



SHABBAT CANDLE LIGHTING 6:28 PM | 5 TISHREI | SEPTEMBER 27, 2025

שבת שובה/פרשת וילך
SHABBAT SHUVA
PARSHAT VAYEILECH

Haftorah is Hosea: 14:2-10 (שובה ישראל); Joel 2:11-27 and Micah 7:18-20. On Motzei Shabbat do not say וירי נועם or ואתה קדוש.

FRIDAY EVENING

MINCHA 6:30 PM

TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 7:26 PM

SHABBAT

HASHKAMA 7:45 AM

MAIN 9:00 AM

LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:48 AM

DRASHA ≈10:45 AM

PRE-MINCHA SHIUR 5:40 PM

MINCHA 6:20 PM

MAARIV/HAVDALAH 7:30 PM

יום הכפורים
YOM KIPPUR
10 TISHREI / OCTOBER 1-2

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON/NIGHT

MINCHA 3:30 PM

CANDLE LIGHTING 6:19 PM

KOL NIDREI 6:25 PM

TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 7:18 PM

THURSDAY

SHACHARIT 8:00 AM

LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:50 AM

YIZKOR ≈11:30 AM

MINCHA 4:35 PM

NEILAH 6:05 PM

MAARIV/HAVDALAH 7:21 PM

SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE



Please welcome Rabbi Josh Blass and his wife Ilana, who are joining us this Shabbat. Schedule is as follows: (1) Friday Night Tisch at the Shestack home at 9:00 PM (please come earlier to help set up), (2) Shabbat Shuva Drasha: "Teshuva as Man's Search for...", (3) Women's shiur at the Nudelman home, and (4) a special Seudah Shlishit Panel discussion with three mental health care professionals and a lawyer.

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Shirley & Avi Vann to commemorate the Yahrtzeit of Avi's Grandfather, Joseph Wengrofsky ז"ל.

FROM THE RABBI

- Kol Nidrei Drasha: "Kol Nidrei in the Forest".
- Yizkor Drasha: "Does God Try to Convince us to do Teshuva?".

KOL NIDREI APPEAL

To make a pledge, click here: [Kol Nidrei](#).

SIMCHAT TORAH KIDDUSH

To become a Platinum sponsor (\$180), Gold Sponsor (\$118) or a general sponsor (\$54), please email Steve at seplotnick@gmail.com. We also need donations of single malt Scotch. Donors to date on Page 3.

MIKVAH CHAVA FAIGA OF FAIR LAWN/MEN'S HOURS

- Erev Yom Kippur, Wednesday, Oct. 1, 4:30 AM - 3 PM. All men must shower at home and bring their own towel.
- Book a time slot: [Mens Mikvah](#). \$30/ Fair Lawn resident (family discounts).
- Walk-ins will be accommodated when possible. Cost will be \$40/per person.

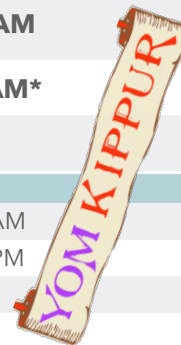
FROM THE MEN'S CLUB

- (1) **ETROG-LULAV SALE WILL BE THIS SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM.**
- (2) Sylvia Latkin ז"ל Sukkah construction is this Sunday after Shacharit. **PLEASE BRING ALLEN WRENCHES AND STEP LADDERS IF YOU HAVE THEM.**
- (3) Sukkah hop will take place on the 1st day of Sukkot, Tuesday, Oct. 7. See page 3 for the schedule.



WEEKDAY MINYONIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM

	SUNDAY 9/29	MONDAY 9/29	TUESDAY 9/30	WEDNESDAY 10/1	THURSDAY 10/2	FRIDAY 10/3
SHACHARIT	6:20 AM	5:45 AM	5:55 AM	6:15 AM		6:20 AM
2nd SHACHARIT	8:00 AM	7:00 AM*	7:00 AM*	7:15 AM*		7:25 AM*
MINCHA/MAARIV	6:31 PM	6:29 PM	6:28 PM			6:20 PM
ZMANIM *YISHTABACH EXPECTED AT 7:40 AM FOR INDICATED 2ND SHACHARIT MINYONIM						
Earliest Talit	5:56 AM	5:57 AM	5:58 AM	5:59 AM		6:01 AM
Gedolah	1:16 PM	1:16 PM	1:15 PM	1:15 PM		1:14 PM
Shkia	6:43 PM	6:41 PM	6:40 PM			
Tzait	7:23 PM	7:21 PM	7:20 PM			



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Sept. 28** - Sukkah assembly after Shacharit.
Oct. 4 - Birthday/Anniversary Kiddush.
Oct. 11 - Kohelet Round Robin. Click here to sign up to discuss a chapter: [KOHELET](#).
Oct 19 - Sukkah dismantling after Shacharit.
Nov. 1 - Birthday/Anniversary Kiddush.
Nov. 12 - Israeli Bond Event - Save the Date. Details to come.
Dec. 6 - Birthday/Anniversary Kiddush.

IN OUR FUTURE

- Oct. 4** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Jewel & Robert Safren to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Jewel's mother Sara Mondshine^{נ"ע}, Sarah bas Reuvain.
Oct. 8 - Kiddush is sponsored on the second day of Sukkot by the Winchester family on the Yahrzeit of Steve's mother Helen Winchester^{נ"ע}, Miriam Hendl bas Shimon.
Oct. 25 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by David & Lori Garfunkel in memory of Jonathan^{נ"ע} and Lori's mother ברוניא רחל דוד Tootsie Markovitz^{נ"ע}, and by Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick on the Yahrzeit of Betsy's father יהודה בן ירמיהו Howard Perlmuter^{נ"ע}.

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? Email 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.

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH

- To add a birthday or anniversary to our September list (next Kiddush on Shabbat, Oct. 4), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/ sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the October birthday by Saturday night, September 27.

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. 
- 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. This week: **Chapter 16**.
- SHABBAT SHIUR, **Sanhedrin Ch. 8**, 40 minutes prior to mincha.
- 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).
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit - **On hiatus this week due to the special presentation with our Scholar-In-Residence.**

BOARD MEETINGS 8:15 PM

- Oct. 28** - At shul w/Zoom option.
Nov. 18, Dec. 29 (Monday), Jan. 27, Feb. 24, Mar. 24, Apr. 28, May 26, & June 30

GITA COOPERWASSER^{נ"ע} YOUTH EVENTS

- Sept. 28** - Sukkot Decoration & Donuts, 10:00 AM.
Oct. 12 - Kids Sukkah Hop, 3:00 PM.
Oct. 14 - 26th Annual Farewell to Sukkah/ Kinderkafot in the Sylvia Latkin^{נ"ע} Sukkah at 5 PM, followed by kid's dinner, hakafot, & dancing in the David Schwitzer^{נ"ע} social hall. \$5 per child/\$12 per family. RSVP here: [Simchat Torah for Kids](#), by Oct. 9.

GITA COOPERWASSER^{נ"ע} SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- **SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS: 3RD - 5TH GRADE: ZOE & ISABELLA; K - 2ND GR.: ABBY & ARNELLA; AND 3 YRS OLD - PRE K: PERRI & MAYA**
- 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>

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), email Steve at seplotnick@gmail.com. We also need donations of single malt Scotch. Sponsors to date: **PLATINUM (\$180)**: Garfunkel, Heller, Plotnick, & Winchester; **GOLD (\$118)**: S.&A. Brooks, & A. Cohen; and **GENERAL (\$54)**: Eisman, Greene, Oppenheim, Riskin, Sokoloff, Sonnenblick, Strich, Wechsler, & S. Wigod.



SUKKAH HOP (OCTOBER 7) SCHEDULE

Mayer Sukkah - 3:55 PM
Transit - 4:25 PM
Goldberg ("ChaChas") Sukkah - 4:35 PM
Transit - 5:05 PM
Borsuk Sukkah - 5:25 PM
Transit - 5:55 PM
Mincha - 6:10 PM



DAVID SCHWITZER ד"ר SOCIAL HALL

Contact Lori at garfmom@gmail.com to book the David Schwitzer ד"ר 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.

YAHRTZEIT 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.

EREV YOM KIPPUR / ערב יום כפור

Only a few Selichot are said in the morning. Eat in a bountiful fashion the entire day. It is an obligation for men to immerse in a mikveh. We finish the סעודת המפסקת (the concluding meal) well before sunset. One should drink plenty of water (before any fast).

Where there is a custom for everyone to light a candle in Shul, no Bracha should be made over that candle. Regarding the custom to light a "lamp symbolizing the soul" (נר נשמה), it is sufficient to light one lamp for departed parents, and one lamp for the household. We bless our children.

YOM KIPPUR / יום הכפורים

All activities forbidden on Shabbat are forbidden today. We afflict ourselves by abstaining from: (1) eating and drinking, (2) any washing, (3) application of oils and creams, (4) wearing leather footwear, and (5) marital relations. Hands that are soiled may be washed in cold water. Come to Shul early to allow the saying of Kol Nidrei before sunset. Don the Kittel (married men) and Tallit (with the Bracha "להתעטף בציצית") before sunset. Allow enough time to say "תפלה זכרה". It is proper to seek each other's forgiveness for any possible wrongdoing.

After Kol Nidrei the Chazzan and congregation recite "שהחיינו". The congregation should finish before the Chazzan to answer "אמן" to his Bracha. Women who have already made the Bracha "שהחיינו" over the candles at home should not repeat it. Many have the custom to say all the שמירת המצוות and שמירת המצוות at the conclusion of Maariv. Many people say the first four chapters of Tehillim (Psalms) before they go to sleep. Some people recite the entirety of Tehillim on Yom Kippur. One should be particularly careful not to harbor impure thoughts this night.

Upon arising one should wash each hand, alternately, up to the end of the knuckles, three times. Washing the face is not permitted. However, while one's hands are still somewhat moist, one may wipe them over his eyes so as to clear them of sediment. We make the Bracha over the washing of hands as well as the other usual morning Brachot.

The custom is for married men to wear a Kittel underneath the Tallit. During Yizkor it is customary to make pledges to Tzedakah as a means of elevating the souls of the departed.

During Mincha the third Aliyah is Maftir who reads the Haftarah, consisting of the entire Book of Jonah. "The Divine Judgement that was written on Rosh HaShanah concerning the fate of all beings, whether for good or for bad, is sealed by the end of Neilah. A person must actively prepare himself for the prayers of Neilah. For the culmination of the Ten Days of Repentance is Yom Kippur, and the culmination of Yom Kippur is Neilah; everything hinges upon these final few moments. If not now, when? Therefore, even if one is physically weakened by the fast, he still must gird himself, like a warrior preparing for battle, in order to pray with a pure and clear concentration and to accept upon himself all of the many facets of genuine repentance. One who comes to purify himself is helped from Above and will be sealed in the Book of Good Life" (Mishne Brurah: 623:3).

MAARIV/DEPARTURE OF YOM KIPPUR / ערבית

In Shemonei Esrei we no longer recite the additions for the Ten Days of Repentance (if one forgot and said "המלך הקדוש" instead of "הא-ל הקדוש", one does not have to repeat Shemonei Esrei).

After one has eaten it is a good custom to begin working on the Succah. The next morning we arise early for services in Shul.

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



COMMUNITY
SECURITY
SERVICE

To 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.]





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!



AHAVAT ACHIM
— קהלת אהבת אחים —
THE FAMILY SHUL

Congregation Ahavat
Achim presents

SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE

RABBI JOSH BLASS

SHABBAT, SEPTEMBER 27

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



**Friday Night
Tisch @ the Shestack's**

**Shabbat Shuva
Drasha by R' Blass**

**Shabbat Afternoon
Women's Shiur @ the
Nudelman's**

Seudat Shlishit

**"3 Therapists and a Lawyer: a panel on Judaism and Mental Health" w/
Rabbi and Rebbetzin Blass and Rabbi and Rebbetzin Shestack**

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. 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.

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.

EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG

Men of Fair Lawn, Friendly Reminder:



**DO NOT PARK HERE
After 7pm**

- The Fair Lawn
Mikvah Association



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 28th 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>

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

YOUTH SUKKAH HOP

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12TH

**REACH OUT
TO SPONSOR
A STOP!**



3:00 - 3:40 PM

John and Shifra Caruso



3:50 - 4:30 PM

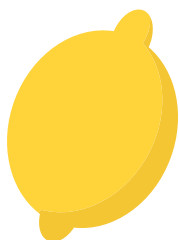
Tzahi and Jordana Cohen



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 5TH TO GET THE
ADDRESSES!**

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

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





Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

VAYELECH • וילך

FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS זצ"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 זצ"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 Heart, the Home, the Text

By now Moses had given 612 commands to the Israelites. But there was one further instruction he still had to give, the last of his life, the final mitzva in the Torah.

Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be My witness against the people of Israel.

Deut. 31:19

The Oral Tradition understood this to command that each Israelite should take part in the writing of a Sefer Torah. Here is how Maimonides states the following law:

Every male Israelite is commanded to write a Torah scroll for himself, as it says, "Now therefore write this song," meaning, "Write for

yourselves [a complete copy of] the Torah that contains this song," since we do not write isolated passages of the Torah [but only a complete scroll]. Even if one has inherited a Torah scroll from his parents, nonetheless it is a mitzva to write one for oneself, and one who does so is as if he had received [the Torah] from Mount Sinai. One who does not know how to write a scroll may engage [a scribe] to do it for him, and whoever corrects even one letter is as if he has written a whole scroll.

Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah and Sefer Torah 7:1

There is something poetic in the fact that Moses left this law until the last. For it

was as if he were saying to the next generation, and all future generations: Do not think it is enough to be able to say, 'My ancestors received the Torah from Moses.' You must take it and make it new in every generation.

And so Jews did.

The Koran calls Jews "the People of the Book." That is a great understatement. The whole of Judaism is an extended love story between a people and a book – between Jews and the Torah. Never has a people loved and honoured a book more. They read it, studied it, argued with it, lived it. In its presence they stood as if it were a king. On Simchat Torah, they danced with it as if it were a bride. If – God forbid – it fell, they fasted. If one was no longer fit for use it was buried as if it were a relative that had died.

For a thousand years they wrote commentaries to it in the form of the rest of Tanach (there were a thousand years between Moses and Malachi, the last of the prophets, and in the very last chapter of the prophetic books Malachi, says in the name of God, "Remember the Torah of My servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel"). Then for another thousand years, between the last of the prophets and the closure of the Babylonian Talmud, they wrote commentaries to the commentaries in the

form of the documents – Midrash, Mishna, and Gemara – of the Oral Law. Then for a further thousand years, from the Gaonim to the Rishonim to the Acharonim, they wrote commentaries to the commentaries to the commentaries, in the form of biblical exegesis, law codes, and works of philosophy. Until the modern age virtually every Jewish text was directly or indirectly a commentary to the Torah.

For a hundred generations it was more than a book. It was God's love letter to the Jewish people, the gift of His word, the pledge of their betrothal, the marriage contract between heaven and the Jewish people, the bond that God would never break or rescind. It was the story of the people and their written constitution as a nation under God. When they were exiled from their land it became the documentary evidence of past promise and future hope. In a brilliant phrase the poet Heinrich Heine called the Torah "the portable homeland of the Jew." In George Steiner's gloss, "The text is home; each commentary a return."¹

Dispersed, scattered, landless, powerless, so long as a Jew had the Torah he or she was at home – if not physically then spiritually. There were times when it was all they had. Hence the lacerating line in

¹ George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text," in *The Salmagundi Reader*, pp. 99–121.

one of the liturgical poems in Neilah at the end of Yom Kippur:

“Ein lanu shiur rak haTorah hazot.”

“We have nothing left except this Torah.”

It was their world. According to one Midrash it was the architecture of creation: “God looked in the Torah and created the Universe.” According to another tradition, the whole Torah was a single, mystical name of God. It was written, said the sages, in letters of black fire on white fire. Rabbi Jose ben Kisma, arrested by the Romans for teaching Torah in public, was sentenced to death, wrapped in a Torah scroll that was then set on fire. As he was dying his students asked him what he saw. He replied, “I see the parchment burning but the letters flying [back to heaven]” (Avodah Zarah 18a).

The Romans might burn the scrolls, but the Torah was indestructible.

So there is immense power in the idea that, as Moses reached the end of his life, and the Torah the end of its narrative, the final imperative should be a command to continue to write and study the Torah, teaching it to the people and “putting it in their mouths” so that it would not abandon them, nor they, it. God’s word would live within them, giving them life.

The Talmud tells an intriguing story about King David, who asked God to tell him how long he would live. God answered him, that is something no mortal knows. The most God would disclose to David was that he would die on Shabbat. The Talmud then says that every Shabbat, David’s “mouth would not cease from learning” during the entire day.

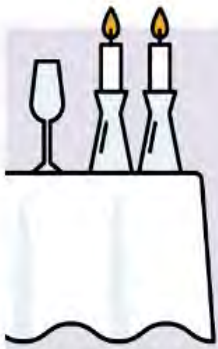
When the day came for David to die, the Angel of Death was despatched, but finding David learning incessantly, was unable to take him – the Torah being a form of undying life. Eventually the angel was forced to devise a stratagem. He caused a rustling noise in a tree in the royal garden. David climbed up a ladder to see what was making the noise. A rung of the ladder broke. David fell, and for a moment ceased learning. In that moment he died (Shabbat 30a-b).

What is this story about? At the simplest level it is the sages’ way of re-envisioning King David less as a military hero and Israel’s greatest king than as a penitent and Torah scholar (note that several of the Psalms, notably 1, 19 and 119, are poems in praise of Torah study). But at a deeper level it seems to be saying more. David here symbolises the Jewish people. *So long as the Jewish people never stop learning, it will not die.* The national equivalent of the Angel of Death – the law that all nations, however great, eventually decline and fall – does not apply to a

people who never cease to study, never forgetting who they are and why.

Hence the Torah ends with the last command – to keep writing and studying Torah. And this is epitomised in the beautiful custom, on Simchat Torah, to move immediately from reading the end of the Torah to reading the beginning. The last word in the Torah is *Yisrael*; the last letter is a *lamed*. The first word of the Torah is *Bereishit*; the first letter is *beit*. *Lamed* followed by *beit* spells *lev*, “heart.”

So long as the Jewish people never stop learning, the Jewish heart will never stop beating. Never has a people loved a book more. Never has a book sustained a people longer or lifted it higher.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. What does making the Torah new in every generation mean to you?
2. What do you think of Heine's comment about the “portable homeland of the Jew”?
3. Why would the Torah end with this mitzvah? Would you pick a different mitzvah as the final one?

● 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/nitzavim/why-be-jewish/>