**Jewish Texts on Accompaniment Through the Ages**

**I. BERESHIT: ORIGIN STORIES**

**GENESIS CH 21, TRANSLATION: NJPS**

33 [Abraham] planted a tamarisk [eshel] at Beer-sheba, and invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34 And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time.

**RASHI ON BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SOTAH 10A**

“Pundak (inn/hostel)—to lodge visitors there. The [Torah’s] word eshel is an acronym for food, drink, and accompaniment, for [Abraham] would feed them, give them drink, and then accompany them on their way.

**GENESIS 29:34, TRANSLATION: EVERETT FOX**

[Leah] became pregnant again and bore a son, and said: Now this time my husband will be joined [yelaveh] to me, for I have borne him three sons! Therefore they called his name: Levi/Joining.

**FOR DISCUSSION:**

- What is the role of accompaniment (or joining someone on a journey) in these two stories?
- What are the similarities and differences between Abraham’s accompaniment and the kind of accompaniment (“joining”) that Leah is seeking?

**II. THE EGLAH ARUFAH: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

**DEUTERONOMY 21, TRANSLATION: NJPS**

1 If, in the land that the LORD your God is assigning you to possess, someone slain is found lying in the open, the identity of the slayer not being known, 2 your elders and magistrates shall go out and measure the distances from the corpse to the nearby towns. 3 The elders of the town nearest to the corpse shall then take a heifer which has never been worked, which has never pulled in a yoke; 4 and the elders of that town shall bring the heifer down to an everflowing wadi, which is not tilled or sown. There, in the wadi, they shall break the heifer’s neck. 5 The priests, sons of Levi, shall come forward; for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to pronounce blessing in the name of the LORD, and every lawsuit and case of assault is subject to their ruling. 6 Then all the elders of the town nearest to the corpse shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi. 7 And they shall make this declaration: “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. 8 Absolve, O LORD, Your people Israel whom You redeemed, and do not let guilt for the blood of the innocent remain among Your people Israel.” And they will be absolved of bloodguilt. 9 Thus you will remove from your midst guilt for the blood of the innocent, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD.

**RASHI AD. LOC.**

“Our hands did not shed”—Would it ever occur to you that the elders of the court are murderers? Rather, [they say]: We did not see him and [it was as if] we sent him off without food or accompaniment. And the priests say: This is an absolution for Your people Israel.

**FOR DISCUSSION:**

- Who are the different actors in this vignette? What role does each of them play?
- What responsibility does this text suggest we have to other members of our community and to visitors?
- How does this compare to your own beliefs or values?
III. MISHNAH: ESCORTING THE ACCUSED

In ancient times, murders were commonly avenged by a "blood avenger" from the deceased’s family. To mitigate this practice, the Torah instructs that a manslayer—one who kills by accident—flee to a designated "City of Refuge," where s/he would be protected from the blood avenger. The Mishnah in Tractate Makkot sets forth laws related to the Cities of Refuge.

MISHNAH MAKKOT 2:5

They send [with the manslayer] two sages, so that if [the blood avenger tries to] kill him on the way [to the City of Refuge], they can speak to him. Rabbi Meir says: [The manslayer] speaks for himself, as it says (Deut. 19:4): “This is the word/law of the manslayer…”

For Discussion:

• The Mishnah here lays out two opinions as to the role the sages play while accompanying the manslayer. What does each opinion teach about the purpose of accompaniment?

IV. TALMUD: HOSPITALITY AND THE DIVINE PRESENCE

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SHABBAT 127A

Rabbi Yochanan taught: Hospitality is as important as Torah study, for [the Mishnah used the same phrasing], “Because of guests” and “Because of the cancelling of Torah study.”

Rav Dimi of Neharde’a taught: Hospitality is more important than Torah study, because [the Mishnah first] said “Because of guests” and then later said “Because of the cancelling of Torah study.”

Rav Yehudah taught in the name of Rav: Hospitality is more important than receiving the Divine Presence, for Abraham interrupted his visit with God (Gen. 18:3) to greet guests.

For Discussion:

• How might hospitality and Torah study be related?
• How does this text align or conflict with other attitudes towards hospitality that you have encountered (in your own life, in American culture, media, etc.)?

V. REMA: WHO COUNTS AS A GUEST?

REMA ON SHULCHAN ARUCH ORACH CHAYIM 333:1

All shevut1 (work-like activities forbidden on Shabbat by the rabbis) that is permitted for the sake of a mitzvah is also permitted for the sake of welcoming guests. But they are only called guests if they are sleeping in your house, or if you invited them for a meal and they are sleeping in someone else’s house. If you invite your friend to eat with you, s/he is not called a guest and it is not a mitzvah-meal, just an ordinary meal.

For Discussion:

• The Rema both limits and expands the halachic scope of how we treat guests. What do you think is the significance of his ruling?
• How does this ruling make the Talmudic teachings above concrete and actionable?

The Shulchan Aruch (“Set Table”) is the most authoritative Jewish law code, compiled by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the mid-16th century and reflecting Sephardic practice. A Polish rabbi called the Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles, wrote a commentary called the Mappah (“Tablecloth”) that adapts the Shulchan Aruch’s rulings for Ashkenazi Jews.

1 Shevut means actions that are not part of the 39 classical categories of work (such as lighting a fire) but that resemble such work. The Rema in effect is allowing us to violate Shabbat in order to welcome guests, but only up to a point.
VI. MAHARAL: ACCOMPANYING THE DIVINE IMAGE

MAHARAL OF PRAGUE, NETIVOT OLAM, NETIV GEMILUT CHASADIM CH. 5

When someone sets out on the way and others accompany them, they give honor to the Divine Image by not letting them go alone. By accompanying them on their way, the Divine Image remains on the path. If people fail to do so, it is as if they had shed blood; they remove the Divine Image in which s/he was created, and this nullification is itself bloodshed. For it says (Genesis 9:6), “One who sheds a person's blood, his/her own blood shall be shed by a person, for the person was made in the Divine Image.” That is, the essence of bloodshed is nullifying the Divine Image in a person. Whoever does not accompany a person and show the proper respect—that is, who allows a person to go out alone—nullifies the honor of the Image that a person needs on their journey.

FOR DISCUSSION:

• In this passage, the Maharal adds a spiritual dimension to accompaniment, which prior generations had viewed as a quite physical form of protection. How does this affect your understanding of accompaniment work today?
• Have you ever had a spiritual experience while accompanying someone? Can you describe it?

Our Common Humanity From The Very Beginning

RABBI SHAI HELD, SPEAKING IN NEW YORK CITY AT A TRUAH PROTEST AGAINST FAMILY SEPARATION, JUNE 21, 2018.

Genesis 1, the first chapter of the Torah, is like a hymn to biodiversity. God does not just create animals, we learn; God creates animals of all kinds, leminem. God does not just create birds; God creates birds of all kinds, leminam. God does not just create plants; God creates plants of all kinds, leminem. God delights and revels in the sheer diversity of creation. And when you listen to Genesis 1 being read, you expect that when God creates the human being you will hear: vayivra Elohim et ha’adam b’tzalmo lemino—“And God created the human being in God’s image, in all its kinds.” But the word lemino, “in all its kinds,” is not there. And there is a reason for that. Because although the Torah will go on to defend cultural and linguistic diversity, it will not do that before first establishing that, in contrast to animals and in contrast to plants and in contrast to birds, there are no “kinds of” human beings. And so the fundamental lesson is—and it’s excruciating to [have to] say this—that Mexican immigrants are no less human than anybody else. That Central American asylum seekers are no less human than anybody else. That Muslim families seeking out a new life are no less human the anybody else.