



CANDLE LIGHTING 5:54 PM | 19 TISHREI | OCTOBER 18, 2025 | HAVDALA 8:56 PM

שבת פרשת בראשית

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEREISHIT

Haftorah is Isaiah 42:5-43:10. We bless the month of MarCheshvan. Do not say either **אב הרחמים** or **צדקתך צדק**.

FRIDAY EVENING

MINCHA 6:00 PM

SHKIA 6:12 PM

TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 6:52 PM

SHABBAT

HASHKAMA 7:45 AM

SHACHARIT - MAIN 9:00 AM

POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR 9:56 AM

LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:44 AM

FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR 11:30 AM

PRE-MINCHA SHIUR 5:05 PM

MINCHA 5:45 PM

SHKIA 6:11 PM

MAARIV 6:56 PM

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם



Molad for MarCheshvan is Wed., Oct. 22, 12:54 AM & 8 Chalokim.

ראש חדש מרחשון יהיה ביום רביעי ויום חמישי הבא עלינו ועל כל ישראל לטובה

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Mayer family in memory of Richie's father.

TAKING DOWN THE SUKKAH



Volunteers will be needed to take down the Shul's Succah on Sunday, Oct. 19, after Shacharit (around 9:00 AM), weather permitting. Please assist!

FAMILY FALL FOLIAGE HIKE!

After the shul's Succah is down, this Sunday we will drive to Minnewaska State Park for a hike (not stroller friendly, but easy enough to carry a child in a carrier and for children to walk). Come with us and enjoy!



ETROG COMPOSTING DROP-OFF DEADLINE



ETROG COMPOSTING

November 7 is the Deadline: For info, click here: [Etrog Composting Drop-Off](#). Also, we are offering the service of picking up your etrog for you, click here: [Form for Pickup](#).

MAZEL TOV!



Mazel tov to Chatan Torah Greg Riskin and Chatan Bereshit Steven Plotnick. May you each continue to go "m'chayil l'chayil", from strength to strength!



SUNDAY
10/19

MONDAY
10/20

TUESDAY
10/21

WEDNESDAY
10/22

THURSDAY
10/23

FRIDAY
10/24

WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM

SHACHARIT	8:00 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM	6:10 AM	6:10 AM	6:25 AM
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:10 AM	7:10 AM	7:25 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV	5:57 PM	5:56 PM	5:55 PM	5:53 PM	5:52 PM	5:50 PM

ZMANIM

Earliest Talit	6:18 AM	6:19 AM	6:20 AM	6:21 AM	6:22 AM	6:23 AM
Gedolah	1:08 PM	1:08 PM	1:08 PM	1:08 PM	1:07 PM	1:07 PM
Shkia	6:09 PM	6:08 PM	6:07 PM	6:05 PM	6:04 PM	
Tzait	6:49 PM	6:48 PM	6:47 PM	6:45 PM	6:44 PM	

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Oct 19** - Sukkah dismantling after Shacharit.
Oct. 19 - Family Fall Foliage Hike! After shul Sukkah dismantling we will drive to Minnewaska State Park for a hike (not stroller friendly, but easy enough to carry a child in a carrier and for children to walk).
Nov. 1 - Birthday/Anniversary Kiddush.
Nov. 12 - Israeli Bond Event - For more info, see page 3.
Dec. 6 - Birthday/Anniversary Kiddush.

IN OUR FUTURE

- Oct. 25** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by David & Lori Garfunkel in memory of Jonathan ע"ה and Lori's mother רחל ברנאי ע"ה. Tootsie Markovitz ע"ה, and by Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick on the Yahrzeit of Betsy's father יהודה בן ירמיהו ע"ה, Howard Perlmutter ע"ה.
Nov. 1 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Brett Norton in memory of mother, Leah bat Meyer (Lynne Norton ע"ה).

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

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 19**.
- 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 - **AKEIDAH (R. Donin - p. 198, R. Munk - N/A)**.

18-25 Saddle River Road

Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

201.797.0502

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH EVENTS

TBA - TBA

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



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

ISRAEL BONDS

Join Israel Bonds on November 12, at 7:30 PM, as we welcome Israeli artist and elite combat soldier Albert Levi. Albert served in the IDF in an elite combat unit and will speak about his experiences serving, as well as how he became an artist. He has created beautiful works of art that showcase the beauty and strength of Israel. His artwork and merchandise will be available for purchase at the event. Attendees will also enjoy a very special Israeli wine tasting. Please consider donating an Israel bond to Belev Echad, a 501(c)(3) that provides life saving support to wounded IDF soldiers, which is very important to Albert. For more information, please contact Danielle Ross at danielle.ross@israelbonds or 973-712-1408.



NAME	HEBREW DATE	CANDLE EVENING OF	DEDICATOR	RELATIONSHIP
Mirla Teitelbaum	1	October 22	Joyce Sperling	Mother
Leon Eisman	5	October 26	Jamie Eisman	Father
Jonathan Garfunkel	6	October 27	Lori & David Garfunkel	Son
Rhea "Tootsie" Markovitz	7	October 28	Lori Garfunkel	Mother
Alex Singer	8	October 29	Seth Bader	Grandfather
Henry Garfinkel	14	November 4	Shelly Winchester	Father
Rachel Kor	16	November 6	Hazkiel Kor	Mother
Helene Adler	16	November 6	Rose Dworkis	Mother
Paula Sperling	17	November 7	Arnie Sperling	Mother
Edith Wigod	21	November 11	Seymour Wigod	Mother
Jerome Greenberg	23	November 13	Natan Santacruz	Grandfather
Chaim Shlomo Ben Yechiyel	24	November 14	Arnie Sperling	Mother's Family
Raizel Bat Shlomo	24	November 14	Arnie Sperling	Mother's Family
Gital Bat Raizel	24	November 14	Arnie Sperling	Mother's Family
Yechiel Ben Chaiim	24	November 14	Arnie Sperling	Mother's Family
Velvel Ben Yechiyel	24	November 14	Arnie Sperling	Mother's Family
Chaya Miriam Bat Raizel	24	November 14	Arnie Sperling	Mother's Family
Julius Ellman	25	November 15	Shirley Vann	Father
Lucy Heller	29	November 19	Joyce Heller	Mother-In-Law
Yetta Singer	29	November 19	Sheree Kor	Grandmother

DAVID SCHWITZER ע"ה SOCIAL HALL

Contact Lori at garfmom@gmail.com to book the David Schwitzer ע"ה 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.

MARCHESHVAN ADAPTED FROM CHABAD.ORG

The Jerusalem Talmud informs us that "the names of the months came up with us from Babylonia."¹ Until the Babylonian exile, the months were either known by their number, e.g., "the first month," or by names that are not commonly used nowadays. In fact, in the Book of Kings, this month is called "the month of Bul, the eighth month,"² counting from the springtime month of Nissan. The post-Babylonian-exile Scriptures (such as Esther and Nechemia), while mentioning other months, never mention this month, so there is no clear scriptural inference one way or the other. Some suggest that "Marcheshvan" appears to come from the Akkadian word meaning "the eighth month."³

Marcheshvan vs. Cheshvan

The Mishnah⁴ and Talmud,⁵ and many later works, call the month Marcheshvan. This is also the case when dating Jewish legal documents or blessing the new month.⁶ On the other hand, we find that in the oldest extant esoteric work, Sefer Yetzirah (the Book of Formation)—a book predating and mentioned in the Talmud⁷—the month is referred to as Cheshvan.⁸ The Zohar likewise calls it Cheshvan.⁹ And this is how it is usually called in everyday speech. So why the discrepancy? Because there is a difference of opinion whether the month's true name is Marcheshvan, or whether it really is Cheshvan and the mar is merely an appellation added to describe the month. There are a number of explanations offered as to the deeper meaning behind the mar in Marcheshvan.

Bitterness

Some explain that mar means "bitterness" (think of the maror we eat on Passover). The month is seen as bitter for a number of reasons: (1) After the holidays of Tishrei, the month of Marcheshvan is devoid of any holidays,¹⁰ (2) Sarah (and Rachel) passed away during this month,¹¹ and (3) During the First Temple Era the Jewish nation split into two kingdoms and Jeroboam, king of the northern tribes, instituted a pagan holiday in the month of Cheshvan to counter the worship of G-d that took place in Jerusalem.¹²

A Drop of Water

Others explain that the Hebrew word mar means "a drop of water," as in the verse "like a drop (mar) from a bucket."¹³ It is in this month in the land of Israel that we begin praying for rain, and adding mar is a prayer for rain.¹⁴ Also, the Mabul (Great Flood) in the times of Noah began in this month.¹⁵ Commentators point out that the original name for the month found in Scriptures, "Bul," is also a reference to the Mabul.¹⁶

Head or Master

Some suggest that the mar in Marcheshvan actually has a positive connotation, as the word mar can mean the honorific "Master", and it was given since this is the month that King Solomon finished building the First Temple.¹⁷ In truth, there is an element of bitterness here as well, for although it was finished then, the Temple wasn't dedicated until later, leaving the month bereft of a possible holiday. Despite the dedication of the First Temple not being in the month of Marcheshvan, the Midrash relates that the Third Temple will be dedicated in this month.¹⁸ Thus, not only will it not be a "bitter" month, on the contrary, it will be a month of rejoicing!¹⁹ May it be speedily in our days!

1. Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 1:2.

2. I Kings 6:38.

3. Thus it would be related to the words Merach-Shvan: Merach - month and Shvan - eight. See however the Aruch Hashaleh where he suggests that it is Merachesh-Van; Merachesh (flows) Van (water).

4. Mishnah Taanit 1:3-4.

5. See, for example, Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 7a.

6. See, however, Minhagei Vermaisa 234, which says that the people of Worms, Germany, had the custom to call the month Cheshvan when blessing the month.

7. See, for example, Talmud Sanhedrin 65b.

8. Sefer Yetzirah 5:4.

9. See, for example, Zohar 2:275b, 3:260b, Zohar Chodosh 42a.

10. See Sdei Chemed, Maarechet Chatan U'Kallah 23.

11. See Esther Rabbah 7:13 and Sdei Chemed, Maarechet Chatan U'Kallah 23.

12. I Kings 12; see also Sefer Hatodaah.

13. Isaiah 40:15.

14. Pri Chadash, Even Haezor 126:7.

15. Opinion of Rabbi Eliezer in Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 11b.

16. Radak on I Kings 6:38.

17. See I Kings 6:38.

18. Yalkut Shemoni, Melachim 184.

19. Torat Menachem, 5742, vol. 1, p. 353-354; Bnei Yissaschar 2:56-57.

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 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.]



Mishlei/Proverbs
Post-Hashkama Shiur 5 – Benefits of Listening

”בני אדם תתקח אומרי ומצוה תצפן אתה: לִהְיוֹת שׂוֹמֵר לְחֻמֵּי תִּבְיוֹנָה: כִּי אִם לְבִינָה תִקְרָא לְתִבְיוֹנָה וְתָנוּ קוֹלָהּ: אִם תִּבְקֹשׁ עָנָה כְּכֹסֶף וְכַמְטָמוֹגִים תִּחְפְּצָנָה: לֹא תִבִּין יִרְאַת יְ-ה-וָה וְהָיָה לְךָ נִדְעָה אֶל-ה-י-ם תִּמְצָא: כִּי יִי-ה-וָה וְהָיָה יָתֵן חֲכָמָה מִפִּי וְדַעַת וְתִבְיוֹנָה: יִצְפֹּן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׁמְרֵהּ מִגֵּן לְהִלְכִי תָם: לִנְצֹר אֲרָחוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְדָרֶךְ חֲסִידוֹ יִשְׁמֹר: לֹא תִבִּין צָדֵק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִיּוֹשְׁרִים כָּל-מַעֲגָל-טוֹב: כִּי-תִבְּאֹה חֲכָמָה בְּלִבְךָ וְדַעַת לִנְפְשְׁךָ יִנָּעַם: מִזֹּמָה תִּשְׁמֹר עַלֶיךָ תִּבְיוֹנָה תִּנְצֹרָה: לִהְיוֹת מְדַבֵּר רַע מֵאִשׁ מְדַבֵּר תִּהְיֶה כוֹחַ: הֲעֹזְבִים אֲרָחוֹת יִשָּׂר לִלְכֹת בְּדֶרֶךְ-יְהוָה: הֲשִׁמְחִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רַע יִגְדְּלוּ בְּתִהְיוֹת רַע: אֲשֶׁר אֲרָחוֹתֵהֶם עֹשִׂים וְגִלּוּזִים בְּמַעֲגָלוֹתָם: לִהְיוֹת מְדַבֵּר מֵאִשׁ וְהָיָה מְנַכְרִיָּה אֲמָרֶיהָ הִתְלִיקָה: הֲעֹזְבֹת אֶלּוּף נְעוּרֶיהָ וְאֶת-בְּרִית אֶל-ה-י-ה שָׁחָה אֶל-מִנּוֹת בֵּיתָהּ וְאֶל-רָפָאִים מַעֲגָלֶיהָ: כָּל-בְּאִיָּה לֹא יִשְׁבֹּן וְלֹא-יִשְׁיֵגוּ אֲרָחוֹת חַיִּים: כְּלָמֶן תִּלְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ טוֹבִים וְאֲרָחוֹת צְדִיקִים תִּשְׁמֹר: כִּי-יִשְׁרִים יִשְׁכְּנוּ-אַרְצָךְ וְתִמְיָמִים יִגְדְּלוּ בָּהּ: יִתְרוּ בָּהּ: וְיִרְשָׁעִים מֵאַרְצָךְ יִכָּרְתוּ וּבִגְדִים יִסְתּוּ מִמֶּנָּה: -

1My son, if you accept my words, and treasure my commandments, 2to make your ear attentive to wisdom, [and if] you incline your heart to insight; 3if you call for understanding [and] raise your voice for insight, 4if you seek it like silver, and hunt for it like treasures, 5then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and you will discover the knowledge of God. 6For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth [come] knowledge and insight. 7He lays up sound wisdom for the upright, a shield for those who walk in integrity; 8to keep the paths of justice, and watch the way of His pious. 9Then you shall understand righteousness, justice, and equity - every good path. 10When wisdom comes into your heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant to your soul, 11foresight shall watch over you; insight shall guard you, 12to save you from an evil way. From a man who speaks perversity; 13[from] those who forsake the ways of uprightness, to go on ways of darkness; 14[from] those who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perversity of evil, 15who are crooked in their ways and perverse in their paths. 16To save you from a forbidden woman, from a foreign one who makes her words smooth, 17who deserts the friend of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God, 18for her house sinks to death, and her paths [lead] to the dead; 19none who go to her return, neither do they achieve the ways of life, 20in order that you go in the way of the good, and you keep the ways of the righteous. 21For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the innocent shall remain therein. 22But the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and the treacherous shall be uprooted therefrom.¹

A. The father begins with a reference to “my commandments.” Accepting that this in fact refers to the mitzvot given by Hashem, the Beit Halevi sees this as a reference to תוֹרָה שְׁבַע-עֲלֶיפָה, which is personal to Jewish to the exclusion of the rest of the world.²

B. The opening five verses restates the father’s desire that the son be on a quest for wisdom, insight and knowledge, and the father lists rewards perhaps in descending order (from most important to least) as –

- (1) Understanding the “fear of the Lord” and discovering the “knowledge of God.” – Pasuk 5.
- (2) Understanding “righteousness, justice, and equity - every good path”. Pasuk 9
- (3) Foresight watches over you [and] insight shall guard you – “to save you from an evil way”. Pasuk 11-12.
 - Evil is then identified:
 - (a) A man who speaks perversity. Pasuk 12.
 - (b) Those who forsake the ways of uprightness, to go on ways of darkness. Pasuk 13.
 - (c) Those who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perversity of evil, who are crooked in their ways and perverse in their paths. Pasukim 14-15.
 - (d) “A forbidden woman . . . who deserts the friend of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God,” whose “house sinks to death, and her paths [lead] to the dead”. Pasukim 16-18.
 - (e) A smooth talking foreign woman (presumably non-Jewish woman). Pasuk 16.
- (4) “Dwelling” and “Remaining” in the land. Pasuk 21.
 - Rashi sees the dwelling as forever (here and in the world to come). Metzudos adds that those innocent of sin will remain in the land when the wicked in the next verse are thrown out.

¹ Mishlei Chapter 2

² See Beit HaLevi on Torah, Yitro 16.

C. Some parallels from other philosophical works:

- Compare this with Shlomo's proclamations in Kohelet where reward for following a path of wisdom is not necessarily assured to give rise to reward: (1) "I have seen everything in the days of my vanity; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his wickedness."³ And (2) "There is vanity that is done on the Earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous; I said that this too is vanity."⁴
- Iyov, on the other hand, does not necessarily see a benefit per se to following this path. As mentioned in the last shiur, he sees fearing the lord and shunning evil as a goal unto itself,⁵ but does question why there isn't more of a cause-effect relationship in this world: "Why do the wicked live on, grow strong and powerfully rich? Their children are well established in their sight with them, and their children's children are before their eyes. Their houses have peace from fear, and God's rod is not upon them. His bull impregnates and does not fail; his cow bears young and does not abort. They send forth their infants like sheep, and their children dance. They raise [their voice] with the tambourine and the harp, and they rejoice to the sound of the flute. They end their days in prosperity, and in a moment they descend to the grave."⁶
- Aristotle in giving over the benefit of following the path of wisdom and prudence in practice as the attainment of flourishing and well-being, as opposed to the physical reward by Shlomo herein as dwelling in the land. *Nicomachean Ethics* I.4.

³ Kohelet 7:15.

⁴ Kohelet 8:14.

⁵ Iyov 28:28.

⁶ Iyov 21:7-13.



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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 5773 (2012–2013). These timeless messages are accompanied by a new [Family Edition](#) created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha and Haftara.

A Living Book

It is the most famous, majestic, and influential opening of any book in literature:

“בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא...”

“When God began creating heaven and earth, the earth was void and desolate, there was darkness on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved over the waters. God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light.”

Genesis 1:1–3

The traditional translation is, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” What is surpassingly strange is the way Rashi – most beloved of all Jewish commentators – begins his commentary on the Chumash:

Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah – *which is the Law book of Israel* – should have begun with the verse, “**This month**

shall be to you the first of the months” (Exodus 12:2), which is the first commandment given to Israel.

Rashi on Genesis 1:1

Can we really take this at face value? Did Rabbi Isaac, or for that matter Rashi, seriously suggest that the Book of Books might have begun in the middle – a third of the way into Exodus? That it might have passed by in silence the creation of the universe – which is, after all, one of the fundamentals of Jewish faith?

Could we understand the history of Israel without its prehistory, the stories of Abraham and Sarah and their children? Could we have understood those narratives without knowing what preceded them: God’s repeated disappointment with Adam and Eve, Cain, the generation of the Flood and the builders of the Tower of Babel?

The fifty chapters of Genesis together with the opening of Exodus are the source-book of biblical faith. They are as near as we get to an exposition of the philosophy of Judaism. What then did Rabbi Isaac mean?

He meant something profound, which we often forget. To understand a book, we need to know to what genre it belongs. Is it history or legend, chronicle or myth? To what question is it an answer? A history book answers the question: what happened? A book of cosmology – be it science or myth – answers the question: how did it happen?

What Rabbi Isaac is telling us is that if we seek to understand the Torah, we must read it as Torah, which is to say: law, instruction, teaching, guidance. Torah is an answer to the question: how shall we live? That is why he raises the question as to why it does not begin with the first command given to Israel.

Torah is not a book of history, even though it includes history. It is not a book of science, even though the first chapter of Genesis – as the 19th-century sociologist Max Weber pointed out – is the necessary prelude to science, because it represents the first time people saw the universe as the product of a single creative will, and therefore as intelligible rather than capricious and mysterious. It is, first and last, a book about how to live.

Everything it contains – not only commandments but also narratives, including the narrative of creation itself – is there solely for the sake of ethical and spiritual instruction.

It moves from the minutest details to the most majestic visions of the universe and our place within it. But it never deviates from its intense focus on the questions: What shall I do? How shall I live? What kind of person should I strive to become? It begins, in Genesis 1, with the most fundamental question of all. The Psalm puts it thus:

“What is man that You are mindful of him?”

Tehillim 8:5

Pico della Mirandola’s 15th century *Oration on Man* was one of the turning points of Western civilisation, the “manifesto” of the Italian Renaissance. In it he attributed the following declaration to God, addressing the first man:

“We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own

free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very centre of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.”

Homo sapiens, that unique synthesis of “dust of the earth” and breath of God, is unique among created beings in having no fixed essence: in being free to be what he or she chooses. Mirandola’s *Oration* was a break with the two dominant traditions of the Middle Ages: the Christian doctrine that human beings are irretrievably corrupt, tainted by original sin, and the Platonic idea that humanity is bounded by fixed forms.

It is also a strikingly Jewish account – almost identical to the one given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in *Halachic Man*: “The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself. It is this idea that Judaism introduced into the world.” It is therefore with a frisson of

recognition that we discover that Mirandola had a Jewish teacher, Rabbi Elijah ben Moses Delmedigo (1460–1497).

Born in Crete, Delmedigo was a Talmudic prodigy, appointed at a young age to be head of the yeshiva in Padua. At the same time, he studied philosophy, in particular the work of Aristotle, Maimonides and Averroes. At the age of 23 he was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Padua. It was through this that he came to know Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who became both his student and his patron. Eventually, however, Delmedigo’s philosophical writings – especially his work *Bechinat ha-Dat* – became controversial. He was accused, by other rabbis, of heresy. He had to leave Italy and return to Crete. He was much admired by Jews and Christians alike, and when he died young, many Christians as well as Jews attended his funeral.

This emphasis on choice, freedom and responsibility is one of the most distinctive features of Jewish thought. It is proclaimed in the first chapter of Genesis in the most subtle way. We are all familiar with its statement that God created man “in His image, after His likeness”. Seldom do we pause to reflect on the paradox. If there is one thing emphasised time and again in the Torah, it is that God has no image. “I will be what

I will be”, He says to Moses when he asks Him His name.

Since God transcends nature – the fundamental point of Genesis 1 – then He is free, unbounded by nature’s laws. By creating human beings in His image, He gave us a similar freedom, thus creating the one being capable itself of being creative. The unprecedented account of God in the Torah’s opening chapter leads to an equally unprecedented view of the human person and our capacity for self-transformation.

The Renaissance, one of the high points of European civilisation, eventually collapsed. A series of corrupt rulers and Popes led to the Reformation, and to the quite different views of Luther and Calvin. It is fascinating to speculate what might have happened had it continued along the lines signalled by Mirandola. His late 15th

century humanism was not secular but deeply religious.

As it is, the great truth of Genesis 1 remains. As the Rabbis put it (Bereishit Rabbah 8:1; Sanhedrin 38a): “Why was man created last? In order to say, if he is worthy, all creation was made for you; but if he is unworthy, he is told, even a gnat preceded you.” The Torah remains As the Rabbis put it (Bereishit Rabbah 8:1; Sanhedrin 38a): “Why was man created last? In order to say, if he is worthy, all creation was made for you; but if he is unworthy, he is told, even a gnat preceded you.” The Torah remains God’s supreme call to humankind to freedom and creativity on the one hand, and on the other, to responsibility and restraint – becoming God’s partner in the work of creation.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. What is a human being? How does Bereishit answer this question?
2. How does seeing the Torah as “teaching” instead of history or science change the way you read Bereishit?
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/bereishit/a-living-book/>