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Avniel  
Spatz

Some Lessons of Cross River Dialogue  
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**Charnice Milton Community Bookstore** presents this title as part of an effort to promote literacy and crucial community conversations.

Charnice A. Milton, her memory is a blessing, was a local journalist for whom reading and writing were crucial. Books were refuge and companion throughout her life. As a journalist, Charnice used writing to serve the community in which she was raised. She was killed on her way home from assignment, and her homicide remains unsolved. She is missed.

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# Rereading Exodus along the Anacostia

Some Lessons of Cross River Dialogue

Virginia Avniel Spatz

**Pre-Passover Excerpts  
for Tzedek Chicago**

Charnice Milton Community Bookstore  
2022

## Who Are We?

One reason we re-learn the Exodus story, year after year, is to give ourselves another opportunity to grasp the many ways in which we have yet to experience Liberation. One way to seek out new perspectives is to consider ourselves as some, or all, the characters in a sacred text.

- How are we, like the midwives at the start of the story (Ex 1:15-21), attempting to stand up to power and for life?
- How are we, like Moses (Ex 2ff), struggling with identity -- raised in one household and culture but connected in many ways to another?
- How are we, like Pharaoh (Ex 1ff), impatient with the past and fearful of the future, ready to knock down anyone or anything that threatens those we believe we must protect?
- As *Yisrael-ite* or *Mitzrayim-ite*, what assumptions and experiences form our views?

Can we learn to hold more than one point of view at the same time or in conversation with one another?

Some go further and seek perspectives of non-humans in the story: the basket which carries infant Moses; The River (Nile); the bush that burns but is not consumed; the staff adult Moses carries ;the snake the staff temporarily becomes; the Sea of Reeds, before, during, or after its splitting. God.

Some people liken this method of Torah study to dream interpretation. And some teachers place this work in a therapeutic context. Please do note that, in grappling deeply with text, challenging images and memories can arise. This is one reason it's useful to work with a partner or a group.

This kind of Torah study can be the basis of additional storytelling, and other forms of artistic expression, around the sacred text. It can be used to create "Bibliodrama" with others.

The Institute for Contemporary Midrash, one of the first places I learned bibliodrama and other forms of midrashic expression, is now a web-based program, still run by its founder, Rivka Walton. Visit [ICMidrash.org](http://ICMidrash.org).

However we approach the Exodus story, one part of our learning job is to figure out how we've been contributing to the oppression of others and how we might begin to address that. It's hard work. Sometimes processing in a group can be helpful or joining in existing efforts. See "Some Resources to Explore" for a few suggestions.

Here are selections from a relevant example from Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ). "*Maggid*" [Telling]" is the main narrative section of the Passover seder.

"After the Maggid: When We Imagine Ourselves Allies"  
by Sarah Barasch-Hagans and Graie Barasch-Hagans

Author Note:

In most discussions of racial justice, interracial families are often made completely invisible. This is ironic, as these families constantly deal in a microcosm with the larger issues of white supremacy and thus have much to teach us. This piece began as a way of addressing the complexities of oppression within interracial families and pushing against how abstract and disconnected most conceptions of "allyship" can feel for white members of interracial families. The language of fighting for family may make more sense for everyone to acknowledge the experiences of an interracial family unit and of a larger multiracial human family.

...If everywhere is a desert then the sand we stand is always shifting, and so is our relationship to each other. Let us take a moment to imagine ourselves thus...

#### **Sometimes we are Bat Pharaoh...**

...Pharaoh's daughter, choosing "compassion" without hesitation, pulling the baby out of the river and giving him a home. But when we pull him from the river, he is taken from his people and forced to pretend to be someone else in order to survive. And we know that he is family and we love him as our son, but we ask impossible things of him....

#### **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...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.

#### **Sometimes we are Tziporah...**

...fully capable of defending ourselves but in need of a few more allies. Ready to be an ally when it means leaving our family, circumcising our children, and wandering in the desert for decades. And

some of us are still Tzipporah. Marveling at how quickly you forget this when our children are killed by the police....

-- from *#BLM Haggadah Supplement*, 2016

Download the entire publication and more from [jfrej.org](http://jfrej.org)

The authors's note also makes the point, one that cannot be emphasized often enough: "The Exodus story is filled with allies and oppressors, with many of the characters inhabiting both roles at different points."

Considering multiple perspectives, all valid, and exploring contradictory realities, all true, is key in collaboration and community building. It is also a traditional way to read Jewish sacred text. This can be confusing for people not used to this way of reading, especially this approach to Bible -- which some of us were taught had "the meaning" we needed a particular sort of teacher to impart.

*The Peoples' Companion to the Bible*, cited above, explains this neatly, using the example of Fortress Press' own "commentary from the respected Hermeneia series" for comparison:

While the 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.

-- p. xxvii, Introduction, *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible*

Throughout *Rereading Exodus*, we will see that Bible passages yield readings focused on individuals and interpersonal relationships, on systemic racism, on anti-Jewishness, on the intersection of those and other forms of oppression, and on many other facets of the text. All those layers are contained within the text. Even if we're discussing which one adheres more closely to the grammar at one point or some other element of the text, or which makes more sense in one particular context, all the layers are there.

That variety is an important tool. And, as with any tool, taking care in its use is essential.

[ritual questions are out of order here; sorry!

For Passover-related reasons, "we counted 6" is linked with "Roundabout and Old Bones" below]

[7]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49

**"The Exodus story is filled with allies and oppressors,  
with many of the characters  
inhabiting both roles at different points."**

-- from *#BLM Haggadah Supplement*, 2016

-----Some Resources to Explore-----

**Ammud** provides Jewish education for Jews of Color, by Jews of Color. Many of their programs are accessible on-line now. As a white Jew, I have not participated directly in Amnud's regular programs, but I have been inspired when their teachers present in the wider world. They also offer an opportunity to stay in touch through their "Ally Circle." Amnud.org

**Drisha** was one of the, if not *the*, earliest places for women to learn advanced classical text. Their offerings have expanded to wider adult Jewish education, and much is now available on-line, including many useful approaches to Exodus. I have learned with Drisha in-person and on-line and highly recommend for the more text-focused among us. Drisha.org

**Jews for Racial and Economic Justice** is based in New York and focuses on local issues but also provides materials, including *#BLM Haggadah Supplement* and other materials of wide use plus programming that supports understanding Jewish text and ritual in a social justice context. jfrej.org/

**Jews in ALL Hues (JIAH)** is an education and advocacy organization supporting Jews of Color and multi-heritage Jews. They aim "to build a future for the Jewish people where intersectional diversity and dignity are normative." Workshops include "Practical Allyship and Liberation," and "The Intersection of Racism, Judaism, and White Supremacy." jewsinallhues.org/

**SVARA:** The Traditionally Radical Yeshiva focuses on Talmud, rather than Bible, and might appear at first glance too advanced or too heavy and maybe too far removed from Exodus. But SVARA is dedicated in everything it does to promoting racial justice and examining oppression and privilege, thereby offering new angles on Exodus themes. They call their style "hardcore, queer, and radically inclusive," and are the most supportive, soul-affirming learning of any kind I've met yet. There are free opportunities to try out their learning and all classes are pay-what-you-can. svara.org

**Tzedek Chicago** is "an intentional Jewish congregation based on core values of justice, equity and solidarity." Torah study, which has been on-line since early in the pandemic, is open to all and draws people from around the world and from many backgrounds. Rabbi Brant Rosen strives to make discussion accessible. The weekly studies are focused on portion of the week, so not necessarily about Exodus all the time; however, issues of equity and community building are constant themes. tzedekchicago.org

**Uri L'Tzedek** is an orthodox Jewish social justice organization. Their resources include Torah teachings in text, webinars, and other resources of use in anti-racism and other Exodus-related work. utzedek.org

## Who Are We Not?

Exodus opens with that list of names discussed above, Jacob/*Yisrael* and his eleven sons. The text then adds:

Joseph was in Egypt already. -- Ex 1:5

[8]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49

Joseph is mentioned twice more in the next few verses and then again in Ex 13:9. His role in this saga is pivotal, and -- aware that where we begin is crucial to a story's shape -- knowing a little about Joseph will be important in *Rereading Exodus*.

In his 1974 *Bible Tales with Commentary*, Dick Gregory (*ꝑ*) provides a summary, excerpted here ("From The ABC's of Slavery"), before he launches his commentary, which is insightful on its own and useful for our purposes, simultaneously dated and way too current.

Gregory 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." -- *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."

Today, as in 1974, readers of many backgrounds can relate to a system that tries to destroy dreams by attacking dreamers.

It is noteworthy in Gregory's presentation here that MLK is introduced without explicit reference to race; in contrast to elsewhere in the same book, where King's Blackness is highlighted, this passage portrays the leader more generally as a dreamer who treaded in dangerous political territory.

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. -- *Bible Tales*, p.73

Then, as now, readers outside Black communities can relate to the feeling of being ill-used. But here Gregory specifically references the experience of Black people enslaved in the U.S. and their descendants. Those of us for whom this is not direct experience must recognize what we know and what we don't know.

We might consider the dreamer passage **outside-in**, bringing outside experience to illuminate sacred text, while the butler passage works **inside-out**, bringing sacred text to illuminate the outside world. These forms of Torah overlap, and we can all learn from both. It is crucial for all of us to listen to and try to empathize with views not our own. But these two forms of commentary from Dick Gregory illustrate crucial reminders for Passover and year-round:

- Each generation must see ourselves as though we actually left *Mitzrayim*, but that experience alone does not make 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, and mistaking it for our own, on the other.

Dick Gregory (1932-2017, ז"ל) was an author, comedian, civil rights leader, health educator, activist, and mentor. Among his writings, *Dick Gregory's Bible Tales with Commentary* (James R. McGraw, ed. NY: Stein and Day, 1974) is an often neglected treasure.

Gregory was long active in school desegregation and other efforts in Chicago and ran for mayor in 1967. He was later active for decades in the DC area. He was mentor to many, including members of CRD. Gregory supported Kymone Freeman's organizing of Black LuvFest, for example, and founding of We Act Radio, where he was interviewed at length. 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.

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## From "The ABC's of Slavery,"

*Dick Gregory's Bible Tales with Commentary* James R. McGraw, ed.  
NY: Stein and Day, 1974 (Harper & Row/Perennial Paperback also 1974)

### "A. Dealing with the Dreamer (Genesis Chapter 37)"

Joseph was one of many brothers and half-brothers. But because Joseph had been born in Jacob's old age, he was the favorite of his father. Jacob was always doing things for Joseph, dressing him up in boss threads and fine vines [1974, remember]. For example, he gave Joseph a long-sleeved coat of many different colors, a style that was really in at the time. [p.63]

Joseph's brothers couldn't stand him. They thought he was a spoiled brat, a tattletale, and Daddy's little pet. Of course, Joseph brought much of the hatred on himself. For example, he just couldn't resist telling his dreams to his brothers....

So they sold Joseph for 20 shekels and the traders took Joseph to Egypt....

...The traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. The dreamer was about to start a new career in the court of Pharaoh. But that's another story. [pp.64-65. See also "B. The Butler, the Baker and the Captain's Wife (Genesis Chapters 39-40)" not excerpted here.]

### "C. Feast and Famine (Genesis Chapter 41)"

...And Joseph was given the second chariot behind Pharaoh, and wherever he rode, people got down on their knees before him. So Joseph did his Charlton Heston bit throughout the land of Egypt.

And Joseph put his conservation program into effect. In every city food from the surrounding fields was stored up....

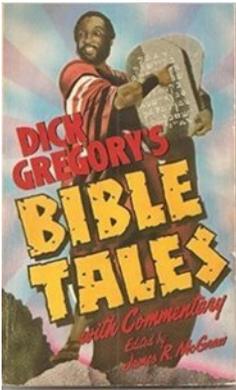
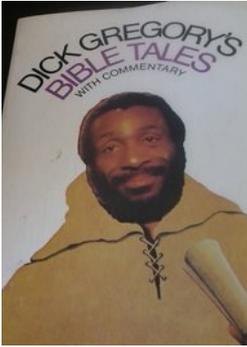
Then the famine came. There was no food in all the earth, except in the land of Egypt. The people cried out in their hunger to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh said, "Go see Joseph and do whatever he says."...

And Joseph said to Pharaoh one day, "Good business just requires patience. I knew we'd get a good wheat deal if we had sense enough to wait seven years." [p.70. end of Gregory's summary; end of excerpt]

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Two additional notes about the biblical Joseph:

- 1) He is great-grandson of Sarah and Abraham; grandson of Rebecca and Isaac; and son of Rachel and Jacob/*Yisrael*.
- 2) As Genesis ends, he arranges for his extended family to settle in *Mitzrayim*, and as Exodus opens, that clan of 70 re-appears.



Photos: Left and below: two book covers for *Dick Gregory's Bible Tales*, both 1974  
Right: Dick Gregory at Black LuvFest 2017.

Top left: Trade paperback cover, with title, "Dick Gregory's Bible Tales with Commentary" in slight arc over photo of dark-haired Dick Gregory, smiling slightly, dressed in costume of biblical-looking robe with scroll in his left hand. Below left: Mass market paperback cover with title superimposed on image of Gregory, posing as Moses atop a mountain with two stone tablets in arm.

Right: Silver-haired Gregory (looking, at 85, very like his picture at 42, excepting the gray hair) in tan summer suit, tie, and light-colored shirt, squinting into the sun, alone in front of a small crowd interacting among display stalls; between Gregory and the festival are two large cement planters filled with bedraggled plants.

NOTE: *Dick Gregory's Bible Tales with Commentary* was written a long time ago. Parts of it are outdated in cute, nostalgic ways, like the reference to how we'd only have three commandments if Rose Mary Woods had been in charge.... Duck-Duck-Go it if need be (or use a search engine that tracks your movements and sells them to marketers, if that's your preference).... Parts of it show its age in ways in that just remind us how long ago the 1970s are. But it still has power, some of which comes from the fact that it was written so long ago, and some of which comes from Gregory's perception and wit. However, the book has been out of print for decades. Stein and Day are long gone. I am looking into possibilities for having it re-published and would love to hear from anyone with thoughts on this.

## Roundabout and Old Bones

The previous section took us back to the Joseph story in Genesis, an essential precursor leading to the Exodus story. Here, we continue to orient ourselves for the journey, with a jump ahead: past 13 chapters of drama, to what is sometimes understood as "the Exodus," the point when the *Yisrael-ites* finally leave *Mitzrayim* and then cross the Sea of Reeds.

Getting out is a goal for the first 13 chapters of Exodus and then a climax in the story. The triumphant moment appears in the Torah portion called "*Beshalach*" (Exodus 13:17-17:16), including the Song of the Sea sung by grateful *Yisrael-ites* after they escape Pharaoh's army...

...In *The Prince of Egypt*, I'm told, the Song occurs before they get through the sea; not sure if/how that changes experience of the moment -- worth considering for those for whom that movie is part of their vision here...

The triumphant moment of the Exodus -- the fact that it's always at least one of the end-points for this drama -- sometimes overshadows the complexities of the story. 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*" (see box) opens with noteworthy complexities. [Again, ritual questions are out of order here; sorry!] [6]

The Song of the Sea has long been part of Jewish liturgy, as have psalms that celebrate coming out of *Mitzrayim* (Psalms 113-118, "Egyptian Hallel"). Celebratory Exodus themes are part of many other moments in the daily, Shabbat and Festival prayers, as well as Passover. But these triumphal elements have also long raised conflict.

Jewish tradition has always included the bitter along with the sweet and asked us to recognize painful parts of the Exodus story -- for example, the ritual removing of wine from our Passover cup for each of the ten plagues. For many Jews, however, this is not enough. See, e.g., *Siddur Dvar Hadash* and "Red Sea," quoted in the Introduction. But change leads through conflict...

### Change of Heart, Old Promises

47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54
55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62
63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78
79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86
87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94
95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102

First, the *Yisrael-ites* are sent on a roundabout route, to avoid a "change of heart." Seeking to avoid war is a worthy motive. But the text here suggests that the People are being sent on a roundabout way because they might fear conflict: The verb translated as "change of heart" [nachum, נָחַם] also means "comfort." So, there is a strong sense that this particular leadership decision is about seeking comfort over facing even potential conflict (Ex 13:17-18 -- see box).

**from *Beshalach***

When Pharaoh sent the people out,  
God did not lead them [*v'lo-nacham*]  
by the coastal/Philistine route, although it was nearer, for God said:  
"Lest the people may have a change of heart [*pen yinnachem*]  
when they see war, and return to Egypt."  
So God led the people roundabout, by wilderness route,  
at the Sea of Reeds...  
And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him;  
for he had extracted a vow from the Children of *Yisrael*, saying:  
"God will surely remember you;  
and you shall carry up my bones away with you."  
-- Exodus 13:17-19

Then we're told that the *Yisrael-ites* are carting along old bones. This is to honor a vow made generations earlier, back when the old Pharaoh still knew Joseph (Gen 50:24-26 and Ex 1:8, Ex 13:19).

In regard to this promise, there are commentaries from many perspectives. Some of the most ancient look at ritual concerns; while beyond the scope of this book, it is worth noting that questions around respectful treatment of the dead are age-old concerns from many traditions.

R' Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810 CE, Ukraine) teaches that carrying Joseph's bones can be understood as Moses, "the aspect of the mind," being bound to Joseph "the aspect of the *tzaddik* [untranslated in Breslov Institute's English]." Although *tzaddik* can be translated as "virtuous" or "just," it also means "to be clear." So, carrying Joseph's bones is binding clarity to mind. (*Likutei Moharan*. 211:1)

One symbolic approach links Joseph with a quality the *Yisrael-ites* need for this trip. R' Nachman (see left) has a specific quality in mind. But, as we learn more about the biblical Joseph, we can also ponder if/how he exemplifies a quality the People need here and what that quality might be.

Sforno (16th Century, Italy; see above) again offers us political practicalities:

...any obligation undertaken communally must be honoured by the leader of that community when the time and opportunity presents itself to discharge that obligation (Eliyahu Munk trans. via Sefaria).

This raises many questions, including: What does it mean for a community to be obligated? How does that come about, and how is it discharged? What do we owe leaders, or other community members, of the past?

## Liberation and Conflict

Finally, as if to underscore the illusory nature of liberation, the *Yisrael-ites* are sent out of the Narrow Place and meant to believe escape is at hand. But, they are again trapped, with *Mitzrayim's* army behind and the Sea of Reeds ahead (Ex 14; not quoted here).

The Bible story continues 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* emerging on the other side with Pharaoh no longer a threat.

Hurston describes events this way:

"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 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 those seeking justice heard, from in their own communities and beyond --

"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."

Have we learned more about approaching conflict that to help us this time?

And what about these old bones?

Are we honoring ancestors by carrying them?

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

**What does it mean for a community to be obligated?**

**How does that come about, and how is it discharged?**

**What do we owe leaders,  
or other community members, of the past?**



## We counted 6.

**Are those not actively suffering** from oppression allowed to decide what the times will bear in terms of community change? How can this reality be highlighted so as to encourage a change of perspective?

**Have you heard these themes** directed at you or others?

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

"Now is not the time...Be patient." or "You'll get us all killed."

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

What kinds of responses have been tried? What might work better?

**And what about** these old bones? Are we honoring ancestors by carrying them? Or are we tied to older visions and promises that are holding us back, might even shame those same ancestors? What does it mean for a community to be obligated? at all? What do we owe leaders, other community members, or vows of the past?

### [Intention, Blessing, Count]

היום שבָּעָה זְמַיִם שֶׁהֵם שְׁבוּעַ אֶחָד לְעֹמֶר  
*Hayom shivah yamim shehem shavua echad la-omer.*  
Today is seven days which is one week of the Omer.



## We counted 7.

**How are we, like the midwives** at the start of the story (Ex 1:15-21), attempting to stand up to power and for life?

**How are we, like Moses** (Ex 2ff), struggling with identity -- raised in one household and culture but connected in many ways to another?

**How are we, like Pharaoh** (Ex 1ff), impatient with the past and fearful of the future, ready to knock down anyone or anything that threatens those we believe we must protect?

**As Yisrael-ites or Mitzrayim-ites**, what assumptions and experiences form our views?

**Can we learn to hold** more than one point of view at the same time or in conversation with one another?

### [Intention, Blessing, Count]

היום שְׁמוֹנֶה זְמַיִם שֶׁהֵם שְׁבוּעַ אֶחָד וַיּוֹם אֶחָד לְעֹמֶר  
*Hayom sh'monah yamim shehem shavua echad v'yom echad la-omer.*  
Today is eight days, which is one week and one day of the Omer.



## We counted 8.



**Non-Black Jews** might have experiences of oppression and carry generational trauma. We can learn from others. But that does not make us first-hand experts on topics like "America's treatment of Black folks."

**Non-Jewish folks** might have experiences of oppression, carry generational trauma, and can learn from Jews. But non-Jews are not first-hand experts on topics like "alarm bells that anti-Jewish conspiracy raise for me."

**How do we speak and write** so as to distinguish shared, or universal, experiences from more particular ones?

### [Intention, Blessing, Count]

הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁעָה יָמִים שֶׁהֵם שְׁבוּעַ אֶחָד וּשְׁנַי יָמִים לְעוֹמֵר  
*Hayom tishah yamim shehem shavua echad ushnei yamim la-omer.*  
Today is nine days, which is one week and two days of he Omer.



## We counted 9.

Rabbi Gerry Serotta says that, instead of focusing on the identities of the people who left, we should instead ask:

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

### [Intention, Blessing, Count]

הַיּוֹם עֲשָׂרָה יָמִים שֶׁהֵם שְׁבוּעַ אֶחָד וּשְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעוֹמֵר  
*Hayom asarah yamim*  
*shehem shavua echad ushloshah yamim la-omer.*  
Today is ten days, which is one week and three days of the Omer.



## We counted 10.



R' Jacob argues that existing personal friendships were changed through propaganda. **Might a counter-effort** have helped them survive?

History has shown us individual friendships surviving, and serving to ameliorate effects of oppressive conditions around the globe, for short periods.

**What about the long-haul?** At what point does friendship become untenable if the systemic conditions are not addressed?

Consider the role of "systematically encouraged hate" in our lives today.