

Hadar's Project Zug Shavuot Companion

4 Classes
for Your Tikkun Leil Shavuot 5784



ON STUDYING TORAH IN TIMES OF WAR

The *aron*, the holy ark, housing the *luhot* (tablets) under the protective reach of two golden cherubs, is a premier Jewish symbol, a singular representation of God's presence, power, and Torah. According to R. Yehudah ben Lakish (in the Baraita de-Melekheth ha-Mishkan), however, the *aron* could not be a singular representative of Torah because there was not only one *aron*! He believed there existed two arks—one for the Torah, and one for the *shivrei luhot*, broken shards of the first tablets destroyed in response to the sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32:19). This second *aron*, the one carrying the broken shards of Torah, had a particular function: it would accompany the Children of Israel when they went to war.

On every level, war is a shattering experience. So perhaps it's fitting that the Torah carried by the Children of Israel into battle would be the broken version. Yet there's a sadness in it, too, to think that even the Torah we hold onto in times of war such as these is as broken as we might feel.

How uplifting and hopeful it is, then, to consider that the practice of learning Torah all night on Shavuot is called a *tikkun*, a repair. On some level, perhaps our engrossment in Torah study this Shavuot might constitute a spiritual repair for the broken things we are holding now in our hearts—our Torah, our people, and our world.

As you learn through this packet, we encourage you to keep in mind the brokenness of what is happening in Israel and beyond. May our Torah study provide some *tikkun* for all of it, and may we soon see days of everlasting peace.

The Hadar Team



◆ Tikkun Leil Shavuot 5784

Tikkun Leil Shavuot is the tradition of studying Torah all night on Shavuot. According to a *midrash*, the Israelites overslept on the morning they were to receive the Torah and had to be awakened by a *shofar* blast from God. We learn Torah all night so that we can be awake on Shavuot morning and make up for our ancestors' mistake (a *tikkun*, meaning "repair").

HADAR'S PROJECT ZUG SHAVUOT COMPANION

Four Classes for Your Tikkun Leil Shavuot 5784◆

The festival of Shavuot, *Zman Matan Torateinu*, is our annual invitation to receive the Torah anew by devoting time—sometimes a whole night—to Torah study. This companion provides meaningful and compelling material to learn on Shavuot.

In these pages, you will find a small sample of our favorite Project Zug courses spanning a wide range of topics and genres. Each of these four source sheets is just one session of a longer course that was made to be learned with a *havruta* (learning partner) over multiple weeks. We chose these source sheets because we think they each stand alone as accessible, thought-provoking lessons for people of all Jewish learning backgrounds.

There are so many ways you can use this companion—with a friend, family member, small group, or a whole community. Get creative! Here are just a few suggestions from the Project Zug team:

"I'm running a late-night program with my community"

Print out a handful of copies and leave them in an open "Beit Midrash" space for a "choose-your-own-adventure" learning experience! Anyone who wants to learn in pairs or small groups can pick up the packets, pick the topic(s) that look most interesting to them, and spend the evening learning.

"I'm facilitating a session or group discussion"

Use one of the source sheets as the basis for your class. Learn the sources together as a group, or break everyone up into *havrutot* (pairs) to learn the texts and come back together for the discussion questions.

"I'm planning my own personal learning experience"

Grab a partner and learn! You can pick one topic for up to an hour of learning, or you can spend the night going through all four sessions.

We'd love to hear from you! Tell us how you used this companion and which sources you enjoyed most. Email the Director of Project Zug, Rabbi Keilah Lebell at lebell@hadar.org.

Hag Shavuot Sameah,
Project Zug and the Hadar Institute Team

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

TORAH ♦ “Intro to the Jewish Bookshelf” by R. Avi Strausberg

New to Torah study? Why not start at the very beginning? This class explores the very first verses of the Torah and invites us to explore mind-bending questions about time, creation, and whether there might have been something before the world as we know it came into existence. What does the Torah’s story of the very beginning want to teach us about time and our world?

TANAKH ♦ “Theology of Psalms: Praying Biblical Poetry” by R. Shai Held

This past year, Jews throughout the world have been turning to liturgy for comfort and clarity, in particular by reciting psalms written thousands of years ago by people who were likewise experiencing despair and uncertainty. However, we rarely study psalms carefully. This session invites us to closely read Psalm 13, a psalm of lament, to deepen our understanding of the text and the worldview it expresses.

TALMUD ♦ “Talmudic Personalities: Get to Know the Rabbis” by R. Tali Adler

When the Temple was destroyed by the Romans around 70 CE, how did Judaism continue? How did it survive the transition from a Temple-focused religion to one centered around the synagogue and learning Torah? In Rabbinic legend, the answer is one man: Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. This session introduces him and examines how he responded to this huge challenge of his day, nothing less than the death and resurrection of Judaism.

MIDRASH ♦ “Midrash and the Rabbinic Imagination” by R. Ethan Tucker

Midrash is neither the mechanical reading of biblical verses, nor the invention of Rabbinic flights of fancy, but the meeting place between the features of a text and an idea in need of articulation. By looking closely at texts from Tanakh and the works of *midrash* (Rabbinic Literature), we will read Scripture as our Rabbis did—like a love letter addressed directly to us. This particular class explores why characters from elsewhere show up in midrashic expansions of biblical narratives.



Looking to continue learning after Shavuot? Sign up to finish the course you start on Shavuot during Project Zug’s Summer Learning Cycle. You can register with your Shavuot *havruta* or tell us about yourself and we’ll match you with someone new. Visit www.projectzug.org to register for our Summer Learning Cycle by the June 16th registration deadline.

- 8 **Intro to the Jewish Bookshelf**
R. Avi Strausberg
- 14 **Theology of Psalms: Praying Biblical Poetry**
R. Shai Held
- 17 **Talmudic Personalities: Get to Know the Rabbis**
R. Tali Adler
- 25 ***Midrash* and the Rabbinic Imagination**
R. Ethan Tucker

COURSE EDUCATORS



RABBI TALİ ADLER

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



RABBI SHAI HELD

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



RABBI AVI STRAUSBERG

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



RABBI ETHAN TUCKER

is President and Rosh Yeshiva at Hadar. He was ordained by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and earned a doctorate in Talmud and Rabbinics from the Jewish Theological Seminary. A Wexner Graduate Fellow, he was a co-founder of Kehilat Hadar. He is the author, along with R. Micha'el Rosenberg, of *Gender Equality and Prayer in Jewish Law* (2017).

ABOUT PROJECT ZUG

Project Zug fosters connection and empowers Jews to take ownership over their learning through one-on-one *havruta* study. We provide curated source materials and a guided learning framework that enables people of all Jewish learning backgrounds to build connections with each other and engage deeply with our tradition. Combining facilitation and flexibility, Project Zug gives participants the resources to learn on their own schedule from anywhere in the world.

PROJECT ZUG TEAM



RABBI KEILAH LEBELL

is Director of Project Zug. She is on a mission to transform Jewish lives through the profound power of *havruta* learning. She is passionately dedicated to guiding individuals, communities, and organizations toward cultivating wisdom, meaning, and connection through this time-honored, Jewish learning method.



ALEEZA SCHOENBERG

is Project Zug's Coordinator. The essential person behind info@projectzug.org, she provides customer and technology support for Project Zug users and works closely with our website developers to advance the user experience.

Intro to the Jewish Bookshelf

Rabbi Avi Strausberg

UNIT 1 The Seventy Faces of Torah SESSION 1 “In The Beginning”

♦ The Biblical Text

TaNaKh is an acronym that refers to the collection of books that includes the Torah (meaning the Five Books of Moses), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). If you skim through a Tanakh, you'll find not only the entire Five Books of Moses but also the books of the prophets that contain prophetic exhortations and the Israelites' journeys in the Land of Israel, as well as the books referred to as Writings. According to the Talmud, a group of sages known as the Great Assembly compiled and codified the Tanakh in 450 BCE, although many scholars believe it wasn't actually codified until between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE.

The foundation of every Jewish bookshelf is the Torah. When people refer to the Torah, they might be referring to Torah at large, meaning any and all Jewish teachings, or they might mean Torah as narrowly defined by the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Torah is the basis for all later commentary, ranging from Rabbinic literature to halakhic code, and even modern Jewish poetry. The Five Books of Moses are also referred to as the *Humash*, as the word *hamesh* means “five” in Hebrew. There are many different *Humashim* (plural of *Humash*) that are worthwhile checking, and that may offer slightly different English translations and commentaries alongside the biblical text. ♦

Questions from R. Avi Strausberg

Read through all of the first chapter of Genesis to get a flow and context for this recounting of creation and ask yourselves:

1. What do you find striking?
2. What words stand out?
3. What questions does it raise?
4. What is created on each day?
5. How does one day relate to the next?

SOURCE #1

בראשית א:א-לא

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה
תְּהוֹ וָבִהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹקִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי
הַמַּיִם:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהי־אֹר וַיְהי־אֹר:
וַיֹּרֶא אֱלֹקִים אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב

Genesis 1:1-31

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that

וַיִּבְדֵּל אֱלֹקִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:
וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹקִים ׀ לָאֹר יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא
לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם
וְיִהְיֶה מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם: ⁷וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹקִים
אֶת־הַרָקִיעַ וַיִּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת
לָרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מַעַל לָרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־
כֵן: ⁸וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹקִים לָרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב
וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יִקְווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד וְתֵרָאֶה הַיַּבֵּשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן:
¹⁰וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹקִים ׀ לַיַּבֵּשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמִקְוֵה
הַמַּיִם קָרָא יָמִים וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים כִּי־טוֹב:

¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאֶרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֹשֶׂב
מְזִרִיעַ וָרֹעַ עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר
וָרֹעַ־בוֹ עַל־הָאֶרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן: ¹²וַתּוֹצֵא הָאֶרֶץ
דָּשָׂא עֹשֶׂב מְזִרִיעַ וָרֹעַ לְמִינֵהוּ וָעֵץ עֹשֶׂה־
פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר וָרֹעַ־בוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים
כִּי־טוֹב: ¹³וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:

¹⁴וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי מְאֹרֶת בָּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם
לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת
וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנָיִם: ¹⁵וַהֲיוּ לְמְאֹרֹת
בָּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאֶרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:
¹⁶וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹקִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים
אֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־
הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת
הַכּוֹכָבִים: ¹⁷וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹקִים בָּרָקִיעַ
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאֶרֶץ: ¹⁸וּלְמַשָּׁל בַּיּוֹם
וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים כִּי־טוֹב: ¹⁹וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר
יוֹם רְבִיעִי:

the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” ⁷So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so.

¹⁰God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered water God called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

¹¹Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹²The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נָפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם: ²¹וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה וְהַרְמֵשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף כְּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: ²²וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בְּיָמִים וְהָעוֹף יִרְבֵּב בָּאָרֶץ: ²³וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם חַמִּישִׁי:

²⁴וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֶמָּה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַי-תּוֹ-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן: ²⁵וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת-הַבְּהֶמָּה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

²⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמוּתֵנוּ וַיֵּרְדּוּ בְּדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֶמָּה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

²⁷וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים וְאֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אוֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אוֹתָם: ²⁸וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבִּשְׁתֶּה וּרְדוּ בְּדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ: ²⁹וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב וְזֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ פְּרִי-עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ: ³⁰וְלֹכְל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלֹכְל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹכְל וְרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת-כָּל-יֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן:

³¹וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי:

²⁰And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." ²¹So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." ²⁹Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

♦ '929' Chapters
of Tanakh

You can learn
more about it
here:

<http://www.929.org.il/pages/aboutEN.html>

Questions from R. Avi Strausberg

1. Now, go back and closely read verses 1-5.

What's confusing about these verses? What questions do you have that are unanswered?

2. Draw a picture in your mind of what the world looked like before God began creating. Describe this picture to your *havruta*.
 - a. Was there a world? What was it like?
 - b. Then, what happened?
 - c. When does light enter the picture? Darkness? Water? Are these things pre-existing or does God bring them into the world through creation?
 - d. Are your answers similar, or very different?

Take a look at the following two texts drawn from a great project called '929' that provides modern commentary and interpretations on all of Tanakh from great teachers, thinkers, and writers. The project invites you to join with students all around the world learning a daily chapter of Tanakh, according to a set schedule, until they complete all '929' chapters of Tanakh. ♦

SOURCE #2

Etgar Keret, from '929—Bible Together'

I remember the first time I read from the Bible. I was six years old and after I read the first verse I stopped. I had a strong impulse, not to read the next verse but rather, to understand what it was there in front of me. Before the first verse, in verse zero, before the heavens and the earth, before it all began, before that scary word "B'reishit—In the beginning". Because I knew, even then, that everything in the world had something that existed before it, that influenced it, that caused it to change, and suddenly here is this word, used like a 'No Entry' sign preventing me from asking what existed there before it. As a son to Holocaust survivors I was well acquainted with this sign, that place that declares itself the beginning so as not to be obligated to expose the horrors that occurred previously.

I felt that the Bible too was concealing some secret, some primeval trauma. Something that happened before its first written word. The thought scared me as I had no knowledge of this terrible thing that couldn't even be expressed in words, but it also filled me with hope because it revealed that a certain point

in time, whenever things become too terrible, anyone can just decide “that’s enough”. Anyone may stop and start from the beginning, create his world anew. Anyone, even God.

SOURCE #3

Rabbi Ilay Ofra, from ‘929—Bible Together’

The first three words in the Torah have no meaning in Hebrew. The first three words in the Bible, in the definitive text of the Jewish People, of the Jewish religion, of Jewish culture over the generations and maybe of all of humanity, are words that no-one has ever understood.

“*B’reishit*—In the beginning”—we cannot understand or define the concept of time but merely how to measure it. Human consciousness is incapable of comprehending the infinite, and therefore when we hear the word “*B’reishit*”, we always ask “And what existed before that?” And we cannot understand a beginning that has no end before it.

“God”—easy and simple: if humankind succeeded in understanding it, it cannot be God.

“Created”—humans are incapable of creating anything, they are limited by the law of Conservation of Mass. We know how to assemble materials, to dismantle them, to change their physical state and even use them to make complex tools, but we are unable to “create” anything. We can make things from other pre-existing things but never out of nothing. Our feeble intellect has difficulty in understanding how it is possible to create an object from material that didn’t exist.

So the Torah begins with three words that humans, by definition, nature and essence cannot understand.

Maybe this is in order to teach us a touch of humility while reading this book. Maybe in order to encourage us to investigate and seek and make an effort. Maybe to accord a measure of awe and fear of ecstasy to our study.

But for those who, despite all this, successfully traverse these three words—the continuation is usually a little less complex.

Questions from R. Avi Strausberg

These two writers offer very different and very compelling responses to the first three words of the Torah.

1. What's your response to reading the first three words of the Torah? What do they make you think of? What do you think of the responses of Etgar Keret and Eli Ofran?
2. Have you ever read any parts of the Torah before? If yes, in what context? What do you remember from those times? If this is your first time, was there anything surprising?
3. Does the story of the creation of the world feel important to you? Why or why not? What makes Torah a compelling (or not compelling) place to learn about creations?



Theology of Psalms: Praying Biblical Poetry

Rabbi Shai Held

UNIT 2 Psalms of Lament

SESSION 5 “How Long Will You Hide Your Face From Me?”

♦ Psalm 13

Translation: NJPS, 1999.

Each session of this course explores one psalm and reads not only as poetry, but also something you might pray. This unit focuses on the genre found in the book of Psalms called “lament.”

Psalm 13 is often cited as a textbook example of an individual lament. The psalmist gives voice to his suffering (vv. 2-3); petitions God to help him (vv. 4-5); and then declares his trust in God, Whom he promises to praise when he is saved (v. 6). As often in these psalms, the exact circumstances in which the psalmist finds himself are unclear. That very unclarity may well be part of what gives the psalm its power—every person who prays the psalm can find his or her own situation within it.

I. THE PSALM

The psalmist’s mood changes abruptly between v. 5 and v. 6. What do you think might have happened to elicit this shift? The tenses here (as often in psalms) are difficult: It’s not entirely clear whether he is saying that he trusted in God and was saved or that he trusts in God and is confident that he will be saved. As you read, ask yourself how the psalm reads differently in either case.

SOURCE #1

תהלים יג	Psalm 13♦
¹ לִמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:	¹ For the leader. A psalm of David.
² עַד-אָנָּה ה' תִּשְׁכַּחֲנִי נָצַח עַד-אָנָּה י תַסְתִּיר אֶת-פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי:	² How long, O Lord; will You ignore me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?
³ עַד-אָנָּה אֲשִׁית עֲצוֹת בְּנַפְשִׁי יְגוֹן בְּלִבִּי יוֹמָם:	³ How long will I have cares on my mind, grief in my heart all day?
עַד-אָנָּה י יְרוֹם אֹיְבִי עָלַי:	How long will my enemy have the upper hand?
⁴ הֲבִיטָה עָנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי	⁴ Look at me, answer me, O Lord, my God!

הָאֵינָה עֵינַי פֶּן־אֵישׁן הַמָּוֶת:	Restore the luster to my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;
פֶּן־יֹאמַר אֹיְבִי יִכְלֹתִיו צָרִי יִגִּילוּ בִּי אֲמוֹט:	⁵ lest my enemy say, “I have overcome him,” my foes exult when I totter.
אֲנִי וּבְחֶסֶדְךָ בְּטַחְתִּי יָגֵל לִבִּי בִישׁוּעָתְךָ אֲשִׁירָה לַה' כִּי גָמַל עָלַי:	⁶ But I trust in Your faithfulness, my heart will exult in Your deliverance. I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me.

Questions from R. Shai Held:

1. What effect does the fourfold repetition of “how long” (vv. 2-3) have on the reader (or pray-er) of this text? (Is “how long” a question or an exclamation?) How do you understand the paradoxical question “how long will You ignore me forever”?
2. How do you understand the psalmist’s claim that that God is hiding (v. 2) while nevertheless referring to God as “my God” (v. 4)?
3. If God looks at the psalmist (v. 4), then is God still hiding (v. 2)?
4. In very subtle ways, the psalmist’s complaint and God’s answer are linked by repeating sounds. For example, “*Ad anah*” (How long) and “*va-ani*” (v. 6); “*yagon bilvavi*” (grief in my heart) and “*yagel libi*” (my heart will exult). What effect does this have on the reader/pray-er of this text? What point is it trying to make?

II. SUPPLEMENTARY SOURCES

To enrich your understanding of Psalm 13, see also these two verses from other psalms:

SOURCE #2

תַּחֲלִים יַחֲמֹז	Psalm 18:47
חַי־ה' וּבָרוּךְ צוּרִי	The Lord lives! Blessed is my rock!
וַיְרוֹם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	Exalted be God, my deliverer...

תהלים קח:ו

Psalm 108:6

רוֹמָה עַל־שָׁמַיִם אֱלֹקִים
וְעַל כָּל־הָאָרֶץ בְּבוֹדֶךָ:

Exalt Yourself over the heavens, O God;
let Your glory be over all the earth!

Question from R. Shai Held:

Verse 3 in our psalm describes the psalmist's enemy as exalted over him (*yarum oyvi alai*) (JPS: "have the upper hand"). This term, exalted (*ram*), is often used to characterize God's status. In describing the enemy as "exalted," what do you think the psalmist trying to say?





Talmudic Personalities: Get to Know the Rabbis

Rabbi Tali Adler



UNIT 1 Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai

SESSION 1 The Death and Resurrection of Judaism



When the Temple was destroyed by the Romans around 70 CE, how did Judaism continue? How did it survive the transition from a Temple-focused religion to one centered around the synagogue and learning Torah?

In Rabbinic legend, the answer is one man: Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. This course spends the next 3 sessions getting to know him and seeing how he responded to this huge challenge of his day, nothing less than the death and resurrection of Judaism. The first of these is included here.

Discuss with your *havruta* the following questions to help you get into Rabban Yoḥanan's mindset:

1. There were all sorts of responses one might have to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. Perhaps someone would take this as a sign that:
 - a. Judaism is not the right path, or
 - b. God is angry with us for some reason and we need to ask for forgiveness, or
 - c. we should be rebuilding a new Temple in Jerusalem, or
 - d. we should start a totally new model.
 - e. (Or some combination of these.)
2. Which do you think would have been your reaction? Why?
3. Which approach seems hardest / easiest? Why?
4. If someone had told you that he can save just the scholars and start an academy, would you have been impressed by this? Why or why not?

Framing our learning

Before we get into our first text, one word of framing. It is basically impossible to recover reliable historical information about our sages—there's no independent archeological evidence for individuals like these, nor would we expect any. All we can do is learn from how our sages are presented in our sources. The stories that we will learn are primarily literary works designed to teach us about ourselves, as we will explore.

So we are not learning “history” in this course, we are learning something better and more powerful: legend (or *aggadah* in Hebrew), as filtered through our texts, primarily the Babylonian Talmud (or Talmud Bavli in Hebrew).

Talmud scholar Devora Steinmetz writes about the personalities of our sages that comes through from these literary tales:

◆ Source #1

From “Agada Unbound: Inter-Agadic Characterization of Sages in the Bavli and Implications for Reading Agada,” by Devora Steinmetz, from *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammam) to the Aggada* ed. Jeffrey Rubenstein

◆ The Talmud

The Babylonian Talmud or Talmud Bavli is the monolithic masterpiece of ancient Babylonian Jewry. It is built upon the Mishnah (but frequently digresses) and is mostly finished in the 6th century CE. See next note for more details about its layers!

◆ Tannaim and Amoraim

Some vocabulary! The Talmud is made up of three layers: (1) Tannaim, sages who lived from roughly 1st-3rd centuries CE, responsible for the Mishnah; (2) Amoraim, sages who lived from roughly 3rd-6th centuries CE, who comment and expand upon the earlier material; (3) Stam, the anonymous voice that weaves the sources together and turns them into a literary and logical flow. The main subject of our course are thus four of the earliest Tannaim (late 1st-early 2nd centuries), but we only know about them through the lens of the later layers.

◆ Rabban

For reasons that are not totally clear, some rabbis around this period (late 1st-early 2nd centuries) are generally referred to with the title “Rabban,” literally “our rabbi.” It may represent some level of their importance, or it may be a little random. Traditionally, it signifies that they are the *nasi*, the head of the court, but there are some people who are *nesi'im* who do not have this title (e.g. Hillel) and some who do not appear to have been *nesi'im* who do (e.g. Yohanan ben Zakkai!). But calling him “Rabbi” is okay too!

SOURCE #1◆

Intuitively... students of rabbinic texts sense that they “know” certain sages, that there are sets of attributes that characterize certain prominent sages, whether these attributes are personality traits, beliefs of stances, practices of experiences, or kinds of interrelationships with others. Whether or not some or all of these have their basis in historical fact neither adds to nor detracts from the sense that, when one encounters one of these sages in an *agada*, one is meeting a familiar figure—and it is inevitable, and perhaps expected, that one will read the *agada* with what one “knows” about the figure from other passages in mind...

The Bavli assigns to certain sages specific tendencies which are constructed and conveyed through the interrelationship of a range of passages [i.e. stories]. The Bavli does not invent these elements of characterization whole-cloth, but neither does it simply reiterate earlier traditions about these sages. Rather, in the citation or omission of traditional material, in recasting or adding to traditional material, and, significantly, in contextualizing traditional material in contexts that highlight or disclose new significances, the Bavli focuses and sharpens traits and stances that it presents as characterizing certain sages.

Explanation from R. Tali Adler

The Talmud◆ is a great collector of material and puts it altogether into new and previously unknown forms, but it is fundamentally based on the earlier material of the Tannaim and Amoraim.◆ We will put these collections in conversation with each other to explore the mindsets of our rabbis as told through our sources.

RABBAN◆ YOHANAN BEN ZAKKAI ESCAPES JERUSALEM

This story is built up from many parts. The first thing to do is to read the story aloud with your *havruta* as one coherent plot. The Talmud is very terse and so you will have to do some reconstruction work yourself. At every stage, try to enter the characters’ heads (especially of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai) and ask: what is he thinking and feeling? What are the factors he is weighing? What do his actions show about his motivations? Then, go to the questions below.

◆ **Babylonian Talmud Gittin**

This is excerpted from a larger story structure about the destruction of the Temple, cut down so we can focus on Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. But you should read the rest when you get a chance!

◆ **Sikra**

“Sikra” is from the Latin “sicarius” = assassin.

◆ **This**

In the context of the wider story, this is referring to the fact that the thugs burnt down the storehouses to force the Jews to fight the Romans and not make peace, which Abba Sikra now seems to regret.

◆ **A living person is lighter than a dead one**

A corpse does not actually have any more weight than a living body, but it feels heavier probably because of its stiffness and immobility.

◆ **R. Eliezer went in...**

We’re going to learn more about these characters in a future session!

SOURCE #2 ס

תלמוד בבלי

גיטין דף נו עמוד א-ב

1. אבא סקרא ריש בריוני
דירושלים בר אחתיה דרבן
יוחנן בן זכאי הוה

2. שלח ליה תא בצינעא
לגבא

3. אתא

4. א”ל עד אימת עבדיתו
הכי וקטליתו ליה לעלמא
בכפנא

5. א”ל מאי איעביד דאי
אמינא להו מידי קטלו לי

6. א”ל חזי לי תקנתא
לדידי דאיפוק אפשר דהוי
הצלה פורתא

7. א”ל נקוט נפשך בקצירי
וליתי כולי עלמא ולישיילו
בך ואייתי מידי סריא ואגני
גבך ולימרו דנח נפשך
וליעיילו בך תלמידך ולא
ליעול בך איניש אחרינא
דלא לרגשן בך דקליל את
דאינהו ידעי דחייא קליל
ממיתא

8. עביד הכי

9. נכנס בו רבי אליעזר מצד
אחד ורבי יהושע מצד אחר

Babylonian Talmud

Gittin 56a-56b ◆

1. Abba Sikra, ◆ the head of the thugs of Jerusalem, was the son of Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai’s sister.

2. [Rabban Yohanan] sent him [a message], “Come privately to me.”

3. He came.

4. [Rabban Yohanan] said to him, “Until when will you do this ◆ and kill the world with famine?”

5. He said to him, “What can I do? Since, if I say anything to them, they will kill me.”

6. He said to him, “Show me a solution for me, that I should get out; maybe there will be a small salvation [from it].”

7. He said to him, “Act as if you are sick, and have everyone come and ask about you; and [then] bring something putrid and have it lay with you and they will say that you have died. Have your students bring you out and no other men should bring you out, so that we don’t become aware that you are light, since they know that a living person is lighter than a dead one.” ◆

8. He did this.

9. R. Eliezer went in on one side and R. Yehoshua ◆ went in on the other side.

♦ **They**

Could be referring here to the Romans or the other Jews. What do you think makes more sense?

♦ **Vespasian**

Who, according to before the quoted passage, was the Roman general sent to destroy Jerusalem.

♦ **As it is written**

If you like, take a look at the verses and see how Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai understood them vs. their contexts.

10. כי מטו לפיתחא בעו למדקריה

11. אמר להו יאמרו רבן דקרו

12. בעו למדחפיה

13. אמר להו יאמרו רבן דחפו

14. פתחו ליה בבא

15. נפק

16. כי מטא להתם אמר שלמא עלך מלכא שלמא עלך מלכא

17. א"ל מיחייבת תרי קטלא חדא דלאו מלכא אנא וקא קרית לי מלכא ותו אי מלכא אנא עד האידנא אמאי לא אתית לגבאי

18. א"ל דקאמרת לאו מלכא אנא איברא מלכא את דאי לאו מלכא את לא מימסרא ירושלים בידך דכתיב (ישעיהו י, לד) והלבנון באדיר יפול ואין אדיר אלא מלך דכתיב (ירמיהו ל, כא) והיה אדירו ממנו וגוי ואין לבנון אלא ביהמ"ק שנאמר (דברים ג, כה) ההר השוב הזה והלבנון

19. ודקאמרת אי מלכא

10. When they came to the opening, [the thug gate keepers] wanted to stab him.

11. They said to them, "They♦ will say, 'they stabbed their rabbi!'"

12. And [then] they wanted to jostle him.

13. They said to them, "They will say, 'they jostled their rabbi!'"

14. They opened the gate.

15. He went out.

16. He got there [and] said, "Peace to you, O king, peace to you, O king."

17. [Vespasian]♦ said to him, "You have made yourself guilty of two death penalties: first, since I am not a king and you have called me, 'king'; and also, if I am a king, why did you not come to me until now?"

18. He said to him, "That which you said, 'I am not a king,' you will be a king; since were you not a king, Jerusalem would not be delivered into your hand, as it is written♦ (Isaiah 10:34 [ס]), 'and the Lebanon will fall by a mighty one.' And 'mighty' can only be a king, as it is written (Jeremiah 30:21 [ס]), 'And his mighty one shall be from him.' And Lebanon can only be the Temple, as it is stated (Deuteronomy 3:25 [ס]), 'this goodly mountain and the Lebanon.'"

19. "And that which you said, 'If I am a

♦ **Serpent**

In other words, I need to destroy Jerusalem (the barrel of honey) in order to get rid of the thugs (the snake).

♦ **Rav Yosef and some say, Rabbi Akiva...**

R. Akiva is a Tanna close in period to Rabban Yohanan, as opposed to Rav Yosef who is an Amora in Babylon, centuries removed.

♦ **...fattens the bone**

In other words, your feet are larger because you heard the good news of your ascension!

אנא אמאי לא קאתית
לגבאי עד האידנא בריוני
דאית בן לא שבקינן

20. אמר ליה אילו חבית
של דבש ודרקון כרוך עליה
לא היו שוברין את החבית
בשביל דרקון

21. אישתיק

22. קרי עליה רב יוסף
ואיתימא רבי עקיבא
(ישעיהו מד, כה) משיב
חכמים אחור ודעתם יסכל
איבעי ליה למימר ליה
שקלינן צבתא ושקלינן
ליה לדרקון וקטלינן ליה
וחביתא שבקינן לה

23. אדהכי אתי פריסתקא
עליה מרומי אמר ליה
קום דמית ליה קיסר
ואמרי הנהו חשיבי דרומי
לאותיבך ברישא

24. הוה סיים חד מסאני
בעא למסיימא לאחרינא
לא עייל בעא למשלפא
לאידך לא נפק

25. אמר מאי האי

26. אמר ליה לא תצטער
שמועה טובה אתיא לך
דכתיב (משלי טו, ל)
שמועה טובה תדשן עצם

27. אלא מאי תקנתיה?

king, why did you not come to me until now'; the thugs that we have with us did not allow us."

20. He said to him, "If there was a barrel of honey with a serpent wrapped over it, would one not break the barrel for the sake of [getting rid] of the serpent?"♦

21. He was silent.

22. Rav Yosef—and some say, R. Akiva♦—would read [this verse to be] about this (Isaiah 44:25 [פ]), "He turns back the wise and renders their knowledge foolish." He should have said to him, "We take tongs and we take the serpent and kill him and leave the barrel."

23. Meanwhile, a messenger came to him from Rome. He said to him, "Get up, the [reigning] Caesar has died, and those dignitaries of Rome have placed you at the helm."

24. He had put on one of his shoes, [and] wanted to put the other one on. It would not go on. He tried to remove the [first one and] it would not come off.

25. He said, "What is this?"

26. He said to him, "Do not be troubled; it is a good tiding that has come to you, as it is written (Proverbs 15:30 [פ]), 'a good tiding fattens the bone.'♦

27. [Vespasian said to him,] "But what is its remedy?"

♦ R. Tzadok

Earlier in the passage, R. Tzadok was fasting so much that he was in danger of death.

28. ליתי איניש דלא
מיתבא דעתך מיניה
ולחליף קמך דכתיב (משלי
יז, כב)
ורוח נכאה תיבש

29. גרם עבד הכי עייל

30. אמר ליה ומאחר
דחכמיתו כולי האי עד
האידנא אמאי לא אתיתו
לגבאי

31. אמר ליה ולא אמרי לך

32. אמר ליה אנא נמי
אמרי לך

33. אמר ליה מיזל אזילנא
ואינש אחרינא משדרנא
אלא בעי מינאי מידי דאתן
לך

34. אמר ליה תן לי יבנה
וחכמיה ושושילתא דרבן
גמליאל ואסוותא דמסיין
ליה לרבי צדוק

35. קרי עליה רב יוסף
ואיתימא רבי עקיבא
(ישעיהו מד, כה) משיב
חכמים אחור ודעתם
יסכל איבעי למימר ליה
לשבקינהו הדא זימנא

36. והוא סבר דלמא כולי
האי לא עביד והצלה
פורתא נמי לא הוי

28. [Rabban Yohanan responded,] “Bring someone you are displeased with and have him pass in front of you, as it is written (Proverbs 17:22 [כב]), ‘And a lowly spirit dries the bone.’”

29. He did this [and the other shoe] went on.

30. He said to him, “And since you are so wise, until now why did you not come to me?”

31. He said to [Vespasian], “Didn’t I [already] tell you?”

32. [Vespasian] said to him, “I also [already] told you.”

33. [Vespasian] said to him, “I am leaving and I will send someone else, but ask something that I can give you.”

34. He said to him, “Give me Yavneh and her Sages and the line of Rabban Gamliel and a cure to heal R. Tzadok.” ♦

35. Rav Yosef—and some say, R. Akiva—would read [this verse to be] about this (Isaiah 44:25 [כה]), “He turns back the wise and renders their knowledge foolish.” He should have said to him, “Leave us this time!”

36. And he thought that perhaps that much he would not do, and there would [then] not even be a small salvation.

Questions from R. Tali Adler

1. In line 1, the text goes out of its way to tell us the familial connection between Abba Sikra and Rabban Yoḥanan.

Why do you think it does this? How does it affect each of their motivations and actions here?

2. In line 5, Abba Sikra feels trapped by his fellow thugs, but Rabban Yoḥanan thinks he can see a way out. What character traits does Rabban Yoḥanan show in their exchanges?

3. Rabban Yoḥanan pretends to be dead in line 8 and then springs to life before Vespasian in line 16, which seems to be a metaphor for Judaism in this moment—thought dead, but soon to spring new life.

What purpose do you think the thugs at the gate serve to the larger story? Why do they threaten to stab the “corpse”? And how do they persuade them not to?

4. Rabban Yoḥanan makes an outlandish claim to Vespasian: that he is the emperor!

Do you read this as a moment of prophecy? A lucky and audacious guess? A savvy assessment of the direction of Roman politics? How do these different approaches change your reading of Rabban Yoḥanan in this moment?

5. The conversation turns sharply in line 20 to Vespasian explaining why Jerusalem had to be destroyed.

Why do you think Vespasian suddenly starts talking about this? Why does Rabban Yoḥanan have no response? What do these two characters think of each other at this moment?

6. In line 22, a secondary voice adds its own comment.

How does Rav Yosef / R. Akiva assess Rabban Yoḥanan’s action? Why? What do you think: would their rejoinder have worked in the story’s context and power dynamics?

7. Vespasian is named emperor and immediately he no longer fits into his shoes in lines 23-24.

What do you think is the meaning of this metaphor?

8. Rabban Yoḥanan is able to explain the cause and solve Vespasian’s problem in lines 26-29.

How does this affect their relationship? How does it portray Rabban Yoḥanan?

9. They have a terse exchange in lines 30-32 where they both reiterate that they have already discussed what needs to be discussed.

What do you make of this? What is each character thinking in this moment?

10. Why does Vespasian decide to give Rabban Yoḥanan a gift in line 33?

11. Why does Rabban Yoḥanan ask for the things he asks for in line 34—a place for the sages to go (Yavneh), the “line of Rabban Gamliel” (perhaps the house of the patriarch), and healing for R. Tzadok?

12. Rav Yosef / R. Akiva’s response appears again in line 35.

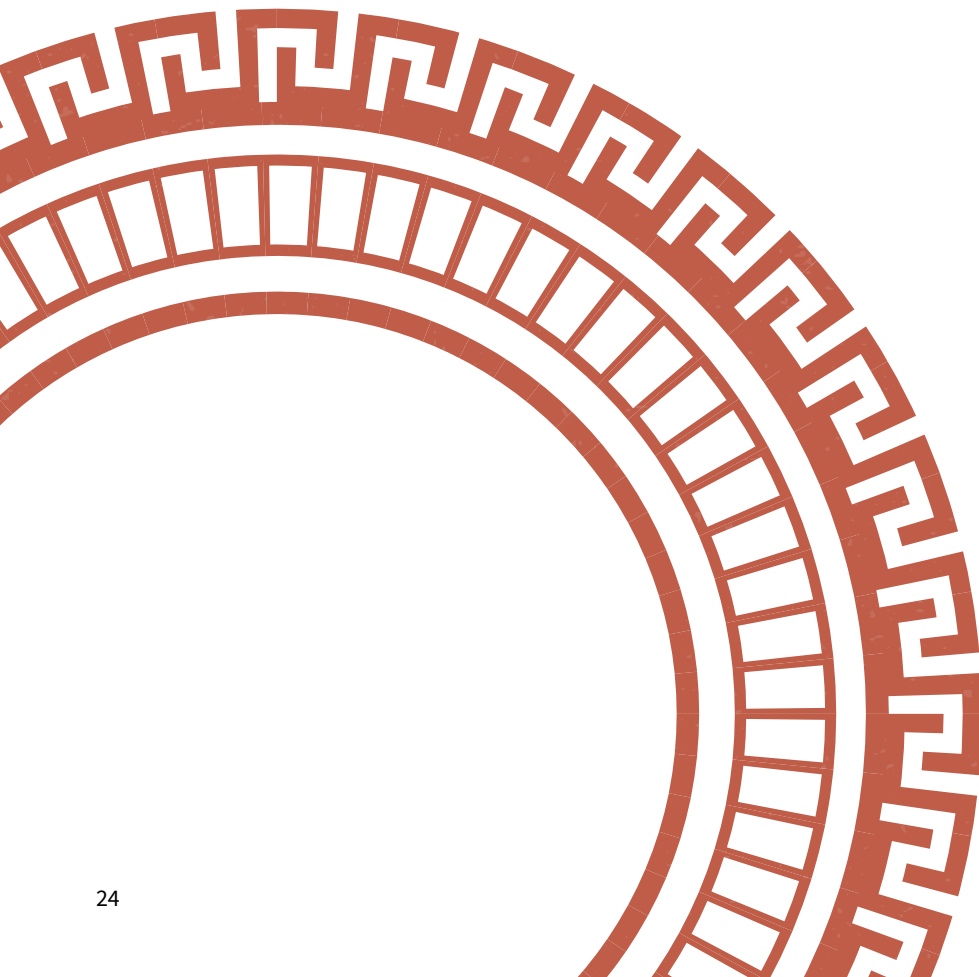
What do they think of Rabban Yoḥanan's actions? Do you think the criticism is fair? Why or why not? Is it any more or less fair than when it appeared above?

13. The Talmud then responds in line 36 and justifies Rabban Yoḥanan's actions.

Why do you think it does this here but not above?

14. Finally, ask yourselves the following summary questions:

- a. What kind of a person is Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai?
- b. What does he care about?
- c. How does he interact with the other characters in the story?
- d. What does the Talmud think of his actions?
- e. What do you think? Was there anything else Rabban Yoḥanan could have done?





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Midrash and the Rabbinic Imagination

Rabbi Ethan Tucker

SESSION 4 Crossover Characters

◆ Selections from Job 1-2

The opening and ending of the book of Job emphasize that one must have complete faith in God, even when terrible things happen. But the middle, consisting of speeches from Iyyov and various of his companions, culminating in God's speech describing the monster Leviathan, seems to make the opposite point: that God is unknowable to the point of cruel. This rich and complex book is not studied so much by Jews today, but worth a closer look from all of us.

◆ he feared God

This is a connection with the Exodus we don't have room to explore. There is a little-known group of people among the Egyptians who avoided the plague of hail because they feared God (Exodus 9:18-21 [5]). Perhaps Iyyov was one of these? For more on this and the other *midrashim* in this session, see my essay, "Responsibility and Redemption: The Key Role of Iyyov in the Exodus Story," available here: <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/responsibility-and-redemption-key-role-iyyov-exodus-story>.

Very little is known about Job (or Iyyov in Hebrew). Even though his book is a good size, it tells us almost no information about how he fits into the rest of the biblical narrative. In fact, in one *midrash* (Bereishit Rabbah 57:4 [6]), there are no less than 11(!) opinions as to when Iyyov lived, whether he was a Jew or a non-Jew, or whether he ever existed at all.

In this session, we will explore one midrashic strand that locates Iyyov in the Exodus narrative. By putting these two books together (Job and Exodus), we can use each of them to unlock meaning in the other.

I. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IYYOV AND THE EXODUS

First, take a quick look through the following selection of verses from the opening of the book of Job. As you read, think about any details that you can see that might evoke the Exodus from Egypt (some of the more obvious ones are bolded below, but there's more to find!). Think about with your *havruta*:

1. What details in this opening might help us place Iyyov's story in the Exodus?
2. What does putting Iyyov into the Exodus help us explain about the book of Job?

SOURCE #1 [7]

איוב א-ב

1:1 אִישׁ הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ-עוּז אִיּוֹב
שָׁמוֹ וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא תָם
וְיָשָׁר וִירָא אֱלֹקִים וְסָר מִרָע...
3 וְיָהִי מִקְנֵהוּ שִׁבְעַת אֲלָפֵי-צֹאן
וּשְׁלֹשַׁת אֲלָפֵי גְמָלִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה
מֵאוֹת צֶמֶד-בָּקָר וַחֲמִשָּׁה מֵאוֹת
אֲתוֹנוֹת וְעֶבְדָּהּ רַבָּה מְאֹד וְיָהִי
הָאִישׁ הַהוּא גָדוֹל מִכָּל-בְּנֵי-
קִדְם...

Selections from Job 1-2◆

1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz named Job. That man was blameless and upright; he feared God◆ and turned from evil...

3 his **possessions** were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and a very large household. That man was wealthier than anyone in the East...

♦ fire

The word *eish* can also mean “lightning.”

♦ Adversary

In the book of Job, there is an accusing angel in God’s court who encourages God to afflict Iyov called “the Satan,” translated here as “the Adversary.” It does not have the meaning of Devil or Satan the way it is used today.

14וּמַלְאָךְ בָּא אֶל-אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר
הַבֶּקֶר הָיוּ חֹרְשׁוֹת וְהָאֲתָנוֹת
רְעוֹת עַל-יְדֵיהֶם: 15וַתִּפֹּל
שָׁבָא וַתִּקָּחֶם וְאֶת-הַנְּעָרִים
הָכּוּ לְפִי-חֶרֶב וְאֶמְלָטָה רֶקֶד
אֲנִי לְבַדִּי לְהִגִּיד לָךְ: 16עוֹד
זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר אִישׁ
אֱלֹקִים נִפְלָא מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם
וַתִּבְעַר בָּצֵאן וּבְנֵעָרִים
וַתֹּאכְלֶם וְאֶמְלָטָה רֶקֶד-אֲנִי
לְבַדִּי לְהִגִּיד לָךְ: ...

18עַד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר
בְּנִיךָ וּבָנוֹתֶיךָ אֹכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים
יַיִן בְּבֵית אֲחֵיהֶם הַבְּכוֹר:
19וַהֲנֵה רוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה בָּאָה וּ
מִעֵבֶר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּגַע בָּאֲרָבַע
פְּנוֹת הַבַּיִת וַיִּפֹּל עַל-הַנְּעָרִים
וַיָּמוּתוּ וְאֶמְלָטָה רֶקֶד-אֲנִי לְבַדִּי
לְהִגִּיד לָךְ: 20וַיָּקָם אִיּוֹב וַיִּקְרַע
אֶת-מְעָלוֹ וַיִּגְזַ אֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּפֹּל
אֶרֶצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:

21וַיֹּאמֶר עָרָם יֵצְאֵתִי מִבֶּטֶן
אִמִּי וְעָרָם אָשׁוּב שָׁמָּה יִקְוָה
נָתַן וַיִּקְוָה לָקַח יְהִי שֵׁם יְקֹוֹק
מְבֹרָךְ:

22בְּכָל-זֹאת לֹא-חָטָא אִיּוֹב
וְלֹא-נָתַן תִּפְלָה לְאֱלֹקִים: ...

2:7וַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׁטָן מֵאֵת פְּנֵי יְקֹוֹק
וַיֵּךְ אֶת-אִיּוֹב בְּשֹׁחִין רָע מִפָּן
רִגְלוֹ וְעַד קִדְקֶדוֹ: 8וַיִּקַּח-לוֹ
חֶרֶשׁ לְהִתְגַּבֵּד בּוֹ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב
בְּתוֹךְ-הָאֵפֶר: 9וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ
אִשְׁתּוֹ עֲדֵךְ מִחֲזִיק בְּתִמְתֵּךְ

14a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the she-asses were grazing alongside them 15when Sabceans attacked them and carried them off, and put the servants to the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.” 16This one was still speaking when another came and said, “God’s fire ♦ fell from heaven, burned the sheep and the servants, and burned them up; I alone have escaped to tell you.”...

18This one was still speaking when another came and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their firstborn brother 19when suddenly a mighty wind came from the wilderness. It struck the four corners of the house so that it collapsed upon the servants and they died; I alone have escaped to tell you.” 20Then Job arose, tore his robe, cut off his hair, and threw himself on the ground, and prostrated.

21He said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; God has given, and God has taken away; blessed be the name of God.”

22For all that, Job did not sin nor did he cast reproach on God...

2:7The Adversary ♦ departed from the presence of God and inflicted severe boils on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8He took a potsherd to scratch himself as he sat in ashes. 9His wife said to him, “You still keep your

◆ **Blaspheme**

The Hebrew uses the word “bless” euphemistically.

◆ **Bil’am**

The prophet who was hired by King Balak to curse the Jews (Numbers 22-24 [ס]).

◆ **Yitro**

Moshe’s father-in-law with whom he finds refuge after he flees from Egypt.

◆ **killed**

See Numbers 31:8 [ס].

◆ **Stone**

The seat of the Sanhedrin, the council of sages in Jerusalem.

בְּרַךְ אֱלֹקִים וּמָתָּ: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלֶיָּהּ כְּדַבֵּר אַחַת הַנְּבִלּוֹת
תִּדְבְּרִי גַם אֶת־הַטּוֹב נִקְבֵּל
מֵאֵת הָאֱלֹקִים וְאֶת־הָרָע לֹא
נִקְבֵּל בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־חָטָא
אִיּוֹב בְּשִׁפְתָיו:

integrity?! Blaspheme! ◇ God and die!”

¹⁰But he said to her, “You talk as any shameless woman might talk! Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?” For all that, Job did not sin with his lips.

II. MEEKNESS TO A FAULT

Now, we will explore two *midrashim* that explicitly place Iyyov in Pharaoh’s court and what we can learn from this operation about the Exodus. Uniting three minor characters from the period of the wilderness, R. Hiyya bar Abba describes their fate based on what they did in the face of Pharaoh’s evil decrees against the Israelites:

SOURCE #2 [ס]

תלמוד בבלי סוטה יא.

Babylonian Talmud Sotah 11a

א"ר חייא בר אבא א"ר
סימאי, שלשה היו באותה
עצה: בלעם, ואיוב, ויתרו,

Said R. Hiyya bar Abba said R. Simai: Three were consulted by Pharaoh in that counsel: Bil'am, ◇ Iyyov, and Yitro. ◇

בלעם שיעץ - נהרג,

Bil'am, who hatched the plan, was killed. ◇

איוב ששתק - נידון
ביסורין,

Iyyov, who was silent, was punished by suffering.

יתרו שברח - זכו מבני בניו
שישבו בלשכת הגזית.

Yitro, who ran away, merited that some of his children’s children sat in the Chamber of Hewn Stone. ◇

Questions from R. Ethan Tucker:

1. The only one who walks away unscathed is Yitro because he actively removes himself from Pharaoh’s court. How can one distance themselves from adjacent evil? What level of culpability do you think Yitro really had? Put another way: was there a way for Yitro to have stayed and still remained clean?
2. Bil’am hatched the plot to enslave the Israelites, and it makes sense that he is punished as a result. But Iyyov did nothing! Why was Iyyov punished? What is this text trying to say about our complicitness in evil?

◆ Samael

Another name in later literature for Satan (in Job: the Satan; see above).

3. The story of the Exodus naturally focuses on Moshe and the slaves. This tradition of Iyyov adds a new angle: the politics of Pharaoh's court. Why is this angle also important to consider? What can thinking about this tell us about evil and authoritarianism in our own time?

III. THERE IS NEVER COMPLETE REDEMPTION

The Torah thinks that redemption for the Israelites was an essential good—but this does not mean that there was no collateral damage. All of Egypt was destroyed, including crops and animals, despite Pharaoh being the main instigator of the crimes. This is highlighted in the following *midrash* using Iyyov:

SOURCE #3

שמות רבה כא:ז

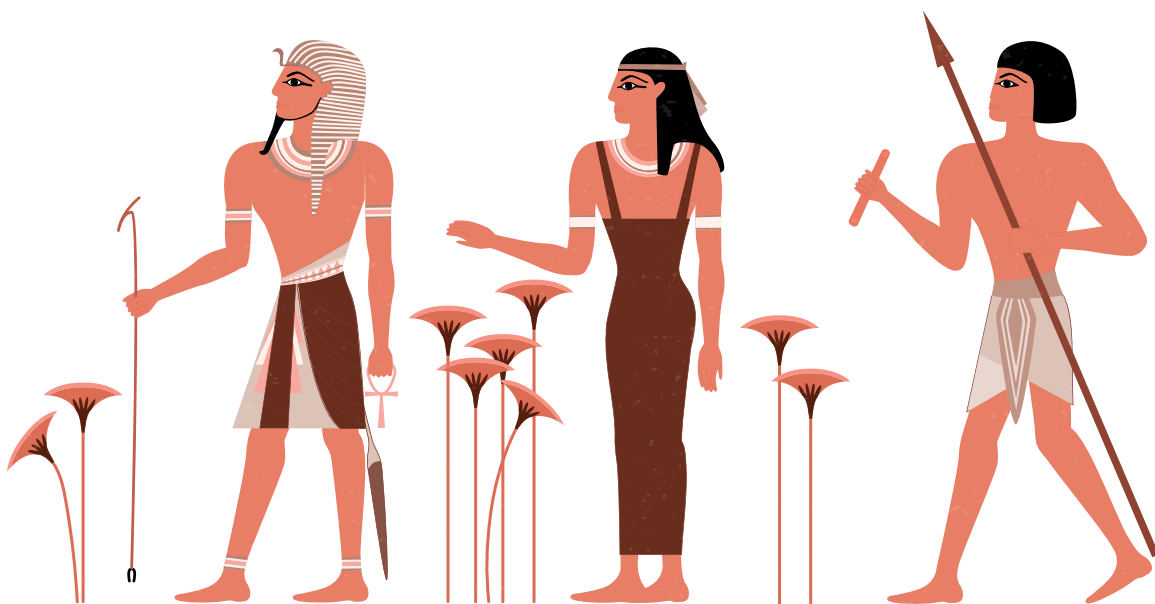
א"ר חמא ב"ר חנינא בשעה
שיצאו ישראל ממצרים עמד
סמאל המלאך לקטרג אותן,
ור' חמא בר חנינא פירשה
משום אביו משל לרועה
שהיה מעביר צאנו בנהר בא
זאב להתגרות בצאן, רועה
שהיה בקי מה עשה נטל
תיש גדול ומסרו לו אמר יהא
מתגשש בזה עד שנעבור את
הנהר ואח"כ אני מביאו, כך
בשעה שיצאו ישראל ממצרים
עמד סמאל המלאך לקטרג
אותן אמר לפני הקדוש ברוך
הוא רבש"ע עד עכשיו היו
אלו עובדים עבודת כוכבים
ואתה קורע להם את הים
מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא
מסר לו איוב שהיה מיועצי
פרעה דכתיב בו (איוב א:א)
"איש תם וישר", אמר לו הנו
בידך, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא
עד שהוא מתעסק עם איוב
ישראל עולים לים ויורדים
ואח"כ אציל את איוב.

Shemot Rabbah 21:7

Said R. Hama bar R. Hanina: When Israel was leaving Egypt, the angel Samael[◆] came to argue against them. R. Hama b. Hanina explained this, in the name of his father, as a parable: A shepherd was crossing his sheep across the river and a wolf came to attack them. What does an experienced shepherd do? He takes a big, old goat and hands it over to the wolf, thinking, "Let the wolf struggle with the goat—this will buy us time to cross the river, and then I will go back and get the goat." Similarly, when Israel left Egypt, the angel Samael came to argue against them in God's presence. He said, "Master of the Universe, these people were idolaters—you are going to split the Sea for them?!" What did God do? God handed him Iyyov, who was one of Pharaoh's advisers, for he was "complete and honest" (Job 1:1 [טו]). God said to him: "I hereby hand him over to you." God thought, "While Samael is dealing with Iyyov, Israel can make it through the Sea and then I will go back to get Iyyov."

Questions from R. Ethan Tucker:

1. This *midrash* suggests that God did not hand over Iyyov to the Satan (= Samael) for capricious reasons (as the book of Job suggests), but rather for the greater good: to save the Israelites. What do you think about this transformation of Iyyov's story?
2. While we might have focused on the suffering of the Egyptians because of their despotic leaders, this *midrash* brings our focus elsewhere: to the righteous, blameless Iyyov who was just caught up in the story and suffered through no fault of his own. What is this telling us about redemption? What about the culpability of the ordinary Egyptians and/or Iyyov?
3. This *midrash* pushes us to realize that if the only redemption we can stomach is one in which no one gets hurt, then we do not really want redemption at all. There is no such thing as redemption without violence. We can mourn the suffering, but this should not eclipse the fact that it was required for freedom. What do you think about this idea?



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