

If God Had Only Given Us Reparations - Dayenu

*A Haggadah Supplement from the Tikkun Olam
Commission of the Reconstructionist Movement*



**RECONSTRUCTING
JUDAISM**
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If God Had Only Given Us Reparations

by Rabbi Micah Weiss

The movement for reparations is alive and well, but we are still far from the Promised Land.

In January 2023, the Reconstructionist Movement completed a multi-year process of passing a movement-wide [resolution on reparations](#). The resolution commits each of our constituent bodies to reckoning with the foundational harms our societies are built upon. The resolution also calls on us to engage in deep reflection on the ways in which we have participated in or benefitted from racial injustices in our communities and to answer the call of the Torah to pursue justice and practice teshuvah by taking concrete steps to repair that harm. This life-giving work of reparations must occur at the national and local levels of government, and in all of our major institutions, but it can also happen in smaller communal settings like our synagogues or even at the Passover seder table. *This essay is an invitation to the hyper-local reckoning and reflection work of reparations at your Passover seder. It provides a close examination of the evolution of the Reconstructionist liturgy of the Passover Haggadah and how it can help orient us to the racial justice work of the current moment.*

Why continue to work on reparations when the current political environment seems so hostile to all things progressive?

Tikkun Olam Commission member Sandy Gerber, shared one of the best explanations of the importance of reparations work at the beginning of the second Trump administration with her congregation, Mayim Rabbim in Minneapolis, in her *dvar Torah* for *parashat bo*.

“For one thing, the hardest hits coming down at the moment have the heaviest impact on people of color, whether it’s roundups and deportations of immigrants, abolition of DEI programs and bashing people of color as DEI hires, layoffs of civil service workers in federal jobs, banishing of Black history curriculums, shut-downs of abortion services, or the ramping up of dirty fossil fuels. The hits aren’t equally distributed, and neither are the costs. We’re not starting on an equal playing field since so much that’s already owed is past due — therefore, the need to struggle for past-due reparations that are owed to people of color remains constant. This is particularly true in the present moment, when the disparate impact of reactionary policies on white communities and on communities of color will be widening exponentially. The work of reparations is just as important now as ever before.”¹

For another thing, the Reconstructionist movement made a commitment to racial justice and healing that is still sorely needed, and foundational to a Jewish approach to social justice. The impacted communities calling for reparations are steadfast in their work, and want and need partners to stay engaged and supportive of their efforts. We will continue to fight for the full dignity and equality of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) Jews and our non-Jewish BIPOC neighbors and community members, and work to transform our society into one that lives up to our highest, democratic ideals of justice and liberty. We must honestly learn from our past and be accountable to harm done in order to create the conditions for true societal healing and transformation. We consider it our duty to continue this soul-healing work for ourselves, for those we love, and for all of humanity. We hold to the sayings of our rabbis, “You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it” ([Pirkei Avot 2:21](#)).

Touchpoints of Jewish and Reconstructionist Racial Justice Work: 2020-2025

Following the summer of 2020, the North American Jewish communities’ commitment to racial justice work was the strongest it’s been since the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. As the instability of the world seemingly increases each day, threats to Jewish safety and well-being grow in our mind’s eye, and the collective dedication of the Black Lives Matter movement fades with time, these commitments have been difficult for many Jews and Jewish institutions to sustain. In addition, the Oct. 7 massacre in Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza have deeply strained relationships between many Jewish communities and their progressive movement partners for racial justice, leaving many Jews uncertain of whose lead to be following in working for social justice. We are living in a moment of great uncertainty about what the future of Jewish life all across the world will look like in the coming years.

We have seen, in dozens of Reconstructionist congregations, how the Jewish framework of reparations helps Jewish communities recommit ourselves to the racial justice work of the present moment, moving out of paralysis, and back into coalition and action.

This winter, 20 Reconstructionist congregations across North America participated in the first-ever [Reparations Shabbat program](#). Each congregation’s offerings looked different, but the weekend generally followed an arc of starting in study and moving toward action. We revisited the foundational harms our societies are built upon and then took inspiration from the dozens of local reparations projects emerging around the world, searching for the right model for our own congregational reparations work. The weekend culminated with our keynote program, [Reparations in Action: How to Move from Resolving to Repairing](#). We encourage you to check out the [resource guides](#) we created to help catalyze a reparations project that’s the right fit for your Jewish community.

Reconstructing Judaism has been undertaking our own organizational process of reflection on the ways in which we may have participated in or benefited from racial injustice in the past. In May 2024, we offered a week-long seminar for rabbinical students, board members and congregational leaders titled, “1299 Reckoning: Research and Reflection on RRC’s Move from the City to the Suburbs.” The class explored the founding of RRC in North Philadelphia in 1968, our subsequent move to the suburbs in 1982, and whether or not our institution was responsible for any harm in that process. RRC students just completed a fall

research seminar, and we will be compiling organizational recommendations for our Board of Governors this spring. Although there may not have been direct harm done by RRC to our former North Philadelphia neighbors, we think that there are important reparative acts Reconstructing Judaism could take in choosing how we tell our own story, and that this process can serve as a model for other legacy Jewish institutions going through their own heshbon hanefesh/self-examination process.

Reparations and Reconstructionist Liturgy:

There are long-standing, important debates within the reparations movement as to what work is considered “reparations” and what is not. The Tikkun Olam Commission works diligently to maintain fidelity to our movement partners and their visions for reparations, and, we intentionally and strategically choose to be as expansive as possible in welcoming the diverse variety of racial justice initiatives taking place across the Reconstructionist movement under the umbrella of “reparations.”

One site of Jewish life that the Tikkun Olam Commission has been exploring through a framework of reparations is the liturgy of the Reconstructionist Passover Haggadah. In 2024, the TOC published a seder supplement titled, [“Adding JOC Voices to A Night of Question,”](#) as a corrective to the inadvertent omission of any JOC authors from the commentaries and supplementary texts of Reconstructionist Haggadot, past and present. This year, we are turning our attention to a critique of the Reconstructionist liturgy raised by Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein. Specifically, the erasure of the textual “hook” for telling the part of the Exodus story where the Israelites receive reparations from the Egyptians as compensation for their many generations of unpaid slave labor. The phrase used in the Haggadah for receiving reparations is, *נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־מָמוֹנָם*, *natan lanu et mamonam*, God gave us their wealth.”

Rabbi Bernstein’s 2020 Evolve essay, [“The Torah Case for Reparations: A Jewish View,”](#) follows this essay in our Haggadah supplement packet. It is one of the best arguments, made through a close analysis of traditional Jewish sources, for why the gold and silver taken by the Israelites from the Egyptians in parashat Bo should be understood as reparations and an essential part of our liberation story of redemption from servitude. Check it out!

Mordecai Kaplan Reconstructed the Haggadah

Jewish liturgy has continuously evolved over time as the Jewish people, and our social influence and communal needs change. What was taken out can be put back in, and what was added back in can be taken out again. When we innovate new traditions or changes to our liturgy, some changes withstand the test of time, and some fade away after less than a generation. This is the way of the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. Reconstructionists are just a bit more explicit (and, at times, iconoclastic) in our process of evolving Judaism.

Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, the ideological parent of the Reconstructionist Movement, was one of the greatest Jewish changemakers of the modern era. Kaplan was infamously excommunicated in 1945 by a New York Orthodox rabbinical association, following the

publication of the New Sabbath Prayer Book (which was ceremoniously burned at the excommunication ceremony)². This prayerbook was the first siddur to widely publish many of the radical Reconstructionist liturgical changes that are now commonly practiced in Reconstructionist Jewish communities today. But at the time, it was quite the scandal.

“because of the terrible scandal done in a high-handed and openly insolent manner by a certain person called Dr. Mordecai Kaplan, in publishing a new monstrosity by the name of *Siddur Tefihlos* in which he demonstrated total heresy and a complete disbelief in the God of Israel and in the principles of the law of the Torah of Israel — and the future of a heresy that continues like this who can contemplate? — therefore, it has been decided unanimously and in one congregation to banish him and to excommunicate him and to separate him from the community of Israel until he fully repents in accordance with law and custom³.”

This was not the first time Kaplan incurred a strong rebuke for publishing radically new and innovative Jewish liturgy. Four years earlier in 1941, Kaplan received a letter from the entire faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary condemning the publication of *The New Haggadah* (the first Reconstructionist Haggadah) as, “liturgical blasphemy⁴.” He was critiqued for taking “heretical” liberties with the Haggadah, such as removing the recitation of the 10 plagues; reconceptualizing the esoteric, midrashic structure of the maggid section; and eliminating the “*Shfoch Chamatkah*” lines from Psalm 79: “Pour out your fury on the nations that do not know you, upon the kingdoms that do not invoke your name, they have devoured Jacob and desolated his home.”

Kaplan knew his innovations would be controversial, and he made them with great weight, gravity and significance, in service of the flourishing of a Judaism that responded to the needs of the social realities he found himself within. Kaplan also took the critiques of *The New Haggadah* very seriously. Some of the changes, such as the omission of the Ten Plagues, reverted back to the traditional liturgy in subsequent Reconstructionist Haggadot. But *The New Haggadah* was a bestseller for a reason, and many of the liturgical edits and abbreviations were wildly popular and are still commonly employed in the majority of liberal Haggadot published today. The introduction to *The New Haggadah* proudly declared,

“The pesach haggadah has assumed once again a major role in the lives of Jews. It has a message that is fraught with power and beauty. It needs only to be transposed into a new key — into the key of modern thought, modern experiences, and modern idioms. The language and the concepts of the ancient rite need to be revised so that they go straight to the minds and the hearts of the men and women of today ...

“Among the innovations in this haggadah are the omissions of those exegetical passages contained in the traditional haggadah that convey no special message, and the inclusion of entirely new readings...All references to events, real or imagined, in the Exodus story which might conflict with our highest ethical standards have been omitted; and several passages have been shortened in order to keep the haggadah from becoming over-long⁵.”

Reconstructionist 'Dayenu'

The composition of *Dayenu* dates back to at least the ninth century, and up until Kapan, the poem/song maintained the same basic structure of three sections of five-stanzas each, numerically alluding to the 15 psalms of ascent that were sung on the steps of the ancient *Beit Hamikdash* in Jerusalem. Kaplan removed four of the 15 lines of the song, "*Dayenu*."

Specifically, those lines that reference events in the Exodus story that "might conflict with our highest ethical standards." These lines are, "Had God not ...

1. brought judgment upon their gods - עָשָׂה בְּאֱלֹהֵיהֶם
 2. killed their firstborn sons - הָרַג אֶת־בְּכוֹרֵיהֶם
 3. given us their wealth - נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־מָמוֹנָם
 4. drowned our enemies in [the Reed Sea] - שָׁקַע צָרֵנוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ
- ...Dayenu! "It would have been enough."

This was a really big deal, and it was one of the most popular changes Kaplan made to the Haggadah. The ethical dissonance of celebrating God killing all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians and drowning the entire conscripted Egyptian army is just as glaringly problematic for most Reconstructionists today as it was for Kaplan's followers in 1941. However, the elimination of, "Had not God given us their wealth," may not be as obviously uncomfortable for today's reader.

At the conclusion of his teaching on the "Torah of Reparations" at the Reconstructionist Movement's Day of Learning on Reparations on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* 2021, Rabbi Bernstein presented the following theory of why Kaplan may have removed this line:

"Starting in the mid-20th century, at the height of Jewish American high liberalism, some liberal haggadot took out the line אֱלֹהֵינוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־מָמוֹנָם *Illo natan lanu et mamonom*, Had God [only] given us their wealth, including — I believe the first one to take it out — was Mordecai Kaplan in his 1941 haggadah...

I think that moment was a moment of anxiety in 1941 for the Jewish people... Not wanting to be seen as doing bad things to Gentiles... making judgment on their idols... taking their money... Jews were dealing with antisemitic ideas about Jews as money-grubbing. It was embarrassing to talk about taking [their] money. A lot of liberal haggadot in the middle 20th century and up until today omit this line, as though we're embarrassed of having taken the Egyptian's wealth. Maybe this is a part [of the exodus story] that's caused shame to American Jews. I think among young progressive Jews today, things have really shifted.

One of the first progressive haggadot to put reparations back in the haggadah was Rabbi Arthur Waskow's first Freedom Seder in 1969. He put it back in and added a whole explanation. Instead of just saying, "[Had God only] Given us their money," he said, "[Had God only] Given us their money as reparations for unpaid labor." There's a need to be didactic about it⁶."

It should be noted that in his 1986 autobiography, Rabbi Ira Eisenstein strongly refutes a similar critique made by Maurice Samuel at the time of the publication of *A New Haggadah*.

“[Samuel] felt we had knuckled under [to the adherents of the good will movement⁷ by deleting from the text the verse *Shfokh hamatekha al hagoyim*, “Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations which know Thee not.” He insisted that at the moment when the world was called upon to resist and destroy Nazism, the quotation from the Psalms was all the more needed. He made no apologies for calling upon God to pour out His wrath upon Hitler and his murderers⁸.”

Eisenstein is emphatic that the liturgical changes in *The New Haggadah* were not influenced by a concern for non-Jewish opinion.

“Kaplan had argued that if the *haggadah* was to be edifying, and, if our purpose was to engage the attention of young people, we should omit all texts which smacked of cruelty and vengeance. I can truly testify that he never reckoned with possible gentile reactions. Knuckling under was a stance he resolutely eschewed⁹.”

Bernstein’s assumptions of Kaplan’s personal motivations to remove, “*נָתַן לָנוּ אֱתֵּימּוֹנָם, natan lanu et mamonam*, God gave us their wealth” from the Haggadah may very well have missed the mark. But his societal critique of early 1940s’ hyper-assimilationist liberal American Jewish life, and the dissonance it engenders with the deep yearning of a new generation of Reconstructionists who want to see their political convictions reflected in Jewish liturgy and tradition, is a poignant critique that has continued to resonate with the Tikkun Olam Commission over the course of our reparations work these past four years. Bernstein followed his critique with a challenge to Reconstructionists.

“The work on reparations that you all are doing in the Reconstructionist movement is sacred, holy work. Part of it also has the potential to be a restorative practice for our own spiritual losses. In addition to the important political movement work of reparations, I’ll encourage your liturgists and your liturgy committees to rethink the [Haggadah] liturgy, too. Let us ask ourselves: What are the stories that we tell at our Passover seder? What really grounds us in being the most liberated and liberating people that our tradition calls us to be? And might we revisit some of those things that have been left on the cutting room floor, particularly that line of the Dayenu poem¹⁰?”

Adding Liturgy Back Into the Haggadah as Practice of Spiritual Reparations

Adding traditional liturgy back into the Haggadah is one form of the restorative or reparative liturgical practice that Bernstein describes. A sacred text that in one generation may have done spiritual harm and alienated young Jews from Jewish tradition can become a foundational text for a subsequent generation’s spiritual practice and pride in the political throughlines of Jewish tradition. This would not be the first time that Reconstructionists returned sections of traditional liturgy to the siddur, machzor or Haggadah from the “cutting-room floor.” Kaplan also led the effort to remove Kol Nidre, the ceremonial annulment of vows at the start of Yom Kippur, from the machzor at the Society for Advancement of Judaism in 1927.

“If we were to make use of music instead of words as a means of prayer, we could not conceive of any music more appropriate for the Yom Kippur mood than the music of Kol Nidre. It strikes the chords both of tragedy and of hope with such inevitable truth that once heard it never ceases to haunt us thereafter. Let us therefore by all means conserve it. But as prayer is also to depend upon the use of words, no text could be more inappropriate and less in keeping with the spirit of Yom Kippur than the text of Kol Nidre. It is a dry, legalistic formula couched in ancient Aramaic to be recited in matter-of-fact fashion in the presence of an improvised Beth din of three men for the purpose of absolving one from ritualistic vows. All that talk about it having been recited by the secret Jews to absolve them from their acceptance of Christianity is mere rubbish, since it is known to date back to the Gaonic period before the Spanish persecution¹¹.”

Despite the strength of Kaplan’s rationalist argument, the replacement of the words of Kol Nidre with the words of Psalm 130 was wildly unpopular (even with Kaplan’s own mother¹²), and Kol Nidre was returned to the machzor for the 1948 Reconstructionist High Holy Day Prayerbook¹³ (albeit, with a slightly edited text).

Another example: Many Reconstructionists felt that our most widely publicized liturgical change — removing the theological declarations of Chosenness from the blessings before the Torah reading — would never be questioned. To the great shock of many long-time followers of Kaplan, the *Kol Haneshamah* prayerbook commission (the latest Reconstructionist prayerbook series) decided to include the traditional Torah blessing “below the line¹⁴” to accommodate the people who continued to prefer reciting the traditional blessing.

“The 1945 Reconstructionist Prayer Book eliminated all references to Jewish chosenness for both ideological and moral reasons. Chosenness posits a God who chooses, and it supports claims of national superiority. Thus, that prayerbook’s Torah blessings replace *bachar banu mikol ha’amim* / who has chosen us from all the peoples, with *asher kervanu la’avodato* / who has drawn us to your service. This prayerbook follows the 1945 version but provides alternatives in the commentary on the facing page¹⁵.”

An Alternative Approach to Repairing Sites of Liturgical Harm

Another reparative practice for addressing sites of Jewish liturgy that have caused spiritual harm or ethical dissonance is to look to Jewish liturgical lineages beyond the Eastern European Ashkenazi traditions for alternative texts and insightful approaches. These traditions are just as “authentic” and “traditional” as *nusakh ashkenaz* but deeply unfamiliar to many Reconstructionists who have not spent significant time in non-Ashkenazi communities in the United States, Canada, Israel or around the world. The Reconstructionist conclusion to *Birkat Hamazon* (“Grace After Meals”) employs this reparative practice. The final paragraph of the traditional Ashkenazi liturgy contains a line from Psalm 37 that has made generations of Reconstructionists squirm with its counterfactual insistence that good behavior directly causes Divine reward, and by implication, a hungry person’s misfortune is due to their religious or moral failings.

“The traditional text of *Birkat Hamazon* continues with the verse נָעַר הָיִיתִי גַם־זָקֵן וְלֹא־רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק נֶעְזָב / I was young and now I am old, and I have never seen a righteous person forsaken or the children of the righteous begging for bread (Psalm 37:25). The experience of our time makes the recitation of this statement impossible for many Jews. The passage מִה־שָּׂאֲכַלְנוּ / May what we ate, taken from the Sephardic version of *Birkat Hamazon*, is used here instead¹⁶.”

Ashkenazi conclusion:

<p>נָעַר הָיִיתִי גַם־זָקֵן וְלֹא־רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק נֶעְזָב</p>	<p>I was young and now I am old, and I have never seen a righteous person forsaken or the children of the righteous begging for bread (Psalm 37:25)</p>
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Sephardi/Reconstructionist Conclusion:

<p>מִה־שָּׂאֲכַלְנוּ יְהִי לְשִׂבְעָה וּמִה־שָּׂשְׂתִינוּ יְהִי לְרִפּוּאָה וּמִה־שָׁהוּתֵנוּ יְהִי לְבִרְכָה כְּדַכְתִּיב. וַיִּתֵּן לְפָנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּתְּרוּ כְּדַבַּר יְקֹוֹק</p>	<p>May what we ate be a source of satisfaction, What we drank be a source of health, What we left be a source of blessing. According to the Torah, “Food was set before them, they are, and some was left, as THE LIVING ONE had spoken.” (2 Kings 4:44)</p>
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While we could have removed the *na'ar hayiti* line altogether or written something entirely new, or added an additional phrase to make the verse aspirational instead of prescriptive¹⁷, turning to the Sephardic tradition for an alternative liturgical path forward was also in service of other Jewish reparations goals. It honors and celebrates the wisdom and value of Sephardic traditions, which are all too often shunned and denigrated in Ashkenazi-normative Jewish communities. It preserves liturgical continuity with the past, leaning into the experiential power of saying the very same words our Jewish ancestors have been saying for thousands of years before us. It also centers a commitment to global Jewish peoplehood over tribal/ethnic differences, which is a desperately needed spiritual practice in these fractious times among the Jewish people. Finally, it celebrates cultural hybridity as an ancient and authentic Jewish practice (while providing proper attribution to a source or tradition that we are adopting as our own).

Learning from Sephardi Haggadot:

In applying this reparative practice to Dayenu, we found that *nusakh edot hamizrach*¹⁸ Haggadot contain a fascinating liturgical difference from the Ashkenazi *Dayenu* liturgy. When the song reaches the line, “אֱלוֹהֵינוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־מָמוֹנָם” *Ilu natan lanu et mamonam*, Had God only given us their wealth,” the Haggadah text is interrupted by a long, midrashic parenthetical discussion of the Torah origins and meaning of God giving us their wealth:

אלו הרג בכוריהם. ולא נתן לנו
את-ממונם־דינו

... If God had killed their firstborns, but not given us their wealth, it would have been enough.

[Dayenu is interrupted]

ומנין שנתן לנו את-ממונם
שנאמר. וינצלו את-מצרים

From where in the Torah is it derived that “God gave us their wealth!?” From where the Torah says, “And they emptied Egypt” (Exodus 12:36). *[the text proceeds to teach a midrash on this Torah verse from the Babylonian Talmud in Berachot 9a]*

עשאוה כמצולה שאין בה דגים
דבר אחר עשאוה כמצודה שאין
בה דגן.

They made [Egypt] like husks in which there is no grain.
A different opinion: They made [Egypt] like a net without fish.

למה מחבב הכתוב את בזת הים
יותר מבזת מצרים.

Why does the scripture prefer the spoils of the sea to the spoils of Egypt?*[there is a midrash that the Israelites collected gold, silver, and precious stones at the Reed Sea that adorned and then fell off the Egyptian horses when they drowned in the sea. These are ‘the spoils of the sea’. ‘The spoils of Egypt’ are the gold and silver the Israelites took from the Egyptians before departing²⁰.]*

אלא מה שהיה בבתי נטלו
במצרים. ומה שהיה בבתי
תשוראות נטלו על הים

Rather, what remained in the houses was received in Egypt, and what remained in the houses of teshurot was received by the sea.

וכן הוא אומר כנפי יונה נחפה
בכסף. זו בזת מצרים.
ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ. זו בזת
הים.

And this is why God said, “wings of a dove sheathed in silver,” (Psalms 68:14). This is the spoils of Egypt.
“It’s (the dove’s) pinions in fine gold” (second half of the verse in Psalms), this is the spoils of the sea.

ותרבי ותגדלי ותבאי. זו בזת
מצרים
בעדי עדיים. זו בזת הים

“And you continued to grow up,” (Ezekiel 16:7) This is the spoils of Egypt. “Until you attained to womanhood,” (next phrase of the verse in Ezekiel), This is the spoils of the sea.

תורי זהב נעשה־לך. זו בזת
מצרים
עם נקדות הכסף. זו בזת הים

“We will add wreaths of gold,” (Song of Songs 1:11) This is the spoils of Egypt. “To your spangles of silver.” (second half of the verse in Song of Songs), This is the spoils of the sea.

[Dayenu Continues]

אלו נתן לנו את-ממונם. ולא
קרע לנו את הים, דינו

If God had given us their wealth, and not split the sea for us, it would have been enough ...

What can Reconstructionists learn from these Sephardi Haggadots' versions of Dayenu? While this text itself is not particularly easy to interpret, nor is it well-suited for a simple textual substitution like the Sephardi conclusion to *Birkat Hamazon*, there's still much we can learn from and be inspired by in this alternative *nusakh*:

1. Members of the Tikkun Olam Commission are not the first Jews to ask you to interrupt your seder in the middle of Dayenu to have an in-depth discussion about reparations. Sephardim all around the world have been doing a variation of this practice for many generations. It's not the death of the firstborn, or the splitting of the sea, or the giving of the Torah that the Haggadah asks additional questions of; it's the giving of reparations. There is some core aspect of this particular blessing out of the 15 blessings and miracles mentioned in *Dayenu* that demands closer attention across time, geography and political context. This is a really important part of the Exodus story and not intuitive or obvious to understand what's going on at first glance. The reparations from Egypt require greater attention and exploration.
2. Quoting the text of the Torah is not sufficient in and of itself to explain what, "If God had only given us their wealth" means. If you just say, "The Tikkun Olam Commission says that when the Torah says, וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת־מִצְרָיִם "And they emptied Egypt," it means the Israelites got reparations from the Egyptians and that's why we should support reparations for slavery and Indigenous land theft and genocide today," you are unlikely to have made a very compelling "case for reparations" to your seder guests. Teach them *midrash* as well, and build a really strong and compelling Jewish case for reparations. For some, this will look like teaching classical rabbinic commentary, like the *talmudic* stories Rabbi Bernstein teaches in [The Torah Case for Reparations](#), or that the Sefardi Haggadah quotes. For others, this will look like reading selections of contemporary articles from [The Stolen Beam Series](#), or excerpts of "[The Cost of Free Land: Jews, Lakota and an American Inheritance](#)," or your favorite lines from the great *divrei Torah* you've read on reparations.
3. Sometimes, our seder experiences are enriched by "shortening the text to keep the Haggadah from becoming over-long²¹," and sometimes, "the more in-depth one goes in the telling of the story of the exodus from Egypt, the more admirable they are²²." The best way to pick which parts of the story to elaborate on is by listening to the parts of the story that any children at the seder have questions about. But after that, try out this Sephardic custom and facilitate an in-depth discussion about reparations! It may be just the deep and meaningful conversation your seder guests didn't know they needed to have this year.

Reparations and ‘Dayenu’ at Your Seder This Year

To support you in your efforts, the Tikkun Olam Commission has created two new supplements to the Reconstructionist Haggadah: *A Night of Questions* that you can use at your Passover seder to spark a great exploration of reparations. (We suggest picking one of the supplements and not trying to do both activities).

We Were Liberated from Slavery ... With Reparations, by Sandy Gerber

This supplement provides a new Reconstructed Reconstructionist Dayenu liturgy, and a series of discussion questions to guide conversation after going through the ritual.

Should we put reparations back in ‘Dayenu’? By Rabbi Micah Weiss

This activity convenes a pretend Reconstructionist prayerbook commission tasked with debating the Tikkun Olam Commission’s demand to “put reparations back in Dayenu!” It invites participants to wrestle with all the fun challenges of liturgical evolution considered in this essay and above.

May the learning and grappling with reparations we do at our Passover seder table help lay the foundation for a path to greater liberation and reparation for all who are in need in this year to come.

Chag Sameakh!

Footnotes:

1. D’var Torah for RJ Reparations Shabbat, “A 1299 (Church Road) Reckoning: The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College’s Move from the Inner-city to the Suburbs,” By Sandy Gerber, Mayim Rabim, Minneapolis MN, 1/31/25
2. Silver, Zachary, “The Excommunication of Mordecai Kaplan,” American Jewish Archives Journal, 2010, pg. 21
3. Translation by Dr. David Golem. Accessed online <https://kaplancenter.org/herem-text/>
4. Silver, Zachary, “The Excommunication of Mordecai Kaplan,” American Jewish Archives Journal, 2010, pg. 22
5. Introduction, *The New Haggadah for the Passover Seder*, Edited by Mordechai M. Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein for the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1941.
6. Bernstein, Aryeh, “The Torah Case for Reparations,” Reconstructionist Day of Learning on Reparations, Rosh Hodesh Elul 2021.
7. An interfaith movement of the 1920s that sought to create national institutions to promote greater sympathy among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews and to promote religious diversity in the US.
8. Eisenstein, Ira. *Reconstructing Judaism: An Autobiography*, Reconstructionist Press, 1986. pg. 163
9. Eisenstein, Ira. *Reconstructing Judaism: An Autobiography*, Reconstructionist Press, 1986. pg. 164
10. Bernstein, Aryeh, “The Torah Case for Reparations,” Reconstructionist Day of Learning on Reparations, Rosh Hodesh Elul 2021.
11. Soclof, Adam, “The Case Against Kol Nidre,” Jewish Telegraph Agency, September 12, 2012.
12. Rabbi Nathan Kamesar, Kol Nidre Dvar Torah 5779, Society Hill Synagogue.
13. Kievel, Herman. “The Curious Case of Kol Nidre,” Commentary Magazine, October 1968.
14. Kol Haneshamah contains insightful commentary by a variety of authors “below the line” underneath the liturgy of the siddur.
15. Rabbi David Teutsch, comment, Kol Haneshamah, *Shabbat v’Chaggim*, pg. 396, and *Machzor l’yamin noraim*, pg. 473
16. Kol Haneshamah, *Shirim Uvrachot*, pg. 40.
17. Other liberal liturgies have added the phrase, (*lu y’hi* - may it be that...) before *na’ar hayiti*.
18. An umbrella term used to describe the forms of prayers used by the majority of Sephardim in Israel today. There are many variations of this nusakh with variations unique to the locations they come from (Italian, Greek, Iraqi, Egyptian, Syrian, etc.). The most popular versions today emerge from the *halakhic* rulings of the 19th century Iraqi authority, the Ben Ish Hai, and the 20th century Israeli sephardic authority, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.
19. Text from Sefaria.org. Translations of the rabbinic texts are my own. Translations of the biblical verses are from *The Contemporary Torah*, JPS, 2006.
20. See Rashi on Exodus 12:22
21. Introduction, *The New Haggadah for the Passover Seder*, Edited by Mordechai M. Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein for the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1941.
22. Passover Haggadah, Maggid section, “avadim hayinu”

The Torah Case for Reparations: A Jewish View

by Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein

This is a much-abbreviated version of Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein's 2018 article, "The Torah Case for Reparations," which you can read in full at [this link](#). The author prepared this shortened version for Evolve: Groundbreaking Jewish Conversations.

In the last several years, cultural and political winds have moved the demand for reparations to Black Americans from the fringe into the mainstream of American politics. Ta-Nehisi Coates's magisterial 2014 article, "[The Case for Reparations](#)," deserves much of the credit for this shift. Slavery and its aftermath sit at the heart of the mythic consciousness of Judaism. Does Judaism have anything to contribute to a national consideration of reparations? I think it does.

We Took Reparations

Jews must support reparations in principle because we took reparations for our slave labor. We were commanded by God to do so, and we were promised these reparations in the earliest divine plan for our liberation. The Torah emphasizes that on the way out of Egypt, the Israelites emptied their Egyptian neighbors of their wealth ([Exodus 12:35-36](#)). This taking of reparations was not castigated as dishonest plundering or sinful vindictiveness, nor even as an optional bonus, but was a required component of liberation, as God had explicitly commanded the day before ([Exodus 11:2](#)).

Receiving reparations was a core component of the Exodus. God's first promise to liberate the Israelite slaves, spoken to Moses at the burning bush, already explicitly included abundant reparations ([Exodus 3:21-22](#)). The taking of reparations is at the very heart of the slavery story, even promised to Abram as part and parcel of the Bible's first premonition of slavery and redemption. The first time the Torah's core story — slavery and liberation — is revealed, the entire content of that liberation is the future departure from Egypt *with reparations*: "Know for sure that your seed shall be an alien in a land not their own, and shall serve them; and they shall abuse them — four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with significant property" ([Genesis 15:13-14](#)). We recite this passage ritually in our [Passover Seders](#) to this day, annually reviewing that God's faithfulness is expressed through a promise kept over hundreds of years, and that that promise was reparations for slavery.

Are These Really Reparations?

The rabbis of the Talmud understood the wealth taken by the Israelites as slavery reparations, as shown in a piquant story in the Talmud ([Sanhedrin 91a](#)), which imagines the Egyptians suing the Jews in the court of Alexander the Great, symbol of the international superpower *par excellence*, to

return the wealth they took on the way out of Egypt. A non-rabbi named Geviha ben Pesisa serves as defense attorney for the Jews and countersues: *“I, too will bring you evidence only from the Torah, as is said, ‘And the Israelites’ residence, which they resided in Egypt was 430 years’ (Exodus 12:40): Give us payment for the labor of 600,000, whom you enslaved in Egypt for 430 years.”* The Egyptians offer no response and drop their case.

The rabbis understood Egyptian spoils as reparations and imagined that this should be legally coherent and just in the eyes of the international community. Egypt exploited the Israelites for hundreds of years, stealing their labor; any Egyptian perception of prosperity was delusional. The wealth in their hands was not theirs. Judged by morality and Divine law, it was money owed to Israelite laborers, held in sloppy escrow. Egypt was wealthy only if theft is the law of the land. Egypt owed the Israelites generations of reparations, but was not about to pay them willingly or to acknowledge the depth of its wrongdoing. The Egyptians were barely willing even to release the Israelites from slavery and did so only out of desperate fear, perhaps only by failing to understand that they were leaving forever and would not persist as their underclass. According to the Talmud and even the Torah itself, not only were reparations just, but taking them by any means necessary, even deception, was just and commanded by God.

The sages also don't want us to underestimate the value of these reparations. We took a lot — really, really, a lot. In the Talmud ([Bekhorot 5b](#)), Rabbi Hanina reports that Rabbi Eli'ezer taught that every single Israelite left Egypt with “ninety Libyan donkeys laden with Egypt's silver and gold,” and that this, in fact, is why we are commanded forevermore to redeem every firstborn donkey in offering to God ([Exodus 13:13](#)), who enabled our ancestors to receive this start-up wealth.

The Alexander story concludes with the literary fantasy of having the Egyptians turn over even more property to the Jews when they flee in humiliation, abandoning their agricultural holdings. A thousand years and many regimes after the Exodus, Egypt still owed the Jews *more* reparations. Systemic injustices must be remedied even long after the end of official slavery.

By placing this event during a sabbatical year, when Jews are prohibited from farming and therefore vulnerable to food shortage, the rabbis add a happy ending literary flourish showing that this deserved windfall came in the nick of time, when they needed it, and in reward for performing a difficult commandment. It may say something more, though. Observing the sabbatical year disrupts anyone's domination over land and people. The land is released to grow wild and debts are relieved. Temporary economic straits, then, cannot plunge a person into structural poverty and servitude. Just as the Torah contrasts Egyptian slavery with observance of the weekly sabbath ([Deuteronomy 5:15](#)), the prophet Jeremiah tells the people that God commanded the sabbatical year laws “on the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” ([Jeremiah 34:13](#)). For the rabbis, Egyptian spoils were reparations, were massive in quantity, yet still insufficient compensation, and contributed to an economy set up as a foil to the exploitation of slavery.

The Torah's Internalization of the Legal Implications

The Torah does not frame the Israelites' taking of Egyptian reparations only as an important historical element to their past liberation, but as a core component of the Divine law moving forward. As the Torah prepares the Israelites for life in the Land of Israel as an independent nation, God warns them of the proper way to transition vulnerable and dependent indentured servants to freedom ([Deuteronomy 15:12-15](#)). Landowners, having used their servants' labor to generate not just income, but wealth, are commanded to endow freed servants with wealth that will enable them to escape the poverty that plunged them into servitude in the first place. This legal burden is a lesson of the redemption from Egyptian slavery.

If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years; and in the seventh year you send him free from you. And when you send him free from you, do not send him empty. Provide for him liberally from your flock, and from your threshing floor, and from your winepress; from that which YHWH your God has blessed you, give to him. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and YHWH your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.

The Torah emphasizes a connection between releasing indentured servants responsibly and remembering that we were slaves in Egypt, liberated by God. What is the nature of that connection? The passage highlights this connection with an important literary allusion. Verse 13 says, "And when you send him free from you, do not send him empty." This echoes God's promise of reparations at the Burning Bush: "And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that when you go, you will not go empty" ([Exodus 3:21](#)). God redeemed us from slavery with reparations — resources to break the cycle of poverty and subordination. Accordingly, when we have economic security, we must never prop ourselves up with wealth exploited from those subordinated to us through financial misfortune.

[Rashi](#), following a *midrash* ([Sifrei](#) #120), sharpens the link between the liberation from Egyptian slavery and this commandment: " 'And remember that you were a slave' and I provided for you and gave to you twice, from the spoils of Egypt and the spoils at the sea; so, too, you must provide for [your departing indentured servant] and give to him twice." Our ancestors were rescued from slavery with reparations bountiful enough to build long-term financial security. Our free society is commanded to ensure the same for those plunged into economic subordination, so that temporary poor-ness never becomes structural poverty.

Reparations in Practice: The Resulting Spiritual Economy

Not only is the epic story of the Exodus a story largely about reparations, but so is the desert aftermath, the highs and lows of the free nation's religious life. God commands the people to contribute gold, silver, copper and fine fabrics towards the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Torah states that it is the construction of the *Mishkan* that enabled God to dwell among the Israelites in the desert ([Exodus 25:8](#)). From the perspective of Exodus, then, intimacy with God for the Israelites was enabled by reparations.

The spoils of Egypt also feature at the center of the other “religious” construction of Exodus, the Golden Calf. Though the rabbis link the sin of the Golden Calf to the spoils of Egypt, they do not question the justice of those reparations, implying that not taking reparations would have been even worse than the sin of the Golden Calf. The Talmud ([Berakhot 32a](#)) links the sin of the Golden Calf to the reparations:

From the School of Yannai, they said:

So said Moses to the Holy Blessed One: “Ruler of the Universe, [the sin of the Golden Calf] was because of the silver and gold that you loaded on Israel until they said, ‘Enough!’ THAT is what caused them to make the Calf.”

From the School of Yannai, they said:

A lion does not roar from a box of straw, but only from a box of meat

R. Hiyya bar Abba said that R. Yohanan said:

This is a parable, to one person who had a son; he bathed and perfumed him, fed him food and drink, and hung a wallet from his neck, and dropped him off at the door of a brothel. What can this son do but to sin?!

Rashi and numerous other commentators incorporate this passage into their comments, especially to [Deuteronomy 1:1](#). The Golden Calf stands out as one of the epic catastrophes of the Bible, perhaps the Israelites’ greatest sin, which resulted in a God-sanctioned bloodbath. Saying that the Golden Calf was enabled by reparations might raise a question as to their propriety, suggesting that the rabbis thought that reparations can lead to misconduct, [as some contemporary naysayers argue](#). After all, the rabbis even deflect some of the responsibility for the sin away from the Israelites onto God.

This would be a misreading of the passage. The argument that the spoils of Egypt inevitably led to sin doesn’t hinge on the spoils being reparations *per se*, but on their being *money*, specifically rapidly accrued money. The rabbis never challenge the *justice* of reparations; it’s the *method* of reparations collection that is implicated as the cause of the negative consequences. Sure, if a large population snatches hundreds of years’ worth of reparations in one night, then runs to freedom, drunk on the cocktail of novel liberation, PTSD, migration stress and the exhilarating terror of witnessing God split the sea and drown their oppressors, and then, weeks later, that same population is overwhelmed with the terror of that God appearing to them with smoke, lightning and thunder at a mountain, we should expect some aspects of their emotional life to go haywire.

It would have been better to have a reparations commission and a process for steady payment over years or generations, directed to rebuild the Israelite economy sustainably. There was no roadmap for that to happen. The justice of reparations is so clear that if they are not disbursed in an organized way, plundered people are urged by God to take them anyway, and if the ensuing chaos produces calamity, so be it. When

people talk about reparations today, they mean targeted programs, overseen by governmental commissions. [Various models](#) have been [proposed](#) and [implemented](#) in different places; they should be studied, selected and implemented. Refusal to do so is irreconcilable with the Torah tradition.

What Are We Supposed to Do About it?

In this congressional session, as in every one for more than 25 years, a bill ([H.R. 40](#)) has been introduced to the U.S. Congress, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act. Though its number of signatories has grown significantly in recent years and last year an accompanying [Senate bill](#) was introduced for the first time, in all these years, this bill has never been brought to the House floor. This reflects the status of reparations in broad, American discourse: they're seen as a joke. The Torah covenant tells us differently: It is not that reparations are a joke, but that they are so serious and of such massive implication as to cause national vertigo. As Coates put it,

“The popular mocking of reparations as a harebrained scheme authored by wild-eyed lefties and intellectually unserious black nationalists is fear masquerading as laughter” (We Were Eight Years in Power, 202).

As Jews, if we are to take seriously our Torah, our covenant, our faith, our brit milah ceremonies and Passover seders, our Kiddush blessings and every time we invoke the “memory of the Exodus from Egypt” — זכר ליציאת מצרים — then we cannot participate in that fear or engage in that laughter. Without the justice of reparations, we have no liberation story. As Jews, if we take our Torah tradition seriously, we should make it a core issue of Jewish American politics to demand that H.R. 40 be brought to the House floor and passed. We know that liberation from slavery without reparations is a woefully incomplete liberation.

To continue your learning at greater depth, read the full article, “The Torah Case for Reparations,” at [this link](#).

Seder Supplement: We Were Liberated from Slavery...With Reparations

by Sandy Gerber, Mayim Rabim Reconstructionist
Congregation, Minneapolis

The Tikkun Olam Commission of the Reconstructionist Movement invites you, at your seder, to add a line of traditional liturgy back into the Passover Haggadah — a line that Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan originally removed from the song “Dayenu” in 1941.

Reader: Tonight, we add reparations back into the Haggadah.

Dayenu expresses gratitude to God for a series of miraculous blessings bestowed upon the Jewish people during and after the Exodus from Egypt. There is a crucially important blessing missing from Dayenu in our Haggadah, which we are re-inserting tonight. The removed line, אֱלֹהֵינוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־מָמוֹנָם” *Ilu natan lanu et mamonom*, Had God [only] given us their wealth,” thanks God for the gold, silver and jewels we acquired from the Egyptians as partial compensation for more than 400 years of our enslavement to them. Perhaps the lines were removed due to anxiety about Nazism raging in Europe and intense antisemitism in the United States. Or perhaps the decision was based on internalized shame regarding antisemitic beliefs in society about Jewish control of money. Or perhaps it was ethical discomfort with this part of the Exodus story, interpreting the taking of Egyptian wealth as duplicitous and unfair.

Adding this line back into Dayenu reclaims reparations as an essential piece of the story of our liberation from slavery. We acknowledge that we likely could not have survived the 40 years of wandering in the desert, nor built a flourishing community when we arrived in the land of Israel, without monetary restitution. This liturgical repair, re-inserting אֱלֹהֵינוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־מָמוֹנָם” *Ilu natan lanu et mamonom*, Had God [only] given us their wealth,” into *Dayenu*, helps align our Jewish communities with the struggle of other formerly enslaved and colonized peoples currently fighting for reparations. It calls on us to demand reparations today for all peoples who deserve them.

Let us proudly [sing OR recite] [Version 1 (abridged) OR Version 2 (full)] of the newly Reconstructed Reconstructionist ‘Dayenu,’ followed by a thoughtful discussion of these questions:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does acknowledging reparations as part of the exodus from Egypt change your understanding of our story of freedom?
2. How does our story affect your understanding of the need for others’ reparations today?
3. What are your *mitzrayim* (narrow/stuck places) when the topic of reparations comes up? How might you create more expansiveness within yourself around reparations in the coming year?

Reconstructed Reconstructionist 'Dayenu' (Abridged):

(set to this widely familiar Dayenu melody) ♪

Ilu hotzi hotzianu hotzianu mimitzrayim

Hotzianu mimitzrayim dayenu

Dai, dayenu (3) dayenu dayenu

Had God taken us out of Egypt ... dayenu - it would have been enough.

אלו הוציאנו ממצרים, דינו

Ilu natan natan lanu natan lanu et mamonam

Natan lanu et mamonam dayenu

Dai, dayenu (3) dayenu dayenu

Had God given us their wealth ... dayenu - it would have been enough.

אלו נתן לנו את־ממונם, דינו

Ilu natan natan lanu natan lanu et hashabbat

Natan lanu et hashabbat dayenu

Dai, dayenu (3) dayenu dayenu

Had God given us Shabbat ... dayenu - it would have been enough.

אלו נתן לנו את־השבת, דינו

Ilu natan natan lanu natan lanu et hatorah

Natan lanu et hatorah dayenu

Dai, dayenu (3) dayenu dayenu

Had God Given us the Torah ... dayenu - it would have been enough.

ולא נתן לנו את־התורה, דינו



Reconstructed Reconstructionist 'Dayenu' (Full):

Ilu hotzi'anu mimitzrayim		אלו הוציאנו ממצרים
velo asah vahem shefatim, dayenu.	דינו	ולא עשה בהם שפטים,
Ilu asah vahem shefatim,		אלו עשה בהם שפטים
velo natan lanu et mamonam, dayenu.	דינו	ולא נתן לנו את ממונם,
Ilu natan lanu et mamonam		אלו נתן לנו את ממונם
velo kara lanu et hayam, dayenu.	דינו	ולא קרע לנו את הים,
Ilu kara lanu et hayam		אלו קרע לנו את הים
velo he'eviranu vetokho bekharavah, dayenu.	דינו	ולא העבירנו בתוכו בחרבה,
Ilu he'eviranu vetokho bekharavah		אלו העבירנו בתוכו בחרבה
velo sipek tzorkeinu bamidbar arba'im shanah, dayenu.	דינו	ולא ספק צרכנו במדבר ארבעים שנה
Ilu sipek tzorkeinu bamidbar arba'im shanah		אלו ספק צרכנו במדבר ארבעים שנה
velo he'ekhilanu et haman, dayenu.	דינו	ולא האכילנו את המן
Ilu he'ekhilanu et haman		אלו האכילנו את המן
velo natan lanu et hashabbat, dayenu.	דינו	ולא נתן לנו את השבת,
Ilu natan lanu et hashabbat,		אלו נתן לנו את השבת
velo kervanu lifnei har sinai, dayenu.	דינו	ולא קרבנו לפני הר סיני,
Ilu kervanu lifnei har sinai,		אלו קרבנו לפני הר סיני
velo natan lanu et hatorah, dayenu.	דינו	ולא נתן לנו את התורה.
Ilu natan lanu et hatorah		אלו נתן לנו את התורה
velo hikhnisanu le'erezt yisra'el, dayenu.	דינו	ולא הכניסנו לארץ ישראל,
Ilu hikhnisanu le'erezt yisra'el		אלו הכניסנו לארץ ישראל
velo vanah lanu et beit habekhirah, dayenu.	דינו	ולא בנה לנו את בית הבחירה

Had God brought us out of Egypt without bringing judgment upon [our oppressors], dayenu

Had God brought judgment upon them without giving us their wealth, dayenu

Had God given us their wealth without splitting the sea for us, dayenu

Had God split the sea for us but not brought us through it dry, dayenu

Had God brought us through [the sea] dry without providing for our needs for forty years in the desert, dayenu

Had God provided for our needs for forty years in the desert, without feeding us with manna, dayenu

Had God fed us with manna without giving us Shabbat, dayenu

Had God given us Shabbat without drawing us close around Mount Sinai, dayenu

Had God drawn us close around Mount Sinai without giving us the Torah, dayenu

Had God given us the Torah without bringing us to the land of Israel, dayenu

Had God brought us to the land of Israel without building for us the House God chose, dayenu

Seder Activity: Should We Put Reparations Back in ‘Dayenu’?

by Rabbi Micah Weiss

This role-playing activity is designed to generate a lively discussion of the many considerations involved in making intentional changes to Jewish tradition — a foundational component of a Reconstructionist approach to Judaism. The topic of reparations is the catalyst for the conversation, not an end goal that everyone has to agree on. Debating liturgical changes to the Haggadah can be a spiritually restorative practice for Jews living in two civilizations and constantly navigating places of ethical dissonance in the larger societies we live in to try and reach greater alignment with our ideals.

There are two versions of the activity: One requires no background knowledge, and the other asks either that participants pre-read the essay, “If God Had Only Given Us Reparations,” or that someone be prepared to summarize key parts of the article.

Reader:

“Welcome to the first (pretend) meeting of the Reconstructionist Haggadah Commission. You have been charged to recommend liturgical changes for a brand-new Reconstructionist Haggadah. The Tikkun Olam Commission (TOC) asks that the very first liturgical recommendation you should consider is whether or not we should add the line, ‘אלו נתן לנו אֶת־מָמוֹנָם *Illo natan lanu et mamonomam*, Had God [only] given us their wealth,’ back into the words of Dayenu. This line was one of four that Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the intellectual parent of the Reconstructionist movement, removed from Dayenu when he published the radically innovative Haggadah *The New Haggadah* in 1941. He argued that they referenced events in the Exodus story that ‘might conflict with our highest ethical standards.’

“The four lines removed from the Reconstructionist Dayenu are, ‘Had God not ...

1. brought judgment upon their gods - עָשָׂה בְּאֱלֹהֵיהֶם
 2. Killed their firstborn sons - הָרַג אֶת־בְּכוֹרֵיהֶם
 3. Given us their wealth - נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת־מָמוֹנָם
 4. Drowned our enemies in [the Reed Sea] - שָׁקַע צָרֵנוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ
- ...Dayenu! It would have been enough.’

These changes were very popular in their day and have been emulated by most liberal Haggadot ever since. However, a new generation of Reconstructionist leaders have developed a surprising interest in restoring lines of traditional liturgy that were removed or revised in the past, claiming

that some of the texts that once were experienced as ethically dissonant are now the places where their deepest political and spiritual convictions are reflected. The TOC claims that by removing the “textual hook” of “אֶת־מַמּוֹנָם לָנוּ נָתַן *natan lanu et mamonam*, God gave us their wealth,” from the Haggadah, we inadvertently disinherited ourselves from one of our most politically important Jewish theological traditions: that of reparations. Apparently, many of us have not been telling an essential part of the story of our liberation from Egypt to our children — mainly, that we received reparations as we left Egypt, and so, too, should all formerly enslaved and colonized peoples when they are set free. This is a serious allegation, and we hope you will consider the TOC’s recommendation carefully.”

Discussion Version 1: [No Background Knowledge Required]

1. Before we weigh the demands of the Jews of the “present, let’s give more consideration to the wisdom of our Jewish leaders of the past. Why might Kaplan have removed this line from Dayenu in the first place, and why has it been such a widely popular liturgical revision for so long?
2. What other changes are we opening ourselves up to if we agree to put this line back in Dayenu? Should we also consider returning the lines, “brought judgement upon their gods,” “killed their first born sons” and “drowned our enemies in the Reed Sea” to the Reconstructionist Haggadah text? Can we bring back one without bringing back the others?
3. How do we know that reparations isn’t just a short-lived political fad of the moment? Is there value to bringing back this line of liturgy beyond using the Haggadah as an organizing tool to mobilize support for a contemporary social justice campaign? How much or how little does that matter?
4. Why is it so important to name reparations specifically in Dayenu? There are other places that reference this part of the exodus story in the traditional Haggadah text. What’s so important about Dayenu?
5. *[at the conclusion of your discussion]* What’s your final position? Try to sway the rest of the commission to approve your recommendation for the new Reconstructionist Haggadah.

Discussion Version 2: [With “If God Had Only Given Us Reparations” as Background]

In addition to questions 1-5 in Discussion, Version 1:

6. If you were to add additional, interlinear texts or sources to the Dayenu text in the style of many Sephardi Haggadot, what would you add to help focus the Reconstructionist Dayenu text on reparations?
 - a. How would you make sure these additional texts would stand the test of time?
7. How does this particular political moment feel similar and different to 1941, when *The New Haggadah* was published? Does the current landscape of antisemitism make you think differently about this question than you would have in the summer of 2020? What can we learn about how to navigate antisemitism today from how the founders of the Reconstructionist movement navigated their oppression, as Jews, in their day?

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