



CANDLE LIGHTING 6:51 PM | 22 ADAR | MARCH 22, 2025 | HAVDALA 7:56 PM

**שבת פרשת ויקהל/פרשת פרה**  
**SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYAKHEL**  
**PARSHAT PARAH**

Two Sifrei Torah. Maftir reads from Chukat (Numbers 19:1-22). Haftorah is Ezekiel 36:16-38. Do not say אב הרחמים. We do say צדקתך צדק at Mincha.

**FRIDAY EVENING**

<b>MINCHA</b>	<b>6:55 PM</b>
SHKIA	7:10 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	7:50 PM

**SHABBAT**

<b>HASHKAMA</b>	<b>7:45 AM</b>
<b>SHACHARIT - MAIN</b>	<b>9:00 AM</b>
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	HIATUS
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	10:00 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	11:30 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	6:00 PM
<b>MINCHA</b>	<b>6:40 PM</b>
SHKIA	7:11 PM
<b>MAARIV</b>	<b>7:56 PM</b>

**TODAH RABAH**

Thank you to those who packed and delivered the shul mishloach manot! Thank you to Natasha Borsuk for arranging, and to David & Lori Garfunkel, Jordana Cohen, Audry Bickel, Ariella Jacob, Margo Heda, Michelle Dubin, Richie & Perri Mayer, and Rabbi Shestack for a successful blood drive!

**MAZEL TOV!**



Mazel Tov to Nicole & Eitan Sufian, and big sister Maayan, on the birth of a baby boy! Shalom Zachar, 9 - 10 PM at their home.

יגדלוהו לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים ויכניסוהו לבריתו בזמנו ובעתו

May they raise him to Torah, chuppah and good deeds, and may he be entered into the covenant of Abraham.

**MAZEL TOV!**

Mazel Tov to Shelly & Steven Winchester on the birth of a granddaughter to Elana & Daniel Miller (and Mazel Tov to big sisters Kira and Raquelle).

יגדלוהו לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים

May they raise her to Torah, chuppah and good deeds.



**MAOT CHITIM**

Donate "wheat monies" for the poor before Pesach here: [Maot Chitmim](#).

**THIS SHABBAT!**

Pre-mincha shiur this week: "Olam Chesed Yibaneh: How Kayin Marrying His Sister Provides a Sociological Insight into Affirmative Action and Feminism and Their Competition". Fundamentals: how, when and why to kasher kitchen utensils with Rabbi Shestack and a special guest (fundamentals will be in the back of the women's section due to the construction).



SUNDAY  
3/23

MONDAY  
3/24

TUESDAY  
3/25

WEDNESDAY  
3/26

THURSDAY  
3/27

FRIDAY  
3/28

**WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM**

<b>SHACHARIT</b>	<b>8:00 AM</b>	<b>6:15 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>	<b>6:15 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>
<b>2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM</b>		<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>
<b>MINCHA/MAARIV</b>	<b>7:00 PM</b>	<b>7:01 PM</b>	<b>7:02 PM</b>	<b>7:03 PM</b>	<b>7:04 PM</b>	<b>7:05 PM</b>

**ZMANIM**

<b>Earliest Talit</b>	6:00 AM	5:58 AM	5:54 AM	5:55 AM	5:53 AM	5:51 AM
<b>Gedolah</b>	1:34 PM	1:34 PM	1:34 PM	1:33 PM	1:33 PM	1:33 PM
<b>Shkia</b>	7:12 PM	7:13 PM	7:14 PM	7:15 PM	7:16 PM	
<b>Tzait</b>	7:52 PM	7:53 PM	7:54 PM	7:55 PM	7:56 PM	

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Mar. 29** - Scholar-In-Residence Rabbi Jesse Horn.

**April 5** - Shir HaShirim Perek-By-Perek shiur at Seudah Shlishit. Please sign up to give a shiur here: [Song of Songs](#).

**April 6** - Hagolas Kelim/Pesach Kashering, 9:00 - 11:00 AM, at the shul.

**April 11** - Seraifat (Burning) Chometz, 8:00 AM to noon, at the Norton residence, 20-11 Hunter Pl. No foil, plastic, paper, cardboard, pasta, sauces or liquids. Bread, cereal, crackers and dry items only.

**Apr. 12** - Latest to eat Chometz: 10:45 AM

**Apr. 12** - Latest to own Chometz: 11:51 AM

**May 3** - Mizrahi Israel 360 Scholar-In-Residence Rabbanit Surale Rosen.

## IN OUR FUTURE

**April 19** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Sonnenblicks to commemorate the yahrzeit of Marty's father, Moshe Yehuda ben Yosef Dov Halevi<sup>ה"ע</sup>.

**May 31** - Seudah Shlishit sponsored by Eli Zezion in memory of בין אליהו ושלמה.

**June 14** - Seudah Shlishit sponsored by Eli Zezion in memory of ברוך מפציר בן שמואל.

## BOARD MEETINGS

**March 25** - 8:30 PM via Zoom.

**April 29** - 9:00 PM via Zoom.

**May 27** - 9:00 PM via Zoom.

**June 24** - 9:00 PM via Zoom.

## ISRAEL ACTION INITIATIVE



**Tzedakah Fund of the Month**- Leket Israel, Israel's national food bank. Give now by clicking here: [Leket Israel](#).

## MAOT CHITIM

Donate "wheat monies" for the poor before Pesach here: [Maot Chitmin](#).



## COMMUNITY EVENTS

This Shabbat is the *Together for Tefilah Project*, in partnership with the RCBC and the Consortium of Jewish Day Schools, a community-wide initiative focused on strengthening Tefilah for both adults and children together.

## SHIURIM



• RAV SOLOVEITCHIK ON THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM (<https://zoom.us/j/7291311899>, PW: 112233).

• TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via a Whatsapp group, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at [rabbishestack@gmail.com](mailto:rabbishestack@gmail.com).

• SHABBAT SHIUR, 40 minutes pre-mincha.

• FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush, discussing our community's kashrut standards.

• MESORAH-IN-REVERSE lecture series at Seudah Shlishit.

• Tzurba M'Rabanan with Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.

• Mishna Chaburah, led by Jeff Safier, after 7:25 AM Shacharit minyon (≈10 minutes).

## KIDDUSH & SEUDAH SHLISHIT



• Enjoy Scotch at Kiddush, please donate a bottle to the shul from time to time.

• To sponsor a Kiddush (prices start at \$318, plus a bottle of scotch) email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com).

• Want to know the menu for Kiddush? If so, please email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com) so he can put you in the WhatsApp group.

• To sponsor Seudah Shlishit for \$136 (or in the case of multiple sponsors, \$100 per sponsor), email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com).

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

TBA - TBA

## GITA COOPERWASSER<sup>ה"ע</sup> SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



• **SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS, 2ND - 5TH GRADE: LETIZIA & EMMANUEL; 4 YRS - 1ST GR.: ABBY, SEBASTIAN, & ARIELLA**

• Youth group for in 2nd - 5th Graders starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on left on entering the social hall.

• Youth group for children 4 years old through 1st Grade starts at 9:15 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on the right upon entering the social hall.

• Parent & Me, 9:00 AM in the Beit Midrash.

• Rabbi Meet & Greet, Friday night, kids can come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!

• Children 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 prizes.

• Children's corner at Seudah Shlishit, 1st to 5th graders will get 10 Torah questions in 10 minutes from Rabbi Shestack, with special snacks, tickets and more.

## SHALOM BRAUSER, ADULT EDUCATOR/TEEN MENTOR

**March 22** - Teen Mentor

**April 5** - Teen Mentor

18-25 Saddle River Road  
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410  
201.797.0502

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>



Congregation Ahavat  
Achim presents

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**RABBI JESSE HORN**  
**SHABBAT, MARCH 29**

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- Pre-Mincha Shiur: "A Minor Infraction: Theft of Less than a Penny"
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[EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG](mailto:EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG)

## DAVID SCHWITZER ד"ר שוויצער

### SOCIAL HALL

Contact Lori at [garfmom@gmail.com](mailto:garfmom@gmail.com) to book the David Schwitzer ד"ר שוויצער Social Hall for an event or occasion. \$250 (members), \$325 (Associates), or \$400 paid in advance for non-members, plus the cost of clean up (and a \$150 refundable security/cleaning deposit). Private caterers must be approved by the Rabbi.

## CHESED TEAM

If you or someone you know needs assistance, email us at [chesed@ahavatachim.org](mailto:chesed@ahavatachim.org).

## 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 yahrzeit and announce name during public Yizkor. Email Amy at [aagress@gmail.com](mailto:aagress@gmail.com) to arrange.

## DONATE A SEFER, ETC.

Donate Siddurim & Machzorim (\$40), and Chumashim (\$60). Contact Jeff Safier at [jeff.Safier@gmail.com](mailto:jeff.Safier@gmail.com) for details.

## MISHEBAYRACH

For a Mishebayrach pledge 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."

## HONORARIA

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

## SINGLES SHIDDUCH GROUP

Reach out to Rabbi Shestack or Sara Levine ([saralevine06@gmail.com](mailto:saralevine06@gmail.com) if interested).

## 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 Steve Plotnick for questions or clarifications.

## MEN'S CLUB

Email [MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org](mailto:MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org) to join the Men's Club.



From The OU.ORG Four Shabbatot, adapted from The Book of Our Heritage by Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, and other sources.

## PARSHAT PARAH

"This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come." (BaMidbar 19:2) This is an example of Law of the Torah which is considered completely above human comprehension. The paradox is that those who are involved in the preparation of the ashes of the cow become ritually impure, while the sprinkling of water with those ashes is used to remove contamination! It is an example of a Law which must be accepted on faith alone.

On the Shabbat after Purim (most years), two Torah Scrolls are removed from the Ark. The weekly Sidrah is read from the first, and from the second, the chapter of Parah Adumah, the Red Cow (or Red Heifer). It gives the procedure through which people can purify themselves from the contamination caused by a human corpse.

The reading of this chapter was instituted for this time of the year because Jews were required to purify themselves before coming to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festival of Passover. The Haftarah read on Shabbat of Parashat Parah contains the verse, "And I shall sprinkle pure water upon you, that you be cleansed. From all your contamination and from all your filth I will cleanse you" (Ezekiel 36:25). Another parallel in the Haftarah are the concepts of sin represented by contamination and atonement represented by purity.

This is discussed the ArtScroll Ezekiel commentary (pp. 534-5), as follows: Freedom of will in moral matters is the first and irreplaceable condition for living one's life on the higher plane demanded by the Torah. Belief in man's freedom of action, however, is endangered by the fact that man cannot avoid death and that he is subject to the superficial limitations imposed by the forces of nature. This belief is particularly shaken by the sight of a dead human being. If the whole human being has succumbed to death, been overpowered by physical forces - If man, like all other organic beings, cannot escape the spell of an overpowering force - then there is no room for the moral "you shall" next to the physical "you must." Moral freedom of will would then be an illusion, and the Divine law of morality with its demand for total free-willed devotion to the illuminating, purifying fire of its sanctuary would be incomprehensible. (R'Hirsch, Numbers 19:22).

Thus, sin is related not only to death, but also to contamination, which is closely associated with death. Because the sinner is shackled by his desires, he loses spiritual control of actions. He is swept along by the physical lusts that have overpowered his spiritual self. Thus, the most meaningful part of life, the spiritual, has been killed. For this reason, when G-d forgives man's sin and grants him a new heart and a new spirit, He is imbuing him with purity, the state of mind in which man is the sole master of his actions.

A living (and therefore a pure) person uses his body as he wills; it is his tool to use as he sees fit. The regenerate sinner, upon returning to the state of purity, joins once more the state of the living - and the free. (Chazon HaMikra) As with the other of the Four Parshiyot, a boy who is not yet of Bar-Mitzvah age should not be called to the Torah for Maftir on Shabbat Parshat Parah, nor should he read the Parshah for others. For since he is free of the obligation of Mitzvot, he cannot enable others to fulfill their obligation through him.

## 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

**FACEBOOK:** [www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100091322384429](http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100091322384429)

**INSTAGRAM:** [www.instagram.com/ahavatachim/](http://www.instagram.com/ahavatachim/)

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

## BULLETIN DEDICATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHUL CALENDAR

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

## COMMUNITY SECURITY



COMMUNITY  
SECURITY  
SERVICE

To volunteer and become part of our community security service, email Margo at [security@ahavatachim.org](mailto:security@ahavatachim.org).

## HOW TO DONATE TO THE SHUL USING PAYPAL

Please do not simply pay the shul using PayPal, as that incurs a 3% service charge that will get charged to the shul. Instead, please use our fee-free dedicated PayPal link <http://paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/1444321>. PayPal will email you a receipt for your charitable donation and the shul will receive 100% of your donation. [Make sure you click the "SHARE MY NAME" box so the shul will know who paid so that we can credit your account.]



# INSPIRATION FROM ISRAEL'S FRONT LINES



## AHAVAT ACHIM

PRESENTS A SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE SHABBAT WITH  
**RABBANIT SURALE ROSEN**

SAVE THE DATE  
**SHABBAT PARASHAT TAZRIA-METZORAH**  
**MAY 2-3, 2025**



**Rabbanit Surale Rosen** heads London School of Jewish Studies' Iyun Halakha programme. She headed Metivta – Matan Jlm Advanced Talmud Programme and founded Shayla – Matan's Halachic Online Responsa where she wrote and edited *Shutim*. Rabbanit Surale is also a certified Rabbinic Arbitrator and has a certificate in mediation for family conflict resolution from The Israeli Centre for Negotiation and Mediation. She holds degrees in Talmud and English Lit, teaches Gemarah in Migdal Oz and Halakha as well as Midrash in various communities and shuls. Rabbanit Surale is on the board of the Rabbinic organization "Beit Hillel" and is actively involved in various programmes for female Orthodox religious leadership, including one with the Ministry of Religious Affairs on creating female Rabbinic examinations authorized by the government. She lives in Jerusalem, Married to Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Dov Rosen, Rabbi of the Yakar community and is a grateful mother of girls and boys.

**Mizrachi360** reflects Israel's international reach and Mizrachi's mission of spreading Torat Eretz Yisrael across the world. To celebrate Israel during the month of Iyar, Mizrachi brings inspiring Israeli speakers and thinkers to 360 communities all around the globe. [www.mizrachi.org/mizrachi360](http://www.mizrachi.org/mizrachi360)





AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

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The Rabbinical Council of Bergen County &  
The Consortium of Jewish Day Schools Present

# Together FOR Tefilah

ברכינו אבינו  
כולנו כאחד

Bless us, our Father  
ALL OF US AS ONE

## A joint shul + school project

with Bergen County Middle Schools

Week of Parshat Vayakhel, March 22

RCBC  
ועד הרבנים

אגודת ישיבות לחינוך יומי  
CONSORTIUM of  
JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS  
BERGEN COUNTY BRANCH

### PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS:

Focusing on 'Sim  
Shalom' bracha of  
Shemonei Esrei

- In-school learning during the week
- Shul inspiration for adults and kids on Shabbat



# Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

VAYAKHEL • ויקהל

FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ז"ל

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

"I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah.

An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks

This year's series of essays were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks ז"ל in 5772 (2011–2012).

These timeless messages are accompanied by a new [Family Edition](#) created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha and Haftara.

## Mirrors of Love

The Torah in Parshat Vayakhel, which describes the making of the Mishkan, goes out of its way to emphasise the role women played in it:

The men accompanied the women, and those who wanted to make a donation brought bracelets, earrings, finger rings, and body ornaments, all made of gold.

Ex. 35:22

Every skilled woman put her hand to spinning, and they [all] brought the spun yarn of sky-blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool and fine linen. Highly skilled women volunteers also spun the goats' wool.

Ex. 35:25-26

Every man and woman among the Israelites who felt an urge to give something for all the work that God had ordered through Moses, brought a donation for God.

Ex. 35:29

Indeed the emphasis is even greater than it seems in translation, because of the unusual locution in verse 22, *Vayavo-u ha-anashim al hanashim*, which implies that the women came to make their donations first,

and the men merely followed their lead (Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Rabbenu Bachye).

This is all the more striking since the Torah implies that the women refused to contribute to the making of the Golden Calf (see the commentaries to Ex. 32:2). The women had a sense of judgment in the religious life – what is true worship, and what false – that the men lacked.

Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550 – 1619) makes the further point that since the Tabernacle was an atonement for the Golden Calf, the women had no need to contribute at all, since it was the men not the women who needed atonement. Nonetheless, women gave, and they did so before the men.

Most moving, though, by far is the cryptic verse:

He [Betzalel] made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of the dedicated women [*ha-tzove'ot*] who congregated at the entrance of the Communion Tent.

Ex. 38:8

The Sages (in *Midrash Tanhuma*) told a story about this. This is how Rashi tells it:



Israelite women owned mirrors, which they would look into when they adorned themselves. Even these [mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the Mishkan, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts].

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, “Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything, because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt.” When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labour, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, “I am more beautiful than you.” And in this way they aroused their husbands’ desire and would be intimate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: “Under the apple tree I aroused you” (Song 8:5).

This is [the meaning of] what is **בְּמִרְיָתָם הַצְּבִלִים** [lit., the mirrors of those who set up legions]. From these [the mirrors], the washstand was made.

The story is this. The Egyptians sought not merely to enslave, but also to put an end to, the people of Israel. One way of doing so was to kill all male children. Another was simply to interrupt normal family life. The people, both men and women, were labouring all day. At night, says the Midrash, they were forbidden to return home. They slept where they worked. The intention was to destroy both privacy and sexual desire, so that the Israelites would have no more children.

The women realised this, and decided to frustrate Pharaoh’s plan. They used mirrors to make themselves attractive to their husbands. The result was that intimate relations resumed. The women conceived and had children (the “legions” referred to in the word *tzove’ot*). Only because of this was there a new generation of Jewish children. The women, by their faith, courage, and ingenuity, secured Jewish survival.

The Midrash continues that when Moses commanded the Israelites to bring offerings to make the Tabernacle, some brought gold, some silver, some bronze, some jewels. But many of the women had nothing of value to contribute except the mirrors they had brought with them from Egypt. These they brought to Moses, who recoiled in disgust. What, he thought, have these cheap objects, used by women to make themselves look attractive, to do with the Sanctuary and the sacred? God rebuked Moses for daring to think this way, and ordered him to accept them.

The story is powerful in itself. It tells us, as do so many other *midrashim*, that without the faith of women, Jews and Judaism would never have survived. But it also tells us something absolutely fundamental to the Jewish understanding of love in the religious life.

In his impressive recent book, *Love: A History* (2011), the philosopher Simon May writes:

“If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew.”

Judaism sees love as supremely physical *and* spiritual. That is the meaning of “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might” (Deut. 6:5).

This is not the language of meditation or contemplation, philosophical or mystical. It is the language of passion.

Even the normally cerebral Maimonides writes this about the love of God:

What is the love of God that is befitting? It is to love God with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one’s soul shall be knit up with the love of God, such that it is continually enraptured by it, like a lovesick individual whose mind is never free from passion for a particular woman and is enraptured by her at all times ... Even more intense should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him. They should be enraptured by this love at all times.

Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah*, 10:5

This is the love we find in passages of Tehillim such as, “My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:2)”

Only because the Sages thought about love this way, did they take it for granted that the Song of Songs – an extremely sensual series of love poems – was about the love between God and Israel. Rabbi Akiva called it “the holy of holies” of religious poetry.

It was Christianity, under the influence of classical Greece, that drew a distinction between *eros* (love as intense physical desire) and *agape* (a calm, detached love of humanity-in-general and things-in-general) and declared the second, not the first, to be religious. It was this self-same Greek influence that led Christianity to read the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit as a story of sinful sexual desire – an interpretation that should have no place whatsoever in Judaism.

Simon May speaks about the love of God in Judaism as being characterised by, “intense devotion;

absolute trust; fear of his power and presence; and rapturous, if often questioning, absorption in his will ... Its moods are a combination of the piety of a vassal, the intimacy of friends, the fidelity of

spouses, the dependence of a child, the passion of lovers...” He later adds, “The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and ‘an eye for an eye,’ while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history.”

The Midrash dramatises this contrast between *eros* and *agape* as an argument between God and Moses. Moses believes that closeness to God is about celibacy and purity. God teaches him otherwise, that passionate love, when offered as a gift to God, is the most precious love of all. This is the love we read about in *Shir ha-Shirim*. It is the love we hear in *Yedid Nefesh*<sup>1</sup>, the daring song we sing at the beginning and toward the end of Shabbat. When the women offered God the mirrors through which they aroused their husbands’ love in the dark days of Egypt, God told Moses, “These are more precious to Me than anything else.” The women understood, better than the men, what it means to love God “with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.”



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. How do you show love for the people and things that matter most to you? Is it through words, actions, or something else?
2. How does this detail about the mirrors connect to what we have learnt about the Jewish aesthetic?
3. Where else in Tanach have we seen physicality as a way to express love to God?

● These questions come from this week's **Family Edition** to Rabbi Sacks' Covenant & Conversation. For an interactive, multi-generational study, check out the full edition at <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-family-edition/vayakhel/mirrors-of-love/>

<sup>1</sup> *Yedid Nefesh* is usually attributed to Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri (1533-1600). However Stefan Reif (*The Hebrew Manuscripts at Cambridge University Libraries*, 1997, p. 93) refers to an earlier appearance of the song in a manuscript by Samuel ben David ben Solomon, dated *circa* 1438.