

A Sliver of Light



Parshat Bo 5783

On Wednesday night, I got home after a long day and turned on my computer to look at my email. And sure enough, Google asked me to log in again.



Fine; I have a password manager. It would do it for me. But I discovered that I had been logged out of my password manager. Ok. No problem; I would log back in. But, my password didn't work.

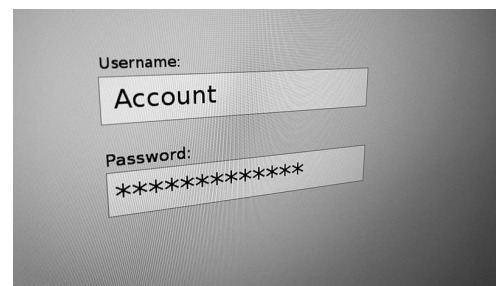
I had changed my password a few days earlier in an effort to be more "password responsible." And what I typed was wrong - I was off by just one "special character" or one digit or something. OK. No problem. I would reset my password by having the program send me a text message.

Seconds, minutes, went by. The text never came. I tried again. Nothing. I told it to call me. No call. OK. A small problem. But, I would just close all my windows, restart my browser and then I was sure I would get the text and all would be fine.

Just as I was panicking, I realized there was another window open on my browser where I could see my passwords. In order not to take a chance, I decided to write down the essential passwords (why I didn't cut and paste them into another file on my computer - don't ask!). An hour later, I had copied most of the important 16-digit wacky passwords, which made my eyes glaze over and my head spin.

I reset everything, was excited to fix all this, and even had insurance. I reset the password. I logged in... but now my account was locked. I had tried too many times. It was a bit of a dark moment.

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Sometimes things don't work the way they should or the way we want. Even a sort of silly thing, like losing easy access to all your passwords, can take you down a rabbit hole that can eat up hours.

And sometimes, it's something much worse. There are many ways we can find ourselves at the edge of despair. For important reasons and even for trivial ones. It's not always easy to roll with things. The darkness that seems far away can quickly surround us.



us.

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Darkness is a big part of this morning's *parashah*. The ninth plague. Darkness.

Unlike many of the other plagues, it arrives unannounced. It just descends everywhere - *hosheikh-afeilah* - a thick darkness. You could almost touch it. In our *Etz Hayim*, Rabbi Kushner comments that it may have been a spiritual or psychological darkness, a deep depression. Not so easy to escape.

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But, embedded in this *parashah* is also a glimmer of hope - if not a way out, then, at least, a way forward.

The first commandment the Israelites receive is not the Passover sacrifice or telling the story of our freedom, both of which would make a lot of sense. These commandments only appear further on in our reading. The first commandment is *Rosh Hodesh* - the commandment to mark the beginning of each month - in the lunar cycle.

The traditional explanation for why this is given a place of such prominence is logic: in order to mark sacred time, we need to be on the same page. We must make sure we all start counting on the same day - we all must agree when the month begins. That way, we will all observe Seder on the same night.

Before Google calendar or any calendar, we can imagine how critical this was - not to mention how awkward it would be to show up at someone's seder a day early... Not a great feeling.

But I want to offer another perspective on the new month. I want to look at this as a deeply spiritual commandment. Our rabbis wanted us not merely to start counting the

days of the month, but also to notice the moon, and they created a ritual to appreciate this new, waxing light.

The ceremony is called *Kiddush Levanah* - the sanctification of the Moon. It's not well known, as modernity pushed out the more visceral, the less "rational" parts of our faith. But that was a loss. This ritual has great power.



Kiddush Levanah is a monthly moment where we are supposed to go outside and look at the moon between the 3rd and the 15th of the month when the moon is getting larger and brighter. We recite a blessing, appreciating the beauty of nature and the hope that the light brings.

While this tradition bears similarities to ancient pagan rites from which it probably originated, there is a major difference. The moon is not a god which we worship. It is a spark; seeing it reminds us of God's sovereignty in the universe, the spiritual grandeur that is hiding in every corner, even on the edge of darkness.

Joyfully, we celebrate the renewal of light and hope. A new month reminds us that the world and all its possibilities, including new life, can suddenly open for us. We do not bless the moon, but are enraptured in a moment of Heschelianian "radical amazement."

A minyan of ten people is preferred for the experience, which can be shared with song and great delight. It can conclude with a hug, the Talmud reminding us the light should be brought right down into our relationships.

Its songs, including *David Melekh Yisrael*, invite us into a celebration that points to a Messianic Age. We are reminded that we need not be trapped in the darkness of our own doing or the darkness that descends upon us - that we have no control over.

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But we can search out the light.

The moon, and appreciating it, awakens us to the realization that we can break out of difficult places. While it may not be easy, there are slivers of light. Hope may not shine as brightly as the sun, but the moon is there.

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A more mundane sliver of light appeared to me on Wednesday. I was ready to give up on getting back into my computer, especially after trying to contact customer service - that never goes anywhere. And then I noticed a sliver of a button in the corner of my screen - "click here to revert to your previous password."

Oh.

That was good.

I remembered that password exactly.

I clicked, and after a few more hoops, all was restored.

Look for the sliver of light.