

CANDLE LIGHTING 4:15 PM | 2 KISLEV | NOVEMBER 22, 2025 | HAVDALA 5:18 PM

שבת פרשת תולדות SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT

Haftorah is Malachi 1:1-2:7.

FRIDAY EVENING

MINCHA	4:20 PM
SHKIA	4:33 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	5:13 PM

SHABBAT			
HASHKAMA	7:45 AM		
SHACHARIT - MAIN	9:00 AM		
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈9:15 AM		
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:17 AM		
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	HIATUS		
GEDOLAH	12:07 PM		
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	3:25 PM		
MINCHA	4:05 PM		
SHKIA	4:33 PM		
MAARIV	5:18 PM		

KIDDUSH

Kiddush is sponsored in honor of Chatan Torah Greg Riskin and Chatan Bereshit Steven Plotnick. May you each continue to go "m'chayil l'chayil", from strength to strength!



SPECIAL EVENT FOR WOMEN



This Monday, Nov. 24, there will be a special women's program starting at 8:15 PM entitled <u>Living Waters: The Story of Mikvah from Torah to Today</u>, led by Rebbetzin Chana Shestack and

special guest Shira Teichman of the Fair Lawn Mikva Association.

MAZEL TOV

Mazal tov to Liz Jacob on her engagement to Daniel Avital.
יעלה הזיווג יפה ויבנו בית נאמן בישראל
May the beautiful couple be elevated in the building of

May the beautiful couple be elevated in the building of a faithful house of Israel.



MIX AND MATCH DINNER



Thank you to Liz Jacob and Sara Santacruz for organizing the this Friday's mix and match dinner and to all participants!

SIGN-UP FOR THANKSGIVING DAY EVENTS

Be part of our flag football and pie giving Thanksgiving Day events by RSVPing here: <u>Turkey Day</u>.

PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

Sara Molinksy & Steven Shtaynberger; and Jacob





Alison & Akiva Gordon; and Moshe

ORTHODOX UNION ANALYSI Enhancing Jewish Life	SUNDAY 11/23	MONDAY 11/24	TUESDAY 11/25	WEDNESDAY 11/26	THURSDAY 11/27	FRIDAY 11/28			
WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM									
<u>SHACHARIT</u>	8:00 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM	6:25 AM	6:20/8:00 AM	6:20/8:00 AM			
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:25 AM					
MINCHA/MAARIV	4:20 PM	4:20 PM	4:19 PM	4:19 PM	4:18 PM	4:15 PM			
ZMANIM									
Earliest Talit	5:55 AM	5:56 AM	5:57 AM	5:58 AM	5:59 AM	6:00 AM			
Gedolah	12:07 PM	12:07 PM	12:07 PM	12:08 PM	12:08 PM	12:08 PM			
Shkia	4:32 PM	4:32 PM	4:31 PM	4:31 PM	4:30 PM				
Tzait	5:12 PM	5:12 PM	5:11 PM	5:11 PM	5:10 PM				
Rabbi Fly Shestack									

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 25 - Deadline for Shul's Food Drive.

Nov. 27 - Flag football and pie giving.

Nov. 29 - S.I.R. Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider.

Dec. 6 - Birthday/Anniversary Kiddush.

Dec. 21 - Boker Tov Chanukah Event, with musical Hallel, kids activities, and breakfast (no charge). RSVP here: <u>Chanukah</u>.

IN OUR FUTURE

Dec. 6 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Gerry & Howard Kessel on the 1st yahrtzeit of Gerry's father דוב בן שלמה, Bernard Roth "ש. Dec. 13 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Dina & Elliot Greene to commemorate the yahrtzeit of Dina's mother, Zelda Rubinowitz" (Zelda bat Tzvi).

BOARD MEETINGS 8:15 PM

Dec. 29 (Mon.) - At shul w/Zoom option. 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 December list (next Kiddush on Shabbat, Dec. 6), click here: <u>SIMCHA</u>. Listings/sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the December birthday/anniversary kiddush by Sat. night, Nov. 29.

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@amail.com.
- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, alternates between examining the development of Halachot and analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs)
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush, discussing the Political Philosophy of our Patriarchs.
- 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 minyon (≈10 minutes).
- HALACHA SHIUR FOR WOMEN, Monday nights, 8:15 PM. Current topic: Mezuzah.
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit - Korbonot Part II (R. Donin p. 199-200, R. Munk - pp. 61-73).

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Nov. 23 - Shaimot disposal, 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM, in Saddle Brook. For details, click here: Shaimot.

Dec. 6 - The Fair Lawn Mikvah Association's 3rd Annual Women-Only Community Evening of Inspiration, Sat. night, at Shomrei Torah. Click here: <u>Inspiration</u>.

18-25 Saddle River Road Fair Lawn, NJ 07410 201.797.0502 http://www.ahavatachim.org

GITA COOPERWASSER^{¬"y} YOUTH EVENTS

Nov. 17-28 - Bergen County Annual Chanukah Toy Drive.

Dec. 6 - Parent-Child Learning/Chanukah Edition, at 6:00 PM.

Dec. 20 - Children's Seudah Shlishit/ Chanukah program at 4:15 PM, followed by



a glow-in-the-dark musical havdala! RSVP here: Youth, by 12/14! \$5/child, \$12 family/ max.

Jan. 3 - Parent-Child Learning.

Feb. 7 - Parent-Child Learning.

GITA COOPERWASSER

- SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS: 3RD 5TH GRADE: CASSANDRA, ISABELLA & LETIZIA; K 2ND GR.: MAYA, DANIELLE & ZOE; AND 3 YRS OLD PRE K: PERRI & BELANA.
- 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

Mishlei/Proverbs Post-Hashkama Shiur 10 – The Forbidden Woman

אָבָני לְּחָכְמָתֵי הקּשֶׁיכָה לַּתְבּוּנָתִי הַט־אָזְגֵּך: בּלְשָׁלָר מְזְמֵּוֹת וְלַצְעַה שָׂפָתִי וֹנְיִלְרוּ: יֹבְי נְפָרוּ שִׂפְתִי וֹנְתְּהְ בְּנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לֵי וְאַל־מְּמָבְי וֹנְאָרִי חָבְּהּ: יֹבְּעְבָה חַבְּהּ: יֹאָרח תִּיִּים בֶּן־תְּפָלֵס נָעִּוּ מִׁעְּגְּלֹתָיהָ לְאׁ תַדְע: 'וְעַתָּה בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לֵי וְאַל־תָּסִוּרוּ מֵאִמְרִ־בְּי: "הַרְתַּקּ בְּלְוֹת מָנֵת שְׁאֹוֹל צְעָדֵיהָ יִתְּלְכוּ: 'אָרח תִיִּים בֶּן־תְּפָלֵס נָעִוּ מִעְּגְלֹתָיהָ לְאׁ תַדְע: 'וְעָתָּה בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לֵי וְאַל־מָּמְ בְּאַהִריתָה בְּכְלְוֹת מֵעְתְּ בְּאַהָריתָה בְּלְוֹת בְּנִי תְּנְבִי בְּילְנִים בְּעָבְיה בְּיְבִי בְּלְוֹת בְּנִי שְׁמְעוּי מִנְּהָ בְּבְּיִם הּוֹדֶך בְּאַרִיתְיּ בְּבָּרְוֹת מָנְתוֹן לְצָּיִבְ בְּלְוֹת בְּנְיבִי וְיִבְּבְּה וְאַבְיִי בְּבָּרְוֹת מָנְתוּ בְּבָּלְוֹת בְּלְבְּבְּה וְאָבְיִי בְּבָּרְוֹת מִיְתִּוֹּ בְּבְּיִבְּי וְלְאִ־שְׁמְעִים הְּבָּבְי וְלְאִרְשְׁמְצְיִם מְתִּוֹּהְ בְּבָּרִי בְּעָרְם בְּלְבְּבְּה וְאָיְתְרָבְי בְּבְרִב בְּיִבְּיה וְנְיִבְּיִם מְבּבּיי יְבְיְבְּה וְבִּלְים מְתִּוֹּךְ בְּבְרִיבְּת בְּעְיִבְּיתְיְ בְּבְרְבִי וְיִבְּבְּת בְּעִבְּית בְּעִבְית בְּבְרבּים מִתְּוֹב בְּבְרְבִיה בְּבְירִב בְּיוֹתְיבְיתְים מְתִּוֹך בְּבָּלְיתְ בְּבְּבְיב בְּיִבְיתִים מְבָּבְּיתְם בְּבְּיבְיתְ בְּבְּבְיב בְּיוֹבְיתְיבְיתְיבְיים בְּבְּבְיתְים בְּתְּבְּבְיתְיבְּבְיתְיבְים בְּבְּבְיתְים מְמָוֹךְ בְּבְרבּיב מִינְינְנְיבְּתְיבְיב בְּיִבְיתִים מְבִּבְיתְים בְּבְּלְיתִים מְתִּוֹךְ בְּבְּלִיתְים בְּעְבְּלְתִים מְתָּוֹבְיתְיבְיב בְּיִבְבְּתְיבְיב בְּיִבְיתְיבְּבְיתְיב בְּבְירְים בְּבְּבְיתְיב בְּיוֹתְיבְיב בְּנִיתְים בְּבְּיתְים מְּבְּבְיתְיבְּבְּיתְּבְיבְיבְּבְּבְיתְּיבְילְם בְּעִבְּתְים בְּעְבְּבְיתְיבְּבְיתְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְּבְיבְיבְיבְּבְיבְיבְיבְּבְיבְיבְיבְּבְּבְיבְיבְּבְיבְּבְיבְּבְיבְיבְיבְּבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְים מְעִבְּיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְּיבְּבְּבְיבְיבְיבְּבְיבְיבְּבְיבְּבְּבְיבְים בְּעִבְּיִבְיבְיבְּבְיבְּבְּבְיבְיבְיבְיבְיבְּבְיבְבְיבְים מְּבְּבְיבְבְיבְיבְּבְיבְבְיבְים בְּבְּיבְבְים מְישְּבְּבְיבְּבְבְּבְיבְבְּיבְּבְּבְיבְּבְיבְים בְּבְּבְבְּבְבְּבְּבְּבְבְּבְיבְּיִים בְּבְּבְּבְבְ

₁My son, hearken to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, ₂to watch [your] thoughts, and your lips shall guard knowledge. 3For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her palate is smoother than oil. 4But her end is as bitter as wormwood, as sharp as a two-edged sword. 5Her feet descend to death; her steps come near the grave. ¿Lest you weigh the path of life, her paths have wandered off and you shall not know. 7And now, sons, hearken to me and do not turn away from the sayings of my mouth. 8Distance your way from her and do not draw near to the entrance of her house, slest you give others your glory, and your years to a cruel one; 10 lest strangers be sated with your strength and your labors be in the house of an alien. 11And you shall moan when your end comes, when your flesh and your body are consumed, 12and you will say, "How [is it that] I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof; 13 and I did not hearken to my instructors, and to my teachers I did not incline my ear? 14I was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and the assembly." 15Drink water from your own cistern and running water from your own spring. 16May your springs spread out rivulets of water in the squares. 17You alone shall have them, and strangers shall have nothing with you. 18 Your fountain shall be blessed, and you shall rejoice with the wife of your youth; 19a lovely hind and a graceful mountain goat, her breasts will satisfy you at all times; you shall always be intoxicated with her love. 20 Now why should you, my son, be intoxicated by a forbidden woman, and embrace the bosom of an alien one? 21For man's ways are before the Lord's eyes, who examines all of his paths. 22 Iniquities shall trap the wicked man, and he shall be hanged with the ropes of his sin. 23 He shall die without discipline, and he shall err with his exceeding foolishness.1

A. The chapter breaks down into three parts:

- (1) It begins with familiar exhortations to be receptive to wisdom, etc., and to guard knowledge, and concludes not just by enumerating potential consequences of choices that might be made but by emphasizing that Hashem is watching so as to magnify these warnings.
- (2) After the opening exhortations, we are reminded of a threat, the forbidden woman, first introduced to us at Mishlei 2:16 as among people that should be avoided. There she is referred to as a "smooth" talker, but here the level of her ability to entice (references to "honey" and "oil", and being "intoxicated" by a forbidden woman) is presented.
 - The Malbim sees this as both (1) a straightforward warning that physical desire can entice one to sin, with various midrashim seeing this as a warning against an adulterous relationship with a married woman, and (2) as an allegory to warn against the lure of false ideologies (Rashi) or simply the yetzer hora (Vilna Gaon and Alshich).

Before the chapter's concluding pasukim, it turns to the foil of the forbidden woman, a legitimate female mate, *i.e.*, "wife of your youth" with whom you shall "rejoice", who is graceful and who will satisfy you, and whose love is "intoxicating".

- The Malbim sees the reference to the "wife of your youth" as being an allegorical allusion to the Torah, *i.e.*, the counter to the "forbidden woman" allegorically representing false

¹ Mishlei Chapter 5.

Post-Hashkama Shiur 10

- ideologies. As previously discussed, Torah and wisdom may be synonymous in this regard, so this a preview for the upcoming presentation of the conflict between Lady Wisdom and the Forbidden Woman.
- (3) And in between the descriptions of the forbidden woman and her foil, the wife of one's youth, the question again is raised as to why people would knowingly make illogical choices.

B. Some parallels from other philosophical works:

- We can perhaps compare the references to the forbidden woman and the wife of one's youth to Plato's references to the "lower eros" (seeking pleasure from the senses) and "higher eros" (seeking pleasure from understanding truth and righteousness). *Symposium*.
- Aristotle sees a possible loss of control of oneself due to an obsession with bodily pleasures, and calls for one to moderate desires (but not to eliminate them). *Nicomachean Ethics III*. Similarly, while Mishlei warns of the intoxicating nature of the forbidden woman as a negative, it also positively talks about the intoxication of the wife of one's youth.
- : אָם־נִפְתָּה לָבִי עַל־אָשֶׁה וְעַל־פָּתַח רַעִי אָרֶבְתִּי: תִּטְחַן לְאַחֵר אִשְׁתִּי וְעָלִיהָ יִכְרְעַוּן אָחֵרִין "If my heart was enticed by a woman, and if I lurked at my neighbor's doorway, may my wife grind for someone else, and may others kneel over her." As Iyov protests his innocence, he once again seems to refute a potential accusation against him (a relationship with a forbidden woman) that one might suspect him of.
- יְמָלֵט מִשְּׁלָה וְחוֹטֵא (הָהַיִּם מְּלָּנָה הְיִה מְּלָנִת בָּהְאָשָׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִּיא מְצוֹדֵים וְחֲרָמֵים לְבָּה אֲסוּרִים יָדֵיה טוֹב לְפְנֵי הֵ-אֶ-לֹ-הַ-יִם יִמְלֵט מִשְּׁנָה וְחוֹטֵא "And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, her hands are bonds; whoever is good in God's sight will escape from her, and a sinner will be taken by her." Kohelet equates escaping the lure of an improper woman as requiring Hashem's help, while Mishlei uses the concept that Hashem is watching to help control one's being trapped by her lure.

² Ivov 31:9-10.

³ Kohelet 7:26.



MIX & MATCH SHABBAT DINNER

FRIDAY NIGHT, NOVEMBER 21ST FOLLOWING DAVENING

DINNERS STARTING BY 5:45PM!

SIGN UP HERE TO HOST OR BE HOSTED FOR FRIDAY DINNER!

DEADLINE TO SIGN UP: 11/17

Questions? Email: <u>events@ahavatachim.org</u>





CHANUKAH CELEBRATION



SEUDAH SHLISHIT DINNER FOR CHILDREN, AN INTERACTIVE CHANUKAH PROGRAM FOLLOWED BY GLOW IN THE DARK MUSICAL HAVDALA!

DECEMBER 20TH STARTING AT 4:15 PM

RSVP HERE BY 12/14 \$5/CHILD, \$12/FAMILY MAX

Sponsorship welcome!







We are partnering with Jewish Family & Children's Services of Northern NJ to help our community!

Most Needed Items:*

- Canned Tuna/Salmon
- Canned Mix Vegetables
- Canned chick peas
- Canned Black beans
- Canned pinto beans
- Canned Spaghetti sauce
- Oats
- Pancake mix
- 1% Shelf Stable Milk
- Almonds
- Walnuts
- Grape jelly

*Unopened and not expired.



Drop off items in the bin located in the lobby by November 25th

For more information contact Natasha Borsuk: chesed@ahavatachim.org



Donate to JFCS donate ifcsnnj.org

Amazon Wish List https://a.co/4iPYvGh





Ahavat Achim invites you to join us for a fun

Monthly

I Simcha Kiddush

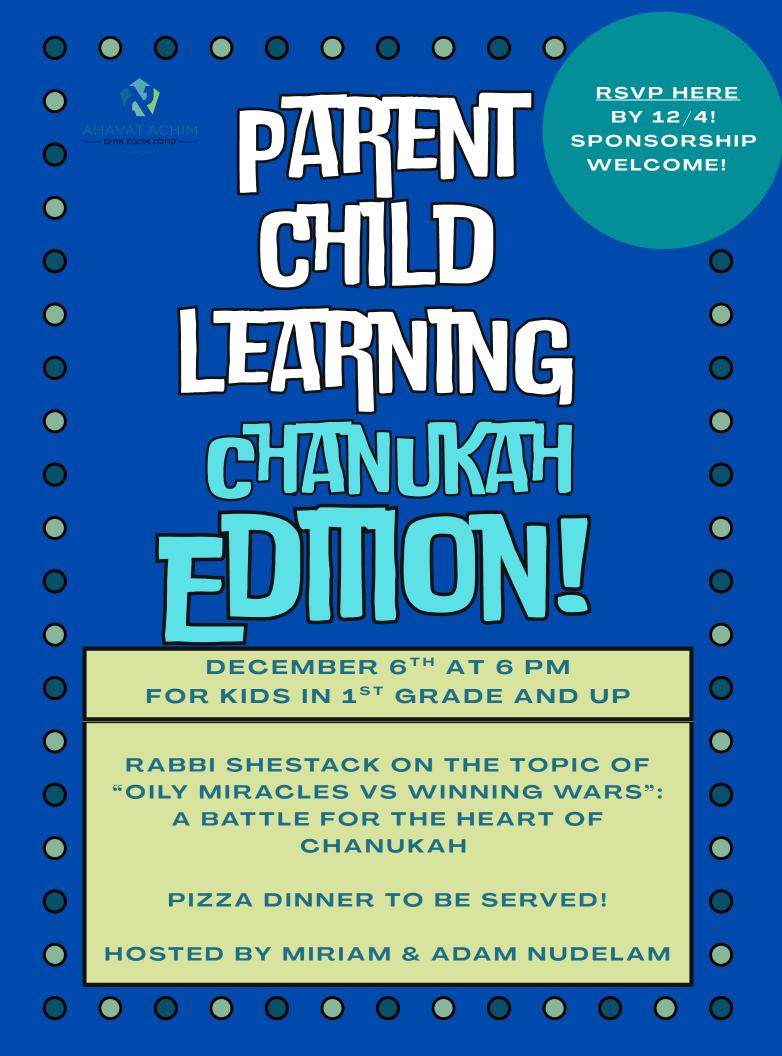
Have a birthday, anniversary, or another reason to say Mazel Tov?

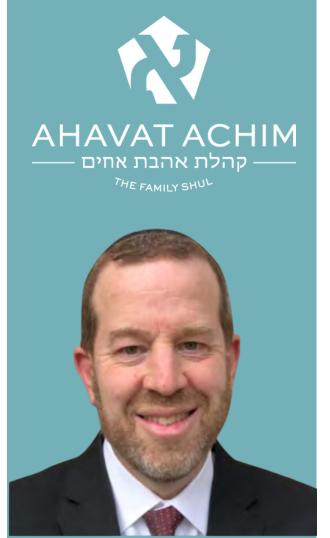
For \$36, you can co-sponsor that month's simcha kiddush!

Click <u>HERE</u> to get your sponsorship in!



Deadline: 1 week before each kiddush!





Congregation Ahavat Achim presents

SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE

RABBI AARON GOLDSCHEIDER

SHABBAT, NOVEMBER 29

Save the date and join us for an inspirational and meaningful Shabbat!

Shabbat Drasha

Fundamentals following kiddush

Seudah Shlishit

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider serves as chief-editor of OU Israel's 'Torah Tidbits', Coordinator of Rabbinic/Leadership Training at Yeshiva University's RIETS Gruss Kollel, and Faculty member at the Rabbinical Council of America's 'Machon Melton' conversion program in Jerusalem. He is the author of the best-selling Haggadahs, The Night That Unites (Urim Press), and Layla Shel Achdut (Yediot Achronot) and Chanukah companion, The Light That Unites (OU Press). He most recently published Torah United (Aug 2023), a book on the weekly parashah from Rav Kook, Rabbi Soloveitchik, and the Chassidic Masters (OU Press).

EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG











Be on the lookout for RSVP forms and sponsorship opportunities!

CHANUKAH

5786/2025



Parent Child Learning - Chanukah Edition

"Oily Miracles vs. Winning Wars"

December 6th at 6pm | Nudelman Home

Pizza Dinner to be Served



Chanukah Shiur at the Shestack Home

"8 Ways to make Chanukah a Richer Experience"

December 14th at 7:30pm

Shiur to begin at 8:00pm



Friday Night Dinner

Dinner following Ma'ariv
December 19th at 5:30pm



Youth Chanukah Celebration

Kids program followed by Seudah Shelishit and a musical glow in the dark havdallah December 20th starting at 4:15pm



Boker Tov Chanukah

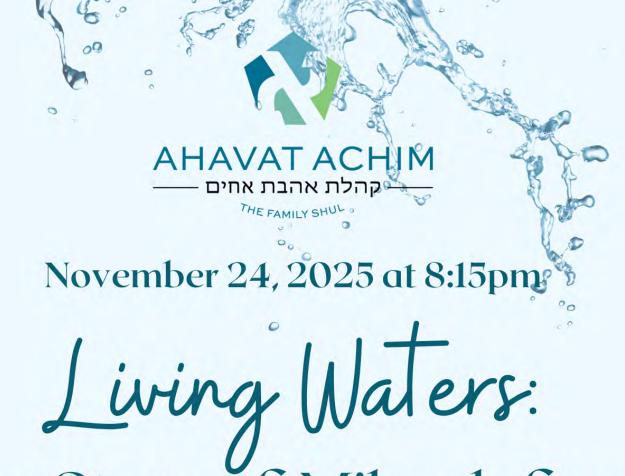
Shacharit with Musical Hallel followed by Kids Activities and Breakfast December 21st starting at 9:15am



ANNUAL BERGEN COUNTY CHANUKAH TOY DRIVE

Drop off new, unwrapped gifts for children and teens in the designated box in the shul lobby from November 17-28





The Story of Mikvah from Torah to Today

Join your fellow women in learning about the history, evolution, and social impacts of the mitzvah of mikvah

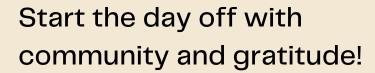


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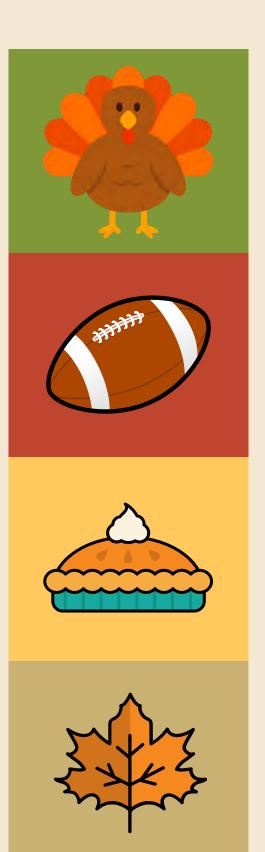




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FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"21

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 zt"l in 5773 (2012–2013). These timeless messages are accompanied by a new <u>Family Edition</u> created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha and Haftara.

Between Prophecy and Oracle

The Rebecca, hitherto infertile, became pregnant. Suffering acute pain, "she went to inquire of the Lord" [vatelech lidrosh et Hashem] (Bereishit 25:22). The explanation she received was that she was carrying twins who were contending in her womb. They were destined to do so long into the future:

Two nations are inside your womb; Two peoples are to part from you. One people will be stronger than the other, And the older will serve the younger

And the older will serve the younger [ve-rav ya'avod tsa'ir].

Bereishit 25:23

Eventually the twins are born – first Esau, then (his hand grasping his brother's heel) Jacob. Mindful of the prophecy she has received, Rebecca favours the younger son, Jacob. Years later, she persuades him to cover himself in Esau's clothes and

take the blessing Isaac intended to give his elder son. One verse of that blessing was "May nations serve you; may nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers and may your mother's sons bow down to you." (Bereishit 27:29) The prophecy has been fulfilled. Isaac's blessing can surely mean nothing less than what was disclosed to Rebecca before either child was born, namely that "the older will serve the younger." The story has apparently reached closure, or so, at this stage, it seems.

But biblical narrative is not what it seems. Two events follow which subvert all that we had been led to expect. The first happens when Esau arrives and discovers that Jacob has cheated him out of his blessing. Moved by his anguish, Isaac gives him a benediction, one of whose clauses is:

By your sword you will live, And your brother you will serve; But when you break loose, You will throw off his yoke from your neck.

Bereishit 27:40

This is not what we had anticipated. The older will not serve the younger in perpetuity.

The second scene, many years later, occurs when the brothers meet after a long estrangement. Jacob is terrified of the encounter. He had fled from home years earlier because Esau had vowed to kill him. Only after a long series of preparations and a lonely wrestling match at night is he able to face Esau with some composure. He bows down to him seven times. Seven times he calls him "my lord." Five times he refers to himself as "your servant." The roles have been reversed. Esau does not become the servant of Jacob. Instead, Jacob speaks of himself as the servant of Esau.

But this cannot be. The words heard by Rebecca when "she went to inquire of the Lord" suggested precisely the opposite, that "the older will serve the younger." We are faced with cognitive dissonance.

More precisely, we have here an example of one of the most remarkable of all the Torah's narrative devices – the power of the future to transform our

understanding of the past. This is the essence of Midrash. New situations retrospectively disclose new meanings in the text. The present is never fully determined by the present. Sometimes it is only later that we understand now. This is the significance of the great revelation of God to Moses in Shemot 33:23, where God says that only His back may be seen – meaning that His Presence can be seen only when we look back at the past; it can never be known or predicted in advance. The indeterminacy of meaning at any given moment is what gives the biblical text its openness to ongoing interpretation.

We now see that this was not an idea invented by the Sages. It already exists in the Torah itself. The words Rebecca heard – as will now become clear – seemed to mean one thing at the time. It later transpires that they meant something else.

The words ve-rav ya'avod tsair seem simple: "the older will serve the younger." Returning to them in the light of subsequent events, though, we discover that they are anything but clear. They contain multiple ambiguities.

The first (noted by Radak and R. Yosef ibn Kaspi) is that the word *et*, signalling the object of the verb, is missing. Normally in biblical Hebrew the subject precedes, and the object follows, the verb, but not always. In Job 14:19 for example, the

¹ Please see, for example the essay 'The Midrashic Imagination' by Michael Fishbane.

words avanim shachaku mayim mean "water wears away stones," not "stones wear away water." Thus the phrase might mean "the older shall serve the younger" but it might also mean "the younger shall serve the older". To be sure, the latter would be poetic Hebrew rather than conventional prose style, but that is what this utterance is: a poem.

The second is that rav and tsa'ir are not opposites, a fact disguised by the English translation of rav as "older." The opposite of tsa'ir ("younger") is bechir ("older" or "firstborn"). Rav does not mean "older." It means "great" or possibly "chief." This linking together of two terms as if they were polar opposites, which they are not – the opposites would have been bechir/tsa'ir or rav/me'at – further destabilises the meaning. Who was the rav? The elder? The leader? The chief? The more numerous? The word might mean any of these things.

The third – not part of the text but of later tradition – is the musical notation. The normal way of notating these three words would be *mercha-tipcha-sof passuk*. This would support the reading, "the older shall serve the younger." In fact, however, they are notated *tipcha-mercha-sof passuk* – suggesting, "the older, shall the younger serve"; in other words, "the younger shall serve the older."

A later episode adds a yet another retrospective element of doubt. There is a

second instance in Genesis of the birth of twins, to Tamar. The passage is clearly reminiscent of the story of Esau and Jacob:

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb. As she was in labour one child put out a hand, so the midwife took a crimson thread and tied it to his wrist, saying, "This one came out first." But he pulled his hand back and then his brother came out. She said, "How you have burst through!" So he was named Peretz. Then his brother came out with the crimson thread on his wrist. He was named Zerah.

Bereishit 38:27-30

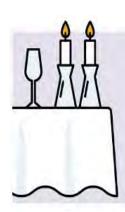
Who then was the elder? And what does this imply in the case of Esau and Jacob?² These multiple ambiguities are not accidental but integral to the text. The subtlety is such, that we do not notice them at first. Only later, when the narrative does not turn out as expected, are we forced to go back and notice what at first we missed: that the words Rebecca heard may mean "the older will serve the younger" or "the younger will serve the older."

A number of things now become clear. The first is that this is a rare example in the Torah of an oracle as opposed to a prophecy (this is the probable meaning of the word *chiddot* in Bamidbar 12:8,

² See Rashi to Gen. 25:26 who suggests that Jacob was in fact the elder.

speaking about Moses: "With him I speak mouth to mouth, openly and not in chiddot" – usually translated as "dark speeches" or "riddles"). Oracles – a familiar form of supernatural communication in the ancient world – were normally obscure and cryptic, unlike the normal form of Israelite prophecy. This may well be the technical meaning of the phrase "she went to inquire of the Lord" which puzzled the medieval commentators.

The second — and this is fundamental to an understanding of Bereishit — is that the future is never as straightforward as we are led to believe. Abraham is promised many children but is 100 years old before Isaac is born. The patriarchs are promised a land but do not acquire it in their lifetimes. The Jewish journey – though it has a destination – is long and has many digressions and setbacks. Will Jacob serve or be served? We do not know. Only after a long, enigmatic struggle, alone at night, does Jacob receive the name Israel meaning, "he who struggles with God and with men and prevails." The most important message of this text is both literary and theological. The future affects our understanding of the past. We are part of a story whose last chapter has not yet been written. That rests with us, as it rested with Jacob.



Around the Shabbat Table

- 1. Divine promises are not guarantees; they are challenges." What does this message mean to you?
- 2. "Why do you think struggle is such an important part of faith?
- **3.** Where else in Tanach are the characters tested in their faith and commitment to God? What about in later Jewish history?
- 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 rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-family-edition/chayei-sarah/hopes-and-fears/



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