


Text Study  Text Study – **א** – Aleph
Memory and Identity

In small groups, after saying the blessing before study, read the following texts out loud and answer the questions following each text

...A person is a small world.

The Midrash (of Rabbi) Tanchuma

1. What do you think this statement suggests about a person's life?
2. What are the aspects of one's world that determine who he/she is?

...If we wish to know about a person, we ask what is his story--his real, inmost story? For each of us is a biography, a story. Each of us is a single narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us--through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narration. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, we are each of us unique.

Oliver Sacks, Jewish neurologist and author of *Awakenings*

3. Share an example of an experience or an event that shaped who you are and became part of your "story." How did it make you a "unique" person?

In every generation one is obligated to see oneself as if s/he had gone out of Egypt. For it says [in the Torah, the Book of Exodus] "And you are to tell your child on that day, saying: It is because of what YHWH did for me, when I went out of Egypt."

From The Passover Haggadah

4. What is the benefit, do you think, of personalizing the Exodus experience? Who benefits? In what ways?
5. If we all share in the "memory" of this experience, how might that make us, as a people, unique?

Who Are These Jews?

There are women who sat in the market
selling beets and cabbages so their men could study;
they were Jews.

There were men of Yemen, great swordsmen,
guards of the king: they were Jews.

There are dark women from India, wearing saris,
Black farmers from Ethiopia,
Children with slanted eyes: all Jews

There are dressmakers and sculptors,
thieves and philanthropists, scholars and nurses
beggars and generals.

There are women who follow every rule of Kashrut
and men who know none of the rules,
yet all of us are Jews.

Though we are not alike in mind or body,
somewhere in the depths of our souls
we know we are the children of one people.

We share a history, a hope and some prayers;
We speak many languages;
We have heard one Voice:

All of us stood together at Sinai
When our past and our future
Exploded in thunder and flame before us.

Ruth Brin

6. What other events or experiences, in addition to the Exodus from Egypt and standing together at Sinai, do you think have helped to shape our people's Jewish identity?
7. To what extent is your Jewish identity shaped by the history of the Jewish people?