

Parashat Bo: Seeing our way out of darkness, together

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Parashat Bo tells the dramatic final stages of the Exodus story, culminating in the Israelites' liberation from slavery by Pharaoh in Egypt. One of the most poignant images in this parashat is the plague of darkness. The Torah describes it as a tangible gloom where no one could see or move for three days (Exodus 10:23). Today we could call this darkness a form of depression. Depression is a plague of darkness where people might not be able to see their way forward and they may not be able to see their connections to others, to nature, to community, to family and friends. The result is a profound feeling of hopelessness and isolation. Yet, the text notes "All the Israelites had light in their dwellings." This contrast highlights the importance of inclusive community in providing a trusted space of warmth, connection and hope.

The inclusion of every Israelite in the Passover communal rituals further underscores the importance of belonging. The Torah says *all* Israelites must mark their doorposts and *all* Israelites must eat the Passover meal in family groups. No one in the tribe is left out of these mitzvot. However, it's not just Israelites included in the journey to freedom. Inclusion also appears in the Torah's emphasis on the "*mixed multitude who went up with them*". They too left Egypt with the Israelites as described in Exodus 12:38. The Exodus narrative embraces diversity, demonstrating that all who flee slavery and who choose to join in are welcomed to take part in the Israelites' journey. From the beginning of our redemption, this has been a group project of communities within communities.

Thriving communities are those where everyone can bring their full selves, at all stages in their journey through life. People in our Masorti Judaism synagogues and communities bring their unique passions, interests, talents, memories and traditions, as well as their curiosity to learn and grow. We show up for each other, however we can. Whether it's helping out on the kiddish rota, organising committees, helping out with security, learning to leyn, or just being a friendly greeter, everybody can get involved. Little by little, as familiarity grows, bonds are strengthened.

Ultimately, Parashat Bo teaches that liberation, whether from external oppression or internal struggle, is not an individual journey but a communal one. Together, through mutual support and inclusion, we hope our communities are places where people find the comfort of shared meaning, together.