



The kitchen and food closets will be closed on Pesach. Do not go into these areas. Groups will be providing Pesach snacks.

14 NISAN | APRIL 12, 2025

**שבת הגדול פרשת צו/ערב פסח
SHABBAT HAGADOL PARSHAT
TZAV/EREV PESACH**

Haftorah for Shabbat HaGadol is Malachi 3:4-24 (repeating verse 23). Final time for kiddish levanah of Nisan is the first night of Pesach (Sat. night) until 2:08 AM. Don't say צדקתך צדק or אב הרחמים.

FRIDAY EVENING

CANDLE LIGHTING	7:14 PM
MINCHA	7:20 PM
SHKIA	7:32 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	8:12 PM

SHABBAT

SHACHARIT	7:45 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:40 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	6:30 PM
MINCHA	7:10 PM
SHKIA	7:33 PM

**פסח/חפסח
APRIL 12-14 / 15-16 NISAN**

SATURDAY EVENING

MAARIV	7:50 PM
CANDLE LIGHTING	>8:18 PM
1st SEDER w/ HAVDALAH	>8:18 PM

SUNDAY

SHACHARIT	8:45 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:39 AM
MINCHA	7:15 PM
SHKIA	7:34 PM
MAARIV	7:45 PM
CANDLE LIGHTING	>8:19 PM

MONDAY

SHACHARIT	8:45 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:38 AM
MINCHA	7:20 PM
SHKIA	7:35 PM
MAARIV - HAVDALAH	8:20 PM

FROM THE RABBI

- NO 9:00 AM SHACHARIT MINYAN THIS SHABBAT!!!** ONLY 7:45 AM (so everyone can eat their first shabbat daytime meal before 10:45 AM).
- Last time to eat Chometz on Shabbat is 10:45 AM.
- Last time to possess Chometz on Shabbat is 11:51 AM.
- Kol Chamira must be said this Shabbat before 11:51 AM.
- No seder preparations whatsoever can be done on Shabbat, i.e., not until after Tzait Hakochovim (nightfall).

JOURNAL DINNER HONOREES



Mazel tov to this year's honorees, Aliza & Richie Mayer, and to this year's Young Leadership Awardee Elizabeth Jacob! Get your ads in now by clicking here: [Online Ad Form](#).

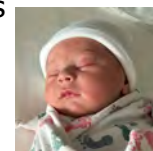


MAZEL TOV

Mazel tov to Rebecca Berger & Jay Herman, and big brothers Yonah and Ami, on the birth of a baby boy!

גדלוהו לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים

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



CONDOLENCES

We regret to inform you of the passing of Yehuda Haddad, beloved father of Yuval Haddad.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

	SUNDAY 4/13	MONDAY 4/14	TUESDAY 4/15	WEDNESDAY 4/16	THURSDAY 4/17	FRIDAY 4/18
WEEKDAY MINYONIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM						
SHACHARIT			6:00 AM	6:00 AM	6:00 AM	6:00 AM
2nd SHACHARIT			7:10 AM	7:10 AM	7:10 AM	7:10 AM
MINCHA/ MAARIV			7:25 PM	7:26 PM	7:27 PM	7:25 PM
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit			5:20 AM	5:18 AM	5:16 AM	5:15 AM
Gedolah			1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:30 PM
Shkia			7:37 PM	7:38 PM	7:39 PM	
Tzait			8:17 PM	8:18 PM	8:19 PM	



UPCOMING EVENTS

April 19 - Shir HaShirim Perek-By-Perek shiur between Mincha & Maariv. Please sign up to give a shiur here: [Song of Songs](#).

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

June 24 - Membership Meeting, 9:00 PM.

IN OUR FUTURE

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

June 14 - Seudah Shlishit sponsored by Eli Zezon in memory of בן שמואל וברוך מפציר.

BOARD MEETINGS

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](#).

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.
- 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).

COMMUNITY EVENT

Kidney Donation Swabbing, Sun., Apr. 27, 9:00 AM – noon, at Temple Emanu-El, 180 Piermont Rd, Closter, NJ. Questions? Contact Rabbi Josh Sturm at R26338@renewal.org or (718) 431-9831.

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה

YOUTH EVENTS

April 19 - Shul Playground and Snacks

April 20 - Edison Playground and Snacks

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה

SHABBAT YOUTH INFO

- SHABBAT - NO GROUPS
- PESACH DAY 1 YOUTH LEADERS, 2ND - 5TH GRADE: LETIZIA, EMMANUEL, & NICOLE; 4 YRS - 1ST GR.: SEBASTIAN, PERRI, & ARIELLA
- PESACH DAY 2 YOUTH LEADERS, 2ND - 5TH GRADE: LETIZIA, ZOE, & ABBY; 4 YRS - 1ST GR.: ARNELLA, PERRI, & 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.

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.
- Want to know the menu for Kiddush? If so, please email 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.

Sunday Evening, April 13



Monday Evening, April 14



Tuesday Evening, April 15



Wednesday Evening, April 16



Thursday Evening, April 17



Friday Evening, April 18



Saturday Evening, April 19



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

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>

SHABBAT HAGADOL

(ADAPTED FROM AISH.COM)

The Shabbat prior to Passover is called Shabbat HaGadol. The source of the term is unclear as it is not found in the Tanach or Talmudic literature, though in the Middle Ages a number of authorities occupied themselves with explaining the origin of the term (see Machzor Vitri, § 259). One approach sees Shabbat HaGadol as originating with the special Haftarah, Malachi 3:23, which says "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the **great** and awesome day of the Lord."

Therefore the Talmud teaches: Rabbi Yehoshua says: "In Nissan the world was created ... the bondage of our ancestors ceased in Egypt; and in Nissan they will be redeemed in time to come." (Talmud Rosh HaShana 11a) The tradition, which accords Elijah a primary role in the Messianic age, calls upon us to read the portion of the prophet which alludes to that "great" day.

Other commentaries look back to the past for an explanation for the term. The Talmud teaches that the day the Jews left Egypt -- the 15th of the month of Nissan -- was a Thursday, and the 10th of the month was the previous Shabbat: "As to Nissan in which the Israelites departed from Egypt, on the fourteenth they killed their Passover sacrifices, on the fifteenth they went forth, and in the evening [of the 15th] the firstborn were smitten... and that day was a Thursday. (Shabbath 87b)."

The significance of the 10th is mentioned in the Torah: Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, "In the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house." (Exodus 12:3) Tosfot point out that by taking the lamb, the Jews piqued the interest, and the ire, of the firstborn of Egypt. They pleaded with Pharaoh to release the Jews. When he refused, the firstborn rebelled and attacked their own parents. Therefore the day is considered great, due to the miracle of God which was manifest and the subsequent unraveling of Egyptian society. This explanation though points to the significance of the 10th of Nissan rather than to the Shabbat which precedes Passover. While that 10th of the month in Egypt happened to fall on Shabbat, its significance has apparently no intrinsic connection with Shabbat.

Another idea comes from the Sfat Emet who says that the term "Shabbat HaGadol" results from the Shabbat taking on new significance upon the Jews redemption from Egypt causing Shabbat to acquire an historical identity intertwined with theology. The Sfat Emet explains that Shabbat had now become "greater", with the second aspect of Shabbat, articulated in the repetition of the Ten Commandments, realized.

DAVID SCHWITZER ד"ר שוויצער SOCIAL HALL

Contact Lori at 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.

YAHARZEIT 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 yahrzeit@ahavatachim.org to arrange.

DONATE A SEFER, ETC.

Donate Siddurim & Machzorim (\$40), and Chumashim (\$60). Contact Jeff Safier at 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.

SINGLES SHIDDUCH GROUP

Reach out to Rabbi Shestack or Sara Levine (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 to join the Men's Club.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10

First born have a custom to fast, redeem themselves with money for Tzedakah, or participate in a Seudat Mitzvah such as a siyum. In the evening search for chometz everywhere we bring it during the year.

Someone not participating in the search places ten pieces of chometz in random locations to which we bring chometz during the year (failure to do so does not invalidate the search, but be very careful to find all ten pieces). Before the search recite the Bracha "אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על ביעור חמץ" – on the removal of chometz (for the search is the beginning of the process). After the search, one declares "כל חמירא" (preferably in a language that he understands) nullifying all chometz and sourdough of which he is unaware.

FRIDAY, APRIL 11

The chometz you authorized Rabbi Shestack to sell must be placed in a reserved area by 11:30 AM, after which the sale will have taken place.

EREV PESACH - SHABBAT, APRIL 12

It is forbidden to eat Matzah on Erev Pesach, after Tzait Hakochavim (nightfall). Chometz set aside for breakfast may be eaten until the end of the fourth proportionate hour after dawn (10:45 AM). One may not possess chometz after the fifth proportionate hour (11:51 AM), and after any chometz is properly disposed of say the formula of "כל חמירא" nullifying and making free all chometz of which we are both unaware and aware, but do not make any Bracha (one should have in mind that if the sale to the non-Jew is found invalid, such Chometz too is nullified and rendered free). One must not prepare for the Seder on Shabbat.

PESACH - SATURDAY/SUNDAY NIGHTS, APRIL 12 & 13 - SEDARIM

Upon the appearance of three small stars, most married men don Kittels and take their place at the table. The leader has someone else pour each of the Four Cups of wine for him (in the manner of a wealthy free man) and begin the Seder with Kiddush, including שהחיינו. We follow the order presented in the Haggadot. All four cups at the Seder must be full, containing at least a רביעית of preferably red wine (a רביעית is a little more than 3 ounces or 86.5 grams). One should drink the entire cup, but must finish at least the majority of a רביעית. The Four Cups, as well as the eating of the Matzah, Hillel's sandwich and Afikomen, must be done in a reclining position to one's left side (בהסיבת שמאל). Women and children are obligated to drink the Four Cups, although children can be given small cups relative to their age and size. Romaine lettuce must be thoroughly cleansed and then carefully inspected for bugs. The horseradish must be grated.

PRAYER FOR DEW - MUSSAF - APRIL 13

The Chazzan dons a Kittel. We say "משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם" during silent Shemonei Esrei at Mussaf. In his Repetition the Chazzan stops saying "...ומוריד הגשם". The congregation no longer says "...ומוריד הגשם" at Mincha. It is advisable to repeat 101 (or at least 90) times "אתה רב להושיע מכלכל חיים"; so that it becomes fluent and habitual, avoiding any future doubt as to whether one failed to omit "משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם".

SECOND NIGHT - COUNTING THE OMER - APRIL 13

Wait until Tzait before lighting candles or preparing for the 2nd day. Maariv begins after Tzait. Each night before counting the Omer we recite the Bracha "אשר קדשנו במצותיו... וצונו על ספירת העומר" and then proclaim the current day of the Omer. Both the Bracha and the count itself must be done while standing. It is best to count the Omer after Tzait. If one counted before then, it is proper to count again after Tzait without a Bracha. If one counted earlier than Plag HaMincha he must count again with a Bracha when the stars appear. If one forgot to count at night, he must count during the day without a Bracha. He may then continue to count again on all of the successive nights with a Bracha. If one failed to count an entire day, one continues to count the following nights without a Bracha.

AHAVAT ACHIM MEMBERSHIP/ HOSPITALITY

Email Sara at 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. 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

INSTAGRAM: www.instagram.com/ahavatachim/

FLICKR: flickr.com/photos/ahavatachim/albums

BULLETIN DEDICATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHUL CALENDAR

Email 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



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

HOWARD is a family man, soon to become a grandfather. Kidney failure is getting in his way.

HE IS IN URGENT NEED OF A KIDNEY DONOR



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Donors usually return to their normal lifestyle within 2-4 weeks post-transplant, with Renewal available to cover lost wages.



Living kidney donation is performed laparoscopically with minimal scarring.

To learn more about kidney donation or to see if you are a match email R26338@renewal.org or call 718-431-9831 Ext. 209

HOWARD LAVIN is a family man, soon to become a grandfather. Kidney failure is getting in his way.

HE IS IN URGENT NEED OF A KIDNEY DONOR



Please join us for a

KIDNEY DONATION SWAB DRIVE

SUNDAY, APRIL 27




From 9:00 AM
Until 12:00 PM

TEMPLE EMANU-EL

180 Piermont Rd.
Closter, NJ

Rabbi Josh Sturm the Director of Outreach
at Renewal will be available for questions

 **Renewal**
www.renewal.org

SEE PAST KIDNEY DONOR STORIES
   @renewalnews

Renewal is a non-profit organization dedicated to saving lives by helping kidney donors and recipients navigate all aspects of the transplant process.

If you can't make the event and would like to learn more about kidney donation or to see if you are a match email R26338@renewal.org or call 718-431-9831 Ext. 209





Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

TZAV • 14

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.

The Thanksgiving Offering

Among the sacrifices detailed in this week's Parsha is the *korban todah*, the thanksgiving offering:

If he offers it [the sacrifice] as a thanksgiving offering, then along with this thanksgiving offering he is to offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and loaves of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil.

Lev. 7:12

Though we have been without sacrifices for almost two thousand years, a trace of the thanksgiving offering survives to this day, in the form of the blessing known as *Hagomel*: "Who bestows good things on the unworthy", said in the synagogue, at the time of reading of the Torah, by one who has survived a hazardous situation.

What constitutes a hazardous situation? The Sages (Brachot 54b) found the answer in Psalm 107, a song on the theme of giving thanks, beginning with the best-known words of religious gratitude in Judaism, *Hodu la-Shem ki tov, ki le-olam chasdo*, "Give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness is forever" (Psalm 107).

The psalm itself describes four specific situations:

1. Crossing the sea:

Some went out on the sea in ships;
they were merchants on the mighty waters . . .
They mounted up to the heavens and went
down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away . . .
Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.

2. Crossing a desert:

Some wandered in desert wastelands,
finding no way to a city where they could
settle.
They were hungry and thirsty,
and their lives ebbed away.
Then they cried out to the Lord in their
trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.

3. Recovery from serious illness:

They loathed all food
and drew near the gates of death.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.

He sent forth his word and healed them;
he rescued them from the grave.

4. Release from captivity:

Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom,
prisoners suffering in iron chains . . .
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He brought them out of darkness and the
deepest gloom
and broke away their chains.

Brachot 54b

To this day, these are the situations of hazard (many nowadays include air travel as well as a sea voyage) on which we say Hagomel when we come through them safely.

In his book *A Rumour of Angels*, the American sociologist Peter Berger describes what he calls “signals of transcendence” - phenomena within the human situation that point to something beyond. Among them he includes humour and hope. There is nothing in nature that explains our ability to reframe painful situations in such a way that we can laugh at them; nor is there anything that can explain the human capacity to find meaning even in the depths of suffering.

These are not, in the classic sense, proofs of the existence of God, but they are experiential evidence. They tell us that we are not random concatenations of selfish genes, blindly reproducing themselves. Our bodies may be products of nature (“dust you are, and to dust you will return”), but our minds, our thoughts, our emotions - all that is meant by the word “soul” - are not. There is something within us that reaches out to something beyond us: the soul of the universe, the Divine ‘You’ to which we speak in prayer, and to which our ancestors, when the Temple stood, made their offerings.

Though Berger does not include it, one of the “signals of transcendence” is surely the instinctive human wish to give thanks. Often this is merely

human. Someone has done us a favour, given us a gift, comforted us in the midst of grief, or rescued us from danger. We feel we owe them something. That ‘something’ is *todah*, the Hebrew word that means both ‘acknowledgement’ and ‘thanks’.

But often we sense something more. It is not just the pilot we want to thank when we land safely after a hazardous flight; not just the surgeon, when we survive an operation; not just the judge or politician when we are released from prison or captivity. It is as if some larger force was operative, as if the hand that moves the pieces on the human chessboard were thinking of us; as if heaven itself had reached down and come to our aid.

Insurance companies tend to describe natural catastrophes as “acts of God”. Human emotion does the opposite. God is in the good news, the miraculous survival, the escape from catastrophe. That instinct - to offer thanks to a force, a presence, over and above natural circumstances and human intervention - is itself a signal of transcendence. That is what was once expressed in the thanksgiving offering, and still is, in the Hagomel prayer. But it is not just by saying Hagomel that we express our thanks.

Elaine and I were on our honeymoon. It was summer, the sun was shining, the beach glorious and the sea inviting. There was just one problem. I could not swim. But as I looked at the sea, I noticed that near to the shore it was very shallow indeed. There were people several hundred yards from the beach, yet the water only came up to their knees. What could be safer, I thought, than simply to walk out into the sea and stop long before I was out of my depth.

I did. I walked out several hundred yards and, yes, the sea only came up to my knees. I turned and started walking back. To my surprise and shock, I found myself suddenly engulfed by water. Evidently, I had walked into a deep dip in the sand. I was out of my depth. I struggled to swim. I failed. This was

dangerous. There was no one nearby. The people swimming were a long way away. I went under, again and again. By the fifth time, I knew I was drowning. My life was about to end. What a way - I thought - to start a honeymoon.

Of course someone did save me, otherwise I would not be writing these lines. To this day I do not know who it was: by then I was more or less unconscious. All I know is that they must have seen me struggling. They swam over, took hold of me, and brought me to safety. Since then, the words we say on waking every day have had a deep meaning for me: "I thank You, living and enduring God, for You have restored my life to me: great is Your faithfulness." Anyone who has survived great danger knows what it is to feel, not just to be abstractly aware, that life is a gift of God, renewed daily.

The first word of this prayer, *Modeh*, comes from the same Hebrew root as *Todah*, 'thanksgiving'. So too does the word *Yehudi*, 'Jew'. We acquired the name from Jacob's fourth son, Judah. He in turn received his name from Leah who, on his birth, said "This time I will thank [some translate it, 'I will praise'] God" (Gen. 29:35).

To be a Jew is to offer thanks. That is the meaning of our name and the constitutive gesture of our faith.

There were Jews who, after the Holocaust, sought to define Jewish identity in terms of suffering, victimhood, survival. One theologian spoke of a 614th commandment: You shall not give Hitler a posthumous victory. The historian Salo Baron called this the 'lachrymose' reading of history: a story written in tears. I, for one, cannot agree. Yes, there is Jewish suffering. Yet had this been all, Jews would not have done what in fact most did: hand on their identity to their children as their most precious legacy.

To be a Jew is to feel a sense of gratitude; to see life itself as a gift; to be able to live through suffering without being defined by it; to give hope the victory over fear. To be a Jew is to offer thanks.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. When was the last time you felt a genuine sense of gratitude, and what prompted it?
2. How might regularly expressing thanks change how you view everyday challenges?
3. What does it mean to "choose hope over fear" in your daily life?

● 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/tzav/the-thanksgiving-offering/>