



B’Khol Dor Va’Dor: How Jewish Storytelling Shapes the Religious Imagination and Orients Us in Time and Space

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Michael White & David Epston, Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends, 1990, pp. 9-10

In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them. Specific experiences of events of the past and present, and those that are predicted to occur in the future, must be connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account. This account can be referred to a story or self-narrative. The success of this storying of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives, and this is relied upon for the ordering of daily lives and for the interpretation of further experiences. Since all stories have a beginning (or a history), a middle (or a present), and an ending (or a future), then the interpretation of current events is as much future-shaped as it is past determined.

Griffith & Griffith, Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy, Narrative Approaches to Therapy, pp. 83-84

1. To a great extent we are lived by our stories. While we are always shaping and creating our life stories, we are also shaped by the stories we tell ourselves and are told by others about who we are and can be. Our stories influence to whom we are bound and from whom we are separate.
2. These stories are not just independent creations by us or our families, but are made within the forces of society, beginning before our birth in the ways our ancestors treated others and were treated. Indeed, our stories precede us not only through our bloodlines, but through the forerunners of our racial groups, social class, nationality, gender and religious group. Previous and present distribution of power among these groups determines “who gets a say about what.” In this way the discourses, values, politics, and standards of society in which we live continually open space for or constrain the self-narratives we can entertain.
3. There is always more lived experience than has yet been put into the stories of ourselves. There are always multiple – and sometimes contradictory – stories of our identity and relationships, our limits and possibilities.
4. Some narratives about our lives are already known, readily articulated to others, and easily received by them. Some are known to us, but difficult to speak to others. Still others are not yet formed, existing only as sketchy outlines at the edge of awareness. Therapy is a forum to entertain both stories made and stories in the making, and to reflect on which stories one desires to be guided by and which stories one desires to resist.
5. Therapists have a particular privilege and responsibility to the people who consult with them as both witness and co-creator of stories of their lives. Due to power imbalances both within the therapy relationship and within the larger culture in which therapy occurs, the therapist is called to “radical listening” (Weingarten, 1995) that listens first and foremost to what the storyteller thinks about the story he or she is telling. The teller’s experience about its meaning and primacy are privileged above the therapist’s impressions.

Rituals and ceremonies thus provide a way for human beings to address that which existentially must remain ambiguous, uncertain, or inchoate. When a relationship breaks up for reasons that cannot be understood, tragedy strikes the life of one who is blameless, or an immigrant grieves silently for his or her lost home, then life presses the realization that destiny can be neither logical nor just. Ritual and ceremony can provide a capacity to bear that which cannot be understood.

Exodus 13:8

(8) And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what ה' did for me when I went free from Egypt.'

שמות י"ג:ח'

(ח) וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֵבֹר יְהוָה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Malbim on Exodus 13:8:1

And you must tell your son [child]. This is the positive commandment of relating the story of the Exodus, which applies only "on that day." This is in contrast to the earlier verse, "Remember this day" (Shemos 13:3), which is an injunction merely to mention the exodus but it applies every day.

מלבי"ם על שמות י"ג:ח':א'

והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא. הוא מ"ע של ספור יצ"מ, כי מ"ש למעלה זכור את היום הזה הוא מ"ע של זכירת יצ"מ שזה נוהג בכל יום, אבל והגדת הוא הספור, שאינו נוהג רק ביום ההוא,

Or HaChaim on Exodus 13:8:3

Another reason that the Torah had to write the word לאמור in addition to והגדת is that the former was addressed to "your son." A father of girls or a husband not blessed with children might have concluded that since he had no son he would be free from the obligation to conduct the annual סדר celebration; the Torah writes לאמור, to tell us that even if the person is all alone he must relate what happened during that night to himself. Seeing that this is so, you may well ask why the Torah had to speak about a father telling his son at all? Perhaps I would not have known that under certain conditions one must "tell oneself" the *Haggadah shel Pessach* unless the Torah had used extra verbiage. Perhaps the Torah hinted that if someone is particular about telling of the Exodus, G'd will eventually grant him a son to whom he can relate these events.

אור החיים על שמות י"ג:ח':ג'

עוד ירצה באומרו לאמר להיות שאמר והגדת לבנך תינח אם יש לו בן אם אין לו בן יהיה פטור תלמוד לומר לאמר שעל כל פנים צריך להגיד אפילו בינו לבין עמו. ואם תאמר כיון שעל כל פנים הוא צריך להגיד אפילו בינו לבין עצמו אם כן למה אמר לבנך. ואולי שבאמצעות היתור אני מבין כן ולא בלא יתור. ואפשר עוד שירמוז באומרו והגדת לבנך שאם יגיד הגדה האמורה בנין יזכה ה' שיגיד לבנו וכדי שלא תטעה לומר דוקא, לזה אמר לאמר:

Rashi on Exodus 13:8:2

עשה ה' לי GOD DID FOR ME — Here is an indication of the reply to be given to the wicked son: that one should say to him, “God did for me” — and one should not say “what God did לנו, for us” — thus implying “not for thee”, for if thou hadst been there (in Egypt) thou wouldst not have been regarded as worthy of being redeemed (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 13:14:1).

רש"י על שמות י"ג: ח': ב'

עשה ה' לי. רמז תשובה לבן רשע, לומר עשה ה' לי, ולא לך, שאילו היית שם לא היית כדאי לגאול (מכילתא):

Torah Temimah on Torah, Exodus 13:8:3

“God did for me.” In every generation a person is obligated to see oneself as if they one came out of Egypt, as it says: “It is because of what God did for me when I went free from Egypt.”

תורה תמימה על התורה, שמות י"ג: ח': ג'
עשה ה' לי. בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאלו הוא יצא ממצרים, שנאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים (פסחים קט"ז ב').

Steinsaltz on Pesachim 116b:3

And they further said: In every generation a person is obligated to see oneself as if they one came out of Egypt, as it says: “And you shall explain to your child on that day, ‘It is because of what ה' did for me when I went free from Egypt.’ In every generation a person says “what God did for me” and does not say “for my ancestors.”

ביאור שטיינזלץ על פסחים קט"ז ב: ג'
ועוד אמרו: בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא עצמו יצא ממצרים, שנאמר: “והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים” (שמות יג, ח), ובכל הדורות אומר אדם בלשון “עשה ה' ליי” ולא אומר בלשון “לאבותי”.

Mishnah Pesachim 10

(4) The attendants **poured the second cup for the leader of the seder, and here the son asks his father** the questions about the differences between Passover night and a regular night. **And if the son does not have the intelligence** to ask questions on his own, **his father teaches him** the questions. The mishna lists the questions: **Why is this night different from all other nights? As on all other nights we eat leavened bread and matza as preferred; on this night all our bread is matza. As on all other nights we eat other vegetables; on this night we eat bitter herbs.**

משנה פסחים י'

(ד) מְזַגְגוּ לוֹ כּוֹס שְׁנַי, וְכָאן הֵבִין שׁוֹאֵל אָבִיו, וְאִם אֵין דְּעַת בִּבְנֵי, אָבִיו מְלַמְּדוֹ, מֵה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלֹת, שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֵמֶץ וּמֶצֶה, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ מֶצֶה. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יִרְקוֹת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מְרוֹר. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֶּשֶׂר צָלִי, שְׁלוּק, וּמִבְּשֵׁל, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ צָלִי. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלֹת אָנוּ מְטַבֵּילִין פְּעַם אַחַת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְעָמִים. וּלְפִי דְּעַתוֹ שֶׁל בֵּן, אָבִיו מְלַמְּדוֹ. מִתְחִיל בְּגִנוֹת וּמְסִים בְּשֶׁבַח, וְדוֹרֵשׁ מֵאֲרָמֵי אוֹבֵד אָבִי, עַד שֶׁיִּגְמַר כָּל הַפְּרָשָׁה כְּלָה:

When the Temple was standing one would ask: **As on all other nights we eat** either **roasted, stewed, or cooked meat**, but **on this night all** the meat is the **roasted** meat of the Paschal lamb. The final question was asked even after the destruction of the Temple: **As on all other nights we dip** the vegetables in a liquid during the meal only **once**; however, **on this night we dip twice**. **And according to the intelligence** and the ability of the son, **his father teaches him** about the Exodus. When teaching his son about the Exodus. **He begins with** the Jewish people's **disgrace and concludes with** their **glory**. **And he expounds** from the passage: **"An Aramean tried to destroy my father"** (Deuteronomy 26:5), the declaration one recites when presenting his first fruits at the Temple, **until he concludes** explaining **the entire section**.

(5) **Rabban Gamliel would say: Anyone who did not say these three matters on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation: The Paschal lamb, matza, and bitter herbs.** When one mentions these matters, he must elaborate and explain them: The **Paschal lamb** is brought **because the Omnipresent passed over [pasah] the houses of our forefathers in Egypt, as it is stated: "That you shall say: It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Paschal offering for He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt" (Exodus 12:27).** The reason for **matza** is **because our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt, as it is stated: "And they baked the dough that they took out of Egypt as cakes of matzot, for it was not leavened, as they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry" (Exodus 12:39).** The reason for **bitter herbs** is **because the Egyptians embittered our forefathers' lives in Egypt, as it is stated: "And they embittered their lives with hard service" (Exodus 1:14).** The *tanna* of the mishna further states: **In each and every generation a person must view himself as though he personally left Egypt, as it is stated: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: It is because of this which**

(ה) רבון גמליאל הִיא אוֹמֵר, כֹּל שֶׁלֹא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים אֵלּוּ בַפֶּסַח, לֹא יֵצֵא יְדֵי חוֹבָתוֹ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן, פֶּסַח, מַצָּה, וּמְרוֹר. פֶּסַח, עַל שׁוּם שֶׁפֶסַח הַמְקוּם עַל בֵּיתֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם. מַצָּה, עַל שׁוּם שֶׁנִּגְאָלוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם. מְרוֹר, עַל שׁוּם שֶׁמָּרְרוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם אֶת חַיֵּי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם. בְּכָל דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּב אֲדָם לְרִאוֹת אֶת עֲצָמוֹ כְּאֵלּוּ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת יג), וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לְפִיכֵן אֲנַחְנוּ חֲבִיבֵינָא לְהוֹדוֹת, לְהַלֵּל, לְשַׁבַּח, לְפָאֵר, לְרוֹמֵם, לְהַדָּר, לְבָרֵךְ, לְעַלֵּה, וּלְקַלֵּס, לְמִי שֶׁעָשָׂה לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ אֶת כָּל הַנְּסִים הָאֵלּוּ, הוֹצִיאָנוּ מֵעֲבָדוֹת לְחֵירוֹת, מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׁמְחָה, וּמֵאֲבֵל לְיוֹם טוֹב, וּמֵאֲפֵלָה לְאוֹר גְּדוֹל, וּמִשְׁעָבוֹד לְגֵאֲלָה. וְנֹאמַר לְפָנָיו, הַלְלוּיָהּ:

the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:8). Therefore we are obligated to thank, praise, glorify, extol, exalt, honor, bless, revere, and laud [*lekales*] the One who performed for our forefathers and for us all these miracles: He took us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to a Festival, from darkness to a great light, and from enslavement to redemption. And we will say before Him: *Halleluya*. At this point one recites the *hallel* that is said on all joyous days.

Griffith & Griffith, Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy, Existential Questions, p. 46

- What has sustained you?
- From what sources do you draw strength in order to cope?
- Where do you find peace?
- Who truly understands your situation?
- When you are afraid or in pain, how do you find comfort?
- For what are you deeply grateful?
- What is your clearest sense of the meaning of your life at this time?
- Why is it important that you are alive?
- To what or whom are you most devoted?
- To whom, or what, do you most freely express love?

Griffith & Griffith, Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy, p. 265

Each existential crisis state is itself one half of a couplet of emotional postures: despair versus hope, meaninglessness versus purpose, helplessness versus personal agency, isolation versus communion, resentment versus gratitude, sorrow versus joy. Despair, meaninglessness, helplessness, isolation, resentment, and sorrow each represent a retreat from purposeful activity, a readiness to quit responding to challenges whether they be mental or physical ones. These are states of breakdown in which coping actions become chaotic and ineffective. As such, they constitute states of vulnerability to illness.

Mishneh Torah, Leavened and Unleavened

Bread 7:6

In every generation, one must show himself as if he personally had come out from the subjugation of Egypt; as it is stated (Deuteronomy 6:23), "And He took us out from there, etc." And regarding this, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded in the Torah (Deut. 5:15, 15:15, 24:22), "Remember that you were a slave" - meaning to say, as if you yourself had been a slave, came out to freedom, and were redeemed.

Sforno on Exodus 24:18:1

Italian 1470-c.1550

ויהי משה בהר, each time Moses ascended the mountain from this point on he remained on it for a period of 40 days and forty nights. This period corresponds to the time it takes for a fertilized egg in a woman's womb to achieve a critical status that permits us to refer to it as a fetus. Moses' stay on the mountain for such periods of time effected his spiritual progress in a similar manner, elevating him to higher spiritual dimensions. The evidence lies in the fact that eventually Moses' face radiated so much spiritual illumination that the people were frightened by this phenomenon and Moses had to veil his head. (Exodus 34,29) Moses had been meant to achieve this stature already at the end of his first 40 days' stay on the mountain, but the people's making the golden calf and worshipping it, foiled this plan. G'd Himself told Moses to descend due to his people having become corrupt (Exodus 32,7).

משנה תורה, הלכות חמץ ומצה ז' ו'

בְּכֹל דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּב אָדָם לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת
עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ יָצָא עִתָּה
מִשְׁעַבְדֵי מִצְרַיִם שְׁנַאֲמַר (דְּבָרִים ו' כג)
”וְאֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם” וְגו'. וְעַל דָּבָר
זֶה צִוָּה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּתוֹרָה
וְזָכְרָתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ כְּלוּמַר כְּאִלּוּ
אָתָּה בְּעַצְמְךָ הָיִיתָ עֶבֶד וְיָצָאתָ לְחֵירוֹת
וְנִפְדִּיתָ:

ספורנו על שמות כ"ד: י"ח: א'

ויהי משה בהר בכל פעם שעלה שם מכאן
ואילך שהה ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה
כימי יצירת הולד, לקנות תחתיו שם הויה
נכבדת, ראויה לשמוע מפי הרב מה שלא
ישיגהו זולתו, כמו שהעיד באמרו כי קרן
עור פניו בדברו אתו, וקלקל זה חטאם
בסוף ארבעים יום ראשונים, בעת שהיה
ראוי להשיגו, כאמרו לך רד כי שחת עמך