

Torah and Western Thought:

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At the end of Parshat Bo, before the children of Israel exit Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, God commands the still-enslaved people to tell the story of their yet-to-be redemption to future generations:

And you shall tell your child on that day, saying 'It is because of what the L-rd did for me when I went free from Egypt.' (Exodus 138)

In His Infinite Oneness, as Maimonides explains, ~

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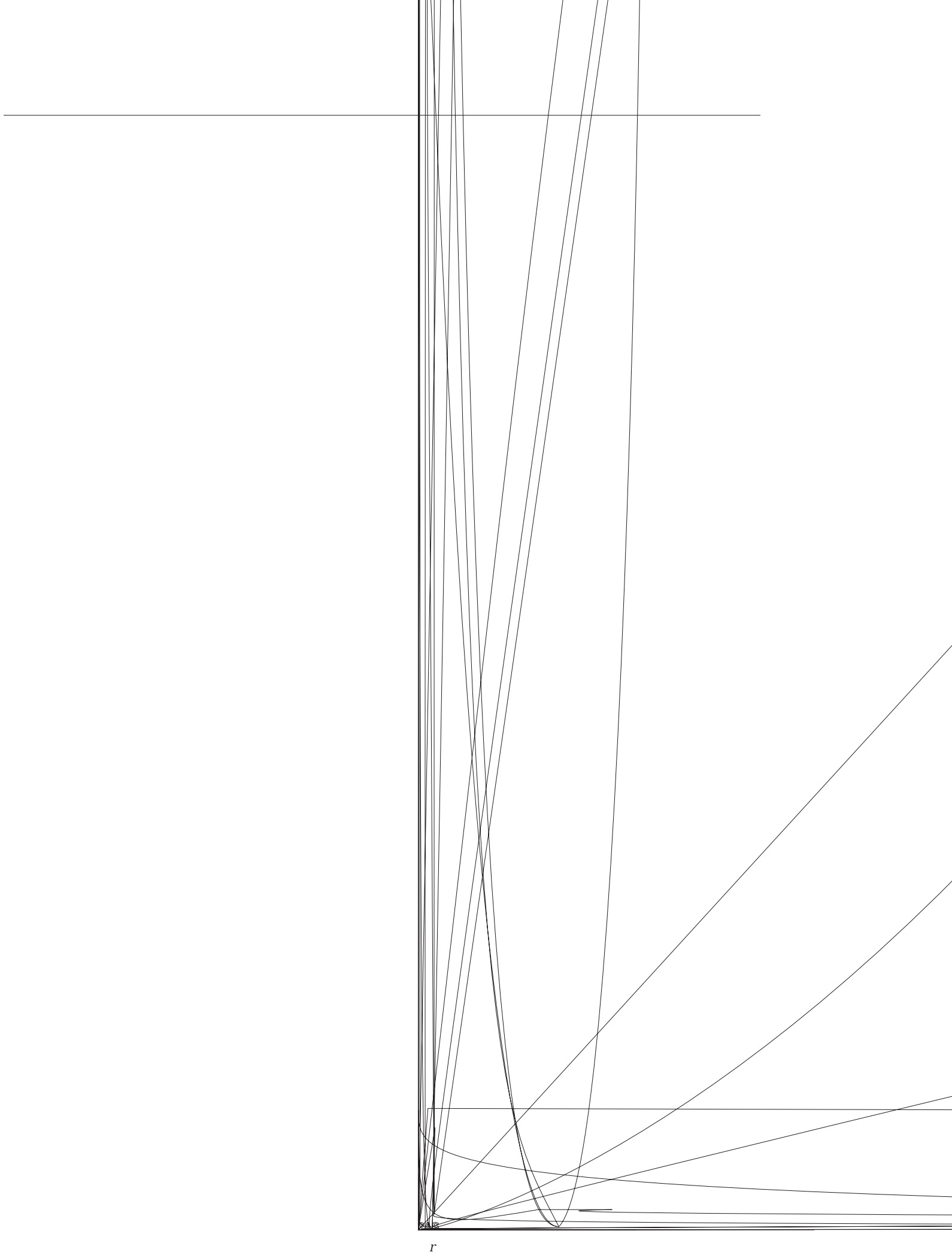
Over the last few years, gathering families and making Passover plans has been especially challenging. None of us know the future. Many have felt the pain of empty seats at the Seder table, as well as the joy of newly assembled high chairs. From the very young to the hard-wisdom won, the participants at the Seder present a range of ages, abilities, and attention spans. And with great blessing comes the great responsibility of handling the complexities of intergenerational communication with care.

One of the most devastating stories of a mismanaged parent-child relationship is captured in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The life of "[King Leir], ruler over the Britaines in the yeare of the world 3105 at what time Ioas reigned in Iuda," was recorded in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and other sources that Shakespeare frequently consulted throughout his career.

The play begins with the aged king's decision to resign the throne and divide his kingdom between his daughters while he lives so "that future strife may be prevented." Yet in forcing his daughters to compete for their portions—demanding each answer "Which of you doth love me most?"—he initiates a sibling rivalry that escalates to familial and political devastation. The youngest, Cordelia, refuses to flatter her father like her sisters, plainly stating "I love your Majesty according to my bond, no more nor less." Her honesty is met with incredulity. Lear prompts her to mend her speech and she continues, "You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I return those duties back as are right fit: obey you, love you, honor you," adding she hopes never to be like her sisters who have husbands but claim to love their father "all." Cordelia's instant and severe banishment activates the question that powers the rest of the play: what do children owe parents and parents owe their children?

Though Shakespeare often sidestepped controversy by setting his plays in the pagan past, Cordelia's use of "bond," "obey," and "honor" would have had biblical resonance for his Protestant audience. In the religious discourse of the day, the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother was a basic tenant of faith. In the time of the Israelites' exodus, it was nothing short of revolutionary.

In ancient Egypt, the nuclear family was the basic social unit. Monogamy was predominant, and census records show the average household included two adults and two children; sons grew up, married, and moved to start a new household. New couples would live independently from their parents.



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