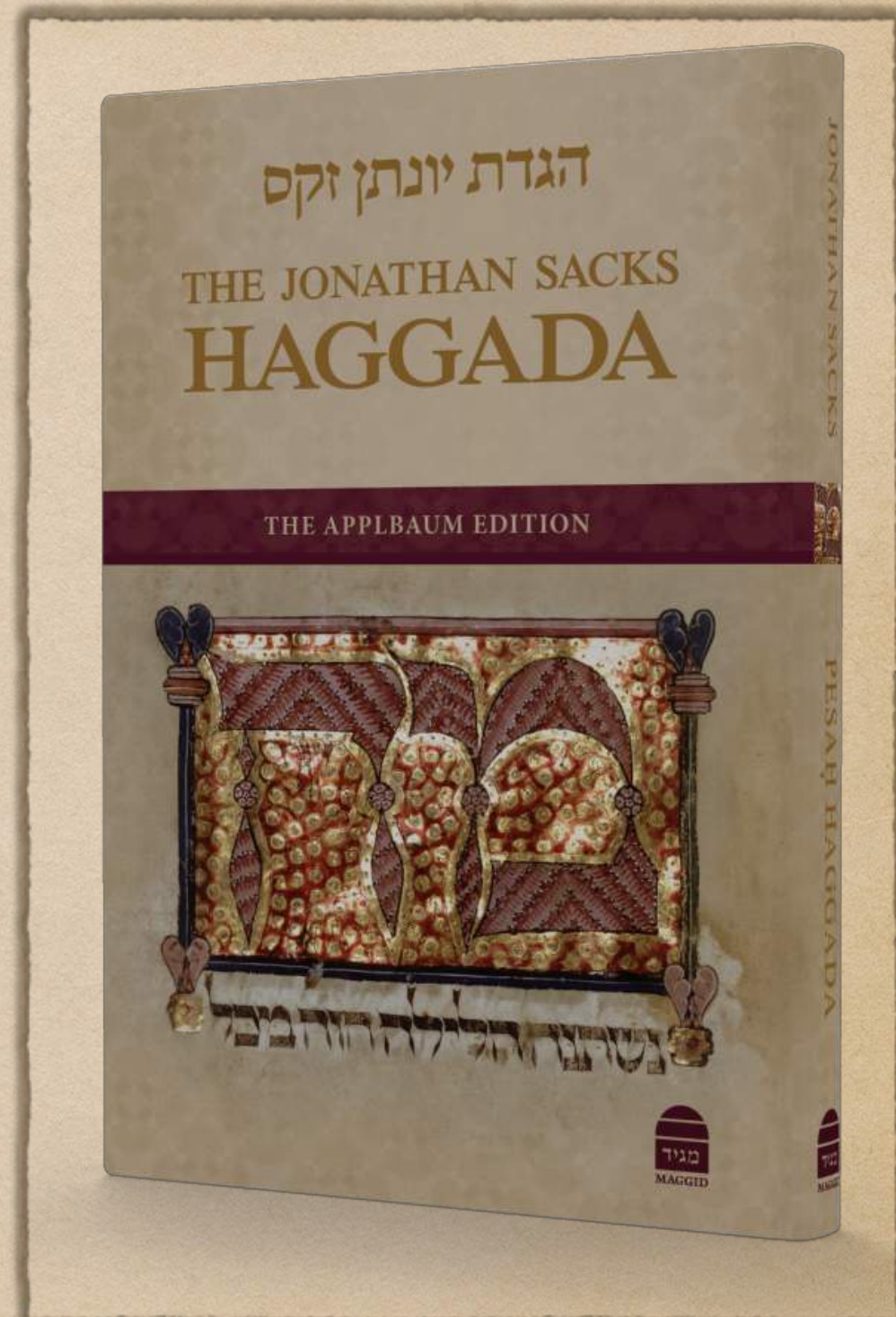


# Extracts from The Jonathan Sacks Sacks Haggada

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## חג כשר ושמח!



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Pesach is the oldest and most transformative story of hope ever told. It tells of how an otherwise undistinguished group of slaves found their way to freedom from the greatest and longest-lived empire of their time, indeed of any time. It tells the revolutionary story of how the supreme Power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless. It is a story of the defeat of probability by the force of possibility. It defines what it is to be a Jew: a living symbol of hope.


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**This year we are slaves -  
next year, may we be free**

הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי, לְשָׁנָה  
הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוּרִין

**There are two words for freedom in Hebrew, *chofesh* and *cherut*. *Chofesh* is 'freedom from.' *Cherut* is 'freedom to.'** *Chofesh* is what a slave acquires when released from slavery. He or she is free from being subject to someone else's will. But this kind of liberty is not enough to create a free society. A world in which everyone is free to do what they like begins in anarchy and ends in tyranny. That is why *chofesh* is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination. *Cherut* is collective freedom, a society in which my freedom respects yours. **A free society is always a moral achievement.**



**It rests on self-restraint and regard for others.** The ultimate aim of the Torah is to fashion a society on the foundations of justice and compassion, both of which depend on recognising the sovereignty of God and the integrity of creation. Thus we say, 'Next year may we be *bnei chorin*,' invoking *cherut* not *chofesh*. It means, 'May we be free in a way that honours the freedom of all.'





## Why is this night different from all other nights?

## מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

The Torah speaks of children asking questions on Pesach. 'And when your children ask you, "What does this ceremony mean to you?" then tell them . . .' From this, tradition inferred that the story of the exodus from Egypt must be told, wherever possible, in response to the questions asked by a child.

**The Torah has two words for inheritance, *yerushah* and *nachalah*, and they represent the two different ways in which a heritage is passed on across the generations.** The word *nachalah* comes from the root *nachal*, which also means 'a river.' It represents an inheritance that is merely handed down without any work on the part of the recipient, as water flows in a river. *Yerushah*, by contrast, means active inheritance. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch pointed out that *lareshet*, the verbal form of *yerushah*, sometimes means 'to conquer' or 'to capture.' It means actively taking hold of what one has been promised. An inheritance for which one has worked is always more secure than one for which one has not. That is why Judaism encourages children to ask questions. When a child asks, it has already begun the work of preparing to receive. **Torah is a *yerushah*, not a *nachalah*. It needs work on behalf of the child if it is to be passed on across the generations.**





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Judaism is a faith that, more than any other, values the mind, encouraging questions and engaging us at the highest level of intellectual rigour. Every question asked in reverence is the start of a journey towards God, and it begins with the habit that, on Pesach, Jewish parents teach their children: to ask, thereby to join the never-ending dialogue between human understanding and heaven.

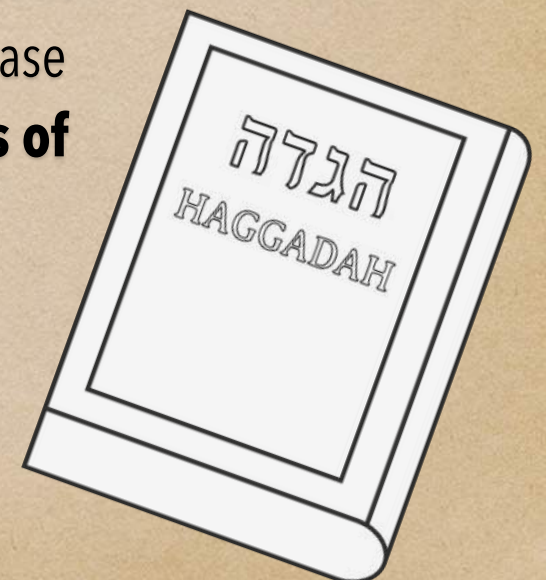
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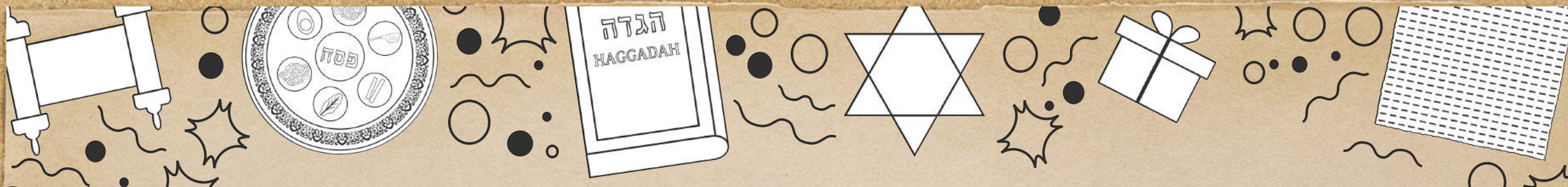
## The Four Children

אַחַד חָכָם, וְאַחַד רָשָׁע, וְאַחַד  
תָּם, וְאַחַד שְׂאִינֹו יוֹדֵעַ לְשֵׂאוֹל

**It may be that the 'four children' are not different people but successive stages in the development of a child.** We begin by being unable to ask. We accept the world as given. The next stage in intellectual growth is curiosity (the 'simple' son). We ask questions with no ulterior motive. We simply want to learn. This is often followed by a period of testing and challenging the values we have received (the 'wicked' or adolescent son). The Hebrew word for adolescent, *na'ar*, also means 'to shake off.' The teenage years are ones where we develop our own identity by putting received values to the test. This can sometimes lead to rebellion as a form of self-exploration. The culmination of cognitive growth is 'wisdom,' the point at which we have both internalised the values of our heritage and are sufficiently mature to see their objective merits. Although the Haggadah uses the word 'wise,' rabbinic tradition preferred the phrase *talmid chakham*, a 'wise disciple.' **Wisdom, in Judaism, is not a state but a process of constant learning. That is why it lies as much in the questions one asks as in the answers. Every answer is itself the prelude to a deeper question, and thus constant growth as we move to new levels of understanding.**







**This teaches that they [the Jews] were distinctive there**

וְיִהְיֶה שֵׁם לְגוֹי. מְלִמָּד  
שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְצִינִים שֵׁם

They did not assimilate. According to the sages, the Israelites preserved their identity in four ways: they did not change their names, their language or their customs and they did not betray one another.

The Hebrew word for distinctive, *metsuyan*, is derived from the same word as Zion. In modern Hebrew it means 'excellent.' It signifies something that stands out from its surroundings. The word *tsiyun* means a 'signpost.' **Zion is not just a place. It is a way of life.** Jews are called to moral excellence, to have the courage to stand out from their surroundings, to be different and to be a signpost in the wilderness from whom others get their bearing and sense of direction. Zionism is not only a matter of where we live, but also how we live.

**Judaism is the great counter-voice in the conversation of mankind. To be a Jew is to be willing to think and act differently, to swim against the tide. It is to be part of society but also apart from it, to live not only in the 'now' but with the wisdom of the past and a vision of the future.**



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There is a profound difference between history and memory. History is his story - an event that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is my story - something that happened to me and is part of who I am. To be a Jew is to know that over and above history is the task of memory. More than any other faith, Judaism made this a matter of religious obligation. Pesach is where the past does not die but lives, in the chapter we write in our own lives and in the story we tell our children.

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## And God heard our voice

## וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת קוֹלֵנוּ

There is an unusual feature of biblical Hebrew, namely that it has no word that means 'to obey.' The word used by the Torah is *Shema*, which means 'to listen attentively to, and act accordingly.' **Judaism does not demand blind obedience. To the contrary, it asks us, as far as possible, to understand the reasons for the commandments, even though their full wisdom will always be beyond our understanding. Obedience in Judaism is a form of active listening.** Pre-modern English used the word 'hearken' to convey this, but there is now no word in common usage that has this precise sense. 'And God heard' means 'He attended to the cries of the Israelites and set it in the context of the promise He had given the patriarchs that He would bring their children safely out of slavery and back to the land of Israel. He therefore knew that He must act.'



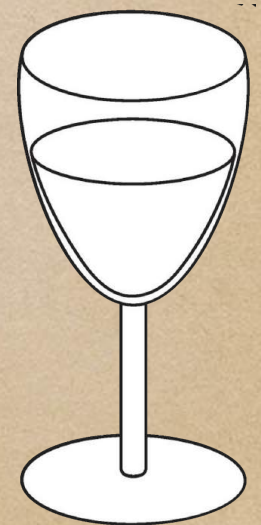


## Spilling wine

דָּצִ"ךְ עַד"שׁ בְּאַח"ב

One of the most beautiful explanations about why we spill a drop of wine at the words 'Blood,' 'Fire,' and 'Columns of smoke,' at the mention of each of the plagues, and at the three words of R. Judah's mnemonic is that of Avudraham, who interprets it in accordance with the verse in Proverbs (24:17), 'Do not rejoice when your enemy falls.' Even as we give thanks for the miracle of the plagues, as a result of which our ancestors gained their freedom, we also shed a symbolic tear for those who suffered. That is why the Torah does not mention the word *simchah*, 'rejoicing,' in connection with Pesach, unlike the other festivals. **God does not rejoice in the downfall of the wicked; nor should we.**

**Moral maturity involves an ability to live with complex situations and emotions.** We may be uplifted by an event because it represents the triumph of justice, while at the same time identifying with the suffering of the victims. One of the glories of Judaism is that it reflects the complexity of the moral life without retreating into scepticism or relativism. The heroes of the Torah are rarely without their faults, nor are the villains wholly without virtues. This does not prevent us from making moral judgements, any more than grey refutes the existence of black and white. But it should protect us against the kind of attitude that divides humanity into the 'children of light' and the 'children of darkness.' **Judaism was the first faith in history to teach the unity of mankind under the universal fatherhood of God. Tears, therefore, are a universal language, and sympathy should know no religious or national borders.**





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Once a year, every year, every Jew is commanded to relive the experience of Egypt as a constant reminder of the bread of oppression and the bitter herbs of slavery - to know that the battle for freedom is never finally won but must be fought in every generation.

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# It would have been enough

דייננו

This series of praises, with the refrain *Dayenu*, enumerates the kindnesses of God to His people on the long journey from slavery to freedom. The word *day*, meaning 'enough,' echoes the phrase from Malachi (3:10), recited as part of the haftarah for the Shabbat before Pesach, 'I will pour you out a blessing *ad bli day*' which the sages translated as 'until your lips are exhausted through saying, Enough.'

This song is a *tikkun*, a making-right, for the ingratitude of the Israelites in the wilderness. At almost every stage of the way they complained: about the water, the food, the difficulties of the journey, the challenge of conquering the land. It is as if the poet were saying: **Where they complained, let us give thanks. Each stage was a miracle. Each would have been enough to convince us that there is a providence at work in our fate.**

As Hegel points out, slavery gives rise to a culture of resentment, a generalised discontent; and the Israelites were newly released slaves. **One of the signs of freedom is the capacity for gratitude. Only a free person can thank with a full heart.**



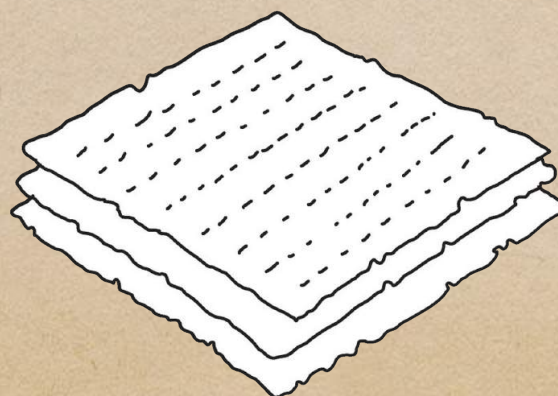


Rabbi Gamliel said...  
Pesach, Matzah, Marror

רַבּוֹן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר...  
פֶּסַח, מַצָּה, וּמָרּוֹר

This is a requirement peculiar to Pesach. Normally commands are fulfilled by performing the requisite act with the intention of observing the commandment. To fulfil the duty of sukkah, for example, we do not have to tell the story of the wandering of the Israelites in the desert. However in the case of Pesach two commands coincide: **the first, to eat the festive meal; the second to tell the story**. The two, argues Rabban Gamliel, are connected. **The story explains the food; the food allows us to relive the story.**

The Torah states: 'When you enter the land that the Lord your God will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spread our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.'" (Ex. 12:25-27). Thus from the very outset, **a connection was drawn between eating, asking and explaining**, and it is this on which Rabban Gamliel bases his view that all three elements of the Passover meal must be explained.





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Pesach tells us that the strength of a nation does not lie in horses and chariots, armies and arms, or in overt demonstrations of power and wealth. It depends on simpler things: humility in the presence of the God of creation, trust in the God of redemption and history, and a sense of the non-negotiable sanctity of human life, created by God in His image: even the life of a slave or a child too young to ask questions. Pesach is the eternal critique of power used by humans to coerce and diminish their fellow human beings.

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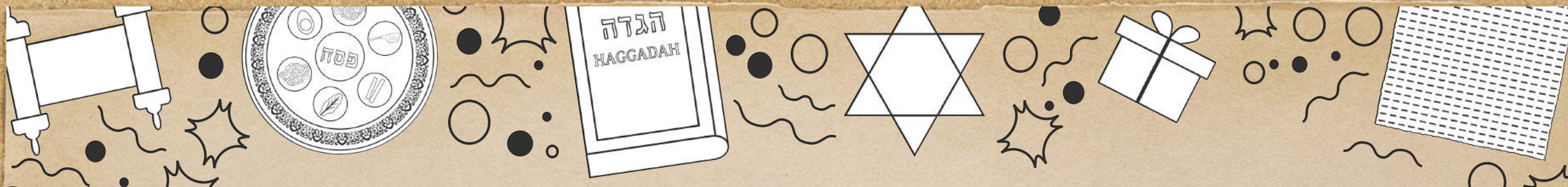
## In every generation

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדּוֹר

Most texts of the Haggadah reproduce the language of the Mishnah: 'In every generation each individual should see [*lir'ot*] himself as if he had personally left Egypt.' Maimonides, however, writes that each individual should show [*lehar'ot*] himself as if he had left. This is because **Maimonides holds that there are two separate commands of reciting the Haggadah: [1] to tell ourselves the story, [2] to tell our children the story.** Seeing is part of the first mitzvah, showing is part of the second. For us to feel the full impact of the drama we have to internalise it. For us to show it to others, we have to externalise it by, for example, reclining as we drink the wine. In general, Judaism reverses the usual order of emotion and action. In other cultures, feeling leads to doing. **In Judaism, doing leads to feeling. We are commanded to act in certain ways in order eventually to feel in certain ways.** Thus, showing our freedom to others is one of the best ways of coming to see it ourselves.







**Therefore we are  
bound to thank**

**לְפִיכָךְ אֲנִי  
חַיְבִים לְהוֹדוֹת**

**This is one of the transitional moments of the Haggadah, when we move from story to song, from prose to poetry, from recitation (Maggid) to praise (Hallel).** We have told the story of the Exodus. Now, like the Israelites 3,300 years ago, we sing a song of praise. We lift the cup at this point, fulfilling the words of the Psalm, 'I will lift the cup of salvation and call on the name of God' (Psalm 116:13).

Song plays a vital part in Judaism. At the end of his life Moses gave the Israelites the last of the commands – that in every generation we should write a new Sefer Torah. On that occasion he used an unusual word. He called the Torah a 'song' (Deuteronomy 31:19). **Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.** Whenever speech is invested with deep emotion it aspires to the condition of song. Thus we do not say our prayers; we sing them. We do not read the Torah; we chant it. We do not study Talmud; we intone it. Each kind of text, and each period of the Jewish year, has its own melody. Thus **Moses was saying: to transmit Torah across the generations as a living faith, it must be, not just a code of law, but also the song of the Jewish people.**



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The Exodus is the inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who long for freedom. It taught that right was sovereign over might; that freedom and justice must belong to all, not some; and that, under God, all human beings are equal. It took many centuries for this vision to become the shared property of the liberal democracies of the West; and there is no guarantee it will remain so. Freedom is a moral achievement, and without a constant effort of education it atrophies and must be fought for again.”

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