



SHABBAT CANDLE LIGHTING 6:33 PM

28 ELUL 5782

SEPTEMBER 24, 2022

**שבת פרשת נצבים**  
**SHABBAT PARSHAT NITZAVIM**

Haftorah is Isaiah 61:10-63:9. Tishrei is not blessed. Pirkei Avot 5&6. Motzei Shabbat don't say ואתה קדוש or ויהי נועם.

**FRIDAY EVENING**

MINCHA	6:35 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	7:32 PM

**SHABBAT**

HASHKAMA	8:15 AM
MAIN	9:00 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:47 AM
GEMARA SHIUR	5:40 PM
MINCHA	6:25 PM
MAARIV/HAVDALAH	7:35 PM

**ראש השנה**  
**ROSH HASHANAH**  
**1 & 2 TISHREI/SEPT. 25 - 27**

**SUNDAY EVENING**

CANDLE LIGHTING	6:30 PM
MINCHA	6:35 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	7:28 PM

**MONDAY**

SHACHARIT	7:45 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:48 AM
MINCHA/TASHLICH	6:10 PM
SHKIA	6:47 PM
MAARIV	7:15 PM
CANDLE LIGHTING	> 7:28 PM

**TUESDAY**

SHACHARIT	7:45 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:48 AM
MINCHA	6:30 PM
SHKIA	6:45 PM
MAARIV/HAVDALAH	7:30 PM

**SEUDAH SHLISHIT**

Seudat Shilishit is sponsored by the Agress and Greene families for the Yahrzeit of Amy's father Ha'Rav Yisroel Yehuda Ben Ephraim Michal Ha'Levi Pruzansky ז"ל and Elliot's father, Harold Greene ז"ל (Tzvi Hirsch ben Shimon).

**PARENT - CHILD LEARNING**

Parent-Child Learning, Rosh Hashanah edition, is this Shabbat at 4:00 PM in the David Schwitzer ז"ל Social Hall followed by honey cake decorating. Children ages 7 and up will enjoy an interaction learning session with Andrew Wigod while the younger children participate in PCL!

**FROM THE MEN'S CLUB**



- (1) Order your Etrog & Lulav, promo code BANE5 to get \$5 off, here: [ARBAMINIM](#) (deadline is Thursday, Oct. 6, pickup at shul is Sunday, Oct. 9, 9:00 to 11:00 AM).
- (2) Sylvia Latkin ז"ל Sukkah construction is Sunday, Oct. 2 after Shacharit.
- (3) Sukkah hop will take place on the 1st day of Sukkot, Monday, October 10. Email [egreene@acm.org](mailto:egreene@acm.org) to be one of the families to volunteer their Sukkah.

**BABY SITTING**

Baby sitting for children ages 2 to 12 on Rosh Hashanah will be from 9:00 AM to 1:30 PM, and on Yom Kippur 9:00 AM to 2:30 PM, and 6:15 PM to 8:15 PM during Kol Nidre. Please email [kira.batist.msw@gmail.com](mailto:kira.batist.msw@gmail.com) with any questions. Click here to to enroll your children: [Yomim Noraim Babysitting](#).



**SIMCHAT TORAH KIDDUSH**

We can't pull off the Simchat Torah Kiddush without you! To become a Platinum sponsor (\$180), Gold Sponsor (\$118) or a general sponsor (\$54), please email Steve at [seplotnick@gmail.com](mailto:seplotnick@gmail.com). We also need significant donations of single malt Scotch.

**FROM THE RABBI**

- After Mincha/Tashlich, 6:45 - 7:15 PM, all are invited to a special Rosh Hashanah family shiur, "Is Hashem a Good Dad?: 3 Elementary Parenting Anecdotes to Help Us Relate to Our Father in Heaven".
- Rosh Hashana Drasha #1: "Apples Dipped in Honey on Judgement Day: Between Yitzchak and Yaakov".
- Rosh Hashana Drasha #2: "A Twisted Commemoration of a Disturbing Encounter: Between Avraham & Yitzchak".

	SUNDAY 9/25	MONDAY 9/26	TUESDAY 9/27	WEDNESDAY 9/28	THURSDAY 9/29	FRIDAY 9/30
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**WEEKDAY MINYONIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM**

SHACHARIT	7:00 AM		6:00 AM	6:00 AM	6:00 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV			6:31 PM	6:30 PM	6:25 PM

**ZMANIM**

Fast Begins			5:38 AM		
Earliest Talit	5:53 AM		5:56 AM	5:57 AM	5:58 AM
Gedolah	1:18 PM		1:16 PM	1:16 PM	1:16 PM
Shkia			6:43 PM	6:42 PM	
Tzait/Fast Ends			7:23 PM	7:22 PM	

## IN OUR FUTURE

**October 8** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Winchester family for the upcoming Yahrzeit of Steve's mother Helen Winchester, Miriam Hendl bas Shimon<sup>ע</sup>

**October 11** - Kiddush is sponsored by the Winchester family on the Yahrzeit of Steve's mother Helen Winchester, Miriam Hendl bas Shimon<sup>ע</sup>

**October 29** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored in honor of a siyum for Mesechet Ketuvot.

**November 5** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by David & Lori Garfunkel in memory of Jonathan<sup>ע</sup>, and Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick on the Yahrzeit of Betsy's father יחיה בן ירמיהו, Howard Perlmutter<sup>ע</sup>

**May 20** - Mikey Finkelstein Aufruf

## KIDDUSH INFORMATION



- To sponsor a Kiddush (prices start at \$318, plus a bottle of scotch) email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com) to coordinate details and budget.
- If you are around when the Rabbi says "על המחיה", your assistance in clean up would be appreciated.

## SEUDAH SHLISHIT INFO



To sponsor for \$136 Seudah Shlishit (or in the case of multiple sponsors, \$100 per sponsor) to commemorate Yahrzeits, for a Siyum, or for another occasion, email David at [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com).

## YOUTH TORAH QUESTION OF THE WEEK

If you see someone going to murder someone (a "rodeif") on Shabbat and you can stop them more effectively if you break Shabbat, could you break Shabbat to stop them more effectively?

**Rabbi's Answer**

*Yes. Saving a life overrides Shabbat, and while one should take non-lethal measures to stop a rodeif, if there is a lesser chance of stopping the rodeif, one must use lethal force to stop the rodeif.*

## SHIURIM



- TALMUD 4 ALL CLASS - ON HIATUS.
- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via a Whatsapp group, with 3-minute daily halacha insights and a weekly 5-minute parsha elucidation. To join email Rabbi Shestack at [rabbishestack@gmail.com](mailto:rabbishestack@gmail.com).
- WOMEN'S MONTHLY SHABBAT AFTERNOON SHIUR with Rebbetzin Chana Shestack.
- WEEKLY GEMARA SHIUR, Shabbat afternoons 45 minutes before Mincha.
- MESORAH-IN-REVERSE lecture series at Seudah Shlishit on Shabbat.



## COMMUNITY SECURITY

To volunteer and become part of our community security service, email



Margo at [security@ahavatachim.org](mailto:security@ahavatachim.org).

## BULLETIN DEDICATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHUL CALENDAR

- Email [seplotnick@gmail.com](mailto:seplotnick@gmail.com) to request an announcement of a simcha, refuah or life cycle event in the bulletin or to dedicate a bulletin for \$36 (\$54 w/Photo).

## FROM THE RABBI

Shabbat Shuva Drasha (after kiddush next shabbat): "Shehechyanu after Candle Lighting: Live and Let Live as an Occasional Halachic Principle".

## GITA COOPERWASSER<sup>ע</sup> YOUTH EVENTS

**October 2** - Create Sukkah decorations at 3:00 PM and enjoy a fun pizza party at Ahavat Achim! Pizza is \$5/child or \$12 max/family. Please RSVP by 9/25.

**October 11** - Sukkah Skip event, from the Herman's sukkah to the Brooks' sukkah, with interactive holiday fun! Starts at 4 PM.

## GITA COOPERWASSER<sup>ע</sup> YOUTH PROGRAM



- Rabbi Meet & Greet, every Friday night, kids come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!
- Shabbat Youth groups start at 10:00 AM (children up to 7 years old) and 10:15 AM (children 8 to 12 years old). Children can earn tickets for coming to minyan (Friday night and/or Shabbat day), asking the rabbi questions or attending parent-child learning programs! Tickets can be redeemed for exciting prizes over time!
- Children under age 4 meet in the youth room at 10:00 AM to the left upon entry to the social hall. Tefillah begins at 10:45 AM led by Perri Mayer.
- Children ages 4-7 meet in the youth room to the right upon entry to the social hall. This group will be run by our wonderful youth leaders. Parents are encouraged to drop their children off.
- Older elementary aged children and pre-teens meet in the Beit Midrash.



201-367-2222

or

212-230-1000

[www.bergenhatzalah.org](http://www.bergenhatzalah.org)

18-25 Saddle River Road

Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

201.797.0502

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>



NAME	HEBREW DATE	CANDLE EVENING OF	DEDICATOR	RELATIONSHIP
Starinsky-Kutovsky Family	1	September 25	Seymour Wigod	Family
Jerry Pruzansky	2	September 26	Amy Agress	Father
Andzia Zuckerberg	6	September 30	Sophie Infield	Mother
Lenore Bickel	9	October 3	Jack Bickel	Mother
David & Augusta Cahn Maier	10	October 4	Audrey Bickel	Grandparents
Sofie Maier & Children	10	October 4	Audrey Bickel	Great-Grandmother & Family
Blanche Mueller	11	October 5	Joyce Heller	Mother
Nathan Arthur Weinflash	11	October 5	Joan Goldberg	Father
Herschel Israel Frankel	13	October 7	Elyce Smedresman	Uncle
Ronald Heller	13	October 7	Joyce Heller	Husband
Helen Wincheshter	16	October 10	Steve Winchester	Mother
Walter A. Rothschild	19	October 13	Audrey Bickel	Father
Philip Goldberg	20	October 14	Barry Goldberg	Father
Ellen Hope Rosenberg	21	October 15	Joyce Heller	Sister
Max Smedresman	22	October 16	Steve Smedresman	Father
Max Heller	26	October 20	Joyce Heller	Father-In-Law
Musia Krakow	26	October 20	Seymour Wigod	Aunt

**DAVID SCHWITZERד"ר  
SOCIAL HALL**

Please contact Lori Garfunkel at [garfmom@gmail.com](mailto:garfmom@gmail.com) to book the David Schwitzerד"ר 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 additional clean up (and a \$150 security/cleaning deposit refunded when the social hall is returned in its original condition). Private caterers must be approved in by the Rabbi.

**DONATE A SEFER, ETC.**

Siddurim & Machzorim (\$36), and Chumashim (\$54), are available for donation. Please contact Jeff Safier at [jeff.Safier@gmail.com](mailto:jeff.Safier@gmail.com) for details.

**SCRIP**

Men's Club scrip is available. Email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com) for details.

**HONORARIA**

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

**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 using Paypal's Giving Fund (with 100% of the proceeds going to the Shul), by clicking here: [Ahavat Achim Donations](#). If by check, please indicate on its face "Aliyah Donation."

**YAHRZEIT PLAQUES**

Memorialize a loved one with a plaque, \$300 for members/\$450 for nonmembers. We will strive to send you written notice of upcoming yearzeit and announce name during public Yizkor. Email Amy at [Yahrzeit@ahavatachim.org](mailto:Yahrzeit@ahavatachim.org) to arrange.

**MEN'S CLUB**

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

**SPONSORSHIPS**

Sponsorships opportunities for Yahrzeits, Refuahs, and Hodahs (thanks), are available for regular shiurim, youth events and similar activities (but not for established honorariums or sponsorship funded events). Cost of sponsorship (shiur or youth event) is \$100 per sponsor. Multiple sponsors for an event will be accepted. Sponsorships will be listed in the bulletin and announced at the event (and, if possible, a placard with the sponsorship will be prepared and displayed at the event).

Sponsorships do not include any extra amenities (such as food). Please contact either Stephen Agress or Steve Plotnick for questions or clarifications.

## 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: "לשמע קול שופר", "שהחיינו" and "שהחיינו" 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 SEPTEMBER 28, 3 TISHREI

Fast is observed from 5:38 AM until 7:23 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 (Shemot 32: 14 & 34: 1-10).

## AHAVAT ACHIM MEMBERSHIP/ HOSPITALITY

Email Sara at [membership@ahavatachim.org](mailto:membership@ahavatachim.org) for membership details or Shabbat hospitality.

## 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 (\$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. Go to <http://www.fairlawnmikvah.org/> for online booking.

**TWITTER:** [AhavatAchimFL](https://twitter.com/AhavatAchimFL)

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

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

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

## AMAZON SMILE

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After a one-time set up designating your preferred charity as Congregation Ahavat Achim of Fair Lawn, just make your regular Amazon purchases. Amazon donates 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to Ahavat Achim.





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*All proceeds from this sale  
go toward scholarships and  
other Zionist youth programs*



Join Ahavat Achim Youth  
Parent Child Learning  
Rosh Hashanah Edition

Shabbat, September 24th at 4 PM  
in the Kiddush Hall



Honeycake decorating to enjoy with  
your friends!

Plus interactive learning session with  
Andrew Wigod for kids ages 7 & up.

RSVP to [youth@ahavatachim.org](mailto:youth@ahavatachim.org) by 9/20

# ***Sukkot Craft & Pizza Party***



***Create a special sukkah decoration with  
your friends!***

***Sunday, October 2 at 3:00 PM  
@ Ahavat Achim (exact location TBD)***

***\$5/child or \$12 max/family***

***RSVP to [youth@ahavatchim.org](mailto:youth@ahavatchim.org) by 9/25***



**AHAVAT ACHIM**

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY GROUP



ד"ר

# COVENANT & CONVERSATION



## ESSAYS ON ETHICS

WITH RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ל"צ

ORIGINALLY WRITTEN AND DISTRIBUTED IN 5775 / 2015



With thanks to **Wohl Legacy** for their generous sponsorship of *Covenant & Conversation*. Maurice was a visionary philanthropist. Vivienne was a woman of the deepest humility. Together, they were a unique partnership of dedication and grace, for whom living was giving.

## Why Judaism?

### Nitzavim

This week's parsha raises a question that goes to the heart of Judaism, but which was not asked for many centuries until raised by a great Spanish scholar of the fifteenth century, Rabbi Isaac Arama. Moses is almost at the end of his life. The people are about to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land. Moses knows he must do one thing more before he dies. He must renew the covenant between the people and God.

This nation's parents had entered into that commitment almost forty years before when they stood at Mount Sinai and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we shall do and we shall heed." (Ex. 24:7) But now Moses has to ensure that the next generation *and all future generations* will be bound by it. He wanted no-one to be able to say, "God made a covenant with my ancestors but not with me. I did not give my consent. I was not there. I am not bound." That is why Moses says:

*Not with you alone* am I making this covenant and oath; with you who are standing here with us today before the Lord our God I make it, and *with those, too, who are not with us today.* (Deut. 29:13-14)

"Those who are not with us today" cannot mean Israelites alive at the time who were somewhere else. The entire nation was present at the assembly. It means "generations not yet born." That is why the Talmud says: we are all *mushba ve-omed meHar Sinai*, "foresworn from Sinai." (Yoma 73b, Nedarim 8a)

Hence one of the most fundamental facts about Judaism: converts excepted, we do not choose to be Jews. We are born as Jews. We become legal adults, subject to the commands, at age twelve for girls, thirteen for boys. But we are part of the covenant from birth. A bat or bar mitzvah is not a "confirmation". It involves no voluntary acceptance of Jewish identity. That choice took place more

than three thousand years ago when Moses said “*Not with you alone* am I making this covenant and oath... *with those, too, who are not with us today,*” meaning all future generations.

But how can this be so? There is no obligation without consent. How can we be subject to a commitment on the basis of a decision taken long ago by our distant ancestors? To be sure, in Jewish law you can confer a benefit on someone else without their consent. But though it is surely a benefit to be a Jew, it is also in some sense a liability, a restriction on our range of legitimate choices. Why then are we bound now by what the Israelites said then?

Jewishly, this is the ultimate question. How can religious identity be passed on from parent to child? If identity were merely ethnic, we could understand it. We inherit many things from our parents – most obviously our genes. But being Jewish is not a genetic condition. It is a set of religious obligations.

The Sages gave an answer in the form of a tradition about today’s parsha. They said that the souls of all future generations were present at Sinai. As souls, they freely gave their consent, generations before they were born. (Shevuot 39a)

However, Arama argues that this cannot answer our question, since God’s covenant is not with souls only, but also with embodied human beings. We are physical beings with physical desires. We can understand that the soul would agree to the covenant. What does the soul desire if not closeness to God?<sup>1</sup> But the assent that counts is that of living, breathing human beings with bodies, and we cannot assume that they would agree to the Torah with its many restrictions on eating, drinking, sexual relations and the rest. Not until we are born, and are old enough to understand what is being asked of us can we give our consent in a way that binds us. Therefore the fact that the unborn generations were present at Moses’ covenant ceremony does not give us the answer we need.

In essence, Arama was asking: Why be Jewish? What is fascinating is that he was the first to ask this question since the age of the Talmud. Why was it not asked before? Why was it first asked in fifteenth century Spain? For many centuries the question, “Why be Jewish?” did not arise. The answer was self-evident. I am Jewish because that is what my parents were and theirs before them, back to the dawn of Jewish time. Existential questions arise only when we feel there is a choice. For much of history, Jewish identity was not a choice. It was a fact of birth, a fate, a destiny. It was not something you chose, any more than you choose to be born.

In fifteenth-century Spain, Jews were faced with a choice. Spanish Jewry experienced its Kristallnacht in 1391, and from then on until the expulsion in 1492, Jews found themselves excluded from more and more areas of public life. There were immense pressures on them to convert, and some did so. Of these, some maintained their Jewish identity in secret, but others did not. For the first time in many centuries, staying Jewish came to be seen not just as a fate but as a choice. That is why Arama raised the question that had been unasked for so long. It is also why, in an age in which everything significant seems open to choice, it is being asked again in our time.

**“No religion, no civilisation, has insisted so strenuously and consistently that we can choose.”**

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Arama, *Akeidat Yitzhak*, Deuteronomy, Nitzavim.

Arama gave one answer. I gave my own in my book *A Letter in the Scroll*.<sup>2</sup> But I also believe a large part of the answer lies in what Moses himself said at the end of his address:

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today. I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life - so that you and your children may live...” (Deut. 30:19)

*Choose life.* No religion, no civilisation, has insisted so strenuously and consistently that *we can choose*. We have it in us, says Maimonides, to be as righteous as Moses or as evil as Jeroboam.<sup>3</sup> We can be great. We can be small. We can choose.

The ancients - with their belief in fate, fortune, *Moirai*, *Ananke*, the influence of the stars or the arbitrariness of nature - did not fully believe in human freedom. For them true freedom meant, if you were religious, accepting fate, or if you were philosophical, the consciousness of necessity. Nor do most scientific atheists believe in it today. We are determined, they say, by our genes. Our fate is scripted in our DNA. Choice is an illusion of the conscious mind. It is the fiction we tell ourselves.

Judaism says no. Choice is like a muscle: use it or lose it. Jewish law is an ongoing training regime in willpower. Can you eat this and not that? Can you exercise spiritually three times a day? Can you rest one day in seven? Can you defer the gratification of instinct – what Freud took to be the mark of civilisation? Can you practise self-control (which, according to the “marshmallow test”, is the surest sign of future success in life)?<sup>4</sup> To be a Jew means not going with the flow, not doing what others do just because they are doing it. It gives us 613 exercises in the power of will to shape our choices. That is how we, with God, become co-authors of our lives. “We *have* to be free”, said Isaac Bashevis Singer, “we have no choice!”

*Choose life.* In many other faiths, life down here on earth with its loves, losses, triumphs, and defeats, is not the highest value. Heaven is to be found in life after death, or the soul in unbroken communion with God, or in acceptance of the world-that-is. Life is eternity, life is serenity, life is free of pain. But that, for Judaism, is not quite life. It may be noble, spiritual, sublime, but it is not life in all its passion, responsibility, and risk.

Judaism teaches us how to find God down here on earth not up there in heaven. It means engaging with life, not taking refuge from it. It seeks not so much happiness as joy: the joy of being with others and together with them making a blessing over life. It means taking the risk of love, commitment, loyalty. It means living for something larger than the pursuit of pleasure or success. It means daring greatly.

Judaism does not deny pleasure, for it is not ascetic. It does not worship pleasure. Judaism is not hedonist. Instead it sanctifies pleasure. It brings the Divine Presence into the most physical acts: eating, drinking, intimacy. We find God not just in the synagogue but in the home, the house of study, and acts of kindness; we find God in community, hospitality, and wherever we mend some of the fractures of our human world.

**“Choose life. Nothing sounds easier yet nothing has proved more difficult over time.”**

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<sup>2</sup> *A Letter in the Scroll: Understanding Our Jewish Identity and Exploring the Legacy of the World's Oldest Religion* (New York: Free Press, 2000). Published in Britain as *Radical Then, Radical Now: The Legacy of the World's Oldest Religion* (London: HarperCollins, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Hilchot Teshuvah 5:2.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Mischel, *The Marshmallow Test*, Bantam Press, 2014.

No religion has ever held the human person in higher regard. We are not tainted by original sin. We are not a mere bundle of selfish genes. We are not an inconsequential life-form lost in the vastness of the universe. We are the being on whom God has set His image and likeness. We are the people God has chosen to be His partners in the work of creation. We are the nation God married at Sinai with the Torah as our marriage contract. We are the people God called on to be His witnesses. We are the ambassadors of heaven in the country called earth.

We are not better, or worse, than others. We are simply different, because God values difference, whereas for most of the time, human beings have sought to eliminate difference by imposing one faith, one regime or one empire on all humanity. Ours is one of the few faiths to hold that the righteous of all nations have a share in heaven because of what they do on earth.

*Choose life.* Nothing sounds easier yet nothing has proved more difficult over time. Instead, people choose substitutes for life. They pursue wealth, possessions, status, power, fame, and to these gods they make the supreme sacrifice, realising too late that true wealth is not what you own but what you are thankful for, that the highest status is not to care about status, and that influence is more powerful than power.

That is why, though few faiths are more demanding, most Jews at most times have stayed faithful to Judaism, living Jewish lives, building Jewish homes, and continuing the Jewish story. That is why, with a faith as unshakeable as it has proved true, Moses was convinced that “*not with you alone* am I making this covenant and oath... *with those, too, who are not with us today.*” His gift to us is that through worshipping something so much greater than ourselves we become so much greater than we would otherwise have been.

Why Judaism? Because there is no more challenging way of choosing life.



## AROUND THE Shabbat Table

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1. Why was it so important that Moses renewed the covenant with the Children of Israel?
2. Why do you think people so often choose to pursue wealth, power, and fame?
3. How can you “choose life”?