left Egypt. In this way, our constructed collective "memory" becomes a tool to help us preserve the past.

And yet this process might feel contrived. After all, we weren't really there, were we?

Thankfully—and quite intentionally—the creators of the Haggadah wrote these instructions to help us foster a greater sense of empathy. Indeed, they insisted that we look not only to the past to understand slavery, but to recite: "This year we are slaves." By personalizing these events, the Haggadah suggests, we understand them better.

I vividly recall how, when I was a boy, my father would bring a map of the world to the seder table and identify countries run by "modern-day Pharaohs." He wanted everyone gathered to become global citizens, responsive to the needs of people living in slavery today. He would also frequently stand vigil during his lunch hour, just across from the Soviet Embassy in the early 1970s, as a gesture of personal protest. On occasion I would join him.

Noah and I carry on that tradition. Along with our walks, we now march together as civil activists. On one of these occasions, Noah asked me how his grandfather would have responded to this tense moment in our history.

I didn't have to answer. We simply looked at each other and knew instantly that, although my father was not with us physically, he was there spiritually, marching right alongside us.

TORAH FROM JTS

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Bo 5777 **בא תשע"ז**

"Us" and "Them"

Paula Rose, Student, The Rabbinical School of JTS (Class of 2017)

"They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat."

This tongue-in-cheek summary of most Jewish holidays applies most strongly, perhaps, to the Passover Seder. We retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, we praise and thank God for redeeming us, and then we eat a festive meal. Cast in that light, the story of the Exodus seems so straightforward. The Israelites are innocent victims, somehow pawns in God's larger plan. The Egyptians, and especially Pharaoh, are wicked, oppressing the Israelites with forced labor. God punishes the Egyptians with plagues and redeems the Israelites with signs and wonders. In our popular conception of the story, there's a clear distinction between good and evil, the Israelites and the Egyptians, those whom God favors and those whom God punishes.

Indeed, in the beginning of the parashah, Moses and God define the Israelite community in relatively simple ways. Moses tells Pharaoh: "We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the Lord's festival" (Exod. 10:9). Men and women, adults and children, are all part of the story of the Exodus. God then adds future generations to Moses's definition of the Israelite community: "This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time" (Exod. 12:14). The in-group is no longer only the Israelites who are experiencing the Exodus in real time, but all of their descendants in perpetuity.

Generally speaking, this is still the way we think about our own community. At the seder table, we reinforce the imagined direct familial link between ourselves and the ancient Israelites, proclaiming: "If the Holy Blessed One had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, then we, our children, and our children's

children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." In upholding this model of Jewish communal identity, we assert that God favored our ancestors, and therefore us as well; just as the ancient Israelites are redeemed, so are we. Thus, we maintain the clear-cut dichotomies of self and other, Israelite and Egyptian.

But in studying Torah, as in living life, very little is so simple. As we continue reading the story of the Exodus in this week's parashah, those boundaries between who is in and who is out become much more blurry.

As God gives instructions about not eating or owning *hametz* during the festival of unleavened bread, the in-group becomes radically expanded: "For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country" (Exod. 12:19). In this command, it would seem, those who might not identify as Israelites are still very much included as part of the community. This trend towards wider boundaries continues as the text describes that alongside the Israelites leaving Egypt, a "mixed multitude" left with them (12:38). According to the plain meaning of the text, it seems that it is not only the Israelites who are the good guys, whom God protects, but others as well, presumably Egyptians, who join their narrative.

Given these different definitions of who comprises the Israelite community, it is unsurprising that as God outlines the laws of the paschal lamb, the first element discussed is who may or may not consume it. The child of the foreigner may not partake; the circumcised slave may. The bound or hired laborer may not; the circumcised stranger may (12:43-49). The boundaries of the Israelite community, of the protagonist team of the Exodus, are clearly more complicated than our usual narrative allows for.

These specific categories do not all perfectly map onto the experiences of the contemporary Jewish world. Nonetheless, they raise important questions about the nature of our communal boundaries. Who is in and who is out? Are the answers different depending on the context? What are the relationships between ethnicity, religion, and peoplehood? What identities are we born with, and what identities do we choose?

Too often, we choose simple answers to these questions, preferring the comfort of black and white over the complicated nuances of gray. But people, and therefore communities, are complex, and Parashat Bo reminds us that the answers to those questions are not, and should not be, simple. The boundaries of the Israelite community are porous, with more gray area than perhaps we would always like to admit.

We say, "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat." Using our sacred texts as our guides, let us remember to explore: Who are the "they" who tried to kill us? Who are the "we" who won? And who who are we obligated to welcome to our seder table?

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דבר אחר | A Different Perspective

From Generation to Generation Activism is Alive!

Rabbi Jonathan Lipnick, Rabbi-in-Residence at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education, JTS

My son Noah and I like to take walks together. It affords us time to connect—to talk about food, sports, relationships, and politics, and, once in a while, to explore an existential question.

"If I had never met my grandfather," Noah once asked me, "is it true to say that I will never really know him?"

Parashat Bo addresses this conundrum by insisting that we retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt to our children as if we had lived it ourselves: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: "It is because of what Adonai did for me when I came forth out of Egypt" (Exod. 13:8).

In the Haggadah, we read that seder participants are obligated to see themselves as having personally

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