

Hagaddah of Pesach וְהִיא שְׁעֻמָּה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שְׁלֹא אָחַד בְּלִבָּד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, אֲלֵא שְׁבָכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם.

And it is [God's promise of redemption] that has stood for our ancestors and for us, since it is not only one that has stood against us to destroy us, but rather, in every generation, they stand against us to destroy us. But the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hand

וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא עַל־יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ, וְלֹא עַל־יְדֵי שְׁרָף, וְלֹא עַל־יְדֵי שְׁלִיחַ, אֲלֵא הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכַבּוּדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ
The Lord brought us out of Egypt. Not by an angel, nor a seraph, nor by a messenger; but it was God and God alone [who redeemed us.]

The Martyrdom of Rabbi Akiba, 135 CE, Talmud Brachot 61b. Our masters taught: Once the wicked Roman government issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practice the Torah. ... Soon afterwards, Rabbi Akiba was arrested and thrown into prison...

When Rabbi Akiba was taken out to be executed, it was the time for the recital of the Shema. As the executioners were combing his flesh with iron combs, he was lovingly making himself ready to accept upon himself the yoke of the kingship of Heaven (ie: to recite Shema).

His disciples asked: "Our teacher, [*ad kaan*] even now?!"

He replied, "All my days I have been troubled by this verse, '[Love the Lord your God...] with all you soul' (Deut 6:5) which I have interpreted as meaning, 'Even if He takes your soul.' But I said, 'When shall I have occasion to fulfill the precept? Now that I have the occasion, shall I not fulfill it?'"

He prolonged the Shema's concluding word, "*ehad* One," until he expired.

A divine voice proclaimed: "Happy are you, Akiba, that your soul has departed with the word *ehad*!"

The ministering angels cried out to God: "Such Torah and such its reward?! {*zo Torah v'zo s'chorah*} He should have been 'of those that die by Thy hand, O Lord' (Ps 17:14). God replied, "Their portion is in life." (Ps 17:14).

Just then, another divine voice went forth and proclaimed: "Happy are you, Akiba, destined as you are for life in the world-to-come!"

On the day Rabbi Akiba died, Rabbi Judah was born.

Hagaddah.

מִתְחִלָּה עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וְעַכְשָׁיו קָרְבָנוּ הַמְּקוֹם לְעַבְדָתוֹ

In the beginning, our ancestors were idol worshipers. And now, God has drawn us close to serving [only] God.

אֲדִיר הוּא יִבְנֶה בֵּיתוֹ בְּקֶרֶב. בְּמַהֲרָה, בְּמַהֲרָה, בְּיָמֵינוּ בְּקֶרֶב. אֵל בְּנֵה, אֵל בְּנֵה, בְּנֵה בֵּיתְךָ בְּקֶרֶב

O mighty God ! Rebuild thy house speedily. Speedily even in our days, rebuild it, O God!

וְאַתָּה הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְשַׁחַט לְמַלְאָךְ הַמּוֹת, דְּשַׁחַט לְשׁוֹחַט, דְּשַׁחַט לְתוֹרָא, דְּשַׁחַט לְמֵיָא, דְּכַבֵּה לְנוֹרָא, דְּשַׁרְף לְחוּטְרָא, דְּהָפֵה לְכַלְבָּא, דְּנָשַׁף לְשׁוֹנְרָא, דְּאָכְלָה לְגִדְיָא, דְּנָבִין אָבָא בְּתַרֵי זוּזֵי. חַד גִּדְיָא, חַד גִּדְיָא

Then came the Holy One, blessed be He and slaughtered the angel of death, who slaughtered the schochet, who slaughtered the bull, that drank the water, that extinguished the fire, that burnt the stick, that hit the dog, that bit the cat, that ate the kid that my father bought for two zuz, one kid, one kid.

"A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under their bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning..." (Exodus 2:23)

Mei Shiloach (Rabbi Mordecai Yosef Leiner, 1801-1854, the "Ishbitzer Rebbe") Immediately, as their cry rose up, salvation began. Till then, they had not had any arousal to cry and to pray. But since God wanted to save them, He roused them in a cry – and that is the beginning of redemption. For before God wants to save, one does not see one's own lack, one is unaware of what one has not. But when God wants to save, he shows one the root of one's lack, so that one sees that all the complexity of one's need is rooted in this basic lack. And He gives one the power of prayer, of crying out to God. One begins to rage to God about it...

Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehuda Arye Alter, 1847-1905, the “Gerer Rebbe”) Until the king died, they were so deeply sunk in exile that they did not even feel it. But once the process of redemption began, they became aware of their exile and they started to cry.

Surely, there are several rungs in each exile. [There] are those who are prisoners in exile – unable to broaden out that point of divine life that is within them. They need to be brought forth from that prison. [There] are others who are not really in exile but remain there only for the common good. Such was the case with Moses, who had already been a shepherd. He was prepared for redemption. In essence he was no longer in exile at all, but was there just to redeem Israel. ... All these rungs seem to exist in every person. Every Jew has some inner place in which he is a free person. This is especially true since we have already come out of Egypt: now there is surely something free in every Jew. This helps the person to prepare for redemption.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, (1772-1810) the “Bratslaver Rebbe” In Mitzrayim (Egypt), Da’at – the intimate knowledge and conscious awareness – is in exile. It is absent. When any Jew lacks or loses Da’at -- his awareness of God and his own self-awareness – he falls into spiritual exile under Pharaoh’s domain. Once this happens, his actions are no longer governed by spiritual reality. Instead, he becomes enslaved by his imagination and his illusions. Driven to act upon his misperceptions of reality and compulsively live his self-delusions, the labors of his life are spiritually meaningless.

“Pharaoh” indicates imagination (fantasy). [the Hebrew, *paruah*, means “wild”] Pharaoh is king of Mitzrayim. He rules over Mitzrayim – the constriction of the mind, the limitations of awareness. It is his function to restrain and repress human awareness of the Divine. [the Hebrew *Mitzrayim*, translated as “Egypt,” is literally, “the narrow place.”] To this aim, the king of Egypt kept us perpetually busy, our minds incessantly preoccupied with worldly illusions. As Da’at, our awareness of God, descends into exile, we become unaware of ourselves, of our alienation from God and one another. We aren’t even aware that we aren’t aware. We don’t remember what there is to be aware of.

Mordecai Kaplan. Changes...have taken place in human life which render the simple version of the Exodus and its meaning no longer adequate. ...Jews have entered into such intimate relationship with the life of the world about them that they can no longer envisage their own deliverance except as a phase of general human deliverance. If miracles are to be enacted as part of future redemption, they cannot be conceived of as similar to those which tradition associates with the Exodus. [italics original] *The new redemption to which Jews look forward involves the redemption of society in general from present ills. It implies the transformation of human nature and social institutions through the divine power of intelligence and good-will.* ... The opening sentence of the Ten Commandments sets forth, to be sure, the claim upon Israel’s loyalty to God mainly by reason of what He did for His people....the the opening words of the Ten Commandments imply that in redeeming Israel from Egypt, their God manifested the most characteristic phase of His nature.There can be no question that *in the Torah the story of the Exodus has the connotation that to help the oppressed is an essential attribute of godhood.* ... We miss the point of [the Exodus] epic if the stories of the miracles are merely so many wonder tales that tax our credibility. ... The contest between Pharaoh and YHWH [is] a contest between the embodiment of arrogant tyranny on the one hand, and the Power that makes for redemption on the other. ... *The conception of God as the redeemer of the oppressed has revolutionized the meaning and function of religion, and has placed it at the service of the ethical impulses.*

It is a mistake to conceive God and man as separate and distinct, with man, on the one hand, enslaved by his physical self, by his fellow man, or by his own tools, and on the other, God completely transcendent, in Himself absolutely free, dispensing the gift of freedom. God as immanent in human life is manifest in the urge to realize to the utmost the highest potentialities of the human being. To the extent that man is unfree, the God in man is unredeemed.So long as men yearn for freedom and strive to attain it, human life is identified with God, with that aspect of the cosmos which spells life and creativity.

Irving “Yitz” Greenberg. How can we talk about God, again, after such an event [the Holocaust]? My answer is that you can’t talk about God. You can only re-create the image of God. And if you can re-create the image of God, like you can re-create yourself, that is the statement of God’s presence...After the Shoah, the Jewish people didn’t talk about God. What they did was to recreate the image of God...

The next step for the Jewish people is to take power. ... I believe ... that God was saying, “I am not going to save you. This is *tzimtzum*, divine self-limitation. I’m asking you to stop the Holocaust. You are human, the partner in the covenant. Take responsibility.”

Taking power is the fundamental transformation of our religion now. We can no longer be a religion that says, “God will save you.” God’s own message is that you have to take responsibility. If there was ever a time God was going to intervene miraculously, it was during the Holocaust. So if God didn’t do so then, He must have intended for us to take responsibility...The Jewish people overwhelmingly understood that. That’s why they arose and declared the State of Israel. Before the war, the majority of Reform and Orthodox were anti-Zionist. After the war, overwhelmingly, the Jewish people became Zionist, and understood that taking power is the only way you can live, the only way to combat genocide...The establishment of the State of Israel was the turning point for Jewish religion and Jewish history. It was the turning point for all of us. That affirmation, that taking of covenantal responsibility, that carrying out the great redemptive act states, in the face of the contradictory evidence of Auschwitz, that hope is not dead, that life is still stronger than death. This statement – the building of Israel -- was done by all Jews.

David Hartman, “Auschwitz or Sinai?” In the 20th century we have again become a traumatized nation. The ugly demonic forces of anti-Semitism have horrified our sensibilities. We can never forget the destruction of millions of Jews in World War II. Many, therefore, justify and interpret the significance of our rebirth in terms of Jewish suffering and persecution... While I respect and share in the anguish expressed in these sentiments, I believe it is destructive to make the Holocaust the dominant organizing category of modern Jewish history and of our national renewal and rebirth. It is both politically and morally dangerous for our nation to perceive itself essentially as the suffering remnant of the Holocaust. ... Although it is right to appreciate the dignity that comes with power and statehood, with freedom from the inconsistent and fragile goodwill of the nations of the world, it is a serious mistake to allow the trauma of Jewish suffering to be the exclusive frame of reference for understanding our national renaissance.

Israel is not only a response to modern anti-Semitism, but is above all a modern expression of the eternal Sinai covenant that has shaped Jewish consciousness throughout the millennia. It was not Hitler who brought us back to Zion, but rather belief in the eternal validity of the Sinai covenant. One need not visit Yad Vashem in order to understand our love for Jerusalem. It is dangerous to our growth as a healthy people if the memory of Auschwitz becomes a substitute for Sinai.

It is important to remember that the Jewish people did not go from the suffering conditions of Egypt directly into the land. We first went to Sinai, made a covenant with God, and pledged absolute allegiance to the commandments. We spent years in the desert casting off the mantle of the suffering slave. After we overcome the humiliating memory of slavery and persecution and understood that we were called to bear witness to God’s kingdom in history, only then did we enter the land. The memory of suffering in Egypt was absorbed by the conventional normative demands of Sinai. We were taught not to focus on suffering outside of its normative and moral implications.

The model of Sinai awakens the Jewish people to the awesome responsibility of becoming a holy people. At Sinai, we discover the absolute demand of God; we discover who we are by what we do. Sinai calls us to action, to moral awakening, to living constantly with challenges of building a moral and just society which mirrors the kingdom of God in history. Sinai creates humility and openness to the demands of self-transcendence. In this respect, it is the antithesis of the moral narcissism that can result from suffering and from viewing oneself as a victim...