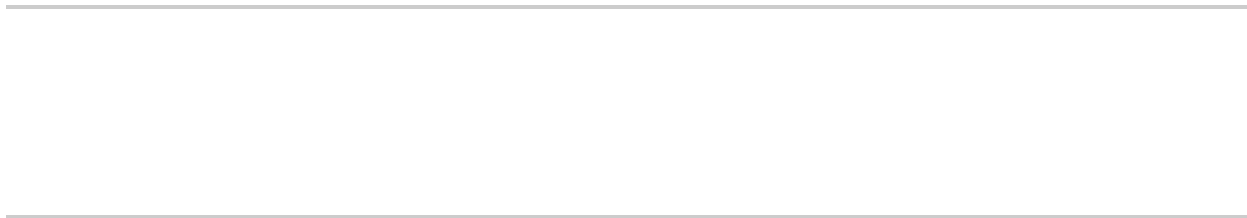




Jews have always been a community drawn together by virtue of Torah. No matter where you may be, we welcome you to the Ziegler community through Today's Torah e-mail.

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might be the object. As for “oved,” this word could function here as either the verb (what was done) or as a kind of adjective, as “to be” in the present tense (e.g., “is” and “are”) does not have distinct forms in biblical Hebrew and is almost always implied by the context and content of the sentence. And one more complication: this root “a.v.d.” has multiple meanings. It can have the sense of “to perish, be ruined, be destroyed,” and also “to be loss, strayed.”

If this phrase rings a bell for you, it is likely because you heard this past spring – and many springs before that, at a Passover seder. In that context, it is most commonly translated as “An Aramean sought to destroy my father.” According to the traditional Passover haggadah, this Aramean is Lavan, the father is our patriarch Jacob, and this is the introduction to the story of the descent of Jacob and his family to Egypt, the enslavement of their descendants there, and the ultimate redemption of the Israelites from slavery by God. We read and discuss this passage at the seder in order to fulfill the obligation of MráyMer ire

Amalek attacked us without provocation while we were wandering in the desert, and the message of that command is: “Don’t be naive.”

...

“Passover Jews” are motivated by empathy with the oppressed; “Purim Jews” are motivated by alertness to threat.

Now it just so happens that the command to remember Amalek is actually immediately juxtaposed to the first fruits ritual and declaration we have been discussing so far; it is Deut. 24:17-19, the final words of last week’s parashah. Which suggests that perhaps we need to add a third type of Jew – the Shavuot Jew – to the other two; and/or we might reconsider what it might mean to be a Passover Jew in contrast to a Shavuot Jew rather than in contrast to a Purim Jew.

There is much the Jew on Passover and the Jew on Shavuot share. Most significantly, Deut. 25:8-10 stress what God has done for God’s people: rescued us from Egypt and slavery, brought us to the Land, gave us the bounty of the Land. At the heart of our festivals, and our religious consciousness more generally, should always be our awareness of God’s role in the world and our lives. What we have and what we have experienced should be met with humility and gratitude rather than selfishness and self-satisfaction. Indeed, this might be something the Passover Jew and the Shavuot Jews share differently than the Purim Jew, in that the book of Esther is famously the one book of the Tanakh in which God’s presence and hand are hidden, the one book in which God’s name does not appear.

And yet... Halevi sees in the Passover Jew the call for justice for the oppressed: we know what it is to have been oppressed and so we are the ones in a place of power we should never become oppressors ourselves, when we can protest oppression and take up the cause of the oppressed, we must. And he is not wrong. But when the Passover Jew stands next to the Shavuot Jew, she looks a bit different to me.

The Passover Jew is redeemed from slavery, but still must go into the wilderness. She has been redeemed up to a point, but threats still abound, and she knows she is still in need of, and must seek, God’s protection. Also, the Passover Jew is bound up in the paradox of triumphantly listing the plagues that finally defeated the Egyptians while also pouring out drops of wine to mourn lives lost even among our enemies. The Passover Jew knows trauma, and is certainly allowed to celebrate its overthrow, but is challenged to seek compassion and justice nonetheless.

The Shavuot Jew, on the other hand, has arrived, in every sense of that word. She has a Land of her own in which she lives comfortably, and her needs are well met. What threatens her is complacency, smugness, and unwarranted self-congratulation. The challenge of the Shavuot Jew is not to forget that he too still needs God’s protection – in fact, that all that he has must be credited to God’s gifts and love.

And finally, what Halevi observes about his two types of Jews is true even for our three:

Both are essential; one without the other creates an unbalanced Jewish personality, a distortion of Jewish history and values.

We all have to find, and embrace, our inner Passover Jew with her sense of justice, our inner Purim Jew who is vigilant on behalf the welfare of the people – and our inner Shavuot Jew who is full of gratitude and wonder at the blessings we experience.

And with that, I return us all to our regular scheduled fall holidays about to be in progress... Shabbat shalom and shanah tovah u’metukah!

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