A Shakespearean Seder

Elements of the Exodus in Shakespeare's Henry V

Dr. Paul Cantor, University of Virginia
Dr. Shaina Trapedo, Yeshiva University

Illustrations by Abigail Pinchot '22 Stern College for Women

Yeshiva University
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER
FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Introduction

Irony, suggested Rabbi Norman Lamm in a 1970 sermon delivered at the Jewish Center in Manhattan, may well be the central theme of Passover. Although Purim stands out as the holiday of inversions and twists of fate, Rabbi Lamm directs us to the dramatic climax of the Exodus epic, when the Egyptian army deploys a full-scale military operation to recapture—or else vanquish—the entire Jewish population. Pharaoh marshalls his mightiest horses, well-wrought chariots, and highly-trained charioteers to pursue the Jews to the brink of death, but the Egyptian king's trusted tactics prove false assurances. God's "right hand shatters the foe" (Ex. 15:6), and Moses and Israelites "sing unto the Lord for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider He hath thrown into the sea" (Ex. 15:1).

Pharaoh's army "brought to its knees by having the very source of his pride become his downfall" is more than just a twist of fate, Rabbi Lamm argues. It indicates a "measure of unexpected justice in the world." Unexpected by those who fail to fathom their own folly and whose overconfidence is undercut by God. Such a surprising turn of events demonstrates "that only He has the right to pride" and that blessing, strength, and security come from the Almighty. Instances of irony, Rabbi Lamm continues, appear throughout the Exodus account and are structured into the Seder. Although the Temple has been destroyed, so are those who sought to destroy us, and we gesticulate our freedom and enduring hope by adopting the Roman oppressors' "posture of leisure" as we lean to the left around our tables. The Egyptians who drowned Israelite infants to thwart the nation's future went to their own watery graves, and to this day, the Seder centers around children, inviting their curiosity and precious participation in Jewish continuity. "Seen in this light," Rabbi Lamm finds, "irony possesses enormous moral significance. To open up oneself to the awareness of irony in history is to acknowledge the limitation of man in the face of God, the ultimate victory of divine justice, and the inscrutable presence of God in the affairs of mankind."

We might also find a touch of irony in the fact that Edward I expelled the Jews from England in 1290, yet English monarchs and their supporters continued to use the sacred texts of a scattered nation to solidify their own authority. Early English kings consistently turned to the Hebrew Bible to legitimize their "divine right" to rule and glean guidance on governance and leadership from figures like Moses, Joshua, David, and Esther. This practice of drawing credibility and inspiration from Hebrew scriptures permeated early English culture, including the popular entertainment of the time. Even though today Shakespeare's literary legacy today is tied to tragedies

like *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, it is his history plays that launched his career in the 1590s. In works such as *Henry V*, Shakespeare acknowledges the influence of the Hebrew Bible on England's history and leadership through the verbal echoes and allusions he laces into his lines.

In depicting the inner lives and national challenges of English monarchs, Shakespeare tackled critical questions of his day. What is the relationship between religion and politics? Is success achieved through strategy or spirituality? Does focusing on the past hinder or hasten human flourishing?

The value of the Hebrew Bible's approach to such perennial imperatives has been embraced for centuries—even when its people have not. And we take comfort and inspiration in knowing that the "same Finger of God first revealed at Egypt [is] ever active" in human affairs, to borrow Rabbi Lamm's words, directing history toward the inevitable turn toward justice and restoration.

This ebook is adapted from a conversation between Dr. Paul Cantor and Dr. Shaina Trapedo originally released as an episode of ***Twice Blest***, a podcast exploring Shakespeare and the Hebrew Bible from the Zahava and Moshael Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University. Hosted by Dr. Trapedo, *Twice Blest* brings listeners conversations with faith leaders, scholars, and writers that bridge the wisdom of Judaic and classical texts so we can live more informed and fulfilling intellectual and spiritual lives.

Dr. Paul Cantor, who passed away in February 2022, was the Clifton Waller Barrett Professor of English at the University of Virginia. For over forty years, he shaped Shakespeare scholarship. His earliest publications illuminated the influence of ancient Rome on Shakespeare's early modern plays, and his engaging lectures "Shakespeare and Politics" are available online through the Great Thinkers project. In this discussion of *Henry V*, Dr. Cantor unpacks the influence of early Israelite leaders, including Moses, Joshua, and David, on Shakespeare's compelling and complex representation of English sovereignty. May his memory be a blessing.

Citations from Shakespeare's *Henry V* are from The Folger Shakespeare. Ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library.
https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/henry-v/

A Shakespearean Seder:
Elements of the Exodus in Shakespeare's *Henry V*

TRAPEDO: *Although there is some debate when it comes to dating Shakespeare's plays, most scholars agree that his first commercial successes came in the early 1590s with his works depicting the reign of Henry VI, who lived from 1421 to 1471. Throughout his career, Shakespeare summoned former English kings to flourishing Elizabethan stages, dramatically representing the lives of King John, Richard II, Richard III, and Henrys IV, V, VI, and VIII. The vast majority of these plays about deceased sovereigns either open with the king striding the stage or his courtiers and nobles keeping counsel close by. Right away, the audience is meant to feel as if they have immediate and intimate access to royalty.* Henry V, *though, is a bit different. Shakespeare makes us wait for it. Instead, the play opens with a conversation between two clerics, the Bishop of Ely and the Archbishop of Canterbury, discussing a proposed bill threatening church revenue.*

BISHOP OF CANTERBURY
If it pass against us,
We lose the better half of our possession,
For all the temporal lands which men devout
By testament have given to the Church
Would they strip from us… Thus runs the bill.

BISHOP OF ELY
This would drink deep.

BISHOP OF CANTERBURY
'Twould drink the cup and all…

BISHOP OF ELY
But, my good lord,
How now for mitigation of this bill
Urged by the Commons? Doth his Majesty
Incline to it or no?

BISHOP OF CANTERBURY
He seems indifferent,
Or rather swaying more upon our part (Act 1, Scene 1)

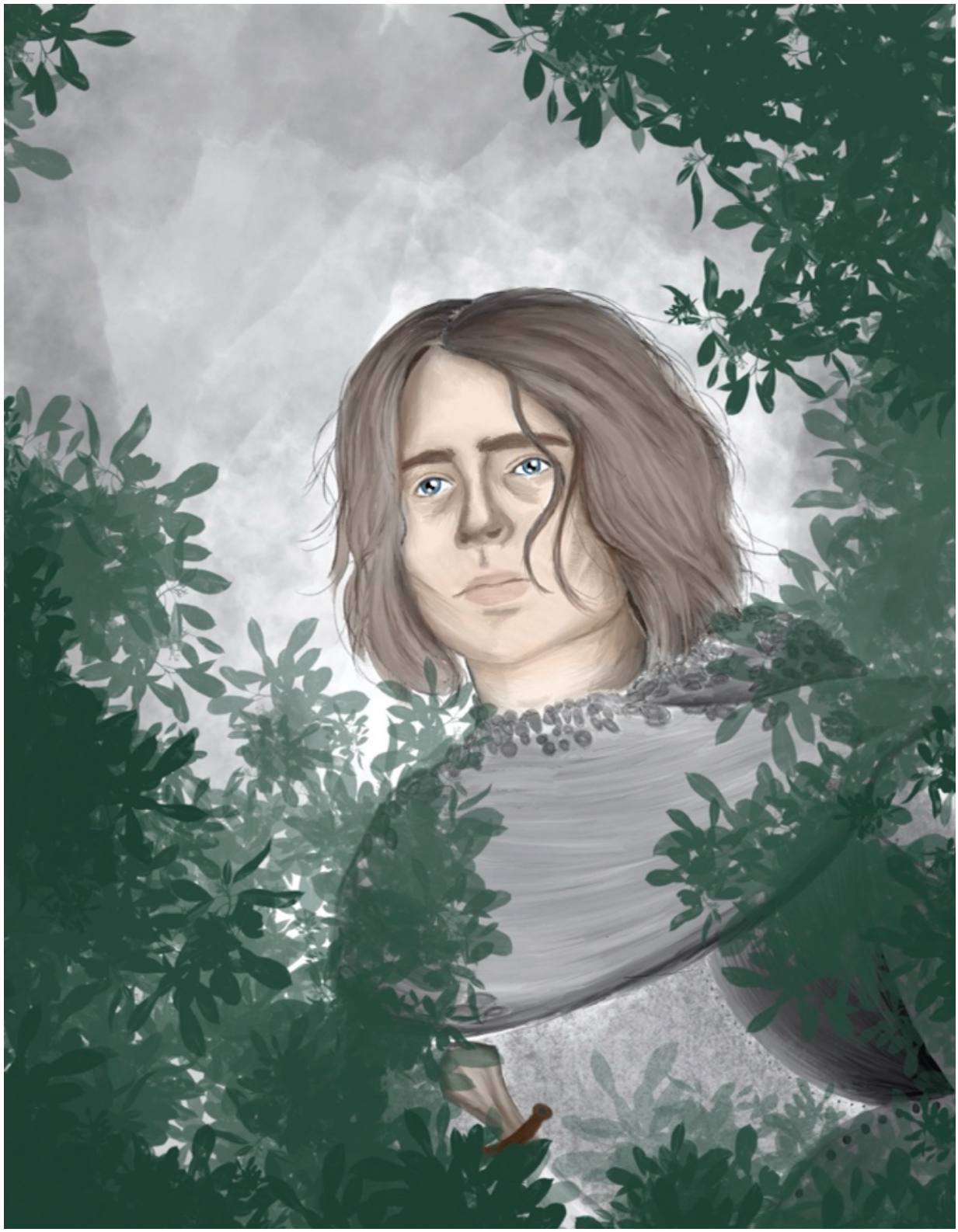
This conversation goes on for the first hundred lines of the play, and it seems like a strange place to start for a drama that, as the Chorus promises, will present "kingdom… princes… monarchs… [and] the warlike Harry." Before getting into the more specific instances of the Hebrew Bible's appearance and influence on the play itself, what are your thoughts on this

scene and its significance? What might Shakespeare be suggesting about the relationship between politics and religion?

CANTOR: Shakespeare is highlighting religion as a central issue of politics. I kind of fell out of my chair the first time I read this scene because it's so extraordinary. It's not a simple presentation of a bishop and archbishop. They sound like Exxon lobbyists getting ready to deal with Congress. And indeed that's Shakespeare's point. It is actually a fundamental point throughout the history plays, but in some ways, it culminates here.

One of the key questions of England's history—and the foundation of what, for Shakespeare, was the modern English idea of kingship—was how to deal with the problem with the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church looked very different in Henry V's day than it does now. It was infinitely more powerful. In England, it owned huge amounts of land. It had a tremendous amount of revenue, arguably was richer than the king himself, and it had an allegiance to the papacy, which looked like a foreign power to England. The papacy was then a political unit and far larger than the mere Vatican now. And so, one of the issues that Shakespeare's plays about English kings have to address is how to deal with the Catholic Church.

[Henry V was king of England for a relatively short time, 1413 to 1422, and long gone by the time Shakespeare dramatized his conquests in 1599, when Elizabeth I was on the throne.] Yet, in the opening of *Henry V*, Shakespeare shows his audience what they already knew was to be England's final resolution of the Catholic problem in the mid-1530s: namely, Henry VIII breaking from the Church and taking the country Protestant. In some ways, more importantly, it meant seizing all the Church's land, especially the very wealthy monasteries, and using that land to create a whole new set of aristocrats who would be directly loyal to Henry VIII. Now, in the play, Henry V does not do that, but he's on the verge of doing it. It's exactly what the bishop and the archbishop were worried about. It's the first thing they focus on: the loss of the land that they mentioned that could support a whole number of dioceses. And so, by threatening the Catholic Church (represented in the figures of Ely and Canterbury) with what we might call the nuclear option today, Henry gets them to back off and give him what he wants, namely, the religious justification to go to war with France. He would very much like a holy war and the chance to gain a new legitimacy for his regime by appearing to lead the country with God's support against the French. So it's a really brilliant scene in the sense that it introduces us immediately to what Shakespeare saw as a key element to the policy the English kings had brought to fruition, namely to create the national Church of England.



King Henry V

TRAPEDO: *That rich context that sets us up to notice the play's investment in gaining legitimacy through "religious justification," to use your words, or at least the appearance of God's support in war. And this is especially interesting when we keep in mind that Henry V is a play about an early 15th-century English monarch written for a late 16th-century Protestant audience who already knows what happens. In what follows, the archbishop, at great length, indeed lays out the basis for Henry's right to take the French throne, summarizing decades of political conflict and royal succession. Eventually, Henry interrupts and presses the cleric for a direct yes or no.*

KING HENRY
May I with right and conscience make this claim?

BISHOP OF CANTERBURY
The sin upon my head, dread sovereign,
For in the Book of Numbers is it writ:
"When the man dies, let the inheritance
Descend unto the daughter." Gracious lord,
Stand for your own, unwind your bloody flag,
Look back into your mighty ancestors. (Act 1, Scene 2)

As Naseeb Shaheen and other careful readers of Shakespeare and the Bible have noted, the archbishop's assurance of the "sin upon my head" echoes a phrase that appears throughout the Hebrew Bible in Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Esther, and Psalms. For instance, in the book of Joshua, in return for Rahab's assistance, the spies sent by Joshua promise that her family will be spared when Jericho is taken but warn that if anyone ventures outside the doors of her house, damo b'rosho*, "his blood will be on his head"; they add, however, that if a hand is laid on anyone who remains in the house,* damo b'rosheinu*, "his blood shall be on our head" (Joshua 2:19). Later in the play, when Henry V disguises himself and spies on his own soldiers the night before the Battle of Agincourt to gauge the mood and mindset of his troops, an iteration of this phrase is used.*

KING HENRY
The King is not bound
to answer the particular endings of his soldiers, the
father of his son, nor the master of his servant, for
they purpose not their death when they purpose
their services... Besides, there is no king, be his cause
never so spotless... with all unspotted soldiers.
Some, peradventure, have on them the guilt...
Now, if these men have defeated the
law and outrun native punishment, though they can

outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God.
War is His beadle, war is His vengeance, so that here
men are punished for before-breach of the King's
laws in now the King's quarrel… Every subject's duty is
the King's, but every subject's soul is his own…

WILLIAMS 'Tis certain, every man that dies ill, **the ill
upon his own head**; the King is not to answer it. (Act 4, Scene 1)

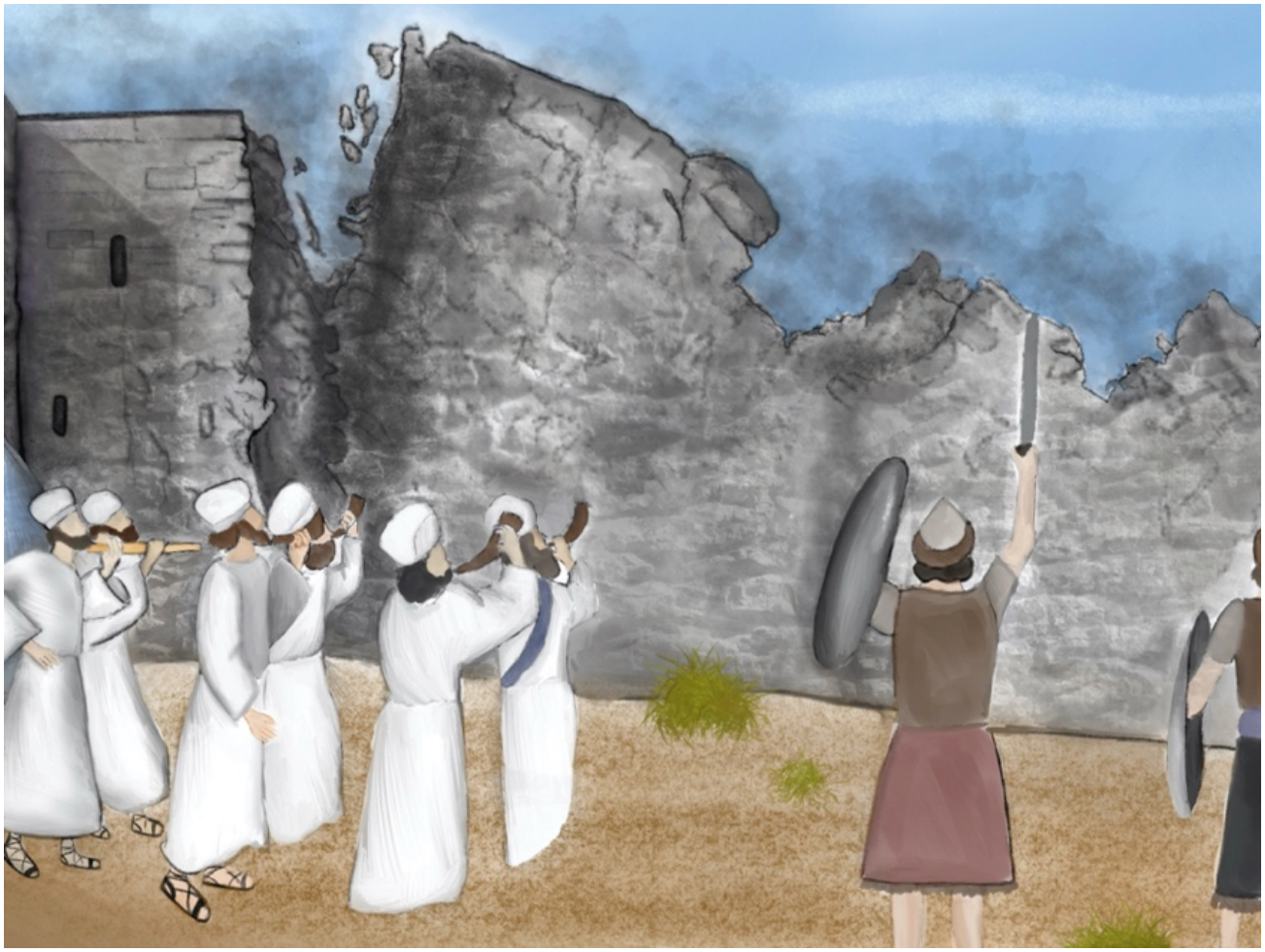
I may be overreading these reverberations here, but what do you make of Shakespeare's use of this biblical trope that takes up the responsibility or accountability of leaders, soldiers, and individuals in times of war and conquest? And perhaps more broadly, how do you see the early Israelite narrative working here in an English history play?

CANTOR: Well, I don't think you're overreading it at all. In fact, some very astute commentators on *Henry V* have shown how the whole book of Joshua was very much in the background. For example, Joshua's besieging cities and the policy he uses to do that are very much paralleled by Henry V. In fact, one critic has pointed out that if you go to Deuteronomy and see God's instructions for the siege, Henry V follows them to every point—except one. As a military strategy, the cruelty of sieges lies in what to do when a city resists. Namely, kill everyone. But Henry V avoids having to do that precisely by threatening the French town of Harfleur with that outcome, which scares them into surrendering. So in general, so much of what goes on in this play is sketched out in the book of Joshua, including the issue of spying. Spying is so crucial in the book of Joshua, as seen in the whole incident with Rahab. Henry is a master at spying. He spies on his nobles and uncovers a plot against him. He spies on his own troops the night before the battle to see what the morale is, and so on.

It's very interesting that the one time that Henry V addresses God directly, he uses "God of battles," which is very similar to the biblical "Lord of Hosts" and is not the most preferred Christian way of addressing God.

KING HENRY
O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts.
Possess them not with fear. Take from them now
The sense of reck'ning or th' opposèd numbers
Pluck their hearts from them. Not today, O Lord,
O, not today, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown.
I Richard's body have interrèd new
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
Than from it issued forcèd drops of blood.

Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay
Who twice a day their withered hands hold up
Toward heaven to pardon blood. And I have built
Two chantries where the sad and solemn priests
Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do—
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
Since that my penitence comes after all,
Imploring pardon. (Act 4, Scene 1)



The Siege of Jericho

Henry is essentially asking for forgiveness for his father's murder of Richard II. He addresses "God of battles," a distinctly Old Testament phrase, and I think that is very significant that what we're seeing in this play is a notion of God who is fundamentally manifest in the victories of that nation over its enemies. I think Shakespeare sensed a problem with the Christian God as a God of battles, given all this emphasis on peace and forgiveness in Christianity. There's this wonderful

Irishman in *Henry V*, Macmorris, who, at one point says, "I would have blowed up the town, so Chrish save me," (Act 3, Scene 2). It's such a contradiction! Here's this aggressive man seeking divine help to enact violence. Only Shakespeare could have written that line, and I've never seen anyone notice the oddness of it. But Shakespeare made the point that we are lucky that some of our soldiers have a Christianity that runs only skin deep. If they were profoundly Christian, they wouldn't be blowing up towns. That you need a certain kind of hypocrisy to be a valiant soldier in a Christian regime. So in some ways, I think Shakespeare is looking for cover under the Hebrew Bible as something that has authority with Christians, and yet presents a very different view of war, and in fact, has a "God of battles."

TRAPEDO: *I agree that Henry offering a prayer, as it were, to the "God of battles" strikes us as odd here, especially from a figure in the play where the Chorus tells us is "a mirror of all Christian kings" (Prologue). But to me, it seems more pagan than Jewish. Really, we are offered such a strange English translation of a Hebrew term here as Shakespeare tries to invoke the Hebrew Bible and link his Henry to early Israelite leaders. Steven Marx, in his book* Shakespeare in the Bible*, explores the influences of Moses and Joshua and David in* Henry V*, and he notes this divine epithet "God of battles" as a derivative or translation of the Hebrew term "*Hashem tzivaot*," which Shakespeare would have seen in translations available in his time as "Lord of Hosts," an archaic military word for "army" or "legions."*

*There are various names for God in the Hebrew Bible and extensive commentary which discusses how each name encapsulates a different attribute of the divine essence: one name invokes God's wisdom, another compassion, and another justice, and so forth. But I do think it is worth noting, at this point, that the name "*Hashem tzivaot*," which would have appeared in the English Bibles of Shakespeare's time as "Lord of Hosts," doesn't actually appear at all in the Five Books of Moses, which might run contrary to popular belief. It's much more prevalent in the later Prophets. The words "*tzava*" or "*tzivaot*", when they do appear, can be understood as "troops" or "legions," but can also be used to mean "tasks," "masses," or "multitudes." And as one of the names of God to appear in the Hebrew Bible, it is discussed in the Talmud and has its own Jewish exegetical tradition. It even features prominently in Hasidic philosophy. But some commentators have said this name "*Hashem Tzivaot*," understood as "God of multitudes" rather than "battles," underscores God's omnipotence—God as commander of all creation from Heaven to Earth. So if Shakespeare is following the cultural-political trend of his time that was linking early English experience with the Israelites, who were transitioning from an enslaved people emancipated by God to a nation of God who was with them in battles, then I see how he got here.*

CANTOR: And so indeed, the notion of God and the nation going together, that's what Henry brings about in this play. And this business of “sin upon my head,” it’s very characteristic of Henry that he's always trying to transfer the sin off his head to somebody else's. He’s pretty clever in that way.

In the first act, he gets the archbishop to take the blame for the war on France, essentially first giving the go-ahead and then basically getting him to say that if it goes wrong, blame me. That’s very convenient for Henry. In the second act, when Henry discovers that three nobles have been plotting against him, he first asks for advice on how to handle traitors. After they suggest traitors should be killed, Henry says, by the way, you are the traitors, and I’m going to have you executed. And they’re stuck. They’ve just endorsed their own capital sentence. Similarly, Henry V has an extended conversation or struggle with some of the soldiers while he’s disguised. Without realizing they are talking to the king, some of them claim that if they die in an unjust war, it's Henry’s fault. Henry goes through all sorts of Sophistic reasoning to reverse that belief. And with the town of Harfleur, he gives them a choice. If they surrender, they’ll be okay, and if they don’t surrender, he’ll kill all of them, but it will be their own fault since he’s given them an out. So I think Shakespeare sees here the psychological point that it’s an enormous burden for a king to carry: whether the sin is on my head or on your head. It’s very fundamental to Henry in the play.

TRAPEDO: *That's very interesting since the book of Joshua shows us a series of moral dilemmas for leadership. And each episode reinforces that military success is, first, collective, and second, not about might. It's about faithfulness to God's covenant. But if Henry insists that he's not responsible for the lives that might be lost on the battlefield, can he still turn around and claim responsibility for what transpires in the event of a victory?*

CANTOR: It's a two-fold strategy, really. He wants to gain credit for the battle but not claim it. And I think he knows he is going to get credit for this battle. I mean, he is the king. He led the troops into battle over everybody's objections and won, and no one is going to take that away from him. And there are many kings who, I think Shakespeare feels foolishly, would want to seize the credit and make the most of it. Henry, instead, insists that this was God's victory. Indeed, he refuses to take credit for the battle.

KING HENRY
O God, thy arm was here,
And not to us, but to thy arm alone
Ascribe we all! When, without stratagem,

> But in plain shock and even play of battle,
> Was ever known so great and little loss
> On one part and on th' other? Take it, God,
> For it is none but thine. (Act 4, Scene 8)

Here Shakespeare echoes Psalms:

> For they inherited the land not by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but Thy right hand, and Thine arm… because Thou favored them (Psalms 44:3-4).

Henry claims the battle was won with divine assistance and "without stratagem," and the Duke of Exeter replies, "'Tis wonderful!" And that's just what Henry wants: the idea that his victory is a miracle because that means that God stands behind them. And this is necessary because Henry has had this terrible problem since his father, Henry IV, killed the anointed king, Richard II, and, in doing so, stripped the religious aura, the sacred character, from the English kingship. Henry's trying to get it back here, claiming to be a miracle king with God's support.

Amazingly, he says this is accomplished "without stratagem." Now, anybody who knows the Battle of Agincourt knows it depended on one of the great stratagems in world military history: using, essentially, a phalanx of archers to mow down the French cavalry. It's what won the battle, and it's never even mentioned in the play. The numbers were miraculous. The French had thousands dead and the English had casualties in the double figures by various historical accounts. It was one of those moments as we saw in World War I—the first time machine guns were used en masse on charging soldiers, which is why there was so much carnage—that is absolutely an example of military technology winning the battle. But Henry doesn't want to explain it that way. He wants the assurance that God stood behind him. After the battle, at the end of Act 4, Henry requests songs be sung:

> KING HENRY
> Do we all holy rites;
> Let there be sung Non nobis and Te Deum (Act 4, Scene 8)

Non nobis is from Psalms 115: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the glory, for Thy loving mercy and for Thy truths sake" (115:1). It describes God intervening to save the Israelites when they left Egypt. It's a very famous psalm, and it is, in fact, part of the Passover service. So this is Henry's Passover here. And the idea is that we will give credit to God for this victory over the French just as the

Hebrews gave credit to God over their victory over Pharoah and the Egyptian chariots. In the famous St. Crispin's speech before the battle in Act 4, Henry sets up his own Passover service: he basically says we're going to win this battle, and we're going to celebrate and have a feast, and we're going to talk about it, and you should teach your sons about it.

> KING HENRY
> Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
> But he'll remember with advantages
> What feats he did that day: then shall our names.
> Familiar in his mouth as household words
> Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
> Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
> Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.
> This story shall the good man teach his son;
> And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
> From this day to the ending of the world,
> But we in it shall be remember'd... (Act 4, Scene 3)

It's quite amazing. It's like Shakespeare's been to a Seder. So, yes, this is very significant. It's weird that he transfers blame to other people, but here he transfers the credit elsewhere, namely God. But it's all part of his larger strategy in this play of cultivating a holy aura. His father, Henry IV, had proposed a crusade after usurping Richard II, a rightful monarch. He thought that was the only way to establish his position as a revered king in England, and he never got to the holy land. In an irony, he died in a room in his castle named "Jerusalem." But he told his son that's what was needed, and Henry V came up with the idea of a "crusade" against France that he'd get the Church to bless, attribute the victory to God, and then he'll be the holy anointed king of England. It's really a brilliant strategy, and I think Shakespeare understands it. It's Henry V starting on a route to a Church of England, which is what later emerges if you go to the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, which culminate with the first Tudor monarch, Henry VII.

Historically, Shakespeare's history plays go from the end of the middle ages, when the last of the holy Plantagenet kings were killed, which plunges England into chaos. Henry V almost gets England out of that chaos, except he dies young and his son comes to the throne too early, so it takes another cycle before Henry VII emerges. But I think Shakespeare understands what the English monarchs must do is to get some of the prestige of Hebrew kingship for their rule.

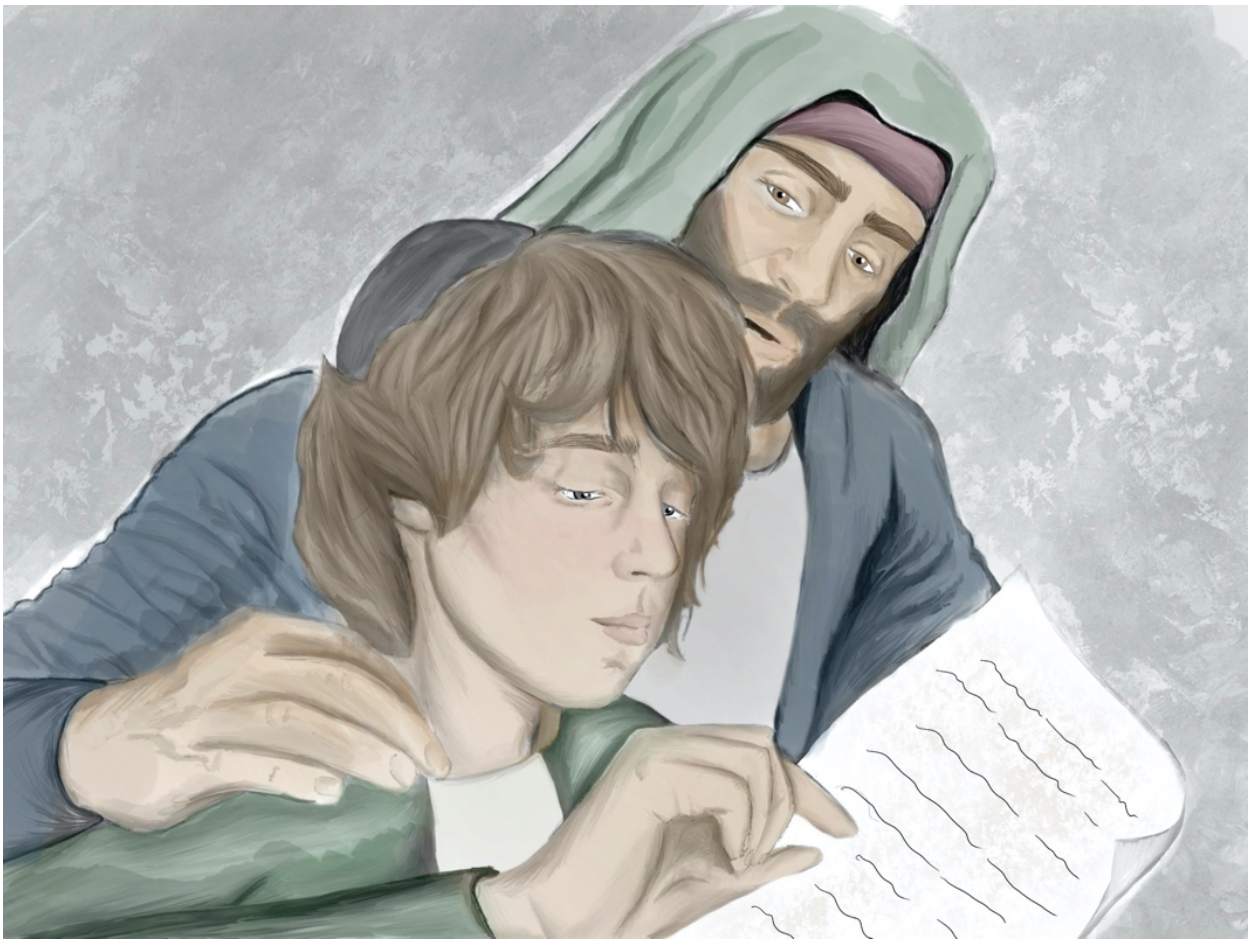
TRAPEDO: *All of this is so fascinating, and I'm especially charmed by the idea of a "Shakespearean Seder." I agree that many of the lines from Henry's rousing speech to his troops before the epic battle have Exodus overtones. In fact, if we look at* Holinshed's Chronicles*, one of Shakespeare's historical source texts that he followed closely, the lines in the play that don't appear in the documented accounts of Henry V's speech from October 25, 1415, are the lines that you call our attention to. They sound almost lifted from Exodus. For instance, "And when thy son shall ask thee in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' thou shalt then say unto him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt'" (Exodus 13:14), which we also read in the Haggadah concerning the Four Sons.*

Shakespeare seems to borrow, perhaps, this temporal structure of projecting the past into the future as a means to ensure legacy, heritage, and continuity. In his commentary on this portion of Exodus, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory, considers the rhetorical potential of the moment when Moses addresses the Israelites for the first time after they've been freed from two centuries of exile, slavery, and oppression. He notes that Moses had a few thematic options for this momentous occasion. He could have focused on the value of freedom, as Abraham Lincoln did in the Gettysburg Address. Moses could have pivoted to the new bliss in the land of milk and honey that awaited them or offered a warning and laid out the dangers and challenges ahead. But instead, Moses, Joshua's mentor, speaks about the importance of educating the next generation, which underscores the message that the real challenge, as Rabbi Sacks phrases it, "does not lie in gaining freedom, it lies in sustaining it; keeping the spirit of liberty alive in the hearts of the successive generations" (Parshat Bo, Covenant and Conversation, 5781). And this, for Rabbi Sacks, fits with one of the unique features of Judaism: that its greatest heroes are not conquerors or strategists, but rabbis, educators, and teachers.

On that note, I wonder if you might share with us one final thought about what makes Shakespeare so enduring. The history of the English monarchy might not be my history or yours, but we return to it over and over again. So, what brings us back to Shakespeare? What does he have to offer us as a dramatist and maybe as a teacher?

CANTOR: Well, I think we can see, in a sense, it's not only Jews who learn from the Bible. In some ways, what Shakespeare gives us is rooted in the Hebrew Bible, but in some ways, I think it's quite different. But in any case, he has the same ability to tell human stories that have incredible emotional power, incredible dramatic power. Stories like Abraham and Isaac or the story of David. These are archetypal stories, but they also have deep meaning and can teach us so much. And that's why they live on. And in particular, in light of what we said today, they have so much political meaning. Now, I'm not claiming that Shakespeare was Jewish, and he had never been to a Seder, yet he found great meaning in the Hebrew Bible. I think it's true for

Machiavelli as well. Machiavelli was fascinated by the story of Moses and ranked him up there with the great founders like Cyrus and Romulus; he found a kind of "Machiavellian meaning" in the story of Moses, who took these enslaved people out into a desert for 40 years to shape them up into a people who could maintain their independence, and that meant becoming an army too. And by invoking Moses in the background of *Henry V*, I think Shakespeare is feeling the same way about Henry V and the English people in general. So, there are so many lessons in these works, and they're often somewhat hard to figure out. You have to read the plays carefully, and that itself is Shakespeare training us to be readers and to learn things in the very process of reading. So in that sense, I'm not surprised that these plays continue to fascinate people.



The Unbroken Chain

TRAPEDO: *Thank you so much. This has been unbelievably enlightening, and this emphasis on coming back, reading again, and again, and the power that yields, is so important for us and for our listeners.*

CANTOR: Well, you know, it's interesting that in many ways the best impulses of Shakespeare critics are Talmudic. They are learning to read a text, to consider arguments about the text, to go back and forth on reading the text. I don't think it's an accident that many of the great Shakespeare scholars have been Jewish. In that sense, there is, I think, a very interesting connection between studying Shakespeare and studying the Bible. And I like to think, in that sense, I was brought up to read Shakespeare. It didn't hurt that my mother had the same birthday as Shakespeare, April 23.