



Shoftim

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Interception

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The latter two weeks of Av tend to take me by surprise—after the calamitous Three Weeks, a reawakening to tenderness. For me, this turn is deepened by recent memory. Two years ago, the Three Weeks overlapped with end-of-life care for my father, who died on Tu B’Av. In both communal and personal observance, the sense that there is nothing more to be done allows, and requires, a heightened sense of all that must be done, both in formal observance and via a more diffuse service of the heart.

I wrote “Interception” after a turn of another kind, in the days following the initial missile barrages of June 12-14. After nights of running to the miklat and the bone-shaking booms of interceptions and impacts, the sheer ordinariness of morning sunlight and a creakily reawakening body felt like a kind of gift, not unlike the gift of weeks that conclude Av. All of this despite—or maybe precisely because of—the provisionality of relief.

What would it be like if the bombardments were unrelenting, if there were no morning sunlight, if there were no place to run? It is unimaginable, yet the heart, reawakened to tenderness, still strains to hear.

To rehearse the end of the world, and then wake up the next morning. Birdsong, a querulous crow or two, the usual bad taste in your mouth. The struggle

to find footing is nothing more than usual, the ground is solid enough, your body is reliable enough, and nothing at all is new

except, maybe, this wash of tenderness, taking you by surprise, bringing tears to your eyes—

Such a narrow quotient of joy! The placement

of your bones, a little sunlight streaming through
the blinds,
small routines, clumsy preparations, morning
prayers—
even the nameless yearning pulling you from
your life,

a distant rumbling, a siren from another
district that your heart, even now, strains to
hear—

Daniel Deronda: George Eliot's Book of Exodus

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As if in response to God's command to Moses to "Bring up this people, and an angel will lead them to the Promised Land" ([Exodus 33:12](#)), toward the end of George Eliot's 1856 novel, *Daniel Deronda*, Daniel says, "The idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national center, such as the English have, though they too are scattered over the face of the globe" (*Daniel Deronda*, Chapter 69).

My imagined dialogue between Moses and Eliot's Zionist character sets the stage for the thrust of

this study: to read the novel as Eliot's re-imagined Book of Exodus in order to understand her two main goals: 1) to argue for the re-establishment of a Jewish nation, and 2) to warn Englishmen of the ethical and spiritual cost of anti-Semitism.

In an earlier essay on *Daniel Deronda* for Lehrhaus, I investigated the relationship between the novel's feminist and Zionist themes in relation to Rav Soloveitchik's *Fate and Destiny*, suggesting that women could employ the same approach and tactics as Zionists used to create independence. In this essay, I explore the novel's Zionist and philo-Semitic themes in relation to the novel's richly-layered references to the Book of Exodus, suggesting an allegory in which Eliot's Jewish characters represent the Children of Israel, and its Christian figures, the Egyptians; for, in Ruth Wisse's words, for Eliot, "to learn to appreciate the Jews was to save England from Perdition" (Allan Arkush, "For George Eliot..." [Mosaic](#); Ruth Wisse's lectures on *Daniel Deronda* - see below, n1).

Thus, I propose that Eliot (nee Mary Anne Evans, 1819-1880) intended the novel as a cautionary tale for Christian Englishmen to avoid going the way of Pharaoh's Egypt – its reign drowned by history. Moreover, understanding the novel in these allegorical terms explains the heretofore unidentified organic connection between the novel's two parts: its infamously derogated 'separate' Christian and Jewish storylines, discussed below.

Summary of *Daniel Deronda*

Daniel Deronda's 800-plus pages comprise eight books, the first four of which concern Christian Gwendolyn Harleth and a cast of Christian characters, and the second quartet of which concerns Daniel and a host of Jewish characters. The first storyline reveals that Gwendolyn's formerly aristocratic family has lost its benefactor and that the young woman has just lost everything at the roulette tables. Desperate for money, she pawns a turquoise necklace, which is soon returned to her anonymously. Fearing homelessness, Gwendolyn marries the wealthy but cruel Henleigh Grandcourt, despite learning of his mistress and four children who reside in a coal-mining district. After months of enduring psychological abuse at Grandcourt's hands, Gwendolyn watches him drown off their yacht.

The second storyline explains that the Harleths' benefactor, Sir Hugo Mallinger, has raised Daniel as an English gentleman. Daniel's mother, the Princess Leonora Halm-Eberstein, nee Charisi, rejected her father's Judaism and bequeathed her late husband's fortune and her two-year-old son to Sir Hugo on the condition that he conceal the child's Jewish heritage from him. Leonora eventually informs Daniel of her father's chest of Jewish documents, which she has long intended to burn.

Daniel happens to see Gwendolyn at the roulette table, is taken with her beauty, and secretly redeems and returns her pawned necklace. The two are romantically drawn to each other, but

when he learns his true identity, the Christian Miss Harleth is no longer marriageable. Later, by chance, Daniel rescues his future wife, a poor, Jewish, eighteen-year-old girl, from suicide in the Thames. Through searching for her long-lost family, Daniel meets Mirah's thirty-year-old brother, Mordecai, who is dying of tuberculosis. Mordecai voices Eliot's arguments for a Jewish homeland, and upon his death, Daniel and Mirah marry and move to Palestine to fulfill Mordecai's (and Eliot's) vision. This second narrative offers readers an education in Judaism and Jewish history, including its biblical roots, rituals, philosophies, and Eliot's insistence on the humanity of Jews.

Background, Critical Reception, and England's Lingering Anti-Semitism

George Eliot's immersive and extensive education in Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, Kabbalah, Hasidism, and Jewish history has been well-documented. Numerous books and articles on Jewish aspects of her works, particularly *Daniel Deronda*, bring to light the extent to which her knowledge of Judaism informed her writing.

Twenty-first-century scholarship alone testifies to the flourishing interest in Eliot's integration of Judaism into her novels. Nurbai and Newton's 2002 [*George Eliot, Judaism and the Novels: Jewish Myth and Mysticism*](#) explores how Jewish mysticism informs Eliot's work. Gertrude Himmelfarb's 2009 [*The Jewish Odyssey of George Eliot*](#) retraces the why and how of Eliot's Jewish journey, her studies with Hebrew scholar Emanuel

Deutsch, and her interest in Zionism. Josh Glancy's [2021 article](#) "George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*: How One Novel Reshaped the Image of British Jews" points out similarities between Daniel and Moses, and also investigates the lasting effects of Eliot's at-the-time radically dignified, sympathetic characterization of Jews – while noting eminent British critic and Cambridge don F. R. Leavis's proposed publication of the novel's Christian part only, to celebrate the novel's 1976 centennial. Most recently, Ruchama Feuerman's [2025 article](#), "George Eliot's Ground-Breaking Novel about Jews" examines the novel's presentation of Jews as complete human beings, with spiritual, intellectual, and emotional lives. But to my knowledge, no one has yet reconciled the two 'separate' parts of *Daniel Deronda*, the Christian and Jewish storylines — nor fully explored its Daniel-cum-Moses parallels.

Regarding those two distinct storylines, it is important to note that Daniel is present in the opening chapters with Gwendolyn. In fact, the scene in which he redeems her necklace leads to the heart of Eliot's vision for England – to accept and respect its Jews as equals, even saviors of the English soul. For example, in Chapter 2, we are told that Gwendolyn "plays roulette not because of passion, but in search of it." If she represents the

British people, as Ruth Wisse suggests, the girl's empty soul reflects Eliot's fear of bigotry's effects on them.¹ For in pawning her necklace, Miss Harleth complains, "these Jew dealers were so unscrupulous in taking advantage of Christians unfortunate at play" (Chapter 2). Unfortunately, this expression of prejudice is not unique to Gwendolyn.

Even though Jews had been readmitted to England by Cromwell in 1656 after a three-and-a-half-century ban, and were even admitted to Parliament by the Jewish Relief Act of 1858, Eliot believed that the country's Jews were still not treated as equals culturally or socially. Her letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, anticipating *Deronda*'s negative reception, explicitly states Eliot's feelings about the British attitude toward Jews, and any peoples who are different from the British. She wrote to Stowe:

"As to the Jewish element in 'Deronda,' I expected from first to last in writing it, that it would create much stronger resistance and even repulsion than it has actually met with.... Moreover, not only towards the Jews, but towards all oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact, a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness is observable which has become a national disgrace

¹ In her third lecture on *Daniel Deronda*, Ruth Wisse states, "How Gwendolyn will react to being rejected by Daniel [will tell us whether] England can ever accept the distinctiveness of the Jews." (Quoted in Allan Arkush, *Mosaic*, March 15,

2017. [For George Eliot, to Appreciate the Jews Was to Save England » Mosaic](#))

to us.”²

England’s “arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness” is embodied by the likes of Grandcourt, but even Gwendolyn, Hugo Mallinger, and various secondary characters make anti-Semitic remarks that give voice to Eliot’s “national disgrace.”

To wit: With Daniel at a Jewish-owned book store, the narrator says, “In most other trades you find generous men who are anxious to sell you their wares for your own welfare; but even a Jew will not urge Simson’s Euclid on you with an affectionate assurance that you will have pleasure in reading it” (Chapter 33). Even Sir Hugo is not immune. Upon Daniel’s decision to return to Germany to claim his grandfather’s chest rather than visit Gwendolyn, Sir Hugo tells him, “I hope you are not going to set a dead Jew above a living Christian” (Chapter 59). Another character says of Mirah, “She will see no Jew who is tolerable. Every male of that race is insupportable—‘insupportably advancing’—his nose” (Chapter 37). Perhaps most surprising, when Daniel’s mother asks his forgiveness for giving him away, she says, “Have you the cursing spirit of the Jew in you? Are you not able to forgive me?” (Chapter 52). Ironically, Leonora appears to be the most anti-Semitic figure in the novel, for she felt Judaism enslaved her. (For more on Leonora, see my earlier Lehrhaus article.)

Echoes of Exodus

In the biblical narrative, baby Moses is rescued from the Nile and raised as a Prince of Egypt, only to become the ruin of Pharaoh, and the Hebrews’ savior, leading them to the Promised Land. Here, in Eliot’s narrative, two-year-old Daniel is rescued from what his mother believes would be a life of slavery to Judaism and is raised by an English gentleman, only to embrace his (Daniel’s) true heritage and transport it to Palestine with a chest of his grandfather’s papers, (metaphorically holding either the Bones of Joseph or the Ark of the Covenant), to recreate the Jewish nation in the Promised Land. However, it is his relationship with the alluring Gwendolyn Harleth that links the novel’s Jewish and Christian worlds. Marrying solely for financial security, Gwendolyn weds the Pharaonic and abusive Grandcourt. Fittingly, he ends up drowning off his yacht, Gwendolyn silently watching.

Gwendolyn loves Daniel, but he marries Mirah Lapidoth, the young Jewish wanderer whom he saved from suicide by drowning. Ezra Mordecai Lapidoth, her consumptive older brother, seems to me the voice of God’s messenger, if not God Himself in Eliot’s Exodus, he who teaches Daniel the Law and spiritual/political necessity of a Jewish nation. For example, in his meetings with the Philosophers Club, a group of Jewish men who

² *The George Eliot Letters: Vol. 6, 1874-1877*, quoted in Chimi Woo, “Victorian Others and Genre in George Eliot’s *Daniel*

Deronda,” *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, Issue 20.2, Summer 2024. <https://ncgsjournal.com/issue202/woo.html>

meet regularly to discuss the status of Jews in England, Mordecai says to them: “Revive the organic center: let the unity of Israel which has made the growth and form of its religion be an outward reality,” and to Deronda, “You must be my hopes – see the vision I point to – behold a glory where I behold it... [then] our race shall have... a heart and brain to watch and guide and execute; the outraged Jew shall have a defense in the court of nations, as the outraged Englishman or American” (Chapter 42). Moreover, Mordecai speaks to Mirah in “thou’s.” Evoking the King James Bible’s language, he addresses her as ‘thou’ four times in the space of two pages (Chapter 61). This use of the biblical pronoun is notable because *Daniel Deronda* is Eliot’s only novel set in her own time (1864-1866). Thus, Mordecai’s repetition of ‘thou’ seems intentionally biblical, if not divine.

I suggest that, as mentioned above, since the novel’s publication in 1876, respected scholars, including F. R. Leavis and Henry James, have not properly understood Eliot’s knitting together of her novel’s Christian and Jewish worlds; critics on both sides have insisted that the book’s two halves be published separately. (See Himmelfarb, 136-140). But Eliot insisted that everything in her text belonged there; indeed, that “it was all of a whole” (73).

Indeed, the mechanics of Eliot’s Exodus allegory appear as early as Chapter 4 (of 70) when Gwendolyn is described with imagery alluding to Pharaoh’s dream of impending famine (Genesis 41: 22-24): “Always she was the Princess of exile,

who *in time of famine* [should have] her breakfast-roll made of the finest bolted flour from the *seven thin ears of wheat*” (Chapter 4) (Emphasis added). Referring to Gwendolyn as a Princess anticipates her marriage to the tyrannical Grandcourt, and linking her to Pharaoh’s dream lends weight to his role as the novel’s Pharaoh figure. But most significantly, this passage evokes Joseph in Egypt, the genesis of Exodus.

Thus, if we pay attention to the novel’s integration of the Book of Exodus, its use of names (Shemot, meaning names, is the Hebrew title of Exodus), its use of Jewish history, and its impassioned arguments for a Jewish nation, we can see that in *Daniel Deronda* Eliot offers anti-Semitic England a way to avoid becoming Pharaoh’s Egypt. This is writ small when Daniel redeems Gwendolyn’s pawned necklace, and she later tells him twice, “It shall be better with me because I have known you” (Chapters 36, 69). In short, Eliot saw England’s acceptance of Jews as human beings as its redemptive path to becoming a more moral society, possibly the same sort of moral society God intended for the Children of Israel in the Book of Exodus. According to Himmelfarb, Eliot believed that the “Jewish Question” in her time involved accepting that “Judaism... was of a whole with the culture and history of mankind” (Himmelfarb, 73). She points out that Daniel “embodies the wholeness of Judaism” because he combines the virtues of an English Christian gentleman and a Jew. This puts a finer point on the Daniel-cum-Moses allegory, as Moses also embodied the virtues of an Egyptian Prince and a Hebrew.

Eliot's Names

Supplementing their roles in her re-imagined Exodus, Eliot's characters' names tie them to events in Jewish history, strengthening her biblically-based argument for a Jewish homeland. For example, Daniel, meaning "God is my judge," is the maternal grandson of Charisi, meaning "merciful grace," and the biological son of Leonora, meaning lion and light, and her cousin, Ephraim Deronda. The biblical Ephraim was one of Joseph's sons whom Jacob blessed and adopted, and who became identified with one of the twelve tribes and the founding of Israel. Thus, the fact that Daniel's father is named Ephraim anticipates the son's mission – to found the Jewish nation. And Jacob's blessing of Joseph's younger son amplifies the novel's themes of family, tradition, and leadership.

Daniel learns of his true parentage and heritage only because his grandfather's friend, Kalonymos, keeper of Charisi's chest of Jewish documents, happens to recognize Daniel at a synagogue in Frankfurt (where Daniel goes to learn more about Mirah's Judaism) and forces Leonora to tell the young man the truth of his Jewish identity. Historically, Kalonymos was a prominent Italian family in the Middle Ages and was responsible for spreading Ashkenazi Judaism in Italy, France, Greece, and Germany. In the Talmud, Kalonymos was the father of Onkelos, a convert who wrote the definitive Aramaic Targum (interpretive translation) of the Torah. (See [The First Families of Ashkenaz by Dr. Tamar Ron Marvin](#)). Eliot's Kalonymos's first name is Joseph, tying him, like

Ephraim, to the children of Israel's descent to Egypt.

Eliot's choice of the name Mirah Lapidoth for Daniel's future wife is also linked to Exodus, but in an ironic reversal. Mirah is a form of Miriam, the name of Moses' sister, who watches from the Nile's banks to ensure her baby brother is rescued. When she sees Pharaoh's daughter, the Princess, take the basket from the river, she further ensures that the baby is nursed by his mother ([Exodus 2:1-10](#)). Eliot's inverted allegory here is ingenious: Daniel rescues Mirah from drowning in the Thames and places her with the Meyricks, a kind but anti-Semitic Christian family who take care of her, just as Pharaoh's daughter provides for Moses.

The Mirah/Miriam allusion also consists of the young girl's connection to her long-lost brother, Ezra Mordecai Lapidoth, who instructs Daniel in Judaism and inspires him to help establish a Jewish nation in Palestine. Thus, just as the Egyptian Princess saved Moses and raised him as an Egyptian, so Daniel's mother saves and places him with Christian Hugo Mallinger, who raises the boy as an English aristocrat, promising to conceal his heritage. But Daniel and Mirah also save each other: she from suicide and he from a life without purpose. Yet Eliot's name symbolism does not stop there. Lapidoth was the name of Deborah's husband in the Bible ([Judges 4:4](#)) and refers to illuminating flames; he is Midrashically said to be so-called because he carried her wicks to the Tabernacle, which accurately describes Mirah and Mordecai.

Mordecai, of course, evokes the Purim story, in which he prevents Haman's planned destruction of the Jews, restoring their right to defend themselves ([Esther 8:9-11](#)). Eliot's Mordecai urges Daniel and Mirah to create a Jewish nation that would defend itself, as any other country does. Even though he is called Mordecai in the novel, his first name is Ezra, evoking the learned scribe and priest who helped rebuild the Jewish community and spread Torah after the Babylonian exile ([Ezra 7:11-25](#)). Here we see Eliot's deep knowledge of the Hebrew bible and Jewish history informing her characters and her intentions for them. (For thorough accounts of Eliot's Jewish education, see Feuerman and Himmelfarb.)

The Novel's Parallels to Exodus and Jewish History

Eliot's intentions for her novel are also evident in its numerous allusions to the Book of Exodus. In one of Mordecai's emotional speeches about the need for Jews to found their nation, he tells Daniel, "The Messianic time is the time when Israel shall will the planting of the national ensign. The Nile overflowed and rushed onward: the Egyptian could not choose the overflow, but he chose to work and make channels for the fructifying waters, and Egypt became the land of corn" (Chapter 42). Mentioning the Nile and a land of corn plants the novel in Egyptian soil, alluding to Joseph's interpretations of Pharaoh's dreams, foreshadowed in Chapter 4's reference to "a time of famine" and "seven thin ears of wheat," quoted above.

Although Eliot provides no burning bush per se, out of which God spoke to Moses in Exodus, ("And He said: 'Fear not to face Pharaoh, for I will be with you, and you will find favor in his eyes, and this **burning bush** is a sign for you that I have sent you'" ([Exodus 3:12](#)), she does offer this exchange between the just-saved Mirah and Daniel. He says, "You had a covering for your head." She replies, "My hat? It is quite hidden in the bush," to which he responds, " I will find it" (Chapter 17). The metaphorical bush turns out to be Mordecai, burning with a Zionist passion that not only does not consume him, but is kindled in Daniel and Mirah.

Eliot also repeats the word 'burn' six times in close proximity with regard to Leonora's temptation to burn her father's chest of religious documents. She confesses to her son: "I have hidden what was his. I thought once I would burn it. I have not burned it. I thank God I have not burned it!... Once, after my husband died, I was going to burn the chest. But it was difficult to burn; and burning a chest and papers looks like a shameful act" (Chapter 51). To my mind, Leonora's frantic repetition of the word harks back to the burning bush, and this, coupled with Eliot's use of the word 'stranger' to describe Jews some dozen times, also suggests intentional allusions to Exodus. In Egypt, the Children of Israel were strangers in a strange land; what Leonora didn't burn amounts to her son's heritage.

Daniel describes the chest's contents to Mordecai this way: "My grandfather, Daniel Charisi,

preserved manuscripts, family records stretching far back, in the hope that they would pass into the hands of his grandson. And now his hope is fulfilled, in spite of attempts to thwart it by hiding my parentage from me... Some of them I can read easily enough—those in Spanish and Italian. Others are in Hebrew, and, I think, Arabic; but there seem to be Latin translations” (Chapter 63). In other words, a chest containing the history of Daniel’s Sephardic family, a chest which he will take to Palestine, here represents Joseph’s sarcophagus and the Ark of the Covenant, which were also taken to the Promised Land. While Joseph’s bones linked the Children of Israel to the Abrahamic Covenant (as Joseph was Abraham’s great-grandson), the ark of the Ten Commandments linked Israelites to the Sinaitic Covenant. In this sense, Daniel’s grandfather’s chest preserves physically not only his family’s ancestral history, but also metaphorically its covenantal history with God. And it is literally handed down from generation to generation.

The ten plagues are represented by five of them, enough to alert us to the rest. In the novel’s chronology they are: 1) Pestilence, which appears in the novel’s epigraph, a warning to readers to

look into their souls, as “o’er the fairest troop of captured joys/Breathes pallid pestilence”; 2) Blood, when Gwendolen’s mother says of Daniel, “One would guess, without being told, that there was foreign blood in his veins” (Chapter 29); and when we are told that “pure English blood did not declare itself predominantly in the party at present assembled” (Chapter 42), describing members of “The Philosophers”; 3) The Cattle Plague of 1865 is mentioned in a letter from Daniel’s friend Hans Meyrick, referencing the English plague that was caused by cattle imported from Russia (Chapter 52); 4) Hail appears metaphorically, describing Mirah’s scoundrel of a father “as a man finding shelter from hail in an open cathedral might take a little religious howling that happened to be going on there” (Chapter 66); and 5) Darkness.³

When, bereft of everything, Gwendolyn settles into her new home, the narrator asks, “Does one who has been all but lost in a pit of darkness complain of the sweet air and the daylight? There is a way of looking at our life daily as an escape, and taking the quiet return of morn and evening—still more the star-like out-glowing of some pure fellow-feeling, some generous impulse breaking

³ One of the most significant interpretations of the order of the plagues involves 3 groupings of 3, explained by the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Yehuda, “whose mnemonic acrostic of the plagues, “d’tz’ch, a’d’s’h, b’a’ch’v”, divides the plagues into three groups” (See [Introduction to the Ten Plagues](#)). They are: 1. Blood, frogs, lice; 2. Wild animals, pestilence, boils; 3. Hail, locusts, darkness; ...And finally the Death of the Firstborn.

The first group is introduced with G-d saying, “[so that they know who I am.](#)”

The second group is introduced with “[so that they know I am in the midst of the land.](#)”

The third group is introduced with “[so they know there is none like me.](#)”

Eliot includes at least one plague from each group in the corresponding order, faithfully representing God’s intentions.

our inward darkness—as a salvation that reconciles us to hardship” (Chapter 69).

Of the twenty-five occurrences of the word ‘darkness,’ many of which apply to death, these two combine the hopelessness of a pit of darkness with fellowship’s ability to light an inward darkness, enabling us to cope with adversity. Egypt’s plague of darkness removed people’s ability to see; Eliot’s darkness removes her people’s ability to see within. It is also worth noting that these plague allusions apply in Christian contexts or to English Christians, Eliot’s latter-day Egyptians. The presence of half of Egypt’s plagues is perhaps the most recognizable Exodus element in the novel, alluding to the degree to which Eliot believed England’s lingering, even casual, anti-Semitism corrupted her countrymen.

Continuing her Exodus allegory, Eliot deliberately describes challah as “a memorial of the manna that fed the wandering forefather” (Chapter 34), and then turns her attention to Mount Nebo, the golden calf, and shattered tablets. These references place the novel historically in Jewish time, as does her poem written “in the style of Yehuda Ha Levi” (Chapter 38) to voice Mordecai’s cry of frustration at his inability to see his dream to fruition:

“Away from me the garment of forgetfulness.
Withering the heart;
The oil and wine from presses of the Goyim,
Poisoned with scorn.

Solitude is on the sides of Mount Nebo,
In its heart a tomb:

There the buried ark and golden cherubim Make
hidden light:

There the solemn gaze unchanged, The wings are
spread unbroken: Shut beneath in silent awful
speech The Law lies graven.

Solitude and darkness are my covering,

And my heart a tomb;
Smite and shatter it, O Gabriel!

Shatter it as the clay of the founder
Around the *golden image*.” (Chapter 38)
(Emphasis added)

Along with the manna reference, this poem places us squarely at Mt. Sinai as Moses descends with the tablets, only to see the people’s “golden image” and shatter them. (See Exodus 32:19) These shattered tablets also appear in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1854 poem “[The Jewish Cemetery at Newport](#).” There, the poet compares them to broken tombstones, preceded by a reference to the “Exodus of Death:”

And these sepulchral stones, so old and brown,
That pave with level flags their burial-place,
Seem like the tablets of the Law, thrown down
And broken by Moses at the mountain's base.

Longfellow then presents a compassionate recitation of biblical and European persecution of Jews, asking:

...What burst of Christian hate,
What persecution, merciless and blind,
Drove o'er the sea — that desert desolate —
These Ishmaels and Hagers of mankind?

[who lived in] “Ghetto and Judenstrass, in mirk and mire” and
“At every gate the accursed Mordecai
Was mocked and jeered, and spurned by Christian feet.”

Longfellow, Eliot’s fellow Englishman, distilled in poetic form Eliot’s philo-Semitism and disgust for history’s anti-Semitism. But where the poem ends with “And the dead nations never rise again,” Eliot’s novel ends with their resurrection in the Promised Land. In this context, the second set of tablets might be a fitting symbol of a restored Land of Israel.

Returning to Eliot’s poem, “The clay of the founder,” might also refer to God. However, Eliot extends the shattering of the Law to Leonora. (For Eliot’s Jewish sources for this poem, see William Baker, “[George Eliot’s verse in Chapter 38 of Daniel Deronda](#)”) . She is described as ‘shattered’ four times within two chapters during her

confrontation with Daniel, whom she hadn’t seen since he was two years old. She confesses to him, “I [did not mean] to be the shattered woman that I am now; that her second husband, Charisi, found her “weak and shattered;” that “Your mother is a shattered woman” (Chapter 51); and when mother and son next meet, she “look[s] less shattered than when he had left her” (Chapter 52).

Casting Leonora as a shattered vessel links her to the shattered clay tablets of Mordecai’s poem, which were, of course, replaced by a second set. In Eliot’s allegory, Daniel becomes those replacement tablets. For Mordecai tells him:

“You will be my life: it will be planted afresh; it will grow. You shall take the inheritance; it has been gathering for ages. The generations are crowding on my narrow life as a bridge... and the bridge is breaking. But I have found you. You have come in time. You will take the inheritance which the base son refuses because of the tombs which the plow and harrow may not pass over or the gold-seeker disturb: you will take the sacred inheritance of the Jew” (Chapter 40). The words 'pass over' alert us to the Mordecai-Moses connection, and 'gold seeker' evokes the golden calf. But Mordecai's intent here is to anoint Daniel as the next Moses, who will re-establish the Jewish nation in the Promised Land.

In fact, this association is further validated by Moses’ upbringing as an Egyptian and Daniel’s as a Christian English gentleman. In his book, [Founding God’s Nation](#) (2021), Leon Kass explains that, because in Egyptian Moses means simply

'son,' "[Moses] will have to earn the meaning of his name. He will have to gain his identity" (Kass 44). Compare this to Daniel's telling his mother, "I consider it my duty – it is the impulse of my feeling – to identify myself, as far as possible, with my hereditary people" (Chapter 53). Here, both characters must create their own identities. Kass also points out that "Moses can become [Israel's] champion and God's on, through, out of, and against his rearing as a prince of Egypt" (Kass 46). Compare that to Daniel's answer to his mother's scornful question, "What shall you do?... Make yourself just like your grandfather... turn yourself into a Jew like him?" Her son replies: "That is impossible. The effect of my education can never be done away with. The Christian sympathies in which my mind was reared can never die out of me" (Chapter 53).

Like Moses, Daniel must also forge his Jewish identity through his upbringing, including exposure to and absorption of England's pervasive anti-Semitism. For instance, we are startled to read: "Deronda could not escape (who can?) knowing ugly stories of Jewish characteristics and occupations; and though one of his favorite protests was against the severance of past and present history, he was like others who shared his protest, in never having cared to reach any more special conclusions about actual Jews than that they retained the virtues and vices of a long-oppressed race" (Chapter 19). These parallels are just a few examples of how Eliot's frighteningly perceptive understanding of Moses and Exodus

informs *Daniel Deronda* -- the character and the novel.

For Eliot, the stakes could not be higher. She wanted *Daniel Deronda* to "rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow men who most differ from them in customs and belief" (Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, quoted in Woo). To do so meant disrupting English fiction's myth of the Jew, to paraphrase Lionel Trilling. From Chaucer's "The Prioress's Tale" to Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, the image of the Jew has taken the form of usurer, Machiavel, or Judas. Trilling attributes the change to Eliot's realistic portrayal of Jews, who, "for the first time in English literature... are visualized not merely in the aspects in which they come in contact with Gentiles and the Gentile world, but in terms of their own life and their own problems" ("[The Changing Myth of the Jew](#)," *Commentary*, August 1978)). Trilling further asserts that Eliot "is the first to deal with the problem of assimilation." That is, she tackles the question of where in British society Jews actually stand.

Eliot's text is also faithful to the dominant images of Exodus's conclusion: the tabernacle and God's presence in a cloud. The tabernacle occupies chapters 25-40, and God's presence in the form of a cloud runs from Exodus [13:21](#) to [40:38](#). Building the tabernacle occupies nearly one-third of the book. Building God's House, as Leon Kass

observes, serves to unite the rabble of newly freed slaves by forcing them to be organized and work together for a common purpose (Kass, 457). In Eliot's view, Mordecai is "the tabernacle of flesh" (Eliot Chapter 42), and, nearly quoting Exodus, he says of visiting a Jewish family, "I dwell in their tent as in a sanctuary" (Chapter 40). Merging Exodus's Tent of Meeting and tabernacle casts Mordecai as both tabernacle and God, for he is the divine spirit that inhabits Daniel and leads him to the Promised Land.

The novel's cloud imagery is no less resonant with Exodus, in which God appears via a cloud. Near the biblical book's very end, for example, we are told that "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of YHVH filled the Tabernacle" ([Exodus 40:34](#)). Compare that with Mordecai's association of God with clouds, when he tells Daniel, "men have helped to prepare you, as Moses was prepared, to serve your people the better... and beneath *all the clouds with which our thought encompasses the Eternal*, this is clear..."(Chapter 63) (Emphasis added). Here, Mordecai seems to identify God's presence in clouds with the mind's ability to grasp the divine, suggesting that he understands the Children of Israel's experiencing God in the form of clouds. As such, Mordecai is Eliot's voice of God-as-cloud in a tabernacle of flesh. Thus, as God's cloud-like presence in the Tent of Meeting marks the re-establishment of the covenant in Exodus, so Daniel's embrace of Judaism and acceptance of his grandfather's chest/ark also re-establish the covenant. And near the very end of Mordecai's life (and the end of the novel), he pronounces,

"Where thou goest, Daniel, I shall go. Is it not begun? Have I not breathed my soul into you? We shall live together" (Chapter 70). This final biblical echo, this time of [Ruth 1:16](#), links the novel's end to the Children of Israel's future, and the future King David, Ruth's great-grandson, from whom a Redeemer is promised to descend. Eliot obviously had faith in Israel's spiritual and political future.

Conclusion

Yet her faith in Britain's spiritual future depended on its acceptance of Jews as deserving the same respect and opportunities that Christians enjoy. That is, Eliot sought in writing *Daniel Deronda* an exodus not just *to* a Jewish homeland, but *for* Britain itself: an escape from its centuries-long anti-Semitism, which she saw as corrupting the British soul. I hope this study has revealed the ways in which Eliot's Zionist novel echoes the original story in the Book of Exodus: *Daniel Deronda's* use of biblical names, evocations of enslavement by Pharaoh in Egypt, the rescue and raising of baby Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, Pharaoh's drowned army, manna in the wilderness, the giving and shattering of the ten commandments and their replacement, God's cloud-like presence in the tabernacle, and finally, the journey toward establishing a Jewish nation in the Promised Land.

While she used the Book of Exodus as a template, if you will, for her novel, my sense is that Eliot did not want England's Jews to flee. If they did so, the British would have no opportunity to cure their own "spirit of arrogance and contemptuous

dictatorialness” that Eliot termed “a national disgrace.” Paradoxically, she believed that her country needed its Jews and ‘others’ to teach her countrymen civil morality. Indeed, this essay’s opening quote, in which Daniel wishes to restore a political existence to his people, continues: “At the least, I may awaken a movement in other minds, such as has been awakened in my own.” This sounds as much like Eliot’s wish for her people as it does for Daniel’s.

The Trees of Eden and the Trees of the Siege: Conquest and Protection

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Chapter 20 of Deuteronomy outlines a series of laws about warfare, addressing the Israelite nation as they prepare to conquer the land of Canaan. One of these laws pertains to the treatment of trees during the siege of a city:

“When you besiege a city for a long time, waging war against it to capture it, do not destroy its tree¹

by wielding an ax against it. You may eat from it, but you must not cut it down. Is the tree of the field a human, to withdraw from you in the siege? Only a tree that you know is not for food may be destroyed; you may cut it down and construct siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it is subdued.” ([Deuteronomy 20:19-20](#))²

This translation reflects the interpretation of the Hebrew phrase *ki ha-adam etz ha-sadeh* as “Is the tree of the field human?” - in line with the Aramaic translation of Onkelos. Onkelos, understanding the phrase as a rhetorical question, renders *ki* as 'because' and adds the word 'no' to clarify the meaning. According to him, the phrase means, “Because the tree of the field is not like a man...”³

Rashi comes to a similar conclusion, by identifying *ki* with *shema* (“perhaps”):

“Is the tree of the field perhaps a man, that it could withdraw before you into the siege and suffer the afflictions of famine and thirst like

¹ As Robert Alter notes in [The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary](#) (W.W. Norton, 2018) on this verse, “The Hebrew uses a collective noun, in the singular.” While most translations use “trees” in the plural, I have chosen the more literal “tree” in the singular.

² NJPS translation, with slight modifications for clarity and alignment with the Hebrew original.

³ Shimon Heksher, in his book *Va’Ani Lo Bati Ela* (Mishlabim, 2015), 404, observes that Onkelos makes a similar adjustment in [Genesis 18:25](#), rendering the rhetorical question “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” as “The Judge of all the earth will surely deal justly.”

the people of the city? Why should you destroy it?”

While other commentaries on this verse, such as Ibn Ezra, Rashbam,⁴ and Ramban, explain the phrase differently, the interpretation of Onkelos and Rashi is the most widely accepted and appears to align most closely with the plain meaning of the verse. However, this interpretation, which frames the verse as a rhetorical question challenging the analogy between trees and people, raises a problem: if trees deserve to be saved because they cannot flee a siege like humans, why should this depend on whether they bear fruit for food?

I suggest that the unusual phrasing - “Only a tree that you know is not for food” - offers a clue. The verse could simply have said “only a tree that is not for food,” which would suffice. The addition of “know” evokes another tree associated with knowledge: the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

When we examine both the story of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3) and the laws of the siege, we observe that in each case, there are two types of trees, each with distinct regulations. In the Garden, we see how these regulations were preserved (or violated), whereas in the siege law, the regulations form a command for the future:

Garden:

Tree	Directive
Tree of Knowledge	Man was instructed to leave the tree alone (and not to eat from it) but instead violated the tree
Tree of Life	Angels protect the tree to prevent it from being violated (Genesis 3:24)

Siege:

Tree	Directive
Tree without fruit	Humans may violate it for the purposes of the siege
Tree with fruit	Humans must protect the tree to prevent it from being violated.

⁴ In his commentary on Deuteronomy 34:10 (as included in *Mikraot Gedolot “Ha-keter”*, ed. Menachem Cohen, Bar-Ilan University, 2011), Rashbam is even more critical of his

grandfather Rashi’s explanation of Deuteronomy 20:19, calling it nonsense, and claiming that only someone foolish and ignorant would think this way.

From this, we can draw two key observations:

- 1) **Trees without edible fruit** are analogous to the Tree of Knowledge. This connection is hinted at by the phrase “that you know” in the siege law. Although the Tree of Knowledge bore fruit that seemed edible - Eve saw it was “good for eating” (Genesis 3:6) - God’s command rendered it off-limits, as if it bore no fruit at all. Adam and Eve were meant to treat it as such, relying on divine instruction rather than their own rationale. As with other prohibitions in the Torah, the divine command redefines intuitive understanding, transforming what appears naturally permissible into something morally or spiritually forbidden.
- 2) **Trees with fruit** are analogous to the Tree of Life. Ibn Ezra’s alternative understanding of *ki ha-adam etz ha-sadeh* offers insight here: he interprets it as meaning, “for the (life of) man (comes from) the tree (that bears fruit.)”⁵ All fruit trees can provide life through their produce - not eternal life like the Tree of Life, but life nonetheless. In the siege law, humans are tasked with protecting these trees, mirroring the angels who guard the Tree of Life in the Garden.

Further linguistic parallels also link the siege law to the Garden story:

The phrase “you may not eat of it” appears in [Genesis 2:17](#), and its opposite, “you may eat from it,” appears in Deuteronomy 20:19; and the key words “man,” “tree,” and “eat” appear in both passages.

Through these connections and allusions, the Torah encourages readers to draw parallels between these seemingly unrelated passages.

The one missing element in the Garden story is the siege. After noting all the other parallels, we might expect some element reflecting a siege to complete the mirroring. While we don’t find it in Genesis 2-3, which describes the Garden, the imagery does appear in Genesis 1, where man is given a mission:

“...fill the earth and conquer it...”
([Genesis 1:28](#))

This command for conquest manifests in the wars humanity will wage, including the wars of conquest that Israel is later commanded to undertake.

Reinforcing this message, the next phrase in the

⁵ Ibn Ezra on Deuteronomy 20:19.

verse reads:

“...and subdue the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”⁶

A parallel can be found here as well. The Hebrew root *R-D-D* (to “subdue”) appears in [Deuteronomy 20:20](#) as “until it is subdued.”

The following verse in Genesis ([1:29](#)), after assigning man the mission to conquer and subdue, allows him to eat from *all* trees:

“God said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.”

However, as described by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (“the Rav”) in *The Lonely Man of Faith (LMOF)*, a very different message appears in Genesis 2. Instead of being told to “conquer and subdue” the earth, man is instructed to “work it and guard it” ([2:15](#)). Moreover, instead of being granted access to all the trees, one tree is off-limits:

“And the LORD God commanded

the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.” ([2:16-17](#))

We all know how the story ends: Adam followed the mandate of Genesis 1, disregarding either the variant reality (as suggested in *LMOF*) or the new restrictions of Genesis 2 (as some commentators propose). He conquered when he should have guarded.

However, whether one views the relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 as parallel passages or as sequential chapters, Genesis 2 does not negate Genesis 1. As the Rav argues in *LMOF*, there are situations where the rules of each apply:

“God created two Adams and sanctioned both. Rejection of either aspect of humanity would be tantamount to an act of disapproval of the divine scheme of creation which was approved by God as being very good.”⁷

Ignoring the boundaries between these two aspects is perilous, however.

⁶ Rashi, in his commentary on Genesis 2:19, quoting [Bereishit Rabbah 17:4](#), interprets the word *vayitzer*—“(God) formed”—as referring to the conquest and subjugation of animals by man. He brings a surprising prooftext: Deuteronomy 20:19, *ki tatzur*—“when you besiege.”

⁷ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, [The Lonely Man of Faith](#) (Maggid, 2012), 60.

One scenario in which the Genesis 1 mentality might override the sensibilities of Genesis 2 is in war. In the laws of the siege, the Torah subtly hints at the failure in the Garden. The Torah doesn't merely say "a tree that is not for food" but specifically mentions "a tree that you *know* is not for food." It serves as a reminder: "You gained knowledge by eating from a tree that wasn't meant for food - remember that story." In the military reality of a siege, it may be necessary to cut down trees that aren't for food. Yet the Torah's wording should remind the warrior of the first occasion in which a tree not meant for consumption was violated. This memory should lead to an awareness of the responsibility to protect life-giving trees - the ones that can be eaten from.

Another hint appears in Targum Yonatan's interpretation of Deuteronomy 20:19, which builds on Onkelos' approach. Onkelos had interpreted the verse as saying, "Because the tree of the field is not like a man." Targum Yonatan's Aramaic translation adds a crucial word:

"...because a tree in the open field is not like a man (able) **to hide** before you in the siege."

When the Torah states that trees aren't like humans, it's because they cannot hide during a siege. But who did hide? Adam and Eve, after their sin. No longer the mighty conquerors of Genesis 1, they had to hide because of their violations:

"...and the man and his wife **hid** from the LORD God among the trees of the garden" ([Genesis 3:8](#))

The Torah, addressing the warriors engaged in the siege, is essentially bringing them down a peg. While they are focused on the important task of "conquer and subdue" (as in Genesis 1), they also have another responsibility: "to protect" (as in Genesis 2). Outside the city limits, there are fruit trees providing life-sustaining food. These trees are echoes of the Tree of Life, and they need protection from humans who, in their arrogance, might violate them. But the command is not only symbolic: Israel is not entering the land to raze it but to inherit it, to dwell in the cities and live from the orchards that already exist. To cut down those trees would be to inherit a barren ruin. Just as Adam was placed in the Garden "to work it and guard it," so too the warriors, swords in hand and emulating the angels who guarded Eden, are charged with protecting the vulnerable fruit trees that will one day be theirs to cultivate.

While the parallels are clear, some questions remain. Why are trees entitled to protection, while cities can be destroyed during a siege? Even if trees and people are not directly analogous, shouldn't cities be afforded at least the same security as orchards?

This can be better understood in light of the

parallels we've drawn with the Garden. The themes of Genesis 1 and 2 continue in the verses immediately following the Garden story. After leaving Eden, Eve gives birth to a son and names him Cain:

"Now the human knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain [*Kayin*], saying, "I have acquired [*kaniti*] a man with the LORD." ([Genesis 4:1](#))

Cain's name, derived from "acquired," symbolizes the motifs of acquisition, ambition, and mastery that will define his life. He begins as a farmer, dominating the land and living close to his crops, in contrast to his nomadic brother Abel, a shepherd.

When God approaches Cain after rejecting his sacrificial offering, He uses the language of mastery:

"Surely, if you do right, there is uplift. But if you do not do right, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you can rule over it." ([4:7](#))

From all of this, we see that Cain embodies the ideals of Genesis 1, described in *LMOF* by the archetype Adam I. And just as Adam I is instructed with the combative language of "conquer" and

"subdue," Cain is told to rule over his inclination to sin.

Yet Cain takes his urge to rule in a different direction. He relates to his brother in a similarly aggressive way, ultimately killing him in a dispute. Though punished with exile after the murder, he doesn't fully abandon his path of dominion. No longer content as a simple farmer, he escalates his ambitions by founding the world's first city:

"Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then became the builder of a city and named the city after his son Enoch." ([4:17](#))

Judy Klitsner observes:

"In much of the Book of Genesis, cities are places of alienation: from the earth's natural goodness... The first biblical city is built as an alternative to the idyllic agrarian life before the earth was cursed in Eden... [it] is built by Cain, in defiance of God's command to wander the earth."⁸

Klitsner quotes Abarbanel on Genesis 4:17, who notes that the text refers to Cain as "the builder of the city" in the present tense, rather than stating "he built the city" in the past. This suggests that Cain remained in active rebellion against his divine

⁸ [Subversive Sequels in the Bible](#) (Maggid, 2019), 46.

mandate of exile. Similarly, the next city-builder, Nimrod ([Genesis 10:8-12](#)), bears a name that contains the root *mered* - rebellion.

According to Klitsner, this rebellious nature reaches its height in the story of the Tower of Babel ([Genesis 11](#)). To this, we might add that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah ([Genesis 19](#)) also serve as paradigms of wickedness, presented in stark contrast to the modest, nomadic lifestyle of Abraham, and initially, Lot (had he not parted ways with Abraham and moved to Sodom). Likewise, [Genesis 34](#) presents the city of Shechem as depraved, marked by the violation of Dinah and the townspeople's complicity, reinforcing the depiction of cities as morally corrupt environments. Later, the Torah associates the Canaanites with fortified cities ([Numbers 13:28](#); [Deuteronomy 3:4-5](#)) - the very cities that Israel will besiege, as outlined in Deuteronomy's laws of war. It's important to note that cities aren't inherently evil or destined for destruction. The Torah acknowledges that the Israelites will not remain nomads like Abraham but will eventually settle in the land, including in cities. However, these cities are branded as originally Canaanite:

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land that He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to you - great and flourishing cities that you did not build.” (Deuteronomy 6:10)

“When the LORD your God has cut down the nations whose land the

LORD your God is giving to you, and you have dispossessed them and settled in their cities and houses.”
(Deuteronomy 19:1)

This serves as a reminder that there is an inherent risk of adopting corrupt Canaanite ways when settling in “their” cities.

Later in the Bible ([Isaiah 1:21](#)), Jerusalem is described as once being a “faithful city, filled with justice.” This is certainly the model the Torah expects cities to follow. Unfortunately, even this description comes in the context of the prophet's lament over the city's current depravity.

Ideally, all cities would follow the model of faithfulness and justice. Under such circumstances, they would receive the divine reward, “Blessed are you in the city, and blessed are you in the field” ([Deuteronomy 28:3](#)). However, when the inhabitants of a city embrace a distorted form of the Adam I mentality - focusing exclusively on conquest and subjugation, as exemplified by Cain - they forfeit the preference given to them over the trees of the field.

There is another challenge that strikes at the core of the parallel between the Garden story and the siege laws. In both passages, we encounter trees that were not designated for consumption and can be violated. In the Garden, Adam and Eve violated the forbidden Tree of Knowledge by eating from it in defiance of God's restriction. In the siege laws,

the Torah permits soldiers to violate those trees that do not bear fruit.

Yet, this alignment isn't perfect. If the situations are meant to mirror each other fully, shouldn't it be forbidden to violate non-fruit-bearing trees, as it was forbidden to violate the Tree of Knowledge? Why, in the real-world context of a siege, does the Torah permit replicating the act that led to humanity's initial downfall - violating a tree that cannot be eaten from?

Perhaps that's precisely the point. We should not assume that we are meant to return to the Garden, or even aspire to a Garden-like existence. While the Land of Israel is described as a "land flowing with milk and honey," evoking an image of abundance similar to the blissful life in Eden, there are also clear signals that humanity was never intended to remain in the actual Garden. For example, even before the Garden story, the Torah introduces humanity's role in the broader world:

"No shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the ground." ([Genesis 2:5](#))

After the sin in the Garden, the Torah reiterates humanity's mission:

"So the LORD God sent him from the Garden of Eden, to work the

ground from which he was taken."
([Genesis 3:23](#))

This verse suggests that Adam did not originate in the Garden and was not intended to remain there permanently.

A close reading of the Torah suggests that even yearning for a purely Edenic life can be spiritually dangerous. The Torah associates various locations, recalling the transitive law in mathematics: if a equals b and b equals c , then a equals c .

For instance, when describing Sodom, the Torah compares it to both the Garden and Egypt:

"Lot looked about him and saw how well-watered the whole plain of the Jordan was, all of it - this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah - all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt."
([Genesis 13:10](#))

This verse surprisingly groups the Garden with two morally corrupt places, Egypt and Sodom. To underscore this point, Egypt is later contrasted with the Land of Israel:

"For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sow your seed and water it with your foot like a

vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing into is a land of hills and valleys that soaks up water from the rain of heaven.” ([Deuteronomy 11:10-11](#))

The commonality between the Garden, Sodom, and Egypt - their reliance on rivers for irrigation -- is presented as a contrast to Israel’s dependence on rain. While the Garden may have been a utopia, returning to the life that Adam and Eve experienced there is not the goal.

Reversing the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge is not a goal either. Once the tree was violated, returning to a pre-knowledge state is neither possible nor, perhaps, even desirable.⁹ We are burdened - or perhaps blessed - with the knowledge that altered our existence. The Torah shifts its focus from the unattainable Garden ideal to the reality of life beyond Eden: the protection of the tree(s) of life.

Achieving the proper balance between conquest and submission is a perpetual challenge. This challenge was present in the Garden, where Adam and Eve were tasked with both mastery and restraint, and it reappears on the battlefield, where the laws of war call for protection alongside conquest. As the Rav noted, this tension extends

into every aspect of human life. Towards the end of *LMOF*, he warns:

“Modern Adam the first...clings zealously to his role as majestic man exclusively, demanding the surrender of faith to his transient interests. In his demonic quest for dominion, he forgets that relativization of faith...will inflict untold harm upon him and his majestic interests.” (72)

The Rav is cautioning against a mindset that focuses entirely on achievement and conquest, dismissing the restraints that faith and moral integrity should impose. Such relentless pursuit of dominion inevitably leads to harm, both to individuals and to the very objectives they seek to achieve. This dynamic is painfully evident in the tragedy of Adam and Eve, who violated divine limits, and it is precisely the kind of outcome the Torah’s siege laws aim to prevent. The Rav’s warning, therefore, underscores that all people must navigate the tension between these two poles of human existence, ensuring that faith and morality temper their drive for mastery.

The Torah’s law to protect the vulnerable fruit trees offers a timeless message: even outside of Eden, both dimensions of humanity – mastery and restraint - must remain in equilibrium.

⁹ For an investigation of the consequences of attempts to return to that state, see my [Kohelet - A Map to Eden](#) (Maggid,

2023). I discuss Noah’s attempt (143-144) and that of Nadav and Avihu (144-146).

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