

Crash Talk

October 9, 2018

Benay Lappe: ... progress of this talk that we'll lean in together tonight. I've been working on it for a number of years, and every time I give it, my hope is, and it inevitably happens, that I learn something new. Your job tonight is to tell me you learned something new, okay? This is going to be an interactive conversation, so feel free to jump in, object, scream, holler, at any point. Fair enough? You willing?

Audience: Yeah.

Benay Lappe: Great. First I want to ask how many of you have seen my ELI Talk? Because it is a shortened version of this talk. Okay, just wanted to see how many people so that I can know if I can repeat the same old jokes. Let's see, I can repeat quite a few jokes. Those of you who raised your hand, just laugh anyway. Pretend like you've never heard it before. Okay.

This theory that I've come up with, called the Crash Theory, is really my way of putting my molecules together as a queer person and as a Jew. It's how I've come to understand my life. I was quite astonished to realize it wasn't just my personal story – it was the story of lots of us. And not only lots of us individuals, but that traditions just so happened to go through the same kinds of life events as individuals. When I realized that both I and my tradition had gone through the same thing, I thought, “Maybe I'm on to something here.” [00:02:00] Out of that came this theory.

I'd like to share this with you as a way of, on the one hand, explaining why we learn Talmud. At Svara, we're committed to learning Talmud, and we think it, doing so is going to change the world. I want to explain why I think that. I want to tell you what the Talmud is, who created it, and what they were up to. That's part of this talk. I also want to say if you feel a little bit like, “It's just me. This doesn't quite work for me, but it's just me,” I hope this will reassure you that it's not just you – it's all of us. We're in a time.

Let me begin with a story. The story is what happened to me on my first day of rabbinical school. It was 1991, and on the first day of rabbinical school the president of the university, the seminary, was to greet and have lunch with all of the new students. He arrived a half hour late. When he finally arrived, he said, “I'm really, really sorry I'm late. As I was walking out of my office, the phone rang, and I picked up the phone,” and it was a certain prominent sociologist, who was friend of his, who was responsible for compiling the statistics for the national Jewish population study of 1990, which was to be the temperature taking of the Jewish community – how were we doing, what was going on? Results had not yet come out, and this sociologist was going to be releasing, soon, the data. The president said to him, “What's it going to show?” He said, [00:04:00] “Well, there's good news and here's bad news. The good news is that Judaism will exist in 100 years. The bad news is that it will be unrecognizable to us.”

This is my first day of rabbinical school. I feel like I'm signing on to the Titanic, right? I'd gone to rabbinical school because I kind of liked the way Judaism looked and felt, and I had a very nostalgic connection to my tradition, and I really was kind of down with exploring what this thing that my grandparents, my great-grandparents, all the way down, could pass down to me. To find out that it was going to be radically different was very discouraging to me.

Until I learned Talmud. Then I realized that this sociologist was both right and wrong. He was right – I believe that Judaism will be unrecognizable to us in 100 years. But I think he's wrong in that I don't think that's bad news. What I'd essentially like to talk about tonight is why I don't think it's bad news that Judaism will be unrecognizable in 100 years.

I want to begin with a hypothesis. My hypothesis is that all human beings, no matter when you lived, whether in history or today; no matter your gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, social class; no matter what, all human beings share the same basic big questions of life. What are they, the biggies? [00:06:00]

Audience: Why am I here?

Benay Lappe: Why am I here?

Audience: Who am I?

Benay Lappe: Who am I?

Audience: Why do bad things happen?

Benay Lappe: Why do bad things happen?

Audience: What happens when we die?

Benay Lappe: What happens when we die?

Audience: How did the cosmos [inaudible 00:06:18]?

Benay Lappe: How did the cosmos [inaudible 00:06:19]? I've never, ever had to prompt a group to come up with those very questions. That is because I believe it is encoded in our DNA to have them. It is what it means to be a human being, to have those questions. Every civilization, every tradition, every religion comes into being for one and only one reason – to answer those basic human questions. It will do so by means of a master story.

If you're Jewish, your master story is called ...

Audience: Torah.

Benay Lappe: Torah. If you're Christian, maybe it's Scripture, right, maybe the Bhagavad Gita, maybe the Upanishads, right? But every tradition has their master story. It exists to answer those

basic human questions. As long as your master story is working for you, you're not even aware that you have questions.

Audience: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Benay Lappe: You don't walk around going, "How did I get here?" You know – your story tells you. "Is there a God?" You know – your story tells you. "What's right? What's wrong?" you know – your story tells you.

Hypothesis number two: Every master story will ultimately [00:08:00] and inevitably crash. Crash, crash, crash, crash, crash. One of three things will have happened. Either you've encountered another master story whose answers you like better. Something in the world has happened, some historical event, something out there, that makes your master story no longer work for you. Or something inside of you has changed – you're different, and the old answers from your master story no longer seem true. That's a crash.

Crashes can be societal, civilizational, traditional, familial, institutional, organizational, or personal. "And they lived happily ever after." That's part of the master story, right? Divorce – crash. "May you live to be 120." The death of a child – crash. "And God created the world in six days." Carbon dating – crash. [00:10:00] "We're all straight." Oh, shit, I think I'm queer – major crash. Yeah?

There are three, and only three, ways to respond to a crash – any kind of crash, ever. And by the way, it matters how you respond to a crash. How you respond to a crash will determine the kind of life you'll live, what kind of person you'll become, and the kind of world you're going to create. Let's look at those three options.

Option 1: You deny the crash. You say, "No, no, no, that didn't happen." You revert to your master story, and you take refuge there, and you hang on for dear life. You're also likely to build a wall around that story to make sure no other inconvenient truths get in. We're going to call that Option 1.

During my rabbinical school years, I spent a year in Israel. It was 1993. That year, there was a dairy company that decided that they could increase sales by printing on the milk cartons little diagrams and factoids about dinosaurs. This is a true story. If it weren't true, I would have made it up, but I wouldn't have told you that it is a true story. [00:12:00] Why did they put little dinosaur factoids on the milk cartons?

Audience: Kids like dinosaurs.

Benay Lappe: Kids like dinosaurs. "Mommy, Daddy, somebody, please buy me this milk." Okay, fine. Then what happens? Kid says at breakfast, "Hmm, *Tyrannosaurus rex*, 5 million years old." Give me another dinosaur.

Audience: Brontosaur. Triceratops.

Benay Lappe: Brontosaurus. [inaudible 00:12:29] Flintstone characters. Okay ...

Audience: They had brontosaurus ribs you can get.

Benay Lappe: That's why I have always [inaudible 00:12:36] right? They're the big ribs, sit on the table. Brontosaurus was a really weird thing, right?

Audience: Yeah.

Benay Lappe: Okay, 5.8 million years. "Oh. Mom, what year is it?" "It's 5773." "What does that mean?" "It's been 5,773 years since God created the universe." Crash. See that? Guess what happened to that milk company?

Audience: Crash.

Benay Lappe: The Rabbanut – this is true – the rabbinic authority in Israel, the government authority, threatened them by saying, "If you do not take the dinosaurs off the milk cartons, we will pull your kashrut certification." Okay? You know what they did? Pulled the dinosaurs off the milk carton. Why? Because you do not want your master story crashing at the breakfast table. That's a classic Option 1 move – get the dinosaurs off the milk carton. Okay, you get it?

Audience: Yeah.

Benay Lappe: When I was about 16, [00:14:00] I used to have this little green leather Eisenhower jacket with epaulettes and gold buttons, a little military jacket. I was a little baby dyke, had not yet come out. I loved that jacket, and I wore it everywhere. I was a waitress at that time. I remember going in to the restaurant where I worked, Sam & Hy's Deli. Anybody remember Sam & Hy's? No? Yeah? You ever come into Sam & Hy's?

Audience: Yes.

Benay Lappe: Maybe I waited on you.

Audience: Maybe.

Benay Lappe: I walked in, and my boss said to me, "You're looking mighty dykey today." It was 1976. I was horrified, and I took off the jacket, put it in my basement, and I never put it on again. That's an Option 1 moment. The PS to this story, by the way, is my daughter now wears the little Eisenhower jacket, so ...

Audience: The same one?

Benay Lappe: The same one, the very same one.

Audience: Right.

Benay Lappe: She got it out of the basement. We'll get to that option in a minute.

Every one of the three options has its upsides and its downsides. There are things that are gained and things that are lost in any of the options that you take. What are the upsides of going Option 1?

Audience: Go back to your comfort zone.

Benay Lappe: Comfort zone, okay. It's really comfortable to be here. I know what the story's like, I know what the rules of the game are, got all my peeps around me. Really comfortable. Great, what else?

Audience: Acceptance.

Benay Lappe: Acceptance, yep.

Audience: All your questions answered.

Benay Lappe: You still love me, they still love me. All your questions are answered, right? Have all those answers.

Audience: It's efficient.

Benay Lappe: It's what?

Audience: It's efficient.

Benay Lappe: It is efficient. Say more.

Audience: You don't have to spend time learning more and thinking about other things, and ...[00:16:00]

Benay Lappe: Yeah. It's all done.

Audience: ... trying to figure it all out.

Benay Lappe: That's one of the great things about tradition – it's all done. Got all the answers. What else? Upside of going Option 1.

Audience: You have a community around you.

Benay Lappe: Yes. Got your community around you, same community you were in before. You have your place. They still call you up to the Torah, whatever. You still have a place in your home. What else?

Audience: Continuity of a certain story.

Benay Lappe: That's great. Continuity of my story. You're still in the same story, right? That feels very good.

Audience: You feel safe and secure.

Benay Lappe: Safe and secure, absolutely. What else?

Audience: It's probably where my parents are.

Benay Lappe: Yeah. Your parents are there, probably. Probably your friends are there. Kids growing up there.

Audience: You think that you protected yourself from another crash. Not only did you go back to the master story, but this time you built a wall, so ...

Benay Lappe: Great. You're here, you've protected ... by the way, these walls can be emotional, spiritual, physical. No crashes now, because I built that wall and I'm all safe here, right? Super safe and secure.

Okay, now let's go downside. The downside of Option 1.

Audience: It's not necessarily honest.

Benay Lappe: Uh-huh (affirmative). Say more.

Audience: You're burying the cause of your crash, denying it, and going back to what's comfortable.

Benay Lappe: Right. There's a certain cognitive dissonance happening here. It is not fully, as you say, honest. [00:18:00] You cannot un-ring the bell of crash.

Audience: No.

Benay Lappe: When a crash happens, it's happened. You know it, and everybody knows it. Well, not maybe everybody yet. But if you experience it, you know it, and you are not dealing with it. Great. What else is a downside?

Audience: It's not necessarily healthy for your ability to move forward.

Benay Lappe: Yes.

Audience: You're cocooning yourself, and not acknowledging that something really happened, and that that could move you somewhere else. [inaudible 00:18:35]

Benay Lappe: Yes. This is not about movement, growth, moving forward. This is about safe and secure and all sorts of other things, right?

Audience: Building a wall keeps you safe, but also keeps everyone else out.

Benay Lappe: Yeah, isn't that something? There's a lot of boundary keeping that you have to do in Option 1. Don't let those kids play with my kids, don't watch those movies, don't read these books, don't walk in my neighborhood wearing those clothes. You get the idea, right? A lot of keeping out, a lot of people who are not part of your world. Yeah?

Audience: The next crash will hit harder.

Benay Lappe: Uh-huh (affirmative). Say more about that.

Audience: If you built up this wall to protect your master story, you have this nice, hard protective shell to slam into when you hit the next crash as well.

Benay Lappe: That's so interesting. I never thought about that. You're saying that the more you do this, the harder it actually becomes ...

Audience: It can buy time, but ...

Benay Lappe: That's interesting. Very interesting. It makes you less able to ...

Audience: Take a different option.

Benay Lappe: ... be resilient when the next crash comes.

Audience: Yeah.

Benay Lappe: Very interesting. [00:20:00]

Audience: To build on what you were saying, Rebecca, that that wall is keeping others out – but also keeping out the people who do accept you, but know that you had a crash and are concerned because you don't want to talk about it, you don't want to deal with it. In a way, you're also building walls even between yourself and the community that accepts you.

Benay Lappe: Can you give me an example of that?

Audience: Yeah. Trying to deal with growing up in the South, where God is a Republican. And having to come to terms with the fact that that's not how I saw it, but that most of the community I had built up did. Trying to still fit and be authentic, but not fitting, and having to build walls around certain parts of myself with people who I care about a lot.

Benay Lappe: You were isolated from those people who might have been of support.

Audience: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Benay Lappe: Very interesting. Yeah. What else? Downside of going Option 1.

Audience: I feel like a lot of times there can be a preservation of the current power structures ...

Benay Lappe: Absolutely. That might even be what Option 1 is about. You're absolutely right. There is a big power thing happening here. Yup. And it's about retaining your power, right? If you go Option 1, part of it might be, "I really like all the goodies I have here. I want to keep my goodies." Goodies are good – that's why they're called goodies. You remember that line? What movie was that, where ... who was it? He says, "That's why they call it money." Whatever. [inaudible 00:21:58] [00:22:00] Yeah. This is a lot about power.

Good. What else? Downside of Option 1.

Audience: I don't think it allows for much creativity.

Benay Lappe: Yes. No, creativity is not the watchword of Option 1. For sure, 100%. This is about tradition. This is about Torah true. This is about doing it the way we've always done it. This is about, "These are the rules of the game, and this is your place, and this is my relation. Yeah.

Audience: But if you value creativity and art and artists, I think you cut yourself off from, or cut those people off, as the case may be, from a lot of opportunities.

Benay Lappe: Yes, I think that is true.

Audience: I think that even though it might be about safety, on some level it also has a certain nagging insecurity that becomes part of it.

Benay Lappe: Yeah, I think you're right. There's something, it feels real secure here, and that's part of why you're there. But there is a constant threat. You are very vulnerable in Option 1, because you are just holding on to make sure you keep all the goodies, you keep your power, you keep your place, you keep your privilege, you don't rock the boat, right? It turns out that these walls are actually not all that good at keeping out the world, or they're always porous, and shit gets in. It's a constant stay vigilant kind of ... keep it out, keep it out, keep them out.

Audience: Which is exhausting, [00:24:00] psychically exhausting.

Benay Lappe: Psychically exhausting, absolutely. It is exhausting.

Audience: Because, in a way you're also protecting yourself from yourself.

Benay Lappe: Say more.

Audience: The crash happened. If you go back to the master story and nothing, just as it had been, then you're also trying to avoid that thing about you or your reaction to the thing outside that caused the crash to begin with. You also have to not look at that part of yourself.

Benay Lappe: So much you can't look at, because this is too scary. There's something distorting and perverting about Option 1. It tends to wring out of shape the master story, which at one point was a healthy story – it wouldn't have lasted long if it hadn't been. But Option 1-ifying it tends to distort it.

Audience: I think it's important to draw a distinction between master story before the crash and after the crash.

Benay Lappe: Yeah, I love that. I love that. Maybe master stories are healthy, maybe by definition that's what it means, before the crash. And then master story begins its decline into ... very interesting. I love that.

Audience: Sometimes Option 1 really is actually, materially, about your survival.

Benay Lappe: Yes. And let's note that sometimes the best thing to do is go Option 1. [00:26:00] We're bagging on Option 1 in a big way, but let's remember that there are times when Option 1 is the right thing to do, because that's what's going to keep you safe. If you are a 13 year old queer kid and you know that coming out is going to get you thrown on the street, you better damn well go Option 1 for now.

Audience: There's got to be a difference between how we act and how we feel. I don't know, are they really doing Option 1? Maybe.

Benay Lappe: You're right. It's ...

Audience: Sometimes ...

Benay Lappe: Yeah. It's not about not coming out. It's about coming out but hanging out here, maybe. I'm not sure.

Audience: Or there's something in the middle, or ...

Audience: That's also a way more precarious place to be. The place of, "I know who I am, and I feel comfortable in that, but my community won't support that so I'm going to ..." If you don't have the resources, emotional or otherwise, to be able to pull yourself up with that, then having a wall that builds up allows you to do anything, to do other things. It allows your energy to go to be a good student or whatever, instead of just trying to ... instead of it spending all of your energy on holding yourself up in your head alone.

Benay Lappe: Yeah.

Audience: The options I don't think happened instantaneously. It's a process.

Benay Lappe: Absolutely. It's not only a process. You might choose the options serially. [00:28:00] It's not like you respond one way to a crash. Sometimes first you respond one way, and then you respond another way.

Okay, so let's take a look at the second way that you can respond to a crash. Option 2. You accept the crash, and you completely reject your master story. You say, "Yeah, that crash happened, and my master story is a crock of shit. I'm going to go out here, and I'm going to live in a new story, the story of the crash." That's your new culture, and you're going to hang out here. This is the baby with the bathwater option. We're going to call that Option 2. You're now in a new story. Let's remember that you always live in a story. It behooves you to know what story you're living in.

Okay, upsides of Option 2. Remember, it has upsides and downsides. What is the upside of going Option 2?

Audience: I'm curious that no one else's master ... is it a master story if somebody else is ...

Benay Lappe: Yeah, it is. But that's a good question. Is it always an existing master story, right? That's what you're asking.

Audience: Or are you making up a story? You're not making up a story.

Benay Lappe: No, I don't think so. No, this is not making up a story. This is jumping into another, existing story. But that's an interesting thing to think about. I think it's already existed.

Audience: It may start out as a solo story.

Audience: If we think of the fact that stories are built on other stories, maybe it can be a conglomerate thing that you put together of stories that already exist. I'm just spitballing.

Benay Lappe: Maybe. [00:30:00] Let's do it simple. I'll give you an example from my own life. Let's say you're jumping off into the story whose competition with your story was what caused your crash. Upsides of going Option 2?

Audience: Everything makes sense again.

Benay Lappe: Now I'm happy-happy. Option 2 is happy-happy. That's my nickname for Option 2. Happy-happy. Because I no longer have to deal with a crash, no longer have to deal with my master story that isn't working for me. I'm off in my new world. Happy-happy. That's nice. Good, what else? Upside of going Option 2.

Audience: It feels honest.

Benay Lappe: Right, it feels honest. I've accepted the reality. I'm honest. I'm not avoiding anything.

Audience: You don't have to pretend that the master story tells the truth anymore.

Benay Lappe: Right.

Audience: You feel that you're really trying to find what's the truth.

Benay Lappe: Yeah. There's a lot of freedom, relief. You're feeling honest. What else?

Audience: Expansive.

Benay Lappe: Expansive. You're learning all sorts of new stuff. You're meeting new people, you're really liking this story, liking your new community, liking all the new things you're learning and exposed to. That's really great.

Audience: It's something to compare your old life to, your story to, get a perspective that you wouldn't have had before.

Benay Lappe: Great. You have a new perspective, new input. Yeah, that's good.

Audience: It feels authentic.

Benay Lappe: Are we going upsides or downsides? Let's start with ...

Audience: I'd say that's the upside, and it feels authentic.

Benay Lappe: It feels at least true and honest. [00:32:00] What do you mean by "authentic"?

Audience: True for you at that time.

Benay Lappe: True for you. Great. This is true for me. I'm in a place that's true for me. Let's go downside. What are the downsides of going Option 2? Larry

Audience: You lose whatever was good in Option 1.

Benay Lappe: Yes. You've lost all the good stuff about your master story. Let's be clear. Master stories do not crash in their entireties, ever. That's not the way the world works. Pieces of them crash. The pieces that didn't crash, you are now, as they say in Yiddish, *ahftseloches*. You are out of luck, because it's no longer part of your story. You've left it all behind. You are now in a new story. You have none of your old master story with you. You don't have your traditions, your family, your community. That's all the world you left behind. Some of that was some good stuff, and now you don't have it. It's a downside. What else is downside of going Option 2?

Audience: This is dark, but going off Ilana's point of is this somebody else's story, is it can be violent if you're joining or inserting yourself into a culture or a society that you weren't invited into.

Benay Lappe: Absolutely. And what you're also intimating is this story can crash too, right? All of a sudden, you see the dark side of it. You see that you're maybe not so welcome here, you're not an insider here, it's not as rosy as you thought. Not so happy-happy after all. Remember hypothesis number two? All stories will ultimately and inevitably crash. This story, too, is going to crash, and you're going to have to jump [00:34:00] off of it into another story, and on and on and on. That's a downside of Option 2. Yeah? So far so good?

Audience: And it's more likely to crash sooner because it's more fragile.

Benay Lappe: Why is it more fragile?

Audience: It hasn't been around for centuries.

Benay Lappe: How do you know that? I'm not saying this is a new story.

Audience: Oh, okay.

Benay Lappe: This is not necessarily a new story. This could be an older story than your master story. Yeah?

Audience: It's also a means of avoidance.

Benay Lappe: Yeah.

Audience: You're still not actually dealing with the crash.

Benay Lappe: What you're getting at is something very important, and that is that Option 1 and Option 2 are opposite sides of the same coin. They share the same basic wrong-headed premise. And that is that master stories are fixed, unchanging, immutable, and eternal. This is not true. And how many of us have not been taught that? Torah is fixed, eternal, unchanging, and immutable. If it cracks, you have only two choices – to say, “No, that didn't happen,” or, “Yeah, it happened, and it's a crock of shit,” to throw it all away. There's a similarity between the two, and that is they share the idea that stories are fixed and unchangeable.

Audience: Can you give us the example you said you would give about your life?

Benay Lappe: My life?

Audience: For Option 2?

Benay Lappe: Yeah. I'll start with my central life crash. We all have lots of them, but maybe one is our defining crash, or at least for some period of time. For me, that was coming out. I grew up in a traditional Jewish family in the 60s and the 70s in this country, [00:36:00] and I learned that everybody is straight. When I began to come out as a teenager, it was a very, very big crash. I didn't know any other queer people – not a single other queer person. There were no TV shows. There was no internet, obviously. I very much did not want to be gay. And so I went Option 1,

and I tried to be straight, and I let my mother fix me up on blind dates. I would go to the movies on these blind dates, because that way I wouldn't have to talk to these guys. I thought maybe I could do that for a long time.

On one of those dates, I ran into a guy I went to high school with. Now I'm 19 years old. We ran into each other, and we got together afterward, and he said, "Benay, I want you to know that I'm gay." I said, "I know, I know, I know, Gary. I knew that when you were 14." I said, "Gary, I want you to know that I'm gay." He said, "I know, I know, I've known that since you were 14." He convinced me to come out to my parents, because he said I could never be fully who I was if I didn't. He was right. That was a very good thing, because [00:38:00] if you're queer and you go Option 1, it can end up tragically, because it's a very, very bad place to be queer.

At a certain point, a year or two later, I fell in love. I fell in love with a woman, and she fell in love with me. From the moment that we kissed, I understood that love was love, and that I was going to be okay, and that I was okay. I ran out of Option 1 as quickly as I could, and I dashed over to Option 2. I jumped into the gay subculture, and I was happy-happy. Super happy-happy.

It turns out that when you go Option 2 on some important part of your life, you tend to go Option 2 on a whole bunch of other parts of your life. I don't know exactly why this is, but there's some sort of contagion that happens when you go Option 2. I not only came out; I decided that even though I'd wanted to be a doctor my entire life, no, I didn't want to be a doctor – that's what my parents want for me, that's what society wants for me, just like they wanted me to be straight. I'm not going to be a doctor. Jewish? No, that's what they want from me. I'm going to go and live in Japan. I'm going to run away from home. I hung out there for nearly a decade, and I became a shoemaker. You can't go more downward mobility than being a shoemaker. I'm joking, because I love shoemakers.

I went Option 2 on a lot of things. I became a Buddhist. I was a happy-happy Buddhist for quite a while. I went Option 2 on [00:40:00] my sexual orientation, my geography, my career, my religion. There's something about Option 2 that pulls you to do that. At a certain point, this started crashing for me as well.

I'm going to put a sticky here, because now I want to overlay, on top of the beginnings of this scheme, Jewish history. What does this have to do with being Jewish? Any thoughts so far, before we move on to the Jewish ... okay.

Audience: I have a theory for why you go Option 2 on a lot of parts of your life when you go Option 2.

Benay Lappe: You have a theory?

Audience: I think in Option 2 or Option 1, when you build a wall, in one way you're on the inside, and in another way you're on the outside. When you go Option 2 in a lot of areas of your life, then it's less likely that your wall will have holes, even though you're on the outside.

Benay Lappe: That relates to what you were saying. Very interesting. Let me say it again. You tell me if I got this right. Once you go Option 2, you are actually getting more crash flex, or less resistant ... say it again, slowly.

Audience: You described Option 1 as putting yourself inside the master story and building a wall. I think when you go Option 2, you build the wall still. Instead of me being inside of the master story, I build a wall separating myself from the master story.

Benay Lappe: Wow.

Audience: Then you said you can make a wall that's porous. But if I go number 2 on a lot of parts of my identity, I'm less likely to notice the holes in the wall because I'm looking at other [inaudible 00:41:41].

Audience: So much of our lives is wrapped up in that master story. If you build a wall around it, it's really hard for any other part of your life that was touched by that master story to still ...

Benay Lappe: I love this idea that I think you're both getting at, that when you go Option 2 [00:42:00] you're actually building a wall against your story. Now you're even more invested in rejecting your master story, right? That sounds familiar to you? You're going, "Yeah, that sounds familiar." Say more. No. okay, if you want, later.

Audience: What was Option 2 about coming out? I don't think I understand that.

Benay Lappe: Why was Option 2 coming out for me?

Audience: How was coming out Option 2?

Benay Lappe: Option 2 is I'm rejecting the piece of the master story that says all people are straight. And because I was also a victim of, "The Torah is fixed, eternal, unchanging, immutable," and I had learned that that's what the Torah says. The Torah says you have to be straight. I had no choice, I thought, but to reject that if I was going to privilege myself as a queer person.

Audience: I think I have to know what Option 3 is to understand. Cool.

Benay Lappe: This is, "I am so out of here." Yeah.

Audience: I feel like the analogy around ... I guess not that. But getting high. It is both exhilarating, because you're creating your own future, and you're in this new place where you can bring all these really happy-happy idols to things. It is also exhausting, because ...

Benay Lappe: Option 2?

Audience: Yeah. Because by definition, all that knowledge that you already had in your previous story, you have to reject, which means you've got to refill that bucket constantly. There's this exhilarating but exhausting, exhilarating but exhausting ... it can only go so long before you crash. [00:44:00]

Benay Lappe: You could be very busy being someone who used to be Jewish. Or someone who doesn't want to be in that community. That could take up a lot of your consciousness. Absolutely. Yeah.

Audience: I see this as a process, and Option 3 is the evolution. You wouldn't be who you are if you hadn't been Option 1 and then Option 2.

Benay Lappe: Yeah, I think you are 100% right. I think you are 1000% right. I think they're all really important options. Really, really ...

Audience: We all probably experience them to different degrees.

Benay Lappe: 100%, absolutely right.

Audience: It's different ways of answering those questions. It's testing the boundaries, or the alternates, the possibilities of what the answers to those questions might be. It's really about exploring life, exploring yourself.

Benay Lappe: It is. A crash is not an unfortunate part of life.

Audience: No. It is not.

Benay Lappe: It is life.

Audience: Exactly.

Benay Lappe: How you respond is about whether you grow or you don't grow.

Audience: Right.

Audience: Yes, but we can't say that going to Option 1 means you're not growing, because ...

Benay Lappe: Absolutely right. I so appreciate you reminding me of that, because as you can probably sense, I have a lot of Option 1 baggage. You have a lot of Option 1 gratitude. You're right. There is a lot of learning that happens. You're 1000% right. I couldn't do what I'm doing now if I hadn't hung out here and really gotten this, nor if I hadn't done that. Yeah. [00:46:00]

Audience: I'm thinking what's ... maybe personally, and maybe other people will resonate, but what's really difficult and tragic about Option 2 for me is that you, I guess through sealing off

the other people who might share your experience from within your tradition in the past, other people who have fought to hold these two disparate identities together who you can walk in their strength. And also younger people who are coming after you.

Benay Lappe: That's right. There's a lot lost here. There's a lot of opportunity lost, there's a lot of support lost, there's a lot of carrying the future that's lost. Yes, absolutely.

Audience: It also disconnects you from the original questions that you have, the big questions. It doesn't necessarily connect back to those answers of why are we here, what are we looking for, who put us here.

Benay Lappe: I never thought about that. Am I not right that each of these is an attempt to answer the same questions? I think they're ultimately never going to be perfect. They're never going to be whole and satisfactory answers. If you've lived in a time of crash, if you've experienced a profound crash in your life, you have the gift and the challenge of what that means, which is, you are on the cutting edge of [00:48:00] the next master story, and you don't have the benefit of that story yet for yourself. You're going to have to be creating it. We're going to get there in just a second.

Let's go Jewish. Okay, Jewish. Jewish master story is called Torah, we established that. Arguably, the biggest crash in Jewish history happened in the first century, in the year 70. What happened in the year 70?

Audience: The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Benay Lappe: Right, Second Temple was destroyed. Why was that such a big crash?

Audience: How can you be Jewish and have all those traditions [inaudible 00:48:49] Judaism?

Benay Lappe: Exactly. This was your story. This was your handbook for how to be a Jewish human being. This master story, which lived in a book called the Bible – Torah, the Torah – it told you how to behave in the world. It told you how to have a relationship to God. It told you how to get forgiveness in your life. Very important core need. How is it that you have a relationship with God in this master story?

Audience: Sacrifice.

Benay Lappe: Right. You go to the temple, you do the sacrifice thing. If you want to get forgiveness, you do this kind of sacrifice. If you want to express your thanks to God, you do this kind of sacrifice. If you want to ask for something you need, "Please heal my mother," you bring another kind of sacrifice. It all happens at the Temple, and that's where God lives.

The year 70, the Second Temple was destroyed. A major, major crash. [00:50:00] That kind of an event, the destruction of one's temple, was not something that we, as Jews, alone felt. Everyone in the Ancient Near East had a temple – we weren't the only ones. Everyone had a

temple for their god, and they went there to have their god thing. If your temple was destroyed, it meant the deal between you and God was off. It meant God didn't love you anymore, God loved somebody else, and that was over. That was a major, major tragedy for anyone. And that happened to us.

I want to crank back, actually, to the year 69. Temple's still standing, but things are looking bad for the Jews. Romans 2, Jews 1. Who's going Option 1 in the year 69?

Audience: The priests.

Benay Lappe: Priests. The priests are going Option 1. Here's a corollary to the master story. If you are employed by a master story, you are going to be an Option 1 person. I want to say that again, especially for all of the Jewish professionals in the audience. If you get your paycheck from the master story, it is going to be very, very difficult for you to be anything but an Option 1 person. Obvious, right? Priests went Option 1.

They also couldn't imagine any other way to be a human being. It's something of a failure of imagination, as well. They fought for that master story. [00:52:00] They fought for that Temple and that way of being a human being to the death. They built a wall around it, actually, an actual wall. How did that work out for them? Not too good. Crash. Real crash. Temple went down. When was the last time ...

Audience: For a stupid little wall.

Benay Lappe: Yeah, the wall was still there. It's funny. Walls are more resilient than the stories themselves. That's interesting.

Audience: That wall is so important to us today.

Benay Lappe: Yes. Especially to Option 1 people. It's really important, because it represents that master story.

Audience: Yes. But it's not important to other people?

Benay Lappe: I'm not saying it's not. There's an enormous nostalgic connection as well to that master story, even for folks who have gone Option 2. I think it's particularly attractive to Option 1 people. By the way, there are people, I'm sure you know, who want to rebuild the Temple, and have collected lots and lots of money to recreate the artifacts of the Temple, to rebuild it again. Yes.

Audience: I just wanted to point out that when the First Temple was destroyed, everyone who came back and built the Second Temple, that was one mass Option 1 group.

Benay Lappe: Ooh, that's interesting. That sounds right.

Audience: After the First Temple was destroyed, the thing that all the people had done up to that point was, well, you got conquered, so you go get carried off to their lands, take up their gods.
[00:54:00]

Benay Lappe: That's very interesting. That sounds right.

Audience: Coming back and rebuilding the Temple, it was just ...

Benay Lappe: That's very interesting. Yes.

Audience: I don't know very much about this part of history, but ...

Benay Lappe: Neither do I. [inaudible 00:54:18].

Audience: If they rebuilt the Temple, would it necessarily be Option 1? I don't know about the history of that time. Maybe their story was interrupted. No one said the Temple wouldn't work anymore – it just got knocked down. I don't know.

Benay Lappe: You're saying kind of the same things, that this, the rebuilding of a Temple, between Temple 1 and Temple 2, is a kind of maintenance ... I don't know. There's something there. I'm not sure. But you guys are on to something.

Audience: I think I'm wondering if it would be Option 1 at all.

Audience: Yes.

Audience: They continued to do the same things that they had been doing for generations. The expected reaction to the crash is to go off and worship other gods, and to do Option 2. Instead of adopting another master story, they returned to the master story that they had had for generations, and returned the original place ...

Audience: And renovated it.

Benay Lappe: Right. What I think you're on to is something that I wasn't going to get to til later, but we'll go there now, which is ... ready? Put on your seatbelts for this. There's really no such thing as Option 1. Argh! Option 1 is a myth. It's a story we tell to justify the rejection [00:56:00] of certain people and certain new ideas. It's a marketing campaign to sell people on, "Let's do it this way."

If a tradition lasts for a generation, it's not an Option 1. It can't be. Any tradition that lasts more than a generation is an evolution, because people are an evolution. But it tells a story about itself that it is the way it's always been, because that sells.

Audience: That's true.

Benay Lappe: Because like it or not, there's something in us that really likes continuity and tradition, and ...

Audience: It's reliable.

Benay Lappe: ... don't make me think. It's comforting. That's not a bad thing – it's a good thing. Option 1 is actually the story that we tell about one way of doing what we're now going to see is called Option 3.

Back in the day, 69, priests when Option 1. No more priests. Down. [inaudible 00:57:24] Who went Option 2 in the first century?

Audience: Christians.

Benay Lappe: You know, I used to think that this is Christianity. I don't think so anymore.

Audience: No?

Benay Lappe: Stay tuned. I think I'm going to put Christianity somewhere else.

Audience: Cool. Sounds good.

Benay Lappe: You know who went Option 2 after the crash, when you're talking about the Jewish community? Guess what – almost everybody. Between 90 and 95% of Jews after the destruction of the Second Temple went Option 2. There were between 6 and 8 million [00:58:00] Jews in the first century, before the destruction. After the destruction, and 500 years later, how many Jews? A half a million. Where did they all go? Were they killed?

Audience: Yes.

Benay Lappe: No. Very few were killed. They went Option 2. Option 2 is also called assimilation.

Audience: Right.

Benay Lappe: That was probably the most reasonable response. Everybody knew that if your temple went down, no more god, no more relationship with god. Just like you know you unplug the TV, the people go away – everybody knows that. People go Option 2. You know why so many people go Option 2 after a crash?

Audience: It's easy.

Benay Lappe: Because that's what people do.

Audience: Which is secularism, or conversion for Option 2? What was it then?

Benay Lappe: It's a kind of conversion, but it can be to secularism. This is paganism. This master story was paganism. That's where most Jews went. If I had lived there, I probably would have done that. That was the most plausible response.

By the way, there are all sorts of motivating factors in going Option 2. The lack of alternatives is one. The ...

Audience: Survival.

Benay Lappe: ... dangers in one place or another. Your experience with prior crashes. Your personality. Some people are just, by nature, Option 1-y kind of people. [01:00:00] Some people are, by nature, Option 2-y people. There are all sorts of reasons for staying in a bad relationship. All sorts of reasons, good and bad. One of them might be you're kind of an Option 1 person. You might want to think about it. If you're the kind of person who is like, "I'm so out of here," the first time you have a fight with your lover, you might just be an Option 2 person, and you might want to think about that.

Most Jews were going here. But there was a small, small group of queer, fringy, radical, hippie guys, who said, "No. this is clearly not happening. This is just *chaval*, this is unfortunate and a shame – too much is lost here. There is a better way." They said, "This crash happened. Shit happens, and it happened. We're going to take that, we're going to go back to the animating questions that we need to answer to exist. We're going to revisit our master story and take with us what is still working, what hasn't actually crashed, and retell that master story." And now you got new retold master story. That's Option 3.

Those guys, we now call them ...

Audience: Rabbis.

Benay Lappe: The rabbis. There were no more of them than are sitting in this room right now. Think about that. [01:02:00]

They came up with a new master story. The old master story was called Torah. What did they call their new master story?

Audience: Mishnah.

Benay Lappe: It lived in a little book called the Mishnah, that's for sure. But generally speaking, they renamed their master story ...

Audience: Talmud.

Benay Lappe: It later lived in the Talmud too, but that wasn't their name for this story. I'll get back to the Mishnah and Talmud later. They called their new master story ...

Audience: Jewish.

Benay Lappe: Torah. They called it Torah. I found myself getting into that corner of the teacher for whom there is only one right answer, and I wasn't sure how to get out of it. Okay.

They called their new master story Torah. That was their genius. This is part of how you do Option 3. They knew that that was going to sell, because of the marketing campaign. People don't like crashes. It's very troublesome. We talked about that before. But if this new thing is not that new, if it's really the same old thing, oh, then maybe I can hang out there, it's going to be comfortable. They said, "Okay, that old story, that old master story – that was Written Torah. This is Oral Torah. There."

At this point, I have to acknowledge that my [01:04:00] theological slip is showing. I want to come clean and say I made this shit up, okay? This is just how I keep my molecules together. This is how I understand Jewish history – this is what I personally believe. I'm not telling you what to believe. I'm not saying that if you believe something different, it's wrong. This is how I understand the tradition. I believe that those queer, fringy, radical guys – the rabbis – were geniuses, and were very, very, very much in touch with God – different kind of God, more inner God; we'll come back to that later – when they said, "This is Torah too." I don't mean to be cynical and to impute that cynicism to them. I think that they were quite sincere when they said, "This is Torah too."

Audience: They made a new version.

Benay Lappe: It's a new version. Our original Jewish master story that came out of the Second Temple crash was so new that it would have been, you ready, unrecognizable to a Biblical Jew. See how I did that?

Audience: I see.

Benay Lappe: Now, whenever there's a crash, you never have one Option 3 – you have lots of Option 3s, lots and lots and lots. That's exactly what you want. Why do you want a lot of Option 3s? [01:06:00]

Audience: It's the most likely to need to exist.

Benay Lappe: Yeah. You don't know what's going to work, right? You going to put all your money on 37 red?

Audience: Why do we want it to continue to exist?

Benay Lappe: That's a great question. Why do we want the master story, or the tradition, to continue to exist? I think the driving impulse is the belief that there is a lot of good that we would be foolish to throw away, that we should benefit from what was in that condition. We could make it better. We have lots of ideas for what can make it better – either our own ideas, or

the realities of the new situation, no Temple or whatever. I think that's the answer – but it's a great question. Why do we even want the tradition to continue?

Audience: It does answer some of those big questions.

Audience: Right.

Audience: We're still asking those questions. The answers are not all ...

Benay Lappe: Yeah. Remember, master stories, especially ones that have lasted thousands of years, there's a lot of shit in there, for sure. There's a lot of really good stuff.

Audience: I think it's also maybe about modeling the process of integration. There are good things in the master story to keep, and there are negative things to evolve from, or to throw away. What happens when you go Option 3 is you remetabolize the master story through the lens of your crash. You actually give up the least – you give up much less than you do in Options 1 and 2. [01:08:00] You don't have to reject something. But you move it through the prism of change, and you see it in a new light.

I don't know even that it's primarily about what you hold on to for the master story. Those are added benefits. Oh, there's good wisdom in the master story to not lose – but even more importantly, what you are keeping is a process of integration, to move that forward.

Benay Lappe: I love that. Annie?

Audience: But some master stories are bad. White supremacy is bad. There's nothing we need to hold on to there.

Benay Lappe: That's so interesting. Off the top of my head, maybe white supremacy is not a master story – it's a piece of, sadly, in our country, the American dream. The American dream is our master story. White supremacy is a chunk of that story, for sure, maybe even the foundation of it. But is it possible that it's not a master story all by itself? It's a piece of the story, which, because it is so foundational, when it crashes it feels like the entirety is crashing. Which, by the way, is happening when?

Audience: Right now.

Benay Lappe: Right now. Hope that wasn't lost on anybody. The white supremacy, and all sorts of other pieces of our master story, they're crashing. When stories crash, what do Option 1 people do?

Audience: Become violent.

Benay Lappe: They become violent. They freak the fuck out.

Audience: Yeah, they do.

Benay Lappe: That's what's happening right now. It is a violent [01:10:00] Option 1 response to, that thing is fucking crashing, and they know it, and they are losing a lot of power and privilege. It ain't going to be that good for them ever again, and they know it. Okay, get off my soap box now.

Audience: Having those different Option 3s, it seems to me like when you hit your first little crash with the one that you chose, there's another one that's adjacent enough that it's easy to slide over.

Benay Lappe: Yeah. That's quite right.

Audience: You just keep going until you find the one that doesn't crash on that thing.

Benay Lappe: That's quite right. If [inaudible 01:10:50] weren't working for you, you can jump over into whatever. Yeah, you're quite right. By the way, Option 3.2 is what happens when you move down in time, and the ones that weren't really all that, didn't have much of a ... what do they call it in business language? Value proposition? They dropped away, but the ones that really are good pieces, they tend to be animized in the beginning. Just Talmud study, or just yoga, or just ...

Audience: Farming.

Benay Lappe: Farming. Or just singing. They're going to come together into a full service new Option 3. We are very early in this crash.

By the way, our master story was captured in a little tiny book, you could put it in your back pocket. Called the Mishnah. [01:12:00] It was not the only Mishnah, Jewish Mishnah, that came out of this crash. There were lots of Jewish Mishnahs, one of which made it really big, much bigger than ours. What's that called?

Audience: Christianity.

Benay Lappe: Christianity. Christianity was an Option 3. Did very well for itself, I might say.

Audience: Where does Reform Jewish and Orthodoxy fit in?

Benay Lappe: Great. I'm going to put a note here, "movements." I'm going to come back to them soon.

Those guys who went Option 3 were not new to the game of responding to crashes. I think this is part of the deal, it's part of this process, that the people who go Option 3 aren't caught off-guard by the major crash that everyone experiences. The people who are most crash-3 adept have been crashing long before anyone else catches on to the crash.

There is a crumble – I’m going to call this a crumble – before the crash. Before every crash, there is a crumble – there is some period of time during which the queerest, most marginal outsider folk go, “That master story is just not working.” These were rabbis who, before the Temple was destroyed, were gathering in little ashrams, little retreat centers that they called [01:14:00] synagogues, and they were doing this newfangled, New Age-y spiritual practice that they called prayer, when they could just as easily have gone to the Temple down the block, because it was there. But they were over it, it did not work for them anymore, while it was standing. That form of Judaism had already crashed for them. The enormous crash of the physical destruction only gave them an opportunity.

There’s something about thinking about queerness that I think is quite prophetic. The queer prophecy has nothing to do with sex or sexual orientation. Let me say that very clearly. That’s not the queer prophecy. The prophetic truth that queer people of every variety ... By the way, let me just say when I say “queer,” I’m not only talking about people who are non-heterosexual or non-cisgender. I’m talking about anyone who has experienced a profound experience of otherness, who embodies it, who gleans the insights from that experience, and walks them through the world as a critique on the mainstream. That’s what it means to be queer.

You can be gay and not queer. If you are just totally down with all the goodies, and that’s what you want, for me that’s not queer. I’m not even interested – you’re not even on the map. You can be heterosexual and be quite queer. [01:16:00] You get the point? The queer prophecy is not about gender, sexual orientation. It’s about being in touch with your truth, and living it even at great expense. That’s the queer prophecy. That’s what drives Option 3. That’s what moves civilization forward, that’s what moves us forward. That’s what moves the world forward. That’s the queer prophecy.

The queer folk are like the canaries in the coal mine, the ones who experience the inadequacy of that master story first. But I guarantee you, everyone will eventually follow downstream. Everyone will eventually crash. If something is crashing for you, it is going to crash for everybody else eventually.

I gave this talk once to a group of high school educators. One gentleman was a science teacher, raised his hand, and he said, “Benay, that’s just Darwin.” I said, “Tell me more,” because I didn’t remember my Darwin. That’s what I say when I don’t know, “Tell me more.” He said, “Yeah, Darwin.” What was Darwin’s slogan?

Audience: Adapt ...

Benay Lappe: Adapt ... Oh, you know about Darwin?

Audience: I know that he didn’t say “survival of the fittest,” and that it was coined 30 years after his death.

Benay Lappe: I love that. I wasn't going there anyway, but I love knowing that.

Audience: Yeah, it's natural selection and adaptation from natural selection.

Benay Lappe: Right. Adapt, migrate ... how am I doing? [01:18:00] Or die. That's what Darwin said. At least, that's what my science teacher friend told me. Adapt, migrate, or die. What was Darwin's insight? That any species, when confronted with a threat to its survival, has one of three possible choices – three, and only three. Adapt, migrate, or die. What's adapt in this scheme?

Audience: Option 3.

Benay Lappe: Option 3. What's migrate?

Audience: 2.

Benay Lappe: 2. What's die?

Audience: 1.

Benay Lappe: Isn't that interesting? I think that's so interesting, that point. I thought I made this up – turns out I'm not as smart as I thought.

Audience: Why isn't Option 2 die, because the Jews who went to Option 2, they decided they were no longer Jews?

Benay Lappe: That's so interesting.

Audience: Their Jewishness, that piece of them.

Audience: That identity.

Benay Lappe: That's interesting. I'll have to think more about that. That's a great question.

How are we doing? Hanging in there?

Audience: Yeah.

Benay Lappe: I always wonder. Six to eight million Jews in the first century. 500 years into the story, there's our half a million Jews. What were they thinking?

Audience: It's still my story.

Benay Lappe: That was the slogan.

Audience: It's still mine.

Benay Lappe: But remember, this would have been unrecognizable to a Biblical Jew. I'm wondering what Biblical Jews are signing on to this? [01:20:00] Last year, we were in Jerusalem. We were having our, roasting our lamb in the courtyard for Passover. This year, we're holding up our matzah. "This is our Pascal offering." What the hell? Who is going to believe that? Last year you burned this animal, and the scent, and God, mmm. You say these magic words. Repeat after me, "Baruch atah A-donai." They made that shit up, by the way. God will be with you in your house, at your dining room table. Who is believing that? Go ahead

Audience: Maybe the people who practiced that way even though the Temple was still around because they couldn't get to the Temple, they were working, they're women.

Benay Lappe: I like that. There was some core group of people that ...

Audience: Already practicing ...

Benay Lappe: ... were already doing that. That sounds right to me. I'm wondering who joined them.

Audience: Are these rabbis that you're talking about, is this Rambam, or Rabbi Akiva, or ...

Benay Lappe: Rambam doesn't come for another thousand years, but it's the Rabbi Akivas and the Hillels and the Shammais. Those guys.

Audience: Those were people that one probably wanted to follow. They were fluent, dynamic.

Benay Lappe: Yeah. And knew they were making this shit up. And yet, they were selling it as Torah. I'm almost wondering, who believed that? Who believed that this was Torah? Who was believing the wink, or not seeing the wink? [01:22:00]

Audience: People who couldn't afford the sacrifices.

Audience: There wasn't a wink.

Benay Lappe: There wasn't a wink.

Audience: No.

Benay Lappe: I don't know. Are you sure it wasn't the village idiots who were our ancestors? No?

Audience: No.

Benay Lappe: I don't think it was the village idiot either.

Audience: Maybe they were Option 1 people who didn't have any other options.

Benay Lappe: Yeah, it might have been so. Actually, I think there were a few of those. I think there were a bunch of those who went here. But you know where a lot of them are? They were folks that were off this map. They were folks who were not even Jewish until they meet this story. A disproportionate number of the early rabbis were, are you ready? Converts and children of converts. A disproportionate number of the people going along with Option 3 were converts. That shouldn't surprise you. You go to any successful Option 3 today, and you'll notice lots and lots of people who aren't Jewish, lots and lots of converts.

Audience: One of the famous rabbis, Baba ben Gur ben Gur – he's the son of a convert son of a convert.

Benay Lappe: There you go.

Audience: That's literally his name.

Benay Lappe: There are all sorts of reasons for that. We're going to put a sticky on that.

I think the people, many of the people who joined this new master story, which we now call rabbinic Judaism, is the Judaism that we inherited – those people who went there are our ancestors, spiritual or genetic. They were the ones, if not the village idiots, the ones who said, "Hey, look – I know you're making this shit up. I get it. I see what you're doing. It doesn't feel Jewish to me, [01:24:00] but it will to my grandchildren, so I'll come along."

Audience: I'm the daughter of a convert. I'm wondering how Option 2 fits in with, on converting.

Benay Lappe: Yeah. I've talked with lots and lots of people who have converted to Judaism, and they ask me that. They say, "Have I actually gone Option 2 on my tradition?" I'm not sure how to answer it. I'm not sure it's my question to answer, either.

You know what comes to mind, whenever that comes up? What comes to mind is what the mikveh lady tells you when you go in the mikveh. Has anyone been to the mikveh?

Audience: Yeah.

Benay Lappe: We have a fabulous mikveh lady here in Chicago, Carol. What Carol tells you when you go into the mikveh is ... First you're going to shower. You're going to take off all your wings and whatever, your makeup. You're going to shower. After you get out of the shower, what does she tell you? "Don't dry off." She says, "The drops of water that are on your body from who you are now, you walk those into the mikveh with you, because you always bring who you were with you into who you're going to become."

I don't know. I'm not sure how that might be part of the answer to what has a convert done, which option [01:26:00] ...

Audience: It depends on their inner story.

Benay Lappe: Yeah.

Audience: Their inner story. The convert could be Option 3.

Audience: Converts are not a monolith.

Benay Lappe: And our traditions, whether Jewish or otherwise, aren't things we carry around in suitcases that we can put down to pick up another suitcase. It doesn't work that way. You are your tradition, and parts of it come with you. It could just be that conversion is always an Option 3 move. I'm not sure. It's a really interesting question.

Other thoughts, questions on anything, before we move on? Yeah.

Audience: This might be too far outside. I don't know if we live in one master story. Is our master story Judaism? Is it capitalism? I think we're living in a time where most of us are living within multiple master stories ...

Benay Lappe: 100 percent.

Audience: ... so that complicates this.

Benay Lappe: It complicates it a lot, and it's true. It's at this point that I have to say this is a heuristic. It's an overly simplified scheme, and it is not nearly as complex as reality. Because you're quite right – we never have the master story. And I'm going to go further – what happens when, if we're thinking about Jewishness, what happens when you weren't actually born in a Jewish master story, but you were born over here? What if your parents went Option 2, your parents were Jewish, and you're born here, and you don't actually have a Jewish master story that you've grown up with to crash? [01:28:00]

That's interesting. I think it's really interesting. I'm not sure what to do with it. I actually think that there's something about that scenario that makes those people really teed up to go Option 3, because they're not carrying the baggage and the anger and the disappointment and the nostalgic fracture of those who started out in the master story.

Those guys who went Option 3 knew that crashes were going to happen over and over and over. They built in to their new story mechanisms of resilience, and a methodology for creating people who would be crash flex. Because they knew that every master story crashes. In fact, they knew that the Jewish master story that had crashed wasn't the Ur master story – that there's no such thing as an Ur master story. All master stories are retellings of a prior crash. They had no illusions that Torah was, I don't believe, handed down from God at Mount Sinai, of whole cloth. They knew that that was itself a retelling.

What is most centrally Jewish is not what the tradition looks like in any given iteration, but the fact that it knows how to change, [01:30:00] and attempt to continue to create better and better guesses at that kind of human being it was designed to create in the first place. Human beings who are in the mind. And this was a tweak from the Biblical kind of human being. The Biblical kind of human being that that master story was meant to create was compliant and obedient and a good Boy Scout. They said, “No, that’s not the kind of human being that we really think God wants us to be – we think God wants us to be human beings who are deeply connected to one another, profoundly impacted, able to sit with and tolerate contradiction, paradox, uncertainty, complexity. Able to see the hidden, and not just the apparent or the obvious.”

They built this system that would create those kinds of people, and they built rules and mechanisms so that whatever their Judaism looked like, they weren’t all that invested in – they were simply invested in a Jewish process that would create an even better Option 3, and an even better Option 3 to create human beings who are even closer and closer to that ideal, or available to the new ideal. Getting a little tricky, but so far so good?

Audience: Yeah.

Benay Lappe: Here comes the core set of rules of their new system. They said, [01:32:00] “We inherited the idea that there was one, and only one, source of truth – our master story, Scripture.” This is the truth, or Jewish law. Judaism speaks in the language of halachah, of law. It’s just the vocabulary we use. Don’t get bent out of shape, “Oh, I’m not a halachic Jew, I don’t follow Jewish law.” It’s just a language. It’s the way we talk about that which is most important to us. That’s it. To the extent to which we care about something, we speak about that thing in the language of law. That’s what Jews do.

The rabbis inherited the idea that there was one, and only one, source of truth – Scripture. Everybody knew that. In Hebrew and Aramaic, it’s called “kra.” The rabbinic revolution was the notion that there are actually multiple sources of truth, not just one. That’s what the rabbis contributed, not just to Jewish thought, but to Western civilization generally – the idea that there isn’t just one source of truth.

They said there actually are five sources of truth. Scripture is one of them; we’re going to hang on to it. But they knew that Scripture was an inadequate source of truth. It wasn’t going to tell you how to have a relationship with God, because what it was going to tell you was go to a Temple that doesn’t exist. [01:34:00]

Another source, they said, was custom. *Minhag*, in Hebrew. *Minhag*. “If we’re not prophets, we’re children of prophets,” said the rabbis. “If you want to know what God wants of you, go out and see how people behave – *puk hazei*,” they say. Go out and see, go out and look how people behave. You can trust people. Put a big sticky on that, because there are all sorts of communities and different customs. But be that as it may, we can believe how people behave.

Precedent. In Hebrew, *ma'aseh*. If I don't know how to behave in some new situation that isn't covered by this early proto-retelling of Torah – and by the way, we identified it, it lived in a little book called the Mishnah. You know what “Mishnah” means in Hebrew? Second. They called their new Torah “Torah 2.0.” Seriously. They called it 2.0. But if there was some situation that that little handbook that fit in their back pocket didn't cover, they said, “We can follow, we can behave like people we trust – people who we believe are acting consistent with God's will.” I can act like Rabbi Mo. Rabbi Mo is definitely acting in the path of God – I'll just follow Rabbi Mo, [01:36:00] and I'll be safe. By the way, any lawyers in the room? How can you have a [inaudible 01:36:08]? I was going to have a crash. Does this sound, starting to sound familiar? Straight up law. Precedent.

Legislation. In Hebrew, *takanah*. They said, “If we don't know how to behave, we can follow legislation, determined by other rabbis.” For example, in the 11th century Rabbenu Gershom stood up, and he said, in spite of the fact that the Torah says that a man may marry multiple women, heterosexual, heteronormative context, a man may marry only one woman. He made a *takanah*. From then on, that was what we did – at least certain communities did.

Finally, the rabbis said, there's a fifth source of truth – and that's *svara*. Moral intuition. As you can see, we're getting to the end of our shoe. *Svara*. It's the kishke factor – it's what you know deep down inside of you. Because of your life experience, because what you know about people, because of your understanding of [01:38:00] how the world works, and how human nature works. Insight into relationships and what's happened to you in your life. That's *svara*. The rabbis said that too is a source of law. Just wait. Hold on.

They said, “You can use any one of these five as innovative sources,” sources of innovation. Ways to go Option 3 on the master story. Because in any legal system, you need sources to justify your innovations. You can use any of these as a source to make new norms, rituals, practices, so on.

Anything new that's created, along with everything old, has one of two statuses. Any mitzvah, any practice, ritual, tradition, norm, has one of two statuses. It's either got the higher status, which we call *deoraita*. Oh, and I see I haven't gotten to movements, and I'm going to come back to that. *Deoraita*. That's the Aramaic word for “of the Torah.” *Deoraita* means of the Torah – says so in the Torah. The lower status of any piece of the tradition, *derabbanan*, which means of our rabbis. That means we made that shit up. That's what *derabbanan* means – we made it up. The rabbis made it up. Let's have some examples. [01:40:00]

Audience: Carrying money on Shabbat, not being allowed to carry money on Shabbat.

Benay Lappe: Let's do an easier one.

Audience: Cooking.

Benay Lappe: Make Shabbat, observe Shabbat. Remember and keep Shabbat. *Deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Deoraita*.

Benay Lappe: Very nice. *Deoraita*. Says so in the Torah. Honor thy mother and thy father – *deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Deoraita*.

Benay Lappe: Good. You shall not seethe a calf in its mother's milk. *Deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Deoraita*.

Benay Lappe: Good. You shall have 52 sets of dishes for meat and milk and Shabbat and Pesach and ... *deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Derabbanan*.

Benay Lappe: *Derabbanan*. Doesn't have to be 52. If something is *deoraita*, we take it extraordinarily seriously. We're very strict about its enforcement. If one violates one of those norms, the punishment is severe. The wiggle room is minimal. If one violates a *derabbanan* norm, lots of wiggle room. We can do a lot with that. Punishment not so severe. It's never going to be a death penalty, for sure. A lot of leniency factors.

The rabbis rated these sources according to what kind of mitzvah it would create – a *deoraita* mitzvah or a *derabbanan* mitzvah. If a new practice is based on a scripture – you point to a certain verse, you say, “My interpretation of that verse ...” By the way, “scripture” always means the interpretation of scripture – always. This newfangled practice based on Scripture – is that newfangled practice *deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Deoraita*. [01:42:00]

Benay Lappe: Good, *deoraita*. If a new practice is based on custom – “We're going to do it tis way because that's what people do. We're going to say this blessing over water, because that's what people say.” *Deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Derabbanan*.

Benay Lappe: *Derabbanan*. Precedent. You can behave this way because Rabbi Eliezer behaved this way, or Rabbi Mo behaved this way, or Rabbi Akiva behaved this way.” *Deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Derabbanan*.

Benay Lappe: By definition *derabbanan*. Legislation. Whatever the legislation is, is that new legislation *deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: *Derabbanan*.

Benay Lappe: *Derabbanan*, because it's always done by somebody. *Svara*. We should all behave this way because my *svara* tells me so. This new practice is what I think, is what my moral intuition tells me is right, is this new practice. *Deoraita* or *derabbanan*?

Audience: We need a third one.

Benay Lappe: This is the climax of our show.

Audience: *Deoraita*?

Benay Lappe: *Deoraita*. It is *deoraita*. It is equal in status to the Torah. And what your *svara* tells you can even trump what the Torah tells you – it can overturn and uproot something in the Torah. That's the power the rabbis gave to *svara*.

Audience: That is awesome.

Benay Lappe: That was what I was looking for. Thank you very much. Exactly. Why is it awesome?

Audience: Focus on the self, one's inner knowing. [01:44:00]

Benay Lappe: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Audience: High value.

Benay Lappe: Yes. The rabbis believed in our inner knowing.

Audience: It can completely upset power structures.

Benay Lappe: Yes, it can. This is what drives your entire tradition. The entire halachic system is driven by *svara*, the entire tradition is created by *svara*. That comes out of your sensitivity to the suffering in the world, your sensitivity to the inadequacy of the tradition as we've received it, to create the kind of world and the kind of people that we think should be. That can overturn the entire tradition, and be the building block, create the bricks of the new.

Audience: But if the rabbis gave it that rating, then I don't know what to make of that. That makes it sound like it's *derabbanan*.

Benay Lappe: I know.

Audience: the rabbis ...

Audience: But there's a scripture that they cited.

Benay Lappe: They eventually go back and they say, "The Torah actually says that we can use our *svara* to even overturn Torah." They eventually shore it up with a winky-winky, "Oh, that's really been in the Torah." But you're right. That's the paradox of *svara*. It's not Torah – it's Torah. It completely upends what Torah means. [01:46:00] It's the rabbis saying, "We created this. We made this shit up." It's not a bad thing to make shit up, you just got to make up good shit. It's our job. It's an enormous elevation of status, but an enormous responsibility. You don't get to sit at home going, "Look what God let happen."

But there's a catch.

Audience: The catch is if everybody applies their own moral intuition to everything, pretty soon you've got no glue holding it all together.

Benay Lappe: Exactly.

Audience: That goes beyond it doesn't look recognizably Jewish – that goes to, we all have our own subjective truth.

Benay Lappe: Yes, exactly right. The rabbis knew that. And so they said, "You actually don't get to be a player, to be someone who is an Option 3 creator, just because you're a human being, just because you've got *svara*. *Svara's* not enough." They said, "To be a player," and by the way, to be a player, for some of them, meant to hold the title rabbi. Some held the title rabbi, most did not. PS, the only privilege you get by holding the title "rabbi" is you get indemnified against damages if you make a bad call. That's the only privilege that the title "rabbi" [01:48:00] has with it. And parsonage. Parsonage, really good.

To be a player for them wasn't to be a rabbi. It was to be someone who had two qualifications, only one of which was *svara*. They said, "To be a player, you need to be *savirna*," *svaradic*. To possess *svara*, to possess a broad experience of life, deep insight into human beings and their relationships. Moral intuition. And you needed to be *gamirna*. Anyone recognize the root, or know a word that sounds like "*gamirna*"?

Audience: Gemara.

Benay Lappe: Gemara. The root, *gimmel-mem-resh*, means to learn. Means to learn. In Hebrew it means to finish – in Aramaic it means to learn. They're related. Learning. You have to also be learned learning.

Audience: It has to be informed moral intuition.

Benay Lappe: That's right.

Audience: You can't just make that shit up.

Benay Lappe: That's right. It's informed moral intuition. The idea is that if you are steeped in the values, texts, principles, and history of the tradition, you are less likely to go off and do some wild ridiculous shit like, "I think it's okay to murder this person," or ...

To be a player, you need to have these two things. [01:50:00] SVARA exists to take people who have *svara* in spades, who are *savirna* in spades, because of their queerness, and to give them the opportunity to become *gamirna*, to become learned learning. What is it that we learn to become learned learning? We learn a book. A book that those guys put together almost 2,000 years ago, whose purpose was to say, "This is how we did it – this is how we went Option 3. Here are a thousand different examples of what we did, of the tradition that we inherited that we didn't love. We could have kept it." If a child is stubborn and rebellious, and does not heed his parents' wishes, you shall take that child to the gates of the city and ...

Audience: Stone.

Benay Lappe: Stone him. Can you do that without a Temple?

Audience: Yes.

Benay Lappe: Sure you can. You don't need a Temple to stone a kid. They didn't bring that down into their new story. But they needed to tell a story about why they weren't going to. And they said, "Here are the stories of how we didn't bring along what we thought was unjust, and here are the stories about how we made them just. Here are the tools and the mechanisms." That book is called the Talmud. [01:52:00]

The amazing thing about it is it's constructed in such a way that when you learn it, and it was designed in such a way that when you learn it, you become more and more crash flex. The document itself is not only saying, "Here are lots of examples of how we went Option 3. Stand on our shoulders." But, "If you learn this, you're going to be better able to do it because of how the act of learning it changes you." It's amazing.

That's the Talmud, and our entire yeshiva exists to take it from the one percent who have been learning it and using it for the last 2,000 years, and to bring it to the other 99%. That's it. This is our invitation to you to join us. This is the pitch, okay? To learn with us, and to become a player. Thank you.

Let's do some Q&A. and I definitely want to get back to your question about the ...

Audience: I wanted to say that this, to me, points to the utter value in the crash. That's [inaudible 01:53:38]. Because had there not been the crash, maybe we wouldn't be here.

Benay Lappe: That's right.

Audience: We owe gratitude.

Benay Lappe: Yeah. Crashes are good. [01:54:00] I just want to make a note. I didn't quite bring us into the contemporary era. That rabbinic Judaism that the rabbis created 2,000 years ago is now here.

Audience: That's Orthodoxy, would you say?

Benay Lappe: No. Be careful. It is all of contemporary Judaism. Judaism, for the last 150 years, beginning with the emancipation and the enlightenment, through the Holocaust and modernity and America and democracy, is crashing, has been crumbling, is in a major crash. We are already into Option 3s of this crashing Judaism. Some of these Option 3s, the very first one was called Reform Judaism. The second one was called ...

Audience: Orthodoxy.

Benay Lappe: Orthodoxy. Don't let anybody tell you that Orthodoxy is the tradition. Orthodoxy is an Option 3 on the crash that's been happening since emancipation. So is Conservative Judaism, so is Reconstructionism, so is Zionism. These are all Option 3s. Which, I might add, are all crashing. We got 2,000 years out of that.

Audience: It's not that bad.

Benay Lappe: It's not bad. And we've got 150 or so years out of the Option 3s that have come out of our current crash. Now we're getting to there's Mishkan and there's SVARA and there's Moishe House and there's Urban Adamah and there are yoga minyans. [01:56:00] And we're doing great.

Audience: What's to say that the Talmud won't also go as it crashes, a handbook for change that is no longer are relevant or helpful?

Benay Lappe: Say it again, one more time.

Audience: What if the Talmud is one of the things that is not taken with us after this crash of rabbinic Judaism?

Benay Lappe: Yeah. That's a great question. And by the way, lots of people have decided just that. Lots of people have decided, "No, we don't need that." Reform Judaism said, "We don't need halachah at all, much less the manual that uses the language of halachah, it is all about halachic mechanisms of change and so on." Most of the Option 3s have said, "We don't need it."

I think our insight at SVARA – and it's not only ours; I think a handful of people have it – is that the Talmud has, it's a great methodology for becoming a crash flex person. It takes us back to an era that was much, much more radical and courageous than our own. In a time of crash, you want to have courageous responses. You don't want to have phobic responses. You don't want to have, "Oh, no, better batten down the hatches." You want risk taken, actually. Seems counterintuitive, but that's what you want. The Talmud is a very ...

Audience: Malleable?

Benay Lappe: More than that. It's like go for broke, be courageous charge. [01:58:00] I think that's what you need in a crash. I think that's why they're particularly useful. You know what? We're going to do Talmud. Let some other people not, and see where we end up.

Audience: It sounds like the insight that you're building this whole thing on is that the Talmud is as valuable a manual for process as it is for actual content and law.

Benay Lappe: That's right.

Audience: And to that extent, that's the insight that says ... if you're right about that, then that's why that's the answer to your question, of why the Talmud will [crosstalk 01:58:53].

Benay Lappe: That's a better answer than I gave. I think that's right. I believe deeply that the rabbis were completely agnostic about the content of any Option 3 in the future. I don't think they cared whether we had Shabbos on Saturday or Wednesday, or not at all, and whether you ate cheeseburgers, or you didn't eat cheeseburgers. I think ...

Audience: What were they invested in, then, and why did they ...

Benay Lappe: I think they were invested in a system that would create a certain kind of person, and a system that had within it the mechanisms for making better and better guesses at how to make that kind of person, even what kind of person that that kind of person we're trying to create really should be.

Other thoughts, questions, challenges? Yeah.

Audience: I'm thinking that one of the most compelling narratives ...

[end of first recording]

Audience: ... as a people is that Jews are resilient. I think maybe the appeal of Talmud or many of these other Option 3 situations is that it shows us how Jews have been resilient in the past, and maybe at this time of ... every time, all the time, it's uncertain and scary in the world, and we want to be resilient.

Benay Lappe: Yeah.

Audience: Actually, I don't think the conventional narrative is that Jews innovated and changed. I don't think that.

Benay Lappe: No.

Audience: I think that resilience is ...

Benay Lappe: This is the story we tell.

Audience: Which is that we survived. We kept enough.

Benay Lappe: What do you do when you go to shul? When you take out the Torah? You hold up to it, and your job is to pass it down exactly as you received it. You hold it very, very carefully. Don't let anything happen to it, don't mess with it. If you did your job well, and you lived your life right, your kids are going to do it just the way you did. That's the story we've been told about how to do it right, which is not ever how it's been. But in a time of crash, that narrative gets ... remember, we talked about getting really distorted? It's holding on with its fingernails, and thinking that what will allow us to survive is that we keep doing things the way we've been doing them. It's a strategy. By the way, I'm glad some people do Option 1. If some people hadn't done Option 1, the Talmud wouldn't exist today.

Audience: I think the point you're making is that [00:02:00] ... We tell this story where Judaism is super resilient, and has survived and survived and survived. But in telling [inaudible 00:02:11] we gripped on til our knuckles were white to hold on to something that could survive. Actually, this whole thing is a reframe of what resiliency, to me, is. That what it means to be resilient is actually that, is actually be deeply radical and innovative, that the only way something can be resilient is to adapt. There's a story out there about our resilience, which is true. But what story do you tell about resilience? Is it perverted?

Benay Lappe: Yeah.

Audience: [crosstalk 00:02:50]

Audience: I really liked it. I feel like it's a reclaiming of Jewish resilience. It's much more [inaudible 00:02:57]. Oh, something radical, innovative, disruptive resilience. That's [inaudible 00:03:03].

Benay Lappe: Rather than a dogged ability to keep doing the same thing, maintaining the tradition exactly as it was.

Audience: I really liked how you pulled out the piece that what the rabbis wanted the most was to make a certain type of person. Thinking through all the different strains of Judaism that exist right now, and all that I'm familiar with, back to that big crash in 70 CE ... that tied them together for me in a way that I hadn't seen before. I really appreciate that.

Benay Lappe: Thank you all very, very much.

Audience: Thank you. [00:04:00]

Benay Lappe: I'll hang out. We're all going to hang out. If you have any questions or just want to chat, great. Thank you all for coming.

Audience: Thank you.