

# Dayeinu: an immersive Experience

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Source:

By Rabbi & Dina Brewer

Dayeinu is a highly counter-intuitive hymn.

Among its fourteen stanzas it proclaims that:

*Had God taken our ancestors out of Egypt, but not rescued them at the Red Sea, it would have been sufficient.*

*And had God rescued them at the Red Sea, but not nourished them in the desert, it would have been sufficient.*

*And had God brought them to Sinai, but not given them the Torah, it would have been sufficient.*

These statements make no sense. If God liberated our ancestors from Egypt only to allow them to drown in the Red Sea, would that really have been cause for celebration? And what would have been the point of leading them out to the desert, only have them starve? Or to bring them all the way to Sinai, only to withhold the Torah? Are any of these elements on their own really sufficient? Is the hymn just hyperbole?

Perhaps not. The reason it seems senseless to us is because we know how the story ends. We know that our ancestors have to end up in the Promised Land where they build God's Temple. And so anything short of that is a failure.

But imagine if we didn't know how the story was going to end. Then each separate episode would have been cause for thanksgiving. The Exodus would be a cause for celebration, because the Red Sea had yet to present itself as a terrifying obstacle. The overwhelming relief of being rescued from the Red Sea would be sufficient, because the harsh desert was not yet a reality. And coming to Sinai is a blessing in itself, for who could possibly anticipate the Giving of the Torah?

Dayeinu is an ingenious hymn because, by placing us squarely *in* the story, it allows us to experience what our ancestor's would have felt as the events unfolded in real time.

It does for liturgy what Faulkner, Joyce, and Wolf did for literature.

Dayeinu invites us to be grateful for the blessings in our lives, as and when they unfold. We have no way of knowing how our story is going to end, much less what next year, or even tomorrow, will look like. All we have is here and now. Dayeinu teaches us to live in the moment by cherishing each of life's blessings as we experience them.