DISCUSSION GUIDE

Bo

In Every Generation…

Three times in this week's portion, Bo, God commands the Israelites to retell the story of their redemption from Egypt to future generations. The first occurs near the beginning of the portion, as Moses prepares once again to ask Pharaoh to free the Israelites.

שמות י:א-ב	**Exodus 10:1-2**
א) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי־אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת־לִבּוֹ וְאֶת־לֵב עֲבָדָיו לְמַעַן שִׁתִי אֹתֹתַי אֵלֶּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ: (ב) וּלְמַעַן תְּסַפֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי בִנְךָ וּבֶן־בִּנְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלַּלְתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־אֹתֹתַי אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי בָם וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה:	(1) The Lord said to Moses, "Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, so that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, (2) and so that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt with the Egyptians and what signs I performed among them, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

- **Do you think the second verse is addressed to Moses or the entire Jewish people, and why?**
- **In these verses, God explains that He is purposefully hardening Pharaoh's heart in order to perform more miracles. What problems might this raise, and how might you think about resolving them?**

The next instruction to retell the Exodus story comes a few chapters later, when Moses is explaining the laws of the Passover sacrifice:

שמות יב:כד-כז	**Exodus 12:24-27**
(כד) וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְחָק־לְךָ וּלְבָנֶיךָ עַד־עוֹלָם: (כה) וְהָיָה כִּי־תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת: (כו) וְהָיָה כִּי־יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם: (כז) וַאֲמַרְתֶּם זֶבַח־פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל־בָּתֵּי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנָגְפּוֹ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־בָּתֵּינוּ הִצִּיל:	(24) You shall observe this commandment as a law for you and your children forever. (25) And when you enter the land that the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall continue to observe this service. (26) And when your children ask you, "What does this service mean to you?" (27) You shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the

	houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians but saved our home

- **The child's question has a specific and unusual wording. What does the final word, לָכֶם, which literally means "to you," add to your understanding of what the child is asking?**
- **Do you remember asking adults to explain behaviors that seemed strange to you as a child? How do their explanations compare with your understanding of those behaviors today?**

The final example comes at the end of the portion, as God conveys a series of laws to the Israelites through Moses:

שמות יג:ו-ח	**Exodus 13:6-8**
(ו) שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצֹּת וּבַיּוֹם֙ הַשְּׁבִיעִ֔י חַ֖ג לַיהוָֽה׃ (ז) מַצּוֹת֙ יֵאָכֵ֣ל אֶת שִׁבְעַ֔ת הַיָּמִ֖ים וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶ֣ה לְךָ֔ חָמֵ֑ץ וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶ֥ה לְךָ֖ שְׂאֹ֑ר בְּכָל־גְּבֻלֶֽךָ׃ (ח) וְהִגַּדְתָּ֥ לְבִנְךָ֖ בַּיּ֣וֹם הַה֑וּא לֵאמֹ֗ר בַּעֲב֛וּר זֶ֥ה עָשָׂ֥ה יְהוָ֖ה לִ֣י בְּצֵאתִ֑י מִמִּצְרָֽיִם׃	(6) For seven days you shall eat matzah, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to the Lord. (7) Matzah shall be eaten throughout the seven days, and no leavened bread or leaven shall be seen anywhere within your borders. (8) And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, "It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt."

- **How do you understand the connection between the commandment to eat matzah in verses 6–7 and the commandment to retell the story of the Exodus in verse 8?**
- **What are some similarities and differences between the instructions to tell future generations about the Exodus in this source and the previous one?**

Based on these verses, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides or Rambam, includes the commandment to retell the story of the Exodus in his *Mishneh Torah*. Maimonides was one of the most influential Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages. Among his major works is the *Mishneh Torah*, a comprehensive legal code that systematically organizes and explains Jewish law. In the following excerpt, from the section dealing with the laws of leavened and unleavened bread on Passover, Maimonides explains this commandment:

משנה תורה, הלכות חמץ ומצה ט:ד	**Mishneh Torah, Leavened and Unleavened Bread, 9:4**
עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים, ויוציאנו יי אלהינו משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה. ואילו לא הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אבותינו ממצרים, עדיין אנו ובנינו ובני בנינו משועבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים.	We were slaves to Pharaoh in the Land of Egypt. And the Lord, our God, took us out from there with a strong hand and an

ואפילו כולנו חכמים, כולנו נבונים, כולנו זקנים, כולנו יודעים את התורה – מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים. וכל המאריך ביציאת מצרים – הרי זה משובח.	outstretched forearm. And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our ancestors from Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would [all] be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. And even if we were all sages, all discerning, all elders, all knowledgeable about the Torah, it would [still] be a commandment upon us to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt. And anyone who speaks at length about the exodus from Egypt, behold he is praiseworthy.

- **Why might you have assumed that people who are "all sages, all discerning, all elders, all knowledgeable about the Torah" would be exempt from retelling the story of the Exodus?**
- **Maimonides suggests that our lives are shaped by the experiences of those who came before us. Can you think of someone who preceded you, whether a relative or not, whose life has influenced your own?**

The Haggadah, the traditional Jewish text used at the Passover seder, also addresses the commandment to tell the story of the Exodus. However, rather than focusing simply on retelling the story, the Haggadah emphasizes the importance of reliving it.

הגדה של פסח בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְיָ לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם. לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בִּלְבַד גָּאַל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, אֶלָּא אַף אוֹתָנוּ גָּאַל עִמָּהֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם, לְמַעַן הָבִיא אוֹתָנוּ, לָתֶת לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ.	**Pesach Haggadah** In every generation, each person must see himself as if he himself had come out of Egypt, as it is said: "And you shall tell your child on that day, 'Because of this the Lord acted for me when I came out of Egypt.'" It was not only our ancestors whom the Holy One redeemed; He redeemed us too along with them, as it is said: "He took us out of there, to bring us to the land He promised our ancestors and to give it to us."

1. **The Haggadah quotes Exodus 13:8, which we studied in the third source. How does the Haggadah's interpretation deepen or change your understanding of the verse?**
2. **How might someone today see themselves as part of the Passover story, despite the vast differences in time and circumstances between our lives and the Exodus?**

Further Questions for Discussion

1. Based on the sources we have studied, why do you think the Torah repeatedly commands us to tell the story of the Exodus to future generations?
2. Does your family have any stories that have been passed down through generations? If so, what is your relationship to those stories, and do you feel a responsibility to pass them on?
3. After studying these sources, what is one idea that will stay with you, and what is one question you are left with?

Suggestions for Further Study

If you are interested in seeing further sources on Bo, visit the Simchat Torah Challenge Bo page, which includes additional resources for continued learning. You can also find materials on Sefaria's Bo topic page, which houses a wide variety of sources. You may also be interested in looking at Sefaria's topic pages on Passover, the Exodus from Egypt, and the Ten Plagues.

The last source was an excerpt from the Haggadah, which is traditionally read at Passover seders. This excerpt comes from a section of the Haggadah called Magid, which recounts the story of the Exodus. Although Passover is still many months away, you may enjoy reading through Magid, and noting which elements of the Passover story are highlighted.

Enjoyed this sheet? Receive a new one in your inbox every week by subscribing at simchattorahchallenge.org.