

SEPTEMBER 28, 2019 | SHABBAT CANDLE LIGHTING 6:28 PM | MOTZEI SHABBAT HAVDALA 7:29 PM

**שבת פרשת נצבים**  
**SHABBAT PARSHAT NITZAVIM**  
**28 ELUL**

Haftorah is Isaiah 61:10-63:9 (שוש אשיש). Pirkei Avot Chs. 5&6.

**FRIDAY EVENING**

MINCHA 6:30 PM  
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 7:31 PM

**SHABBAT**

HASHKAMA 8:05 AM  
MAIN 9:00 AM  
LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:48 AM  
GEMARA SHIUR 5:25 PM  
MINCHA 6:10 PM  
MAARIV 7:29 PM

**ראש השנה**  
**ROSH HASHANAH**  
**1&2 TISHREI/SEPT. 29-OCT. 1**

**SUNDAY EVENING**

CANDLE LIGHTING 6:24 PM  
MINCHA 6:30 PM  
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 7:27 PM

**MONDAY**

SHACHARIT 7:45 AM  
LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:48 AM  
MINCHA/TASHLICH 6:00 PM  
SHKIA 6:41 PM  
MAARIV 7:10 PM  
CANDLE LIGHTING > 7:26 PM

**TUESDAY**

SHACHARIT 7:45 AM  
LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:49 AM  
MINCHA 6:20 PM  
SHKIA 6:39 PM  
MAARIV/HAVDALAH 7:24 PM

**HAPPENINGS & EVENTS**

**Seudah Shlishit**  
**סעודה שלישית**

Seudat Shilishit is sponsored by the Agress family on the Yahrzeit of Amy's father Ha'Rav Yisroel Yehuda Ben Ephraim Michal Ha'Levi Pruzansky ז"ל.

We can't pull off the Simchat Torah Kiddush without you! To become a Platinum sponsor (\$100) or a general sponsor (\$36), please email Steve at [seplotnick@gmail.com](mailto:seplotnick@gmail.com).



**FROM THE RABBI**



After Kiddush will be a special 20-minute drasha/primer entitled "What We Need To Know About Rosh Hashanah Before The End of 5779". On Rosh Hashanah the topics will be for Day 1: "Have a Blast!: The Truth Behind Shofar", and Day 2: "Every One of us Like Sheep, Steps, and Soldiers".



Rabbi Michael Hoenig of TABC will be speaking on Monday after Tashlich (before Maariv) discussing "Teshuva on Rosh Hashana: Can I Have Some Change?"



**GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH PROGRAM ALERTS**



Baby sitting for children ages 2 to 12 on Rosh Hashanah will be from 9:30 AM to 1:30 PM, and on Yom Kippur from 10:00 AM to 2:30 PM. Please email [kira.batist.msw@gmail.com](mailto:kira.batist.msw@gmail.com) to enroll your children.

	SUNDAY 9/29	MONDAY 9/30	TUESDAY 10/1	WEDNESDAY 10/2	THURSDAY 10/3	FRIDAY 10/4
<b>WEEKDAY MINYONIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM</b>						
SHACHARIT	7:30 AM			5:45 AM	5:45 AM	5:45 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV	6:30 PM			6:05 PM	6:20 PM	6:20 PM
<b>ZMANIM OF INTEREST</b>						
Fast Begins				5:42 AM		
Earliest Talit	5:57 AM			6:00 AM	6:01 AM	6:02 AM
Gedolah	1:16 PM			1:15 PM	1:14 PM	1:14 PM
Shkia	6:42 PM			6:37 PM	6:36 PM	
Fast Ends				7:17 AM		
Tzait	7:27 PM			7:22 PM	7:21 PM	

## FUTURE EVENTS

- Oct. 15** - Kiddush sponsored by the Winchester family on the Yahrtzeit of Steve's mother, Helen, Miriam Hendl bas Shimon
- Oct. 26** - Youth Taking Over, Sharsheret Pink Sudeah Shlshit, sponsored by Kira & Andrew Wigod
- Nov. 2** - Suedah Shlshit is sponsored by David & Lori Garfunkel in memory of Jonathan, and Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick on the Yahrzeit of Betsy's father יהודיה חיים בן ירמיהו, Howard Perlmutter
- Nov. 5** - Food Bank Volunteering. Email [eligreenbaum@yahoo.com](mailto:eligreenbaum@yahoo.com) for info.
- Nov. 8** - Friday Night Dinner
- Nov. 16** - Suedah shlshit is sponsored by the Kor family in honor of David Aufruf
- Nov. 23** - Shamai Bernstein Bar Mitzvah
- Dec. 7** - Yehuda Farajun Bar Mitzvah
- Dec. 7** - Suedah Shlshit is sponsored by Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick on the Yahrzeit of Betsy's mother Elaine Perlmutter, Elka Shaindel bat Tzvi Hersch
- Dec. 21** - Julia Brenenson Bat Mitzvah
- Dec. 27** - Chanukah Dinner
- Jan. 25** - Suedah Shlshit is sponsored by the Sonnenblicks on the Yahrzeit of Marty's mother Helene, הענטשא מאטל בת ר' זלמן

## SISTERHOOD CALENDAR

- Oct. 13** - Flower Sale
- Oct. 22** - Food Auction
- Oct. 26** - Book club at Esther Schwed's home, discussing Our Souls at Night, by Kent Haruf.
- Nov. 9** - Trivia Night
- Nov. 10** - Coat Drive
- Dec. 17** - Moroccan and Persian Cooking



## GITA COOPERWASSER YOUTH PROGRAM DATES

- Oct. 5 - Stay & Play**, at the home of Esther & Chaim Felberbaum
- Oct. 12 - Parent/Child Learning**, studying Kohelet
- Oct. 21 - 21st Annual Children's Hakafot**, 4:30 PM



## GITA COOPERWASSER YOUTH PROGRAM INFO

- From 1st to 10th grade, meet at the main minyon at 9:00 AM, sharp
- Youth Chabura (1st - 5th), meet Matthew Levine
- Teen Chabura (6th - 10th), this week meet Jon Hurewitz
- 11th - 12th graders, meet Andrew Wigod at 10:15 AM
- Tot Shabbat, 10:30 AM!
- Email ideas/suggestions for the Youth Program to [kira.batist.msw@gmail.com](mailto:kira.batist.msw@gmail.com)
- To inquire about Yomim Noraim babysitting (ages 2 - 11), email [kira.batist.msw@gmail.com](mailto:kira.batist.msw@gmail.com)

## KIDDUSH INFORMATION

- To sponsor a Kiddush (\$1000/\$613/\$318, plus scotch) email [gplotnick@aol.com](mailto:gplotnick@aol.com).
- If you are around when the Rabbi says "על המחיה", your assistance in clean up would be appreciated.

## ADULT EDUCATION



- Nov. 1 - Oneg Shabbat** series in memory of Jonathan Garfunkel resumes.
- Dec 20 - Oneg Shabbat**
- Jan 10 - Oneg Shabbat**
- Feb 14 - Oneg Shabbat**
- Mar 6 - Oneg Shabbat**

## WEEKLY SHIURIM

- GEMARA SHIUR - Shabbat, 45 minutes before Mincha, learning Beitzah.
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT - TBA.
- BEGINNER TALMUD CLASS - Monday evenings, 8:15 PM.

## MEN'S CLUB CALENDAR

- Oct. 6** - Sylvia Latkin Sukkah Building after Shacharit - Please email Elliot at [MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org](mailto:MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org) and let him know he can count on you!
- Oct. 13** - Arba Minim Sale
- Oct. 14** - Sukkah Hop - To Volunteer your Sukkah email [MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org](mailto:MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org)

18-25 Saddle River Road  
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410  
201.797.0502  
[www.ahavatachim.org](http://www.ahavatachim.org)

To dedicate a bulletin for \$36 (\$54 w/ Photo), email [seplotnick@gmail.com](mailto:seplotnick@gmail.com)

## PARSHA POINTS TO PONDER

(1st aliyah) Bonus: In the last verse of this aliyah, Moshe tells the people what they are here to do, to pass through (i.e. accept) the covenant with Hashem your God and \_\_\_\_\_. What/Who is in the covenant besides Hashem and Bnei Yisrael? What is the meaning of the word (in Hebrew: אלתו) imprecation.

(3rd aliyah) Last week we read about the 11 arur curses that the Jewish people were instructed to recite upon entering Eretz Yisrael, and contrasted them to the Aseret Hadibrot. According to the simple reading of the text, what in this aliyah seems to explicitly make reference to that dichotomy?

(4th aliyah) What does this aliyah say will happen after all of the blessings (brachot) and klalot (curses) come to bear?

(6th) What phrase from this aliyah does the famous gemara in Baba Metzia quote to explain why we follow the majority of Rabbis against the minority, even when a voice from Heaven says that the minority position is correct?

(7th) What in this aliyah is paralleled to life and death?

### Answers to Points To Ponder

- (1st) "Olato", imprecation here means the concept of reward and punishment, which makes up the content of the covenant.
- (3rd) "The hidden [sins] are for Hashem, our God, but the revealed [sins] are for us and our children to carry out all the words of this Torah" (29:28)
- (4th) The Jewish people will return to Hashem in their hearts
- (6th) "[The Torah] it is not in Heaven" (20:12)
- (7th) Good and bad.

## IN ELUL WE REMEMBER . . .



NAME	HEBREW DATE	CANDLE EVENING OF	DEDICATOR	RELATIONSHIP
Starinsky-Kutovsky Family	1	September 29	Seymour Wigod	Family
Jerry Pruzansky	2	September 30	Amy Agress	Father
Andzia Zuckerberg	6	October 4	Sophie Infield	Mother
Lenore Bickel	9	October 7	Jack Bickel	Mother
David & Augusta Cahn Maier	10	October 8	Audrey Bickel	Grandparents
Sofie Maier & Children	10	October 8	Audrey Bickel	Great-Grandmother & Family
Blanche Mueller	11	October 9	Joyce Heller	Mother
Nathan Arthur Weinfeld	11	October 9	Joan Goldberg	Father
Herschel Israel Frankel	13	October 11	Elyce Smedresman	Uncle
Ronald Heller	13	October 11	Joyce Heller	Husband
Helen Wincheshter	16	October 14	Steve Winchester	Mother
Walter A. Rothschild	19	October 17	Audrey Bickel	Father
Philip Goldberg	20	October 18	Barry Goldberg	Father
Ellen Hope Rosenberg	21	October 19	Joyce Heller	Sister
Shmuel Sevek Adler	22	October 20	Gideon Adler	Father
Max Smedresman	22	October 20	Steve Smedresman	Father
Max Heller	26	October 24	Joyce Heller	Father-In-Law
Musia Krakow	26	October 24	Seymour Wigod	Aunt

## DONATE A SEFER, ETC.

The shul has Siddurim & Machzorim (\$36) and Chumashim (\$54) available to be donated. Please contact Jeff Safier at [robysafier@gmail.com](mailto:robysafier@gmail.com) for details.

## Yahrzeit Plaques

Memorialize a loved one with a plaque, \$300 for members and \$450 for nonmembers. We will strive to send you written notice of upcoming yahrzeit and announce name during public Yizkor. Email Larry at [lardaybern@gmail.com](mailto:lardaybern@gmail.com) to arrange.

## SCRIP

Scrip is available from Men's Club. Email David at [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com). Pay using Paypal ([treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org)) or use Discover, MasterCard or Visa - email [treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org) for details.

## MISHEBAYRACH

With a Mishebayrach you've pledged to give Tzedakah on behalf of those for whom you asked Hashem's blessing. Contributions to the shul can be made via Paypal to [treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org), or via MasterCard, Visa or Discover by sending info to [treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org). If by check indicate on its face "Aliyah Donation."

## MEN'S CLUB

Please contact Elliot Greene at [MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org](mailto:MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org) to join the Men's Club.

## HONORARIA

The available Honoraria list will be provided upon request by contacting Steven Plotnick at [seplotnick@gmail.com](mailto:seplotnick@gmail.com).

## DAVID SCHWITZER<sup>ר"ע</sup>

### SOCIAL HALL

Please contact Lori Garfunkel at [garfmom@gmail.com](mailto:garfmom@gmail.com) to book the David Schwitzer<sup>ר"ע</sup> Social Hall for an event or special occasion. \$250 per simcha (members)/\$325 for Associates/\$400 paid in advance for non-members, plus the cost of any additional clean up (plus a \$150 security/cleaning deposit refunded when the social hall is returned in the condition it started in). Private caterers must be approved in advance by the Rabbi.

### MITZVAH CARDS

Want mitzvah cards, contact Eita Latkin at 791-8940 or [parentsof3@aol.com](mailto:parentsof3@aol.com). Cost is \$3 per card. Also can be ordered in bulk - ten cards for \$25, which you send out yourself privately.

## EREV ROSH HASHANAH

The Shofar is not blown on Erev Rosh Hashanah to distinguish between the voluntary shofar blowing of Elul and the obligatory shofar blowing of Rosh HaShana. One takes a haircut and bathes. Immersion in a Mikvah should not be before an hour before midday so that we may enter the Day of Judgement in a state of holiness and purity. Candle-lighting Brachot are "להדליק נר של יום טוב" and "שהחיינו".

### א' דראש השנה

## FIRST NIGHT ROSH HASHANAH

First night, after services we bless each other with: "לשנה טובה תכתב ותחתם", "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year". According to the Vilna Gaon we do not say "ותחתם" ('and sealed') on Rosh HaShanah. At home to symbolize a sweet year we dip challah in honey. We also dip a piece of apple in honey and eat it after making the Bracha פרי העץ העץ. We then say, "May it be Your will our G-D and G-D of our fathers that You renew for us a good, sweet year." Other symbolic foods are eaten such as meat of a ram's head, or the head of a fish or fowl, followed by statements like, "May it be Your will that we be raised high and proud like the head and not lowly like the tail." We eat grated carrots (Yiddish word for carrots 'Mehren' can be translated as multiplying) and say, "May it be Your will that we be fruitful and multiply" and "May it be Your will that our merits increase."

### ב' דראש השנה

## SECOND NIGHT ROSH HASHANAH

It is proper for women to wear a new garment or display a new fruit at candle-lighting so that the שהחיינו applies to these as well (do not eat the fruit before Kiddush). On the second night bring to the table a new fruit or wear a new garment so that the Bracha שהחיינו that we recite at the end of Kiddush applies to these as well. (If one forgot to prepare a new fruit or garment he still makes the שהחיינו).

### תקיעת שופר

## SOUNDING THE SHOFAR - BOTH DAYS

Before sounding the Shofar, we recite "למנצח" (Psalm 47) seven times, followed by the verses whose first letters spell out "קרע שטן" "destroy Satan." The Baal T'kiah makes the Brachot: "לשמוע קול שופר", "שהחיינו" and "להחיינו" bearing in mind that the Brachot and sounding the Shofar also are on behalf of all those listening. Baal T'kiah blows three sets each of תשר"ת, תשר"ת, and תר"ת. **One absolutely must not talk during the first thirty sounds, and even afterwards one cannot talk until the conclusion of all one hundred sounds at the end of services unless absolutely necessary.** After the first thirty blasts the Baal T'kiah leads the congregation in: אשרי; and לדוד. We return the Sifrei Torah to the ark.) One may not eat before hearing the Shofar sounded. However, if one feels weak, he may make Kiddush and taste some food immediately after the first thirty blasts – the תקיעות דמיושב. the prohibition against speaking during the Chazzan's repetition of ShemonEh Esrei is a very serious one.

### צום גדלי

## FAST OF GEDALIAH OCTOBER 2, 3 TISHREI

Fast is observed from 5:42 AM until 7:17 PM. The cantor includes the prayer Anenu in the repetition of the Shachrit amidah. At Shacharit Thirteen Divine Attributes are said - Passages of Vayechal are read from the Torah (Shmot 32: 14 & 34: 1-10).

## MISCELLANEOUS

### AHAVAT ACHIM MEMBERSHIP/ HOSPITALITY

Contact Arnie at [aspier@verizon.net](mailto:aspier@verizon.net) for membership details. For Shabbat hospitality contact Sara at [saraG51@yahoo.com](mailto:saraG51@yahoo.com).

### BIKKUR CHOLIM/CHESED COMMITTEE

If someone needs a visit/assistance, contact Sara at [saralevine06@gmail.com](mailto:saralevine06@gmail.com) or Mary Lisa at [kenkatter541@gmail.com](mailto:kenkatter541@gmail.com).

### PERSONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Various life cycle events related to members are announced in the bulletin (e.g., births and weddings of children/grandchildren, bar/bat mitzvahs of children, deaths requiring shiva observance, as well as travel to/from Israel to study). Other personal announcements are not appropriate except as part of the bulletin's dedication (a \$36 cost - \$54 with photo).

### NUMBERS & INFO

**ERUV:** To subscribe for updates, email [fairlawneruv@groups.io](mailto:fairlawneruv@groups.io). Check status at <https://groups.io/g/fairlawneruv> or call 201-254-9190.

**MIKVAH:** 201-796-0350. At Shomrei Torah, 9 PM-10:30 PM, Motzei Shabbat from 1¼ hours after Shabbat ends for 1½ hours. Kaylim Mikvah: Sun. 10 AM-3 PM

**TWITTER:** AhavatAchimFL

**FACEBOOK:** [facebook.com/groups/ahavat.achim/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ahavat.achim/)

**INSTAGRAM:** [instagram.com/ahavatachimfl/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/ahavatachimfl/?hl=en)

**FLICKR:** [flickr.com/photos/ahavatachim/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ahavatachim/albums)

### SHUL CALENDAR

To add events to the shul calendar email Larry at [lardavbern@gmail.com](mailto:lardavbern@gmail.com).





בס"ד

*The Sisterhood of Congregation Ahavat Achim  
Joins with the Families Listed Below  
in Wishing You a Shana Tova!*

לשנה טובה תכתבו

*Amy & Stephen Agress and family  
The Bickel Family  
Natasha, Daniel & Dov Borsuk  
The Brenenson Family  
Michele & Lee Brooks and Family  
Ruth C. Brooks  
Saragail Chessin Carpe  
Ellen & Murray Chass  
Michelle & Zvi Dubin, Jonathan,  
Tamar & Daniel  
Rose & Ron Dworkis and Family  
Lisa & Jacob Eis  
Elfie & Jamie Eisman and Family  
Fred & Marina Fontaine and Family  
Lori, David and Uri Garfunkel  
Revi, Michael, Dalia, Julian, & Zachary Glasser  
Joan & Barry Goldberg and Family  
Naomi & David Graber  
Dina & Elliot Greene and Family  
Joyce Heller and Family  
Gail & Elliott Hershkowitz and Family  
Sophie Infield and Family  
The Jacob Family  
The Katter Family  
Georgette & Ken Kestler and Family  
Irene Komet  
Evelyn & Larry Kraut and Family*

*Al Kustanowitz and Family  
The Kwestel and Jacobson Families  
Gloria & Robert Lewisohn and Family  
Aliza, Richard, Perri, & Sophie Mayer  
Miriam, Adam, & Neshama Nudelman  
Gail & Steven Plotnick  
Shelly & Sam Racenstein  
Howard Rein  
Andrea, Greg, Deborah, Michael and  
Eden Risken  
Robyn & Jeff Safier, Justin and Anny  
Esther Schwed  
Chana & Rabbi Shestack and Family  
The Schwitzer Family  
Elyce & Steve Smedresman  
Tamar & Joe Smith and Family  
Ronald Sokoloff  
Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick and Family  
Rani & Arnie Spier and Family  
Fern & Oded Strich and Family  
Shirley & Avi Vann  
Beth & Steve Wechsler and Family  
Kira, Andrew, & Cayleb Wigod  
Seymour Wigod and Family  
Shelly & Steve Winchester and Family  
Ray & Steve Wolfson  
Sara Yehaskel*

*May Hashem Grant Us All a Healthy, Happy & Peaceful New Year*

Volunteer with **Jewish Federation**  
**Mitzvah Day**  
Sunday, November 24

50 Eisenhower Drive, Paramus | 10-11:30 am & 12:30-2 pm

**Hands on activities for all ages**

- Create **Gifts for seniors** to be distributed to local nursing homes
- Sort and pack **Baby and children's clothing** to be distributed to families in need
- Make **Memory books** for dementia patients
- Assemble **Toiletry kits** for those in need
- Package **New scarves, gloves and hats** for holiday gifts to local Jewish agencies, to the homeless and to youth at risk in Israel
- Wrap **Puzzles as holiday gifts** for people with emotional, psychiatric and addiction issues
- Sort **Thanksgiving food** for local food pantries
- Decorate **Holiday cards**

**WWW.JFNJ.ORG/MITZVAHDAY**

**Drive collections are starting now**

- Baby and children's clothing** new and gently used
- Magazines and plastic sheet protectors** for memory books
- Toiletry kits** new, unopened travel size toiletries including body wash, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, body lotion and combs/brushes
- New gloves, hats and scarves** for holiday gifts
- Puzzles** new, unopened, for ages 8 - 98
- Thanksgiving items** boxes of stuffing, mashed potatoes and cornbread, canned cranberry sauce, fruit and vegetables, canned pie filling, gravy



**Call Me**

Beth Figman • Director, Volunteer Services • 201-820-3947 • bethf@jfnj.org

Mitzvah Day Co-Chairs: Shirley Altman | Laurie Ann Weinstein • Volunteer Center Chair: Sari Gross  
Mitzvah Day Sponsors: G.B. Allen and Associates, Inc. CPA's | Ma'adan | ShopRite of Englewood and Paramus



# COVENANT & CONVERSATION

THOUGHTS ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA  
FROM RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

בס"ד



I am deeply touched that Covenant & Conversation has been generously sponsored by THE MAURICE WOHL CHARITABLE FOUNDATION in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl ז"ל. Maurice was a visionary philanthropist on a vast scale, driven throughout his life by a sense of Jewish responsibility. Vivienne was a woman of the deepest humanity and compassion, who had a kind word for everyone. Together, they were a unique partnership of dedication and grace, for whom living was giving. Through their Charitable Foundation, they continue to bring blessings to Jewish communities around the world. — RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

נצבים תשע"ט  
Nitzavim 5779

## COVENANT & CONVERSATION: FAMILY EDITION

*Covenant & Conversation: Family Edition* is a new and exciting accompaniment to Rabbi Sacks' weekly *Covenant & Conversation* essay, aimed at connecting older children and teenagers with his ideas and thoughts on the *parsha*. To download the accompanying Family Edition to this *Covenant & Conversation* essay, please visit [www.RabbiSacks.org/CCFamilyEdition](http://www.RabbiSacks.org/CCFamilyEdition) or subscribe to Rabbi Sacks' free mailing list via [www.RabbiSacks.org/Subscribe](http://www.RabbiSacks.org/Subscribe).

## Not Beyond the Sea

When I was a student at university in the late 1960s – the era of student protests, psychedelic drugs, and the Beatles meditating with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi – a story went the rounds. An American Jewish woman in her sixties travelled to north India to see a celebrated guru. There were huge crowds waiting to see the holy man, but she pushed through, saying that she needed to see him urgently. Eventually, after weaving through the swaying crowds, she entered the tent and stood in the presence of the master himself. What she said that day has entered the realm of legend. She said, “Marvin, listen to your mother. Enough already. Come home.”

Starting in the sixties Jews made their way into many religions and cultures with one notable exception: their own. Yet Judaism has historically had its mystics and meditators, its poets and philosophers, its holy men and women, its visionaries and prophets. It has often seemed as if the longing we have for spiritual enlightenment is in direct proportion to its distance, its foreignness, its unfamiliarity. We prefer the far to the near.

Moses already foresaw this possibility: *Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.* (Deut. 30:11–14)

Moses sensed prophetically that in the future Jews would say that to find inspiration we have to ascend to heaven or cross the sea. It is anywhere but here. So it was for much of Israel's history during the First and Second Temple periods. First came the era in which the people were tempted by the gods of the people around them: the Canaanite Baal, the Moabite Chemosh, or Marduk and Astarte in Babylon. Later, in Second Temple times, they were attracted to Hellenism

in its Greek or Roman forms. It is a strange phenomenon, best expressed in the memorable line of Groucho Marx: “I don’t want to belong to any club that would have me as a member.” Jews have long had a tendency to fall in love with people who do not love them and pursue almost any spiritual path so long as it is not their own. But it is very debilitating.

When great minds leave Judaism, Judaism loses great minds. When those in search of spirituality go elsewhere, Jewish spirituality suffers. And this tends to happen in precisely the paradoxical way that Moses describes several times in Deuteronomy. It occurs in ages of affluence, not poverty, in eras of freedom, not slavery. When we seem to have little to thank God for, we thank God. When we have much to be grateful for, we forget.

**“When we seem to have little to thank God for, we thank God. When we have much to be grateful for, we forget.”**

The eras in which Jews worshipped idols or became Hellenised were Temple times when Jews lived in their land, enjoying either sovereignty or autonomy. The age in which, in Europe, they abandoned Judaism was the period of Emancipation, from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, when for the first time they enjoyed civil rights.

The surrounding culture in most of these cases was hostile to Jews and Judaism. Yet Jews often preferred to adopt the culture that rejected them rather than embrace the one that was theirs by birth and inheritance, where they had the chance of feeling at home. The results were often tragic.

Becoming Baal worshippers did not lead to Israelites being welcomed by the Canaanites. Becoming Hellenised did not endear Jews to either the Greeks or the Romans. Abandoning Judaism in the nineteenth century did not end antisemitism; it inflamed it. Hence the power of Moses’ insistence: to find truth, beauty, and spirituality, you do not have to go elsewhere. “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”

The result was that Jews enriched other cultures more than their own. Part of Mahler’s Eighth Symphony is a Catholic mass. Irving Berlin, son of a chazzan, wrote “White Christmas.” Felix Mendelssohn, grandson of one of the first “enlightened” Jews, Moses Mendelssohn, composed church music and rehabilitated Bach’s long-neglected St Matthew Passion. Simone Weil, one of the deepest Christian thinkers of the twentieth century – described by Albert Camus as “the only great spirit of our times” – was born to Jewish parents. So was Edith Stein, celebrated by the Catholic Church as a saint and martyr, but murdered in Auschwitz because to the Nazis she was a Jew. And so on.

Was it the failure of Europe to accept the Jewishness of Jews and Judaism? Was it Judaism’s failure to confront the challenge? The phenomenon is so complex it defies any simple explanation. But in the process, we lost great art, great intellect, great spirits and minds.



To some extent the situation has changed both in Israel and in the Diaspora. There has been much new Jewish music and a revival of Jewish mysticism. There have been important Jewish writers and thinkers. But we still spiritually underachieve. The deepest roots of spirituality come from within: from within a culture, a tradition, a sensibility. They come from the syntax and semantics of the native language of the soul: “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”

The beauty of Jewish spirituality is precisely that in Judaism God is close. You do not need to climb a mountain or enter an ashram to find the Divine Presence. It is there around the table at a Shabbat meal, in the light of the candles and the simple holiness of the Kiddush wine and the *challot*, in the praise of the *Eishet Chayil* and the blessing of children, in the peace of mind that comes when you leave the world to look after itself for a day while you celebrate the good things that come not from working but resting, not from buying but enjoying – the gifts you have had all along but did not have time to appreciate.

**“The beauty of Jewish spirituality is precisely that in Judaism God is close. You do not need to climb a mountain to find the Divine Presence.”**

In Judaism, God is close. He is there in the poetry of the psalms, the greatest literature of the soul ever written. He is there listening in to our debates as we study a page of the Talmud or offer new interpretations of ancient texts. He is there in the joy of the festivals, the tears of Tisha B’Av, the echoes of the shofar of Rosh Hashanah, and the contrition of Yom Kippur. He is there in the very air of the land of Israel and the stones of Jerusalem, where the oldest of the old and the newest of the new mingle together like close friends.

God is near. That is the overwhelming feeling I get from a lifetime of engaging with the faith of our ancestors. Judaism needed no cathedrals, no monasteries, no abstruse theologies, no metaphysical ingenuities – beautiful though all these are – because for us God is the God of everyone and everywhere, who has time for each of us, and who meets us where we are, if we are willing to open our soul to Him.

I am a Rabbi. For many years I was a Chief Rabbi. But in the end I think it was we, the Rabbis, who did not do enough to help people open their doors, their minds, and their feelings to the Presence-beyond-the-universe-who-created-us-in-love that our ancestors knew so well and loved so much. We were afraid – of the intellectual challenges of an aggressively secular culture, of the social challenges of being in yet not entirely of the world, of the emotional challenge of finding Jews or Judaism or the State of Israel criticised and condemned. So we retreated behind a high wall, thinking that made us safe. High walls never make you safe; they only make you fearful. What makes you safe is confronting the challenges without fear and inspiring others to do likewise.

What Moses meant in those extraordinary words, “It is not in heaven...nor is it beyond the sea,” was: *Kinderlach*, your parents trembled when they heard the voice of God at Sinai. They were overwhelmed. They said: If we hear any more we will die. So God found ways in which you could

meet Him without being overwhelmed. Yes, He is creator, sovereign, supreme power, first cause, mover of the planets and the stars. But He is also parent, partner, lover, friend. He is *Shechinah*, from *shachen*, meaning, the neighbour next door.

So thank Him every morning for the gift of life. Say the *Shema* twice daily for the gift of love. Join your voice to others in prayer so that His spirit may flow through you, giving you the strength and courage to change the world. When you cannot see Him, it is because you are looking in the wrong direction. When He seems absent, He is there just behind you, but you have to turn to meet Him. Do not treat Him like a stranger. He loves you. He believes in you. He wants your success. To find Him you do not have to climb to heaven or cross the sea. His is the voice you hear in the silence of the soul. His is the light you see when you open your eyes to wonder. His is the hand you touch in the pit of despair. His is the breath that gives you life.

**“Join your voice to others in prayer so that His spirit may flow through you, giving you the strength and courage to change the world.”**

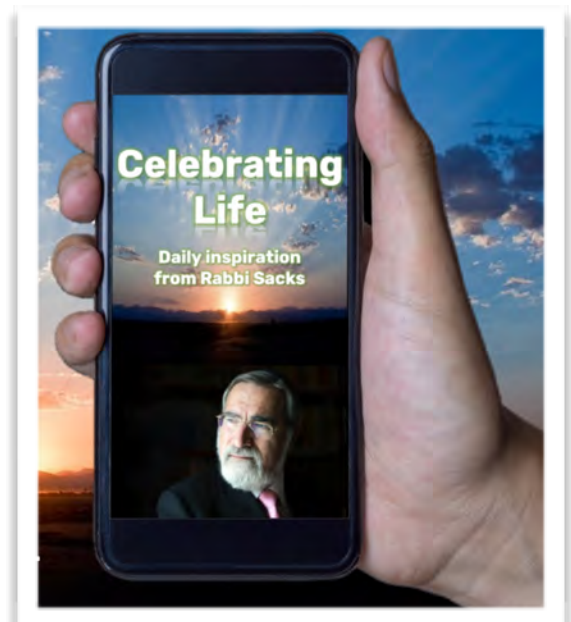
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