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From Slavery to Freedom, A Road Story

An excerpt from *The Chutzpah Imperative*
by Rabbi Ed Feinstein

The Nazis took my uncle Henry at the very beginning of the war. He survived more than five years working as a slave for the SS. Young and strong, he was a carpenter, and the Nazis needed carpenters. They moved him from camp to camp until finally he arrived at Auschwitz. He was part of the forced labor crew that built the camp. When the Allies advanced, he was taken on an infamous Death March through the Polish winter into Germany. In 1945, he was liberated by the American army. He came to America, married my aunt and became part of our family.

For as long as I can remember, Uncle Henry never spoke about these experiences. We knew that he had been in the camps from the numbers on his arm and from the peculiar way he slept so still, as if he were still hiding. But he would never reveal to any of us where he'd been, what he'd seen. He never spoke of any of it.

It was Elie Wiesel who opened my uncle's heart. Wiesel came to lecture at a local university, and my aunt and uncle went to hear him. Wiesel spoke about his time in Auschwitz. Every event Wiesel described, Uncle Henry had personally witnessed. So following the lecture, he approached Wiesel. They talked together in the deserted lecture hall for hours. Finally, Wiesel asked my uncle, "Have you told your children?" And my uncle sheepishly replied that he did not, he could not. "You must," Wiesel admonished, "for if you don't, they will never really believe it happened! They will never learn! You must be a witness. That's why we survived – to tell the story, to teach them!"

After a Passover meal some months later, he sat us down, and for more than three hours, Uncle Henry told us his story: How the Nazis rounded up the Jews of his town and made a selection – who would live and who would die. The cattle cars, the brutal slavery, the camps, Auschwitz, the death march, and finally, his liberation. When at last he finished, we sat in silence for some time. We finally mustered the nerve to ask why he'd waited all these years to share this. He looked at us with an embarrassed expression, "I was afraid

you wouldn't understand. How could you understand? You grew up here, in freedom and safety. You have never felt real hunger or cold, you've never known fear or hate. How could you understand?" So then, why tell us now? "Because Wiesel is right. If you don't hear it from me, you'll never really believe that it happened, that it was real. You will never learn. I am a witness. It happened, worse than I've told you. Know that it happened. Learn from it!"

The survivors of the Holocaust are precious and rare. They are our witnesses. Their eyes saw what human eyes should never see; their ears heard what human ears should never hear. They know the darkest evil with an immediacy that no soul should be able to bear. And yet, they did not surrender to cynicism or bitterness or death. They didn't give up their hopes. Where did they find the courage to return to the world, to build families and communities, to live and work and love again? Following his revelation to us, my uncle became an ambassador of the Holocaust. He visited every high school in his home state of New Jersey telling his story. And at the end of his talk, he would demand that the kids promise they would build a different world. He built Auschwitz, the kingdom of death, he told them, theirs is the task of building a kingdom of life.

This is more than a survivor's resilience. It is an expression of something deeper. God commanded Abraham, "Be a blessing!" Jewish tradition has always held that this commandment is to be fulfilled, not in the private recesses of the soul, but in the real world, in history. Jews don't believe in the salvation of the soul without the redemption of the world. But history, it has been observed, is a charnel house of carnage and absurdity. History is a nightmare. How does a people remain faithful to its mission to bring blessing to the families of the earth, when it finds itself cast into an endless pit of hatred and violence? To experience the darkest evil and not to give up on the world reflects qualities of courage and character we call "chutzpah."

Where did we learn this chutzpah? A place called Egypt.

Egypt

A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground." So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor... Ruthlessly they made life bitter for them with harsh labor at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field. (Ex 1:8ff)

The Garden of Eden represents the divine dream of a world of oneness and peace; Egypt is its diametric opposite. In Egypt, the people Israel entered a nightmare of slavery, brutality, and death. In Eden, the human being was celebrated as a uniquely precious creature fashioned in the image of the Creator. In Eden, we were one with God and one with each other. Egypt is the symbol of individuation taken to its more grotesque extreme – the enslavement of another. Slavery is the deconstruction of all that is human

-- the total objectification of another human being. The slave is not human, not animal, not even an object of any real value, but the embodiment of a quantity of labor. Slavery is the condition of total human insignificance, social invisibility -- to be unseen, unheard, unrecognized, unacknowledged, unvalued. Over time, slaves internalize this condition. They cease to see themselves as human beings enslaved and come to believe this is their natural, ordained, deserved condition. All the dignity and possibility of Eden is lost to them. They cherish only one dream -- let tomorrow's suffering be no worse than yesterday's.

Egypt was God's classroom, part of a radical pedagogy: To create an entire people committed to Abraham's covenant -- to pursue the divine dream of justice in the world, a people prepared to serve as a vessel of divine blessing to all humanity, God brings Israel to a world of ultimate cruelty, darkness and evil. To cherish the dream of Eden, we must live the nightmare of Egypt.

And not just once. "In every generation, each person must see him/herself as if he or she were redeemed from Egypt."¹ This is radical. On Thanksgiving, Americans may remember the experience of their Pilgrim ancestors. But for the Mishna, memory alone is insufficient. It isn't enough just to remember the Exodus from Egypt. It isn't enough to commemorate our escape from slavery, or to celebrate our freedom. We have to be there personally and feel it. We must experience these events and become witnesses. Collective history must become personal memory. And so we return to Egypt every year at Passover. Every year, we eat what they ate. History must be ingested. We choke down the flat dry bread of slaves. We swallow the bitterness of slavery mellowed only by the sweet promise of redemption. We taste the tears.

Why such a demand? Why, of all the memories, are we bidden to return, year after year, to such a bitter moment? To show us what is at stake in human history. Human existence is poised between two poles -- Egypt and Eden -- between the nightmare and the dream. We move the world in one direction or the other. This is the radical responsibility laid upon those who count themselves among Abraham's descendants -- bring the world to the oneness of Eden or watch it fall into the horror of Egypt. The Hasidic master, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav taught that Pharaoh was not an earthly king but a symbol for the human ego. Taught Rabbi Nahman, we are all enslaved to a Pharaoh within. The human heart is driven by jealousy and fear, by greed for gain and lust for power. Having chosen individuation as our way of being, we fall into servitude to the appetites and demands and impulses of the ego. We worship the projections of ego. It takes a radical pedagogy to liberate us and to awaken us to a different vision of human being -- to the possibility of a different world, the vision of Eden's oneness. And so the Jewish collective experience begins in Egypt.

At the Passover Seder, the child asks: "On all other nights we eat leavened bread, why on this night do we eat only matzah?" Matzah has two meanings at the Seder table. At the

¹ Mishna Pesachim 10

beginning of the Seder, it is the dry, tasteless bread of slaves. At the end, it is the flat bread taken in haste by slaves anxious to escape their bondage. This dual meaning attaches to many of the Seder symbols. Charoset, the sweet relish served at the Seder table, is said to resemble the mortar used by slaves in the construction of Pharaoh's monuments. Later in the Seder, it will be eaten with the bitter Maror, so that the bitter taste of slavery is mellowed by the sweet anticipation of redemption. The holiday itself bears both meanings. On this night, we revisit the horror of slavery to know the bitter humiliation of the slave. And then (just before dinner is served) we cross the Sea, a step ahead of the chariots of Pharaoh. Reaching the other side, we celebrate the exhilaration of freedom.

Splitting The Sea

Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split, and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen. ... Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But the Lord hurled the Egyptians into the sea. ... Thus the Lord delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians ... Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. (Ex 14:21ff)

The Exodus narrative teaches us to hold two truths: Evil is real, we have felt its cruelty. But redemption is also real, we have sung its song. Only when we know the harsh brutality of slavery will we become consumed with the divine demand for justice and rise to become partners in reaching for the dream of Eden. And only as participants in liberation, only when our feet are muddied from crossing the Red Sea bed, will we shake off all our cynicism, despair, and inertia, to gain the chutzpah to truly believe that the world can be healed. In Egypt, we were liberated from physical slavery. At the Sea, we were liberated from the slavery of the spirit.

Before there was anything, relates Genesis, there was water. In Genesis, water represents chaos. To create a habitable world, a world where life might thrive, God split the waters and uncovered dry land. The chaos of the waters gives way to the order of cosmos. In Exodus, God again splits the waters, this time to create history. History emerges out of the chaos of human events. History is not the random interplay of blind power, politics and economics. History has order and meaning. History is a journey from Egypt to Eden. At the Red Sea, Israel learned that history has purpose, and God has aspirations for human history. God cares. The divine dream is to bring humanity out of the nightmare of Egypt and into the light of Eden.

But there is something missing in the Torah's story of the Splitting of the Sea. The story has suspense, breathtaking excitement, miraculous special effects – it is certainly the most cinematic episode in the Hebrew Bible. But something is missing. The Rabbis of the

Midrash noticed this. So just as with the story of Abraham and Isaac, they retold the story. They told the story as it *should* have been told.

In the rabbis' telling, Moses leads the people to the banks of the Sea. Then they hear the hoof beats of Pharaoh's approaching armies. They people cry out to Moses. Moses prays to God. He is told to hold his arm over the sea, which will cause the sea to split. And all this he does, exactly as he is commanded...but the sea doesn't split. He tries again, but the sea still does not move. Now he becomes nervous. He tries to recall the exact words of God, the exact instructions. Once again, he holds the arm over the waters. And once again they do not move. Moses panics. The people panic. Everyone is immobilized with fear. And no one knows what to do.

No one, that is, except one man. One man perceived what even Moses our Teacher could not. His name was Nachshon ben Aminadav, one of the princes of the tribes of Israel. Nachshon understood that God was waiting. God had sent Moses. And God had brought the plagues. And God had led them out of Egypt...but now God was waiting for the people to take some role in their own redemption. God, Nachshon understood, would not split the sea until someone moved -- moved toward his or her own redemption -- until someone was ready to risk his or her own life to bring salvation.

So Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped into the waters of the Red Sea.

At first, everyone looked at him with wonder and awe. "What are you doing?" his family shouted. But he paid no heed...he knew exactly what he was doing. And he waded out farther until the water covered his knees. His family screamed and shouted and begged him to return...but he went farther, until the water covered his waist. And now, everyone stood in silence and watched. He waded farther, until the water covered his shoulders. And then a few more steps, and he disappeared under the water. And only when the water covered his nostrils and Nachshon could no longer breathe, only when he began to drown....then, and only then, did the sea split, and Israel cross in safety.

None of this is in the Torah. In the Torah, the people Israel are passive observers – objects, not subjects of the drama. The narrative is all about God – God's glory at the expense of the Egyptians, God's final victory over Pharaoh. The Rabbis of this Midrash objected: This is not how God works in history. There is something missing from the Torah's narrative – God's human partner. Redemption is possible, assert the Rabbis, even immanent. But redemption will not arrive without a substantial commitment of human effort. Waiting passively on the side of the Sea will not bring deliverance. Even prayer does not produce salvation. Redemption comes only when human beings jump into the cold and swirling waters of history. The Sea splits only when someone is ready to go "all in" – to devote body and soul to the task of salvation.

Sometimes the sea doesn't split. Sometimes Pharaoh's armies catch us before we step across. The Rabbis knew this too well. But they would rather believe in a God who depends upon a human partner in shaping history, than a God who relegates the human

being to the passive status of bystander. As slaves, we were passive observers – objects, not subjects of history’s events. As free people, we demand the dignity of sharing in the creation of our own destiny.

Genesis recounts the creation of the universe. Exodus relates the creation of a covenanted people. The slavery of Egypt and the miraculous liberation were only the first steps in the process of shaping a people into a vessel of divine blessing. Crossing the Sea, does not take us directly to the Promised Land. On the far side of the Sea, Israel began a journey across the forbidding wilderness of Sinai.

The Journey

In every generation has its revolutionaries -- passionate spirits who fervently believe that one apocalyptic “Big Bang” can forever liberate the human spirit and transform the human condition. Revolutionary passions are enchanting, their enthusiasms disarming, and their songs inspiring. But their theories are misguided. The Bible shares a revolutionary’s faith in the possibilities of human dreams. But the Bible is more realistic and humble about the limitations of human character. Human beings don’t change all at once. A people enslaved does not become free overnight. Even the most spectacular of divine miracles cannot extinguish the fear that controls the slave’s existence, and defines the slave’s vision of life. A slave is trained to always look down. The cataclysm of the splitting of the Sea cannot lift the slave’s vision nor liberate the inner life. Outer chains can be broken with one sure blow. Inner chains take much longer. Three days after witnessing the miracles at the Sea, the people Israel began to complain.

In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread. For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death! (Ex 16:2-3)

Liberating the human spirit from ingrained their fears, appetites and resentments is harder than liberating slaves from a Pharaoh. It takes more than the apocalyptic moment. A new pattern of daily behavior must be internalized, a pattern that slowly changes human responses and attitudes. The story of this process occupies much of the Torah after the Exodus. It is the story of the wilderness journey.

The Torah is a road story. The road is the most powerful motif in Western literature. Everyone tells road stories – Homer, Chaucer, Melville, Tolkien, even the Wizard of Oz. The road depicts the development of human character. The road is the unfolding of the inner life. Dorothy doesn’t only find the Emerald City, she finds herself and her truth. She may return home to Kansas, but she returns transformed.

The Torah is the archetype of all road stories. The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land represents the human journey from smallness to greatness, from selfishness and fear to compassion and solidarity. This road story is the master narrative of Jewish life. It is recounted daily in the recitation of the Song of the Sea incorporated into the daily

prayer service. It is recounted weekly in the portions of the Torah. It is recounted yearly in the cycle of Jewish festivals – Passover, celebrating the liberation from Egypt; Shavuot, celebrating the revelation at Mt Sinai; Sukkot, celebrating the trek across the wilderness.

The Torah is brutally honest in its portrayal of human moral deficiency. It spares nothing in describing the flawed human material out of which God wishes to shape a holy people. In the wilderness of Sinai we meet the wildness of the human soul. On this road, all our inner demons are revealed – fear, envy, rivalry, zealotry. Only slowly will we come to know our own possibilities and come to share the dreams of the God who liberated us.

Israel begins its national life as morally defective as any people has ever been. The chutzpah of the Torah is its unyielding faith in the power of human transformation. The Torah is not a story about our faith in God, but of God's faith in us. The Torah attests to God's faith that a band of ex-slaves, as narrow-minded, contentious, and fearful as human beings can get – can yet be transformed into agents of blessing. The wilderness is where God's faith is tested.

The Torah's account of the trek across the wilderness is the story of Israel's spiritual and moral growth. The journey across the wilderness is the journey of the soul's education. The Torah's narrative of the arduous trek is woven together with the narrative of revelation, God's instructions.

The principle task of Torah is to teach us to move forward. Torah offers a map across this wilderness. Mitzvot are signposts along the way. Traditionally, "mitzvah" means commandment. In a life of tradition, the observance of mitzvot signifies a gesture of obedience toward a commanding God. But in the context of covenantal partnership, a partnership of shared dedication to the task of bringing divine blessing into the world, mitzvah means more than commandment, and observance means more than obedience. Through the eyes of chutzpah, mitzvot are the discrete acts that bring our shared dream into reality. Mitzvot designate the individual steps that move the human being and the human community from Egypt to Eden. Mitzvot are revealed and they are sacred, not because they were cast down from above upon a submissive people, but because they reveal the way forward in our shared journey toward the world of blessing.

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. (Exodus 22:20)

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I the Lord am your God. (Leviticus 19:33)

You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this

commandment. (Deuteronomy 24:17ff)

For two millennia, Western philosophy has strived to establish a basis for ethics beyond the power of external authority. Plato retells the famous Myth of Gyges – the magical ring that rendered its bearer invisible. Absent the fear of punishment, he wonders, why would anyone be good? Why would anyone do the right thing? Philosophers have argued that ethics are an expression of our nature as rational beings. Others maintained that ethics express our duty to universal maxims. Still others held that ethics are a necessary condition for civil society, a social contract upheld by civilized people. The Torah has a different basis for ethics. Ethics may be informed by rationality, intuition, conscience and social norms. But ethics begins much deeper, in the reflex of perception. Do we see the Other? Do we acknowledge the humanity of the Other?

Sight is a reflex triggered by light striking the eye and sending an impulse through the optic nerve to the brain. But vision is much more complicated. Vision is conditioned by culture, by personality, by expectation. Vision is not passive. We see what we are trained to see. We overlook what we are taught to ignore. We perceive through screens erected by our culture. It was expected that a black woman would give up her seat on the bus to a white man in 1954 Montgomery, Alabama. It was normal. No one noticed until Rosa Parks refused. When I was young, boys could dream of becoming astronauts, firemen, scientists. Girls were offered three choices: Teacher, nurse or mommy. Women went to college to obtain a “Mrs. Degree.” No one noticed until Betty Friedan made us see. Every culture labels certain social facts as inevitable and “normal,” and relegates them into invisibility. Every culture relegates certain people or classes of people to invisibility.

In Egypt, we experienced the condition of ultimate social invisibility. Unseen, unvalued, inconsequential, the slave is socially erased. We remember the humiliation and pain of that experience. From that experience grew the Torah’s imperative that no human being be ever be relegated to invisibility. Egyptian slavery taught to see the Other. Egypt taught us to see ourselves in the Other, to identify with the pain and plight of the Other. It taught that indifference to the suffering of the Other is a denial of the self. The tightly drawn circle of the ego is pried open to include an Other with whom we are one. For the Torah, ethics are based on empathy. And empathy is rooted in memory. Each year, we revisit Egypt to renew those memories and the acute sensitivity it engenders. That sensitivity defines Jewish ethics. It equips us to become vessels of divine blessing on earth.

Note the one small detail from the mitzvah in Deuteronomy: “You shall not take a widow's garment in pawn.” Who is she? This woman who stands silently on the street corner... Once, she was a woman of means, with a life filled with promise. And then a catastrophe – a disease, a business failure, a crime, and she is left bereft with children to feed. So what does she do? She sells her possessions to support the children – the furniture, the jewelry, the clothes. And when she exhausts all that, what is left? She sells her last garment, she offers up her dignity, her humanity – she sells herself. “See her!” demands the Torah, “don’t avert your eyes!” You know her humiliation, you too were once on society’s periphery, neglected and abused. You must never allow a human being to fall to

those depths.

Egypt taught us more than a personal ethic. Egypt taught us a social philosophy. Civilizations are measured by the power of their armies, the prosperity of their economies, the grandeur of their cities. That's not the Torah's standard. Torah judges a civilization based on its responsibility to the most vulnerable. The poor, bereft woman who must sell her dignity on the street is a more significant test of a society than the monuments that line its boulevards. Egypt is renown for its monuments. But looking up at those monuments from the vantage of the slave yields a very different perspective. So the prophet Amos proclaimed:

*Thus said the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel,
For four, I will not revoke it:
Because they have sold for silver
Those whose cause was just,
And the needy for a pair of sandals.
⁷[Ah,] you who trample the heads of the poor
Into the dust of the ground,
And make the humble walk a twisted course!
Father and son go to the same girl,
And thereby profane My holy name.
⁸They recline by every altar
On garments taken in pledge,
And drink in the House of their God
Wine bought with fines they imposed.
¹Hear this word, O people of Israel,
That the LORD has spoken concerning you.
Concerning the whole family that I brought up
from the land of Egypt:
²You alone have I singled out
Of all the families of the earth --
That I why I will call you to account
For all your iniquities. (Amos 2:7ff)*

Every mitzvah is one step on the path from Egypt to Eden. But with all the failures of human character, what gives us the resolution to continue the journey? What gives us any confidence that we might ever arrive? Every week, we are given a glimpse down the road. Every week, we are granted taste of Eden.

Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work -- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you

were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

On Sabbath, everyone rests – the householder, the family, the servants, the slaves, even the animals....even God. No one serves another. On Sabbath, all become equal. On Sabbath, the social hierarchy collapses. We become one -- one with one another, one with all other living things, one with God. That's Eden. Six days a week, we toil in a world that is all too much like Egypt. But for 25 hours each week, we are given a free pass to visit the Garden and enjoy its serenity and unity. Once a week, we are offered a chance to step out of the world's brokenness to experience a world perfected. We know that our aspiration is not unreachable, because we visit it every week. We continue the journey toward Eden, because each week, we are given a taste of its sweetness.

Halfway between Egypt and Eden rises Mt Sinai. At Sinai, the people Israel are given the map of the route of their moral journey, a picture of the landscape they must traverse, and a vision of its goal, the Promised Land.

Kedoshim tiy'hu, ki kadosh Ani Adonai Elohechim. You will be holy, because I, the Lord Your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:1)

Kedusha, translated as “holy,” is the highest spiritual virtue in Judaism. According to the Torah, it is the singular quality of God that we are to imitate. For all of God's infinity, this quality of God lies within our potential. In this one quality, we can be as God.

But what it is? What is *kedusha*?

The conventional definition of *kedusha*, holiness, has to do with separateness – that which is set apart for special purposes. That which is holy is restricted. The Sabbath is set aside from the days of the week. Israel is set apart from the nations of the world.

But there is another way to look upon the very same phenomena – the obverse of the same definition. Look at how the word *kedusha* is used in Jewish life:

Gathered around a table, on Shabbat or a holiday, we stand as a circle of family or friends, we raise a cup of wine and recite a blessing. It isn't the wine that is blessed. It is the circle of intimacy, of sharing, of oneness. That prayer is called....*Kiddush*.

Two loving friends pledge to share life together, to share laughter and tears, to share dreams and disappointments. A ring is placed on the right forefinger and a promise is uttered: *Harey at mikudeshet li*. You are mine, soulmate, lover, friend. Marriage in Hebrew is called *Kiddushin*.

When a loved one dies, we come to realize that love never dies. We never let go. They live with us -- their wisdom, their love, their kindness, their influence. So we stand up in

the presence of community and recite a prayer, a declaration of loyalty, and that's called *Kaddish*.

Kiddush, Kiddushin, Kaddish, Kadosh, Kedusha, all mean holiness, and all mean opening the self to embrace another, bonding with another, holding the other close, never letting go, making the other part of the self. We form around ourselves a circle, a circle of our intimate concern the people we care for, the ones we define as ours. For some, the circumference of that circle is so narrow, it includes only the individual self; its diameter reaching only to the end of the nose. For others, the circle includes family, community, nation. For a very few, it encompasses the whole of the world. We worship a God whose circle of concern is infinite. *Adonai Echad*, God is the infinite circle of concern that embraces all of life.

The aspiration to *kedusha* is rooted in the conviction that the wider our circle of concern, the more Godly our life. The wider the circle of responsibility, the more meaningful, the deeper, is life. Each step we take to open the circle and include another brings God into our life. Each step brings us Each step occasions a blessing to acknowledge God's presence in this act: *asher kidshanu b'mitzvot*

What is the opposite of holiness? At the end of Sabbath, we recite a blessing on the distinction between the holy and the ordinary -- *hamavdeel bein kodesh l'chol*. The Hebrew word for the opposite of holy -- for the profane, the mundane, the ordinary - is *Hol*, which literally means "sand". Try and hold a handful of sand, what happens? Atomized, individuated, disconnected, unbound, the grains slip away. That's the opposite of holiness.

Remembering the slavery of Egypt forms the moral minimum for a Jew. *Kedoshim tihyu*, "you will be holy," points to the moral ideal -- the goal of our long journey. Each gesture of bonding brings to reality a bit of the divine dream, a world made whole, a world made holy, a world returned to the ideal of Eden. We acknowledge this in the blessing recited upon the performance of each gesture:

"*Baruch ata adonai,
elohaynu melech ha-olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav...*
Praised are You, Adonai, our God,
whose presence fills the universe,
who brings us *kedusha*, oneness, with this *mitzvah*, this gesture of holiness.

Just a few verses after *Kedoshim tihyu* in Leviticus, is the highest moral ideal: *Va'ahavt L're'acha Kamocha*. "You will love your neighbor as yourself." This is our ideal -- the oneness of Eden. We are one. We come to realize a self the includes the Other. Every human transaction, teaches the Torah, must lead us to the realization of a world in which we are one, bound together.

The narrative arc of the Torah brings us from the divine dream of the Garden, through the

torturous oppression of Egyptian slavery, and onto the road toward Eden. But this time, Eden will not be given us as God's gift. This Eden will be constructed and maintained by human hands. That's the purpose of Torah. And that is the eternal mission of the Jewish people – to re-plant the Garden, with its oneness and its peace. That is chutzpah at its highest.