“Our stories are our only map.” Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

“We can always rewrite the stories we carry around.”

**Warm-up:** sharing a tiny story from your life

**Life review: a transformative process**

**Recalling a Story from Your Life**

**Step 1**
Think about an anecdote/story from your life that has some “stickiness” to it, an experience troubles you (but not the most painful one). Try to remember salient points/details you’d want to include in telling the story.

**Step 2**
Write a brief version of the story you’ve chosen. Whatever you’re able to write in just a few minutes is enough. It can be a fragment. Every story is part of a larger story.

**Step 3**
Take a moment to think about why this story is important to you and how it relates to spiritual themes of life review we talked about earlier.
Midrashic Inquiry for Life Review

Midrashic inquiry can be helpful in uncovering meaning in the process of life review. Here are some questions to guide this inquiry. One might focus on a single question, or, over time, on many.

**Surface issues** (*p’shat*)

- What information or detail is missing from the story?
- Are there uncertainties or discontinuities in the story?

**Layers of meaning** (*remez*)

- How do the feelings, symbols, or images in the story connect with other stories or experiences in your life?
- How might the story be told by another player?

**Larger narrative** (*drash*)

- Why is this story important to you?
- Does the story reflect values or beliefs held by your family or community?
- How does the story connect with the larger Jewish narrative?
- Is the larger narrative problematic, or can it provide new meaning?

**Mystery** (*sod*)

- Who are the unseen players or forces in the story?
- Where is the Divine Presence in the story?
- What aspect of the story cannot be explained?
Exercise: Making Midrash on a Story from Your Life

Step 1
Use the questions we’ve just presented to reflect on your story. Choose at least one that helps you to find new meaning or perspective on the story/experience. Reflect on that question.

Step 2
Retell your story in light of what you discovered in this inquiry.

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Step 3: Choose a partner and reflect without revealing the content of your story on the life review midrash experience:

1. How did using this midrashic inquiry change the way you told the story?

2. How did it change the way you feel about the story?

3. How has your understanding of the meaning of the story shifted?

4. Was it healing to engage with your story in this way?

5. Is there any call within the story for your life looking ahead?

Resources

Aging and Judaism


Narrative and its Uses


Midrashic Technique/Analysis

Barry Holtz, Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts, Simon and Schuster, 1986.