

Power, Revolution, and Justice  
Models of Social Change in the Torah

BS"D

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## I. Pace of Change: Gradualism Within Revolution

### 1. The Chosen Path

<p><u>Exodus 13:17</u></p> <p>“It happened when Pharoah sent out the people that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, <u>because it was near</u>, for G-d said, ‘Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt.’”</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק יג</u></p> <p>(יז) וַיְהִי בְשִׁלַּח פַּרְעֹה אֶת הָעָם וְלֹא נָחַם אֱלֹהֵי הַיָּם דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי הַיָּם פֶּן יִנָּחַם הָעָם בְּרֹא'תָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִם:</p>
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### 2. Slave Mentality

<p><u>Rambam: Moreh Nevukhim 3:32</u></p> <p>“For a <u>sudden transition</u> from one opposite to another is impossible. .... It is not in the nature of man that, after having been brought up in slavish service...he should <u>all of a sudden</u> wash his hands of the dirt (of slavery)..... The deity uses a gracious ruse in causing (the people) to <u>wander perplexedly</u> in the desert <u>until</u> their souls became courageous...and <u>until</u>, moreover, people were born who were not accustomed to humiliation and servitude.”</p>
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### 3. The Role of Miracles in History

<p><u>Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik: The Emergence of Ethical Man (185-186)</u></p> <p>“The supernatural miracle is not very welcome in the covenant society. <u>We prefer the regular flow of life</u>. The Halakhah is completely integrated with the <u>natural process</u>. It never takes cognizance of any <u>causalistic anomalies</u>. Yet the central theme of the exodus tale is the miracle. What is a miracle in Judaism? The word ‘miracle’ in Hebrew does not possess the connotation of the supernatural. It has never been placed on transcendental level. ‘Miracle’ (pele,nes) describes only an outstanding event which causes amazement. <u>A turning point in history</u> is always a miracle, for it commands attention as an event which intervened fatefully in the formation of the group or that individual....Israel, however, who looked upon the</p>
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universal occurrence as the continuous realization of a divine ethical will embedded into dead and living matter, could never classify the miracle as something unique and incomprehensible...Miracle is simply a natural event which causes historical metamorphosis. Whenever history is transfigured under the impact of cosmic dynamics, we encounter a miracle.”

#### 4. Gradualism

Exodus and Revolution: Michael Walzer (58)

“Here again is the argument for gradualism. **Physically**, the escape from Egypt is sudden, glorious, complete; **spiritually and politically**, it is very slow, a matter of two steps forward, one step back. I want to stress this is a lesson from the Exodus experience again and again.”

#### 5. Remaining Focused on the Daily Work

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say, ‘If there is a sapling in your hand when they say to you, ‘Behold, the Messiah has come!’ complete planting the sapling, and then go and welcome the Messiah,.’” (Avot d’Rebbe natan, version B, #31).

#### 6. Revolutions in the Self

The Revolution Inside Dionne Brand - “Nothing of Egypt” (Trinidad/Tobago)

“Revolutions do not happen outside of you, they happen in the vein, they change you and you change yourself, you wake up in the morning changing. You say this is the human being I want to be. You are making yourself for the future, and you do not even know the extent of it when you begin but you have a hint, a taste in your throat of the warm elixir of the possible.”

## II. Radical Responses to Unique Opportunities

### 1. Immediate response to Suffering

<p><b><u>Exodus 2: 11-12</u></b></p> <p>It happened in those days that Moses grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren. He turned this way and that and saw that there was no man, so he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.</p>	<p><b><u>שמות פרק ב</u></b></p> <p>(יא) וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלֵי תָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מַכֶּה אִישׁ עִבְרָיִ מֵאֶחָיו:</p> <p>(יב) וַיִּפֶן כֹּה נֹכַח וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיַּךְ אֶת הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל:</p>
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### 2. Individual Alacrity : Seize the Moment

<p><b><u>Mesillat Yesharim Chapter 7 (42)</u></b></p> <p>“<u>Alacrity</u> consists of two elements: one that relates to the period <u>prior to the commencement of a deed</u>, and the other that relates to the <u>period that follows the commencement of a deed</u>. The former means that prior to the commencement of a mitzvah a person <u>must not delay</u> (its performance). Rather, when its time arrives, or when the opportunity (for its fulfillment) presents itself, or when it enters his mind, <u>he must react speedily, without delay</u>, to seize the mitzvah and to do it. He must not procrastinate at this time, for no danger is graver than this. Every new moment can bring with it some new hindrance to the fulfillment of the good deed.”</p>
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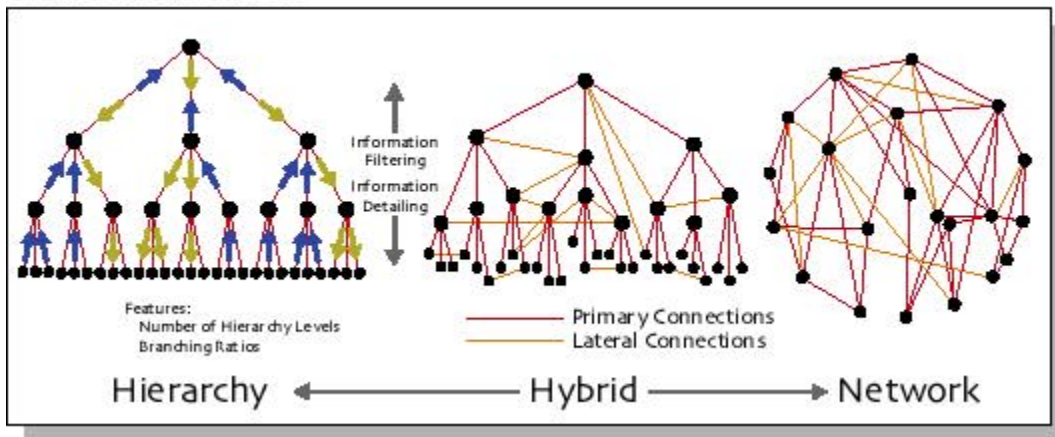
### 3. Jumping into the Furnace for the Other

<p><b><u>Ketubot 67b</u></b></p> <p>In the neighborhood of one of the Rabbis of the Talmud, Mar Ukva, there was an extremely poor person. The Rabbi would daily leave four coins behind the pauper's door. In this way,</p>	<p>מר עוקבא הוה עניא בשיבבותיה, דהוה רגיל כל יומא דשדי ליה ארבעה זוזי בצינורא דדשא. יום אחד אמר: איזיל איחזי מאן קעביד בי ההוא טיבותא. ההוא יומא נגהא ליה למר עוקבא לבי מדרשא, אתיא דביתהו בהדיה, כיון דחזויה דקא מצלי ליה לדשא נפק בתרייהו, רהוט מקמיה עיילי</p>
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the pauper would never see his benefactor. One day the pauper decided to wait for his benefactor to arrive so that he could see who he was. On that particular day Mar Ukva was late for the study hall and when he delivered the coins he was walking together with his wife. When the pauper saw the coins being delivered, he ran out to see who was there. Mar Ukva and his wife sensed that they were being followed so they ran away and jumped into a hot stone oven. The feet of Mar Ukva started to burn on the stones, but his wife's feet did not. His wife said, "Put your feet on mine." Mar Ukva felt bad that this miracle only happened to his wife but not to him. She explained to him that she merited this miracle because the kind of loving-kindness of her charity was greater than his. "I am at home and I provide food for the needy to eat immediately. But you give them money with which they have to go and buy food." The Talmud concludes, what was the need for Mar Ukva and his wife to run and hide in a hot stone oven? Because a person should rather let oneself get thrown into a burning furnace than put another person to shame. Although the poor person was curious to know who his benefactors were, Mar Ukva protected the pauper from being embarrassed to see the great Rabbi providing him his daily needs.

לההוא אתונא דהוה גרופה נורא, הוה קא מיקליין כרעיה דמר עוקבא, אמרה ליה דביתהו: שקול כרעיך אותיב אכרעאי. חלש דעתיה, אמרה ליה: אנא שכיחנא בגויה דביתא ומקרבא אהנייתי. ומאי כולי האי? דאמר מר זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב, ואמרי לה אמר רב הונא בר ביזנא אמר ר"ש חסידא, ואמרי לה א"ר יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי: נוח לו לאדם שימסור עצמו לתוך כבשן האש ואל ילבין פני חברו ברבים; מנא לן? מתמר, דכתיב: +בראשית ל"ח+ היא מוצאת.

## Control Structures



### III. The Educational Dilemma

#### 1. Rav Aharon in Beit Yisrael

“A couple of years after we moved to *Yerushalyim*, I was once walking with my family in the *Beit Yisrael* neighborhood, where R. Isser Zalman Meltzer used to live. For the most part, it consists of narrow alleys. We came to a corner, and found a merchant stuck there with his car. The question came up as to how to help him; it was a clear case of *perika u-te'ina* (helping one load or unload his burden). There were some youngsters there from the neighborhood, who judging by their looks were probably ten or eleven years old. They saw that this merchant was not wearing a *kippa*. So they began a whole *pilpul*, based on the *gemara* in *Pesachim* (113b), about whether they should help him or not. They said, ‘If he walks about bareheaded, presumably he doesn’t separate *terumot u-ma’asrot*, so he is suspect of eating and selling untithed produce.....’”

I wrote R. Soloveitchik a letter at that time, and told him of the incident. I ended with the comment, ‘Children of the age from our camp would not have known the *gemara*, but they would have helped him.’ My feeling then was: Why, Ribbon shel Olam, must this be our choice? Can’t we find children who would have helped him and still know the *gemara*? Do we have to choose? I hope not; I believe not. If forced to choose, however, I would have no doubts where my loyalties lie: I prefer that they know less *gemara* but help him.”

(Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, *By His Light* p. 249)

## 2. Teaching Emotional Intelligence

“With the curriculum already besieged by a proliferation of new topics and agendas, some teachers who understandably feel overburden resist taking extra time from the basics for yet another course. So an emerging strategy in emotional education is not to create a new class, but to blend lessons on feelings and relationships with other topics already taught. Emotional lessons can merge naturally into reading and writing, health, science, social studies, and other standard courses as well.....Beyond teacher training, emotional literacy expands our vision of the task of schools themselves, making them more explicitly society’s agent for seeing children learn these essential lessons for life - a return to a classic role for education. This larger design requires, apart from any specifics of curriculum, using opportunities in and out of class to help students turn moments of personal crisis into lessons in emotional competence. It also works best when the lessons at school are conditioned with what goes on in children’s homes. Many emotional literacy programs include special classes for parents to teach them about what their children are learning, not just to complement what is imparted at school, but to help parents who feel the need to deal more effectively with their children’s emotional life,” (Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman, p. 271, 280).

## 3. Moral Reasoning or Moral Identity

“Gross (1997) has used the resource mobilization frame to interpret a different moral-political phenomenon, the rescue of Jews in Western Europe during Nazi occupation between 1941 and 1945. After interviewing still-living rescuers in a Huguenot community in southern France and a Dutch Calvinist community in the Netherlands, Gross concluded that the organization and coordination of resources by local religious congregations made rescuing operations possible. Ministers of these churches organized their congregants around religious and civic cognitive themes and coordinated resources for the various functions required for rescuing: provision of secure housing, ration cards for food, healthcare, communication, transportation, education for children, recreation and the like. Gross further found that participation in rescuing was unrelated to the level of moral reasoning indicated by a Kohlberg-like measure. He reported that higher-level reasoners were not more prone to participate in rescuing operations, but the community identity built around a common religious and civic sense of Christianity and democracy accounted for the willing participation of morally conventional citizens.”

“When morality meets politics in development,” James Youniss, The Journal of Moral Education (Vol. 38, II, June 2009)