



THE CARDOZIAN

Revitalizing our Tradition. Renewing our Commitment.

Pesach: Freedom Through Constraints

A message from the Dean

Dear Friends,

Nothing is more dangerous to the well-being of the human species than the mistaken notion of freedom. Today, freedom is defined as the ability to do whatever one wants. Entire generations have been thrown into a life of meaninglessness, passivity and boredom in the name of this artificial freedom. It wreaks havoc on many fine souls who no longer have a sense of what they are living for.

Even in the religious community we find many people who observe the commandments by rote because of social pressure or fear of punishment. They dream of freedom, of liberating themselves from their many obligations. Yet, they are unaware that these very obligations are the manifestations of genuine freedom, and a life with no boundaries is a life of confinement.

It is remarkable that Pesach, the Jewish festival of freedom, is associated with so many restrictions and obligations—more than any other festival or ritual. All forms of chametz, leaven, are forbidden to be in one's possession, and even a crumb becomes an issue. The precise rituals to be followed on the Seder night, when Jews celebrate their freedom, are painstaking and even grueling for the modern, carefree soul.

What kind of freedom are Jews celebrating on the very evening of their forefathers' departure from Egypt?

A life of even more restrictions?

When speaking of obligation, people say, "My duty calls me." The metaphor is clear: a duty calls. It is far removed and needs to call man since he may not hear. For man to hear, he must come closer. But he may decide to keep his distance, living his life free of duty.

This is not the case in the Hebrew language, which expresses the concept of obligation very differently. In its world view, duty has arms that embrace man and will not let him go. The Mishna often uses an illuminating expression. When describing a man who has not yet done his duty, it states: *Lo yatza yedei chovato*, "He has not yet left the hands of his obligation." In Judaism, man's duties are not long distance calls. Rather, they hold man in their grasp, and only when he has lived up to his duty can he claim to be free. It is the refusal to do one's duty that casts man into confinement.

Judaism is the art of making a problem out of every solution. It correctly believes that what is taken for granted is boring; it does not get our attention and therefore has no significance. Only when we see something as a challenge and give it thought do we come alive. A sense of duty reflects awareness that the trivial is critical. There is no growth except in the fulfillment of one's duty. Without it, man does not live fully; he merely exists but does not experience the seasons in his soul. This is what the David Cardozo Academy stands for. ■



Activities & Events Abroad

- ▶ Pesach 2016 – Rabbi Cardozo lectured in several synagogues in Manchester, UK.
- ▶ March 16-27, 2017 – Rabbi Cardozo spoke at Limmud in Liverpool and at Beth Knesset Yeshurun in Manchester.
- ▶ April 6-20 – Rabbi Cardozo lectured at several synagogues and community centers in Detroit.
- ▶ October 26-November 16 – Rabbi Cardozo lectured in Holland at several synagogues.
- ▶ December 21 – January 1, 2018, Limmud, Birmingham – Rabbi Cardozo spoke about the Rabbi Joseph Dweck controversy and called for the full support of Rabbi Dweck in the orthodox community and the British Chief Rabbinate.
- ▶ Rabbi Cardozo also spoke about the Rabbi Louis Jacobs Affair, and Rabbi Jacob's stand on Torah min HaShamayim, and about Rabbi Cardozo's new book, *Jewish Law As Rebellion*. He participated in several panel discussions and spoke with international scholars and laymen.
- ▶ July 8th – Rabbi Cardozo will lecture for the "Louis Jacobs Society" in London.

Activities & Events in Israel

- ▶ February 1, 2017, Jerusalem – Panel discussion with Rabbi Cardozo, Professors William Kolbrener and Elliott Malamet on Rabbi Soloveitchik’s philosophy and halachic rulings
- ▶ 27 September, Jerusalem – Rabbi Cardozo introduced Rabbi Dalfin’s lecture on the relationship between Lubavitcher Rebbe and Rabbi Soloveitchik.
- ▶ June, 19 2017, Jerusalem – Rabbi Cardozo lectured on Torah from Heaven—What happened and what does it mean?
- ▶ March 7th and 11, 2018 – Rabbi Cardozo spoke in Modiin and in Efrat on his new book, *Jewish Law as Rebellion*.
- ▶ Rabbi Cardozo will be speaking on the book in the next few months in Jerusalem, Raanana, Natanya and Tel Aviv.

Summary of Think Tank Activities 5778

Vision, Change & Preservation

Dare to dream big!

Our theme for 5778 is “Vision, Change and Preservation.” Since Rabbi Cardozo is a bold thinker, visionary, and dreamer of a better world, we felt it would be fruitful to explore the Think Tank members’ own visions, dreams, and desires for change, along with their views of the mechanisms of change and of what demands preservation at all costs. (See Questions to Ponder, next page.)

One member shared his initial excitement at discovering the ideas of visionary thinkers such as Hartman, Heschel, Berkowitz, and Leibowitz. But in the intervening years, he has encountered the yawning gap between “on paper” and “in practice”, and has lost confidence in how halacha might meet certain challenges. Other members, however, felt as if visions and changes are both eminently possible and necessary.

We noted that when putting together a dream for Jewish life, just as when paskening halacha, one will inevitably contend with competing or conflicting values. Therefore, prior to moving into member presentations, we spent two sessions examining situations from members’ own lives in which competing values constituted the root of dilemma.

One member who chooses to end the blessing with “she’asani yisrael” rather than “shelo asani goy” as more meaningful to him, does not want to say this aloud in a traditional minyan, due to his value of preserving community. His solution is to find a minyan where these blessings are not said aloud. Another member felt that in any case where Am Yisrael and Torat Yisrael conflict, following Rav Amital and



Summary of Think Tank Activities 5778 (Cont'd)

Tana d'bei Eliyahu, the Jewish people should come first, as long as there is any room whatsoever within halacha for this to occur. Another member mentioned the problematics of the halachot surrounding pre-marital intimacy, when the people involved are in their 30s and 40s, and beyond. The value of observing the laws, preserving holiness, and safeguarding against promiscuity may run up against values of mental and emotional health and—it can be argued—the possibility of developing lasting relationships.

Next, we moved into the stage of member presentations. We asked members to relate to two questions: What is your grand (utopian) vision for Judaism? and, secondarily: What are your bold ideas for Judaism's evolution?

In our first presentation of the year, a member born and brought up in Israel shared his vision of reconnecting with great Zionist texts written 100 years ago and his goal of recapturing the level of commitment they experienced. We studied an intriguing document—Avraham Stern's Ikkarei ha-Tehiya, which can be viewed as a kind of alternative Declaration of Independence.

We also hosted a guest speaker, Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz, a visionary and serial entrepreneur who makes his dreams reality as, for example the head of Jerusalem's Yerushalmim party and founder of the Hashgacha Pratit kashrut certificate (which has recently been taken over by the Tzohar rabbinical organization, a major coup and shift in the Israeli kashrut landscape). We look forward to more member presentations in the coming months. ■

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ▶ Is dreaming of an improved Judaism or better Jewish life something you already do?
- ▶ Have you ever been involved with a group or initiative that is driven by a dream of better Jewish life?
- ▶ What would you like Judaism to become?
- ▶ What practices would you like to see stopped? Started?
- ▶ What are the foundations of your ideal Jewish community?
- ▶ How can people be encouraged to dream bigger?
- ▶ What Jewish ideas, rituals, and halachot would you want to preserve at all costs and why?



בכל דור ודור חייב אדם
לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא
יצא ממצרים שנאמר (שמות
יג, ח) והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא
לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי
בצאתי ממצרים פסחים קטז:

In every generation, one is
obligated to see himself as if he
himself came out of Egypt; as it
is written: "This is done because
of what G-d did for me when I
came out of Egypt."

(Talmud, Pesachim 116b)

החדש הזה לָכֶם: הַרְוֵא אֶת
הַלְבָּנָה הַיָּאֵד צְרִיךְ לְבַרֵךְ
בְּזִמְנוֹ שֶׁהָיָה יִשְׂרָאֵל מִקְדָּשִׁין
אֶת הַחֹדֶשׁ יֵשׁ מִן רִבְנָן אִמְרִין
בְּרוּךְ מִחֹדֶשׁ חֲדָשִׁים וְיֵשׁ מֵהֶם
אוֹמְרִים בְּרוּךְ מִקְדָּשׁ חֲדָשִׁים
וְיֵשׁ מֵהֶם אוֹמְרִים מִקְדָּשׁ
יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁאֵין אִין יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִקְדָּשִׁים אוֹתוֹ אִין אוֹתוֹ
קְדוֹשׁ כְּלוּם וְאֵל תְּתַמָּה עַל זֶה
שֶׁהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא קָדֵשׁ אֶת
יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר (וַיִּקְרָא כ, כו)
וְהֵייתֶם לִי קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ
אֲנִי ה' וְלִפִּי שֶׁהֵם מִקְדָּשִׁים
לְשָׁמַיִם לְכַךְ מָה שֶׁהֵם
מִקְדָּשִׁים הוּא מִקְדָּשׁ.
(מדרש רבה על בא טו: כד)

What blessing was to be
recited by one who beholds
the new moon, in the period
when Israel used to sanctify
the new month? Some of the
sages hold: "Blessed be He who
renews the months." Others say:
"Blessed be He who consecrates
the months." And others say:
"Blessed be He who hallows
Israel," since unless Israel
sanctify it, it is not sanctified at
all.

(Midrash Rabbah, Bo 15: 24)

Pesach: Learning to sing in tune with history

Yael Shahar, member of the DCA Think Tank

Pesach celebrates the escape of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, and the miraculous nature of that escape. Perhaps the greatest miracle of all was not the plagues of frogs, hail, or even the death of the firstborn. Rather, it was the fact that a society in which slavery was both socially and economically entrenched was shaken loose of its hold on its slaves.

But did any of this really happen?

For several decades, it has been the fashion to examine the details of Biblical texts in search of proof or counter-proofs to their historicity. The Exodus from Egypt has been a particularly juicy target of such investigations, forming as it does the foundation of so much of Jewish cultural identity.

Rabbi Zev Farber declared categorically that "given the data to which modern historians have access, it is impossible to regard the accounts of mass exodus from Egypt... as historical."

Others, while conceding that the massive Exodus as described in the Torah probably never happened, suggest that the Biblical narrative nevertheless rests on a kernel of truth: only a core group of exiles from the tribe of Levi suffered enslavement in Egypt. As the educator caste, their experience later worked its way into the Israelite cultural myths.

Reading between the lines

In the past few years, the tide of skepticism appears to be turning. In an exhaustive article for Mosaic, Joshua Berman sums up the evidence in support of an Israelite presence in Egypt during the reign of Rameses II. Numerous literary and historical details of the Biblical story, he writes, "do strikingly appear to reflect the realities of late-second-millennium Egypt—the period when the exodus would most likely have taken place."

In particular, Berman notes that the the Exodus story borrows motifs and stylistic elements — and sometimes exact phrases — from a prominent piece of Pharaonic propaganda of the time: the glorification of the Pharaoh's victory over the Hittites in the Battle of Kadesh.

Berman argues that the extent of the similarities, coupled with the fact that the original Pharaonic text was widely known at the time, points to "a deliberate act of cultural appropriation."

In a response to Berman, Richard Hess points out that the Biblical plagues each represent a victory over one or another of the Egyptian gods, and that the tenth plague — the death of the first-born — represents a symbolic defeat of Pharaoh himself as god-king and giver of life to his people.

Berman's conclusion is that there is a core of historical truth beneath the literary embellishment of miracles and wonders. "That [the Israelites] embraced and preserved this defiant transvaluation of royal propaganda suggests that they experienced a collectively transformative event, one that dramatically elevated their lot at the expense of a mighty regent."

History or midrash

Does any of this matter? For some, the historical accuracy of the Bible is the underpinning of all of Jewish life. After all, the Covenant itself, in the form of the Ten Commandments, begins with the preamble: "I am the Lord your God, who

bought you up out of Egypt.” If there was no Egyptian bondage, no miraculous escape to freedom, no subsequent experience at Sinai, then what’s left of Judaism?

Plenty! Judaism, as a culture, a religion, and a philosophy, is robust enough to withstand the decoupling from history—in fact, such decoupling occurs in every generation, and this is what gives Judaism its power and resilience. Judaism has already so radically reinterpreted its foundation myths and historic origins that they no longer have the meanings they did to our ancestors. This is not a bug; it’s a feature! This is how Judaism evolves as a living culture.

But more, the ability to retain significance and meaning for successive generations living in widely different circumstances is the mark of great art and great literature. It is also one of the hallmarks of an art form characteristic of the Jewish people from its inception: the art of midrash aggadah, or interpretive story-telling.

Miracles as musical notes

As moderns, we are trained to sift through the fantastic embellishments of ancient story-telling to look for the truth. This is precisely what Joshua Berman and his responders do in their masterful analysis. It’s what we do as academics, as archaeologists, and as Biblical philologists. But if we stop there, we risk missing a deeper layer of meaning.

The story-telling of the Bible is midrash aggadah at its most powerful. It is not satisfied with mere factual truth; it strives for meaning and purpose. To a people attuned to the theological significance of every event, for whom history was a dialogue with the divine the fantastical and miraculous embellishments were not mere window dressing. Rather, they served as musical notes pointing to one particular interpretation of a historical event.

The details of miracles and wonders are there to help us find the tune, to see the significance of the event in the overall life of our people.

In the case of the Exodus, the conscious appropriation of the Pharaoh’s own propaganda was an act of political satire, and the particular details embellishing the story point to a “tune” which is at once joyous, triumphant... and scathingly insulting to the greatest ruler of the region.

The Egyptian experience, not as a historical fact, but as a deeply-felt cultural motif, penetrates and pervades all subsequent Jewish law. The commandment to “love the stranger” appears no fewer than 36 times in the Biblical text, and serves as the basis of derivation of countless later customs and laws. The relevance of the Exodus story goes beyond mere factual truth; its true significance lies in what we’ve built on it and how it has molded us as a people who, in every generation, have made it our own. ■ [Yael Shahar’s writings can be found at yaelshahar.com](http://yaelshahar.com)



A Big Thank-You to Ilana Sinclair

We want to thank Ilana Sinclair, Director of Marketing at the David Cardozo Academy, for her outstanding work. She lives in Modi’in with her husband and 4 children. Ilana oversees the Cardozo Academy’s communications, media relations and marketing efforts and helps to support its strategic planning and fundraising efforts.

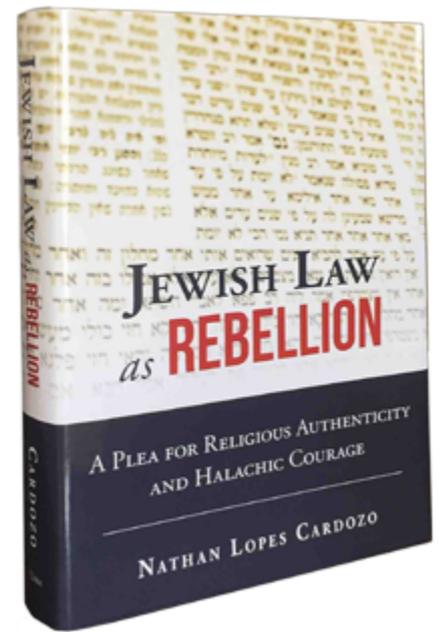
Rabbi Cardozo's new book is now available!

Jewish Law as Rebellion

A Plea for Religious Authenticity and Halachic Courage

In this remarkable, and what promises to be a highly controversial, work, Rabbi Cardozo suggests that Jewish Law must be seen as a discipline of resistance and courage. He pleads for the urgent return to authentic religiosity, which by now has been compromised by nearly all who claim to be religious. Rebelling against the rabbinical establishment, Rabbi Cardozo takes it to task for failing to liberate Halacha from its stagnancy and confinement. With ground-breaking suggestions, he shows how to make Jewish Law once again relevant to our modern society and to the State of Israel.

Out of love for Judaism and all human beings Rabbi Cardozo provokes, challenges, annoys and disturbs his readers, asking them to resist the corrupting effect of the ordinary and often hollow motions of today's religious life. While focusing on Judaism and Jewish Law, much of what Rabbi Cardozo argues applies equally to other religions as well as to secularism. ■



[View at Urim Publications](#) | [Buy on Amazon](#)

Praise for Jewish Law As Rebellion:

"Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo is a unique intellectual presence in the rabbinical world today. His new book raises profound questions that disturb our complacency and demand the attention of our hearts and minds. To think with him and the challenges he raises is one of the great experiences of modern Jewish thought."

– Professor Susannah Heschel

"Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo has written a challenging, even provocative book, inviting us to restore the iconoclasm with which Judaism was born as a religion of protest against the status quo. Agree or disagree, you will find yourself thinking hard and deep about the current state of Jewish law and life, and that makes it a work well worth reading – a new chapter in one of the great Jewish traditions: the dignity of dissent."

– Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

"Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo is a rebel fighting for a most worthy cause – to reinvigorate Judaism and infuse it with real spiritual context. He inveighs against the over-codification of Halachah, a sort of pietistic OCD syndrome, which stifles the true spirit of Judaism. He calls for a return to the Talmud and its sources, with its openness, its bewildering variety of opinions, its multifaceted character, its liberality, and its halachic flexibility. This book is the powerful plea of a genuinely pious Jew deeply concerned for our Jewish future. The problems and challenges he presents are real and urgent, requiring creative rethinking on the part of our religious authorities. He is to be admired and congratulated for his courage and the clarity of his vision."

– Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber

"What this exceptional book offers is a rationale for halakhic practice as a discipline of resistance – resistance to the corrupting effect of the ordinary, to the hollowing-out of human behaviour and human awareness that a fast-paced and feverish culture produces. It is full of insights that will challenge and inspire Jews and non-Jews alike: a reminder that Orthodoxy of whatever kind is empty if it does not arise from the deep, radical awareness of the divine imperative to be amazed and thankful in the face of every thing and every experience. Immensely enriching."

– Dr. Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, former Archbishop of Canterbury

MILESTONES

- ▶ Thoughts to Ponder – We have nearly 600 essays with a readership far above 10,000 subscribers.
- ▶ We're also publishing in the Times of Israel (weekly), The Jerusalem Post, The Los Angeles Jewish Journal, The Algemeiner, The Jewish Press, The Jewish Chronicle
- ▶ [Arutz Sheva/Israel National News interview by Eve Harow](#),
- ▶ Rabbi Cardozo was interviewed by [Jewish Coffee House](#).
- ▶ Torah in Motion – [podcasts of lectures, discussions](#).
- ▶ Rav Cardozo is now on [Facebook in Hebrew](#).

The DCA & Theater and Theology

Exploring bold ideas through art



In May and October of 2017, Rabbi Cardozo partnered with the Theater and Theology company, founded by DCA Think Tank member Yael Valier, to participate in two evenings at the Khan Theater in Jerusalem. Together with the Theater and Theology team, Yael combines her experience in theater and her interest in the beauties and quirks of religion to bring audiences meaningful entertainment both during performances and in post-performance discussions. Last year's season saw the production of *Divine Right*, by Jerusalemite Roy Doliner, about the disputation of Nachmanides against the Catholic Church.

After the performance, Rabbi Cardozo led lively discussions with the audience about the nature of Jewish faith in the coming of the Messiah. In true Israeli fashion, one of the actors was delayed before one performance due to his army commander only allowing him to leave very late for the theater. Rabbi Cardozo delighted the audience and saved the director by giving an impromptu pre-performance mini-lecture! Teaming up with Theater and Theology was an exciting opportunity to bring Rabbi Cardozo's innovative thinking to wider, non-academic audiences. The performances after which Rabbi Cardozo spoke sold out about two weeks in advance, proving that there is a thirst for his ideas in the broader community.

Theater and Theology is currently preparing for its June 2018 production of the comedy *Off the Derech Dolorosa* by Tom Dudzick. The play examines the tension between the rule of law and the rule of compassion, and explores different theories of how to raise children on the "straight path"—even questioning the very definition of the "straight path." It is certain that audiences will be looking forward to hearing Rabbi Cardozo's fresh take on these subjects. ■

The David Cardozo Academy was deeply saddened by the passing away of Gilad, the son of our Think Tank member Yael Valier and her husband Dan. May they only be blessed with happiness.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Calev Ben-Dor



Calev Ben-Dor grew up in a modern Orthodox home in London. After years of education (or indoctrination?) in a Zionist youth movement, he made Aliya in December 2005 – or as he likes to quip, “A week before Ariel Sharon’s incapacitating stroke and two weeks before Hamas won the Palestinian elections.”

Interested in international relations since he was a teenager, Calev worked in the National Security team at the Reut Institute in Tel Aviv before joining the Foreign Ministry’s policy planning division (yes such a thing does exist in Israel!). He is currently Director of Research at the Britain Israel Communication and Research Centre (BICOM), an independent British organisation producing analysis on Israel and the Middle East. He is also a former contributor of opinion pieces to Haaretz Jewish Thinker and an alumni of a negotiation and leadership training program for mid-career Israelis and Palestinians in positions of influence in the public and private sectors.

While it might be natural to think that his years in policy think tanks prepared him for life in the David Cardozo Academy Think Tank, it’s more accurate to say that it was his long-term interest in Jewish life, especially the challenges and opportunities that the State of Israel poses to traditional Judaism, that piqued his interest. A long-time presenter of shiurim on the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem circuits, Calev has presented several times at Limmud UK and this June has been invited to Limmud Oz in Melbourne. He has taught courses on various issues in Jewish tradition: the tension between assertiveness and submissiveness; “Troubling” Torah texts; the concept of Torah from Heaven; and different approaches to reward, punishment, and the role of randomness in our lives. He also created a series called “Conversations on Israel”, which tried to integrate the thought of modern Israeli poets, contemporary philosophers, and traditional Jewish commentators in order to explore various aspects of challenges and dilemmas facing 21st Century Israel – a type of imaginary roundtable in which Nachman Bialik and the Netziv, Shaul Tchernikovsky and Rabbi Akiva, and the Ohr HaChayim and Amos Oz would all converse on issues such as diplomacy, waging war and making peace.

In preparing these classes, Calev says he was primarily motivated by those issues he saw as most pressing in today’s Jewish world. He cites specifically how the re-establishment of the State of Israel altered one of the fundamental assumptions of traditional halacha and thrust the Jewish people out of the classic “four cubits” they had inhabited since the destruction of the Temple, and into a “brave new world” so to speak. “Here the public space, rather than just the private and communal space, is Jewish, and it’s our generation’s challenge to shape that space as best we can. Yet so far we’re stuck using old models that aren’t relevant to the new reality in which we find ourselves,” he observes.

Sometimes referring to the Think Tank discussions as “religious group therapy”, Calev enjoys hearing a plethora of views from different types of people, all of whom are deeply committed to the wellbeing of the Jewish people (even as they often differ as to what form that wellbeing might take). ■

To discuss sponsoring forthcoming books or projects of the Academy, please be in touch with Ilana at IlanaSinclair@cardozoacademy.org. As a non-profit, we rely on the generosity of our friends and supporters to allow us to continue to dream of a better world and to work towards making those dreams a reality.