

Please welcome back Rabbi Dov Goldzweig, our Yomim Noraim Ba'al Tefilah for over a decade, who will be at our shul to check mezuzas and tefillin this Sunday after Shacharit. If you have any questions, you can email the Rabbi beforehand at [goldzweig@bezeqint.net](mailto:goldzweig@bezeqint.net).



CANDLE LIGHTING 6:52 PM | 20 ELUL | SEPTEMBER 13, 2025 | HAVDALA 7:53 PM

## שבת פרשת כי תבא SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TEITZEI

Haftorah is Isaiah 60:1-22 (קומי אורי). Pirkei Avot Chs. 3 & 4.

### FRIDAY EVENING

**MINCHA 6:55 PM**

SHKIA 7:10 PM

TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 7:50 PM

### SHABBAT

**HASHKAMA 7:45 AM**

**SHACHARIT - MAIN 9:00 AM**

POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR 9:30 AM

LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:44 AM

FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR 11:30 AM

PRE-MINCHA SHIUR HIATUS

**MINCHA 6:40 PM**

SHKIA 7:08 PM

**MAARIV 7:53 PM**

KUMZITZ 12:00 AM

SELICHOT 12:50 AM

## SHABBAT CHAYAL

Welcome to our Shabbat Chayal event honoring IDF soldiers, and featuring Rabbi Benjy Kwalwasser of Lev Hatorah, who will be giving the drasha, fundamentals shiur, and speaking at the pre-selichot kumztitz. To sponsor the event (all proceeds to go Lev LaChayal), click here: [Soldiers](#).



## BBQ

BBQ is this Sunday from 3:00 PM to 5:30 PM. Forgot to RSVP, but still want to attend. Please speak to Aaron Czinn. Thank you to the arrangers of this event.

## YOMIM NORAIM 5786

Deadlines have passed, but for late emergency requests for Yomim Noraim seats click here: [Seats](#); and for late registration requests for your children ages 2-12 for Yomim Noraim groups click here: [Childcare](#).

## PRE-SELICHOT KUMZITZ/SELICHOT

This Motzei Shabbat at midnight, join us at our pre-selichot kumztitz with remarks by our special guest Rabbi Benjy Kwalwasser. At 12:50 AM (Chatzot Halayla 12:52 AM), we'll recite Selichot, liturgical requests for forgiveness. Thereafter we recite Selichot every weekday morning through Erev Yom Kippur.



### TORAT ACHIM

- Halacha: Tzurba M'raban, Wed. evenings with Zack Doberman.
- Summer Book Club: [Majesty and Humility](#) by Rav Soloveitchik, Ch. 14, at Fundamentals Shiur.

- Women's Chabura, Shabbat at 6 PM, studying Yehoshua.
- Gemara: Sanhedrin Ch. 8 - Pre-Mincha Shiur.
- "Seder on the Siddur" at Seudah Shlishit - Berachot Part I: R. Donin pp. 191-197, R. Monk pp. 23-37.



SUNDAY  
9/14

MONDAY  
9/15

TUESDAY  
9/16

WEDNESDAY  
9/17

THURSDAY  
9/18

FRIDAY  
9/19

### WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM

SHACHARIT	8:00 AM	5:45 AM	5:55 AM	5:55 AM	5:45 AM	5:55 AM
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		7:00 AM	7:00 AM	7:00 AM	7:00 AM	7:00 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV	6:55 PM	6:53 PM	6:51 PM	6:50 PM	6:48 PM	6:45 PM

### ZMANIM

Earliest Talit	5:41 AM	5:42 AM	5:44 AM	5:45 AM	5:46 AM	5:47 AM
Gedolah	1:23 PM	1:23 PM	1:22 PM	1:21 PM	1:21 PM	1:20 PM
Shkia	7:07 PM	7:05 PM	7:03 PM	7:02 PM	7:00 PM	
Tzait	7:47 PM	7:45 PM	7:43 PM	7:42 PM	7:40 PM	

Rabbi Ely Shestack

President Jay Herman

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Sept. 14** - Community BBQ, 3:00 - 5:30 PM, shul parking lot! RSVP by Sept. 10 here: [BBQ](#)

**Sept. 21** - Scholar-In-Residence R. Josh Blass

**Sept. 28** - Sukkah assembly.

**Oct. 8** - Kiddush is sponsored by the Winchester family on the Yahrzeit of Steve's mother Helen Winchester<sup>נ"ע</sup>, Miriam Hendl bas Shimon

**Oct. 11** - Kohelet Round Robin. Click here to sign up to discuss a chapter: [KOHELET](#).

**Oct. 19** - Sukkah dismantling.

**Nov. 12** - Israeli Bond Event - Save the Date. Details to come.

## IN OUR FUTURE

**Sept. 14** - On this Sunday Rabbi Dov Goldzweig, our Yomim Noraim Ba'al Tefilah for over a decade, will be at our shul to check mezuzas and tefillin. If you would like to get in touch with him beforehand you can email him at [goldzweig@bezeqint.net](mailto:goldzweig@bezeqint.net).

**Sept. 20** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored to commemorate Yahrzeits by the Agress family for Amy's father, הרב ישראל יהודה בן, אפרים מיכל הלוי ז"ל, and by the Greene family for Elliot's father, Harold Greene<sup>נ"ע</sup> (Tzvi Hersch ben Shimon).

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

**September 14** - Ahavat Achim is proud to be a sponsor of a Shiur Petichah for Seder Kodshim entitled "The Relevance and Significance of Studying Kodshim", to be given by Rav Michael Rosensweig, Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel, RIETS. Sunday, 10 - 11 AM, at Jewish Center of Teaneck, 70 Sterling Place. See the flyer for more info.

## BOARD MEETINGS 8:15 PM

**Sept. 16** - At shul w/Zoom option.

**Oct. 28, Nov. 18, Dec. 29 (Monday),**

**Jan. 27, Feb. 24, Mar. 24, Apr. 28, May 26, & June 30**

Thank you Brett Norton for changing the lightbulbs in the sanctuary!



## 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).



- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, alternates between examining the development of Halachot and analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs)
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush, discussing Majesty and Humility by Rav Soloveitchik.
- SHABBAT SHIUR, 40 minutes pre-mincha.
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit.
- TZURBA M'RABANAN w/ Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.
- MISHNA CHABURAH, w/Jeff Safier, after 7:25 AM Shacharit minyan (≈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? Email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com) to be put on 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).
- kiddush by Sunday, August 31, please.

## BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH

- To add a birthday or anniversary to our September list (Kiddush on Shabbat, Sept. 6), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/ sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the September birthday by this Saturday night.

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

**Sept. 20** - High Holiday Youth Program.

**Sept. 24** - 2nd Day of Rosh Hashanah, Shul Playground and Snacks, 4:00 PM.

**Sept. 28** - Sukkot Decoration & Donuts, 10:00 AM.

**Oct. 12** - Kids Sukkah Hop, 3:00 PM.

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



- **SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS: 3<sup>RD</sup> - 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE: LETIZIA & SEBASTIAN; K - 2<sup>ND</sup> GR.: ARIELLA & ISABELLA; AND 3 YRS OLD - PRE K: ABBY & NICOLE**
- 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 9:00 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.

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

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>



PLEASE JOIN US IN FAIR LAWN FOR

# Shabbat Chayal

**Sponsored by Congregation Ahavat Achim  
For the Benefit of Lev LaChayal**

**SEPTEMBER 12-13, 2025  
SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TAVO**



[www.levlachayal.org](http://www.levlachayal.org) | [info@levlachayal.org](mailto:info@levlachayal.org)



# AHAVAT ACHIM BACKYARD BBQ



**SEP. 14TH**

**3:00 - 5:30PM**



**FREE BBQ**

**AA PLAYGROUND FUN**

**BOUNCE HOUSE**

**CHALK + BUBBLES**

**MUSIC + GAMES**



**MUST RSVP BY SEP. 10<sup>TH</sup> AT**  
**[TINYURL.COM/2025AABBQ](https://tinyurl.com/2025AABBQ)**



**AHAVAT ACHIM**

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY SHUL





## Officers

Elul 5785 / September 2025

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## Member Synagogues

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Anshei Lubavitch  
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Darchei Noam  
Shomrei Torah  
Young Israel  
Sephardic Center

Dear esteemed members of the Fair Lawn community,

We are writing with some reminders about our mikvah's operation, as well as information on men's mikvah usage before the *Yamim Nora'im*.

First, some general reminders for both men and women:

- **Men may not park in the back lot of Shomrei Torah after 7:00 PM.** The back lot is reserved for mikvah parking only. You may park in the side lot, on Boyd Avenue, in front of the Yudins' house, or on side streets. **PLEASE SEE DIAGRAM ATTACHED.**
- To the extent possible, women should schedule mikvah appointments in advance on our website [fairlawnmikvah.org](http://fairlawnmikvah.org). Signups close three hours before tevilah. We will do our best to accommodate, however **last minute appointments will incur a \$10 late fee.**

Please see the attached flier for notification about our facility's **availability to men on Erev Rosh Hashana** and stay tuned for further details about Erev Yom Kippur. Please note the following:

- On Erev Rosh Hashana (Monday 9/22), the mikvah will be open for men's usage from 5:00 am - 2:30 pm. **The keilim mikvah will be closed all day.**
- Women looking to schedule an appointment for Rosh Hashana evening should text the mikvah hotline at 201-468-0098.
- Advance registration is strongly encouraged. Registration on our website [fairlawnmikvah.org](http://fairlawnmikvah.org) will open on the morning of Monday, September 15.
- **Pricing is as follows:**
  - Individual appointments: \$30 for Fair Lawn residents, \$35 for nonresidents
  - Family appointments (3 people maximum): \$60 for Fair Lawn residents, \$70 for nonresidents
  - Large Family appointments (4+ people): \$70 for Fair Lawn residents, \$80 for nonresidents
  - Walk-in usage will incur an additional \$10 fee
- **Timing is as follows:**
  - From 5:00 AM - 1:30 PM, men will be able to use the mikvah individually and privately, with appointments taking precedence over walk-ins. Each man (or family) will have a private changing room and will use the mikvah privately. Staff will be present to help facilitate a smooth operation.
  - From 1:30 - 2:30 PM (no entry after 2:15 PM), individual changing rooms will not be available, and mikvah usage will be communal. The keilim mikvah will be available as a group changing room.
- **Bring your own towel.** Towels and showers will NOT be provided or available.

Wishing you and your families a year filled with health, happiness, and holiness.  
*Kesivah v'Chasimah Tovah,*

Shira Teichman  
President of the Fair Lawn Mikvah Association

P.S. If you'd like to receive updates and announcements directly from the FLMA, you may join our mailing list here: <https://bit.ly/flma-mailing-list>





# EREV ROSH HASHANA 5786 MEN'S MIKVAH HOURS



Open to Men Only

***Keilim mikvah closed all day***

All patrons must shower at home and bring your own towel



Pricing for FL Residents:

\$30 pre-register; \$40 at door

Check, Zelle, or cash (exact change)

See website for non-resident pricing



Shomrei Torah

19-10 Morlot Ave, Fair Lawn, NJ

Enter at back



Monday, September 22nd

5:00 AM - 1:30 PM by appointment

1:30 - 2:30 PM "communal hour"

Doors close at 2:15 PM sharp

**Registration begins 9/15**  
**Register at:**

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

Kesiva V'Chasima Tova,  
The Fair Lawn Mikvah Association

Mikvah Chava Faiga  
of Fair Lawn



# Men of Fair Lawn, Friendly Reminder:



**DO NOT PARK HERE  
After 7pm**

- The Fair Lawn  
Mikvah Association





AHAVAT ACHIM  
— קהלת אהבת אחים —  
THE FAMILY SHUL

Congregation Ahavat  
Achim presents

SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE

**RABBI JOSH BLASS**

**SHABBAT, SEPTEMBER 20**

Save the date and join us for  
an uplifting and moving  
Shabbat!



Rabbi Josh Blass has served for the past 21 years as a Mashgiach Ruchani in Yeshiva University. In this role R' Blass gives personal and spiritual guidance and mentorship to YU students of all stripes.

Additionally Rabbi Blass spent nearly two decades in the rabbinic community Rav in Einstein Medical School and Kehillas Beis Yehudah in Wesley Hills, NY. Rabbi Blass holds a Masters in Social Work and has a practice specializing in addiction and trauma. Rabbi Blass has been involved professionally both in a Rabbinic and Mental Health capacity with a number of organizations including Project Tikvah, My Extended Family, Keshet Family and Project Ezra. Rabbi Blass speaks and gives shiurim throughout the Tri-State area.

He will be joined by his wife Ilana who has been practicing law for over twenty years, including having worked for many years as the in-house attorney for the Beth Din of America. They very much look forward to spending Shabbos with the community.

[EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG](mailto:EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG)



**AHAVAT ACHIM YOUTH INVITES CHILDREN OF ALL AGES TO  
OUR ANNUAL**

# **YOUTH SUKKAH HOP**

## **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12<sup>TH</sup>**

**REACH OUT  
TO SPONSOR  
A STOP!**



**3:00 - 3:40 PM**

**John and Shifra Caruso**



**3:50 - 4:30 PM**

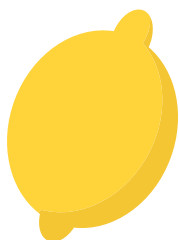
**Tzahi and Jordana Cohen**



**4:40 - 5:30 PM**

**Andrew and Kira Wigod**

**Dairy dinner served at this stop!**



**5:40-6:20 PM**

**Ahavat Achim Playground**

**RSVP BY OCTOBER 5<sup>TH</sup> TO GET THE  
ADDRESSES!**

**[HTTPS://FORMS.GLE/ZFBXKD35LZORIFA69](https://forms.gle/ZFBXKD35LZORIFA69)**

# ***Shiur Petichah for Seder Kodshim***

## ***“The Relevance and Significance of Studying Kodshim”***

**Rav Michael Rosensweig, Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel, RIETS**



**Sunday, September 14 from 10-11 am  
Jewish Center of Teaneck  
70 Sterling Place**

**Words of Introduction by Rabbi Elliot Schrier,  
Rabbi of Congregation Bnai Yeshurun**

**Sigum on Seder Nezikin in Memory of the Kedoshim of Israel's War  
Rabbi Daniel Fridman, Rabbi, Jewish Center of Teaneck**

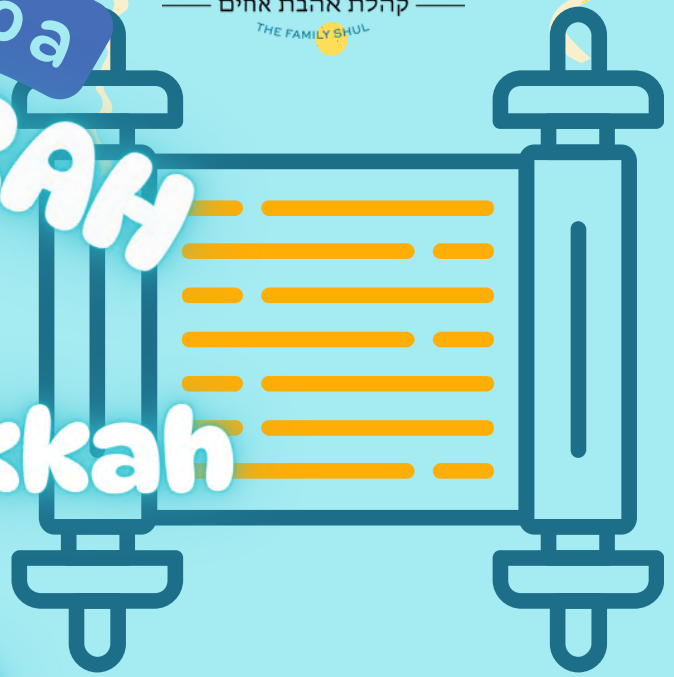
**Shiur Generously Sponsored By:  
Miriam and Elie Berman, Daniella and Dr. Michael Gottesman,  
Nomi and Yechiel Rotblat, Daniel and Sipporah Tracer**

Co sponsors include:

Ahavat Achim, Ahavat Shalom, Ahavath Torah, Arzei Darom, Beis Knesses of New Milford,  
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Congregation Beth Aaron, Congregation Beth Abraham, Congregation Beth Tefillah of Paramus,  
Congregation Darchei Noam, Congregation Keter Torah, Congregation Rinat Yisrael, East Hill Synagogue,  
Ohr HaTorah, Ohr Saadya, Kehillat Keshet, Netivot Shalom, Sephardic Congregation of Fort Lee,  
Shaarei Orah, Shaare Tefillah, Shomrei Emunah, Young Israel of Fair Lawn,  
Young Israel of Fort Lee, Young Israel of Teaneck, Zichron Mordechai

Ahavat Achim Invites you to a  
**SIMCHAT TORAH**

**Farewell to Sukkah  
&  
Kinderkafot**



**TUESDAY OCTOBER 14TH  
@ 5 PM  
MEETING IN THE  
SYLVIA LATKIN A"H SUKKAH**

**FOLLOWED BY AN  
INTERACTIVE PROGRAM  
FOR ALL AGES WITH DINNER  
AND HAKAFOT**

**RSVP here BY 10/9**





**Ahavat Achim Youth  
invites children of all ages to**

# **Celebrate Rosh Hashana together!**

**RSVP by  
9/17**

**Saturday  
9/20  
@ 3:30 PM**

**\$5/child  
\$12 Family  
max**

**Join us for fun on  
the playground at  
3:30 followed by  
a pre- Rosh  
Hashana program  
and dinner**



**AHAVAT ACHIM**  
קהלת אהבת אחים





AHAVAT ACHIM

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY SHUL

Ahavat Achim invites  
you to join us for a fun

# Monthly

*Simcha Kiddush*

Have a birthday, anniversary, or  
another reason to say Mazel Tov?  
For \$36, you can co-sponsor that  
month's simcha kiddush!

Click HERE to get  
your sponsorship in!



**Deadline: 1 week before each kiddush!**

# HIGH HOLIDAY CHILDCARE

Drop off groups for children ages 2-12

Rosh Hashana @ 8:45 AM

Kol Nidre

Yom Kippur @ 8:45 AM

Neilah

All groups end when davening ends

Shofar blowing for youth after mussaf.  
Davening will take place during groups.

sign up [Here!](#)

Early bird (By September 7th): \$15

After September 7th: \$25

No prior registration: \$30

Use of the parent & me room is free for  
those who only have child(ren) under 2

\*must purchase seats to sign up





Sponsorship  
opportunities  
are available!

E-mail

youth@ahavatachim.org  
to learn more.

JOIN US FOR

DONUTS



SUKKAH  
DECORATIONS

CHILDREN OF ALL AGES ARE INVITED TO MAKE  
SUKKAH DECORATIONS!

Sunday, September 28<sup>th</sup> at 10 AM

Bring a photo of your child  
for a special project!



AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

RSVP by 9/21:

<https://forms.gle/iDUdhCnRAn9wj7WE6>

# KIDS PLAYGROUND

Meet Up!

**2<sup>ND</sup> DAY OF  
ROSH  
HASHANAH  
9/24 @ 4 PM**

**@ the Ahavat Achim Playground**



**Snacks will  
be provided!**



**AHAVAT ACHIM**  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL



# Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

KI TAVO • כי תבוא

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.

## Listening and Law

It would be reasonable to assume that a language containing the verb "to command" must also contain the verb "to obey." The one implies the other, just as the concept of a question implies the possibility of an answer. We would, however, be wrong. *There are 613 commandments in the Torah, but there is no word in Biblical Hebrew that means "to obey."* When Hebrew was revived as a language of everyday speech in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a word, *letsayet*, had to be borrowed from Aramaic. Until then there was no Hebrew word for "to obey."

This is an astonishing fact and not everyone was aware of it. It led some Christians (and secularists) to misunderstand the nature of Judaism: very few Christian thinkers fully appreciated the concept of *mitzva* and the idea that God might choose to reveal Himself in the form of laws. It also led some Jews to think about *mitzvot* in a way more appropriate to Islam (the word *Islam* means "submitting" to God's law) than to

Judaism. What word does the Torah use as the appropriate response to a *mitzva*? *Shema*.

The root *sh-m-a* is a keyword in the book of Deuteronomy, where it occurs 92 times, usually in the sense of what God wants from us in response to the commandments. But the verb *sh-m-a* means many things. Here are some of the meanings it has in Genesis:

1. "To hear" as in: "Abram *heard* that his relative [Lot] had been taken captive" (Gen. 14:14).
2. "To listen, pay attention, heed" as in: "Because you *listened* to your wife and ate fruit from the tree" (Gen. 3:17) and "Then Rachel said: God has vindicated me; He has *listened* to my plea and given me a son" (Gen. 30:7).
3. "To understand" as in "Come, let Us go down and confuse their language so they will not *understand* each other" (Gen. 11:7). This is how tradition understood the later phrase



*Naaseh ve-nishma* (Ex. 24: 7) to mean, “first we will do, then we will understand.”

4. “To be willing to obey” as the angel’s words to Abraham after the Binding of Isaac, “Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you were *willing to obey Me*” (Gen. 22:18), when Abraham was about to obey God’s command, and at the last moment an angel called upon him to stop.

5. “To respond in deed, to do what someone else wants” as in “*Do whatever Sarah tells you*” – *sh’ma bekolah* (Gen. 21:12).

It is in this last sense that the verb *sh-m-a* comes closest in meaning to “obey.” The fact that *it* means all these things suggests that in the Torah there is no concept of blind obedience. In general, a commander orders and a soldier obeys. A slave-owner orders and the slave obeys. There is no active thought-process involved. The connection between the word of the commander and the deed of the commanded is one of action-and-reaction, stimulus-and-response. For practical purposes, the soldier or slave has no mind of his own. As Tennyson described the attitude of the soldiers before the Charge of the Light Brigade, “Ours not to reason why; ours but to do or die.”

That is not how the Torah conceives the relationship between God and us. God, who created us in His image, giving us freedom and the power to think, wants us

to *understand* His commands. Ralbag (Gersonides, 1288–1344) argues that it is precisely this that makes the Torah different:

Behold our Torah is unique among all the other doctrines and religions that other nations have had, in that our Torah contains nothing that does not originate in equity and reason. Therefore this Divine Law attracts people in virtue of its essence, so that they behave in accordance with it. The laws and religions of other nations are not like this: they do not conform to equity and wisdom, but are foreign to the nature of man, and people obey them because of compulsion, out of fear of the threat of punishment but not because of their essence.<sup>1</sup>

Along similar lines, the modern scholar David Weiss Halivni speaks of “the Jewish predilection for justified law,” and contrasts this with other cultures in the ancient world:

Ancient law in general is apodictic, without justification and without persuasion. Its style is categorical, demanding, and commanding ... Ancient Near Eastern law in particular is devoid of any trace of desire to convince or to win hearts. It enjoins, prescribes, and orders, expecting to be heeded solely on the strength of being an official decree. It solicits no consent (through justification) from those to whom it is directed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gersonides, Commentary to Va-etchanan, par. 14.

<sup>2</sup> David Weiss Halivni, *Midrash, Mishnah, Gemara: the Jewish predilection for justified law*, Harvard University Press, 1986, 5.

The Torah uses at least three devices to show that Jewish law is not arbitrary, a mere decree. First, especially evident throughout the book of Devarim, is the giving of *reasons for the commands*. Often, though not always, the reason has to do with the experience of the Israelites in Egypt. They know what it feels like to be oppressed, to be a stranger, an outsider. I want you to create a different kind of society, says God through Moses, where slavery is more limited, where everyone is free one day a week, where the poor do not go hungry, and the powerless are not denied justice.

The second, most notably in the book of Bamidbar, is *the juxtaposition of narrative and law*, as if to say, the law is best understood against the backdrop of history and the experience of the Israelites in their formative years. So the law of the Red Heifer – for purification from contact with the dead – occurs just before the death of Miriam and Aaron, as if to say, bereavement and grief interfere with our contact with God but this does not last forever. We can become pure again. The law of *tsitsit* occurs after the story of the spies because (as I explained in an earlier *Covenant & Conversation*) both have to do with ways of seeing: the difference between seeing-with-fear and seeing-with-faith.

The third is *the connection between law and metaphysics*. There is a strong connection between Genesis 1, the story of creation, and the laws of *kedushah*, holiness. Both belong to *torat kohanim*, the priestly voice, and both are about order and the maintenance of boundaries. The laws against mixing meat and milk, wool and linen, and so on, are about

respecting the deep structure of nature as described in the opening chapter of the Torah.

Throughout Devarim (Deuteronomy), as Moses reaches the summit of his leadership, he becomes an educator, explaining to the new generation who will eventually conquer and inhabit the land, that the laws God has given them are not just Divine decrees. They make sense in human terms. They constitute the architectonics of a free and just society. They respect human dignity. They honour the integrity of nature. They give the land the chance to rest and recuperate. They protect Israel against the otherwise inexorable laws of the decline and fall of nations.

Only by recognising God as their sovereign will they guard against overbearing kings and the corruptions of power. Time and again Moses tells the people that if they follow God's laws they will prosper. If they fail to do so they will suffer defeat and exile. All this can be understood in supernatural terms, but it can be understood in natural ways also.

That is why Moses, consistently throughout Devarim, uses the verb *sh-m-a*. He wants the Israelites to obey God, but not blindly or through fear alone. God is not an autocrat. The Israelites should know this through their own direct experience. They had seen how God, creator of heaven and earth, had chosen this people as His own, brought them from slavery to freedom, fed, sustained and protected them through the wilderness, and led them to victory against their enemies. God had not given the Torah to Israel for His sake but for

theirs. As Weiss Halivni puts it: the Torah “invites the receiver of the law to join in grasping the beneficent effect of the law, thereby bestowing dignity upon him and giving him a sense that he is a partner in the law.”<sup>3</sup>

That is the meaning of Moses’ great words in this week’s Parsha:

“*Be silent, Israel, and listen!* You have now become the people of the Lord your God. *Listen* to the Lord your God and follow His commands and decrees that I give you today.”

Deut. 27:9-10

Keeping the commands involves an act of listening, not just submission and blind obedience – listening in all its multiple senses of attending, meditating and reflecting of the nature of God through

creation, revelation, and redemption. It means trying to understand our limits and imperfections as human beings. It means remembering what it felt like to be a slave in Egypt. It involves humility and memory and gratitude. But it does not involve abdication of the intellect or silencing of the questioning mind.

God is not a tyrant<sup>4</sup> but a teacher.<sup>5</sup> He seeks not just our obedience but also our understanding. All nations have laws, and laws are there to be obeyed. But few nations other than Israel set it as their highest task to understand *why* the law is as it is. That is what the Torah means by the word *shema*.



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. How might the Torah’s idea of *shema* shape the way we approach other opportunities, such as learning in school or listening to parents?
2. What happens to people or societies when they follow rules without thinking?
3. Do you think faith should be more about trust, or more about understanding? Why?

● 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/ki-teitse/letting-go-of-hate/>



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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>4</sup> Avodah Zarah 3a.

<sup>5</sup> Tamhuma (Buber), Yitro, 16.