

What-Was-I-Made-For?_Beshalach_Pesach_April18-25-raw

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A few years ago, I was sitting on my couch, not expecting to be cracked open. I wasn't studying Torah, I wasn't meditating. I was watching clips of American Idol on YouTube.

And there she was, Abby Carter, this young woman who sat at a piano and sang Billie Eilish's What Was I Made For from the movie Barbie in a way that, I mean, I can't imagine anybody watching that performance and not crying. Something in me broke open. There was something in her voice, in her trembling honesty, in the way that she asked the question without trying to answer it, that she came from a religious family with many, many siblings, all of whom were trying somehow to hear through the door and cheering her on.

There was something about her that was remarkable. It stopped me in my tracks. And it wasn't just beautiful, it was true.

The lyrics were true in the way that she expressed them, in the way that she prayed them. I think I forgot what I was made for. That line has been alive inside of me ever since because I think many of us, we forget what we're made for.

There's a rabbinic midrash on a verse in Tomorrow Morning's Song of the Sea. The classic reading on the seventh day of Pesach is the Song of the Sea, chapter 15 of the book of Exodus. As Yeshua, Moshe, and then Moses and the Israelites sang a song.

And the Torah tells us that when the splitting of the sea had finished, right? Yashuv hayam le'etano. And the sea returned le'etano to its strength. Le'etano, its strength.

And say, the rabbis, we shouldn't read the word as etan, its strength, but le'etano, to its condition. The same letters of the word etan can be read as tnai, which means conditional. The sea returned to its condition, meaning that God had created the sea with a clause in its contract.

You will exist on condition that one day in the future, you will split for my children of Israel. And so it was only after the sea fulfilled that condition, after it opened, that it truly became itself. But Rabbi Shlomo Zevin asked a question on this midrash.

The word etano, its strength, and the word tnai are being played with. And Rabbi Zevin writes in Moadim, his beautiful Safer's book on the holidays, it's wondrous. If there had been a condition made with the sea that it should split at the moment that it split, why does the verse and its condition happen after the sea split, when it returned to its strength? Because the condition was that it would split.

Why does the verse that alludes to this condition take place on the next day, when the condition has already been fulfilled, and now the etano, it returns to its strength? Rabbi Zevin asked

incredulously, how is it that if the condition has already been fulfilled, why would it not be the verse that precipitates that fulfilling of that condition? And then he asked a second question. The word *tnai*, which is a condition, and the word *etan*, the same letters, but they mean exactly the opposite. He writes, *etan* means to be firm, permanent, and strong.

The sea returned to its *etan*, its strength. But when the sages wanted to say that the creation of the sea was dependent on a condition and on uncertainty, they expressed it using the word that is the complete opposite, *etanai*. His questions point to something remarkable and audacious.

The rabbis are saying, the sea wasn't entirely created. It wasn't a sea, as it were, until it fulfilled its purpose, until it lived into the condition it had been made for from the beginning. It was somehow incomplete in its seanness.

It wasn't quite a sea, not yet, not until it split. Creation was conditional. It was suspended.

As if God said, you will be the sea truly, eternally, wholly, only if, when the children of Israel come trembling to your shores, you open. And until then, you are potential. You are possibility.

You are. It could be. But you are not yet *etan*.

You are not yet strong. That the sea, this vast, ancient force, wasn't really a sea until it fulfilled its purpose. It had been created on a condition.

It existed with an asterisk next to it. You will become the sea, but only when you split. That's the condition of your creation, sea.

And so the sea had to wait, patiently, waiting for the moment, knowing it wasn't yet complete. And only when it opened, only when it answered the call, did it become *etan*, strong. Only then did it return to itself as itself.

What does it mean to believe in a God who creates things conditionally? It means we believe in a God who waits, waits to see if the world, if we will respond, if we'll partner up, if we'll fulfill the potential that was placed in us, inside of us, at the very beginning. Imagine that, everybody. Imagine a God waiting patiently for you to be who you were meant to be.

Imagine a God waiting patiently for your fullest potential to be realized. A God waiting until the right moment, where the condition upon which your life was created and mine, our karma, our charts, our seed acorn, who we were meant to be manifests. There's something heartbreakingly hopeful for me about that.

God invests in our potential. God says, I'll give you form, but you will give yourself meaning. And when we do, when we show up, when we split open, when we become what we were always meant to be, then the world becomes its strength.

Then the world becomes a ton. Because the world waits for us. And we'll look back and say, that was David all along.

That was Mark all along. That was Eden all along. That was Shira all along.

When the seed splits, when we fulfill that condition retroactively, we were there all the time. And so was God. So I'm asking you, where in our lives are we suspended conditionally? Where have we not yet stepped into what we were made for? What condition is still waiting in us to be fulfilled? That is the question every seventh day of Passover every year.

We might look like we're functioning. We might pray. We might lead.

We might parent. We might survive. But so many of us are walking.

Like the sea before it split, formed but not yet fulfilled, visible but not yet revealed. And while we're waiting, while we're waiting like that sea for the moment in which our metal will be tested, in which our deeper truth will be revealed, when we will hear the call, the world also is waiting and crying now. Right now, the world is crying.

Jews, non-Jews, left, right, young, old, staring at impossible waters, wondering if those raging waters will open for us. The moral clarity is murky. The pain is real.

The fear is paralyzing. But this is a moment for all of us as a community, as a people, as a country. We weren't made for paralysis.

We're not made to stand safely on the shores waiting to see what happens. We Jews and human beings were made to step into the raging waters. We're made to open them and to open ourselves.

We are made to respond. And at this moment in time, right here, right now, on this particular Pesach, on this particular year, God is whispering to each and every one of us, you will only become who you are when you step into who you were meant to be. Most of us are living our lives in between that.

And certainly, as a community now, at this moment in our democracy, is there a doubt any longer that we were made for this moment and that questions once asked must now be answered with clear moral voices and with action? Is there a doubt at this moment as the seas rage in front of us that we are the ones that we have been waiting for? We are the nachshons, each and every one of us, jumping in and setting forth the conditions that make for the seas splitting itself. The seas didn't split until nachshon in our folklore stepped in, and so if we want to be etan and we want to be strong, we must step in and out. Out of the paralysis that asks questions like if I get the job, if the relationship lasts, if I can believe again, if, if, if, if I'm not too late, to live in suspended possibility instead of living in the strength that all of us know we have.

Isn't that a strength that we ache for? We're not yet sure if the sea will split, we're not yet sure if it will work, but if we don't step in, if we don't have the strength, we won't find it either. I want to say tonight that the Torah blesses this space. The Torah blesses the space of not knowing if your condition has yet been fulfilled or if you can fulfill it.

The Torah is not ashamed in this folklore to tell us that the primal force known as the sea itself wasn't fully the sea. So if you're not fully you yet, it's cool. Va-yashav hayam le'etano, and the sea returned to its strength after it fulfilled its condition.

It knew that the conditional is not less real, but maybe even holier. Maybe the holiest things in the world are the ones that say I'm here and I'm waiting, but I won't become until you say yes, until you step forward. Maybe those things are the holiest things, the things that require a finishing, that require a partner, that require someone to see the waiting and say I will do it.

You need help, I'll step in. I need help, please help me. Waiting is not a problem, but an option to be taken up.

Waiting is Sinai, waiting is the sea, waiting is love, waiting is parenthood, waiting is democracy. Waiting is faith. Waiting is all of those things, conditional.

All of them waiting to become our strength, all of them. All of them asking us to partner, and what is the strength that is conferred on the sea? It returns to its strength, what is the sea's strength? It's not crashing waves, it had already crashed. The sea's strength was its quiet, rooted presence of something that had come full circle.

The sea, having finally found the strength it always had, the condition upon which its own existence had been in waiting, could now rest in its power. It didn't go backwards, but forwards to the place that proves that the beginning was real. And at that moment, God whispers, I knew you were capable.

I made you with a potential, but now you've shown me, now that you've split, now you're strong. So back to Abby Carter and my couch, with her broken tears and her trembling voice, so full of pathos and power, she brings Billie Eilish's song to powerful Torah moments. I don't know how to feel, but I want to try.

I don't know how to love, but I want to try. Think I forgot how to be happy. Something I'm not, but something I can be.

Something I wait for. I think I forgot what I was made for. That's the voice of the sea before it splits.

That's the voice of all of us waiting to discover if what we were made for will ever come to pass. It's a song about that painful suspended space between form and fulfillment, between createdness, potential and strength and power. But once the sea splits, or when Barbie walks into

the unknown, when we step forward toward the condition that we were made for, we return to something older than memory, to the purpose that is at the core of all of our beings.

That's what it is. That's what we were made for. May we, all of us, merit to live with awareness of that condition that is unique to us, that unique purpose that we were given, and know its moment.

And may all of us as a community also, in this period of great tumult, of great chaos and uncertainty, find a way to split the sea together, to walk in to save our democracy, to save our sense of what is sane and good. May all of us, as a community of humanity, know why and what we were made for.

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