

Why is this Night the Same as Last Night? Lessons from Yom Tov Sheini for Israel-Diaspora Relations

Last year I spoke about Yahatz – not something any of us tend to have very strong opinions about! This year, I am going to try to bring together two topics I would venture to guess most of us have very strong opinions about: two days of yom tov in the Diaspora, and Israel-Diaspora relations.

I consider it an incredible zekhut to share Torah and learn with each and every one of you, especially on these special Shabbatot, and I offer the tefillah that these words spark thinking and then conversations – between us, between each other – this week, over our sedarim, over Pesah, and beyond.

I.

1. Passover Haggadah	הגדה של פסח
Why is this night different from all the other nights?	מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות? The assumption underlying this question, that Pesach is one night – at most seders, in most places, over most of the history of the Jewish people, is patently false!

How can we experience the singularity of a night, of a ritual, of a pinnacle moment of national identity affirmation and spiritual transformation, when it happens twice?

Yom Tov Sheini, the phenomenon of two days of observance of most of our Biblical holidays here in the Diaspora, is a downright bizarre institution. It is riddled with inconsistencies and internal contradiction, it seems irrelevant in the time of a fixed calendar, it points up a deep divide between Israel and the Diaspora, and I would venture to guess that for various reasons at various times, most of us in this room, even the ones who are overall fans of Yom Tov Sheini, have secretly, or not so secretly, wished for its abolition.

More than a few of you have suggested to me that “if we are really Open Orthodox, we will get rid of Yom Tov Sheini”, and that in so doing we might even gain all the members we lost with our past few innovations and purported breaks with the mesorah!

Tonight, I first want to suggest that this question, the question of Yom Tov Sheini, is most pointed, and most significant, on Pesah.

Then I want to make a case for Yom Tov Sheini. I want to argue that the perception of it as a weakly-founded and anachronistic minhag is not compelling, and that in fact it has deep resonance and some important lessons to teach us about the relationship we can have between Diaspora and Israel – between North America and Israel, beginning with what we in the Diaspora should recognize and appreciate about Israel.

I want to show the historic complexity of that relationship between two powerful centers of Jewry in Israel and the Diaspora and how the Haggadah wrestles – by commission and omission – with the same fundamental questions Yom Tov Sheini raises about the Israel-Diaspora relationship.

Ultimately, I want to return to what I hope the Diaspora can contribute to a healthy and vibrant Israel. And what we can achieve together. How we can see our fates as intertwined even as we acknowledge how different our realities are, and, I feel, as we acknowledge what we are missing here in the Diaspora. And I will emphasize – although I think it barely needs explication – why it feels to me this message is more critical than ever.

So why is this coming Friday night actually the same, in many ways, as this coming Saturday night? At least for us in the Diaspora? And why is that critical for all Jews everywhere, on this holiday of Jewish identity and nationhood?

Let's begin.

II.

The observance of a second day of yom tov in the Diaspora is perhaps most strongly felt, and thus most critical to analyze, on Pesah.

Let's survey the holidays and their experiences for a moment before we delve into the textual history of this halakhic institution.

Both Israel and the Diaspora observe two days of Rosh Hashanah, interestingly, and one day of Yom Kippur, interestingly.

Shavuot, although one more day of yom tov in the Diaspora, and therefore a whole additional day of davening and prohibition of melakhah, has no major ritual difference. We all only stay up the first night learning, thank God, and we all read Megillat Rut.

Sukkot, given the existence of Shemini Atzeret at its end, is almost identical in Israel as in the Diaspora. We all sit in the sukkah for the duration of the hag, although perhaps for one more day here, and we all do hakafot, although in Israel it happens on Shemini Atzeret as opposed to on its own day of Simhat Torah. So there, too, there is no fundamental difference in repetitive hag-specific ritual other than the additional day in shul experiencing yom tov.

But on Pesah we have this radical experience of the second Seder. If there is a single night in the Jewish calendar that stands out more than any other night, certainly going back to Biblical times, as a ritualized, historic, irreplicable night, it is this ליל שמורים, this night of guarding; this ויהי בחצי הלילה – the middle of that very night.

And yet, here, we do it twice. Ritually speaking, the experience of the doubling brought about by yom tov sheini, and the gap between the experience of Jews in Israel and America, seems to me never greater than on the seder night.

And how pointed that this is of course the holiday – *the night* – on which we affirm our peoplehood. That we cast our lot with the Jewish people, perform some of the defining rituals and tell the defining story of ourselves as a people, with more Jews than perhaps participate in almost any other ritual throughout the year. And yet it is on this night – the second night, that one part of our people is repeating this ritual, and the other part is watching the news. Or recounting ballots. Or WhatsApping. Or working on building the *next* lunar lander!

So while the sources on yom tov sheini do not necessarily highlight Pesah, Pesah highlights the question of yom tov sheini. And, as I will argue, the Haggadah deepens the tensions this halakhic issue brings to the fore.

Let's try to understand where it comes from and evaluate its place in our lives today.

III.

To accomplish this task, we are going to begin with a look at a fairly technical and complex Gemara. It's one of the more technical texts we have ever looked at in a Shabbat Hagadol derashah, but we can do it! So stick with me. It's somewhat complex and unclear, and we will only be scratching the surface.

First, an introduction about the Jewish calendar – it may be familiar to some of us but always bears reviewing.

The Jewish calendar functions month to month as a lunar calendar, other than the occasional leap month (like last month) – which is intercalated into the calendar to make sure Passover always happens in the spring. Fundamentally, our calendar is a lunar one.

A lunar month is about 29.5 days, but in the Biblical and rabbinic period, there was not a system in place to consistently calculate those periods, or perhaps there was simply a preference not to rely on calculations but rather to set the calendar anew each month based on human observation.

So the calendar was preserved as follows: someone would see the first glimmer of the new moon and go to Jerusalem and testify to having seen it. If their testimony passed muster, the Beit Din would sanctify the New Moon and that day – which would have either been the 30th or 31st day of the month, would be declared the 1st day of the next month.

Now, how would everyone else find out? As the Mishnah in RH records in SOURCE 2, which you can look at as I explain it more broadly, they lit torches as signals from designated mountaintop to designated mountaintop, going northward to the rest of the Jewish community in Israel and eastward to Babylonia where the Jewish community had spread. Within the course of that night, the whole Jewish world knew it was the new month. Well over 2000 years before social media, that's basically the closest you could come to a viral post.

2. Mishnah Rosh Hashana 2:2	משנה ראש השנה ב/ב
Originally they would light signal torches. After the Kutim disrupted them they decreed that messengers go forth.	בראשונה היו משיאין משואות משקלקלו הכותים התקינו שיהו שלוחין יוצאין:

But this was an age of sectarian tensions, and a group identified as the Kutim started sending up their own torches and confusing the message – hackers, if you will. So the Sages had to resort to a more encrypted, and lower-tech, much slower, approach: messengers. They dispatched messengers to the entire rest of Israel and the Diaspora to notify them of the correct date of the New Month. These messengers rested on Shabbat, and while they could cover most of settled Israel in those days in less than two weeks, it took them a long time on foot to get across the Middle East.

Naturally, this meant that there were major swaths of the Diaspora that did not find out whether it was the 30th or the 1st, or the 8th or the 9th, or the 14th or the 15th, until it was already past the midpoint of the month. There was only a margin of error of one day, because every month was always either 29 or 30 days, but that margin of error was very significant. This was a big deal when it came to months that had the holidays in them, where the stakes of which day it was were very high.

And so communities that did not have the messengers arrive before the middle of the month, when it came to Pesach and Sukkot in particular, observed those yom tov days for two days, since they were not sure which was the correct day. This is where we start from.

Now, the context in the Gemara in Beitzah 4b that we are looking at has to do with different examples of eggs that were laid on the first of two consecutive days on which melakhah cannot be done, and whether after being laid on the first of the days, they can be consumed on the successive day. This is tied up in conversations of preparing from one day to the next, and the nature of the two consecutive days.

Let's now look at SOURCE 3. For the purposes of tonight, I will give a basic explanation as we go.

אתמר, שני ימים טובים של גליות, רב אמר: נולדה בזה מותרת בזה, ורב אסי אמר: נולדה בזה אסורה בזה.

So an egg laid on the first day of a two day yom tov - what is its status on the second day? Rav says it is permitted, and Rav Asi says it is prohibited. What is the basis for each position?

Using, on yom tov, an egg which was created on that same day of yom tov is a problem of muktzeh, and preparing on yom tov for another day of yom tov is another problem.

So here's the question:

Based on what we have said so far, the reason we keep two days is because we don't know which day is actually the holiday. In reality, one is and one isn't. But we treat them both like full yom tov in the rituals in davening and not doing melakhah. But the egg case pushes that understanding further: do we go so far in treating the two days each as full yom tov even though in reality only one is that we would not allow an egg laid on one day to be allowed on the next, when one day is truly a weekday?

Rav does allow that egg, presumably because he understands that even though we observe the two days as days of yom tov, one is clearly not yom tov at all – but we're just not sure which day that is. And so the egg is permitted either way. If the first day is really yom tov, an egg laid on yom tov can be eaten the next day on a regular day. If the second day is really yom tov, the egg laid on the first day was laid on a regular day, and then it can be eaten the next day on yom tov.

This approach of Rav is identified with the notion of "shte kedushot" – that there are two separate days here that we are treating as holy, but all the while recognizing that because of the doubt, only one is fully holy. They are separable.

Rav Asi prohibits. The simplest explanation for his opinion seems to be that the Sages didn't just say that we should act as though each day was yom tov, but formally conferred a status of absolute yom tov on each day, even making it as though it were one continuous yom tov day, calling that "kedushah ahat". This is often envisioned by the commentaries as having been some kind of takanah, or edict – some additional halakhic layer that the Sages placed upon these days, that might even hold if the doubt disappeared.

לימא קא סבר רב אסי קדושה אחת היא? והא רב אסי מבדיל מיומא טבא לחבריה!

But now the Gemara asks: does Rav Asi really see these as having become fully yom tov in all senses, even for the egg? This is inconsistent with the fact that Rav Asi would make Havdalah between the two days! He clearly understood them to be separate, and that one really was still hol in some way! So then why did he say the egg was prohibited?

רב אסי ספוקי מספקא ליה, ועביד הכא לחומרא והכא לחומרא.

The answer is that Rav Asi wasn't sure. He didn't know whether to treat the two days as doubt-induced yom tov days but one is hol enough that the egg can be permitted, or whether to imagine that the Sages converted this into two days to be treated as so fully both yom tov that the egg was prohibited. Since he wasn't sure, he was strict in each direction, making Havdalah and prohibiting the egg.

Thus far we really have two opinions about the nature of these two days:

- 1) Rav who allows the egg, preserving some sense that one of the two days is in reality a weekday. Rav Asi agrees with Rav insofar as he makes Havdalah between the two days.
- 2) Rav Asi's stance in disallowing the egg, who seems to understand that we have fully made both days into yom tov, eliminating any awareness of one being a weekday.

אמר רבי זירא: כותיה דרב אסי מסתברא, דהאידנא ידעין בקביעא דירחא וקא עבדין תרי יומי.

Now the Gemara evaluates the opinions. Rabi Zeira says that Rav Asi's opinion that underlies prohibiting the egg makes sense with the fact that even though we now know what the correct days are – whether because we can

make those calculations effectively now on our own, or because the calendar is more set – we still keep two days. This reflects this notion that the identity of these two days is somehow fixed beyond the elimination of the calendrical doubt.

אמר אביי: כותיה דרב מסתברא. דתנן: בראשונה היו משיאין משואות, משקלקלו הכותים התקינו שיהו שלוחין יוצאין. ואילו בטלו כותים עבדין חד יומא, והיכא דמטו שלוחין עבדין חד יומא.

Abaye, on the other hand, sides with Rav. He bases himself not on the fact that we keep two days even though we have no more doubt, but rather on the fact that from the Mishnah in SOURCE 2 it seems like we shouldn't! The Mishnah seems to imply that if the Kutim disappeared, we would revert to keeping one day, and indeed wherever the messengers got to, they did keep one day. In other words, if there is no doubt anymore, there should be only one day. And so whatever doubt we have nowadays is not enough to make a formal transformation of both days into fully yom tov even for the egg, but rather one day is yom tov and one day is in some sense chol, and the egg is allowed on the second day.

השתא דידיעין בקביעא דירחא מאי טעמא עבדין תרי יומי? - משום דשלחו מתם: הזהרו במנהג אבותיכם בידיכם, זמנין דגזרו שמדא ואתי לאקלקולי.

But Abaye then leaves our current condition unexplained. If Rav makes sense because the only reason we keep two days is doubt, then why do we – who have no doubt – keep two days? Now that we know how the moon cycles work – again, either so that we can calculate it ourselves, or because we have some sort of fixed calendar – why do we still keep two days?

This is the very question I get asked all the time! Now that we have a fixed calendar and we have no more doubt, why do we keep two days? So what's the answer?

Because they sent from there: be careful to keep your ancestral customs. Sometime there may be a decree limiting our religious freedoms, and the calendar will be corrupted.

Ok – this is critical. If you tuned out because of eggs and technical argumentation, tune back in! Why do we have two days of yom tov when we have a fixed calendar?

Because they sent from there: be careful to keep your ancestral customs. Sometime there may be a decree limiting our religious freedoms, and the calendar will be corrupted.

There is a lot to unpack in this answer. I want to highlight three points.

First: Usually people quote just the first half of this Gemara: minhag avoteikhem b'yadeikhem. Keep your customs. Mesorah. Even if the reason doesn't apply anymore, we still have to do it. Sounds familiar!

I don't think we should take lightly this concept of minhag avoteinu b'yadeinu. Much of the power of our tradition rests simply upon that. We continue doing what our forebears did. In a world where so much looks different – radically different – from one generation to the next, the power of minhag is religiously important.

Now there is also a **second** piece here: this question only seemed to be a question for Rav, who was focused on the doubt, so when the doubt falls away, the two days should be only one day. But remember Rav Asi! For him, there is no question why we keep two days. Not just because it was a minhag, but because it was a takanah. We might suggest that this means the Sages saw something powerful in creating this two-day holiday, even if it was born out of doubt, and so they actually enshrined that it should be long-lasting, knowing that the doubt may go away at some point, and the holiday should stay. What was that power? I hope we will continue to unpack that question as the derashah unfolds.

But returning to Rav, for whom the question stands, and this is a minhag that should fall away when the doubt disappears: yes, there is a great power to preserving minhag, but when the minhag cuts against a sense of truth,

or of reality, it feels harder to hold. Why should we preserve a custom when the whole premise upon which it was based is gone, is now rendered factually untrue? Now it is as though by keeping two days of yom tov we are perpetuating a falsehood, pretending we don't know something we really know! We know which day it is! Why should we act based on doubt when the doubt is gone?

This brings me to my **third** point, which is the second half of the Gemara's explanation: זמנין דגזרו שמדא ואתי לאקלקולי – sometime they might decree religious oppression, and we will come to a corruption of the calendar. In other words, for starters, we are not just focused on the progress out of the past, but also the uncertainty of the future. What if we lose our access to that fixed calendar?

At first glance, that reason feels far off to us. How could we possibly, in this global and technological age, lose track of our calendar and how to calculate the month?

R Dr. Yehudah Brandes, in his shiurim on concepts of Yom Tov, revives the underlying notion at play in the Gemara. He points out that unless we see this as a fixed edict that simply cannot be revoked – that takanah explanation of Rav Asi – unless we see it that way, its underlying premise is really about doubt.

And then he suggests that even if the doubt about what exact day it is is no longer with us, *there is some kind of uncertainty that remains*. He articulates it this way in SOURCE 4:

<p>4. R. Dr. Y Brandes, Shiurim on Masekhtot Yom Tov</p>	<p>ר' ד"ר יהודה ברנדס, שיעורים על מסכתות יו"ט</p>
<p>The instruction to keep the custom of our ancestors is not an edict that mandates two days, rather its entire nature is to remain with the 'doubt of which day' that perhaps there will be religious persecution and we truly won't know what calendar day it is. <i>It's as if Diaspora Jews are always at risk of the creation of a doubt. Even in the age of the calendar, from the perspective of the Diaspora, we still celebrate two days of Yom Tov out of doubt, not because of an edict.</i></p>	<p>ההוראה לשמר מנהג האבות אינה תקנה שמחייבת שני ימים, אלא כל אופיה הוא להשאר עם ה'ספיקא דיומא' שמא יהיה שמד ובאמת לא יידעו. כביכול יושבי הגולה לעולם נמצאים בחשש הווצרות ספק. גם בעידן הלוח, מבחינת יושבי הגולה עדיין חוגגים שני ימים טובים מספק, ולא מכוח תקנה.</p>

In other words, there is something of the Diaspora experience that is about fundamental – existential – safeik, doubt.

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The Ritva develops this point further as he also raises and answers an important question we have not sufficiently addressed. Why should the dividing line here be Israel vs the Diaspora? If it's just about where the messengers traveled to, then the map of where we keep one day vs two days should be drawn differently. The Ritva explains, in SOURCE 5:

<p>5. Ritva Rosh Hashanah 18a</p>	<p>ריטב"א ר"ה יח.</p>
<p>There is another big question: the messengers would go out to everywhere they could reach, and even to the Diaspora, but they could get to Egypt within 10 days... and they certainly could not get to all of Israel... and as such, there were places in Israel that would need to keep the festivals for two days as in the Diaspora. So why does the world observe one day in Israel except Rosh Hashanah, and those in the Diaspora observe two days?</p>	<p>ויש עוד שאלה גדולה שהרי לכל מקום שהיו יכולין להגיע שלוחין יוצאין ואפי" לחו"ל כדכתיבנא לעיל ולמצרים היו יכולין להגיע בעשרה ימים... ובודאי לא היו מגיעין לכל א"י... וכיון דכן היו מקומות בארץ ישראל שצריכין לעשות המועדות ב' ימים כמו בחו"ל וא"כ אמאי נהוג כ"ע למעבד בא"י כל המועדות יום א' לבד מר"ה ובני חוץ לארץ עושין אותן כולם שני ימים.</p>
<p>The answer is that... they sent from there, 'Be careful with your ancestors' tradition that you hold, because sometime they might cast a decree, and this may lead to a disruption.'</p>	<p>והתשובה ... דשלחו מתם הזהרו במנהג אבותיכם בידיכם דזמנין דגזרי שמדא ואתו</p>

<p><i>That is to say... we should practice as originally done and essentially be as though we don't know anything, and bless on the second day, and sanctify it, as though it is in doubt in our hands...</i></p> <p>And when they enacted that we be careful with our ancestors' customs in our hands, our ancestors had divergent customs, for there were all kinds of places, some that kept two days and some that kept one, and we follow the majority, and in the Diaspora the majority did not have messengers arrive, so we do here two days, but in the majority of Israel, they did one day, and so they do today...</p>	<p>לאקלקולי. כלומר ... שנהי' נוהגין כבתחלה ונהיה בעיקר המעשה כאלו אין אנו יודעין כלום ומברכין בו ומקדשין בו כמו שהוא ספק בידינו ...</p> <p>וכשתקנו לנו שנזהר במנהג אבותינו ואבותינו היו להם מנהגות משונים שהרי מקומות מקומות יש ויש שעושין ב' ימים ויש שעושין יום א' ויש לנו לילך אחר הרוב ובחז"ל רובא (הימים) לעולם שלא היו מגיעין שם שלוחים ולפיכך אנו עושין כאן ב' ימים אבל ברוב א"י היו עושין יום א' ועושין היום ג"כ יום...:</p>
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So the Ritva explains: why do we make the dividing line according to Israel-Diaspora as opposed to where the messengers actually got?

Well, we follow the majority, and majority of Diaspora communities were keeping two days, and majority of Israel communities were keeping one.

Notice, by the way, how the Ritva ends – internalizing the very message he is describing: “in the Diaspora the majority did not have messengers arrive, so we do here two days, but in the majority of Israel, they did one day, and so they do today...”

He could've spoken about each group in the abstract – ‘so is done in the Diaspora, but in Israel, such is done...’, but he doesn't. It's us and them.

And now circle back up to see how the Ritva develops the point R Brandes made. “We should essentially be as though we don't know anything!” We have to act as though we don't know. We enact a sense of doubt, whether we have it or not. We push ourselves to experience uncertainty, instability.

Unwittingly, maybe subconsciously, by pairing these two points, that we need to experience continued doubt by keeping two days, and that just because of following the majority we make a non-obvious dividing line not by distance but by political-religious boundary, between Israel and the rest of the Jewish world, I think the Ritva pushes us to understand that the persistence of the phenomenon of two days of yom tov in the Diaspora is about cultivating a sense of existential doubt in Diaspora Jewry.

We are supposed to feel unsettled, uneasy, uncertain, in some way in our religious lives in the Diaspora.

If we don't, says the Ritva, Yom Tov Sheini is there to remind us that we should. It's there, and we have to acknowledge it.

What are those senses of uneasiness, unsettledness?

Is it the vulnerability we should feel as a minority in a non-Jewish society, even with all the extraordinary gains we have made and integration that makes that uneasiness easy to forget?

Is it the acknowledgment that we are at a distance from our historical and spiritual home, as extraordinary of a religious and spiritual framework as we have built in this country and society, and as grateful as we should be for that?

Because we are powerful and protected and successful.

And we are vulnerable, and at risk, and removed from our covenantal homeland.

I don't like saying that anti-Semitism is on the rise because I don't see our place in America primarily as victims. But it is on the rise, and we certainly would ignore its rise at our own peril. I don't believe we are seeing a replaying of 1930s Germany – I know some do – but I do think we should never pretend that the Gemara's concern, 'לאקלקולי, ואתי שמדא דגזרו דגזרו', that an oppressive government could cause us not to be able to maintain our calendar, that that is an impossibility. It's not.

Yosef Mendeleovich lived under that rule as a prisoner in Soviet Russia, and the story is told that he kept 3 days of Pesach because he was no longer sure what day it was.

And I don't like saying that we are distanced from our spiritual home because my life here in America, growing up in Baltimore and as an adult in New York is spiritually and religiously full and fulfilling. And sometimes Israel feels more complicated. But more complicated doesn't change the fact that I believe with my whole heart that the Jewish heart beats most richly in Medinat Yisrael. That the modern miracle of this reborn homeland is foundational to my religious identity.

That no prayer service is complete without acknowledging that our whole religious orientation is – and our prayers are – literally towards Israel. And we are here, בסוף מערב, at the far reaches of the West – distant, no matter how quickly you can jump on a plane or hop on WhatsApp.

This is not just about a lack, by the way, but also about a yearning. A powerful, constructive sense of longing. We aren't all going to Israel tomorrow, for many good reasons, although I am so incredibly proud of those who make aliyah from our Bayit. But we want to cultivate and carry forward our deep sense of longing.

Two days of yom tov is not a punishment – it is a reminder of our impermanence here. It is a reminder that there is a place where we belong with certainty, and we are not there yet. It's here to force us to look ourselves in the eye and say, "this is not our ultimate home. Here, things are inherently unstable."

I believe this. And when I sit down to my second seder, or embark on the second day of Sukkot, and feel the strangeness of starting all over again (a strangeness that is of course not so strange to me because it is the only thing I have ever known), I try to pause and remind myself: this is about the Diaspora. This is about being further from the place where the calendar was historically set and where the covenantal center of our people lies. And so I am less sure, less convinced, more *b'safeik*, in my personal security and religious identity here.

God made a promise that we will always return to Israel, not Riverdale. I try to carry that with me, as sobering as it is. Not to distress my life here. But to orient me towards Israel.

I want to make an aside here which is not an aside. I want to use it to offer an opinion, not a psak. But I feel it belongs in this conversation. It relates to – deep breath – Americans traveling to Israel! There are three general positions about Americans traveling to Israel in terms of observing yom tov there.

The widespread opinion is that of the Shulhan Arukh and many others, that an American visiting Israel over the hagim keeps two days as when in America. There is a second opinion, very popular, that Americans follow the practice of the place they are going in this regard, and keep one day. And there is a third approach that Americans perform the negative and positive mitzvot for one day, but on the second day, while they refrain from any melakhah, they also daven as though it were a weekday.

Each of these positions has merit, and there are rabbis who rule like all of them (perhaps even within our rabbinic team!). In my opinion, based on what we have learned, I believe an American visiting Israel, who is not moving right then to Israel, needs to continue to experience that Diaspora identity of *safeik*, of uncertainty, even when geographically in Israel, by keeping two days. We should be inspired by being visitors in Israel, inspired to move to Israel, and we should connect as strongly as we can. But we also have to recognize the difference between visitors and residents. It's simply a realization that just having gotten on a plane for a visit to Israel doesn't make

us residents of Israel, doesn't make us embedded and invested there in the same way, and doesn't change the reality of our existence and identity. I doubt this is a popular opinion, and if I don't get fired for offering it, I am happy to talk more about it another time!

This is part one of our Diaspora relationship to Israel – an embrace of the unshakeable *safeik* that we carry with us outside of Israel. There's a very important second part to this, but we need to get a little further to get there.

IV.

There's another layer of complexity to this relationship between Israel and the Diaspora that we need to address. It starts by circling back to the Gemara in the end of SOURCE 3, and it follows nicely on the heels of getting *piskei halakhah* you didn't ask for, like you all just experienced!

Who told the Babylonians in the Talmud there to keep two days? Why were they doing it?

מתם שלחו – that's Aramaic – משם – from there. They sent from there, to keep two days. Where is there? Eretz Yisrael. And while other versions of this text in other places have the sending be in response to a question, I find it quite striking that in our Gemara it is not. It is an unsolicited directive from the authorities in Israel: remember your existential doubt! Don't feel too at home there in the Diaspora.

I beg your pardon? Who asked you? And why is Israel just מש, there? Does it evoke a sense of it being the ultimate longed for place? Or is it displaying the sense of distance the Babylonians felt – שם, that faraway, disconnected and remote, unknown land?

Why is Israel answering the question of the Diaspora?

Of course the message is sent from Israel – they are the religious authorities. They are the mothership – broadcasting out to their far-flung children to remember their instability and stay in touch with home. כי מציון תצא תורה – the Torah and instruction comes from Israel. And that rings true still today – so much of the vibrant and dynamic Torah culture of our Jewish world is unfolding in Israel.

But Israel is also the counterpart that may feel threatened by the strength of the Diaspora, and maybe sending this ruling to the Diaspora is a fear-driven move to control the Diaspora lest it become an independent center, lest Babylonia be able to independently calculate and set the calendar. Then what?

That is to say, Israel and the Diaspora are not the same. Even while we are charged with longing for Israel and recognizing its centrality, we are also building something extraordinary here, and that creates tension with Medinat Yisrael sometimes. This is a tension that neither began nor ended with the message about two days of yom tov in the Babylonian Talmud. Take a look at SOURCES 6 and 7.

6. <i>Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 110b-111a</i>	תלמוד בבלי כתובות קי:-קיא.
<p>R. Zera was evading R. Judah because he wanted to go up to the Land of Israel but R. Judah had expressed: Whoever goes up from Babylon to the Land of Israel transgresses a positive commandment, for it is said in Scripture, <i>They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be, until the day that I remember them, saith the Lord (Jer. 27:22)</i>....</p>	<p>ר' זירא הוה קמשתמיט מיניה דרב יהודה, דבעא למיסק לארץ ישראל, דאמר רב יהודה: כל העולה מבבל לארץ ישראל עובר בעשה, שנאמר: בבלה יובאו ושמה יהיו עד יום פקדי אותם נאם ה' (ירמיהו כז/כב)....</p>
<p>R. Judah stated in the name of Samuel: As it is forbidden to leave the Land of Israel for Babylon so it is forbidden to leave Babylon for other countries...</p>	<p>אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: כשם שאסור לצאת מארץ ישראל לבבל, כך אסור לצאת מבבל לשאר ארצות.</p>
<p>R. Judah said: Whoever lives in Babylon is as though he lived in the Land of Israel...</p>	<p>אמר רב יהודה: כל הדר בבבל - כאילו דר בארץ ישראל.</p>

Rav Yehudah was a student of Rav, who “made yeridah” from Eretz Yisrael to Bavel. Rav Yehudah was a huge force in Torah study in Bavel in the second generation of the Amoraim, and a tremendous figure in the Gemara. He sees Bavel as its own power center, and he forbids people from leaving there and going to Israel. He essentially sees it as an equally valid center. While he doesn’t go so far as to belittle Israel, he doesn’t seem to be someone who would feel existential safeik in galut.

And yet, extraordinarily, the Talmud Bavli also encodes its own criticism as coming from Israel, as in SOURCE 7:

<p>7. <i>Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 24a</i></p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי סנהדרין כד.</p>
<p>What does [the name] Bavel connote? R. Johanan answered: [That the study of] Scripture, Mishnah and Talmud was intermingled [therein].</p>	<p>מאי בבל? אמר רבי יוחנן: בלולה במקרא, בלולה במשנה, בלולה בתלמוד.</p>
<p><i>He hath made me to dwell in dark places like those that have been long dead (Lam. 3:6).</i> This, said R. Jeremiah, refers to the Babylonian Talmud.</p>	<p>במחשכים הושיבני כמתי עולם (איכה ג/ו) - אמר רבי ירמיה: זה תלמודה של בבל.</p>

Here we see the critique of Bavel – absurd on its face, but still being offered by those in Israel.

There are many more such sources in the Gemara, and they highlight for us that there has always been a tension when both Israel and the Diaspora were thriving, between the two places. They are each centers in their own right, and when they create vibrant Jewish life, it becomes hard to assert the supremacy of one just because it is our historic homeland or the place God chooses to bring God’s name to rest.

I think we feel that today. There are incredible things going on in Jewish communities all around the Diaspora, and especially here in America. We are a center in our own right.

And we are inexorably different. Without stereotyping or generalizing, American Judaism is different from Israeli Judaism. American Jewish culture is different from Israeli Jewish culture. We live in different lands with different challenges and different realities. We don’t totally feel at home there, and they don’t totally feel at home here. And I am proud that we build many bridges in our Bayit, and that it is a place where many Israelis come to spend time. And still we acknowledge it. We are different.

How do we manage our differences? How do we uphold the great things happening here and still long to be there? And can Israel appreciate the power of the Diaspora?

V.

This tension comes to a head in the Haggadah.

What is the message of seder night? We celebrate our liberation from servitude and acknowledge God’s great might and covenantal love for us that drives that process. We retell the story in different ways, going further and further back in our history.

But what is the endpoint? Where does it lead us? What is the climax of our liberation as we relive it on Seder night? Is it just the going free, or does it extend forward to making it to the Land of Israel, the next step in the convenantal promises of our people?

In other words, does the Haggadah consider the story complete, even temporarily, before we get to the Land of Israel, validating a Diaspora existence? Or does it categorically reject that stopping point, saying, in essence, this narrative is incomplete and unintelligible without ending in the Land of Israel?

At first glance, we might answer simply: of course it sees Israel as the culmination of the Exodus. Look at how we begin and how we end.

We begin with **הא לחמא עניא**, as in SOURCE 8:

8. <i>Ha Lahma Anya – Passover Haggadah</i>	הא לחמא עניא - הגדה של פסח
This year we celebrate here; Next year in the Land of Israel.	השתא הכא, לשנה הבאה בארץ ישראל.
Now we are still in bonds; Next year may we all be free.	השתא עבדי, לשנה הבאה בני חורין.

This year we are here, next year in the Land of Israel. This line is set up in parallel to “this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people”. As though to say that our state of exile is a state of slavery. Our Exodus is not complete until we are in Israel.

And we end **לשנה הבאה בירושלים** – orienting ourselves to the Promised Land.

And the Dayenu, which takes a very wide view of our journey from slavery to freedom, takes us through the desert to the Land of Israel and all the way to the building of the Temple – its own sort of pinnacle.

And that *is* the frame of the seder, in a certain sense.

But as we get deeper into the heart, into the Maggid and the different ways we are instructed to tell the story, the picture gets murkier. I want to demonstrate the mixed feelings the Haggadah has toward Israel as the ultimate destination with two examples.

First, in the broadest narrative arc of the Haggadah. As we studied a few years ago, the Mishnah in the 10th Chapter of Pesahim, from 2000 years ago, does not provide the text of the Haggadah. It lays out the guidelines of how the story of the Exodus is to be retold. One of those guidelines is **מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח** – begin with disgrace and end with praise.

The Gemara there debates the question, what is the disgrace and what is the praise? What is the painful beginning of the story of the Exodus and what is its happy ending? The Talmud Bavli records two answers, here in SOURCE 9, which we typically identify as Rav and Shmuel. I am grateful to Dr. Joshua Kulp whose wonderful Schechter Haggadah presents the basis of the analysis which follows.

9. <i>Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 116a</i>	תלמוד בבלי פסחים קטז.
“Begins with disgrace and concludes with glory”: What is “with disgrace”?	מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח: מאי בגנות?
Rav said: At first our forefathers were idol worshippers.	רב אמר מתחלה עובדי עבודת גלולים היו אבותינו.
Shmuel said: “We were slaves...”	[ושמואל] אמר עבדים היינו...

Rav says it is that our ancestors were idol worshippers – **מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו**. Shmuel says the disgrace is that we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt – **עבדים היינו**.

Now, Rav’s version varies between the Bavli, which we saw in SOURCE 9, and the Yerushalmi, which you have in SOURCE 10.

10. <i>Palestinian Talmud Pesahim 10:5</i>	ירושלמי פסחים י/ה
Rav said: At in the beginning: “ <i>On the other side of the river your ancestors dwelled...and I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river...and I made [them] numerous.</i> ”	רב אמר (ב)[כ]תחילה. (צריך להזכיר) בעבר הנהר ישבו אבותיכם וגו' ואקח את אביכם את אברהם מעבר הנהר וגו' וארבה.

The Bavli version is clear that the disgrace is our idolatrous origins. Our ancestors were idol worshippers. But the Yerushalmi simply says you must begin with these pesukim, and it quotes the verses from Yehoshua that you have in SOURCE 11.

11. Joshua 24:2-4	יהושע כד/ב-ד
(2) Then Joshua said to all the people, “Thus said the LORD, the God of Israel: In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. (3) But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan and multiplied his offspring. I gave him Isaac, (4) and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir as his possession, while Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.	(ב) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל-כָּל-הָעָם כֹּה-אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶבֶר הַנָּהָר יָשְׁבוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵעוֹלָם תָּרַח אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאָבִי נָחוֹר וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים: (ג) וָאֶקַּח אֶת-אֲבִיכֶם אֶת-אַבְרָהָם מֵעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר וְאוֹלָךְ אוֹתוֹ בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְאַרְבַּ [וְאַרְבֵּה] אֶת-זָרְעוֹ וְאֶתְנֶ-לוֹ אֶת-יִצְחָק: (ד) וְאֶתֵן לְיִצְחָק אֶת-יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת-עֵשָׂו וְאֶתֵן לְעֵשָׂו אֶת-הַר שֵׂעִיר לְרִשְׁתּוֹ אוֹתוֹ וַיַּעֲקֹב וּבְנָיו יָרְדוּ מִצְרָיִם:

What are these pesukim actually about? What is the disgrace in the Yerushalmi? From the pesukim, one can argue that it's actually being outside the Land of Israel! It's the fact that we started in Mesopotamia, and as our Haggadot conclude through the end of verse 4, it's מצרימה ירדו ובניו ויעקב, that we left again of our own will to go to Egypt. Our familial and proto-national story starts outside of Israel and ends outside of Israel – what a disgrace, says the Yerushalmi, the Talmud of the Land of Israel!

Following the general assumption that the Yerushalmi's material is earlier and less edited, we can suggest that at some point, the Bavli recasts the emphasis of Rav's disgrace. It can't be that for the Bavli the disgrace is living outside the Land of Israel, because then every Babylonian is living a life of disgrace! So the Bavli emphasizes the idolatry issue, a very live concern for Jews living in an idolatrous Babylonian society.

The question of what is disgraceful for Rav shifts from Talmud to Talmud because the ideologies, the primary concerns, shift from Israel to the Diaspora. That is Rav.

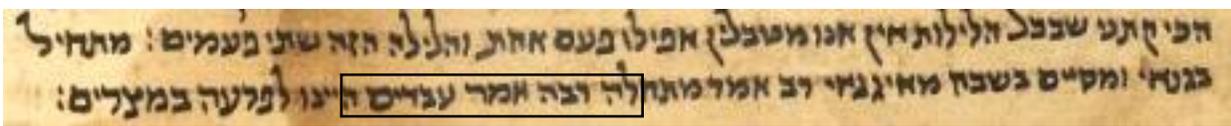
Shmuel's version is Avadim Hayinu. The disgrace is our slavery, and the proof text is as you have in SOURCE 12, the pasuk from Devarim which says this very fact.

12. Deuteronomy 6:21	דברים ו/כא
You shall say to your children, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the LORD freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand.	וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבָנֶיךָ עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרָיִם וַיֹּצִיאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרָיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה:

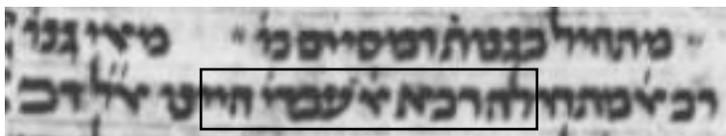
But there is something strange here. The Yerushalmi, which you have in SOURCE 10, never mentions Shmuel's opinion about what the disgrace is, even though it mentions Rav's. Why?

Look back at SOURCE 9. Below the text are two manuscripts, reproduced here.

Manuscript: JTS Rab. 1623



Manuscript: Vatican Ebr. 134



Each of them has a different attributed author for the interlocutor with Rav. In the first, it is Rabbah. In the second, it is Rava. They are both a good century later than Shmuel. While there is not universal agreement among the manuscripts, almost all have Rabbah or Rava – only one has Shmuel, who then appears in our printed editions of the Talmud. It was probably Rabbah or Rava, most likely Rava. Neither of these two would likely have been reported in the Yerushalmi, which is why no second opinion appears there. This is not a contemporaneous debate between Rav and Shmuel, it seems. This is two different iterations, generations apart, of what the story of disgrace and praise should look like.

So then - why does Rava come along and offer this alternative version of disgrace and praise? If Rava was aware of Rav’s original version, preserved in the Yerushalmi, which emphasizes the disgrace of living outside the Land of Israel, he would have felt compelled, as an acculturated citizen of Sasanian Persia – to offer a different story. There is no disgrace to living in the Diaspora. The disgrace started in Egypt, when we were enslaved.

So the entire framework of how we tell the story of the seder night, of what our fundamental disgrace was, is entirely different for the Talmud Yerushalmi, whose disgrace might be not living in Israel, and the Diasporic Bavli, whose disgrace is either idolatry or is the slavery in Egypt. Where you live shapes your concerns, and while the Bavli can hold Diaspora, the Yerushalmi rejects it. That’s the first example.

And if we begin with disgrace, and we end with praise – what is the praise?

This is the second example of the Haggadah’s tension around accepting the Diaspora. The Maggid culminates with the second cup, over which we tell the story of our redemption and recite the Birkat Hageulah, the blessing of redemption. What is the formula of that blessing? The rabbis of the Mishnah debate this in SOURCE 13:

13. <i>Mishnah Pesahim 10:6</i>	משנה פסחים י/ו
<p>And one should conclude with [the blessing of] redemption.</p> <p>Rabbi Tarfon says, 'who redeemed us and our ancestors from Egypt,'" but would not conclude [this section with a concluding blessing].</p> <p>Rabbi Akiva says, 'So Lord our God and God of our ancestors, let us come to reach other seasons and festivals in peace, joyful in the rebuilding of your city, and jubilant in your Temple service, where we will eat from the offerings and Pesach sacrifices etc.' until 'Blessed are you Lord, Redeemer of Israel.'</p>	<p>וחותם בגאולה. רבי טרפון אומר, אשר גאלנו וגאל את אבותינו ממצרים, ולא היה חותם. רבי עקיבא אומר, כן ה' אלהינו וא-להי אבותינו יגיענו למועדים ולרגלים אחרים הבאים לקראתנו לשלום, שמחים בבנין עירך וששים בעבודתך, ונאכל שם מן הזבחים ומן הפסחים כו', עד ברוך אתה ה' גאל ישראל:</p>

The Mishnah records two possible formulas for the blessing of redemption. The difference is clear. Rabbi Tarfon sees the redemption we are telling about and celebrating as one which was completed 1300 years before the blessing he penned 2000 years ago. It is present- and past-oriented. God redeems us in every generation, and redeemed us from Egypt. But wherever we are is where we are. It happens that Rabbi Tarfon was actually in Israel, but his framework is not about the continuation of the Exodus to the ultimate arrival in Israel, but just about the past to present. Someone outside Israel reciting that berakhah need not have any focus on Israel – it is equally a Diaspora blessing.

Notice, by the way, not just the different emphases on what the redemption is, but the acknowledgment of Rabbi Tarfon that חותם אינו חותם, he doesn’t seal, or close. While the technical meaning is that this shorter blessing does not require a closing line, the bigger statement, I think, is that even in holding the Diaspora as a valid place to be, we know that is not the end. Part of the Diaspora existence is about that incompleteness – which has a great power to it, of course.

R Akiva, the ultimate optimist and dreamer, sees the blessing of redemption differently. He turns to Rabbi Tarfon and says, “yes, and!” “Don’t stop there! Keep going!” For Rabbi Akiva, this is not only a blessing in past tense or

present tense but on into in future tense. כן ה' א-להינו יגיענו – so may God bring us to an ultimate redemption that is centered around a national destiny in Israel! Wherever one is who recites this, they are turning the Exodus into a symbol for an ultimate return to Israel.

How do we poskin? We follow Rabbi Akiva!

But we can see why it's so critical to see the Mishnah before saying this berakhah! Even as we are following Rabbi Akiva, we are attuned to the fact that there is a debate here. We remember that even as we embrace the second half, we also recognize the first half. The berakhah holds them in tension – acknowledging that we comprise both – a community that is in the Diaspora and that has inherent value, and the dream of Israel as a final destination.

It's more than just Leshanah Habaah BiYerushalayim, then. The Haggadah encodes and contains the conflict between the view that the story must end in Eretz Yisrael and the validation that the Exodus doesn't get us all the way there, and there is still a fulfillment for us who dwell here in the Diaspora.

VI.

Now we have seen the importance through Yom Tov Sheini of the appreciation of the centrality of Israel and our existential sefeikut in the Diaspora and how real that is for us today.

We have seen that there are two sides to this story, and that the narrative of Israel's centrality is very often promulgated by Israel-centric sources, and Babylonian sources uphold the power of Diaspora. We are different, and it's complicated.

We have seen that this tension plays out in the Haggadah itself around how much the story of our freedom necessitates ending with our arrival in Israel, and how much the Haggadah is a story about a liberation from slavery which can co-exist with a community living in the Diaspora. And that the ultimate goal is to hold both and see them as supporting each other.

Now I want to return to Yom Tov Sheni. Yes, it emerges from and enshrines a fundamental uncertainty about our existence here in the Diaspora, but what does it teach?

I want to make room for the negative feelings some of us have about living through two days in a row where we can't go to work, must use up our vacation days, and can't use technology. About the sometimes confining feeling we have after two – or three! – days a little out of touch with the greater world, a little more constrained geographically, and a little less flexible in where we go or what we do. They are real.

And with that, I ask - what comes out of the phenomenon of Yom Tov Sheni that is constructive – that is actually a model that Jews everywhere, and that Israel which lacks this experience (besides Rosh Hashanah), can learn from? To that we turn our attention now.

Here the source we turn to for starters is not found on the source sheet. In fact, it is not written anywhere. It is innate and intuitive. It is our own experience.

Think about your two seders.

Why is the first night different from the second night? Why is the second night different from the first night?

Maybe it's because two different people lead the two different seders. In our home growing up my grandfather led the first night from the Haggadah his father wrote, and my father led the second night.

And now for me it's because I have one seder with my larger family of 200 at the Bayit, and one with a smaller group of family and Bayit members at home.

Maybe it's because of the longstanding custom you have about who you host the first night, and where you are hosted the second night.

Maybe it's because you arrive at the second night more well-rested and able to engage the seder better.

Maybe it's because of the menu of Shulhan Orekh differing from the first night to the second, or the choice of marror, or the themes of the divrei Torah. Or the melodies for the songs.

The chance to vary, diversify, experiment, and pluralize is baked into the notion of two.

Remember the original Gemara about two days of Yom Tov? I love that the context it emerges from – literally – is a discussion of an egg being laid. Because I see Yom Tov Sheini as generative, as about bringing new things into the world – new ideas, new possibilities.

Yom Tov *Sheni!* The word “sheni”, two, comes from a root which means both to repeat and to change. So much so that perhaps this year as we say Mah Nishtanah, from that same root family, we can have homiletically in mind this meaning: ממה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות? Why is this night doubled – repeated – from among all other nights of the year?

!למה לשנות? כדי לשנות! Why do we repeat? In order to change – to vary, to diversify!

That's the power of two, which embodies new ideas, new possibilities, going beyond the singular to the plural, the diverse, the ever-expanding.

~

Not only that, and here I am really going to make a spiritual pitch: if I gave you a choice to have a getaway vacation with someone you love for two days or one, which would you take?

You see, the explanations for why we observe Yom Tov Sheini proliferated at two moments in Jewish history.

The more recent period was 150 years ago as the Reform movement began in Europe. One of the first changes early Reformers promoted was a “return” to one day of Yom Tov – as indeed is practiced in many Reform communities today. In response, rabbis like the Hatam Sofer and many others wrote lengthy defenses of Yom Tov Sheini with new understandings of its importance and force.

The first era, though, was in the period of the Geonim, around 1000 years ago and more, when the Jewish calendar became more fixed and the question arose most forcefully why we still needed this institution. And the Geonic sages began polemicizing and creating – or discovering – many reasons and justifications for Yom Tov Sheini. They found sources and precedents for it in the Torah – they defended it in many ways.

Here is one Geonic text that for me, rings especially true. It is from a Geonic responsa from the Cairo Geniza, and this is one excerpt (translated from the Judeo-Arabic via the Hebrew), describing the origins of Yom Tov Sheini as dating back to the community in exile from Israel after the destruction of the First Temple – here in SOURCE 14:

14. <i>Geonic Responsum (author, date, location unknown)</i>	תשובת גאונים (פרטים לא ידועים)
<p>... Among them there were people from the exile of Yekhonyah... who were pained and troubled that that they could not go on pilgrimage to Israel and do the sacrifices and other commandments... and they decided as one to make every one of the festivals... two days.</p> <p>The first is a Biblical obligation, and the second is what they agreed to accept upon themselves in exchange for the pilgrimage and sacrifices they could not make... and for the great joy at fulfilling the commandment they were commanded in Scripture of ‘and you shall rejoice in your festivals’... in order to seek thereby the closeness of God and to be diligent about the thanksgiving for God’s lovingkindnesses and to seek the fulfillment of God’s promise to return them to the Land of Israel.</p>	

This is an amazing document. First, it sets the origin of Yom Tov Sheini to the destruction of the First Temple – the earliest time of exile. A lot of aspects of the fundamental reason for Yom Tov Sheini that we already raised are here – a longing for Israel and seeing it as the center that we yearn to return to.

But there is more. The second day is because *we want more time with God.* We want to extend בחגך ושמת. It's a beautiful instinct. Because at its best, Yom Tov Sheini also provides us with that. It helps us cultivate a sense that more time in tefillah, with God, rejoicing, is good, not bad!

It takes the message of Shemini Atzeret, that קשה עלי פרידתכם, the sense from God that it is hard to part ways, that God wants more time with us, and reflects it back from us to God. There's a lot to appreciate in there. And here's the amazing thing. *Israelis crave this, too!*

There are many examples of Israelis – I don't just mean 21st century Israelis, I mean Israelis over the centuries who did not have a second day of yom tov – Israelis seeking extensions of the Jewish holidays. Opportunities to do them twice, differently, to do more. The idea that many Israelis will observe Purim wherever they are and then go the next day to Yerushalayim for Shushan Purim is one simple example.

Even more to the point is the phenomenon of Hakafot Shenyot, begun by the Arizal in Tzefat and continued by Kabbalists and Chasidim alike, that on the night of Simhat Torah in the Diaspora, just after the one day Shemini Atzeret (which includes rituals of Simhat Torah, another example in and of itself of Israelis importing a Diaspora observance), that night, with musical instruments, they repeat the Simhat Torah experience with hakafot and music and song and dance late into the night.

Perhaps the best example is the broad notion of Isru Hag, the day after a holiday. What is this institution? We won't manage to unpack its history now, but suffice it to say there is a lot of evidence that making a celebratory day after the last day of a holiday took root in Israel as a desire to taste a little extension of the holiday like Diaspora Jews got to do.

One extraordinary indication of this is found in SOURCE 15, the Darkei Hayyim V'shalom, which records the customs and attitudes of the Munkacser Rebbe who lived the 19th-20th c in Austria-Hungary.

<p>15. Darkei Hayyim V'Shalom (Munkacser Rebbe Customs and Laws) #524</p> <p>(The Rebbe) greatly praised the custom of Hasidim and God-fearers in the Holy City of Yerushalayim who went on the second day of Yom Tov to honor "Isru Hag" and to honor all of Israel, their brethren in the Diaspora, with Shabbat/Yom Tov dress, and refrained from doing work in public. Even though the poskim ruled that it is a weekday for them regarding laying tefillin and weekday tefillah it is still better to refrain from unnecessary things... after the destruction of the Temple, even in Israel we need to strengthen the Diaspora Yom Tov.</p> <p>And in the Zohar Hai of MHR^Y"A of Komarno it appears that if the sages of Israel will agree to do in Israel today two days of Yom Tov as we do, the redemption would be near. Our Master would conclude that while indeed by strict law we do not uphold this, and who would be so bold as to innovate this in our day against the laws of our ancestors and the customs of our rabbis and the decisions of the Arizal's writings and our master the Beit Yosef, in any event, in the aforementioned matter, the custom of the Hasidim and God-fearers is beautiful.</p>	<p>דרכי חיים ושלום לר' חיים אליעזר שפירא ממונקאטש סימן תקכד</p> <p>מאוד השביח מנהג החסידים והיראים בעיה"ק ירושלים שהולכים ביו"ט שני לכבוד אסרו חג ולכבוד כלל ישראל אחיהם שבגולה במלבושי שבת ויו"ט וגם מונעים עצמם במלאכה בפרהסיא הגם שע"פ דינא נפסק בפוסקים להלכה שחול הוא אצלם לענין הנחת תפילין ותפילת חול מ"מ טוב למנוע עצמו בדברים שאין נצרך כל כך ... לאחר חורבן בית המקדש צריך גם בארץ ישראל להחזיק יו"ט של גליות...</p> <p>ונמצא בזוהר חי להגה"ק מהרי"א מקמארנא (פרי פנחס דף רלא) אם יסכימו חכמי ארץ ישראל לעשות גם בא"י כעת שני יו"ט כמו שאנו עושין הי' קרוב הגאולה וסיים רבינו הגם שלדינא לא קי"ל כן ומי יהין לחדש דבר כזה בימינו נגד הלכות אבותינו ומנהגי רבותינו והחלטות כתבי האר"י ז"ל ומרן הב"י עכ"פ בדבר הנ"ל יפה מנהג החסידים והיראים...</p>
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Could it be clearer?

There was a custom in Yerushalayim – *Yerushalayim, the place from which the New Month was declared! The purported epicenter of Jewish identity and spirituality!* – to practically celebrate Yom Tov Sheini! Without violating any commandments, they came as close to keeping a second day as possible.

This example reflects just one realm, but it's the realm of Yom Tov Sheini. It's the sense that there is a give and take in which there is some recognition of the spiritual and historical power of the Jewish community in Israel and a recognition of the significance of our displacement from it and its consequence. There is plenty of tension and conflict. And, almost perforce, there is an equal and opposite kind of learning and appreciation that comes from Israel to the Diaspora. Often from the very thing, like Yom Tov Sheini, that is caused by the divide between the two communities.

This very powerfully makes them – makes us – complementary and interdependent in very powerful ways.

VI.

Did anyone see the cover of the Jewish Week this week? Israel-Diaspora Ties in Limbo! I promise Gary and I did not coordinate!

We are – or we should be – preoccupied with the Israel-Diaspora relationship in many ways.

What is the future of our enterprise in America, and for Jewry in Europe, and how does Israel relate to those questions? Do we feel at home as Americans in Israel?

And the thornier questions: what is our place vis-à-vis Israel and the battles it wages, internal and external? Of course, on the one hand, we are not there. We don't know the experience of everyday life there, of fully casting our lot with the fate of Israel. So how can we critique, or dictate?

Or to recast the question of the Gemara from which Yom Tov Sheini, our model, emerges: *נוולד בזה מותר בזה*? Is one who is laid here – allowed there? Does the Diaspora Jew have a voice in Israel?

My father used to put this stance into the most extreme terms when he would say to me, "I was a Zionist until the age of 4, and then I stopped being a Zionist." Why? Because he was born in 1944, and he always felt that a true embrace of Zionism is only by those who make aliyah. He loves the state of Israel as much as anyone, but he doesn't feel he earns the title Zionist as long as he is here, and they are there.

So how can we impose our beliefs on them?

But how can we ignore and silence ourselves? Elie Wiesel puts this powerfully in SOURCE 16:

16. Elie Wiesel, "Why Don't I Live in Israel?" *Baltimore Jewish Times*, May 11, 1985

It is given to the Jew of our days to love both Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora; he is not in the least compelled to choose one camp over the other; just as a Jew by definition and by tradition can live in more than one period, so he can attach himself to more than one geographical community. Whoever opposes Israel to Diaspora or the Diaspora to Israel will end by destroying them both. Neither of these two collectivities will be able to replace the other or be substitute for the other. Despite the love – unconditional – that I feel for Israel, I am not ready to sacrifice the Diaspora for her. And if certain Israelis demand such a sacrifice, they are in the wrong...

I know only that I belong, equally, to both of them... In my opinion, there is a place in Jewish destiny, for both communities; there has always been one. *It is their mutual duty to enrich each other, to assist each other by the interrogation that each symbolizes for the other...*

I think another way to put this is the way I understand the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (2:4): אל תדון את חברך עד שתגיע למקומו – do not judge your friend until you arrive in their place. It describes the way in which the space that separates us from another means we cannot judge the other. We never really arrive at their place. So we can't judge.

But that doesn't mean we don't care, we can't suggest, advocate, even argue. *Because* they are our friend, so while we do not judge, we care about their future. It is our future.

So it goes with our closest חבר in the world, to whom we are מחובר – our family – Medinat Yisrael.

If we are truly interdependent, then we know that we need each other. We recognize the ways we complement and complete each other, and our fates are bound up with one another.

Because Yom Tov Sheini teaches us that we are different, sometimes we are in tension, but there is a positive feedback loop when we each appreciate what the other brings to our shared Jewish peoplehood.

So we ought to be able, recognizing our place, humbly, to offer feedback, advocate, and express concern.

That's why we go to AIPAC and NORPAC – and, for some it is J Street, to advocate for Israel and ensure a vibrant and safe and healthy Israel.

That's why we lobby our elected officials for foreign aid to Israel.

That's why we are preoccupied with the concern that Israel be a matter of bi-partisan support in our country.

That's why we support organizations in Israel and try to follow the news as carefully as we can and go whenever we can and try to envision ourselves there – strive to make aliyah.

And long, and pray, and hope, and sing Hatikvah.

And it's why we – I – also feel concern when it seems like Israel is moving away from some of those values that our Diaspora experience has particularly developed, of pluralism and religious tolerance.

When I read articles that say that the consequence of the elections this week is to expect more exemptions for haredim from army service, less room for Women at the Wall, less acceptance of liberal denominations in Israel, more control by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate – I worry.

So I raise my voice. And I reach out across the ocean. I recognize where I am coming from, and where my limitations and blind spots are, and that I am not there – that is my Yom Tov Sheini moment.

And I believe and hope and pray that Israel will see the beauty in that love and concern and advocacy and partnership and respond in kind, embracing those values and concerns in reaching out towards me in kind, like those Hasidim who celebrate a sort of a second day in recognition of the beauty that has been created by the egg that was laid – the creativity that emerges, the spiritual vibrancy that comes from Yom Tov Sheini when we do it right.

VII.

So as we sit down to our seder in 6 nights' time, and then again in 7 nights' time, as we say הלילה הזה twice, let us really reflect on the power of Yom Tov Sheini and the tension it produces, seeing it reflected in the multiple frames of the story in the Haggadah and in our history and in the news and in our relationship with Medinat Yisrael – our other half.

Let us hear and recognize our distance from her, and close that gap with connection and yearning. Let us feel the unease of Diaspora alongside its great power, and reflect on it. And let us continue to birth the amazing things this Diaspora has brought, allowing them to flow forth over the sea along with our love, our hopes, our concerns, our bonds, and our commitment to partner to make a better world for the entire Jewish people, פה ושם, here and there, and let it be a hag kasher vesameah!