



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 Living Waters: The Story of Mikvah from Torah to Today, led by Rebbetzin Chana Shestack and special guest Shira Teichman of the Fair Lawn Mikva Association.

**MAZEL TOV**

Mazel 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 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: [Turkey Day](#).

**PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEWEST MEMBERS**

Sara Molinsky &  
Steven Shtaynberger;  
and Jacob



Alison & Akiva  
Gordon; and Moshe



SUNDAY  
11/23

MONDAY  
11/24

TUESDAY  
11/25

WEDNESDAY  
11/26

THURSDAY  
11/27

FRIDAY  
11/28

**WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM**

|                                                         |                |                |                |                |                     |                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>SHACHARIT</b>                                        | <b>8:00 AM</b> | <b>6:15 AM</b> | <b>6:25 AM</b> | <b>6:25 AM</b> | <b>6:20/8:00 AM</b> | <b>6:20/8:00 AM</b> |
| <b>2ND SHACHARIT MINYON -<br/>YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM</b> |                | <b>7:25 AM</b> | <b>7:25 AM</b> | <b>7:25 AM</b> |                     |                     |
| <b>MINCHA/MAARIV</b>                                    | <b>4:20 PM</b> | <b>4:20 PM</b> | <b>4:19 PM</b> | <b>4:19 PM</b> | <b>4:18 PM</b>      | <b>4:15 PM</b>      |

**ZMANIM**

|                       |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Earliest Talit</b> | 5:55 AM  | 5:56 AM  | 5:57 AM  | 5:58 AM  | 5:59 AM  | 6:00 AM  |
| <b>Gedolah</b>        | 12:07 PM | 12:07 PM | 12:07 PM | 12:08 PM | 12:08 PM | 12:08 PM |
| <b>Shkia</b>          | 4:32 PM  | 4:32 PM  | 4:31 PM  | 4:31 PM  | 4:30 PM  |          |
| <b>Tzait</b>          | 5:12 PM  | 5:12 PM  | 5:11 PM  | 5:11 PM  | 5:10 PM  |          |

Rabbi Ely Shestack

President Jay Herman

## 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: [Chanukah](#).

## IN OUR FUTURE

**Dec. 6** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Gerry & Howard Kessel on the 1st yahrtzeit of Gerry's father ד"ר בן שלמה, Bernard Roth<sup>נ"ע</sup>.

**Dec. 13** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Dina & Elliot Greene to commemorate the yahrtzeit of Dina's mother, Zelda Rubinowitz<sup>נ"ע</sup> (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](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).

## BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH

To add a birthday or anniversary to our December list (next Kiddush on Shabbat, Dec. 6), click here: [SIMCHA](#). 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@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 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 minyan (≈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: [Inspiration](#).

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

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>

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

- **SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS: 3<sup>RD</sup> - 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE: CASSANDRA, ISABELLA & LETIZIA; K - 2<sup>ND</sup> 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

אֲבִי לִחְכַּמְתִּי הִקְשִׁיבָה לְתַבְנוּנֵי הַטֹּאֲזָנָהּ: יִלְשָׁמֶר מִזְמוֹת וְנִעַת שְׁפָתֶיהָ וְנִצְרוּ: יְכִי נָפֶת תִּטְסֶנָּה שְׁפָתֶיהָ וְהָיָה וְחָלַק מִשְׁמֶן חֶבֶה: וְאַחֲרֵיהָ מָרָה כָּל־עֵנָה סִדָּה כְּתָרָב פִּיּוֹת: יִרְגְּלֶיהָ יִרְדּוּ מִן הַשָּׂאִיל צִעְזִיָּה וְתִמְכּוּ: אֶרֶח חַיִּים פֶּן־תִּפְלֹס נָעוּ מִעֲגֻלָּתֶיהָ לֹא תִדַּע: וְעֵתָהּ בָּנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לִי וְאַל־תִּסְוּרוּ מֵאַמְרֵי־פִי: יִהְיֶה־תָּק מִעֲלֶיהָ דֶּרֶךְ וְאַל־תִּקְרַב אֶל־פֶּתַח בֵּיתָהּ: יִפְנִיתָ וְלֹא־תֵדָע וְהִוָּה וְשִׁנְתָּהּ לֹא־תֵדָע: פֶּן־יִשְׁבְּעוּ זָרִים כְּתוּבָה וְעֶצְבִּיךָ בְּבֵית נָכְרִי: יִנְהַמֶּת בְּאַחֲרֵיהָ בְּכָל־זֶה בְּשָׂרָהּ וּשְׂאֵרָהּ: יִאֲמַרְתָּ אֵיךְ שָׂגַתִּי מוֹסֵר וְתוֹכַחַת נָאֵץ לִבִּי: יִלְאֶה־שִׁמְעָתִי בְּקוֹל מוֹרֵי וְלִמְלִמֵּי לֹא־הָיִיתִי אֲזֻנִּיל: יִפְמַעַט הָיִיתִי בְּכָל־הֶעָר בְּתוֹךְ קָהָל וְעַדָּה: יִשְׁמַח־מִיָּם מִבּוֹרָהּ וְנִזְלִים מִתּוֹךְ בְּאֶרֶץ: יִפְּצוּ מַעֲנִיתֶיהָ חֹצֶצָה בְּרַחֲבוֹת פְּלִגֵּי־מִיָּם: יִהְיוּ־לָהּ לִבָּהּ וְאֵין לָזָרִים אֶתָּה: יִהְיֶה־מְקוֹרָהּ בְּרוּךְ וּשְׁמָח מֵאַשֶׁת נְעוּרָה: יִאֲגִלֶּת אֲהָבִים וְיִצְלַת־תָּן דְּדִיהָ וְרִגְוָהּ בְּכָל־עֵת בְּאַהֲבָתָהּ תִּשְׁגָּה תַּמִּיד: יִלְמָה תִּשְׁגָּה בְּנֵי בִּנְיָה וְתִחַבֵּן תָּק נְכָרֶיהָ: יִכִּי נָכַח עֵינֵי יְהוָה־רָחֵם־הָ דֶּרֶךְ־אִישׁ וְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂהוּ מִפֶּלֶס: יִפְּדוּנוּ־הוּי וְלִפְדָּנוּ אֶת־הַרְשָׁע וּבְחִבְלֵי טָשָׁתוֹ יִתְמָד: יִהְיֶה זִמּוֹת בְּאֵין מוֹסֵר וּבְרָב אֲנִלְתּוֹ וּשְׁגָה:

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. 6Lest 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, 9lest you give others your glory, and your years to a cruel one; 10lest 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; 13and 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. 18Your 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. 20Now 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. 22Iniquities shall trap the wicked man, and he shall be hanged with the ropes of his sin. 23He shall die without discipline, and he shall err with his exceeding foolishness.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Mishlei Chapter 5.

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.
- "אם-נפתה לבי על-אשה ועל-פתח רעי ארבותי: תטתן לאתר אשתי ועליה יכרעון אחריי: – "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."<sup>2</sup> 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.
- ומצא אני מר ממונת את-האשה אשר-היא מצודים וחרמים לבה אסורים ידיה טוב לפגי ה-א-ל-ה-י-ם ימלט ממנה וחוטא ילקד בה: – "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."<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Iyov 31:9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Kohelet 7:26.





AHAVAT ACHIM

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY SHUL



# 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:  
[events@ahavatachim.org](mailto:events@ahavatachim.org)



# BOKER TOV CHANUKAH



- MUSICAL HALLEL
- KIDS ACTIVITIES
- FREE BREAKFAST

**SUNDAY DEC. 21ST**

**9:15 AM SHACHARIT (Hallel at 9:40)**

**10:00 AM ARTS & CRAFTS for Kids 0-5**

**MACCABEE GAMES for Kids 6+**

**10:30 AM BREAKFAST**

RSVP AT [TINYURL.COM/BOKERTOVCHANUKAH](https://tinyurl.com/bokertovchanukah)



AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL





# 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!**





**JFCS**

JEWISH FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
OF NORTHERN NEW JERSEY



**AHAVAT ACHIM**

קהלת אהבת אחים

The Family Circle

**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](mailto:chesed@ahavatachim.org)



Donate to JFCS  
[donate.jfcsnnj.org](https://donate.jfcsnnj.org)

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







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!**



# PARENT CHILD LEARNING CHANUKAH EDITION!

RSVP HERE  
BY 12/4!  
SPONSORSHIP  
WELCOME!

DECEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup> AT 6 PM  
FOR KIDS IN 1<sup>ST</sup> GRADE AND UP

RABBI SHESTACK ON THE TOPIC OF  
"OILY MIRACLES VS WINNING WARS":  
A BATTLE FOR THE HEART OF  
CHANUKAH

PIZZA DINNER TO BE SERVED!

HOSTED BY MIRIAM & ADAM NUDELAM





AHAVAT ACHIM  
— קהלת אהבת אחים —  
THE FAMILY SHUL

Congregation Ahavat  
Achim presents

SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE

**RABBI AARON  
GOLDSCHIEDER**

**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](mailto: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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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*







AHAVAT ACHIM

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY SHUL

November 24, 2025 at 8:15pm

# *Living Waters:* 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

RSVP TODAY!

Location provided upon RSVP

<https://forms.gle/oqs4Lelk76BmPHuq9>



Start the day off with  
community and gratitude!

# THANKSGIVING DAY FOOTBALL & PIE DONATION

November 27, 2025

9:30am – 11:30am:

Flag Football

12:00pm – 1:00pm:

Pie Donation to Police  
and Volunteer  
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# Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

TOLDOT • תולדות

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.

## 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  
[*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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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?<sup>2</sup> 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,

<sup>2</sup> 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/chaye-sarah/hopes-and-fears/](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-family-edition/chaye-sarah/hopes-and-fears/)