

SEASON 1

OLAMI MENTORSHIP

SESSION 4: A JOURNEY INTO THE PAST

DEAR MENTEE AND MENTOR,

There is perhaps no group of people in the history of mankind that is as knowledgeable and in-tune to their past history as the Jewish people. In fact, when David Ben-Gurion pleaded the case for a Jewish homeland, his most compelling argument was about our connection to our history. Here are his words: “300 years ago, there came to the New World a boat, and its name was the Mayflower. The Mayflower’s landing on Plymouth Rock was one of the great historical events in the history of England and in the history of America. But I would like to ask any Englishman sitting here on the commission, what day did the Mayflower leave port? What date was it? I’d like to ask the Americans: do they know what date the Mayflower left port in England? How many people were on the boat? Who were their leaders? What kind of food did they eat on the boat? More than 3,300 years ago, long before the Mayflower, our people left Egypt, and every Jew in the world, wherever he is, knows what day they left. And he knows what food they ate. And we still eat that food every anniversary. And we know who our leader was. And we sit down and tell the story to our children and grandchildren in order to guarantee that it will never be forgotten. And we say our two slogans: ‘Now we may be enslaved, but next year, we’ll be a free people’.”

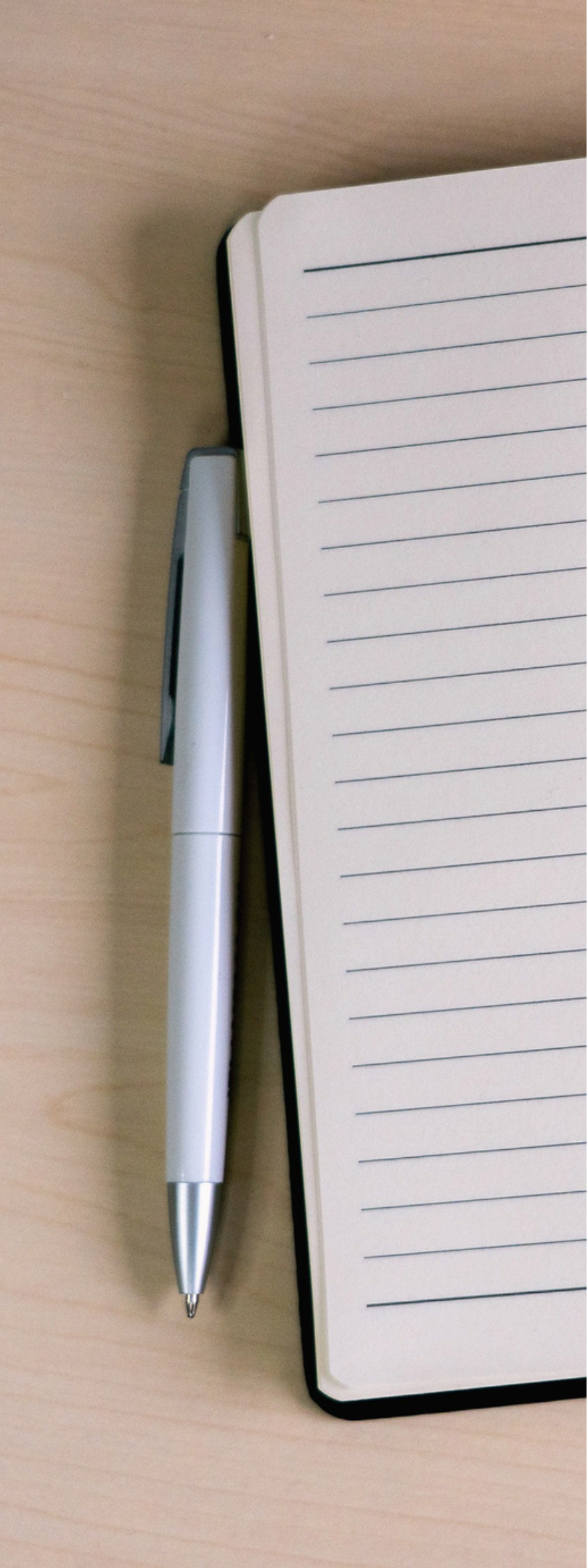
Devarim 32:7

Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of ages past;
Ask your parent, who will inform you,
Your elders, who will tell you.

זְכוֹר יָמֹת עוֹלָם
בֵּינוֹ שָׁנוֹת דּוֹר וָדוֹר
שֶׁאֵל אָבִיךָ וַיְגִידֶךָ
זִקְנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ.

The Torah instructs us never to forget contemplating our past and inculcating the lessons of our mentors, and of our personal and collective histories into our present and future objectives.

Finally, there is extensive research into the critical importance of ensuring that our children know and understand the oscillating family narrative of their past. The knowledge of one’s family history is one of the key components in building resilience and confidence in the younger generation. This session seeks to explore the importance of focusing on one’s past and the importance of building on that past to ensure a strong Jewish future.



REMINDERS:

- Check-in: How was your week?
- Goal check-in. Do you both feel on track?
- Journaling: The journal is a space to track progress and growth throughout this journey.
- Set a time for your next meeting.

PATH 1: STUDENTS OF HISTORY



Step 1:

Imagine that you walk into a delivery room immediately after the birth of a baby. You gaze at the exhausted but jubilant mom, at the grateful dad, and then you shift your gaze to the newborn baby. How would you describe that baby? Scrawny, wrinkled, miniscule? Now think deeper, what other words or adjectives come to mind when looking at the baby? How would you describe the essence of the baby? In theory, there is not much to describe about its current abilities other than the fact that it is totally helpless and dependent on its parents. Yet, if you take a step back, this baby was born with so much more. For within this baby is centuries of ancestors and their circumstances and experiences that ensured that this life could come into the world. It is also the dreams and aspirations of so many of its progenitors!

Step 2:

Try to personalize this perspective and think about the choices, sacrifices, and hopes of your ancestors that your existence represents. Talk about just the last 3-4 generations in your family. Your narrative may include the holocaust, exile, adaptation to new languages and lands. Now think about the values of your grandparents and great-grandparents, how closely do your values align with theirs?

PATH 1: STUDENTS OF HISTORY

Step 3:

As highlighted in the introduction to this session, the Torah actually directs us to do exactly what we described in Steps 1 and 2.

Devarim 32:7

Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past; Ask your parent, who will inform you, your elders, who will tell you.

זְכוֹר יָמֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שָׁנוֹת דּוֹר
וְדוֹר שֶׁאֵל אָבִיךָ וְיִגְדְּךָ זִקְנֶיךָ
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ.

Step 4:

Yet, our Kabbalah has a deeper take on this mandate:

The Almighty's benevolent activities extend globally from the time the universe was created. He provided generously for each of the various species on earth. "Ask your parent" to instruct you on how to learn history by reading the Torah carefully.

Tzror Hamor

It is not sufficient to merely contemplate one's individual history, but rather to consider one's personal story in the context of the infinite global aspect of creation and one's interdependence on every component of the Almighty's complex world.

THOUGHT QUESTION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE INTERDEPENDENT ON OTHER SPECIES? OTHER PEOPLE? PART OF A GLOBAL TAPESTRY?

Internalizing this concept gives one the ability to revisit the intricate tapestry of one's personal and collective history through a Torah lens.





Step 5:

Exercise 1

What specific factors do you think contributed to your family's survival from generation to generation?

Exercise 2

What role does your past play in your future or when making decisions?

PATH 2: HIS-STORY

Step 1:

A popular Jewish history teacher used to begin each school year by writing the following word on the board: “History.” He would then ask the students if they noticed something odd about this word. He would then share that he had capitalized the letter “H” in History to introduce the fact that when we study history, we do so to better understand “His-story;” namely, the Almighty’s remarkable hand in history.

Each Jew should fathom history “with the ears of Isaiah” – namely, with the focus on recognizing the Almighty’s controlling hand in history.

**-Rabbi Samson
Raphael Hirsch
(commentary on Deut. 32:7)**

Step 2:

The day after the expulsion, August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus left on his famed voyage of discovery. His diary begins:

In the same month in which their Majesties issued the edict that all Jews should be driven out of the kingdom and its territories, in the same month, they gave me the order to undertake with sufficient men my expedition of discovery of the Indies.

Furthermore, there’s no question that Columbus’ voyage to America was spiritually linked to the expulsion. Just as one of the greatest Jewish communities of Medieval Europe is being destroyed, God was opening up the doors of what is going to eventually become the greatest Diaspora refuge for Jews in history – America. This is another tremendous pattern we see in history: God making the cure before the disease.

**- Rabbi Ken Spiro,
History Crash Course #48**

Step 3:

Can either of the two of you share a historical incident (personal or not) in which one can clearly see His/story; namely the hand of the Almighty? Can you think about a time (personal or not) when G-d orchestrated a cure before the disease?



PATH 3: A HISTORY BOOK?

Step 1:

Imagine that you just purchased a brand-new Tesla. You are anxious to learn about its operation so you reach into the glove compartment and take out the owner's manual... Fooled you - Teslas don't come with a printed owner's manual, but you can access the manual via the car's touch screen. As you open the manual, you are struck by the fact that the first 25 pages are a comprehensive history of the life of Elon Musk and the Tesla company. How likely are you to read the history vs. scrolling ahead to the users' instructions? If you are like most people, you will jump to the instructions. With this in mind consider the following:

Step 2:

Rashi Genesis 1:1

Rabbi Yitzchak said: The Torah which is the Law book of Israel should have commenced with the verse (Exodus 12:2) "This month shall be unto you the first of the months" which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation? And the subsequent history of our progenitors and their history?

אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק לֹא הָיָה צָרִיךְ לְהַתְחִיל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה אֶלָּא מֵהַחֹדֶשׁ
הַזֶּה לָכֶם, שֶׁהִיא מִצְוָה רִאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁנִּצְטַווּ בָּהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּמֵה טַעַם
פֶּתַח בְּבִרְאשִׁית?

Step 3:

Can you think of an answer to the question posed by Rashi?

PATH 3: A HISTORY BOOK?

Step 4:

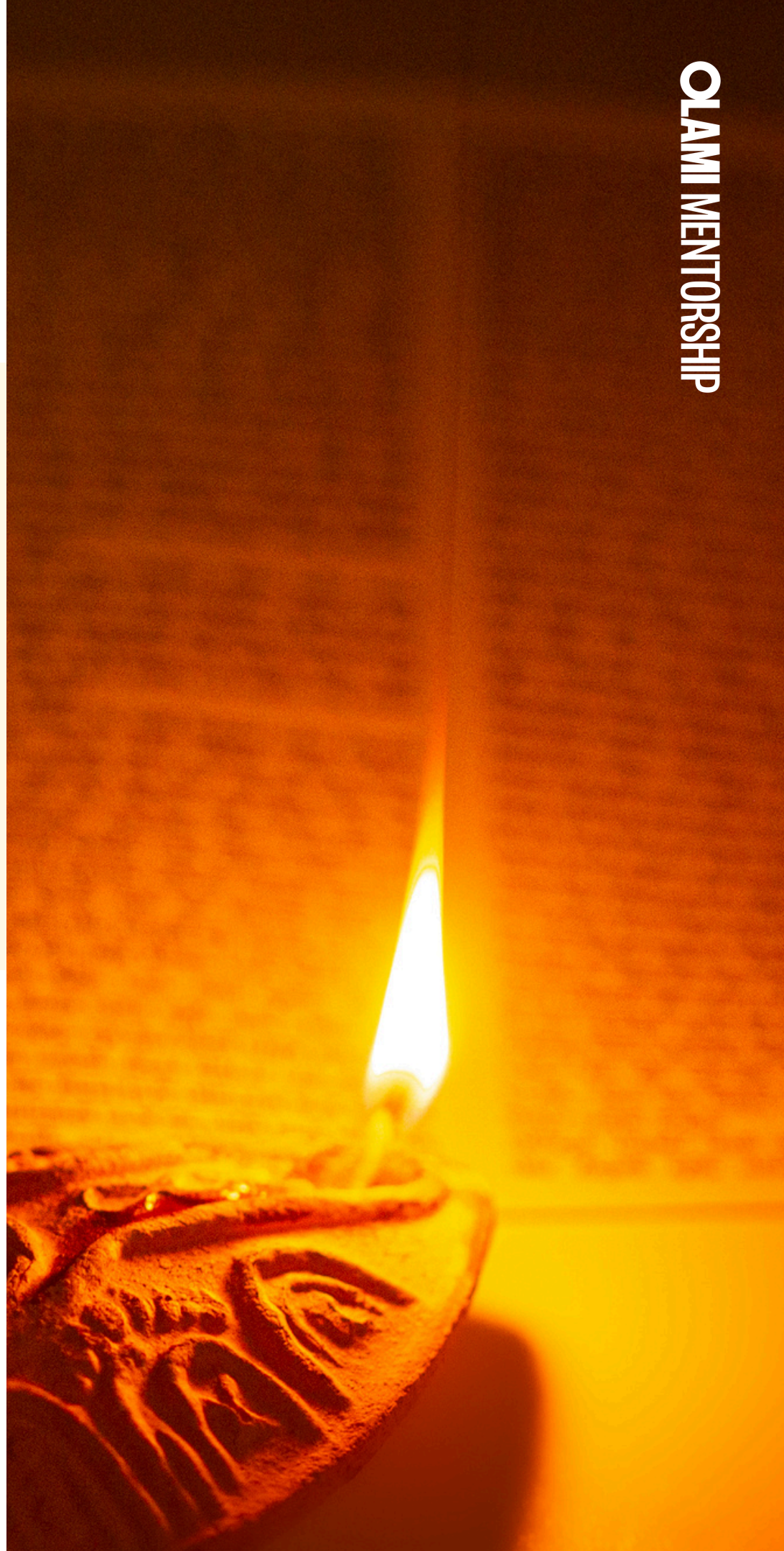
Torah is not a book of history, even though it includes history. It is, first and last, a book about how to live. Everything it contains – not only commandments but also narratives, including the narrative of creation itself – is there solely for the sake of ethical and spiritual instruction.

**- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,
A Living Book**

Step 5:

Can you think of lessons from your family history, the history of our nation, or even global history that you would include in an owner's manual for life?

THOUGHT QUESTION: DID YOUR COMPANY SHARE ITS PROFESSIONAL HISTORY DURING YOUR ONBOARDING PROCESS? WHY?



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