

What we're doing: instigated questions and provoked answers.

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A newsletter.



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

At the culminating moment of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King* (the book, not the movie, which seemed to have nine culminating moments), Frodo and Sam find themselves on the slopes of Mount Doom, the volcano in which the One Ring of Power was forged and into which Frodo has just cast it, destroying it and thus defeating the Dark Lord Sauron. Mount Doom is erupting beneath them, and as they await what they expect will be their imminent demise, Sam wistfully speculates about how their story will be told:

"What a tale we have been in Mr. Frodo, haven't we?" he said. "I wish I could hear it told. Do you think they'll say: Now comes the story of Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom? And then everyone will hush, like we did, when in Rivendell they told us the tale of Beren One-hand and the Great Jewel. I wish I could hear it! And I wonder how it will go on after our part."

It's a moment that echoes the passage in Shemot (12:24-27)—central to the Haggadah text—in which the Israelites are instructed about how they and their descendants ought to tell the story of *Y'tziat Mitzrayim* / the Exodus from Egypt:

"You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants. And when you enter the land that God will give you, as God has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to God, because God passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when God smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.'"

What's particularly profound about each of these texts is the relationship they establish with us, their future readers. By reading these lines, we reify them, fulfilling the promise of stories whose retelling they, themselves, anticipate.

In his poem "[Tintern Abbey](#)," William Wordsworth brings a layer of intimate self-consciousness to a similar undertaking:

*And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years.*

Wordsworth's intended audience is his future self, and his experience of the present moment is enhanced by how he imagines that future self will remember it. In his breathtaking essay "[Arbitrage](#)" (*The New Yorker*, July 10, 2000), Andre Aciman writes, "Wordsworth at Tintern Abbey, it occurred to me, was...firming up the present by experiencing it from the future as a moment in the past. What Wordsworth remembers at Tintern Abbey is not the past but himself in the past imagining the future; and what he looks forward to is not even the future but himself, in the future, retrieving the bone he buried in the past."

It's this looping relationship with time, memory, and legacy that's at the heart of the Seder ritual that Jews around the world will gather to enact next week. More important than personally recalling—as if we could—our own memory of escaping from Egyptian bondage, we remember *our ancestors' anticipation of our recounting of their story* and, in so doing, make the story our own, as the Haggadah instructs us to tell it "*k'elu hu yatzah m'Mitzrayim*," as if we ourselves left Egypt.

In so doing, we accomplish three extraordinary things: First, we affirm our interdependent relationship with our forebears—our narrating of their story fulfills the obligation they assumed on our behalf, re-closing each year a loop that was opened millennia ago.

Second, like Wordsworth, we find ourselves in a heightened state of awareness about our own personal movement through time—the taste of the *matzah*, the familiar songs, the peculiar rituals—these annual nibbles of the (unleavened) Proustian madeleine that confront us with memories of Pesachs past: who we were then, whom we’ve become, and whom we’re still becoming. It’s as if the loops of our helical lives compress during the Seder, and we can more easily gaze across time at our younger and older selves who, in turn, gaze back at us.

Finally, if we’re paying attention, we recognize that the most expansive reading of the Haggadah’s charge is for us to imagine how our present moment will itself be remembered by our descendants and to do the mighty work to ensure that our lives tell a story that we can send with pride as a gift to the future.

Chag Sameach,
Aaron

Dayenu | דַּיְנוּ It Would Have Been Enough.

What does it mean to be enough? To have enough?

[Sh'ma Now](#), on [The Forward](#) website, explores the nuances and implications of DAYENU - it would have been enough. Good all year round, and especially delicious served as part of a passover seder to provoke and deepen your conversations.

GIVING

What’s the difference between restricted and unrestricted grants? At the Ford Foundation, the distinction is now porous – the philanthropic heavyweight recently empowered its Program Officers to exercise judgment and make restricted grants unrestricted. This provides the organizations flexibility and makes use of existing

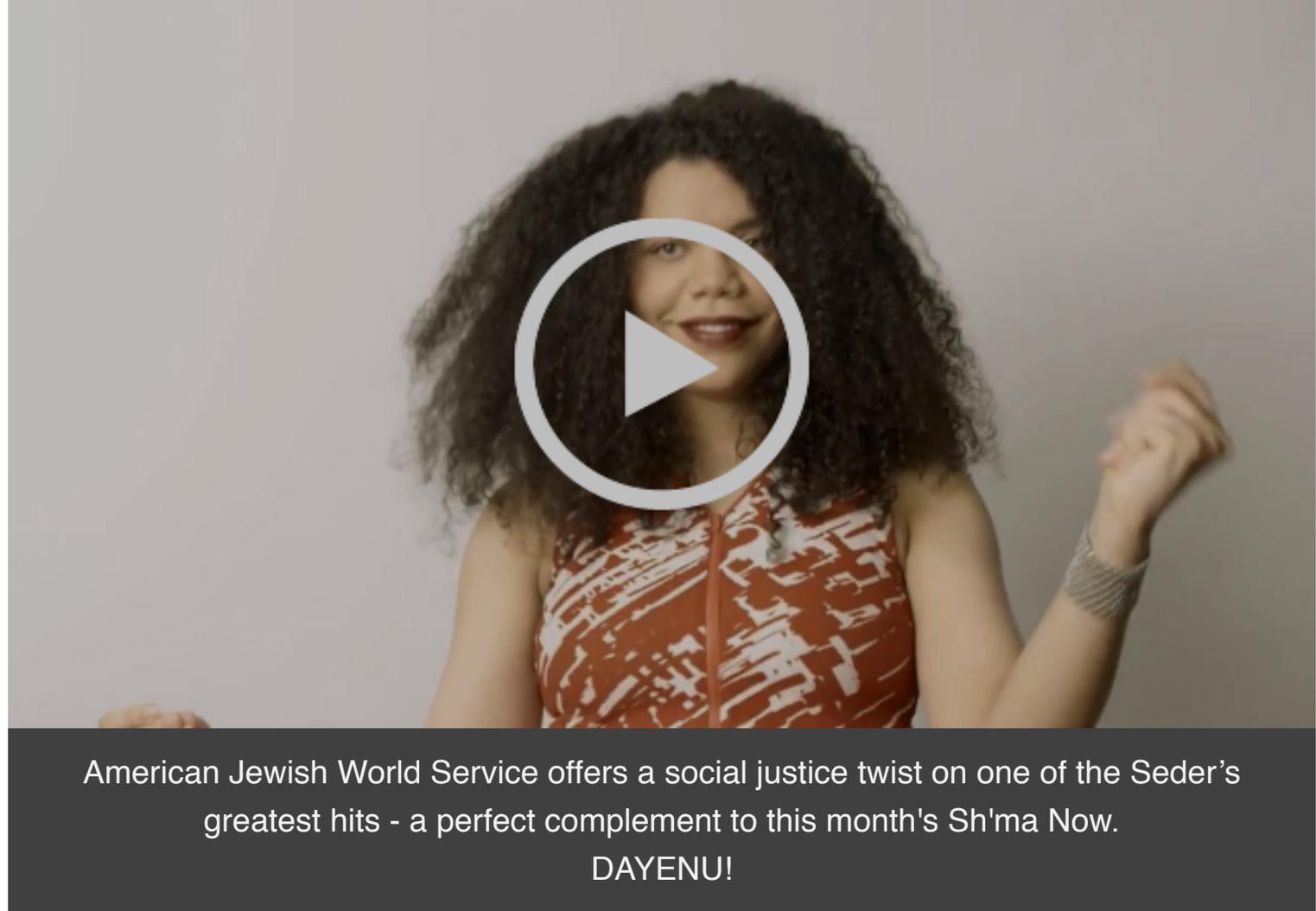
money in the field, and it's a change that has the funding community taking notes.

Like many other funders, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah is concerned about how recent political changes will impact causes we support, as well as those aligned with the values we hold. Life is inherently unpredictable, but the uncertainty of the world has been magnified at every level of late, and it adds to our worry, as people and a philanthropic force.

When we speak with our colleagues, both funders and organizational leaders, there is consensus: what needs to be done as a response to our world post-election is unclear **and** action needs to be taken immediately. The Ford Foundation's switch up is the kind of structural change that puts all of us on solid ground – taking restricted funding off the table entirely would discard an important role for philanthropy to take in channeling, refining, and shaping energy and work in the field, but having the ability to remove those restrictions when they have become barriers to an organization's best work lets them move confidently into an uncertain future.

We're no Ford Foundation in size or scope. However, we took their example to heart recently. As you likely know, UpStart, Joshua Venture Group, Bikkurim, and the US programs of Presentense are undergoing a merger. At the foundation we've been happy to support both the merger costs and the Collaboratory program with a \$100,000 grant. We received an email from a highly diligent staff member asking us how to account for it and we said – strive for the outcomes we agreed on and don't worry about specific dollars. While they've received very solid support from their funders, a merger is a complex situation where there is a degree of uncertainty, and we chose not to add an additional layer of complexity to their work.

Regardless of size and scope - developing trust, aligning around values, and communication about what is happening and why you are trying out certain actions can help define the success of a grant, even in circumstances with a high degree of uncertainty. We can be responsible, impact driven, and flexible – and hopefully in doing so make the lives of the nonprofit professionals a little easier and increase their ability to really make a difference in the field.



American Jewish World Service offers a social justice twist on one of the Seder's greatest hits - a perfect complement to this month's Sh'ma Now.
DAYENU!

LEARNING

[Can Jewish Wisdom Provide Guidance in these Volatile Times?](#)

At the recent [Jewish Funders Network Conference](#), Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah co-sponsored a session with the [Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Fund](#) and the [Jim Joseph Foundation](#) that focused on how Jewish wisdom might help us respond to the current situation in the U.S. Four outstanding Jewish teachers – Yehuda Kurtzer, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Rabbi Melissa Weintraub, and Meir Lakein – explored a variety of potential responses to the current moment [through the prism of Jewish texts](#), both classical and contemporary, and historical experience. Here are some gleanings from their teaching:

Yehuda Kurtzer led the group in a discussion about Louis Brandeis' *Zionism is Consistent with American Patriotism*—a thought provoking text from the early 1900's. We discussed whether we believed in the claim that being a Jew contributes to being an American—is there a false choice in describing oneself as an American Jew versus a Jewish American? The group talked about how this text may be interpreted through the lens of the political situation of the time it was written and then considered whether it remains relevant even in our current times. Throughout the discussion, we came back to the value of providing access to quality learning as

both a short- and long-term strategy to addressing our own uncertainties and our differences with others.

Rabbi Jacobs used the Joseph story in the book of Genesis, especially chapter 47, and other texts to examine how Jews relate to political power – what happens when we acquire some, but are still subordinate to the ultimate authority (Pharaoh)? How and on whose behalf do we exercise that power? How do we deal with feelings of vulnerability that remain even when we acquire a measure of power? To what extent are we obligated to try to protect our own people as the first priority? Can we choose to exercise the power we do have “prophetically,” on behalf of the most vulnerable, rather than “expediently”? Rabbi Jacobs concluded the session with a midrash from *Shir Hashirim* Rabbah that compares the transformation of the Israelites from powerless slaves to a free people “placed in authority over the whole world” to a princess plucked by her father from anonymous work collecting sheaves to join him in his royal carriage. How did the Israelites react: “We are astonished at ourselves.” Are American Jews still astonished at our ascent to power? Does this affect how we use it? The dilemmas of Jewish power, Rabbi Jacobs demonstrated, are both ancient and thoroughly contemporary.

Rabbi Melissa Weintraub led the group in animated discussion about why to prioritize dialogue across disagreement when the mood of the moment is “the world is on fire.” Using a classic text on “heavenly argument” as the jumping off point, Rabbi Weintraub facilitated a conversation about what’s gained communally and societally when we build productive communication across divergent points of views and what’s lost when we instead retreat into echo chambers. We discussed three primary costs to the political adversarialism and polarization of our time: 1) relationship at multiple levels, with costs ranging from communal heartbreak to violence, 2) lost collective insight needed to advance good public decision-making, and 3) political “stuckness” and inefficacy. Rabbi Weintraub closed with some Passover Torah, interpreting the plague of darkness as mutual unseeing, and characterizing this political moment as one in which the collective reflex has come to be premature dismissal of entire groups of people. She posed as the symbolic antithesis to this mutual dismissal the act of Moses returning to the table to negotiate with Pharaoh 11 times, interpreted by Seforno (a medieval commentator) as an effort to reach the rest of the Egyptians. She implored us to continue reaching across divides to discover how we might connect, learn, work together, and impact each other’s thinking.

Meir Lakein led the group looking at Community Organizing in a study of the story of Chiyya bar Abba and Rabbi Yochanan and their illnesses from *Masechet Berachot*. The section we studied ended “Why could not Rabbi Yochanan raise himself? They replied: ‘The prisoner cannot free herself from prison.’” We discussed the need to see power in one another, to act leader to leader (being on an equal footing is important), that both the one doing the raising and the one being raised up have a

role in the change. From here we talked about the imperative “*Shema*” that we listen, and that dispute does not have to be disrespect. Asking questions “what about this” rather than countering argument with argument can be an effective tool in developing new understandings.

[A Sourcebook for the session, including these and other texts, can be downloaded here.](#)



We love this version of Chad Gadya from Nina Paley (and are waiting with bated breath for the completion of her work-in-progress, Seder-Masochism)

SHARING

Want to know what's next for the Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom?

[Read about our plans](#) in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Is technology enhancing or hindering your relationships and connections? Another great moment from the JFN conference was [Sherry Turkle's](#) presentation, which Rabbi Josh Feigelson [wrote about at the Huffington Post](#).

We have a roundup of some [Passover resources at our blog](#) - seder supplements, full *haggadot*, videos for kids and adult, and more. It's not even close to a complete set of all that's out there (we're sure we've missed more than we've curated), but they're all pretty great.

AJWS has great Passover material, but take note: their [Ten Lessons from the Haggadah for Jewish Activists](#) is timely advice that applies year round.

Congrats to the amazing individuals who are about to "level up" in their work - the rosters of [Schusterman Fellows](#) and [Natan Fund ROI Entrepreneurs](#) are proof positive that applying Jewish wisdom can make the world a better place.

Values and Voices, a series of open letters applying religious wisdom to American politics, continues to include strong Jewish voices, including a particularly powerful reminder from Esther J. Hamori about the associations we choose - check out [her letter](#) and [the full set](#).

If you have 45 minutes, [this discussion with David Brooks and Leon Wieseltier](#) touches on some powerful topics - including the current state of political and moral discourse in America and the intrinsic value of Jewish tradition. *Kol hakovod* to the [Mayberg Center for Jewish Education and Leadership](#), now officially open at The George Washington University, off to a strong start!

What else should we be sharing?

[Click here to send us your recommendations!](#)



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