

# Rereading Exodus Toward a New Sense of Joint Liberation





# Rereading Exodus Toward a New Sense of Joint Liberation

**A 49-Stage Journey  
from the Underbelly of the Nation's Capitol**

Part 1 (of 2)

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ISBN (eventually) GOES HERE

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## The Rona/COVID-19 UPDATE

As noted throughout this book, *Rereading Exodus Toward a New Sense of Joint Liberation*, was originally designed with a 49-day reading/thinking/discussion journey in mind, set to coincide with the period beginning on the second day of Passover. So much has changed in our lives, over the course of this writing, however: quarantines, travel bans, interruption of employment, schooling, religious and community gatherings and many of our ordinary routines -- and, for some of us, illness of varying degrees of seriousness, as well.

Our new circumstances have delayed progress on this publication and also altered most Jews' thinking about Passover, logistically at least.

This release, Part 1 (of 2), is offered in the hopes that

- those who celebrate Passover can and suggestion for use.this material to consider new approaches to this newly configured festival; and
- readers of all backgrounds can begin thinking together about how we can manage our newly restricted circumstances, seeking fuller liberation for all.

Ritual counting of the days between Passover and Shavuot  
begins April 9, 2020 (see appendix).

While much of the material for the remaining 25 stages is in the works,  
suggestions and written contributions are welcome for Rereading Exodus Part 2.

**Also look for related programming**  
**-- "Rethinking Exodus Toward Joint Liberation" --**  
**on [Anchor.fm/virginia-spatz](https://Anchor.fm/virginia-spatz)**

## Rethinking Exodus Toward Joint Liberation



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# Welcome!

## Thanks for joining in this journey.

This book is designed for travel of several kinds:

### **Solo Reading**

Scan. Skim. Binge. Study.  
Sample material here and there. Follow up on every citation.  
Meditate on one quoted source. Pause to discuss.  
No declarations here about the length of a "read" --  
perhaps it'll be 12 seconds, maybe hours.

### **Reading and Marking the Journey**

Read, and notice the passing of each of the 49 stages,  
**"Marking the Journey"** as you go.

### **Reading, Marking, and Ritually Counting**

Read, pause to notice each of the 49 stages,  
Marking the Journey as you go,  
*and/or* use this book as an aid in the 7-week, 49-day journey  
**"Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks."**

### **Reading in Collective**

Read, alone or as part of a group, each of the 49 stages,  
collectively **Marking the Journey** as you go,  
*and/or* using each stage for **"Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks."**

**May our varied paths lead to fuller liberation for all.**

## How this Book Works

We will be exploring an ancient story of oppression and liberation, re-reading as we go for new ways forward. This book is a kind of road map that we are drawing together, using some very old instructions to address some very pressing needs. The structure includes 49 basic stages which can be undertaken by a reader alone or in community. The basic path is one that is based in Jewish tradition but designed for readers of all backgrounds.

The main text is designed to require no particular exposure to any Jewish text or tradition. In an effort to include readers of many backgrounds, additional material of several kinds appears, usually in a box:

- Citations and other footnote-ish remarks
- Hebrew quotations and discussions of Hebrew expressions
- Long English quotations
- Explanatory notes likely appealing to only some readers
- Anything else that interrupts the flow of the main text

This presents an option for readers who want to see Hebrew and some traditional sources, without muddying the main section for all; this also allows for some basics to aid those less familiar with the Exodus adventure, without complicating the main section.

## Bible, God, and Quotations

Bible text in translation is tricky territory, and one of the thorniest elements is pronouns for God. Quotations here rely on several sources, with updates for "thou hast" expressions and masculine God-language. Bible and classical quotations inside another author's material are usually included as is, and I made no attempt to rewrite gendered language or old-fashioned spelling and wording in most older commentaries (See also "Bible and Talmud Translation," box)

### Bible and Talmud Translation

Unless otherwise noted, Bible translations here are a sort of adaptation of the public domain "Old JPS" (Jewish Publication Society 1917, via [mechon-mamre.org](http://mechon-mamre.org)), also relying on "New JPS" (1985, available through [Sefaria.org](http://Sefaria.org)). Wherever possible, I adapted "He" out.

For Exodus 6:2-7, I quote Everett Fox's translation because its sense of the God-Moses exchange matches the commentary being discussed. Fox uses masculine pronouns for God, however, presumably to keep to the Hebrew's rhythm; I removed those.

Talmud text is a mix of Soncino and Sefaria (Davidson) -- whichever seemed to make most sense of the content -- sometimes paraphrased to avoid unnecessary clunkiness.

## Sefira, the Counting

Two big cycles occur at once in the Jewish calendar.

1) An old agricultural one, marking three harvests: Passover (barley) in the Spring, Shavuot (wheat) in Summer, and Sukkot (fruit) in Fall. 2) An abstract one: from Liberation (Passover) to Revelation (Shavuot) to Redemption (Sukkot).

The festival of Shavuot -- the Feast of Weeks ("Shavuot" means "weeks" or "sevens" in Hebrew) -- does not have a date of its own; instead, we begin counting on the second night of Passover, counting 49 days and seven weeks, with Shavuot following the count's completion. Passover, the festival of Liberation, is thus tightly linked to Shavuot, celebrating the giving of the Torah.

The period between the two holidays is called "Counting" ("Sefira" in Hebrew) -- from the biblical commandment: "and you shall count for yourselves [*sefiratam*]..." (Lev 23:15). The word "Sefira," has a double meaning related to attributes of the divine, but that is beyond the scope of this book. The period is also called "the Omer," for the measure of grain brought as an offering, from the same biblical verse. But we'll stick with "Counting."

In addition, time between harvests was traditionally one of worry, as fates were decided. It is a period of semi-mourning -- for complex, fascinating reasons largely beyond this book's scope. Passover's liberation theme also prompted traditional prayers for captives.

## Learn, Mourn, and Prepare A Journey of 7 Weeks and 49 Days

A key element in the journey to fuller liberation for all is seeking to understand the workings of oppression and our part in them. We cannot work effectively to end what we do not comprehend. And we cannot act effectively if we feel ill-equipped, over-whelmed, hopeless, and isolated.

This book is an attempt to address these issues. It can be read and/or used for discussion without any reference to the calendar, Jewish or otherwise.

As it happens, however, the Jewish calendar offers a great opportunity to take this journey together in an intentional way.

Between Passover and Shavuot is a "counting period" variously understood as a time of learning, concern, mourning, and praying for captives. These seven weeks are, therefore, the perfect time

- to explore issues like incarceration and bail, as well as the many other ways that we continue to perpetuate bondage;
- to mourn the effects of liberation delayed and denied;
- to become more aware of the ways in which our liberations are intertwined;
- to learn, individually and collectively, and prepare ourselves for action.

This perspectives in this book come to you from within Jewish tradition *and* from within the District of Columbia, more specifically from what some members of our Cross River Dialogue call "the underbelly of the Nation's Capitol."

### Weeks, Days, and the Commandment to Count

The bible mentions counting both 49 days and seven weeks. Jewish tradition considers these separate commandments, so we mention both days and weeks in each day's count. Moreover, **the commandment is to bless then count**. So, we tell someone who is observing *Sefira* the previous day's count, to facilitate the right count once they've recited the blessing.

For all of us this yesterday-focused practice can serve as a reminder  
that we are always arriving from where we've been.

## Rethinking Exodus Toward Joint Liberation



## Introduction: A River Still to Cross

Getting out of biblical Egypt is the climax of an epic full of promises, plagues, and politics. We might picture the story as told in Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), or DreamWorks' *The Prince of Egypt* (1998). Or perhaps we rely on other artistic renderings, biblical teachings and/or Passover tellings. Whatever our sources, escape from *Mitzrayim* (see "Mitzrayim," box) is dramatic and often treated as decisive and final:

Oppression behind us;  
freedom ahead;  
halleluyah!  
And, on Passover: "Let's eat."

The story is longer and messier than we sometimes remember, however, and not nearly as final. Even after the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the People trod through the wilderness for 27 more chapters of Exodus and then the next three books of the bible. The Torah -- the first five books of the Hebrew Bible -- closes, forty years on, an entire generation having perished on the journey and a river still to cross.

Hurston describes this moment from the perspective of Moses, at the end of his work and life:

But here was Israel at the Jordan. If he had failed in his highest dreams he had succeeded in others. Perhaps he had not failed so miserably as he sometimes felt. Israel was at the Jordan inside as well as out.  
-- Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, p.283

The leader is aware, in Hurston's telling as in many Jewish commentaries, of the ongoing trauma of *Mitzrayim*, the many who never made it out, the cost of the trek and the price still to be paid.

Readers in 1939 were expected to see parallels between the ancient drama and both Black experience in the U.S. and the rise of Nazism worldwide. Eighty years later, generations have continued to mutter things like, "Why, they tell me that the new commissioner of finance is an out-and-out Hebrew who renounced his race" (*Moses*, p.34), while Pharaoh still regularly declares: "We don't have any home problems that I can see" (*Moses*, p.62).

### מצרים *Mitzrayim*

"*Mitzrayim*" is biblical Egypt.  
This book uses  
the Hebrew term "*Mitzrayim*"  
to distinguish  
the place of biblical story  
from any actual country,  
ancient or contemporary.

In quotations,  
language of the original text  
is maintained unless noted.

### צר

The Hebrew "*tzar*"  
means "narrow."  
The plural "*tzarim*"  
= "narrow straits."

### *The Zohar*

(13th Century CE, Spain)  
thus suggests that Exodus is about  
God bringing us *mi-Mitzrayim*  
out from  
our own "narrow places"  
including  
constricted opportunities  
and narrow-mindedness,  
a theme elaborated  
by centuries of Jews.

Similarly, "*Yisrael*" is used for  
the biblical People and Land.  
Original language maintained  
in quotations unless noted.

Thus, also, the invented terms  
"*Yisrael-ite*" and "*Mitzrayim-ite*."

Alicia Suskin Ostriker described the post-Exodus wilderness situation this way:

...The promised land really exists, it really doesn't, are we there yet. Borders unspecified, we will know when we've arrived....

An impossible place, let freedom ring in it. We've been to the mountain. We've seen the land: A terrain of the imagination, its hills skipping for joy. How long, we say, we know our failure in advance, nobody alive will set foot in it.  
-- Ostriker, "The Nursing Father" IN *Nakedness of the Fathers*

We know our failure in advance. And yet....

We learn together.

We build community.

We celebrate.

And we set off one more time, reaching again toward a fuller future Redemption. The Jewish calendar aids us by linking the Liberation celebration of Passover to a seven-week journey toward the "Feast of Weeks."

### "Feast of Weeks"

Seven weeks beginning on the 2nd night of Passover are a period of "counting" (*Sefira*, in Hebrew) up to the Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*) on the 50th day. This is a complicated period observed as semi-mourning by many Jews and little noticed by others.

For the purposes of this book, we'll focus on *Sefira* themes of learning, self-examination, and concern.

## Are We There Yet?

In the annual Torah cycle, governing our calendar for centuries, we begin each Fall reading of Creation and early ancestors, move through Exodus, then the wilderness and its Revelation, toward the Promised Land. We never get closer than the river bank opposite, though. Later books of the Tanakh (see "Hebrew Bible") follow *Yisrael* into the Land, but the Torah cycle rewinds to "In the beginning." In that first Fall portion, Eve and Adam are expelled from Eden.... launching anew a story saturated with exile, wandering, and desire for home....until, eventually, the next year, we are again on the river bank, hopeful but not yet home.

This circular path is reflected in other aspects of Jewish thought and practice, including themes of the weekly Sabbath and the annual festival cycle. Every spring, the festival cycle brings us back into Pharaoh's clutches, and centuries of teachers have considered ways to approach Passover's release....

**Hebrew Bible** or **Tanakh** consists of 24 books, 39 in translation (two books of Kings, Samuel, and Chronicles and separate books in place of one Hebrew "Minor Prophets"). The first five books are "Torah [Teaching]" (or "Chumash" or "Pentateuch," from Hebrew and Latin for "five"). After Torah, Tanakh proceeds through prophetic readings, including narrative around the Land, to Psalms and other writings. The last book, Chronicles, ends with Babylonian Captivity (586 BCE), the final two verses relating Persia's King Cyrus promising return.

...a tale we are commanded to remember, re-tell, and celebrate, even as we already know what is on the other side: 40 years of wandering that follow crossing of the Sea; Babylon captivity; and more loss and exile....

The circularity might suggest that we are perpetually trapped. But cycles also bring new opportunities. We can show up better prepared. We can bring new resources, friends, and colleagues. We can approach perennial challenges with fresh energy.... And the seven-week journey beyond Passover is one useful opportunity.

## A Better Place?

Decades ago, Michael Walzer concluded *Exodus and Revolution* with this adage about "what the Exodus first taught" --

- first, that wherever you are, it is probably [*Mitzrayim*]
- second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;
- and third, that the way to the land is through the wilderness. There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

There is much inspiration in this oft-quoted image of "joining together and marching" to that "better place." What was once an urgent call of Liberation Theology, however, has become a kind of platitude. And we are so easily lulled into thinking that we are moving toward a "better place" when, in reality, we've long since reconciled to marching in place. Perhaps marching as a metaphor for liberation is experiencing a "crash"?

...The Exodus story -- as sometimes employed in Judaism, in some Black Theologies, and in a variety of artistic works

### When a Story Crashes

Rabbi Benay Lappe, of SVARA: The Traditionally Radical Yeshiva, teaches that there are three options when our "master story" -- like ancient Judaism's organization around temple worship in Jerusalem -- "crashes," i.e., ceases to function for a culture as it once did:

- 1) re-entrench, ignore evidence of dysfunction:  
For example: there was already a drift away from Temple service even before the destruction in 70 CE; but responses included forms of "Nothing to see here," and then, "All will soon be as before."
- 2) choose a new story.  
Jews without a Temple had the option to assimilate into Greek or Roman or Christian stories, for example.
- 3) transform the old story.  
This is the option taken by the Rabbis of the Mishnah, who created what we now know and practice, in many forms, as "(Rabbinic) Judaism" today.

Listen to the "Crash" talk  
via SVARA's website -- <https://svara.org/crash/>

-- is a clear parting of oppressor and oppressed peoples. A final and violent one at that. This has important and powerful uses. But such readings are problematic when Passover participants are aware of our resemblance, individually and collectively, to Pharaoh. And such readings do not lend themselves to envisioning collaborative, joint liberation. For some of us, this represents a "crash" of sorts. But centuries of alternative, frequently more complex, readings offer possibilities for transforming the old story to serve post-Crash....

In many of our communities today -- here in DC, is one example -- displacement is a serious form of oppression, with imminent harm for people of color. At the same time, fear of displacement -- by refugees, Jews, Muslims, "them" -- fuels hatred, harsh laws, and violence in our country and beyond. Envisioning en masse departure of the oppressed may not be the most helpful metaphor for these circumstances. Maybe sticking around is the more liberatory choice, after all?

At the very least, we must ask some tough questions, of ourselves and our communities, about this concept of marching:

Are we prepared to head toward something truly different?

Will we let go of what we have in order to get there?

With whom have we joined hands?

Whom have we left behind?

Have we been marching toward a liberation  
that never seems to materialize  
for so long that we now wonder if it's worth the upheaval?

### Another River

The Anacostia River has long divided some of DC's most troubled neighborhoods from its most privileged, helped maintain the most persistent of demographic divides, and evolved into a symbol for what separates us, more generally, in the District. Jews live and work on both sides of this divide. All DC Jewish communities and institutions and most Jewish residences, however, have long been west of the river.

To help address the divide -- and the role of Jews in both preserving it and attempting to break it down -- small groups of us have been participating in "Cross River Dialogue." One group (CRD-1), composed of white Jews and Black non-Jews from both sides of the river, has been meeting for 18 months; CRD-2, formed in late 2019, includes a different mix of Black, Jewish, and Black and Jewish participants.

CRD-1 participants come from a variety of religious upbringings. Some of us are part of one or more faith communities today. Others are not. We do not consider ourselves an "interfaith" group. We do, however, discuss elements of our various cultural and belief systems, considering how we can use them to understand and shape our awareness and action in the world.

For example, we explored concepts related to Exodus last year and gathered for a special seder on the eighth night of Passover.

### Cross River Passover

Our makeshift haggadah included materials borrowed from a variety of sources and a few words of our own crafting. We opted for primarily Jewish, rather than multifaith or universalist, sources.

In preparing, Jewish participants had the usual disagreements about what is "essential" in a seder in terms of text and food, ideal length and inclusion of Hebrew, which tunes are "traditional," and -- most relevant for this discussion -- what constitutes the "spiritual" and the "political."

We began our seder:

Freedom and slavery, liberation and oppression, are both always present and always possible. We arrive at the Passover table strong and grateful for one another; for our ever-growing movement for justice and liberation.

In the words of the poet and activist, Aurora Levins Morales:

"This time we cannot cross until we carry each other....This time it's all of us or none."

We come together on this Eighth Night of Passover, understood in Midrash, the tales about the tales in the Bible, to be the point at which we are poised on the edge of the Sea of Reeds, with Pharaoh's army at our backs -- between a series of terrible plagues behind us and an unknown future ahead.

-- *CRD Haggadah* (see bibliography)



### Anacostia

East of the Anacostia river has long housed the District of Columbia's highest proportions of poverty, illiteracy, crime and violence, amid the fewest grocery stores and medical facilities; west of the river includes far stronger infrastructure overall and pockets of privilege in terms of education, wealth, and crime rates. The population east of the river is, and has long been, predominantly Black and mostly non-Jewish while most Jews and every predominantly white neighborhood are west of the Anacostia.

(continues)





## River, DC

(continued) Every Jewish institution -- school, synagogue, havurah, JCC -- in DC is west of the Anacostia, most located far to the north-west. Jewish cemeteries east of the river were founded and maintained by congregations west of the river. Only recently has the city's eastern-most congregation, Hill Havurah (located just west of the river), grown large enough to maintain stable office and worship space and hire a rabbi. One other congregation, the aptly named New Synagogue Project, is located in a neighborhood that is neither predominantly white nor far Northwest in the city.

We closed with impromptu singing of Bob Marley's "Redemption Song," reminding us of commonalities and differences around the table: On the one hand, we can all join in songs of freedom and work to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery; on the other hand, not every I at the table shares a family background of being sold to the merchant ships. Acknowledging both elements -- the common and the disparate -- in our experiences is crucial for the Cross River Dialogue. And it's crucial for larger racial justice work.

**This right here is the purpose of this book:**

**Re-reading Exodus**

**so that Jews and non-Jews,**

**with our varied relationships, and lack thereof, to text and tradition,  
can together find new ways to think about, and jointly act for, liberation.**

**Aurora Levins Morales** is "a writer, an artist, a historian, a teacher and mentor...also an activist, a healer, a revolutionary."

Her poem "Red Sea," has been included on a variety of platforms and publications, including the JVP Metro DC Haggadah of 2019 and the ad hoc CRD Haggadah:

...This time that country  
is what we promise each other,  
our rage pressed cheek to cheek until tears  
flood the space between,  
until there are no enemies left,  
because this time no one will be left to drown  
and all of us must be chosen.  
This time it's all of us or none.

Her *Rimonim* [Pomegranate] Liturgy Project works with Jews in different communities to craft new liturgy that reflects, among other goals:

-- a full integration of the lives and experiences of Indigenous Jews and Jews of Color of all backgrounds; and  
-- a deep commitment to fundamental social transformation in keeping with our deeply held principles of justice.

The full poem "Red Sea" is available, along with much more, at the author's website.

<http://www.auroralevinsmorales.com/red-sea.html>

### Far Enough?

As we launch this journey, it is important to notice....

...Some of us reading and working with this text see ourselves as part of a Jewish or a Christian narrative in which the Exodus plays a key role. Others relate to Exodus through a political philosophy lens. Some may be coming to it as a brand new tale.

...For some of us, telling the next generation "what God did for me" (Ex 13:8) is meaningful and pertinent. For others, not so much.

Simply noticing disparate starting points with regard to "shared" culture is another key stage in joint efforts. Failing to do so can mean dragging each other from one *Mitzrayim* to another.

One Passover teaching, repeated and discussed for some 1500 years, says that each of us must see ourselves as personally coming forth from *Mitzrayim* (see "In Every Generation"). There are many ways of understanding this commandment, and there is no suggestion that non-Jews are under this obligation. So, it would be a stretch to insist that we -- in this generation in the U.S. -- are obligated to re-read Exodus so as to experience coming forth from the Narrow Place of systemic racism and injustice. But we also know that we are "Not at liberty to neglect the task."

The temptation is strong to believe that we've somehow come far enough already. Equally powerful, as exhibited in the bible story itself and in our world today, is the urge to give up and return to the Narrow Place we sought to escape. It is clear, however, that we have much to learn from careful consideration of Exodus, in its long, messy, boundary-crossing complexity. And we have long known that "none of us is free if one of us is chained."

#### Not at liberty to neglect the task

רבי טרפון... הוא היה אומר,  
לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין

He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say:

It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it....

-- Pirket Avot 2:16

#### In Every Generation

בכל דור ודור

חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים

שנאמר והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר

בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים

In each and every generation,

a person must see himself as personally coming forth from *Mitzrayim*.

As it is said: "And you shall tell your child on that day, saying:

It is because of what YHVH did for me when I came forth out of *Mitzrayim*.

-- Mishnah Pesachim 10:5-6 [from early rabbinic writings on Passover]

see also B. Pes 116b [Babylonian Talmud]

## Always a Turning Point?

Preparing some of this material, I was reminded of an interaction in a long-ago discussion group: Someone cited a bible commentary that hinged on a "turning point," a precarious moment centered between the ten generations leading to that point in the story and the ten to come. Another participant laughed, insisting that all moments -- in- or outside the bible --

### "Ten Generations"

I no longer recall the actual commentary in question, and the Sages' fondness for noting "tens" leaves many candidates. But here is an oft-quoted passage:

[There were] ten generations from Adam to Noah, in order to make known what long-suffering is His; for all those generations kept on provoking Him, until He brought upon them the waters of the flood.

[There were] ten generations from Noah to Abraham, in order to make known what long-suffering is His; for all those generations kept on provoking Him, until Abraham came and received the reward of all of them.

-- Pirkei Avot 5:2

are between what came before and what comes after and that each moment is a "turning point" between one thing and another. (See "Ten Generations.")

That incident, in turn, called to mind an early scene in the movie "Little Man Tate" (Orion 1991; Jodie Foster, director): Six-year-old Fred Tate is in his elementary school classroom. The teacher writes on the chalkboard a series of whole numbers -- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6... -- and asks: "Which of these numbers can be divided by two?" When no one responds, she calls on Tate, who responds flatly: "All of them."

The fictional young genius and my mathematically-focused friend were both correct, of course: Any number can be divided by any other (non-zero) number, and most moments can be seen as the center of some timeline. Similarly, if the People always have a Narrow Place to escape, a wilderness to traverse, and a river to cross, we might simply declare:

We're born,  
we wander,  
we reach the journey's apparent end.  
What more is there to say?

Like young Tate, we may be impatient with what can seem limited perspectives.

Like my mathematically-inclined discussion partner, we may find ourselves questioning the validity of some approaches to the text.

If we're not careful, though, what was essential -- properties of odd and even numbers; theological implications of biblical structure -- disappears in a wider view.

Similarly, we already know the big sweeping views of Exodus, like "the main thing is to head toward what looks like justice," or "God is on the side of the beleaguered," etc. To really learn new lessons from Exodus we have to look very closely at both the text and the challenges we face today, exploring where they inform one another.

And, yes, we are always at a turning point.

A good thing, too!

Because we need a new way forward.

## Rethinking Exodus Toward Joint Liberation



## On the Way

This is the first of seven segments, composed of seven stages each, for a total of 49.

Extra source material that didn't quite fit into the numbered/daily sections appears at the end of each segment.

*Rereading Exodus Toward a New Sense of Joint Liberation, Part I* includes three+ stages (24 segments).

More to come in late April. Suggestions and written contributions welcome.

# (#1) One Job: To Learn Something

What would it mean for us, collectively, to "come forth from *Mitzrayim*"?

One clue is suggested by the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder and the verbs associated with them. In Exod 6:6-7 (See "'Exodus 6:2-7'" on Source Page) God tells Moses what is being promised to the enslaved *Yisrael*-ites: "I will...

(1) bring you out..."	<i>v'hotzeiti</i> וְהוֹצֵאתִי
(2) rescue you..."	<i>v'hitzalti</i> וְהִצַּלְתִּי
(3) redeem you..., and	<i>v'gaalti</i> וְגַאֲלְתִּי
(4) take you (as a partner/spouse)..."	<i>lakachti</i> לְקַחְתִּי

We do focus on getting out, being rescued and redeemed, and entering into covenant with God. But it's easy to miss the crucial knowledge component here:

"(by) my name YHVH I was not known to them....and you shall know that I am YHVH your God, who brings you out from beneath the burdens [*sivlot*]\* of Egypt" -- Ex 6:3 (Source Page; more on "*sivlot*," ahead #6 )

According to the text, the People have a history with God, have been sojourning in covenant with God, and are now moaning in servitude.

See Source Page for

"Exodus 6:2-7"

That's the old situation. And it's about to change.

No requirements on the People's part are delineated. It does seem that their moaning has already been crucial to the happenings here (see verse 6:5). Beyond, that, however, Moses is only told about God's promised actions and that the whole process is to result in new knowledge for the People: "and you shall know..." Later in Exodus we'll learn about Passover sacrifice and preparations for departure and related commandments. But right here, where it starts, the People have one job: to learn something new.

## Unknown Name

Use of God's "old" name, "*El Shaddai*," at this point in the story is curious, due to previous appearances of "The Name":

- YHVH was already revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:6);
- Moses was told to share The Name with the children of Israel (Ex 3:15);
- and with the elders (Ex 3:18); and
- The Name appeared in the first audience of Aaron and Moses with Pharaoh (Ex 5:1 ff).

So, how is it that God is now saying: "but (by) my name YHVH I was not known"?

What is it that is still unknown? Umberto Cassuto (Italy, 1883–1951) argues that this "not known to them" stresses the new name's link to future fulfillment of the four promises: bring you out, rescue you, redeem you, and take you (to the Land).

We won't really know God -- “who brings you out from beneath the burdens of Egypt” -- until we collectively experience the Exodus.

One of the things we've learned in Cross River Dialogue is that shared experience, and honest discussion of separate experience, is key to our learning. Living and working near one another too seldom includes going through things together. And going through things together too seldom includes honest assessment and sharing.

Working through this book, alone or in a community, is one way of creating a new, shared experience.

### יהוה

The four-letter name of God (“tetragrammaton,” in academia) -- spelled *yud-hey-vav-hey* in Hebrew and sometimes written “YHVH” in English -- has a special place in Jewish tradition and is not pronounced aloud; instead, it is often replaced by a substitute, such as “*Adonai* [Lord]” or “*HaShem* [The Name].” “The Lord” in translation usually, but not always, means “YHVH,” and some translations use “LORD” (all CAPS) to distinguish this expression. YHVH is distinguished in biblical studies from other names for God, like “El,” which also appears in Exodus. Names, for God, especially, have theological and many other implications in Jewish thought.

The kind of detailed reading -- with an associated, often inventive explanation -- offered by Cassuto here is not an unusual technique in Jewish bible commentary.

In Exodus 5:1, Moses and Aaron tell Pharaoh:

“Thus says the LORD, God of Israel, Let My People go....”

כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׁלַח אֶת-עַמִּי

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

The People are told, in the part of the story we just read, that they might know some old names of God, but do not yet know "Liberator, Fulfiller of Promises, YHVH (I will be who I will be)."

What must we experience together, in our various communities and in the wider society, to know that name?

**After nightfall, see “Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks” and note:  
Yesterday was the first night of Passover.**

## (#2) Did Not Know Joseph: #DontMuteDC Edition

As the story of Exodus begins, a new Pharaoh appeared on the scene, who “did not know “Joseph” (Ex 1:8-10):

A new king arose over [*Mitzrayim*], who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, “Look, [the *Yisrael-ite*] people are more numerous and stronger than we. Come let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they do not increase; otherwise, in event of a war, they might join our enemies in fighting against us and rise up from the ground.”

This is when the trouble begins, and this not knowing eventually becomes Pharaoh’s destruction.

In “Rereading the Plagues,” David Silber writes:

Pharaoh’s “not knowing” carries with it a sense of ingratitude, as Joseph was the savior of his nation; it also suggests callousness and a lack of sensitivity, and the Torah implies that it is not just an intellectual lapse but a moral deficiency.

— p.56, *Go Forth and Learn: A Passover Haggadah*

In a similar spirit, not knowing the contributions of enslaved and otherwise oppressed people to U.S. history “carries with it a sense of ingratitude.” Moreover, such ignorance, in a day when the facts are readily available, “suggests callousness and a lack of sensitivity.” As in the Exodus story, this is “not just an intellectual lapse but a moral deficiency.”

In this context, knowledge of, and gratitude for, some contributions of oppressed people in United States, is an act that may help, in a small way, to reverse some of the moral deficiency of country’s collective not-knowing.

This speech, from journalist Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879), previously enslaved, seems a good place to begin:

White Americans have gained themselves a name like the names of the great men who are in the earth, while we have been their principal foundation and support.

We have pursued the shadow; they have obtained the substance.

We have performed the labor; they have received the profits.

We have planted the vines; they have eaten the fruits.

— address delivered at the African Masonic Hall in Boston (Feb 27, 1833)

More of Maria Stewart’s speech available through *Voices from A People’s History of the United States*

<https://peopleshistory.us/watch>. See also, e.g: Zinn Education Project, <http://www.ZinnEdProject.org>

Clarence Lusane. *The Black History Of The White House*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2010

**The biblical Joseph** will appear again later in our exploration of Exodus. For now, key things to know are

- Joseph, is son of Jacob/*Yisrael* and Rachel; grandson of Isaac and Rebecca; great-grandson of Abraham and Sarah.
- Joseph’s jealous brothers sold him into servitude (Gen 37ff).
- Once in *Mitzrayim*, Joseph was imprisoned for 13 years, became a highly-placed leader, and eventually facilitated his clan’s settlement, with Pharaoh’s permission, in *Mitzrayim*.

As Exodus opens, generations have passed, and what was once an extended family of 70 has been “fruitful, increased, become strong,” now filling the land.



**From “Chocolate City” to #DontMuteDC**

In 1975, the funk band Parliament released the album, “Chocolate City.” Its title song references the DC’s status as a majority Black city and honoring its Black culture and leadership:

There’s a lot of chocolate cities, around  
 We’ve got Newark, we’ve got Gary  
 Somebody told me we got L.A  
 And we’re working on Atlanta  
 But you’re the capital, CC

...The last percentage count was eighty  
 You don’t need the bullet when you got the ballot  
 Are you up for the downstroke, CC?  
 Chocolate City  
 Are you with me out there?  
 -- George Clinton

Since the 2010 US Census, however, the District has gained nearly 100,000 new residents, many of whom “don’t know Joseph.” That is, many don’t know, or connect to, DC’s history in general and, more specifically, to “Chocolate City.” Aspects of local culture, including drummers and other street musicians, became focal points for conflict between residents and businesses -- often, but not exclusively, pitting longer-term DC folks against newer ones.

In 2019, a battle erupted over music and public space at an intersection of long-standing culture, exemplified by a corner store playing Go-Go loud music, and new luxury, exemplified by relatively new condo residents complaining about noise. Julien Broomfield, then a Howard University senior, created the hashtag #DontMuteDC, and a movement celebrating DC’s signature music developed. Results so far:

- return of music to the corner;
- designation of Go-Go as “official music” of DC;
- collaborations with Smithsonian and DC Public Libraries to preserve #DontMuteDC- and Go-Go-related material;
- attention to education needs around the store (Shaw neighborhood) and to health care east of the river (home to many of the activists).

Cross River Dialogue participants have been active in #DontMuteDC, especially community leader Ronald Moten, who is now spearheading creation of a Go-Go Museum east of the river. -- <https://www.dontmutedc.com>

**Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

What are some effects of "not knowing Joseph"  
 historically and in contemporary society?  
 How can we address our country's not-knowing?  
 What about local knowledge?  
 Our own knowledge gaps?

**After nightfall, see “Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks” and note:  
 Yesterday we counted one.**

## (#3) Did Not Know Joseph: “Adread” Edition

Returning to the new king who “did not know Joseph,” consider what happens a few verses later: Despite new burdens placed on the *Yisrael-ites*, they keep increasing and spreading out, and so Pharaoh and his people *va-yakutzu*, which the Old JPS translates as “were adread” (Ex 1:12, see “from Exodus Chapter 1”).

This is a serious reaction. The Hebrew root, *kutz*, can mean “to be grieved, loathe, abhor, feel a loathing or abhorrence or sickening dread.” In addition to the archaic -- but poetically apt -- “adread,” other (mostly Christian) translations include:

- greatly abhorred,
- loathed,
- came to dread,
- were grieved,
- were vexed by,
- were distressed by,
- couldn’t stand them, and
- feared them worse than before.

קוץ

R. Daniel J. Moskowitz writes:

Does the text mean to suggest that it was the memory of Joseph that had kept the Israelites safe from oppression in Egypt? In other words, was the hatred always there just below the surface, waiting for the opportunity to arise?  
 -- “Pharaoh Didn’t Know Joseph,” <http://www.MyJewishLearning.com>

This is an important question to consider in a national as well as a local context.

In the Exodus tale, growing “dread” on the part of *Mitzrayim-ites* contributes to harsher treatment of the *Yisrael-ites*, and finally to attempted genocide. In the U.S., policies and personal behavior fueled by White Supremacy have long contributed to a range of harsh treatment of people seen as non-white: from neighborhood disinvestment, economic and cultural displacement, to outright genocidal actions toward indigenous, Black and brown people.

While losing a favorite take-out restaurant or local hangout may seem a far cry from the harsh conditions of the Exodus story, these are not far removed from racist “dread” at all.

According to a 2019 study by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, the District of Columbia lost 20,000 Black residents to economic displacement in the study period, 2000-2013. In addition, neighborhoods that were once majority Black are no longer so. This has many deleterious effects for remaining Black people.

We see, for example, an increase in precarious incidents involving police in recent years: Police called on a young Black man who was texting someone while waiting his turn at the ATM, in his own neighborhood, which is becoming much whiter and wealthier than it once was. Police called on Black people entering their own residences or visiting others. Police called with noise complaints that escalated into nearly fatal incidents.

As what was once “Chocolate City” continues to attract new residents who “did not know Joseph,” conflicts over music/noise in the street, as in #2 above, are only the tip of the iceberg.

NCRC’s report on displacement includes examples across the nation -- <https://ncrc.org/gentrification/>

See on-line materials relating to “A Right to the City” exhibit at the Smithsonian’s Anacostia Community Museum.

<https://anacostia.si.edu/Exhibitions/Details/A-Right-to-the-City-6222>

In conjunction with “A Right to the City,” We Act Radio offers a weekly broadcast discussion series, “Gentrification or Displacement,” hosted by photographer Joseph Young.

<https://www.mixcloud.com/Displacementfreezone/>

We Act Radio, located in Historic Anacostia, is run by another Cross River Dialoguer, Kymone Freeman, who co-founded the station. Displacement is a regular topic of programming and special events.

More at [www.WeActRadio.com](http://www.WeActRadio.com)

The Talmud (B. Sotah 11a) records a brief disagreement between two rabbis about interpreting Ex 1:8:

- 1) One said that Pharaoh was really new; and
- 2) the other said that his decrees were made new....he behaved like one who did not know Joseph at all.

In this year of national elections, we might profitably ask:

- How much can a new ruler change?
- How much are new rulings the product of other forces -- public opinion, advisors, economic pressures, etc.?

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

How much of what happens in Exodus  
and in our communities today  
is the result of a shift in rulers?

How much is about "hatred always there  
just below the surface, waiting for the opportunity to arise"?

**After nightfall, see “Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks” and note:  
Yesterday we counted two.**

## (#4) Deal Shrewdly with It

The current ruler “did not know Joseph” (Ex 1:8; #2). Next there are worries about how many and how strong the *Yisrael-ite* population is becoming:

He said to his people, “Look, the [*Yisrael-ite*] people are more numerous and stronger than we. Come let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they do not increase; otherwise, in event of a war, they might join our enemies in fighting against us and rise up from the ground.” -- Ex 1:9-10

From its very start, what is now the USA operated so as to “deal shrewdly with” indigenous populations, Africans dragged here and enslaved, and, later, immigrant communities treated with restrictions and suspicion even while welcomed -- or at least permitted -- in for their labor.

This subject is too large for complete exploration here. We can, however, look briefly at U.S. treatment of Black people from the perspective of these opening Exodus verses.

U.S. policy and practice in education, employment, courts, housing, health care, and other areas all acted, throughout history, to keep some populations down. Even if one questions intent, the results for Black communities, in particular, look remarkably like a successful attempt to “deal shrewdly with them” (See “Come on, let us deal wisely”)

### “They Might Join Forces”

To start, we can look at who has been easily, legally armed in U.S. history and who has not:

- from questions about who would be armed during the Revolutionary War,
- through slave patrols and issues around arms in the U.S. Civil War,
- up through current arguments about legal gun ownership

We can look at the words of Glen Ford, journalist and editor today and a soldier during the Viet Nam era. His description of the U.S. military in the late 1960s strongly resembles our passage at the start of Exodus: After seeing Black soldiers unwilling to behave as occupiers at home, the U.S. began militarizing local police instead and shifted the composition of its elite divisions, from majority to Black (in 1968) to predominantly white (today). The motivating fear here, as Ford tells it, seems quite similar to Pharaoh’s:

...young Black men with guns who refused to be counterinsurgency killers either at home or abroad. That would just not do.... -- See excerpt "from Glen Ford's Keynote Address," (Source Pages)

הָבֵה נִתְחַכְמָה, לוֹ

Come on, let us **deal wisely** (King James, 1611)

Come, let us **deal shrewdly** (JPS 1917 and 1985)

Come, let us **outsmart it** (Artscroll, 1993)

Come, let us **be shrewd with them** (Alter, 2004)

Come-now, let us **use-our-wits against it** (Fox, 1995)

The root of the verb is "wisdom,"  
in this form: "to to show oneself wise,  
deceive, show one's wisdom."

"It" (or "he") is a singular pronoun,  
probably referencing the collective "people,"  
sometimes translated as "them."

We can listen to mid-20th Century fear of uprising as a white talk show host demands to know, “whether the Muslim movement [Nation of Islam] does hate me or not and whether it proposes to use force to satisfy its hatred.” We can hear historian/political advisor Eric F. Goldman, then moderator of “Open Mind” (see box), get increasingly riled at lack of “straight answer,” while Baldwin repeatedly notes denial of Black people’s humanity and Malcolm X likens the U.S. to Pharaoh, requiring a “complete separation of slave from his slave master.”

“Black Muslims in America” on NBC-TV’s “Open Mind,” 4/23/61. Eric F. Goldman (moderator from 1959-1967) in discussion with: author James Baldwin; C. Eric Lincoln, author of *The Black Muslims in America* (1961); George Schuyler, editor of *Pittsburgh Courier*; and Malcolm X, then public leader in Nation of Islam.

**Malcolm X speeches and interviews collection**  
[sound recordings] 1960-1964 (18 hours of audio).  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
New York Public Library.

Also widely available on free video platforms.

We can listen to Angela Y. Davis, shortly after her acquittal in the Soledad Brothers Trial:

The prison system is a weapon of repression. The government views young black and brown people as actually and potentially the most rebellious elements of this society. And thus the jails and prisons of this society are overflowing with young people of color. Anyone who has seen the streets of ghettos and barrios can already understand how easily a sister or a brother can fall victim to the police who are always there en masse.

-- June 9, 1972 speech delivered at Embassy Auditorium, Los Angeles. IN *Say It Loud*

And recall what the New York Times said at the time of her capture by the FBI:

...one who might have made a significant contribution to the nation’s normal political debate and to its needed processes of peaceful change became so alienated that she finally went over to revolutionary words and perhaps even worse. -- “The Tragedy of Angela Davis,” editorial, The New York Times, October 16, 1970

### “In the Event of a War”

Topics running through this discussion -- violence, guns, police, etc. -- are among the most challenging for our Cross River Dialogue (CRD-1). Our experiences range as widely as those of Davis and NYT in the early ‘70s. Some of us view “event of a war” at home as a distant possibility, while others experience some aspects of community survival as a daily battle. We learn a great deal from dialogue but have barely begun to explore our differences in background, assumptions, and privileges. *Rereading Exodus* is meant to help us all make some new connections and find some new approaches.

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

Consider Pharaoh's expressed fear and plan to "deal shrewdly"  
to keep some of the country's population down.

In what ways do we see this enacted today?

In what ways are the bruises from past weights still present?

**After nightfall, see “Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks” and note:  
Yesterday we counted three.**

## (#5) Adding Enemies

The *Yisrael-ite* people are increasing and growing strong, so Pharaoh decides to “deal shrewdly with it” (see #4 above) lest it “may join our enemies” (see box on “add”).

The Hebrew for “add” -- *nosaf* -- has an interesting resonance with the name of Joseph, *Yosef* in Hebrew, given by his mother Rachel to mean “May God add for me another son” (Gen 30:24). Everett Fox translates to closely mimic the Hebrew:

Come-now, let us use-our-wits against it,  
lest it become many-more,  
and then, if war should occur,  
it too be added to our enemies  
and make was upon us  
or go up away from the land!

The concern about how a people within one’s borders might act in event of war, or the accusation of “dual loyalty” more broadly, has long been an issue for Black and for Jewish communities in the U.S. Like the related topic raised in #4, it is one of the most challenging for Cross River Dialogue (CRD-1).

CRD-1 has just barely begun to scratch the surface of these issues, as has the U.S. as a whole. Here are a few thoughts based, in part, on what we’ve explored so far.

Jews living in many places over the centuries have been accused of dual loyalty or of sole loyalty to the Jewish People

rather than to the country of residence. For that reason, among others, Jews historically argued with one another about whether/how to support creation of a Jewish homeland. The modern state of Israel brings additional complications for Jews. And, while this does not apply directly to anyone in CRD-1, Israel adds complications for those Christians who have strong commitments to the land for theological reasons. Jews and non-Jews in our group have also been accused of dual loyalty in regard to solidarity with people of color around the world, particularly with Palestinians.

When CRD-1 started, some of us wished to stay entirely away from questions involving Israel and Palestine in order to focus on bridging our local divides. Others felt we needed to address differences between “anti-Israel” or “anti-Zionist” positions versus “anti-Semitic” or “anti-Jewish” ones....And “Israel” here has very little to do with the “*Yisrael*” this book has otherwise been discussing....The discussion in our small group could benefit CRD-1 participants ourselves and perhaps help us deal with the ways in which these issues interfere with our work in the wider world. As it happened, the decision was not entirely in our hands.

Even in our short existence and with our membership never exceeding ten participants, CRD-1 has seen a number of incidents in which someone connected to at least one of us -- personally and/or as part of an organization in which we are active -- was under fire for perceived anti-Semitism: DC Councilmember Trayon White, a mayoral staffer, Ilhan Omar, Mark Lamont Hill, Angela Davis, Bernie Sanders, Tamika Mallory, Linda Sarsour, the entire Women’s March...etc. etc.

We have also found ourselves in challenging circumstances when Jewish organizations of one kind or another -- some to which CRD-1 participants have close ties -- have expressed public opinions or taken action perceived as anti-Palestinian or racist, toward people in- and outside Jewish communities.

It escapes none of us that the issues here seem tailor made to divide us.

That brings us back to the idea of “joining enemies,” or, as Fox translates (see box above), “adding enemies.”

Perhaps we should be asking ourselves how we resemble Pharaoh in this regard, so ready as individuals and in political groups to “add enemies.”

### More on Shrewdness

Several commentaries -- based, no doubt on circumstances of their times and places -- suggest that “deal shrewdly” is Pharaoh considering how to be rid of the *Yisrael-ites* without actually expelling them:

- Sforno (c.1470 - 1550 CE, Italy) describes Pharaoh’s thought process this way: If we do not have adequate reason to expel them we would become pariahs among our neighbours.
- Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194 - 1270 CE, Spain) says that “deal shrewdly” means imposing taxes on foreigners, a common practice in biblical times and his own. Such a course of action, Pharaoh argues in this scenario, would not appear to “be acting out of hate” but would eventually achieve the goal.

Related commentary also mentions issues of “cultural incompatibility.” Commentary has long suggested that Pharaoh found the *Yisrael-ites* dangerous because they remained too culturally distinct -- an interpretation of being “too many and too strong.” Getting rid of the *Yisrael-ites* could, then, be accomplished by making their culture illegal or inconvenient and/or by encouraging assimilation.

Historically, Jews of many ethnic and cultural backgrounds have been perceived, like the *Yisrael-ites* at the start of Exodus, as “too many” and “too strong” (often in an economic or media-controlling sense), from the perspective of the mainstream culture around them. Also, historically, Jews of some ethnic and cultural backgrounds have been perceived, like the *Yisrael-ites* at the start of Exodus, as “too many” or “too strong” in terms of cultural incompatibility by other Jews.

Accusations of being “too many” and “too strong” are also leveled at Black communities in the U.S. by outside (mainstream or “white” culture). Moreover, issues of cultural compatibility and assimilation also arise within Black communities.

As we pursue this journey together in our overlapping Black and Jewish communities, may we continue to learn more about the ways of Pharaoh and his shrewdness and discover ways to recognize and unravel those operations where they appear in our own lives.

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

Consider Pharaoh's expressed concern about "adding enemies."

In what ways does this play out in our lives?

How can we address this

in our various and overlapping Black and Jewish communities?

**After nightfall, see “Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks” and note:  
Yesterday we counted four.**

## (#6) Under the Millstone

Having decided to “deal shrewdly” with the *Yisrael-ites*, Pharaoh’s government appointed taskmasters over *Yisrael* “in order to afflict it with their burdens” (Ex 1:11).

Burdens here is the Hebrew word “*sivlot*” (singular: “*sivlah*” -- see box next page)

Referencing the expression “in order to afflict it,” Ibn Ezra (1089 - 1164 CE, Spain) suggests that the sole purpose of the labor was to inflict suffering, or, alternatively, to effectively lower the high birth-rate among *Yisrael-ites*.

Another commentary focuses on the expression “with their burdens.” saying “their” refers to burdens or labor that had belonged to the *Mitzrayim-ites*. I am sure this is meant literally -- tasks once done by the oppressor-class was given to the oppressed to do -- but this idea of burdens that belong(ed) to someone else strikes me as worth considering, in- and outside the Exodus story.

This concept reminds me, in particular, of a man named Bob, whom I interviewed years ago about homelessness:

“My biggest problem,” Bob explains, “is using the resources I have trying to help somebody else. ... People I care about are still out here and using drugs. ... A lot of people out here get stuck carrying a burden that’s not even theirs.” -- V. Spatz, “Church and Park Struggle with Homelessness,” *DC North* September 2007  
(paper is now *MidCity DC*, still published by Capitol Community News)

“Burden” in verse 11 [“*sivlah*”] is also commonly translated as “yoke” or “oppressive work,” each translation picking up on different views of the *Yisrael-ites*’ experience.

This same word appears in Exodus 6:6-7, discussed above (#1) and three other spots in Exodus (see next page). Exodus 6:6 is associated with the first cup in the Passover seder, and, when quoted in the *New American Haggadah*, translator Nathan Englander uses the unusual expression “the millstone that is [*Mitzrayim*].”

### Mill Metaphors

First encountering the expression “the millstone that is [*Mitzrayim*]” (when the haggadah was new in 2012), I was struck by how powerfully it captures the constant, grinding nature of oppression in the Exodus story and in the U.S.

Moreover, “millstone” suggests regular and fundamental alteration in the process -- as when wheat is transformed into flour -- which also seems apt for describing tyranny and oppression, which affects oppressor as well as oppressed.

Finally, the verb in *New American Haggadah*’s Exodus 6:6 enhances the millstone metaphor. “I will lift you out from under” -- more usually translated as “bring out” or “bring out from under” -- highlights the weight involved and the difficulties in escaping it.

*New American Haggadah* includes no foot- or endnotes, so there is no explanation for Englander’s unusual choice of “millstone.”

My guess is that it reflects the passage we’ve been discussing here: Shortly after the first appearance of “*sivlot*” in the Bible (Ex 1:11, above), we read that Pharaoh inflicted “crushing labor” on the *Yisrael-ites*. *B’farekh* is an unusual word in the Bible, and some ancient commentary suggests it is related to “softening.” Thus: millstone....That’s my theory.



The Hebrew word, “*sivlah*,” as a noun (plural: *sivlot*) appears six times in the Torah:

Ex 1:11, discussed here; and 6:6 and 6:7 discussed here and in #1.

Ex 2:11) Moses “grows up,” goes out to see his brethren, observes their “burdens [*sivlot*],” sees a *Mitzrayim-ite* strike a *Yisraelite* and kills the man [all in one verse, the first recorded acts of grown Moses];

Ex 5:4) Pharaoh chastises Moses and Aaron for interfering with *Yisrael-ite* work (different word: *maasav*) and tells them to get back to their own burdens [*sivlot*]; then...

Ex 5:5) rejects the request for a three-day cessation of the people’s labors [*sivlot*].

Exodus 6:6 appears early in the Passover Seder, and at the start of this book’s journey. Still under the weight of old circumstances and assumptions, we examine where we are and what it might mean to be lifted out from under this millstone:

- Can God bring people out “from under the millstone that is [*Mitzrayim*]” while they remain unmoved?
- Can God rescue people who remain chained to old ideas, accepting enslavement, for themselves or others, as due course?
- Can anyone be redeemed “with an outstretched arm and formidable judgments” without experiencing disruption to life as usual?
- Can God take us and be for us a God, if nothing changes in our commitments?

**Millstones (left) by Wolf-Henry Dreblow. Mill (right) by Falco. Both via Pixabay.**



### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

Consider "the millstone that is *Mitzrayim*"  
and the questions above.  
What will it take for all of us to get out from under?

**After nightfall, see “Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks” and note:  
Yesterday we counted five.**

## (#7) Roundabout and Old Bones

Crossing the Sea of Reeds, and escape from Pharaoh's army, is linked to the eighth day of Passover (the seventh day of *Sefira*). This triumphant moment, and the Song of the Sea sung by the grateful *Yisrael-ites*, is narrated in the Torah portion called "*Beshalach*" ["when he sent them out"] (Exodus 13:17-17:16 -- see "from Beshalach -- Exodus 13").

The triumphant parts of the Exodus story sometimes overshadow its complexities, as we've been exploring. This can fool us into thinking we're freer than we are. It can also hinder us from noticing some useful things about the text.

The portion "*Beshalach*" opens with noteworthy complexities:

Here we are, embarking on our journey into new-found freedom. And --

- ...we're on a roundabout route to avoid fear of potential conflict which might tempt us to turn back. (Ex 13:17-18)
- ...we're carting along old bones, honoring a vow made generations earlier, back when the old Pharaoh still knew our ancestor Joseph, then a highly-placed government administrator in *Mitzrayim* (Gen 50:24-26 and Ex 1:8, Ex 13:19).
- ...then, as if to underscore the illusory nature of our escape, we are again trapped in a deadly power struggle, *Mitzrayim's* army behind us and the Sea of Reeds ahead (Ex 14).

The Bible story continues, of course, with God helping Moses to part the waters, the escaping People marching "into the sea on dry ground," the sea "coming back upon" the pursuing chariots and riders, and, finally, the *Yisrael-ites* emerge on the other side with Pharaoh no longer a threat:

"Well, he's got the great big sea over him, and I reckon that's big enough to suit anybody."

They made a song on that and danced it off. A man with a good voice got out in the center of the ring and sang.

"Old Pharaoh's dead!"

And the chorus answered, "How did he die?"

And the solo man went to dancing and said: "Well, he died like this!" and he dance that off. Then he sang another part and everybody went on dancing and shouting.

"Oh, he died in his chariot and he died in the sea

And he wouldn't have died at all if he let us be."

They sang that over and over and danced on it until they got tired. Then Miriam took the cymbal and some more women went behind her and they went all over the camp singing...

-- Hurston, *Moses*, p.193-194 (see also Exodus 15:1-20)

The Song of the Sea has long been part of Jewish liturgy, as have psalms that celebrate coming out of *Mitzrayim* (Psalms 113-118, sometimes called "Egyptian Hallel"). Celebratory Exodus themes are part of many other moments in the daily, Shabbat and Festival prayers, as well as Passover. But Jewish tradition has always included the bitter along with the sweet and asked us to incorporate alternative understandings into our readings and practice.

As we complete the first week of this *Rereading Exodus* journey, the Exodus story itself is calling us to consider how we deal with conflict and the fear of it:

How often have those not actively suffering from oppression been the ones to decide what the times will bear?

How many times, over how many centuries, have demands for justice been rebuffed, by those under the millstone and those who are not?

"Now is not the time..."

"You're too young to know" and/or "You're too old to understand."

"Be patient. That's what works in the end."

"You'll get us all killed."

"We are better off with the devil we know."

What have we learned about approaching conflict that might help us this time?

And what about these old bones?

Are we honoring the ancestors by carrying them?

Or are we tied to older visions and promises that are holding us back, might even shame those same ancestors?

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

Sefira counts both days and weeks.  
So, we are coming to a counting milestone.  
The story is telling us to celebrate getting this far  
**and** to consider what might be holding us back  
as we try to move ahead.

**After nightfall, see "Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks" and note:  
Yesterday we counted six.**

## Source Pages for #1-#7

Bible translations are slightly adapted JPS, except as noted

### from Exodus Chapter 1

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ, עַל-מִצְרַיִם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדָע, אֶת-יוֹסֵף.  
וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-עַמּוֹ: הִנֵּה, עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--רַב וְעֻצּוֹם, מִמֶּנּוּ.

(1:8) Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph.

(1:9) And he said unto his people: 'Behold, the people of the children of Israel are too many and too mighty for us;

הָבָה נִתְחַכְמָה, לֹ: פֶן-יִרְבֶּה, וְהָיָה כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם-הוּא עַל-שְׂנְאֵינוּ, וְנִלְחֲמ-בָנוּ, וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ  
(1:10) come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and, in the event of a war, also join our enemies in fighting against us, and get them up out of the land.'

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים, לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוּ בְּסִבְלָתָם; וַיָּבֹן עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת, לַפְרֹעֹה--אֶת-פִּתּוֹם, וְאֶת-רַעַמְסֵס.  
(1:11) Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses.

וּכְאֲשֶׁר יֵעָנּוּ אוֹתוֹ, כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ; וַיִּקְצֹ, מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.  
(1:12) But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And they were adread because of the children of Israel....

... וַתֹּאמְרוּן הַמִּילָדוֹת אֶל-פְּרֹעֶה, כִּי לֹא כְנָשִׁים הַמִּצְרִיּוֹת הֵעֲבָרִית: כִּי-חַיּוֹת הֵנָּה, בְּטָרִם תִּבּוֹא אֲלֵהֶן הַמִּילָדוֹת וַיֵּלְדוּ.  
(1:19) And the midwives said to Pharaoh: 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and, before the midwife can come, they have given birth.'

Jewish Publication Society 1917 is in the public domain and available through [Mamre.org](http://Mamre.org).

The 1985 translation is available through [Sefaria.org](http://Sefaria.org) and quoted on a fair use basis.

Most translations here are a kind of mash-up of the two or the 1917 "Old JPS" with updated usage.

Everett Fox. *The Five Books of Moses*. NY: Schocken Books, 1997.

**Exodus 6:2-7**

Translation: Everett Fox

6:2) God spoke to Moshe,  
[and] said to him:  
I am YHVH.

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו  
אֲנִי יְהוָה

3) I was seen by Avraham,  
by Yitzhak, and by Yaakov as God Shaddai,  
**but (by) my name YHVH**  
**I was not known to them.**

וַאֲרָא, אֶל-אַבְרָהָם  
אֶל-יִצְחָק וְאֶל-יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי  
וְשִׁמִּי יְהוָה,  
לֹא נֻדְעָתִי לָהֶם

4) I also established my covenant with them,  
to give them the land of Canaan,  
the land of their sojournings,  
where they had sojourned.

וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם  
לָתֶת לָהֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן  
אֶת אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֵיהֶם  
אֲשֶׁר-גָּרוּ בָּהּ

5) And I have also heard the  
moaning of the Children of Israel,  
whom Egypt is holding-in-servitude,  
and I have called-to-mind my covenant.

וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי,  
אֶת-נִאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם, מַעֲבִדִּים אֹתָם  
וְאֶזְכֹּר, אֶת-בְּרִיתִי

6) Therefore,  
say to the Children of Israel:  
I am YHVH;  
I will **bring you out**  
from beneath the burdens of Egypt...  
I will **rescue you**  
from servitude to them,  
I will **redeem you**  
with an outstretched arm,  
with great (acts of) judgment

לֵכוּ  
אָמַר לְבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אֲנִי יְהוָה  
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֹתְכֶם  
מִתַּחַת סְבֻלוֹת מִצְרַיִם  
וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֹתְכֶם  
מֵעֲבָדָתָם וְגִאֲלֹתִי אֹתְכֶם  
וְגִאֲלֹתִי אֹתְכֶם  
בְּזֵרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה,  
וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים

7) I will **take you** for me as a people,  
and I will be for you  
as a God;  
**and you shall know**  
**that I am YHVH your God,**  
**who brings you out**  
**from beneath the burdens of Egypt.**

וְלָקַחְתִּי אֹתְכֶם לִי לְעָם  
וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם  
לֵאלֹהִים  
וַיִּדְעֻם  
אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
הַמוֹצִיא אֹתְכֶם  
מִתַּחַת סְבֻלוֹת מִצְרַיִם.

*from Beshalach -- Exodus 13*

The opening verses of the Torah portion "Beshalach," which includes the triumphant crossing of the Sea of Reeds --

When Pharaoh sent the people out, God did not lead them [v'lo-nacham]	וַיְהִי, בְּשַׁלַּח פַּרְעֹה אֶת-הָעָם, וְלֹא-נָחַם אֱלֹהִים
by the coastal/Philistine route, although it was nearer, for God said:	דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים, כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא: כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים,
"Lest the people may have a change of heart [pen yinnachem]	פֶּן-יִנָּחֵם הָעָם
when they see war, and return to Egypt."	בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה--וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִמָּה.
So God led the people roundabout, by wilderness route, at the Sea of Reeds...	וַיִּסַּב אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר, יָם-סוּף; .
And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him;	וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף, עִמּוֹ:
for he had extraced a vow from the Children of Israel, saying:	כִּי הִשְׁבַּע הִשְׁבִּיעַ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֵאמֹר,
"God will surely remember you;	פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם,
and you shall carry up my bones away with you." -- Exodus 13:17-19	וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם.

*from Glen Ford's Keynote Address,*  
***“No Compromise, No Retreat in the Fight to End Militarism and War”***  
 Black Alliance for Peace, April 4, 2019

On the day before that cataclysmic event on April 4, 1968, I was a young a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division. I was out in the field doing exercises with my unit...in Fort Bragg, NC. My unit's duty on that day was to guard the division's headquarters, tents. All that Wednesday, company commanders and executive officers filed into those tents, and they were studying maps of Washington DC so that indeed the division would know how to deploy its troops if we had to occupy the cities in case of an insurrection. The very next day on Thursday, Dr. King was killed and were [sent] into Washington to pacify the city.

That city was burning as were 100 other cities....I didn't know what the commanding officers thought their mission was, but the Black soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division knew what our assignment had to be. As far as we were concerned our mission came from Dr. King and from Malcolm....

At that time the 82nd Airborne Division was 60% Black, and the Black troops on that day were united in the mission of ensuring that the white soldiers didn't harm one head in Washington, DC. [All were aware of what had happened in Newark NJ the year before, when National Guardsmen killed 26 men, women, and children.] The Black troops of the 82nd Airborne Division swore that the racist occupation of Newark would not be repeated on our watch, not in DC after they had killed Dr. King. And nobody was harmed by the occupying 82nd because the Black soldiers would not stand for it.

And that is not just an anecdote, brothers and sisters. That was the beginning of the end of the draft in the United States: The United States military discovered that it couldn't control a Black ghetto army, that these heavily Black units saw themselves as guardians of the Black population and not as occupiers.

...after 1968, the Joint Chiefs of the United States Armed Forces were already despairing about the usefulness of a draft army that wound up filling elite units, like my 82 Airborne Division, with majorities of Black soldiers, young Black men with guns who refused to be counterinsurgency killers either at home or abroad. That would just not do....

The antiwar movement of that era thinks that they defeated the draft, and certainly the civilian mass movement was a big factor in getting rid of mass conscription. But after 1968, the Joint Chiefs of the United States Armed Forces were already despairing about the usefulness of a draft army that wound up filling elite units, like my 82nd Airborne Division, with majorities of Black soldiers. Young Black men with guns who refused to be counter-insurgency killers either at home or abroad -- that would just not do. They had to make that change.

If you try to reinstate the draft today, it would be the top military brass that would be the most vocal opponents of the draft. They love the all-volunteer army. Ashton Carter, who was Obama's Defense Secretary, said they loved the all-volunteer military because they get to pick who serves in it.

And today, my old paratrooper unit -- the 82nd, which was 60% Black back in 1968 -- is the whitest unit in the whole US Army. That is by design.

Blacks still make up a disproportionate share of the Army, about 20%, but they're clustered in support units -- driving trucks, supply units, things like that....Super elite troops of the Special Operations Command are overwhelmingly white, and that is by design....

-- Glen Ford, full recording available at Facebook page for Black Alliance for Peace

## Rethinking Exodus Toward Joint Liberation





## Changing Perspectives

This is the second of seven segments, composed of seven stages each, for a total of 49.

Extra source material that didn't quite fit into the numbered/daily sections appears at the end of each segment.

*Rereading Exodus Toward a New Sense of Joint Liberation, Part I* includes three+ stages (24 segments).

More to come in late April. Suggestions and written contributions welcome.

## (#8) "After this Important Message"

From the brief recap of how the *Yisrael-ites* ended up in *Mitzrayim* at the start of the Book of Exodus, through to the warning about the tenth plague in Chapter 11, the story proceeds at a fast clip. Then, suddenly, at Exodus 12:1, we read: “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first month of the year.” The next 24 verses describe a ritual to be conducted while still in *Mitzrayim* and instructions for how events, which have yet to unfold, will be remembered in perpetuity.

A number of contemporary teachers have noted how this interruption can sound a bit like a break in audio or video programming for an advertisement or Public Service Announcement.

Through much of the 20th Century, a TV/radio announcer sometimes prepared us for such an interruption with: “And now, a word from our sponsor” or “We’ll be right back after this important message.” During some programming, an actor from the show -- sometimes still in character -- would tell us how a particular automobile or laundry detergent could change our lives.

Advertisers wanted us to believe in the transformative power of whatever they were trying to sell. So, too, the words Moses conveys, at God’s instruction, in Chapter 12 of Exodus interrupt the narrative to describe a life-changing product, so to speak. Of course, this is no detergent or new toy. The *Yisrael-ites* must enact the ritual as protection from the coming plague, death of the first born.

In some ways, Chapter 12 is a set of instructions separate from the narrative; in some ways it’s integral to the story: This is how the *Yisrael-ites* will get through the destruction that is to come.

As we listen to our various jurisdictions issue edicts and suggestions and warnings about how to get through the Rona (COVID-19) pandemic, I am reminded of this chapter. And I am terrified.

People are going to die in large numbers if we don’t get this right.

Of course, the whole point of the Exodus story -- at least as it is usually understood -- is that only some people will make it out. But *Rereading Exodus toward a Joint Sense of Liberation* is committed to working with all who seek to ensure that more, if not all, of us make it through this time.

And in that spirit...

### **We pause here for an important message:**

We recognize the grave and urgent threat...the novel coronavirus poses. We understand that necessary measures and precautions will have to be taken to prevent community spread. However, we also know that police and jails are not public health tools. In the case of the coronavirus, police and jails are especially detrimental to the public health as they undermine social distancing and facilitate community spread of the coronavirus.

If public health warrants “stay at home” orders, as it has in other cities and states across the country, such an order should not increase police-general public encounters. While it is perfectly reasonable that such an order be enforced against businesses and similar entities that endanger the public by defying it, it should not create penalties for individuals. It should not serve as a pretext for police or military to stop or detain individuals.

Stay at home orders and social distancing must apply to the police, as well. Unnecessary police-general public encounters could spread the coronavirus as they put both the police and the citizen at risk of contracting the virus. The public health intent of a shelter in place order would be undermined if police were to question and/or detain individuals to make sure they were in compliance with it. With or without stay at home orders, it is imperative for public health that all law enforcement agencies operating in the city cease the enforcement of all nonviolent offenses, as police in Philadelphia have done.

[Our town] must place a moratorium on arrests for nonviolent offenses. Courts and detention centers pose unique risks of community spread.... Decarceration is now a public health imperative. In addition to suspending non-emergency matters, the city should consider dismissing all nonviolent cases and lower-level violent cases with no history of violence.

The above is an excerpt from a sign-on petition to officials in my long-time hometown, as it joins many others in the U.S. in responding to the public health crisis around coronavirus. By the time you read this, the situation here in DC and around the country will have changed. The underlying point of this message will remain, however, and it's very similar to the instructions of Exodus 12. Both warn us that what we do now...

...and this is true whether we're talking about a public health crisis or a host of other circumstances...

...will determine who survives.

What we do now will determine what story we are able to tell when, if we make it through, our children ask “What does this Passover service mean to you?”

Returning to the words of Aurora Levins Morales, because this simply could not be more relevant or more urgent:  
“This time it's all of us or none.”

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

What live-saving actions  
have we or our loved ones taken in the face of oppression?  
What live-saving actions might we dream up for this very moment?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted seven.**

## (#9) All of Us?

How can we approach the Exodus story -- and Passover for those who celebrate -- in ways that lend themselves to envisioning collaborative, joint liberation work? As discussed in the Introduction, looking at the story as a clear and final parting of oppressor and oppressed peoples, defined and unchanging from the start of the tale, has its limitations.

The teacher who provided me with the most helpful guidance on this has been that Rabbi Gerry Serotta, who has spent decades in interfaith, pluralistic, and boundary-crossing work. He stresses that it is a mistaken idea to consider either *Mitzrayim* or *Yisrael* in the Exodus story as monolithic....

We can start by noticing that many enslaved *Yisrael-ites* did not leave *Mitzrayim* while many *Mitzrayim-ites* did not stay, according to age-old midrash....*Midrash*, from the Hebrew root “to search,” is a long, deep, and varied tradition of reading scripture beyond the surface.

### **Yisrael-ites:**

It is taught that only one in five among the people of *Yisrael* left *Mitzrayim* (see box), while 80% -- “unworthy,” or those who chose not to leave -- died in the plague of darkness.

In addition, teachers describe quite a variety of possible relationships between *Yisrael* and *Mitzrayim*. (More below)

### **Mitzrayim-ites:**

Shemot Rabbah describes three groups of *Mitzrayim* residents:

- those who left with the Israelites, “and also the *erev-rav*” -- often “mixed multitudes”; Robert Alter translates this as “motley throng” (Ex 12:38; related to “*asaf suf*” in Numbers 11:4; more on this to come);
- those who revolted against Pharaoh and gave provisions (Ex 12:35); and
- Pharaoh, with, perhaps, other unrepentant oppressors.

“Another explanation of “*hamushim*” (in Ex 13:18) [usually translated “armed”] is: only one out of five [*hamishah*] went forth from Egypt, and four parts of the people died during the three days of darkness because they were unworthy of being delivered.”  
– Rashi (France, 1040-1105)

With only one-fifth of the *Yisrael-ites* leaving and some portion of the *Mitzrayim-ites* joining them, the People who go through the Sea of Reeds might be more of a self-selected group than we often suppose.

## **Ask a Different Question**

We should not assume, Rabbi Serotta insists, that some demographic element -- ethnicity, class, etc. -- defined membership in the group that left *Mitzrayim* to become *Yisrael*. Instead, he wants readers of Exodus to ask:

What was it that compelled some people to leave behind the Narrow Place  
and seek liberation outside of the circumstances they previously knew?  
And how can we emulate THAT?

In addition, Serotta says, we see, from early on in the Bible, that “variety is God’s plan.” For example, the Tower of Babel story shows God objecting when the people settle in one place, becoming “of one language” or, “one idea” (Genesis 11). This theme of God preferring variety continues in the Bible and is seen in Jewish exile and dispersion.

All this means that it is good practice to look for the variety of people and perspectives in biblical narrative.

Judaism's idea that God prefers variety may seem contrary to a tale repeating "You are MY people and I am YOUR God" and "Let My people go that they may serve ME." Variety is found in the Exodus tale, however, and in centuries of Jewish teaching centered around it.

Seeking out and naming variety within biblical stories helps us avoid pigeonholing people and stereo-typing groups in the text, in history, and in contemporary life. Exploring and amplifying difference-celebrating strands of Jewish teaching, from ancient times to the present, provides a foundation for inter-group understanding and cooperation.

**Rabbi Gerry Serotta** has served for decades in congregational, chaplaincy, and organizational approaches to community- and justice-building. Some of his work includes:

- In the 1970s, he helped found Breira, an organization calling for a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine.
- In the 1980s, he and others launched the progressive Jewish grassroots organization, New Jewish Agenda.
- In 2002, he co-founded Rabbis for Human Rights – North America, which became (in 2013) *T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call of Human Rights*.
- He co-founded, with Imam Yahya Hendi, the international Clergy Beyond Borders.
- He was Executive Director of the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, 2014-2020.

Meanwhile, he has been active in and helped lead a number of congregations and founded the independent synagogue, *Shirat HaNefesh*, in the DC area.

Also, meanwhile, Gerry Serotta has been an invaluable thought-partner in studies that led to this publication. (I have tried to be careful in attributing to him only things he really said/wrote and not my elaborations/interpretations. If something seems wrong, it is my mistake.)

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

How can we shift our conversations around Exodus  
away from demography  
and toward that which calls for liberation?  
How do we do so without denying  
the long-term harm caused by centuries of  
ethnocentric interpretation?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted eight.**

## (#10) Old Names

Early on (#1), we looked at the name God shares with Moses, telling him how YHVH is related to escape from the Narrow Place. Several times early in Exodus, God stresses that ancestors knew another name: "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as *El Shaddai*, but not by the name YHVH" (Ex 6:3).

### "Back There"

Some teachers stress that using both the old and new name at once points to what is meant to be left behind. Just as Abraham was told to leave behind his native land and his father's house (Gen 12:1), the Exodus story is a journey of leaving behind old ideas. That includes old ideas about God.

The name, *El Shaddai*, itself is possibly linked to Akkadian for "mountain" and/or Hebrew for "breast" or "power." "Mountain" suggests a somewhat localized relationship with God, and "breast/power" focuses on particular attributes, especially fertility. By bringing up the "old" name at this point in the narrative, Exodus is emphasizing the newness of relating to God in a way that is NOT tied to place or to one particular aspect of divinity.

On the other hand, using the old name here emphasizes the on-going narrative connectedness to "back there" and to "them," the folks "back home." Breaking with old ways, places, and people is a strong theme of Genesis and Exodus. But the break is never quite as decisive or as final as we are sometimes led to believe: Back home and the folks still there play important roles in a story that sometimes appears to be all about back there behind. (We'll return to this idea later in *Rereading Exodus*.)

### Individuals and Generations

The Amidah, the center of Jewish daily prayers, opens by calling on "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob" with many Jews adding: "God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel, and God of Leah." Traditional commentary tells us that this formulation -- instead of a more general "God of the ancestors" or even "God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob..." -- highlights individual and generational relationships to God.

Using this expression in the context of prayer is a reminder that each individual and generation has to develop their own relationship. At this point in the Exodus story, identifying God's separate appearances to the three patriarchs stresses that God's relationship to the whole People -- like the name we don't yet know -- is yet to develop. It also spotlights the power and the variety in each individual's previous relationships to God.

Another point to consider is the use of singular and plural for ancestor(s):

- At the Burning Bush, when God his personal mission, God uses the singular: "I am the God of your father (singular) [*anochi elohei avicha*]" (Ex 3:6).
- Later, telling Moses how to address all the children of Yisrael and the elders, God uses the plural, "God of your fathers [*elohei avoteichem*]" (Ex 3:15, 16).

The story is always about both individuals and whole generations. Noticing how the experience of each affects the other is part of *Rereading Exodus* journey, too.

## Other Names

The conversations between God and Moses focus on a name known to the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob). There is no mention of any name(s) by which Matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah) knew God. The dramatic tale in which Hagar, mother of Ishmael, names God after an encounter in the wilderness, is not referenced in the Exodus telling.

We'll explore Hagar's story and topics relating to other names of God a bit later. Meanwhile, those interested might like to review a few biblical texts in which God announces Godself by name:

### God introduces Godself as "*El Shaddai*"

Gen 17:1) When God speaks to Abram, renaming him "Abraham"

Gen 35:11) When God renames Jacob as "Yisrael"

### Patriarchs speak of God as "*El Shaddai*"

28:3) After Jacob steals Esau's birthright and blessing, Isaac uses the name in sending Jacob back to Rebecca's family --

Note, however, that there is no scene in Genesis in which God introduces Godself to Isaac as "*El Shaddai*."  
Instead, Isaac is told, "I am the God of your father Abraham" (Gen 26:24)

43:14) Jacob uses the name in sending his sons to *Mitzrayim* (where the younger, Joseph is, unbeknownst to his family, Pharaoh's assistant)

48:3) Jacob, late in life, tells Joseph about having met God in Luz

49:25) On his deathbed, Jacob blesses his sons using the name "*El Shaddai*"

### Ishmael and Isaac and Hagar's Name for God

We are never told that Isaac, or Ishmael, uses "God of Vision/Seeing/Being Seen" [*El Roi*]-- the name Hagar gives to God (Gen 16:13-14). We do learn that Ishmael settles at the place where Hagar names God -- called "*Beer-lahai-roi*" for that vision. Later, Isaac settles there, too: "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac dwelt by *Beer-lahai-roi*" (Gen 25:11). Rabbi Arthur Waskow uses this often overlooked aspect of the brothers' later life as a teaching on healing and reconciliation (see Source Pages).

Many of us employ non-biblical names for God, as well.  
How do we include those in our conversations

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

As we continue this *Rereading Exodus* journey,  
how do we recognize the roles  
of individuals and generations -- in Exodus and our own stories?  
Have we met some "old names" we should leave behind?  
some we should make more of a point to recall?

After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted nine.

## (#11) Knew and Knew Not

Joseph and his brothers are the first people introduced in Exodus (1:1-5). Trouble followed when a new Pharaoh arose “who did not know Joseph” (Ex 1:8; #2 and #3 above). We just learned that the *Yisrael-ites* honor a promise to carry Joseph’s bones with them across the Sea of Reeds (Ex 13:19, #7). Clearly, Joseph’s story is an important prelude, and part of, the Exodus tale. His story is also long and complex, the longest in Genesis, dominating chapters 37-50 and closing out the book. “The ABCs of Slavery,” the Joseph chapter in *Dick Gregory’s Bible Tales with Commentary*, captures a few of the essentials.

Gregory (see box) begins his commentary with notes on dreamers and dreaming:

Joseph found out it's dangerous to be a dreamer. Just like Joseph's brothers, society today has three ways of dealing with dreamers. Kill the dreamer. Throw the dreamer in jail (the contemporary "cisterns" in our society). Or sell the dreamer into slavery; purchase the dream with foundation grants or government deals, until the dreamer becomes enslaved to controlling financial or governmental interests. Society tries to buy off the dream and lull the dreamer to sleep. It's called a "lull-a-buy."

-- *Dick Gregory's Bible Tales*, p.70

In this 1974 publication, Gregory goes on to say that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “experienced all the ways society tries to deal with dreamers,” concluding: “Dreamers can be killed. Dreams live on.”

Gregory then shifts to a more racially explicit perspective, suggesting that “maybe Joseph was a Black cat.” He continues, regarding Joseph’s incarceration and interpretation of dreams for fellow inmates (Gen 40):

The butler in the Joseph story symbolizes America’s treatment of Black folks. The butler used Joseph’s talent as an interpreter of dreams and he promised to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. As soon as the butler got himself comfortably back in Pharaoh’s palace, he forgot about his word to Joseph.

America was built on the sweat, toil, and talent of Black folks. But when the work was done and the talent utilized, America quickly forgot its debt to Blacks. Black folks helped lay down the railroad tracks, but they could only work as porters after the trains started running. Black slaves picked the cotton, but the garment industry belonged to white folks.

-- *Dick Gregory's Bible Tales*, p.73

### Dick Gregory

Dick Gregory (1932-2017) was an author, comedian, civil rights leader, health educator, activist, and mentor for decades. He ran for mayor of Chicago in 1967 and for U.S. president, on the Peace and Freedom ticket, in 1968. Ally to Martin Luther King Jr. in life, Gregory spent years, following MLK’s death, pursuing facts about the assassination and cover-up.

Among his writings, *Bible Tales* is an often neglected treasure. Dick Gregory’s *Bible Tales with Commentary*, James R. McGraw, ed. NY: Stein and Day, 1974.

More>>

Today, as in 1974, readers of many backgrounds can relate to a system that tries to destroy dreams by attacking dreamers. Then, as now, readers of many backgrounds can relate to feeling ill-used in ways resembling the experiences Gregory describes in the second quoted passage.

It is crucial to notice a difference in the two passages:

In the first quoted passage, Gregory introduces MLK into the story without explicit reference to race. This is notable



within the context of this book in that most other mentions of King highlight his Blackness, while this passage portrays the leader more generally as a dreamer who treaded in dangerous political territory.

In the second passage quoted, Gregory specifically references experiences of Black people enslaved in the U.S. and their descendants. For some readers this is direct lived experience. For some it is not.

All readers must be careful to recognize what we know and don't know:

- Each generation must see ourselves as though we actually left *Mitzrayim*, but that experience alone will not make all of us first-hand experts on topics like "America's treatment of Black folks."
- We must carefully distinguish between learning about others' experiences, on the one hand, which is crucial and important, and mistaking it for our own, on the other.



### Dick Gregory in DC

Gregory was active for decades in the DC area, where his daughter, Ayanna Gregory, is an artist and educator. He was mentor to many, including members of CRD-1. Gregory supported Kymone Freeman's organizing of Black LuvFest, for example, and the founding of We Act Radio, where he was interviewed at length in later years.

His six-hour funeral, in Landover, MD, included celebrity tributes, remarks from local and national government figures as well as just a tiny number of the people whose lives he touched.

Photo (left): Dick Gregory, squinting in the sun at Black LuvFest, 2017.

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

How do we learn from one another's experiences  
without mistaking that sharing with our own experience?

How can we discuss the Exodus  
without confusing ritual understanding with contemporary oppression?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted ten.**

## (#12) Models of Response and Resistance

### From Privilege, Activism

Asked how people raised in privilege could hope to be good activists, organizer/educator Marshall Ganz (b.1943) replied: “Wasn’t Moses raised in Pharaoh’s house?”

(From a 2015 Facebook crowd-sourcing: Joelle Novey, DC)

### Vision and Action

At least one *Yisrael-ite*, Yocheved, launches her child into the Nile to evade the death-order for male babies. This shows some degree of faith in her *Mitzrayim-ite* neighbors, trusting that someone will rescue the child that she cannot raise because of the edict. Moreover, at least one *Mitzrayim-ite*, Pharaoh’s daughter (named Batya, in midrash), does in fact rescue a child from the Nile, also refusing to dehumanize the other, and recognizing the humanity of the baby and his family.

Perhaps there were more *Yisrael-ites* launching babies into the river and more *Mitzrayim-ites* rescuing them. But even if these two women were unique in their world, their example teaches that some on either side of a class-divide or conflict can see humanity in the other.... and that such vision is necessary for the overturning of oppression.

(Based loosely on a sermon at Tifereth Israel in Columbus OH, 2016)

### Is This Resistance?

In contrast to the many small acts of women who appear early in Exodus (and then largely disappear), Moses’ first act as an adult, a big dramatic one, did nothing -- to all appearances in the text and commentary -- to overturn oppression in the long run and illustrates one danger of dehumanizing actors in an oppressive system. (See “from Exodus 2” in Source Pages)

Over the centuries, many explanations have been offered for Moses’ killing of the *Mitzrayim-ite*, most seeking to justify him (many by imputing cruel capital offenses to the man he killed), some calling Moses out for anger or immaturity, and others identifying this action as the reason Moses later dies without entering the Land (cannot find a source for this, and I’ve asked around with no success; so perhaps I remembered wrong).

Leaving commentary aside for now, let’s look at the action and the language of the text itself:

- Moses “had grown up” (in the palace) and now meets his kinsfolk/kinsmen (the Hebrew means “brothers”);
- Moses’ very first act in the world of his “brothers,” is a violent one;
- Moses’ attempt to mediate between or judge his own people is rebuffed;
- “Then the matter is known!” is sometimes interpreted to mean the *Yisrael-ites* were informants;
- Whatever the reasons for his behavior, the result for Moses is his own mini-exile.

A stranger to one’s brothers, now estranged from one’s upbringing, immersed in confusing and dangerous politics with no one to help navigate. How common is this circumstance!

(Inspired in part by drash on Moses at the well, John Spiegel, Fabrangen Havurah)

## Is THIS Resistance?

Just two verses after the above drama, Moses, a complete stranger to Midian, helps unknown sisters water their flocks amid harassment:

- Is this a model of standing up for justice no matter what?
- Or is it an interloper instantly intervening, for better or worse, in a local power struggle, possibly destabilizing the neighborhood?

One lesson to take away from the young adulthood of Moses might simply be how pervasive and complex is the effect of that millstone and how difficult it is to act with any efficacy within an oppressive system.... especially on one's own....

## School for Departure

Passover can be approached as an experience of the ability and power to change anything -- beginning with the switch from fermented products to Passover's unleavened diet:

Think of a fire drill: Where is your exit? And where will everyone meet up once you all get out?

Passover is like a fire drill, because we still have oppressive situations in our world, and we all need to be ready for life saving actions.

(2010 Passover preparation blog, Amy Brookman)

In a similar vein, the Highlander Folk School, founded in 1932, has helped incubate grassroots organizing, from de-segregation in the labor movement, through the Montgomery bus boycott, to prison justice in Central Appalachian today. The school brings together participants often separated in the outside world, due to legal or de facto segregation, and offers inter-generational opportunities to refine thinking, hone skills, and develop a community similarly committed to the essential, perhaps dangerous, work ahead. In these ways, Highlander Education and Research Center serves as a model "school for departure" to inspire new approaches to joint liberation. (See Source Pages for name change, more background, and sadly ironic, unintentional link between "Highlander Research and Education Center" and fire drills.)

Perhaps Moses' Midian stay was also a "school for departure," under the guidance of his new family: his wife Zipporah, who is apparently able to face down God to save her family (see the weird incident at the lodging, Exodus 4:24-26), and his father-in-law Jethro, who later helps turn chaos into a system of community justice (Exodus 18).

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

What can we learn from Moses  
about leadership, community, and strategic action?  
Does a biblical character have to be a good model  
to teach us something?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted eleven.**

## (#13) More Resistance and Response

### Crossers-Over

Pharaoh gives midwives Shifra and Puah a direct order to kill *Yisrael-ite* baby boys. They refuse and have a story ready (more on this later) when he summons them again, demanding to know why they defied him.

We meet the midwives in Exodus 1:15. The expression describing them -- *m'yalleldot* [midwives] *ha-ivriyot* [Hebrew] -- is ambiguous in Hebrew: It can mean either “Hebrews who are midwives” or “midwives to the Hebrews.” Given the context, it seems that the latter reading would mean *Mitzrayim-ites* serving *Yisrael-ite* women in birthing. Both possibilities have been followed in centuries of commentary....

### Resisting Conventions

There is a lesson here, however the phrase is parsed: The word “Hebrew [*ivrit*]” probably comes from the root for “crossing over,” and the midwives, whatever their background, live up to that name:

...it might be said that no matter their origins, they were in their essence Ivriyot. These courageous women were at odds with their surroundings much as Abraham and other Ivrim in the Bible were at odds with theirs. As we have seen, the prevailing culture in Egypt imposes its conformity among oppressors and oppressed alike. The oppressed are cowed into a state of silent suffering, and the oppressors become gradually inured to the degradation and ultimately to the murder of unwanted foreigners. The midwives stand as Ivriyot, steadfastly resisting the corrupt conventions that have taken hold of their society.

-- J. Klitsner, *Subversive Sequels in the Bible*, p.58

(Judy Klitsner, author and teacher at Pardes Institute; 2009)

### Ignoring Propaganda

Pharaoh summons midwives who are already at work among *Yisrael-ite* women. Given how unlikely it would be for only two midwives to attend so many births, some commentary sees Shifrah and Puah as “head midwives,” with many underlings. So what was going on with all these midwives?

- Perhaps Shifrah and Puah were part of a large, oppressive welfare-type system, of a piece with the taskmasters.
  - Maybe they’d been going along to get along, in a tough system, and then had a change of heart when Pharaoh demanded outright baby killing.
  - Maybe they had always been doing their best to keep the midwives they supervised from dehumanizing mothers and babies in their care, “resisting the corrupt conventions of their society.”
- Then again, maybe, just maybe, they were part of a whole network of genuine crossers-over, individuals in both *Yisrael-ite* and *Mitzrayim-ite* communities who never bought into palace propaganda.

(the kernel of this teaching is from a participant-led session of “Kol Isha,” a group which explored spirituality from a woman’s perspective for many years at Temple Micah, DC; early 2000s.)

**NOTE:** When it was still accepted and unremarkable practice to ignore or devalue women and their work/concerns, simply noticing women in the biblical text was cause for celebration. It was common then for midrash to imagine female interaction as counterpoint to male-dominated narrative. In that context, this network of crossers-over was pictured as women reaching across social boundaries, for survival and companionship. I don’t know how the presentation might differ if offered today, but I adapt it to offer us a gender-inclusive group of crossers-over....See also #15: How We Read

## Farewell Gifts

Benno Jacob (Germany, 1862-1945) argues that God wanted the *Yisrael-ite* and *Mitzrayim-ites* to part on good terms and used the opportunity for “farewell gifts” toward this end:

The Egyptians’ gifts to the Israelites were a clear public protest against the policies of the royal tyrant. They demonstrated a renewal of public conscience...a moral change; the receptive heart of the Egyptian people was now contrasted to the hard heart of Pharaoh.

We should especially note that a friendly farewell was **commanded by God....**

...[Israelites] might now feel triumphant and reject the farewell of their former Egyptian neighbors. God wished to win the Israelites to a more generous point of view....

Moses, as shown in [Ex 11:2], simultaneously threatened Pharaoh and searched for peace between the two peoples. These peaceful relations were God’s principal concern during Israel’s last hours in Egypt. **This was the true meaning of the farewell gifts which the Israelites sought and the Egyptians willingly gave.**

— Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, p. 343, 344 (**emphasis** in original)

Jacob devotes pages to discussing the verb “*sha-al*, to ask,” the narrative chronology of the requests, and the specific items of provision in support of his argument. Along the way, he describes a very positive view of the general relationship, prior to the effects of “hate propaganda,” between *Yisrael-ite* and *Mitzrayim-ites*:

The details of our story suggest that they [the Israelites] were scattered throughout Egypt, which must have led to many personal friendships; only a systematically encouraged hate propaganda was able to change this.

— Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible* p.343

“Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask [*v’yishalu*] every man of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.” – Ex 11:2

**Rabbi Benno Jacob**, born in Breslau and active in German Jewish life through the 1930s, was still in Germany when most synagogues were burned. He saw the German Jewish community to which he’d dedicated his life destroyed and witnessed the deportation to Dachau (and eventual return) of his son, Rabbi Ernst Jacob.

The elder Jacob lost nearly everything in moving to England in his late seventies. There he spent his last five years, completing his Exodus commentary in 1940, continuing to revise until his death, at 83, in 1945. See also #15 and Shai Held’s commentary on this commentary (#14 ahead).

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

In a re-imagined set of relationships  
between *Yisrael-ite* and *Mitzrayim-ite* communities  
where is the liberation work of the Exodus story?

After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted twelve.

## (#14) Another Model?

As the battle between God and Pharaoh comes to a close, there is an exchange of treasure between the *Mitzrayim-ites* and the *Yisrael-ites*:

The Israelites had done Moses' bidding and asked from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing. And YHVH had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they *va-y'natzlu* [see below] the Egyptians.

-- Exodus 12:35-36 (1985 JPS adapted)-- Exodus 12:35-36 (1985 JPS adapted)

The verb used for this exchange, *va-y'natzlu*, is variously translated as "strip away, plunder" or "rescue, deliver," and there are many ways of explaining what happened and why.

Some Rabbinic interpretations link these riches back to Genesis and forward through history into four exiles of the Jewish people -- Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome -- in addition to *Mitzrayim*.

Joseph, serving under a different pharaoh, helped the government amass riches during a time of famine:

Thus the land came into Pharaoh's possession. And thus he made serfs of the people from one end of Mitzrayim to the other.... Joseph then said to the people, "See, now that I've bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you-- sow the land. When harvest comes, you must give Pharaoh a fifth, and the other four portions will be food for you and your households, and for your little ones to eat." -- Gen 47:21, 23

Note that Dick Gregory, like many other teachers, doesn't include this part of the long Joseph cycle (#11), and we sometimes conveniently forget this part of the story.

One Talmudic discussion begins with Joseph and the long-ago pharaoh, continues through later books of the Bible, and then declares that this "treasure" was with the Jewish people exiled in Babylon, and then under Persian, Greek, and Roman rule. For the Sages of the Talmud, and in later commentary, exile in "Rome" -- which eventually included the Holy Roman Empire or Christian Europe more widely -- is an on-going experience. So, "the treasure is still in Rome" (B. Pes 119a, Source Pages).

### Reparations?

Another discussion of Exodus 12:35-36 takes a different direction (see also Source Pages), arguing that the *Yisrael-ites* were owed money from *Mitzrayim-ites* for past labor.

Centuries of treasure-related commentary also link Joseph's actions at the close of Genesis with enslavement in Exodus, raising some questions worth considering in the context of coalition and redemption:

- Joseph helped pharaoh take advantage of famine conditions, amassing wealth from around the world and even taking land and means of livelihood from the people in exchange for food. Whose, in that light, is that treasure?
- What lessons might be drawn for the need for Reparations for people descended from enslaved populations in the United States?

## A Gift Too Far?

In a contemporary commentary, Rabbi Shai Held, of Mechon Hadar, confesses skepticism as to whether Benno Jacob's analysis (#13) jives with the plain sense of the text but adds:

One senses in Jacob's words the insights of a brilliant exegete but also the pain of a rabbi and teacher in a Germany consumed by hate\*...In a world suffused with bigotry and hostility, a world in which people of faith often marshal sacred texts to legitimate acts of cruelty and to extol hatred as a virtue, there is great power in reading Jacob's words and being reminded: At the heart of the religious enterprise is the attempt to soften, and open, one's heart, to God and to one-another. If even the Egyptians and the Israelites can be (successfully!) called to love one-another, then perhaps, even in the darkest of times, slim glimmers of hope are available to us.

\*Held includes a footnote citing personal communication with R. Walter Jacob (Benno's son) to confirm that his father was working on the Exodus commentary between 1934 and 1939, while still in Germany.

Held, Shai. "Receiving Gifts (and Learning to Love?): The 'Stripping' of the Egyptians."  
2015 dvar torah, available via Mechon Hadar

(More on this to come.)

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

How can we draw on the complexities of our traditions including some of the less-popular or less-uplifting parts?

How do we keep from sliding into feel-good messages that don't challenge us?

How can we keep from being tangled in the weeds?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted thirteen.**

## Source Pages for #8-#14

Bible translations are slightly adapted JPS, except as noted

### from Exodus 2

Some time after that, when Moses had grown up,  
he went out to his kinsfolk  
and witnessed their labors [*b'sivlotam*].  
He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen.  
He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about,  
he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.  
When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting;  
so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?"  
He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us?  
Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"  
Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known!  
When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh....  
-- Exodus 2:11-15

### Highlander Research and Education Center

I first learned about Highlander Folk School, about thirty years ago in a biography of its founder, Myles Horton (1905-1990). The Montgomery Bus Boycott was before my time, and I knew very little beyond the then-common narrative of "Mrs. Parks was tired" to explain how it started. So, it was eye opening for me to learn about Highlander and how Rosa Parks, MLK and others learned and planned there prior to the boycott and many other actions in the South. That book forever changed for me how I look at any kind of protest or apparently spontaneous public action.

The state of Tennessee, as a result of red-baiting, revoked the school's charter and seized its property in 1961. They reopened the next day as Highlander Research and Education Center. After ten more years in Knoxville, Highlander moved to its current location near New Market, TN, in 1972.

Ten years ago or so, Amy Brookman and I were learning together in advance of Passover, and I was struck with her ideas about how the holiday season is a kind of rehearsal for individual change. I thought, too, about how Highlander helped people prepare to make extraordinary change in the world. Since then, the two ideas have been linked for me. So, I included a version of the passage about Highlander in the precursor to this work, *Exodus and Exile: Thoughts on Coalition and Redemption*, published in March 2019. Shortly after the publication, Highlander suffered a devastating arson attack on March 29, 2019.

No one was present during the fire, but Highlander lost a lot, including irretrievable archives.

Highlander is recovering and, especially in this pandemic situation, is offering wonderful resources for learning and connecting at a distance. Visit [www.HighlanderCenter.org](http://www.HighlanderCenter.org) to learn more, download resources, and support their work.



### Arthur Waskow on Ishmael and Isaac

The story of Ishmael and Isaac concludes in Genesis 25:7ff, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow has long shared important teachings around these brothers. The Shalom Center suggests that the Torah reading(s) for Rosh Hashanah, the new year, which highlight the endangerment and separation of Ishmael and Isaac, “cry out for turning and healing.” Toward this end, Waskow proposes an additional reading for Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement): Gen 25:7-11, wherein the two brothers join together to bury their father and “Isaac goes to live at the wellspring that is Ishmael’s home.”

A few years back, The Shalom Center sent out a message before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, exploring what this passage could teach us during the season of reconciliation “about renewing the cousinship of Blacks and Jews — and of people who live in both communities — when white nationalists are threatening both.”

In previous years, I had thought of this story in terms of interfaith understanding, of the wellspring as a fundamental source that Isaac and Ishmael -- so important in Muslim teaching -- share and a common link to Hagar. Viewing the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael as members of sometimes overlapping Jewish and Black communities today, however, raised new questions for me.

*Beer Lahai Roi* is where Ishmael settled after being expelled from the family home. So what does it mean that Isaac is now living there?

- Is this true brotherly reunion, generally accepted by others in the neighborhood?
- Or does this look to some like colonization of the exiled brother’s home?
- Do the brothers fairly share a joint family heritage in the wellspring?
- Or is Isaac somehow appropriating what had been Ishmael’s?

*Beer Lahai Roi* is a powerful place of God-connection at times of severe travail for Hagar. So what does it mean that Isaac settled there?

- Did separate traumas experienced by Isaac and Ishmael lead them, by divine guidance, perhaps, to a joint source of healing?
- Or did Isaac seek out Ishmael hoping his older brother could guide him?
- Do the brothers learn from one another?
- Or do they, with some rare exceptions, like burying their father, retreat into their own pain?

Perhaps midrash — ancient, modern, or newly discovered — will reveal some answers. Maybe some of these questions are best left open.

## **After the Maggid: When We Imagine Ourselves Allies**

by Sarah Barasch-Hagans and Graie Barasch-Hagans

### **Sometimes we are Moses...**

...conditionally white with Cossack eyes and a quick sunburn, passing but keeping a suitcase by the door just in case. Feeling mostly safe in the palace walls, guilty but not knowing why, until one day everything changes. Until one day we see the Egyptian striking the Israelite and know he is hurting our family—and this time we do not run away. We know that Moses killed the taskmaster, but we do not do not strike anyone, knowing that violence will not lead to greater justice for our families because violence by those of us who ‘pass’ would be met with greater violence and retaliation against those who cannot hide behind conditional whiteness. So sometimes we are standing next to our Black husband at the protest, and we are both chanting peacefully but the policeman strikes him and all we can do is choose not to run away, to stand firmly with our hands raised so that we both get hit.

**Because family means if you hit him then you hit me.**

-- from #BLM Haggadah Supplement, 2016

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice.

Download this and more from [jfrej.org](http://jfrej.org)

"*Maggid*" [Telling] is the main narrative section of the Passover seder.

## On the exchange of goods at Exodus 12:35

The treasure remained [in the Land of Israel] until the time of Rehoboam, son of Solomon (1 Kings 14:26)...Next Jehosaphat came and took the treasure back from the Ammonites (2 Chron 20). It remained in the Land until the time of Ahaz, when Sennecherib came and took it from Ahaz. Then came Hezekiah, who took it from Sennacherib, and it remained in the Land until Zedekiah, when the Chaldeans [Babylonians] came and took it from Zedekiah. Then came the Persians, who took it from the Chaldeans; the Greeks, who took it from the Persians; the Romans, who took it from the Greeks. And the treasure is still in Rome.\*

— Sefer Ha-Aggadah 70:70, from B. Pes 119a

Another approach:

Another occasion the Egyptians came in a lawsuit against the Jews before Alexander of Macedon. They pleaded thus: 'Is it not written, And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, and they lent them [gold, precious stones, etc. (Ex 12:35)] Then return us the gold and silver which ye took!' -- B. Sanhedrin 91a

As the lawsuit continues, the Temple doorkeeper, Gebiha b. Pesisa, asked permission of the Sages to answer the charge and responded as follows:

'Whence do ye adduce your proof?' asked he, 'From the Torah,' they replied. 'Then I too,' said he, 'will bring you proof only from the Torah, for it is written, Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years (Ex 12:40). Pay us for the toil of six hundred thousand men whom ye enslaved for four hundred thirty years.'

— B. San 91a; see also *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* 166:30

## Rethinking Exodus Toward Joint Liberation



## Into the Wilderness

This is the third of seven segments, composed of seven stages each, for a total of 49.

Extra source material that didn't quite fit into the numbered/daily sections appears at the end of each segment.

*Rereading Exodus Toward a New Sense of Joint Liberation, Part 1* includes three+ stages (24 segments).

Part 2 is planned for late April. Your suggestions, and written contributions, for Part 2 are welcome.

Contact [songeveryday@gmail.com](mailto:songeveryday@gmail.com).

## (#15) How We Read

Bible is part of the culture around us and has always been part of how the U.S. defines itself. Even if we're not regular readers ourselves or part of a faith community that reads the Bible, it's important to look carefully at how the Bible shapes us all -- as well as how we can work to shape its effect.

### A Facet, Not a Flaw

It has long been taught that "Torah has 70 faces" (ways to approach each verse or maybe each word or letter), and an ancient teaching tells us: "Just as a hammer shatters rock into many splinters, similarly may one single [Bible] verse be split into many interpretations" (B. San 34a).

.... Jewish communities will declare "right" answers about practice: which foods are kosher for Passover, e.g., or whether it is allowable to drive to religious services on a (non-pandemic) Sabbath. (How the current global crisis will change Jewish practice is still unknown.) Answers will differ between communities, but each one will have a "right" answer (at least for them). But no Jewish community in the rabbinic tradition -- many forms that trace their origin to the Talmudic enterprise, which began about 2000 years ago -- will declare a "right" answer about how to read a Bible verse or story....

This differs from most Christian approaches, as Fortress Press explains, using their own scholarly commentary for comparison:

...while [Fortress'] Hermeneia commentary page is designed to focus attention on the most accurate determination of "the meaning" of the text that a single scholar can provide, the Rabbinic Bible is designed to draw on a variety of voices interpreting a single text. -- *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible*, Introduction, p. xxviii

### Change of Focus

Every Bible commentary is a product of its time and place and its author's social location. This is not a flaw in Jewish understanding. But it is important to explore.

Look, for example, at the "Farewell Gifts" commentary (#13). Written by someone living in comfort within a diverse society, the commentary would be worth considering. For a Jew living through what he saw in Nazi Germany to write about the "many personal friendships" between *Yisrael-ite* and *Mitzrayim-ites*, insisting that "only a systematically encouraged hate propaganda was able to change this," is something else again. This strikes me as powerful Torah. Held's commentary on this commentary (#14 above) is an additional model of Torah developing across time and place.

Look, too, at the crossers-over network (also #13). As noted, it originally grew out of "a woman's perspective" on Exodus. I have a vague recollection of trying to argue, back then, that women wouldn't be the only "crossers-over," but maybe that's time playing tricks; I am sure I wasn't arguing that so much talk about men and women failed to include everyone. But twenty years later? I prioritize different perspectives on gender and sexuality. And I still read this commentary as about the importance of reaching beyond one's community or comfort zone as a form of resistance.

As I read, Benno Jacob's particular lens sharpens the ideas around farewell gifts, while the "woman's perspective" blurs the real focus of the crossers-over concept. Another reader would come at these commentaries and the underlying Bible texts differently. Understanding various factors at work in our individual, and group, reading is part of this journey.

## Self-Inventory

One useful tool is a "Bible Readers' Self-Inventory," which reminds us that "none of us comes to the Bible as a 'blank slate,'" and asks us to consider how a variety of factors -- like family background, race, ethnicity, class, and education -- affect one's reading. The self-inventory can be found in the Introduction to *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible*, available free of charge through the Fortress Press website. It is intended primarily for students at Christian seminaries. An adaptation, "Jews Self-Inventory for Bible Readers," is available on "A Song Every Day" blog and at Academia.edu. (See box for sample results.)

In addition to the factors mentioned above, the inventory includes elements of religious background (or lack thereof), like teachers and beliefs about textual authority. Examining these questions explicitly is a useful step toward uncovering some implicit biases and coming to the Bible with some new understandings. This exploration can also be of helpful far beyond any direct approach to scripture.

Just thinking for a few minutes, maybe jotting down a few notes, about how you came to your ideas about what's in the Bible and what it's supposed to mean for you can be clarifying in many ways. Just as none of us comes to the Bible as a "blank slate," we do not read or address anything else that way. As with all of our work in the world, learning to recognize our own biases and where they came from, is an important step.

### Some self-inventory results from the author, as example and as background disclosure:

I read as a person of faith (of sorts), a Jew committed to egalitarianism and inclusion, valuing all gender expressions, racial and economic justice, and cross-community understanding.

My upbringing includes the snobbery of "regular folks" toward the better- heeled; privileges of the cis-het as well as anger and confusion of a woman in an antifeminist, often misogynist, world in- and outside religion; benefits and challenges of growing up white on Chicago's West Side, with a relatively crime- and violence-free youth, followed by enormous upheaval of the late '60s, "Urban Renewal," White Flight, and the complete dismantling of my childhood neighborhood.

Bible was largely irrelevant in my early years, neither comfort nor foe. Eventually, I found my way in through female and other marginal characters and through commentaries from the margins.

I prioritize sources affirming my values and seeking variety in viewpoints.

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

What makes a reading "alternative"?  
Who benefits from unquestioned, accepted readings?  
What happens when we name hidden assumptions?

After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted fourteen.

## (#16) Predictable Results

Pharaoh's early efforts to get rid of the *Yisrael-ites* do not go to plan:

- First, he set up taskmasters and forced labor, "But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased...." (Ex 1:11-12);
- Then, ruthless labor and making life bitter, apparently without desired effect (Ex 1:13-14);
- Next, the midwives are told to kill baby boys; but the midwives tell Pharaoh the *Yisrael* women give birth too quickly for a midwife to attend (Ex 1:15-21);
- Finally, Pharaoh commands all the people: "Every boy that is born, you are to cast him (off) [*tashlikhuhu*] into The River," but that doesn't quite work as expected either (Ex 1:22ff).

Can we imagine any people behaving as Pharaoh directs toward *Yisrael-ite* babies?

Pharaoh's command (Ex 1:22) is often translated as tossing or throwing ("casting") baby boys into The River. But biblical scholar Adele Berlin notes that the verb here is the same one used when Hagar leaves Ishmael under the bush (Gen 21:15) and in other verses where the meaning is "to abandon" ("cast off"). She makes a comparison with ancient Greek practice of leaving baby girls on hillsides to die out of sight of the parents, saying that here, on the water:

The predictable -- but not immediate -- result would be the baby boy's death.  
-- commentary in *Torah: A Women's Commentary* (URJ, 2008).

Predictable, but not immediate....

### Predictable

A recent study by the DC Department of Health, the infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) in DC was as follows:

- for non-Hispanic white mothers: 2.55
- for Hispanic mothers: 5.33
- for non-Hispanic black mothers: 11.49
- associated map by ward, next page

The maternal death rate for black women in the U.S. is more than double that for white women, according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The maternal death rate in DC is roughly twice the national average, with large and persistent disparities across race.



In addition, according to the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Black women are more likely to

- Be uninsured before becoming pregnant.
- Be exposed to environmental risks.
- Receive subpar medical care based on their location.
- Experience racial bias from health care providers.



FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF DC HOSPITAL AND SURGICAL SERVICES

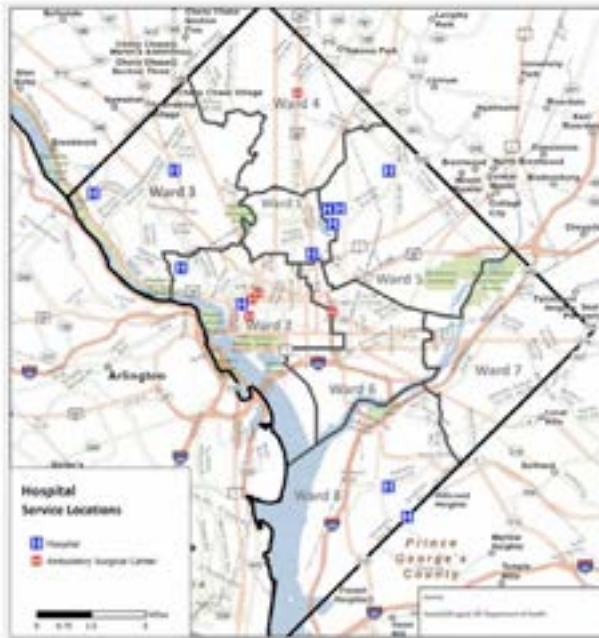
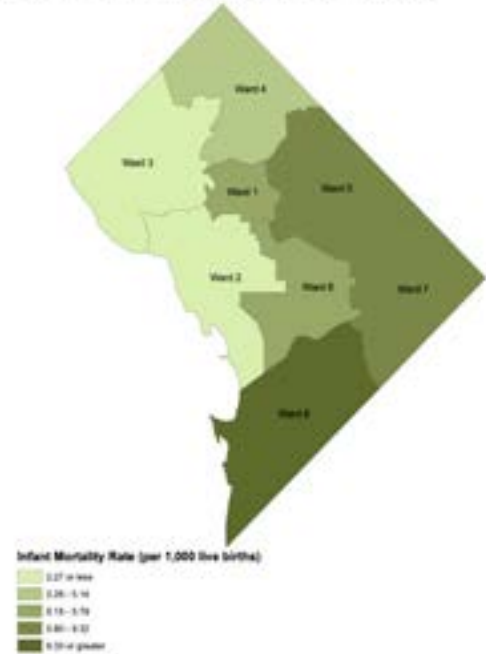


Figure 26. Infant Mortality Rate by Ward, District of Columbia 2012-2016



Since published by DC's Department of Health in 2017, the hospital map changed in two ways:

- 1) Providence Hospital, the public hospital represented by that single blue square in the northeast quadrant, closed;
- 2) United Medical Center, on the southeast border, is slated to close in 2023 and already closed it's obstetrics department.

The remaining blue square in the southeast quadrant of the city is St. Elizabeth's Psychiatric hospital.

**There is currently no facility to assist in delivery of babies east of the Anacostia River in the nation's capital.**

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

Can we imagine any people behaving  
as Pharaoh directs toward *Yisrael-ite* babies?

Can we imagine people tolerating predictable results,  
like those outlined so briefly here?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted fifteen.**

## (#17) Long Predicted Results

“The predictable -- but not immediate -- result would be the baby boy’s death.” (see #16)

Earlier (#11), I shared snippets of commentary from *Dick Gregory’s Bible Tales*, which has been a personal favorite for a long time. Rereading in the process of preparing *Rereading Exodus*, I am struck by what has changed and what has not since the early 1970s. Much of both this book’s content and history is relevant to this journey.

### **Dick Gregory’s Bible Tales**

One obvious change between Gregory’s 1974 writing and today is a shift in language: Men are rarely called “cats” these days, for example, and we have “areas of disinvestment” rather than “ghettos.” I still use “folks” for small and large groups of people, but it’s not common usage these days -- although gender-conscious folks now use “folx.”

In addition, some readers might have to do a little Duck-Duck-Going (or use a search engine that tracks, records and sells one’s every move, if preferred) to get the full meaning in references to “blockbusting” or for passages like this one:

House Majority Leader Thomas P. (“Tip”) O’Neill (D-Mass) says there’s a line going around Washington suggesting if Rose Mary Woods had been Moses’ secretary, we’d only have three commandments. There’d be seven unaccounted for.

-- *Dick Gregory’s Bible Tales*, p.94

But the main themes, and many of the facts he cites, have not changed at all. In some cases, things have gotten worse. So, consider for a moment some implications here: We are reading a passage from 1974, and basic conditions described are still easily recognizable after 40+ years. That means that we have whole generations born into those conditions. And that, in itself, is a worsening of conditions, bringing a longer and deeper legacy of death. As Gregory says about the plagues of Exodus --

The plague of blood symbolizes a tragic reality....

Pharaoh was willing to negotiate in earnest only after his own son was killed. Countless Hebrew mothers and fathers had lost sons. But Pharaoh only listened when death came to his own household. The loss of a loved one caused Pharaoh to change his oppressive ways.

I wonder how many wars would be avoided if the loved ones of the national leaders were the first soldiers to face enemy fire?

-- *Dick Gregory’s Bible Tales*, p.87

We’ll return to the abandoning of babies at the start of Exodus, with another Gregory excerpt, shortly. But first...

### ***Bible Tales Today***

I strongly recommend reading this book. Used copies are rare, now, and priced way too high, though.. Library copies are not common, either (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at NYPL has one). Stein and Day publisher -- more history worth exploring, BTW -- has been gone for decades. Perhaps it’s time to lobby for re-releasing this valuable resource.

## A Blast from the Past

This is the Kirkus Review from October 1, 1974:

Gregory's hip-talking, jive-assed renditions of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac, Joseph and his brothers, Samson and Delilah, etc., are his way of preachin' and teachin' to white folks about God's priorities and how people have messed them up. From the examples of biblical folk disobeying the Lord (who frequently comes off like a mean, spiteful, s.o.b.) Gregory extracts neat little moralisms re racial bigotry, pollution of the planet, male chauvinism, Watergate, etc. Consider that forbidden apple in the Garden: "'Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. If there had been any Black folks in the garden, the serpent would have blamed us.'" That's about as funny as any of this gets. And when Gregory starts pushing "'fruitarianism'" (fruit is all he eats) and birth control as a genocidal trick directed against Blacks, you do begin to wonder if he's really got as direct a line to the Almighty as he thinks. -- <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/a/dick-gregory/dick-gregorys-bible-tales-with-commentary/>

**Disclaimer:** I (primary author) value safe, affordable birth-control for everyone and access to abortion and sterilization for all who seek those. Moreover, I have zero patience for men seeking to restrict women's healthcare options. Therefore, I was tempted to skip, or severely trim, this passage. However, Gregory's birth-control positions were strong and lasting, and he is not alone, historically or today, in these positions. So I am sharing an uncensored, but shortened, passage from his chapter, "Up the River and into a Foster Home":

Pharaoh's genocide plan was a lot more up front than many of the genocidal schemes practiced against Black and other minorities today. Today it's called "birth control."

...One of the definitions of *genocide* is "imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group." Government programs for poor Black folks that emphasize birth control, sterilization, and abortion availability obviously fit into that category.

But there's also a more subtle strain of genocide in the background. Black people are herded into small, over-crowded areas called ghettos, made to live in substandard housing where heat, water, and plumbing facilities are lacking and adequate public services like garbage removal are withheld, making the ghetto areas breeding grounds for rats, disease, and death. Add to this the poor food found in ghetto supermarkets, the absence of health services, and the fires that consume the rundown houses and the little kids who live in them.

The result is an infant mortality rate that is at least twice as high for Black folks as it is for white folks. The same pattern is true for Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and Indians. The combination of birth control, abortion, and infant mortality produces a genocide plan a lot more subtle than Pharaoh's. -- *Dick Gregory's Bible Tales*, p.76-77.

More on "genocide" to come.

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

What were the long-term effects of oppression for the people of Exodus?

What about the U.S., since the 1970s?  
or for the last 400 years?

After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted sixteen.

## (#18) A Very Long Interval

"The length of time that the *Yisrael-ites* lived in *Mitzrayim* was four hundred and thirty years."

-- Exodus 12:40; see also Source Pages

The number 430 "is to be understood as indicating a very long interval of time," according to Cassuto (cited above). *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* says "the message conveyed is that the sojourn in [*Mitzrayim*] lasted a long time." Many teachers understand the number as symbolic. In keeping with the 70 faces of Torah, the symbolism is approached in many ways. (More on Source Pages.)

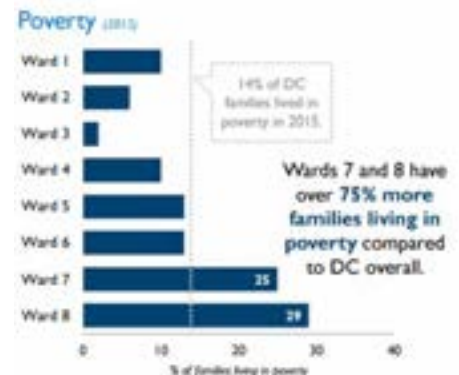
For the purposes of this discussion, we can stick with the idea that the time in the Narrow Place, under the millstone that is *Mitzrayim* "lasted a long time."



### More Predictable Data

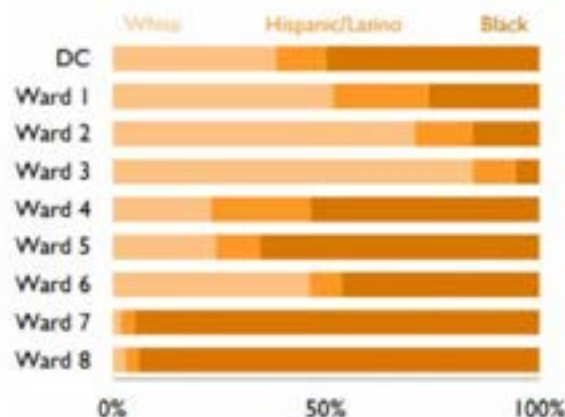
Further to the notes in #16 and #17, this page includes a little more background on DC's demographics and divides, all of which have lasted already a long time.

On this page are a few more bits of information from DC's Department of Health. The cited report was issued in 2017 using data a few years old then. So, on the one hand, the information is slightly dated; on the other, most recent changes (prior to the Rona upheaval) involve an influx of newer, wealthier residents and displacement of Black people in Ward 8, particularly.



Summarizing for those who cannot easily access graphics: Wards 7 and 8, east of the Anacostia, have the highest unemployment, the highest poverty, and the largest gap in availability of mental health professionals. Wards 7 and 8 residents are predominantly Black, while most white residents live to the west of the river.

DC is one of the most diverse places in the nation! However, residential segregation based on race is a concern in DC.



But major discrepancies in unemployment between wards persist. (2013)



## The Lifestyle's Length

The period time that the *Yisrael-ites* had been in *Mitzrayim* is sometimes translated simply as the time they lived there. But translators who seek to follow the Hebrew more closely use a noun:

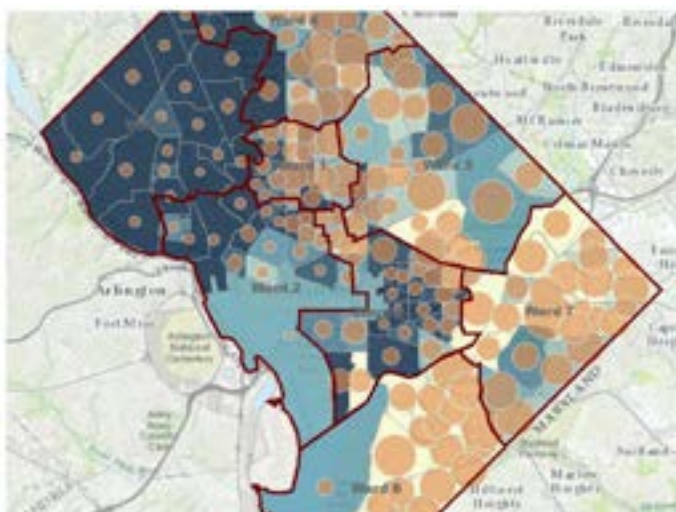
- “settlement” (both Alter and Fox),
- “habitation” (Artscroll),
- “lifestyle” (*Me'am Lo'ez*).

I am struck in particular with the use of “lifestyle.” This suggests that whatever was going on in *Mitzrayim* -- a way of life for both the *Mitzrayim-ites* and of the *Yisrael-ites* -- is coming to an end.

In that spirit, I share an “Opportunity Map” created by some DC high school students and their analysis of it. “Opportunity” is an index of access to health, education, employment, transportation, housing, and wealth. This is how the students summarized their learning:

In the late 1800s, Senator Francis Newlands built the suburb of Chevy Chase, which barred Blacks and Jews, and lobbied for creation of Rock Creek Park as a segregationist barrier... Newlands seems to have succeeded in his mission, because even today in 2017, DC remains firmly segregated by Rock Creek Park and Chevy Chase (in Ward 3) remains predominantly white.

Maret School is a private school in DC's northwest quadrant. Ayo Heinegg Maywood, who was then a social studies teacher at Maret, describes in some detail how the map came to be and what the various shadings and circles mean (Source Pages; see also larger map and link to the real thing).



### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

What kind of “lifestyle” has led to the divides described here?

What changes are needed to get out from under the millstone that fuels DC's divisions and those in so many other places?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted seventeen.**

## (#19) Can We Imagine?

There is more to consider around Pharaoh's attempts to get rid of, or reign in, the *Yisrael-ites* (#16) and the question his command raises for many of us:

Can we imagine any people behaving as Pharaoh directs toward *Yisrael-ite* babies?

Such extreme and callous behavior is hard to fathom...until we recall the Atlantic Slave Trade and its on-going aftermath, for example, or Nazi Germany's "Final Solution."

Or Europe's treatment of the Roma.

Or the Trail of Tears in U.S. history.

Or colonial treatment of just about everyone, but especially black and brown people.

Or violent suppression of LGBTQ people through the ages.

Or differences in response in different areas, based on race and other factors, at time of natural disaster -- or pandemic.

All that is needed is a contextual framework that allows some people to dehumanize others.

And that brings us back to the early stages of the Exodus story.

### Wildlife

As mentioned above (#13), the midwives outsmart Pharaoh's death order by claiming that the *Yisrael-ite* women give birth too quickly for them to attend them in birth. *Yisrael-ites* are "not like the women of *Mitzrayim*," they say, but "*cha-yot*." This word is usually translated here as something like "vigorous" or "lively," but it has other connotations.

Rabbis Waskow and Berman explain some of the word's nuances this way:

[Rather than meet Pharaoh head on in their response, the midwives] played with Hebrew words -- a pun to placate the king while explaining their actions....

What was the pun? In English, there is an overlap in meaning between "animal" and "animated" and an overlap in meaning between "wildlife" and "lively." Saying to Pharaoh that the women were like animals or wildlife ("*cha-yot*," from the root for "life") in their swiftness to give birth would play to his racist contempt for the Israelites. Yet the Hebrew word could also simply mean that the women were "animated," "lively."

The midwives told a truth that was also a lie. This first step into civil disobedience was a sidestep, rather than direct and challenging resistance. It set the stage for more direct resistance later.

-- *Freedom Journeys*, p. 23

Berman and Waskow are not the only teachers to see the midwives' response to Pharaoh as a clever use of his racism for a greater good. Others stress the text's clear celebration of life and nature here and downplay any sense of that the midwives are dehumanizing the *Yisrael-ites*. Rarely do I see -- please share examples if you know them -- serious reflection on what it means in the long run to make use of any strategy that relies on calling any human "wildlife."



As briefly outlined in #16, Black people east of DC's Anacostia -- and across the U.S. -- live the predictable results of generations of such propaganda.

White Jews in the U.S. today do not face the same kind of deadly institutional effects. However, Jews are never unaware of the insidious nature of dehumanizing propaganda and how quickly talk about women being "wildlife" can lead -- and has, in recent memory -- to calls for exterminating us and our offspring.

Our Cross River Dialogue has touched, just barely, on use of the word "genocide" -- as Gregory uses it above, as the 2016 Movement for Black Lives platform used it in reference to U.S. policy in the Congo and Palestine, in the context of "cultural genocide" and gentrification (see #DontMuteDC, above #2), and in Nazi Germany. See related passage from a piece of historical fiction (box below).

CRD-1 continues to struggle with determining what is dangerous, racist and/or anti-Jewish speech and what is merely ignorant or annoying.

"Jazz. Here in Germany it become something worse than a virus. We was all of us damn fleas, us Negroes and Jews and low-life hoodlums, set on playing that vulgar racket, seducing sweet blond kids into corruption and sex. It wasn't music, it wasn't a fad. It was a plague sent out by the dread black hordes, engineered by the Jews. Us Negroes, see, we was only half to blame -- we just can't help it. Savages just got a natural feel for filthy rhythms, no self-control to speak of. But the Jews, brother, now they cooked up this jungle music on purpose. All part of their master plan to weaken Aryan youth, corrupt its janes, dilute its bloodlines.

"...we was officially degenerate.

"...And poor damn Jews, clubbed to a pulp in the streets, their shopfronts smashed up, their axes ripped from their hands. Hell. When that old ivory-tickler Volker Schramm denounced his manager Martin Miller as a false Aryan, we know Berlin wasn't Berlin no more. It had been a damn savage decade."

--Esi Edyugan, *Half-Blood Blues: A Novel*, p.78-79

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

Are there good ways to make use of racist assumptions?

How do overlapping Jewish and Black experiences of genocide inform each other?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted eighteen.**

## (#20) Rescue Me! You! Us!

Return, briefly, to Shai Held's commentary (#14) on Benno Jacob's commentary on Exodus 12:35ff (#13). I am of several minds (or hands) about this and share my struggle here.

On the one hand, I am all for seeking positive messages along our Rereading Exodus journey. I endorse Shai Held's lesson: "...even in the darkest of times, slim glimmers of hope are available to us."

I marvel, as already noted, at Benno Jacob's ability to find messages of cross-community good will, even during the rise of fascism in Germany in the 1930s.

On the other hand, I fear falling into what I think of as the we're-all-in-this-together, let's-hold-hands-and-march trap. It is true that all of our liberations -- like those of the *Yisrael-ites* and the *Mitzrayim-ites* -- are bound together. But that doesn't mean that everyone's experiences -- pre-, midst-, and post-liberation -- are equivalent. That millstone that is *Mitzrayim* may be affecting all who are part of an oppressive system (see #6 above), but that doesn't mean the weight is the same on all involved.

On the other other hand, Jews have traditions teaching that the divine is in exile with the People and so in need of rescue, too. This does not make divine and human experiences equivalent either. It does suggest, though, that maybe we're back to the first other hand, and ought to make this "all-in-this-together" thing work for us.

### Rescue Yourself and Us!

Jewish prayers begging for rescue and mercy often take the format, "You helped them; help us."

An unusual prayer, attributed to Eleazar Kallir (c.570–c.640 CE), implies that God needs saving, too.

The prayer is translated as something like "Save Yourself and us" or "I and You, may You deliver us both," or "Please rescue me and the divine name" [*Ani Va-ho*]. It includes a chorus of "Yourself and us!" and verses describing God accompanying the People out of *Mitzrayim* and other exiles: "As You rescued the communities You exiled to Babylonia, and Your merciful Presence accompanied them — so save us."

This prayer's line of thought, which has been developing for centuries, is meant to teach that "when there is suffering in the world, God is not on the side of the oppressors. Rather God is with the oppressed and suffers with them" (*Or Hadash: A Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom*).

### "Safety" Cards

The idea that "God is with the oppressed" is too often, I fear, used as a sort of universal *Coup-fourré* card, a "safety" to correct any "hazard," so as to stay on the road.

...For those who never played the card game Mille Bornes, maybe "ace in the hole" or "Get out of jail free" card will make more sense; but I find *Coup-fourré* — the process whereby one is able to surmount a pitfall and keep rolling along — more apt here....



It is way too easy to let “God is with the oppressed” console the already comfortable while leaving the afflicted with their travails.

On this Rereading Exodus journey, all of us must examine our “safety” cards. We must ask ourselves where we are when there is suffering and injustice in the world. If the divine went into exile with us, and something similar is required of us, if we are to make any progress on joint liberation.

We must take steps to remove any sense that we are somehow entitled to dwell in safety when others cannot. If God could join us in exile, we can work to dismantle White Supremacy and other protections that can never be equally shared.

If we believe that “God is not to be found on the side of the oppressors,” we had better consider where we are standing ourselves.

If we are going to come out of this Exodus experience knowing something new,  
we have to begin by understanding where we are.

Jewish history presents abundant examples of our communities mistrusting and fearing State forces: from ancient Rome, through Medieval Europe, the Pale of Settlement, pogroms, ghettos -- there were reasons for the Golem -- to the mid-20th Century.

Today many U.S. Jewish communities view our safety as State-protected, although we know such protection is not universal. Some of us are so inured -- assuming that equal protection cannot be expected by those who are transgender, queer, homeless, mentally ill, black, brown, “foreign,” among others -- that we barely register the inequity.

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

What are some ways that you feel safe?  
Do others have the same protections?  
If not, can some aspect of your safety be extended?  
Or is it time to let go of a "safety" card?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted nineteen.**

## (#21) Motley Mob, part 1

Earlier we considered composition of the group that departed in the Exodus, with many enslaved *Yisrael-ites* not leaving *Mitzrayim* while many *Mitzrayim-ites* did (see “#9: All of Us?”). The “*erevrav*” (or “*erev rav*”) who join the Exodus present a complex image crucial to explore. Sometimes translated as “motley mob” or “mixed multitude,” more in box, next page.

...Two Hebrew expressions are used untranslated here, because how to translate them is the main, open question -- hoping this is not too distracting....

We know very little about this group from the bible’s two verses on the topic:

- When *Yisrael* is escaping from *Mitzrayim*, “an *erevrav*” goes up with them (Exodus 12:38). No details and no drama described -- although do note that the *erevrav* is mentioned with the livestock, flocks, and herds.
- Later, some two years into the wilderness trek, “the ‘*asafsuf*’ has a craving [Old JPS: “fell a lusting”] for food back in *Mitzrayim*, and *Yisrael-ites* cry along with them (Numbers 11:4). This is one in a series of complaints to Moses, and challenges to God; it results in God’s ire and gruesome death to the gluttonous folks.

Some Jewish commentary, going back at least 1000 years, has equated the two expressions, *erev rav* and ‘*asaf suf*. This has the effect of giving the otherwise benign group, found in Exodus, the lustful, complaining, leadership-challenging characteristics of the group in the Book of Numbers. In addition, says Rabbi Gerry Serotta (cited above, #9), there is already an assumption within the Biblical text, that “the troublemakers and dissidents are drawn from the *eravrav*... although, of course, the worst troublemakers are the dissident Levites and Reubenites (Korach, Datan and Aviram, see Num 16ff) or even the murderous Levites themselves.”

“This represents a tendency from Israelite times to the present day, to see the Jewish people as a pure ‘ethnos’ and not an admixture of peoples,” Serotta explains. He goes on to discuss Jewish views, from ancient times until now, of intermarriage and conversion -- an important, related topic for another day.

For a host of historical reasons, those negative readings of verses in the Bible, in turn, contributed to the development of ethnocentric ideas of being *Yisrael-ite*, biblically, and Jewish, across a variety of geographic and demographic settings. In this way, what may look like a minor issue in translation and textual analysis -- around two little used expressions -- has had deep and long-lasting effects in the Jewish world and beyond. Re-examining this can have deep and long-lasting effects, too.

*v'gam erev rav* -- וגם-ערב רב

And a mixed multitude went up with them--וְגַם-עֶרְבַּ רַב, עָלָה אִתָּם  
-- Exodus 12:38

Other Jewish translations:

"a great mixture of nationalities" (*Me'Am Lo'ez*, Turkey, 1730)

"motley mob not of Israelite origin" (Cassuto, Italy, 1883–1951)

"motley throng" (Robert Alter, U.S., 2004); cites Cassuto but opts non-alliterative

King James (1611): "Mixed multitude."

Newer Christian translations: "rabble," "mixed crowd," "an ethnically diverse crowd," and "many other people"

*v'ha-asaf-suf* -- והאסףסוף

והאסףסוף אשר בקרבם, התאו תאוה

And the riffraff that was in their midst felt a craving

וישב ויבכו, גם בני ישראל, ויאמרו, מי יאכלנו בשר.

and the Israelites, too, again wept and said, "Who will feed us meat? [We remember the fish we used to eat for free, the cucumbers and the melons and...]

-- Numbers 11:4 (Alter translation)

"Riff Raff" is from Old French for "one and all."

Oxford English Dictionary:

Persons of a disreputable character or belonging to the lowest class of a community; the scum of a community, class, etc.

Funk & Wagnalls:

Populace or rabble.

### Always a Mixed Multitude!! ??

In 2016, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) published "Mixed Multitudes: Nobody's Free 'til Everybody's Free, A Racial Justice Haggadah for Pesach." It includes this clear explanation:

The mixed multitude ["*erevrav*"] comes from Exodus 12:38. In the Israelites departure from Mitzrayim, the biblical text says: "moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them." A mixed multitude of others -- Egyptians and others living in Mitzrayim who, like the Israelites, needed to escape from the narrow place. We have always been a mixed multitude.

In recent years, "we were always a mixed multitude" has become more popular among Jewish teachers, and I fear something crucial is lost in translation: not from the Hebrew, but in the English "we."

JFREJ described "a mixed multitude" as a group who "**like the Israelites** needed to escape from the narrow place." This "we" includes *Yisrael-ites* **and** others, Jews **and** non-Jews. I love this language and find it powerful for circumstances, like community organizing, when the "we" is, e.g., "all concerned about displacement in DC." But I have also seen this idea used as an attempt to emphasize variety **within** the "*Yisrael-ite* community," biblically, and the Jewish community today. The long-term effect of the latter, I am concerned, will be to re-other historically marginalized Jews, including Mizrahi Jews and Jews of Color. In short, I worry this is unintentionally a new way of calling some Jews riff raff.

I am all for separating "Jew" from any kind of ethnic identity: "We (Jews)" are a varied group of all hues, ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds....and Gerry Serotta suggested that maybe a re-purposing of "*erevrav*," as short-hand for that, is underway. Moreover, an old tradition sees "Jews" as growing out of a joint *Yisrael-ite/erevrav* conversion at Sinai (see #23). But I think we need language emphasizing that "we (Jews)" have always been varied **and** that we (Jews) have always lived and loved and learned within a larger, and varied, "we (wider community)." Just as "joining hands and marching" has sometimes flattened out important differences in our experiences, I think failing to distinguish between *Yisrael-ite* and *erevrav* will muddy our thinking about who is out here in this wilderness and what it means for us.

### Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

What are your thoughts on our multitudinous nature  
as Jews and as a wider community?  
How do we speak usefully about the various 'we's to which we belong?

After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted twenty.

## Source Pages for #15-#21

Bible translations are slightly adapted JPS, except as noted

Cassuto explains in his Commentary on the Book of Exodus that a “sexagesimal” (60-based) number system, versus the 10-based decimal system, was common in the ancient world, including Babylon. On this particular verse, he says: “the figure...comprises a round number in the sexigesimal system (360), with the addition of a multiple of seven (70)”

-- Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, p.148

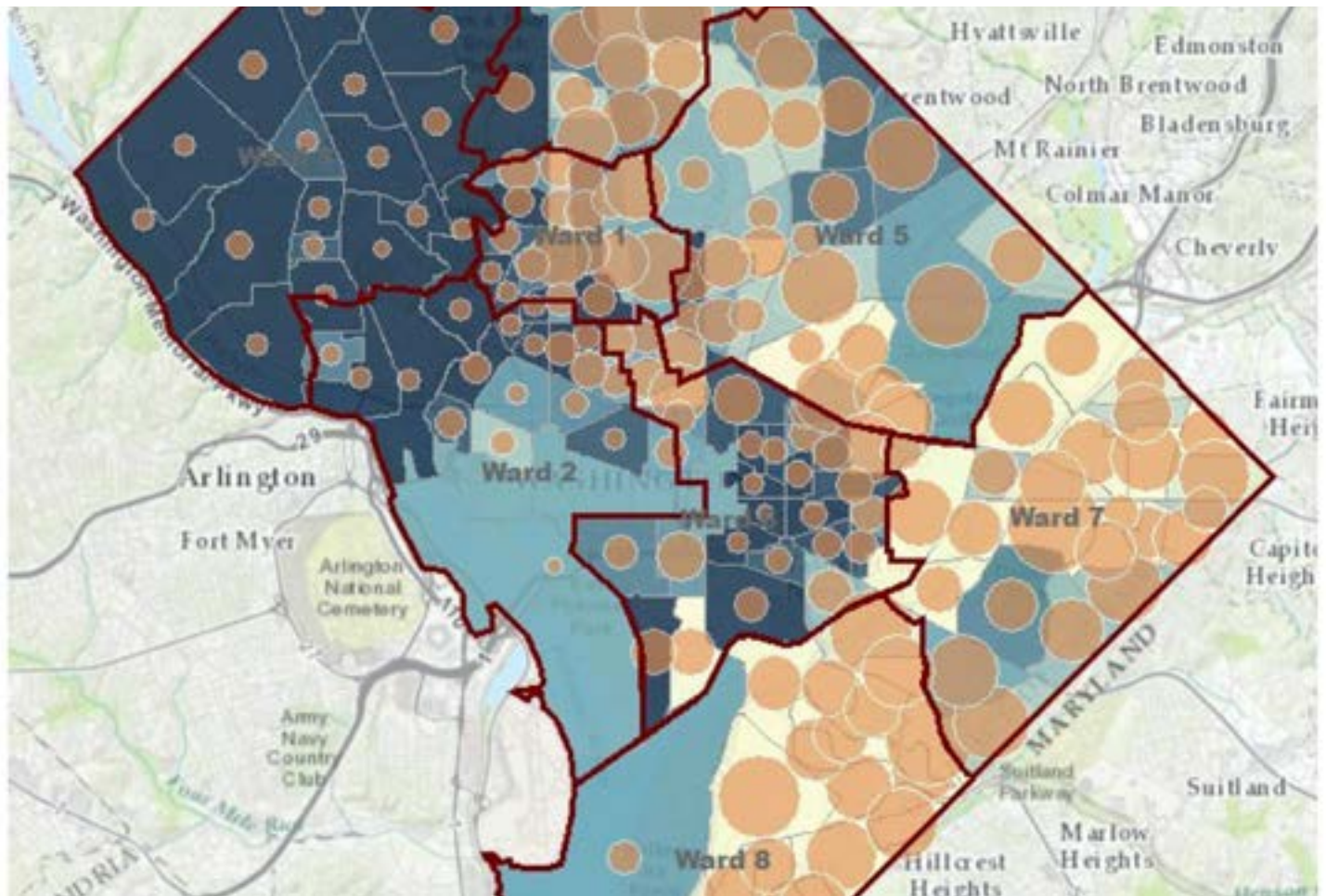
Some scholars go to great lengths to calculate the ages and timing of people and events in the Bible so that 430 makes sense.

### Mixed Messages

Not all Jewish commentary on “mixed multitude” has been negative. For example:

- ***Shemot Rabbah*** (compiled around 1200 CE from earlier sources) says at one point that the “proper [*kosher* ]” people of *Mitzrayim* joined *Yisrael* in making the Passover sacrifice and left with them.
- ***Me’am Lo’ez*** (18th Century CE) explains “*erev rav*” by describing at some length, and quite positively, magicians, formerly of Pharaoh’s court, among some 2.4 million converts leaving *Mitzrayim*.\*\*
- **Umberto Cassuto** (mid-20th Century) focuses on syntax and origin of the word *erevrav*, noting similarity between this and *asafsuf* (from Num 11:4) and several expressions from Isaiah. No judgement of the population.
- **Robert Alter** (late 20th, early 21st Century) focuses on literary and thematic structure of the Book of Numbers and suggests that the text is describing two kinds of gatherings around Moses -- “motley mob” vs “prophetic elders gathered” (Num 11:24) -- rather than making any kind of statement about group identity.

\*\*Note: *Me’am Lo’ez* is a compilation, also including notes about converts retaining pagan ways, being instigators when *Yisrael* sinned, and bearing the brunt of of punishment (“rind” to the desert travelers’ “fruit”). *The Torah Anthology*, p105



This map is the key result of the “Geography of Opportunity” Report from 11th and 12th graders in my “Mapping Inequity in DC” elective. The premise of Ohio University Kirwan Institute’s concept of the “geography of opportunity” is that segregation or where one lives (geography or place) goes a long way in determining one’s access to education, credit, employment, and similar opportunities. Opportunity Maps have been created for about 15 cities across the country, but this is one that my students are creating is first one for Washington DC. In other words, they are [in 2017] doing original research!

We downloaded the data from the US Census and joined it to shapefiles using an ArcGIS program to create our own GIS maps which visualize quantitative data. Using GIS maps (which are quantitative, not qualitative maps), young people with simple tools can analyze large quantitative data sets and do original research. They are using STEM methodology (the scientific research process) and tools to address social science issues.

The shading in the map above indicates greater (darker) or less (lighter) access to opportunity, with “opportunity” being an index of access to health, education, employment, transportation, housing, and wealth indicators. (Indicators that represent greater opportunity are entered as positive number while indicators representing less opportunity are entered as negative numbers.

The circles indicate concentrations of African-Americans, with larger numbers indicating higher concentrations of African Americans and smaller circles indicating smaller concentrations.

Please visit the website for much more -- <http://maret.maps.arcgis.com/>

## Rethinking Exodus Toward Joint Liberation



## River Still to Cross

This is the beginning of the fourth of seven segments, composed of seven stages each, for a total of 49.

Extra source material that didn't quite fit into the numbered/daily sections appears at the end of these three stages.

*Rereading Exodus Toward a New Sense of Joint Liberation, Part 1* includes three+ segments (24 stages).

Part 2 is planned for late April. Your suggestions, and written contributions, for Part 2 are welcome.

Contact [songeveryday@gmail.com](mailto:songeveryday@gmail.com).

## (#22) Trouble to See

"Trouble to see" played an essential role in the Exodus story, according to Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg. Based on ancient, Talmudic tales of Moses at the burning bush, she writes:

God chooses to reveal Himself to Moses, because he has "gone to trouble to see." ... it is his capacity to "twist his neck," to turn his face in wonder and questioning, that brings him the voice of God.

The neck in torsion—an image for desire, a counter image to the stiff-necked intransigence of those who set themselves against the new. Within Moses himself, within his people, within the Egyptians, even within the representations of God in the narratives of redemption, the tensions of Exodus will seek resolution, the momentary equilibrium that again and again is to be lost and reclaimed.

— Avivah Zornberg,  
*Particulars of Rapture*, p.79-80

The Exodus story is filled with what Zornberg calls "the stiff-necked intransigence of those who set themselves against the new" as well as Moses' "trouble to see." Moses had to really twist, according to the commentary above, to see something he might have otherwise missed... new or not. Twisting can be harsh on a body, especially one not accustomed to such an action. But we still have to emulate Moses here in this tension between the urgent need to escape and the pauses built into the seder nudging us to look around.

- Have we "gone to trouble to see" things we did not perceive, or perceive as clearly, before this Rereading Exodus journey began?
- How are we helping one another to notice and appreciate variety already in our Jewish and wider communities?
- How are we working in- and outside Jewish communities for more and deeper inclusion -- across ability, gender expression, sexual orientation, class, color, differences of background and belief?

**This stage of the Rereading Exodus journey is meant to stimulate and invite thoughts on this and related topics for Part 2 of this book.**

**Please consider sharing yours.**

### "Bernie Sanders Looks Like Everyone's Jewish Grandpa"

"[He] doesn't try to be your cute Jewish grandpa, he just is."

Thus read a July 2016 article in the *Jewish Daily Forward*. It was meant as light-hearted fluff, of course. But it highlights a serious situation: Despite the fact that some 11% of U.S. Jews are non-White (see American Jewish Population Project, e.g.), many people in- and outside of Jewish communities retain a kind of casting-call mindset about who "looks Jewish": Central- or Eastern European descent, maybe with a hint of an accent and a smattering of Yiddish-sounding phrases.

The author, many readers, and the editorial staff at the *Forward* were apparently happy to agree, at least for the purposes of a short fluff piece, that Bernie Sanders "looks like *everyone's* Jewish Grandpa." But odds are that some of the Jews pictured on the next page, who bear little physical resemblance to Bernie Sanders, are somebody's Jewish grandpa, or grandma, too. (I know that at least one of the Jews of Color pictured is a grandparent.) Not all Jews look one way. And not all their grandparents do either.

We fail to name what we don't recognize and vice versa.





Images above from Facebook pages of Jewish Multiracial Network and Jews of All Hues (public content).

Image at left: "Ethiopian Jews," Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, March 30, 2012 (correspondent Fred de Sam Lazaro; videographer not listed). Fair use for educational purposes.



"Many of us fight tirelessly for social justice against institutionalized discrimination in this country, yet operate as vehicles perpetuating those same systems of marginalization upon the Jews that don't look like us in our own pews. Or aren't married the way we are. Or don't believe precisely as we believe....

"We tout the Jewish value of every human being created in the same reflection of the Divine Image, but we label other Jews as not being "really" Jewish because they aren't what we see when we look in the mirror."

-- speech of title character,  
MaNishtana, *Ariel Samson: Freelance Rabbi*

...Bigging up all people who are a little miffed 'cuz someone tells you you don't look like or act like your people. Impossible. Because you are your people. You just tell them they don't *look*. period.  
-- from Vanessa Hidary, "The Hebrew Mamita"

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

Do we "label other Jews as not being 'really' Jewish because they aren't what we seen when we look in the mirror"?  
Do we tell others (or ourselves) that we don't "look like your people"?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted twenty-one.**

## (#23) Motley Mob, part 2

The Bible text itself does not give an explanation for why the *erevrav* (#21), or any individual among the group, “went up with them.” Over the centuries, commentary has suggested a range of reasons, from the most base self-interest to the most sincere religious conversion and/or identification with *Yisrael*.

Among the few individuals identified in commentary as part of the *erevrav* is the daughter of Pharaoh who rescues Moses from the river. Her tale in the Bible is quite sparse (six verses total, and she is not named; Ex 2:5-10, Source Pages). We do not learn her initial motives for rescuing Moses or anything else about her, before or after she secures a wet-nurse for the baby. This allows for a variety of interpretations -- in popular culture as well as in Bible commentary -- about who she might have been and her relationships with *Yisrael* and/or *erevrav*.

Zora Neale Hurston has young Miriam, older sister of Moses, describe the scene at the river:

She made them play music and they danced for her because she was so glad because she found the child. I could see everything they did, mama. I wasn't far from the Princess. She told 'em she loved the child a lot already.  
-- Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (previously cited), p.30

Ira Gershwin's lyric in "It Ain't Necessarily So" suggests a completely different story -- one played out, in many versions, countless times over the centuries in so many places where women's choices in bearing and raising children were limited by law and custom. The Gershwins don't follow this up with commentary or sermonizing on what it might mean for Moses and the *Yisrael-ites* or the *Mitzrayim-ites* were his origin different from what "you're liable to read in the Bible" (see box.)

Li'l Moses was found in a stream  
He floated on water  
Till Ol' Pharaoh's daughter  
She fished him, she said, from dat stream  
-- Ira & George Gershwin  
“It Ain't Necessarily So,” 1935

Contemporary biblical scholar Rev. Wilda Gafney (see box, next page) writes:

I call the princess who nurtures Moses Sheshan (the Egyptian word for lotus)...The story does not tell us how old she is, if she is married or single, if she has other children or is infertile, if she has siblings....Did [Pharaoh] know she was fostering a Hebrew child? Did she publicly differ with her father on his treatment of [*Yisrael-ites*]? Was she a beloved and indulged daughter? Or was she one of so many children by so many women that he could not keep them straight?

...The drash I offer constructs her as an ally who works to bring Moses into the world of her privilege. Note that she doesn't work to dismantle that privilege. Allyship has its limits.  
-- Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, p.99, 100

Two stories of Pharaoh's daughter (*Bat-Pharaoh*) receiving the name she is called in post-Biblical Jewish tradition:

- In one chronology, she received her new name at Sinai, after the People had been in the wilderness for two months. God tells her: “Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son; you, too, though you are not My daughter, yet I will call you My Daughter [*Batya*]” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:3).
- In another, we see Bat-Pharaoh completing her conversion -- “bathing in the river to cleanse herself from the impurity of her father’s idols” -- before she ever saw the basket and adopted Moses (B. Sotah 12b).

As we've seen (see #15), Torah has 70 faces, so we need not decide which chronology is "right." But each choice says many things about the meaning of what I'm calling here the "*Yisrael-ite* community" and who belongs and how.

If, as in the Talmudic tradition, she had completed her conversion before adopting Moses, Batya was already part of the *Yisrael-ite* community when she left *Mitzrayim*.

If, as in the Vayikra Rabbah tradition, she was named (as part of a conversion) at Sinai, Batya was initially part of *erevra*, in some sense adjunct to the *Yisrael-ite* community, when she left *Mitzrayim*.

A generous read of the first tradition is that the Sages of the Talmud were conferring what they considered a gift on Batya, giving her an honorary status -- vaguely akin, perhaps, to inviting her to the barbeque; a less generous read is that they simply could not cope with a non-*Yisrael-ite* in such a crucial role and so wrote her into the fold. Conversion stories are also imagined for Zipporah, wife of Moses; Jethro, her father; midwives Shifrah and Puah; and pretty much any Bible character the Sages saw as one of the good guys or as redeemable.

The second tradition singles Batya out for a new name but includes her in what is understood as the mass conversion of all those at Sinai, *Yisrael-ite* and others present. It is "the birth of a whole people -- not only as an ethnic family but as a particular kind of community, one made up of the despised, the enslaved, who come forward to change history -- makes for the birth of a new approach to life" (Waskow and Berman, *Freedom Journeys*, p.29).

Both traditions have their positive aspects...and we'll return to this. But both, in the end, remove any chance to see a non-*Yisrael-ite* as a good guy and a fellow traveler. By converting everyone in the story, we lose the possibility of exploring a variety of relationships, including -- as in Wilda Gafney's version -- allyship....

**The search continues for a framework seeing "we (Jews)" as diverse and "we (Jews and non-Jews)" as a larger, diverse community. Share your thoughts in Part 2 of this book.**

**Rev. Wilda C. Gafney** is Professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, TX. She is the author of many books and articles, including *Womanist Midrash* (cited here), and contributions to *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* (cited above #15). She is an Episcopal Priest, active in inter-religious work, and, according to her Twitter profile: "fights biblical illiteracy|white supremacy|patriarchy." She is a former member of Dorshei Derekh Reconstructionist Minyan in Germantown, PA, and taught at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

### **Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

What does this one biblical character,  
and the many ways she has been drawn over time,  
tell us about how we see community boundaries?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted twenty-two.**

## (#24) Lagged, Late, So Long

In terms of narrative in the Book of Exodus, our discussion has not yet progressed very far. As I close out Part 1 of this book, I ask you to jump ahead about 20 chapters, to another dramatic point:

God has told Moses, “Come up to Me into the mount and be there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written, to teach them” (Ex 24:18, JPS adapted). Things are progressing with teachings, including elaborate instructions for constructing a traveling wilderness worship space. Eight chapters later, however, God tells Moses to go back down, because “your people, the people you brought out of *Mitzrayim*, has become corrupt” (Ex 32:7).

...Use of “your people” (masculine singular) here, in God speaking to Moses, lends itself to more commentary suggesting that perhaps the *erev rav* are responsible for what looks like idolatrous behavior and that Moses is responsible for this group of people coming along on the Exodus. Perhaps we’ll explore this further in Part 2 of this book. Meanwhile...

Whenever translations vary a great deal, that is a clue that there is something interesting going on with the Hebrew. See Source Pages for some different ways of looking at what happened: It seems that Moses was "late" or he "lagged" or was "so long," and this led to a crisis, known as the "incident of the Golden Calf" (Ex 32:1ff).

One way I've come to envision this Torah moment is like this: Imagine you're on a roadtrip with relative strangers to parts unknown, when the driver disappears behind a creepy truck-stop. Is he seeking directions or obtaining supplies? In need of privacy – to relieve himself, or meditate, whatever? Or, given that we barely know these fellow travelers, are we sure we rule out that driver might be up to no good, something we'd rather not witness or be party to?

Unless the instruction before he disappeared were dramatic and very specific – like “give me ten minutes and then come after me” or “wait twenty minutes and then take off, no matter what” – how do we decide what to do and when, as his return is delayed? If the driver left someone else in charge, do we automatically trust them? If our relationships to other travelers are stronger than links to a leader, will factions develop? How long do we wait before declaring “enough is enough” and commandeering the car or going our own ways?

I suspect that most of us, at some point, have been in a situation of uncertainty and some gravity which forced us to decide, for safety and sanity, if and when to bail.

We've probably been involved in situations, too -- in our public politics if not on a personal road trip -- in which someone claims to speak for God and all involved have to decide whom to trust and how to move forward, individually and collectively.

Return, for a moment, to the "Another River" section at the start of this book:

**This right here is the purpose of this book:  
Re-reading Exodus  
so that Jews and non-Jews,  
with our varied relationships, and lack thereof, to text and tradition,  
can together find new ways to think about, and jointly act for, liberation.**

Perhaps you are reading these words shortly after the book's release date in late March 2020;  
or maybe you've reached this stage in late April, 24 days into *Sefira*;  
or you might be reading at another time entirely.

Many readers will find this page while the Rona (COVID-19) is still making our lives more uncertain than we had once thought usual. And, dear reader, your author is having a hard time imaging what life will be like in the Nation's Capitol, its underbelly or elsewhere, in the rest of the U.S., or beyond.

...So, what are we supposed to do when faced with uncertainty?

Most of the Golden Calf story does not offer the best model for handling a crisis or any kind of situation. It does remind us of how frightening uncertainty can be, on our own and within a community. The Golden Calf story warns us of how dangerous it is to let that fright convince us to jump to conclusions and then launch into action, thinking that we know the answers.

Considering the problems that arose due to delay or lag or lateness, I am reminded, too, of a phrase from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail: Justice too long delayed is justice denied.

Like so much in Jewish tradition, this leaves us in the tension between two ideas: not acting precipitously from fear, on the one hand; on the other, not allowing fear to keep us from action when it's time, in the tag-line of We Act Radio, to

**#dosomething.**

**Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey**

How are we doing on this Rereading Exodus journey?  
Where have we yet to travel?  
What more needs to be said about avenues we've already explored?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --  
Yesterday we counted twenty-three.**

## Source Pages for #22-#24

Bible translations are slightly adapted JPS, except as noted

### Exodus 2:5-10

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river; and her maidens walked along by the river-side; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it.

And she opened it, and saw it, even the child; and behold a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him, and said: 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'

Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter: 'Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?'

And Pharaoh's daughter said to her: 'Go.' And the maiden went and called the child's mother.

And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her: 'Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.' And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said: 'Because I drew him out of the water.'

And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren.

A Talmudic commentary provides another suggestion about Batya's life before Moses:

The verse states: "And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe [*lirchotz*] in the river" (Exodus 2:5). Rabbi Yochanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: This teaches that she came down to the river to cleanse herself from the impurity of her father's idols, as she was immersing herself as part of the conversion process.

-- B. Talmud, Sotah 12b

Possibly something was lost or deliberately omitted from biblical text at some point. It seems likely, however, that Exodus is simply not concerned with the backgrounds of the woman who raised Moses or of his birth mother. Neither woman is named during the early reporting on his origins. Nor is Moses' father, for that matter.

Later (Exodus 6:20), the names Amram and Yocheved (Jocheved, Jochebed) are introduced for Moses' parents, and they appear several more times in the Torah. Pharaoh's daughter does not appear again after her six verses, and she remains unnamed in the Bible. She is called "*Batya*" or "*Bitya*," which means "Daughter of God," in later Jewish tradition.

In one midrash, it is God who names Pharaoh's daughter [*Bat Pharaoh*]:

Rabbi Yehoshuah taught in the name of Rabbi Levi that The Holy one said to Batyah the daughter of Pharaoh: Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son; you, too, though you are not My daughter, yet I will call you My Daughter. This is why it says: "These were the sons of Bithiah daughter of Pharaoh" -- *Vayikra Rabbah* [midrash on Leviticus] 1:3

## Exodus 2:1

Three translations, with one footnote, of Exodus 2:1

When the people saw that Moses **was so long** in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him."

– JPS Tanakh, 1985

And the people saw that Moses **lagged** in coming down from the mountain, and the people assembled against Aaron and said to him, "Rise up, make us gods that will go before us..."

– Robert Alter, 2004 (Norton)

Now when the people saw that Moses **was shamefully-late\*** in coming down from the mountain, the people assembled against Aharon and said to him: Arise, make us a god who will go before us..."

– Everett Fox, 1983 (Schocken)

\*Fox's note on this verse: Others, "delayed," but the Hebrew verb (*boshesh*) carries the connotation of "causing-shame/embarrassment."

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NOTE: Some items here may not be included until Part 2

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New American Haggadah (above)  
Ritual Well, project of Reconstructionist movement, originally for feminist versions of rituals or new feminist rituals; now shares all kinds of new rituals and prayers, e.g.: healing after mass shootings  
*The Open Door* (above)

NOTE: I did not have time to track down permissions (yet), so we are not making the CRD Haggadah available.



Babylonian Talmud -- two translations cited here

Soncino 1947, translated and edited by R. Dr. Isidore Epstein, now available at Internet Archive and repackaged into several PDF versions by Halakhah.com (usually without citation)

Sefaria.org offers a crowd-sourced translation based on the William Davidson, free digital version, also relying on the Steinsaltz, with creative common license

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Thanks for reading.

Comments welcome.

Please consider contributing  
an idea for the next 25 days' pages.

Ideas or written pages needed by April 22.

Contact Virginia Spatz  
songeveryday@gmail.com

Also join the journey via  
**Anchor.fm/virginia-spatz**  
**"Rethinking Exodus toward Joint Liberation"**



## Marking the Journey

### STEP 1: REREADING EXODUS MEDITATION

Here I am, ready and prepared to count the days and to make these days count. Aware that we are neither expected to complete the task nor free to neglect it,  
I join others in finding new ways forward from the Narrow Place.

**Continue with Step 2 below**

and/or

insert traditional SEFIRA A) intention and B) blessing (next page)

and C) count (see following pages)

followed by D) closing prayer

**STEP 2: COUNT:** "Today is..." See daily page for count.

### STEP 3 -- CLOSING THOUGHT

In the spirit of the Exodus, I seek the release of all whose bodies and spirits remain captive, and pledge to help effect that liberation

## Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks

PLEASE NOTE: all attempts to find someone who knows non-binary Hebrew to check my draft failed.  
So, this is my best attempt. Maybe an update will be coming, if I finally find someone who knows.

### A) INTENTION

(nb) הנני מוכנה ומזמנה

(f) הנני מוכנה ומזמנת

(m) הנני מוכן ומזמן

לקיים מצות עשה של ספירת העמר כמו שכתוב שכתוב בתורה  
וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימות תהינה. עד ממחרת השבת  
השביעית תספרו חמשים יום

*Hineni mukhaneh umzummeneh* (nb)

*Hineni mukhanah umzummenet* (f)

*Hineni mukhan umzumman* (m).

Here I am, ready and prepared

(ALL cont.) *lekayem mitsvat 'aseh shel s'firat ha'omer, kemo shekatuv baTorah --*  
to fulfill the positive mitsvah of counting the Omer, as it is written in the Torah --

*"Us'fartem lakhem mimaharat hashabbat miyom havi'echem et omer hat'nufa; sheva shabbatot t'mimot tihiyenah. Ad mimaharat hashabbat hash'vi'it tisp'ru chamishim yom."* (Lev 23:15-16) .

You shall count for yourself from the day after the day of rest, from the day you brought the sheaf of wave-offering; seven complete weeks shall be counted; you shall count unto the day after the seventh week, numbering fifty days ."

### B) BLESSING

(nb) ברוכה אתה יה אלהינו רוח העולם אשר קדשתנו במצותה וצונו על ספירת העמר

(f) ברוכה את יה אלהינו רוח העולם אשר קדשתנו במצותה וצונו על ספירת העמר

(m) ברוך אתה אדני אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על ספירת העמר

*B'rukheh ateh Yah Eloheynu ruach ha'olamim*

*asher kideshetnu bemitzvatehe vetzivetnu...*

*B'rukha at Yah Eloheynu khay ha'olamim*

*asher kideshatnu bemitzvateha vetzivatnu...*

*Barukh atah Adonay Eloheynu mekor khayim asher kideshanu bemitzvotav*

*vetzivanu...*

*...al sefirat ha'omer.*

[C) Then counts -- see following pages]

Finally, D) closing prayer -- found at the bottom of counting pages here.

### C) RITUAL COUNTING

*Sefira*, ritual counting of the Omer, is preceded by a blessing (previous page) and carried out in the evening, beginning with the second night of Passover.

To facilitate this ritual of blessing THEN counting, we tell someone who is observing *Sefira* the count for the previous night so the new count can be completed after the blessing.

To emphasize the commandment to count the whole seven weeks, and 49 days, the entire long count is treated as one long ritual. So, if one forgets to count for several days, the count should continue but the blessing is no longer recited along with the counting. If one night is missed, it is possible to catch up on the following morning (without a blessing) and then return to the nightly blessing and count the next night; if two nights are missed, the full period's counting has been interrupted, and counting continues without the blessing.

For example --

היום יום אחד לעמר.

***Hayom yom echad la-omer.***

Today is day one of the omer.

היום שני ימים לעמר.

***Hayom sh'nei yamim la-omer.***

...two days...

היום עשרים יום שהם שני שבועות וששה ימים לעמר.

***Hayom esrim yom shehem sh'nei shavuot v'shishah yamim la-omer.***

...20 days...2 weeks and 6 days...

## C) COUNT

			Evening of --
<b>Hayom yom echad la-omer.</b> Today is day one of the omer.	4/9/20	3/28/21	4/16/22
<b>Hayom sh'nei yamim la-omer.</b> ...two days...	4/10/20	3/29/21	4/17/22
<b>Hayom sh'loshah yamim la-omer.</b> ...three days...	4/11/20	3/30/21	4/18/22
<b>Hayom arbaah yamim la-omer.</b> ...four days...	4/12/20	3/31/21	4/19/22
<b>Hayom chamishah yamim la-omer.</b> ...five days...	4/13/20	4/1/21	4/20/22
<b>Hayom shishah yamim la-omer.</b> ...six days...	4/14/20	4/2/21	4/21/22
<b>Hayom shivah yamim shehem shavua echad la-omer.</b> ...seven days, which are one week of the omer.	4/15/20	4/3/21	4/22/22
<b>Hayom sh'monah yamim shehem shavua echad v'yom echad la-omer.</b> ...8 days, which are one week and one day ...	4/16/20	4/4/21	4/23/22
<b>Hayom tishah yamim shehem shavua echad ushnei yamim la-omer.</b> ...9 days, which are one week and two days...	4/17/20	4/5/21	4/24/22
<b>Hayom asarah yamim shehem shavua echad ushloshah yamim la-omer.</b> ...10 days, which are one week and three days...	4/18/20	4/6/21	4/25/22
<b>Hayom achad asar yom shehem shavua echad v'arbaah yamim la-omer.</b> ...11 days, which are one week and four days...	4/19/20	4/7/21	4/26/22
<b>Hayom sh'neim asar yom shehem shavua echad vachamishah yamim la-omer.</b> ...12 days, which are one week and five days...	4/20/20	4/8/21	4/27/22
<b>Hayom sh'loshah asar yom shehem shavua echad v'shishah yamim la-omer.</b> ...13 days, which are one week and six days...	4/21/20	4/9/21	4/28/22
<b>Hayom arbaah asar yom shehem sh'nei shavuot la-omer.</b> ...14 days, which are two weeks...	4/22/20	4/10/21	4/29/22
<b>Hayom chamishah asar yom shehem sh'nei shavuot v'yom echad la-omer.</b> ...15 days...2 weeks and 1 day...	4/23/20	4/11/21	4/30/22
<b>Hayom shishah asar yom shehem sh'nei shavuot ushnei yamim la-omer.</b> ...16 days...2 weeks and 2 days...	4/24/20	4/12/21	5/1/22
<b>Hayom shivah asar yom shehem sh'nei shavuot ushloshah yamim la-omer.</b> ...17 days...2 weeks and 3 days...	4/25/20	4/13/21	5/2/22
<b>Hayom sh'monah asar yom shehem sh'nei shavuot v'arbaah yamim la-omer.</b> ...18 days...2 weeks and 4 days...	4/26/20	4/14/21	5/3/22
<b>Hayom tishah asar yom shehem sh'nei shavuot vachamishah yamim la-omer.</b> ...19 days...2 weeks and 5 days...	4/27/20	4/15/21	5/4/22
<b>Hayom esrim yom shehem sh'nei shavuot v'shishah yamim la-omer.</b> ...20 days...2 weeks and 6 days...	4/28/20	4/16/21	5/5/22
<b>Hayom echad v'esrim yom shehem sh'loshah shavuot la-omer.</b> ...21 days...3 weeks...	4/29/20	4/17/21	5/6/22

**Li-zekher yetzi'at mitzrayim**

**yehi ratzon sheh-yishukhreru kol ha-shevuyim hen ba-guf,  
hen ba-nefesh vi-sheh-neshamesh ke'ezer lizro'a Elohim ha-netuyah likrat kherut.**

In remembrance of the going out from Mitzrayim,  
we pray that you release all whose bodies and spirits remain captive and enable us to extend  
Your outstretched arm in the process of liberation.



## C) COUNT

היום יום אחד לעֲמָה.  
 היום שְׁנֵי יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום אַרְבָּעָה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום חֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שֵׁשָׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שְ�בַעַת יָמִים שֶׁהֵם שְׁבֹועַת אֶחָד לְעֲמָה.

היום שְׁמוֹנֶה יָמִים שֶׁהֵם שְׁבֹועַת אֶחָד וְיוֹם אֶחָד לְעֲמָה.  
 היום תְּשַׁעָה יָמִים שֶׁהֵם שְׁבֹועַת אֶחָד וּשְׁנֵי יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום עֶשְׂרֵה יָמִים שֶׁהֵם שְׁבֹועַת אֶחָד וּשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום אֶחָד עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁבֹועַת אֶחָד וְאַרְבָּעָה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁבֹועַת אֶחָד וְחֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁבֹועַת אֶחָד וְשֵׁשָׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁנֵי שְׁבֹועוֹת לְעֲמָה.

היום חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁנֵי שְׁבֹועוֹת וְיוֹם אֶחָד לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שֵׁשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁנֵי שְׁבֹועוֹת וּשְׁנֵי יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שְׁבַעַת עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁנֵי שְׁבֹועוֹת וּשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁנֵי שְׁבֹועוֹת וְאַרְבָּעָה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום תְּשַׁעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁנֵי שְׁבֹועוֹת וְחֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום עֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁנֵי שְׁבֹועוֹת וְשֵׁשָׁה יָמִים לְעֲמָה.  
 היום אֶחָד וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׁבֹועוֹת לְעֲמָה.

לְזִכֵּר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם.  
 יְהִי רָצוֹן שִׁשְׁחִירוֹ כָּל הַשְּׁבוּיִים הֵן בְּגוֹף  
 הֵן בְּנַפֶּשׁ וְשִׁשְׁמִשׁ כְּעֶזְרֵ לְזֹרַע אֱלֹהִים הַנְּטוּיָה לְקִרְאָת חֲרוֹת

Evening of --

**Hayom sh'nayim v'esrim yom**

**shehem sh'loshah shavuot v'yom echad la-omer.**

...22 days...3 weeks and 1 day... 4/30/20 4/18/21 5/7/22

**Hayom sh'loshah v'esrim yom shehem sh'loshah shavuot ushnei yamim la-omer.**

...23 days...3 weeks and 2 days... 5/1/20 4/19/21 5/8/22

**Hayom arbaah v'esrim yom shehem sh'loshah shavuot ushloshah yamim la-omer.**

...24 days...3 weeks and 3 days... 5/2/20 4/20/21 5/9/22

**Hayom chamishah v'esrim yom shehem sh'loshah shavuot v'arbaah yamim la-omer.**

...25 days...3 weeks and 4 days... 5/3/20 4/21/21 5/10/22

**Hayom shishah v'esrim yom shehem sh'loshah shavuot vachamishah yamim la-omer.**

...26 days...3 weeks and 5 days... 5/4/20 4/22/21 5/11/22

**Hayom shivah v'esrim yom shehem sh'loshah shavuot v'shishah yamim la-omer.**

...27 days...3 weeks and 6 days... 5/5/20 4/23/21 5/12/22

**Hayom sh'monah v'esrim yom shehem arbaah shavuot la-omer.**

...28 days...4 weeks 5/6/20 4/24/21 5/13/22

**Hayom tishah v'esrim yom shehem arbaah shavuot v'yom echad la-omer.**

...29 days...4 weeks and 1 day... 5/7/20 4/25/21 5/14/22

**Hayom sh'loshim yom shehem arbaah shavuot ushnei yamim la-omer.**

...30 days...4 weeks and 2 days... 5/8/20 4/26/21 5/15/22

**Hayom echad ushloshim yom shehem arbaah shavuot ushloshah yamim la-omer.**

...31 days...4 weeks and 3 days... 5/9/20 4/27/21 5/16/22

**Hayom sh'nayim ushloshim yom shehem arbaah shavuot v'arbaah yamim la-omer.**

...32 days...4 weeks and 4 days... 5/10/20 4/28/21 5/17/22

**Hayom sh'loshah ushloshim yom shehem arbaah shavuot vachamishah yamim la-omer.**

...33 days...4 weeks and 5 days... 5/11/20 4/29/21 5/18/22

**Hayom arbaah ushloshim yom shehem arbaah shavuot v'shishah yamim la-omer.**

...34 days...4 weeks and 6 days... 5/12/20 4/30/21 5/19/22

**Hayom chamishah ushloshim yom shehem chamishah shavuot la-omer.**

...35 days...5 weeks... 5/13/20 5/1/21 5/20/22

**Li-zekher yetzi'at mitzrayim**

**yehi ratzon sheh-yishukhreru kol ha-shevuyim hen ba-guf,**

**hen ba-nefesh vi-sheh-neshamesh ke'ezer lizro'a Elohim ha-netuyah likrat kherut.**

In remembrance of the going out from Mitzrayim,  
we pray that you release all whose bodies and spirits remain captive and enable us to extend  
Your outstretched arm in the process of liberation.

היום שְׁנִי וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְיוֹם אֶחָד לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום שְׁלֹשָׁה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁנֵי יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום אַרְבָּעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום חֲמִשָּׁה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְאַרְבָּעָה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום שֵׁשָׁה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְחֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום שִׁבְעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְשֵׁשָׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום שְׁמוֹנֶה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת לְעֹמֶה.

היום תְּשַׁעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְיוֹם אֶחָד לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁנֵי יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום אֶחָד וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְאַרְבָּעָה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום שְׁלֹשָׁה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְחֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום אַרְבָּעָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם אַרְבָּעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְשֵׁשָׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶה.  
 היום חֲמִשָּׁה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם שֶׁהֵם חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת לְעֹמֶה.

לְזִכֹּר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם.

יְהִי רָצוֹן שִׁישְׁחֻרְרוֹ כָּל הַשְּׁבוּיִים הֵן בְּגוֹף  
 הֵן בְּנַפֶּשׁ וְשִׁשְׁמֵשׁ כְּעֶזְרִי לְזִרְעֵי אֱלֹהִים הַנְּטוּיָה לְקִרְאָת חֲרוּת

# Evening of --

<b>Hayom shishah ushloshim yom shehem chamishah shavuot v'yom echad la-omer.</b>			
...36 days...5 weeks and 1 day...	5/14/20	5/2/21	5/21/22
<b>Hayom shivah ushloshim yom shehem chamishah shavuot ushnei yamim la-omer.</b>			
...37 days...5 weeks and 2 days...	5/15/20	5/3/21	5/22/22
<b>Hayom sh'monah ushloshim yom shehem chamishah shavuot ushloshah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...38 days...5 weeks and 3 days...	5/16/20	5/4/21	5/23/22
<b>Hayom tishah ushloshim yom shehem chamishah shavuot v'arbaah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...39 days...5 weeks and 4 days...	5/17/20	5/5/21	5/24/22
<b>Hayom arbaim yom shehem chamishah shavuot vachamishah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...40 days...5 weeks and 5 days...	5/18/20	5/6/21	5/25/22
<b>Hayom echad v'arbaim yom shehem chamishah shavuot v'shishah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...41 days...5 weeks and 6 days...	5/19/20	5/7/21	5/26/22
<b>Hayom sh'nayim v'arbaim yom shehem shishah shavuot la-omer.</b>			
...42 days...6 weeks...	5/20/20	5/8/21	5/27/22

<b>Hayom sh'loshah v'arbaim yom shehem shishah shavuot v'yom echad la-omer.</b>			
...43 days...6 weeks and 1 day...	5/21/20	5/9/21	5/28/22
<b>Hayom arbaah v'arbaim yom shehem shishah shavuot ushnei yamim la-omer.</b>			
...44 days...6 weeks and 2 days...	5/22/20	5/10/21	5/29/22
<b>Hayom chamishah v'arbaim yom shehem shishah shavuot ushloshah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...45 days...6 weeks and 3 days...	5/23/20	5/11/21	5/30/22
<b>Hayom shishah v'arbaim yom shehem shishah shavuot v'arbaah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...46 days...6 weeks and 4 days...	5/24/20	5/12/21	5/31/22
<b>Hayom shivah v'arbaim yom shehem shishah shavuot vachamishah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...47 days...6 weeks and 5 days...	5/25/20	5/13/21	6/1/22
<b>Hayom sh'monah v'arbaim yom shehem shishah shavuot v'shishah yamim la-omer.</b>			
...48 days...6 weeks and 6 days...	5/26/20	5/14/21	6/2/22
<b>Hayom tishah v'arbaim yom shehem shivah shavuot la-omer.</b>			
...49 days...7 weeks...	5/27/20	5/15/21	6/3/22

## Li-zekher yetzi'at mitzrayim

yehi ratzon sheh-yishukhreru kol ha-shevuyim hen ba-guf,  
hen ba-nefesh vi-sheh-neshamesh ke'ezer lizro'a Elohim ha-netuyah likrat kherut.

In remembrance of the going out from Mitzrayim,  
we pray that you release all whose bodies and spirits remain captive and enable us to extend  
Your outstretched arm in the process of liberation.

היום שְׁשָׁה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יום שֶׁהֵם חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְיוֹם אֶחָד לְעֹמָה.  
 היום שְׁבַעַה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יום שֶׁהֵם חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁנֵי יָמִים לְעֹמָה.  
 היום שְׁמוֹנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יום שֶׁהֵם חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וּשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֹמָה.  
 היום תִּשְׁעָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יום שֶׁהֵם חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְאַרְבָּעָה יָמִים לְעֹמָה.  
 היום אַרְבָּעִים יום שֶׁהֵם חֲמִשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְחֲמִשָּׁה יָמִים לְעֹמָה.  
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 היום שְׁנַיִם וְאַרְבָּעִים יום שֶׁהֵם שִׁשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת לְעֹמָה.

היום שְׁלֹשָׁה וְאַרְבָּעִים יום שֶׁהֵם שִׁשָּׁה שָׁבוּעוֹת וְיוֹם אֶחָד לְעֹמָה.  
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לְזִכֹּר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם.

יְהִי רָצוֹן שִׁשְׁחֻרְרוּ כָּל הַשְּׁבוּיִים הֵן בְּגוֹף  
 הֵן בְּנַפְשׁ וְשִׁנְשִׁמֶשׁ כְּעֶזְר לְזֶרַע אֱלֹהִים הַנְּטוּיָה לְקִרְאָת חֲרוּת

