* and *maror* is not about astronomy, rather it is about the proper ritual calendrical frame. As long as one has ritually begun the 15th of Nisan—by lighting candles, saying Kiddush or otherwise mentally accepting Yom Tov—one can eat the sacrificial meal and its components. R. Yehudah Sirleon thus argues that there is no Rabbinic text that clearly forbids starting the Seder early and eating *matzah* and *maror* before nightfall.[10]

R. Ya'akov of Corbeil's approach dominates subsequent discourse, with almost all assuming that *matzah* may not be eaten until dark.[11]

Maharil (Germany, 1360-1427) assumes a standard requiring one to wait until the stars came out to do Kiddush at the Seder, but is perplexed by this. R. Ya'akov of Corbeil's argument only explicitly requires eating *matzah* after dark! Why not begin the Seder earlier, and allow Kiddush and the narrative retelling last until nightfall, at which point *matzah* can be eaten? He therefore explains that the Mekhilta tells us that the narrative retelling is linked to the ritual foods of the Seder. If the latter can only be consumed after dark, then the former can only be begun after dark. He furthermore emphasizes that *karpas* (vegetable) at the Seder is intended to get children to ask questions and is thus part of the narration. Therefore, this too must be done after dark. Kiddush, strictly speaking, does not need to be done after dark, he argues, but since some people do a longer Kiddush and others a shorter one, the practice emerged to wait for dark to do Kiddush as well.

R. David Abudraham is stricter: he argues that the four cups of wine at the Seder are linked to *matzah* and therefore cannot be drunk until after dark. Since Kiddush at the Seder is one of the four cups, it too cannot be said until after dark. Terumat Ha-Deshen #137 makes a similar point, insisting that the Mekhilta demands that all the rituals associated with *matzah* be done at a time when it is valid to eat *matzah*. He strengthens his argument by appealing to the *midrash* first advanced in Yerushalmi

8 For more on the question of starting Shabbat meals early, see, among other sources, Terumat Ha-Deshen #1 and Bah's citation of Maharal of Prague on Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 472

9 Every other sacrifice can be eaten right away on the day when it was slaughtered, such that this novel point must be made to clarify the *pesah* offering's uniqueness.

10 See Hazon Ovadiah I:1 for further analysis of this position and a close reading of the printed Tosafot on Pesahim 99b and its various versions.

11 Aside from those preferring the substantive approach of R. Ya'akov of Corbeil, anyone who rejects the notion that biblical *mitzvot* tied to a specific day cannot be done before the astronomical onset of the day—אין תוספת יום טוב דאורייתא—also would not be able to accept his view. In other words, anyone uncomfortable with starting Shemini Atzeret early and eating outside of the *sukkah* for that late afternoon meal would not be able to rely on R. Yehudah Sirleon here. See Taz on Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 668.

Pesahim 10:1 that the four cups of wine at the Seder are intended to hint at the four verbs of redemption used by God in Exodus 6, rather than just serving as anchors of a festive meal. They are thus a mythic unit that cannot be separated from the *matzah* and *maror*.[12] Nevertheless, this strict approach to Kiddush was not universally practiced. While R. Shimshon b. Tzemah Duran (14th-15th c., North Africa) advances this position as well in his work Yavin Shemu'ah, a later gloss on that work testifies that it was not common practice to wait until dark to begin Kiddush at the Seder, an effective return to Maharil's approach. Indeed, while Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 472 takes a strict view on starting Kiddush after dark, R. Ya'akov Reischer (in Hok Ya'akov there) notes that the logic on which this is based is challenged by Maharil and seems to favor the latter's position. As a result, R. Ovadiah Yosef (in Hazon Ovadiah I:1) rules that while Kiddush should in fact be said after dark, when one is in a difficult situation, one can say it earlier, based on Maharil's approach.[13]

While almost all subsequent voices endorse the requirement to wait for dark even for Kiddush, some modern authorities questioned this whole line of analysis, suggesting an even more limited reading of R. Ya'akov of Corbeil. R. Yosef b. Avraham Molkho (18th c., Salonica, student of R. Yosef David of Salonica), in his work Shulhan Gavoah, asserts that R. Ya'akov of Corbeil and all other Rishonim that only emphasize the importance of eating after dark would in fact permit all prior parts of the Seder to be done earlier. Only the foods directly compared to the *pesah* sacrifice, and thus associated with the directive to eat it בלילה הזה (on this night), must be eaten after nightfall. But Kiddush, *karpas*, and the whole narrative ritual of the Haggadah, can be done while it is still light out. He in fact claims that the plain language of the Tosefta only seems to be concerned about the rituals of *pesah*, *matzah* and *maror*, but evinces no concern for the earlier parts of the Seder. As a result, he concludes that almost everyone other than Maharil, Abudraham, Terumat Ha-Deshen and Rashbatz would permit starting the Seder while it is still light and timing it to get to the eating of *matzah* at nightfall. Though he prefers starting Kiddush after nightfall, R. Molkho notes that this is only in deference to the Shulhan Arukh, but not because he believes this view to be correct. Hatam Sofer (in his comments on Pesahim 99b) more actively permits starting Kiddush early (possibly only after sunset, though his language there may be an imprecise way of just indicating the onset of Yom Tov) and timing the end of the Haggadah for the emergence of stars.[14]

The four cups of wine at the Seder are intended to hint at the four verbs of redemption used by God in Exodus.

Neither of these views directly engage the Mekhilta, which seems to insist that the narrative retelling happen at the time when *pesah*, *matzah* and *maror* are in play. There are a number of ways they might have addressed this text, two of which are:

12 Maharil in fact challenged this logic, since it would seem to require drinking the third and fourth cups before midnight, after which one cannot consume the required *matzah* at the Seder, a requirement with no basis in earlier sources. Terumat Ha-Deshen might respond that the key for the four cups is not that they all be at a time valid for the consumption of *matzah* per se, but rather at night, so as to coincide with the slaying of the firstborn and Israel's deliverance.

13 He goes so far as to argue that Terumat Ha-Deshen himself would concede this point.

14 It should be noted that Hatam Sofer grounds this position in a fairly weak textual argument, even though the substantive position is tenable; the same can be said of R. Ya'akov of Corbeil's position above.

1. They might read the phrase בשעה שמצה ומרור מונחים לפניך to mean when you are engaged in the direct preparation for eating them. Even if it is not yet a valid time for eating them, the fact that the narrative will culminate with their consumption at the proper time is sufficient to meet this criterion.[15]

2. They may view the Mekhilta as an *asmakhta* (a support, rather than a proof), as having fundamentally less authority than the explicit linkage of the *pesaḥ* offering with *matzah* and *maror* in the Torah. In other words, whereas the Torah specifies night as the proper time for *pesaḥ*, *matzah* and *maror*, it is only the Mekhilta that tries to link the narrative telling of the story to the time of the *pesaḥ*. Therefore, even if we require the telling of the story to happen on the 15th of Nisan (as opposed to on the 1st of the month or even on the 14th during the day), we don't have a strong enough linkage based on the Mekhilta alone to require the telling to be after astronomical dark. Therefore, as long as one has ushered in the ritual frame of the 15th (by committing oneself to refrain from forbidden work, lighting candles, and/or praying Arvit), one may say Kiddush and engage in all Pesaḥ rituals that were not specifically earmarked by the Torah for nightfall.

R. Ovadiah Yosef rejects any such deflection of the Mekhilta and assumes it establishes a strong and binding connection between the Haggadah and *matzah* and *maror*. He therefore does not allow for any leniencies—even in pressing circumstances—for anything other than Kiddush.

15 Note that a close reading of Tosefta Pesaḥim 2:22 suggests that it is preferable to eat *pesaḥ, matzah* and *maror* as close to the onset of nightfall as possible

Can You Start The Seder Early? (Summary)

The halakhic conversation surrounding the timing of the Seder is dominated by those voices that forbid starting even Kiddush—and certainly everything after Kiddush—before nightfall. Also note that the overwhelming consensus of almost all *aharonim* follows the approach of R. David Abudraham and Terumat Ha-Deshen as codified by Shulhan Arukh, and embraces a vision of the Seder where all of its components are part of a nighttime reenactment ritual. This approach emphasizes how we are reenacting the nighttime deliverance that launched the Jewish people's freedom and sees all the rituals of the Seder as part of that reenactment. It is therefore the most powerful model and therefore, the most preferable. Nonetheless, people often find themselves at a Seder that will start earlier than this time and can get stuck about how to proceed without causing a major family dispute. The above sources reveal a richer language for understanding a variety of practices that deviate from what emerged as halakhic consensus in most communities:

1

Accepting Yom Tov through Kiddush and starting the Seder early without concern for delaying eating *matzah* until nightfall. This approach is that effectively defended by R. Yehudah Sirleon, who argued that no Rabbinic source explicitly contradicts this practice. This is a real outlier position in the conversation and strips the Seder experience of any astronomical connection to לילה, a keyword through not only the Torah's narrative of this story, but also the Haggadah's retelling of it. Given where the halakhic conversation has gone,and the plain sense of לילה in the Bible, this is essentially a deviant practice, though it has at least one defender. One at such a Seder should make the minimal effort to eat some *matzah* and *maror* after nightfall as well, even if this model is a way of understanding a family's practice within halakhic discourse.

2

Starting the Seder early but timing the end of Maggid to coincide with the emergence of stars, so that *matzah* is eaten after dark. This practice is validated in principle by R. Yosef Molkho and in practice by Hatam Sofer (with the latter possibly only permitting if Kiddush is begun after sunset). This approach downplays the critical nature of telling the story at the exact same time when *matzah* can be eaten; as long as the retelling and the ritual eating are juxtaposed and done within the same ritual time frame, there is no problem.

3

Starting the Seder early, but beginning עבדים היינו — the formal beginning of the Maggid—after night fall. While no authority I have found seems to take this approach explicitly, it is a reasonable position less radical than those above. This approach would affirm the Mekhilta's linkage of the Haggadah to the ritual eating but would balk at the deep significance of *karpas*, which, after all, has its origins as a typical dipping—or "salad course"—at the beginning of a meal and only later becomes invested with religious significance.

4

Starting Kiddush before nightfall but timing *karpas* to occur with nightfall. This conforms to Maharil's position and is endorsed by R. Ovadiah Yosef in difficult situations (such as wanting to avoid family conflict). This approach affirms that anything done differently on the night of Pesah from another Yom Tov is inherently wrapped up with the Haggadah and thus must be part of the night time ritual.

5

Starting Kiddush after nightfall. This covers all opinions and reflects the assertion of Abudraham and Maharil that the Seder—which includes Kiddush as the first of four cups—is a set piece that reenacts and retells a nighttime event and thus must be done entirely at night. ◆

Hierarchies of Knowledge in the Seder

Is it better to focus on the laws of the Seder or the story of the Exodus?

Jeremy Tabick

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The Seder and the Haggadah have always been used as educational tools.[1] Growing up as a child of (two) Reform rabbis, I saw clearly the educational focus of Seder every year—even at our private Seder on first night, but even more pronounced during the second night communal Seder. My parents' goals for these Seders was to provide congregants with some interesting content and thoughts about Pesah, adding meaning to the following year's exploration of the Haggadah and Seder. Although there was normally a moment to tell the story of the Exodus (since the story itself is not in the Haggadah) and thus a broad overview of why we were doing this, generally the Seder was structured in order to focus on the symbolism of the items on the table and the steps of the Seder. The aim was to provide baseline knowledge of what to do (e.g. "We start with kiddush…", the tunes for Ehad Mi Yodei'a) and how it symbolizes something that matters (e.g. *matzah* as bread of slavery, *karpas* and *beitzah* for spring and rebirth, and so on). We rarely spent long on the *midrashim* that are central to Maggid, these "explanations" of the story seeming archaic and unrelated to the real meaning of the Exodus.

I have often thought about these experiences and how one can educate

1 This is clear from the Torah itself—"When your child asks you in the future saying 'What is this?', you should say to them…" (Exodus 13:14)—and also the Mishnah ("The father teaches him"), discussed below.

most successfully during Seder night. What should be the focus: Telling and discussing the story? Learning the steps of the Seder and the symbolism of the Seder plate? How do we stretch those who know more while providing a baseline for those who know less?

The Haggadah itself acknowledges this dynamic. When accounting for the four instances where the Torah says we need to talk about the Exodus with our children, it divides each instance by personality of the child: "wise" (*hakham*; Deuteronomy 6:20), "wicked" (*rasha*; Exodus 12:26), "simple" (*tam*; Exodus 13:14), and "who doesn't know how to ask" *(she-eino yodei'a lish'ol*; Exodus 13:8). Although the site of an astonishing range of modern visual and literary *midrashim* as to whom these four children refer to in contemporary life, the plain sense of the Haggadah text is that these refer to four different attitudes to learning about the Exodus, which call for four different educational responses, summarized and interpreted in Table 1 below:[2]

Each child has their particular orientation based on their respective verses, and for each is recommended an educational strategy with which to respond, that may be summarized: invitation, rejection, explanation, anticipation.

This set of four children also sets up two contrasts. For the wicked child and the one who doesn't know how to ask, the *midrash* focuses on the manner in which the parent should address them and not the content. The parent should rebuke the wicked one and encourage the one who doesn't know how to ask.

But the contrast between the simple and wise children is with regard to the content they need to know, while the manner of explanation remains the same: the wise one should learn the laws of Pesah, the simple one should learn the story.

Let's flesh out this contrast between the wise and simple children. This *midrash* suggests that this child, the wise one interested in the fine legal discussions of Pesah, should be stretched and taught all the legal minutiae involved; presumably, we can safely assume that the wise child knows the basics of Pesah, both legal and narrative. The simple child's straightforward and ambiguous question, however ("What is this?"), is assessed by the *midrash* to be asking something else: the simple one is not interested in legal complexities, but rather needs to know the

2 The Haggadah's version of this *midrash* is very close to the earliest version in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Massekhta de-Pisha 18, although with some differences, e.g. "simple" is "stupid" (*tippesh*) instead.

Table 1

Child	Nature of the Question	Nature of the Answer
Wise	Interested in legal details: "What are the laws that God commanded us?"	You should respond to them with the legal minutiae of the Seder, down to the last *mishnah* of Pesahim: "They don't conclude with *afikoman* after the sacrifice."
Wicked	Disdainful: "What is this service *for you*!?"	They tried to exclude themselves from Pesah, so you should respond by reinforcing their exclusion: "God did this for me, not for you."
Simple	Interested in base-level questions: "What is this?"	You should respond to them with explaining the outline of the story: "With a strong hand, God brought us out of slavery in Egypt."
Doesn't know how to ask	N/A	Don't wait for them to ask, begin teaching what they need to know now.

baseline knowledge, which is the events of what actually happened. In other words, the *midrash* treats the story of the Exodus as low-level knowledge that we want to ensure everyone knows, and the laws of Pesah as high-level knowledge that we will make sure to teach those who need to be stretched, but that other people don't need to bother with.

The Mishnah basically bears out this approach to Seder night. Its description of the Seder is primarily occupied with the telling of the story.[3] Everyone needs to know what happened, but only some need to know the laws of what we do today. This is reflected in the text of the Mishnah from the Kaufmann manuscript:[4]

משנה פסחים י:ד (כ"י קאופמן)
מזגו לו כוס שיני, וכן הבן שואל. ואם דעת בבן, אביו מלמדו: מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות...

Mishnah Pesahim 10:4 (ms. Kaufmann)
[The servants] mix for [the father leading the Seder] a second cup, and so the son asks. If there is knowledge in the son, the father teaches him: "How different is this night from all other nights!…"[5]

The Mah Nishtanah, according to the Kaufmann text, is the explanation of some customs of the Seder that the father teaches the son with knowledge, in other words, the wise child in our *midrash*. So this form of the *midrash* maps onto the Mishnah: those who are capable should be learning the laws of Pesah, those who aren't should at least know the story of the Exodus.

So far, this is based on how the *midrash* appears in the Haggadah (and the Mekhilta). However, when the *midrash* appears in the Talmud Yerushalmi,[6] it is crucially different specifically with regard to the simple and wise children. As you can see in the Table 2, the responses are inverted (while the original verses that supply the questions remain the same).

So it seems that the Yerushalmi thinks the inverse than the Mishnah: everyone needs to know the laws of Pesah, even the laws of the Temple—in other words, the

3 See Mishnah Pesahim 10:4-5.

4 One of the "best" manuscripts of the Mishnah, i.e. one that is least likely to have been corrected based on other texts or current practice. The word אין is added in the margins and reflects our printed edition, see below. Mishnah Pesahim 10, discussing the Seder, is actually full of important differences between the manuscripts and the printed editions, the latter having been redacted generally to reflect the current Seder night practice; it seems to me that this is because Seder night has been so popular and important to current Jews for so long. A particularly stark example of this is the text of the Mah Nishtanah in the printed edition vs. manuscripts of Mishnah Pesahim 10:5.

5 For more about how to translate the phrase *mah nishtanah*, see Rabbi Elie Kaunfer's essay "Mah Nishtanah" on p. 32 of this volume.

6 Pesahim 10:4 / 37d. The Yerushalmi is the earlier and briefer Talmud from *Eretz Yisrael*, from the end of the 4th century, as opposed to the later and longer Talmud Bavli.

Table 2

Child	Nature of the Question	Nature of the Answer
Wise	Interested in knowing the details: "What are the laws that God commanded us?"	You should respond to them with explaining the outline of the story: "With a strong hand, God brought us out of slavery in Egypt."
Stupid (= simple in our Haggadah)	Interested in the base level practical knowledge: "What is this?"	You should respond to them with the legal minutiae of the Seder: "They don't conclude with *afikoman* after the sacrifice ,one can't get up from one group eating the sacrifice to go to another one."

"what"—but only the wisest among us need to really think and dwell on the story of the Exodus—the "why." This is also reflected in our printed version of the Mishnah:[7]

משנה פסחים י:ד (דפוס)
מָזְגוּ לוֹ כּוֹס שֵׁנִי, וְכָאן הַבֵּן שׁוֹאֵל
וְאִם אֵין דַּעַת בַּבֵּן, אָבִיו מְלַמְּדוֹ: מַה
נִּשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלֵּילוֹת...

Mishnah Pesa<u>h</u>im 10:4 (Printed edition)
They mix for him a second cup, and here the son asks. But if there is no knowledge in the son, his father teaches him: "How different is this night from all other nights!..."

Whereas, according to the Kaufmann text, the Mah Nishtanah is how the leader teaches the wise child, according to the printed edition, the Mah Nishtanah is the prompt the leader uses to encourage the one who doesn't know how to ask. The story is, therefore, high-level knowledge, but the legal details of what to do during the Seder is low-level knowledge, the baseline for everyone.[8]

So there are two ideas of what should be the educational focus of the Seder (the story or the laws), that match onto two ideas of what the Seder participants' baseline knowledge should be (the "why" or the "what"), that are found in the two versions of our Mishnah ("If the son has knowledge" vs. "If the son has no knowledge") and the two versions of the four children *midrash* (Haggadah/Mekhilta vs. Yerushalmi).

Know your audience.

To return to my original questions: One way of running the Seder, then, would be to go through the steps and the laws and explain each and every step ("Why are we washing our hands on *karpas*?" "Why do we recline?"). The baseline knowledge is that we know roughly why we are doing this—to celebrate our freedom—and thus we should be stretched on what to do in order to correctly perform the Seder ritual and find meaning through each action. We are all the wise child learning the Mah Nishtanah (Haggadah/Mekhilta).

Another way, however, would be to do the bare minimum of the legally required Seder and spend the time discussing the deep messages inherent in the story and the *midrashim* of Maggid. The what to do in the Seder is baseline knowledge, but where we want to stretch and explore is in the infinite depths of one of Judaism's most central narratives. We are all the wise child being told by our parents to pay closer attention to the narrative, that which we may have assumed was less worthy of our attention than the legal details (Yerushalmi).

Both of these foci are encapsulated and sanctioned by the dual wording of our Mishnah: "If the son [has]/[has no] knowledge."

The Seder and Haggadah can be a powerful educational tool, no matter which version of the four children *midrash* we use as our inspiration. But know your audience, and even if they are all wise, work out which kind of wise they are and what kind of wisdom they need. Meet the baseline, stretch in the right directions, bring the story and the ritual to life. ◆

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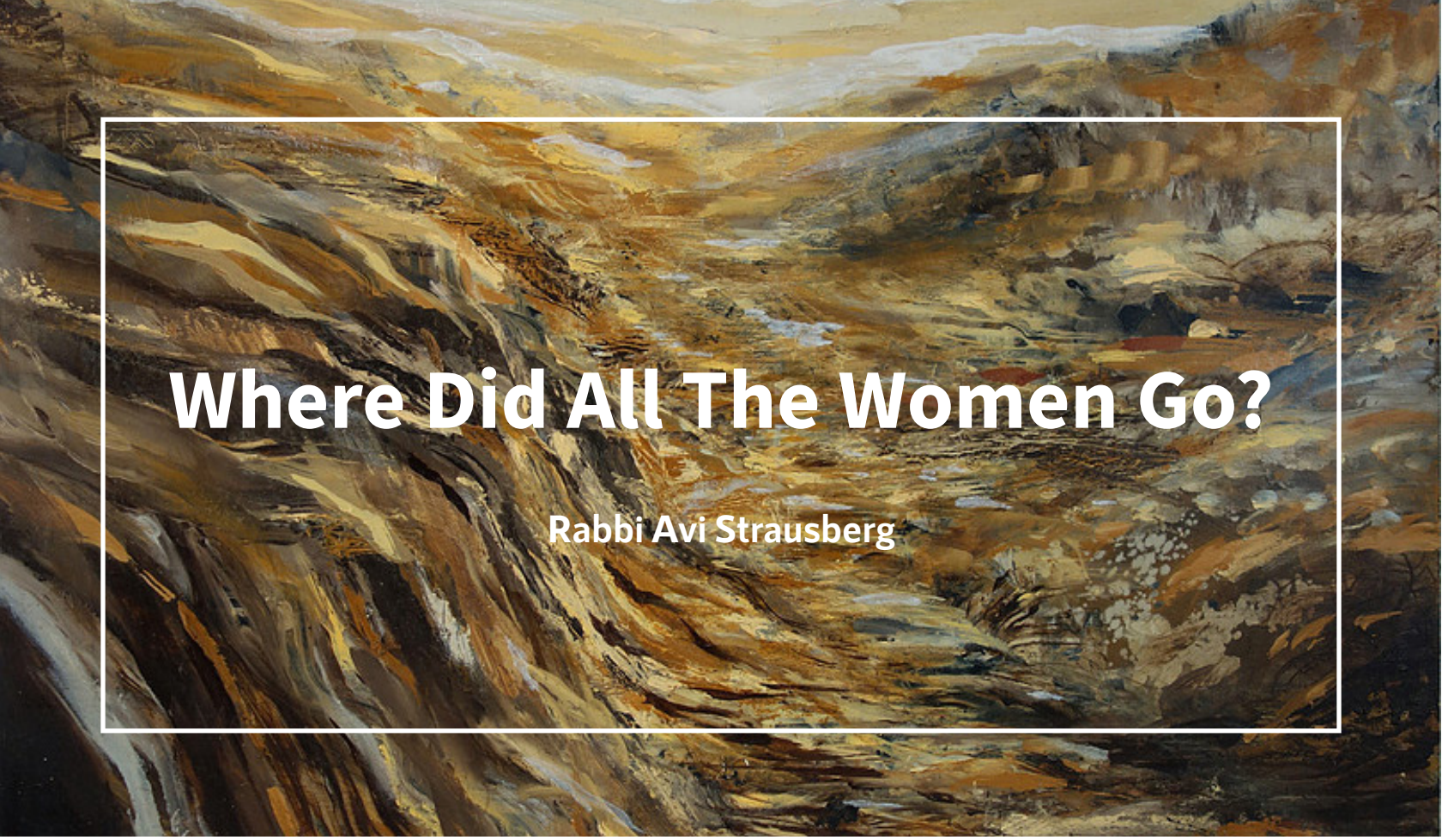
7 This version of the Mishnah, I believe, originates in the Yerushalmi. Immediately after the *midrash* of the four children, the Yerushalmi comments: "א"ר יוסה: מתנית' אמרה כן: אם אין דעת בבן אביו מלמדו". R. Yose's version of the Mishnah already had the word אין, or else he is correcting the text of the Mishnah to match the *midrash*. R. Yose's correction also appears as a marginal addition in the Kaufmann manuscript, see above.

8 This approach is, I think, reflected in the Tosefta's parallel chapter to our Mishnah. While the Mishnah emphasizes the story as the main component of the Seder, the Tosefta emphasizes learning the laws, while almost never discussing the story, e.g. Tosefta Pis<u>h</u>a 10:11 (Lieberman): "חייב אדם לעסוק בהלכות הפסח כל הלילה, אפילו בינו לבין בנו, אפילו בינו לבין עצמו, אפילו בינו לבין תלמידו".



Where Did All The Women Go?

Rabbi Avi Strausberg

Rabbi Avi Strausberg is the Director of National Learning Initiatives at Hadar, and is based in Washington, DC. Previously, she served as the Director of Congregational Learning of Temple of Aaron in St. Paul, Minnesota.

In the Haggadah, we are told that each of us is obligated to see ourselves as if we ourselves came out of Egypt. One of the central ways in which we fulfill this obligation is through the telling and retelling of the story of our Exodus that is at the core of the Haggadah. Pesah is a time in which we come together to collectively shape our narrative and, through this retelling, locate ourselves in this great chain of history. The stories that we tell about and for ourselves reveal who we are and also shape it.

In capturing this dynamic, Director Shekhar Kapur shared this helpful phrasing in his TedTalk "We Are The Stories We Tell Ourselves":

> "A story is our—all of us—we are the stories we tell ourselves. In this universe, and this existence, where we live with this duality of whether we exist or not and who are we, the stories we tell ourselves are the stories that define the potentialities of our existence. We are the stories we tell ourselves."

Our stories provide the framework in which we place ourselves, both to inspire us to live up to them but also to limit us to live within them. So, on this holiday of telling our most central story of the Exodus, it is worth paying attention: When we tell our stories on Pesah, what are we saying

about ourselves? What does it reveal about who we are as a people?

The Haggadah, at its core, is a collection of stories about people telling stories about our Exodus from Egypt. And, yet, when we tell our story, the central narrative of the Jewish people, women neither appear as storytellers, nor are they present as the subjects of our stories. They are completely absent. As Kapur explains, "A person without a story does not exist… I exist because there are stories, and if there are no stories, we don't exist." If we are the stories that we tell, the narratives that we use to define our existence, then our haggadot tell a story in which women do not exist, their presence and contributions unseen and unimportant.

We can't let that be the narrative. If we value women, we have to include their voices, their stories, in our narrative of the Exodus from Egypt. While

Our stories provide the framework in which we place ourselves.

absent from the Haggadah, women feature prominently both in the Torah and rabbinic accounts of the stories of the Exodus. In the Torah, it is thanks to the bravery of Moshe's mother, Yocheved, and his sister, Miriam, that Moshe even lives to see the day when he can become the leader of the Jewish people.[1] It is Pharaoh's daughter, acting in direct defiance to her own father's command, who saves a Jewish baby abandoned in the Nile.[2] It is the midwives, Shifrah and Pu'ah, who, despite Pharaoh's decree to kill all of the male newborns, ensure that the children live and grow strong.[3] So, what happened to all of the women? How come the stories of Miriam and Yocheved, Pharaoh's daughter, and the midwives Shifrah and Pu'ah, don't make into the Haggadah? And, what can we do about at it our Seders today?

The first and one of the most challenging is that we must notice the absence of these female voices.

1 Exodus 2:2-4.
2 Exodus 2:5-10.
3 Exodus 1:15-20.

This is one of the biggest challenges. It's so easy to read through the Haggadah year after year, or any Jewish text for that matter, without realizing that these texts are often devoid of female actors and voices. Often, only one who is looking for their presence notices that they are absent. Only once we realize this can we begin to do something about it. Then, we have to tell their stories. One of my favorite stories about women's roles in the Exodus comes from the pages of Massekhet Sotah.

תלמוד בבלי סוטה יא:
דרש רב עוירא: בשכר נשים צדקניות שהיו באותו הדור נגאלו ישראל ממצרים.

Talmud Bavli Sotah 11b
Rav Avira teaches, "In the merit of the righteous women that were in that generation, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt."

Let's just pause there. While women may be absent from the pages of our Haggadah, here is Rav Avira giving full credit to women for the redemption of the entire Jewish people of that generation. What was it they did that merited God's saving hand in Egypt? Rav Avira explains in the continuation of the passage that, at that time, the men, backs broken from oppressive labor, would come home defeated and tired. One can imagine that in situations of such desperation, the focus would be on surviving in the now rather than looking to producing future generations. But, the women were able to look toward the future. They'd go to the river and come away with pots filled with water and fish. They'd bathe their husbands, rub them with oils, feed them the fish, and ultimately through their loving, rejuvenating actions, these couples would come to have sex, and the women would become pregnant. Once pregnant, these strong women would continue to take matters into their own hands. When it came time to give birth, they would give birth under the apple tree, and the Holy One would join them, sending a midwife to care for the

newborn. These babies were resilient like their parents. When the Egyptians would come for them, a miracle would occur, the earth would absorb them, holding them safe until the threat had passed. They would then emerge from the ground, like grass of the field. As they grew, they would return home, like flocks of sheep, healthy, numerous, and whole.

Rav Avira's midrashic reading not only credits the women with the saving of an entire generation but portrays them as resilient, strong, and independent. They are able to find hope and take action in a moment when perhaps others are unable. They are caregivers, they are midwives, they are incredibly powerful actors and agents in their own stories of redemption. Just as Miriam and Yocheved ensure Moshe's survival, seeing a way past the immediate danger posed by Pharoah, so too these women's actions result in the births of an entire generations that emerge from the ground, like the grass of the fields. Just as Shifrah and Pu'ah defy Pharoah's order and bring forth life with their own hands, so too these women tend to their own births under the apple tree.

All of this—this survival of a next generation, this transmission of strength, resiliency, and hope—thanks to the women who were able to see past their dire situation and look to a better future. The pages of the Talmud, the stories in our rabbinic texts, are filled with narratives that highlight the strength, resiliency, and saving grace of women; this teaching of Rav Avira is only one example of many. The editors of the Haggadah may not have seen fit to include these stories, so it's on us to give these women their proper place in the Pesah story.

The need for a feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence.

Dr. Judith Plaskow writes, "The need for a feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence. It begins with noting the absence of women's history and experiences as shaping forces in the Jewish tradition." We have to take notice of the silence of women in the chosen narrative recorded in our Haggadah. We must note that their voices have been excluded, their contributions ignored. Then, we have to do just a little bit of digging to uncover the richness of the contributions of women as described both in Torah and rabbinic *midrash*. Let's bring these stories, these voices, to our Pesah tables.

Pesah is a time of creativity and exploration. On one hand, we have the fixed text of the traditional Haggadah that we read year after year; and on the other hand, there are so many different haggadot available that allow us to highlight different parts of the Pesah story. If you don't find one that you like, make your own that asks the questions you want to be asking. Place oranges on your Seder plate[4] or introduce a tea bag that speaks to the strength of the women in Egypt.[5] Raise a glass to Miriam as your raise your glass to Elijah and celebrate her role in saving Moshe and her ability to lead the people in song.[6] Most importantly, place women back in the story where they belong as storytellers and as agents of their fate. This year, as you read the midrashic interpretations at the heart of the Haggadah about our descent into Egypt and God's saving hand, read alongside them classic *midrashim* like that of Rav Avira that feature the roles of women or modern *midrashim* written by female scholars.

If we are the stories that we tell, what kind of people do we want to be? ◆

4 https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/an-orange-on-the-seder-plate/

5 https://jwa.org/blog/celebrating-women-s-seders-vs-celebrating-women-at-seder

6 https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/miriams-cup/

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Can Redemption Be Incremental?

Rabbi Avi Killip

Rabbi Avi Killip serves as VP of Strategy and Programs and Director of Project Zug at Hadar. She was ordained from Hebrew College's pluralistic Rabbinical School in Boston. She was a Wexner Graduate Fellow and holds a Bachelors and Masters from Brandeis University in Jewish Studies and Women & Gender Studies.

The following study guide is taken from Hadar's online learning platform, Project Zug. You can use this guide to spark conversation at your Seder, or study it with a havruta partner at any time before or during the holiday. Check out the full course: "How to Question Authority" at www.projectzug.org.

We can't always rely on God's outstretched arm to make changes to a society we see as unjust. At the Seder we tell the story of our complete and total redemption that happened overnight. Do you think liberation can also happen incrementally? What might that look like?

The following two *midrashim* from Shemot Rabbah depict Moses as an Egyptian prince, with a certain amount of power and influence over a system that oppresses the Israelite slaves. The texts describe two different approaches to making incremental change. As you read together, ask yourself and each other: Which approach do you think is most productive and why? What might you do in a similar situation?

Midrash 1

Shemot Rabbah 1:2

וירא בסבלותם, מהו וירא? שהיה רואה בסבלותם ובוכה ואומר חבל לי עליכם מי יתן מותי עליכם, שאין לך מלאכה קשה ממלאכת הטיט, והיה נותן כתיפיו ומסייע לכל אחד ואחד מהן, ר' אלעזר בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר ראה משוי גדול על קטן ומשוי קטן על גדול, ומשוי איש על אשה ומשוי אשה על איש, ומשוי זקן על בחור, ומשוי בחור על זקן, והיה מניח דרגון שלו והולך ומיישב להם סבלותיהם ועושה כאלו מסייע לפרעה,

"And [he] looked on their burdens." What is, "And [he] looked?" For he would look upon their burdens and cry and say, "Woe is me unto you, who will provide my death instead of yours, for there is not more difficult labor than the labor of the mortar." And he would use his shoulders to assist each one of them. R. Eliezer the son of R. Yose the Galilean said: [If] he saw a large burden on a small person and a small burden on a large person, or a man's burden on a woman and a woman's burden on a man, or an elderly man's burden on a young man and a young man's burden on an elderly man, he would leave aside his rank and go and right their burdens, and act as though he were assisting Pharaoh.

Questions

1. When Moses sees injustice, he doesn't argue or protest or complain, he just makes the changes he thinks need to be made. In which situations is this kind of immediate action possible? What power dynamics are at play here?
2. This direct action brings immediate relief—do you think it contributes to systemic change? What parallel behaviors have you seen in your life?
3. Moses seems to be overstepping his scope of authority and pretending to be a messenger of Pharaoh. Share a story about a time when you made a direct change, rather than waiting or asking permission.

Midrash 1 continued on next page

Midrash 1 cont.

אמר הקב"ה אתה הנחת עסקיך והלכת לראות בצערן של ישראל ונהגת בהן מנהג אחים, אני מניח את העליונים ואת התחתונים ואדבר עמך, הה"ד וירא ה' כי סר לראות, ראה הקב"ה במשה שסר מעסקיו לראות בסבלותם, לפיכך ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה.

The Holy One Blessed be He said: You left aside your business and went to see the sorrow of Israel, and acted toward them as brothers act. I will leave aside the upper and the lower [i.e. ignore the distinction between Heaven and Earth] and talk to you. Such is it written, "And when the Lord saw that [Moses] turned aside to see" (Exodus 3:4). The Holy One Blessed is He saw Moses, who left aside his business to see their burdens. Therefore, "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush" (ibid.).

4. This text makes the claim that Moses' behavior is the reason God selects him as a messenger. What are the qualities you look for when choosing a leader? Do you think a person who already has some privilege (like Moses) is the right or wrong person to lead a change movement?

5. God learns from Moses' example. Moses thinks outside the box, and God follows his lead, changing the course of the natural world—abandoning the separation between God and earth. What change are you trying to make? Is there an assumption about how the system works that might need to be abandoned?

Midrash 2

Now we will look at the next *midrash* in the same series. In this text Moses takes a very different, systemic approach to improving the lives of the Israelites.

Shemot Rabbah 1:28

דבר אחר: וירא בסבלותם ראה שאין להם מנוחה. הלך ואמר לפרעה: מי שיש לו עבד, אם אינו נח יום אחד בשבוע, הוא מת! ואלו עבדיך, אם אין אתה מניח להם יום אחד בשבוע, הם מתים! אמר לו: לך ועשה להן כמו שתאמר. הלך משה ותקן להם את יום השבת לנוח.

Another interpretation: "And he saw their suffering" that they did not have rest. He went and said to Pharaoh, "One who has a slave, if he does not rest one day a week, he will die! While your slaves, if you don't allow them rest one day a week, they will die!" He [Pharaoh] said to him: "Go and do for them as you are saying." Moses went and established the Sabbath day for them to rest.

Questions

6. Moses seems to be an ancient lobbyist. He goes directly to the source of power and makes a case for why giving the people a day off is actually in Pharaoh's own interest. Why do you think this method of changemaking is effective? What allowed Pharaoh to listen?

7. Does this method of dealing with authority feel more or less productive than the direct method in the first *midrash*? Which is more authentic? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each approach?

8. Imagine this *midrash* as a workplace scenario: What is the role of the management in navigating between the boss and the workers?

9. Do you think Moses was taking any risks in either version of this story?

The Dough Did Not Have Time To Rise

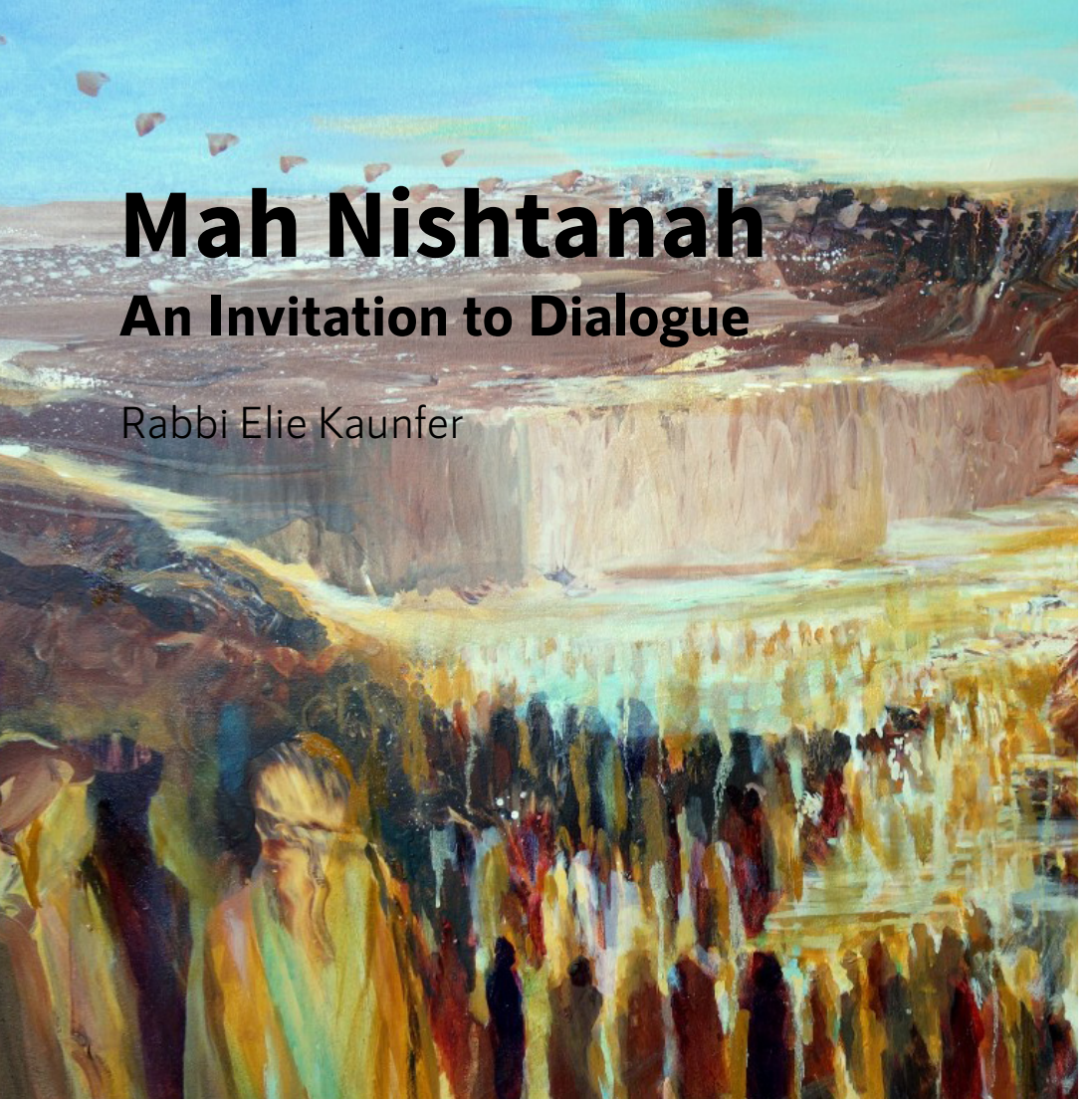
Rabbi Tali Adler

Rabbi Tali Adler, a musmekhet of Yeshivat Maharat, received her undergraduate degree from Stern College, where she majored in Political Science and Jewish Studies. A Wexner Graduate Fellow, during her time at Yeshivat Maharat, Tali served as the clergy intern Kehilat Rayim Ahuvim and Harvard Hillel.

Every year we are surprised when we come to the Song of the Sea and realize that the people had packed timbrels in anticipation of ecstatic celebration in the face of miracles. But it is worth considering that, perhaps, in this moment, dough is more surprising than timbrels.

In the middle of an earth shattering Revelation, the end of over 400 years of slavery, the greatest story of freedom that we still tell today, someone—probably a woman—took a step back, went to the kitchen, and made dough to take on the journey because she knew that her family would be hungry.

That sort of deep, practical, life-clinging love, unshaken in the face of either suffering or ultimate grace — that's the *matzah* that carries us through and out of Egypt and brings us back to tell its story year after year. ◈



Mah Nishtanah

An Invitation to Dialogue

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer is President and CEO of the Hadar Institute. Elie has previously worked as a journalist, banker, and corporate fraud investigator. A graduate of Harvard College, he completed his doctorate in liturgy at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was also ordained.

Every year on Passover we recite the Mah Nishtanah, or the Four Questions, at the Seder. What is the significance of the questions? More specifically, what is the meaning of the opening line of the questions: *Mah Nishtanah Ha-lailah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-leilot.*

Is this phrase a question or a statement? Should the line be translated "How is this night different from all other nights?" or "How different this night is from all other nights!"

The language used to open the questions—*mah nishtanah*—is in fact purposely ambiguous. By playing with ambiguity, the author invites us into a world in which meanings can be multiple. And this, in large part, is a big point of the Haggadah: stories and symbols have multiple meanings.

The very idea of words having multiple meanings has a spiritual dimension as well, which cuts to the core of this holiday. Freedom is the ability to explore more than one meaning. In a slave's world, there is no room for multiple possibilities; reality is flat. But free people can be dissatisfied with singular explanations and explore alternatives. All this is wrapped up in the words *mah nishtanah*.

Looking at the other places the rabbis use the phrase *mah nishtanah* can give us a broader view of the range of possible meanings of these words.

Sometimes *mah nishtanah* can be used to point out a similarity rather than a difference. In the Mishnah, R. Yohanan ben Nuri uses the phrase to object to the claim of another authority.

משנה כלים יז:יד

בָּרְבִיעִי וּבַחֲמִישִׁי אֵין בָּהֶם טֻמְאָה, חוּץ מִכְּנַף הָעוֹז וּבֵיצַת נַעֲמִית הַמְצֻפָּה.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן נוּרִי, מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה כְּנַף הָעוֹז מִכָּל הַכְּנָפַיִם.

Mishnah Kelim 17:14

[All things created] on the fourth day and on the fifth day are not susceptible to uncleanness, except for [what is made] from the wing of the black eagle/vulture and the glazed [shell of an] ostrich egg.

R. Yohanan ben Nuri said: What is the difference between the wing of a black eagle/vulture and all other wings?

Here the phrase is being used make the claim that, in fact, there is no difference between the wings of a black eagle or vulture and any other winged animal. Maybe *mah nishtanah* in the Seder is a prompt meant to arouse a similar objection. The leader asks about the difference between this night and all other nights and others object, saying, "There are no differences!"

In the Talmud, the phrase is also used to ask a question to which the speaker truly doesn't know the answer. It's not a prompt, but an invitation to be taught.

תלמוד בבלי בכורות ה:
אמר ר' חנינא שאלתי את ר' אליעזר בבית מותבא רבא מה נשתנו פטרי חמורים מפטרי סוסים וגמלים.

Talmud Bavli Bekhorot 5b
Talmud Bavli R. Hanina said: I asked R. Eliezer in the house of Motva Rabba: What is the difference between the firstborn donkeys from firstborn horses and camels?

R. Hanina does not know something and approaches his teacher with a statement of wonder: What is the difference? *Mah nishtanah*? In this reading, the rest of the Haggadah could be understood as an answer to an honest question posed by the author.

Finally, *mah nishtanah* can be a rhetorical device meant to expound upon an actual difference. Misrash Tanhuma (Warsaw) Beshallah 10 asks a question concerning a story in the Book of Chronicles in which the Israelites praised God after being saved from warring enemies. But the praise they offered was different from the normal praise, thanking God whose "steadfast love is eternal," rather than thanking God "who is good."

Freedom is the ability to explore more than one meaning.

מדרש תנחומא (ורשא) פרשת בשלח י
מה נשתנה הודיה זו מכל ההודיות שבתורה? שנאמר בכלן כי טוב וכאן לא נאמר בה כי טוב, כביכול לא היתה שמחה לפניו במרום על אבודן של רשעים.

Midrash Tanhuma [Warsaw] Beshallah 10
What is the difference between this thanks (*hodayah*) and all the other ones in the Torah, that in all the other ones it says [about God] "who is good", but here it does not say "who is good"? It is as if there is no joy in the heavens when the wicked die.

Here the author asks a question (or makes an exclamation) about why this praise is different from other praises. But he knows the answer: the reason it's different is because God doesn't celebrate death, and therefore cannot be called "good" in this moment. Full praise is muted in times of war.

So we see *mah nishtanah* is used in rabbinic texts in various ways: as a device to deny distinction, as a question to which the questioner doesn't know the answer, and as an invitation to notice difference.

How does this relate to the Seder experience?

This phrase is so much more than an introduction to a set of questions that we all know how to answer. Rather, by using the phrase *mah nishtanah*, the Haggadah is inviting us into dialogue. Elsewhere, the Haggadah imagines "if we were all sages." During the Seder, we all enter the classic rabbinic study hall and are able to participate as full members. We can ask questions, make declarations, and react to other people's opinions.

And this is perhaps the larger point. Because understanding something as having multiple meanings is one of the deepest expressions of freedom. After all, the Haggadah tells us that whoever expands on the telling of the story of leaving Egypt is praiseworthy. And what better way to expand on the telling than by offering multiple interpretations, multiple questions, and multiple reads of a single line.

The ability to see variety and diversity in words is a luxury of freedom. These two little words, the opening of the opportunity to expound and discuss, guide us to experience an evening of true freedom. ◆

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פרק א בשמות: סיפור ההתדרדרות מפחד לרשע

ר' אביטל הוכשטיין

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פרק א בשמות מלמד אותנו כחברה לקח חשוב: רשעות קלה יותר לביצוע בקהילה. הפרק עומד כתמרור אזהרה – רשעותו של צו נתון איננה מונעת מציבור ללכת בעקבותיו. להפך, היתר רע-לב גורף הוא נח יותר ליישום מאשר היתר נקודתי מרושע. יתר על כן, היתר גורף לרשע הוא בלתי נשלט מטבעו, וסופו שיופנה חזרה גם כלפי הקהילה הפושעת עצמה.

פרק א בשמות פותח במניית היורדים למצרים בשמותיהם. לכתחילה, אין לפנינו מספרים, קבוצות או שבטים אלא פשוט שמות: "וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיְמָה אֵת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ: רְאוּבֵן שִׁמְעוֹן לֵוִי וִיהוּדָה" (שמות א, א'-ב') וכך הלאה. אולם, במהלך הפרק חל מהפך בתיאורם של בני ישראל: מקבוצת פרטים בעלי שמות למעין נחיל עצום. את הפנים הייחודיות מחליפים מאפיינים מכלילים וגורפים: (ז) וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׁרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעַצְמוּ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם: פ

שינוי זה בתיאורם של בני ישראל נותן את האות להידרדרות מתמשכת ביחסיהם עם המצרים: עם גדילתם באה גם ההתנכרות אליהם: "(ח) וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף: ועם ההתנכרות באים פחד, סטראוטיפים, הכללות ודמיונות סכנה ולחימה: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַמּוֹ הִנֵּה עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ: (י) הָבָה נִתְחַכְּמָה לוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרֶאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם הוּא עַל שֹׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ:"

עם או בשל ההתנכרות ודמיונות האימה באות מגבלות מבדילות: "(יא) וַיָּשִׂימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עַנֹּתוֹ בְּסִבְלֹתָם וַיִּבֶן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפַרְעֹה אֶת פִּתֹם וְאֶת רַעַמְסֵס:"

למותר לציין שמגבלות מבדילות אלו אינן רק בגדר 'שונים נבדלים ושווים' אלא מפלים לרעה. תיאור היחס הקשה כלפי מי שנתפס כאחר ומאיים ממשיך אף הלאה: "(יג) וַיַּעֲבִדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ:" כך, אם כן, מדגיש

הפרק בפנינו כי ניכור וחוסר הכרות עשויים להוביל לפחד, ומתוך הפחד קרובה הדרך לאפליה וליחס קשה.

דבר מה חשוב נוסף עולה מן הפסוקים הפותחים את ספר שמות, מתוך הסמיכות שבין פחדו של פרעה לבין גילויי הרשעות שלו. סמיכות זו מעידה על עובדה בחשיבה האנושית: פחד עשוי להפעיל, להניע ואף להיות כלי על מנת להצדיק רשע:" (יד) וַיְמָרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבֵנִים וּבְכָל עֲבֹדָה בַּשָּׂדֶה אֵת כָּל עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרֶךְ:" ולא עוד, אלא שרשע הנובע מפחד עשוי לעלות על גדותיו. כך, גם מי שאיננו מהווה איום יכול לקבל תווי פנים של שטן, גם מי שהוא לגמרי חסר ישע יכול להידמות למפלצתי, הרסני או גורם סיכון קיצוני כל עוד הוא שייך לקבוצה שממנה מפחדים. כך אנו מוצאים עצמנו מובלים, כאילו באופן טבעי, לשלב הבא בסיפור, בו מלך מצרים מצווה על הריגתם של תינוקות בני יומם: "(טו) וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לַמְיַלְּדֹת הָעִבְרִיֹּת אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאַחַת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה: (טז) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיַלֶּדְכֶן אֶת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל הָאָבְנָיִם אִם בֵּן הוּא וַהֲמִתֶּן אֹתוֹ וְאִם בַּת הִוא וָחָיָה:" רשעות המונעת על ידי פחד קשה מאוד לעצירה וקשה מאוד להכרה ככזו. היא מציגה עצמה כמוצדקת, גם כשהיא עולה על גדותיה ומציעה רעיונות שהם בגדר אבסורד.

משהו מניע את המילדות לנהוג אחרת: יירא מפני אמת, פחד למול צדק מוחלט, ראייה נכוחה. נדמה שיש בכוחם של אלו להבהיר ולהעיר מתוך ענני שכרון הפחד והנשייה שמלווה אותם, שכחת האחר, האחריות, והצדק:" (יז) וַתִּירֶאןָ הַמְיַלְּדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים". אילו ממדים אלוהיים הניעו את המילדות – על כך אין לפנינו תשובה בכתובים, אין מענה לשאלה מה משמעותה ומהם מאפייניה של 'יראת אלוהים' עבורן. על כל פנים, הפסוקים מבהירים כי יראה זו היא שהביאה אותן לבחור אחרת: "וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם וַתְּחַיֶּיןָ אֶת הַיְלָדִים:"

רשעות היא תופעה משחיתה, חסרת גבולות וחסרת מעצורים, ומשהיא משוחררת לפעול אין מגבלות ההיגיון פועלות עליה

מלך מצרים מאבד את עשתונותיו. אולי המפחד מעוור אותו. הוא יוצא בקריאה לכל עמו, כעת יהיו כולם מעורבים, והקריאה לרשעות היא גורפת וכוללת: "(כב) וַיְצַו פַּרְעֹה לְכָל עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל הַבֵּן הַיִלּוֹד הַיְאֹרָה תַּשְׁלִיכֻהוּ וְכָל הַבַּת תְּחַיּוּן:" היישום עובר מן הפרטים במרחב הפרטי, המיילדות, אל החברה במרחב הציבורי.

המדרש ברגישותו הטיפוסית, ער לכך שמושא הרשעות איננו מוגדר בפסוק, אלא להפך, מתואר באופן כולל ומכליל: '**כל** הבן'. מתוך רגישות זו אולי מציע ר' יוסי בר' חנינא מדרג משולש לגזירות פרעה:

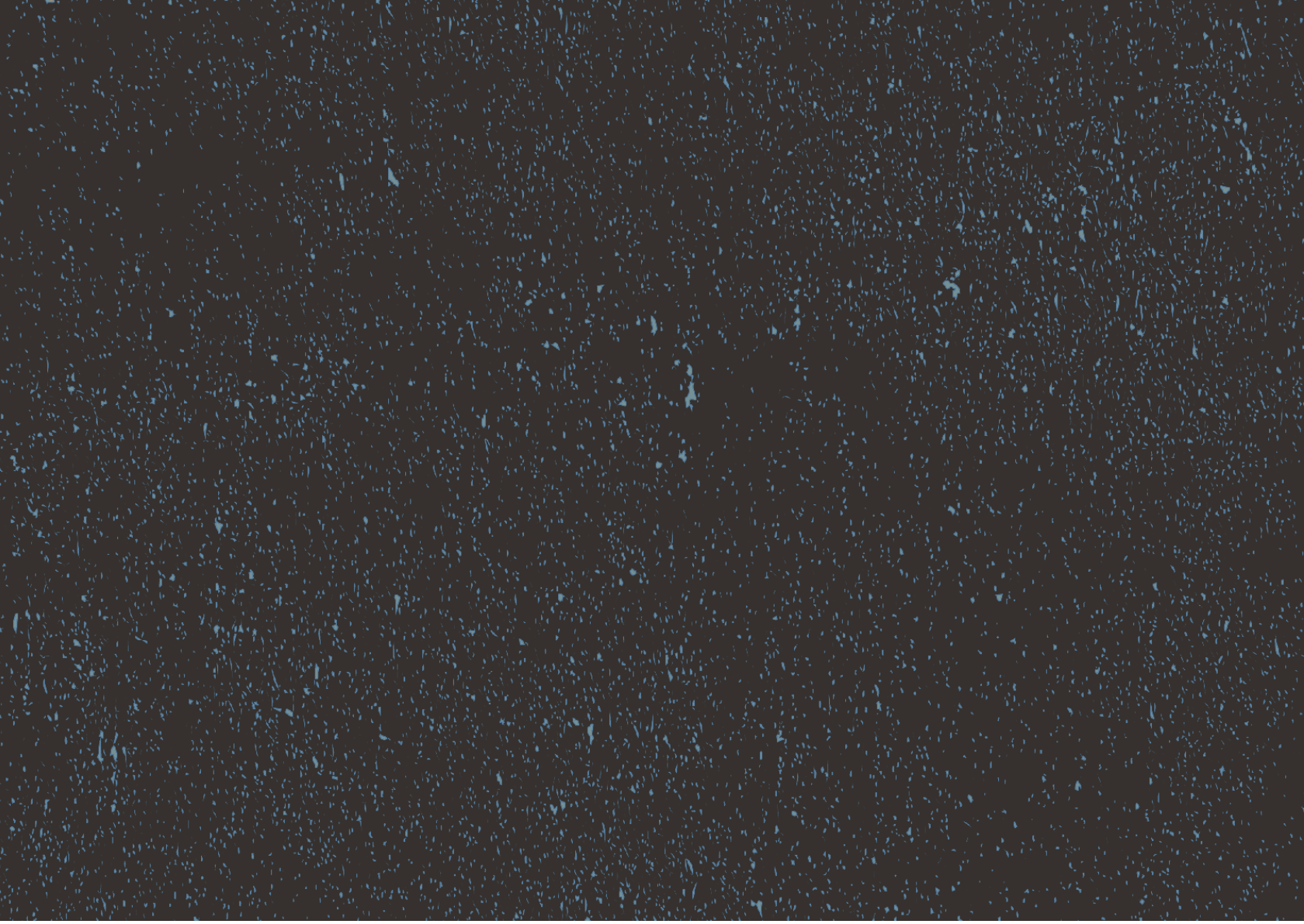
תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוטה
דף יב עמוד א
ואמר ר' יוסי בר' חנינא, שלש גזירות גזר: בתחילה - אם בן הוא והמתן אותו, ולבסוף - כל הבן הילוד היאורה תשליכוהו, ולבסוף - אף על עמו גזר.

מדברי המדרש עולה אפשרות שלכאורה לא תעלה על הדעת, בבחינת אלמלא הכתוב אי אפשר לאומרו: בשלב ראשון גזר פרעה על המילדות להמית את הזכרים שבבני ישראל – כפי שמסופר באופן ישיר בפסוקים, אחר כך גזר מלך מצרים על נתיניו כולם להמית את הזכרים שבבני ישראל, ובשלב שלישי גזר "כל הבן

הילוד", כלומר, ציווה על הרג התינוקות הזכרים שבבני עמו גם כן. אמירת המדרש היא פשוטה: רשעות היא תופעה משחיתה, חסרת גבולות וחסרת מעצורים, ומשהיא משוחררת לפעול אין מגבלות ההיגיון פועלות עליה, ואין משוכות שונות יכולות לעצור בעדה.

פרק א' בספר שמות, אם כן, מזכיר לנו כמה קל לתת לפחד לעוור, כמה מהיר המעבר מפחד לרשע וביזוי, כמה מהיר המדרון מבהלה לרשעות גם כזו שהיא חסרת הגיון ופשר. פתיחת ספר שמות היא תמרור אזהרה: רשעות מעוורת חשיבה ישרה. עד כדי כך, שגם אם לרשעות כיוון מוגדר היא בקלות עשויה לשכוח את מטרתה ולמצוא עצמה מופנית כלפי כל – כולל במקרה זו תינוקות מצרים עצמם.

יש מקום לשמוע את פתיחת ספר שמות כהתראה: גם כשרשעות נדמת כמוצדקת היא איננה צודקת. ולוואי ונשכיל לעצור רשעות סביבנו גם כשאנו מוצאים עצמו בזמנים של בהלה ופחד, שנמצא בתוכנו משהו מכוחן של המילדות ואם אין אנו מסוגלים לכך, שנדע להקשיב לקולותיהם של הנוהגים כמותן בחברתנו ואל ישתיק וישתק הפחד. ◆



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