

The bulletin and the Hashkama minyon kiddush are sponsored by Steve Plotnick upon the post-Hashkama shiur's completion of the father-son discourses of Mishlei.



CANDLE LIGHTING 4:36 PM | 28 TEVET | JANUARY 17, 2026 | HAVDALA 5:41 PM

שבת פרשת וארא
SHABBAT PARSHAT VAEIRA

Haftorah is Ezekiel 28:25-29:21. We bless the month of Shevat. We don't say אב הרחמים, but we do say צדקתך צדק at Mincha.

FRIDAY EVENING

MINCHA	4:40 PM
SHKIA	4:54 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	5:34 PM

SHABBAT

HASHKAMA	7:45 AM
SHACHARIT - MAIN	9:00 AM
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	~ 9:30 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:42 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	~11:30 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	3:50 PM
MINCHA	4:30 PM
SHKIA	4:56 PM
MAARIV	5:41 PM



Molad for Shevat is Sunday, Jan. 18, 3:06 PM & 11 Chalokim.

ראש חדש שבט יהיה ביום שני
הבא עלינו ועל כל ישראל לטובה

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Sonnenblick family for the yahrzeit of Marty's mother, הענטשא מאטל בת זלמן, Helene Sonnenblick^{ע"ה}, and in honor of a siyum upon the completion of Mesechet Zevachim.

UPCOMING SHUL EVENTS

One week from this Saturday night, January 24, is Game Night. RSVP here: [Games](#). In two weeks, please join us for our Musical Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat Dinner. RSVP here: [Dinner](#). Also in two weeks, please join "green" kiddush with cholents made from sustainable ingredients and compostable cutlery. To sponsor or volunteer to make a cholent, click here: [Green](#).

MAZEL TOV!



Mazal tov to Shelly & Steve Winchester on their son Daniel's engagement to Yael Simons.

עלה הזיווג יפה ויבנו בית נאמן בישראל
May the beautiful couple be elevated in the building of a faithful house of Israel.

ANNUAL DINNER



Mazal tov to this year's Dinner Honoree, Dr. Melanie Kwestel, and this year's Young Leadership Awardees Sara & Natan Santacruz. Dinner to take place Sunday, February 22, 5:00 PM, at Temple Israel in Ridgewood, NJ. Click here to make your dinner reservations and to select sponsorship level and other honors: [Dinner](#). To submit a tribute to the honorees, click here: [Tribute](#).



ORTHODOX UNION Enhancing Jewish Life	SUNDAY 1/18	MONDAY 1/19	TUESDAY 1/20	WEDNESDAY 1/21	THURSDAY 1/22	FRIDAY 1/23
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WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM

SHACHARIT	8:00 AM	6:05 AM	6:25 AM	6:25 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		7:10 AM*	7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:25 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV	4:45 PM	4:46 PM	4:47 PM	4:48 PM	4:49 PM	4:50 PM
ZMANIM					* YISHTABACH AT 7:25 AM	
Earliest Talit	6:19 AM	6:19 AM	6:18 AM	6:18 AM	6:17 AM	6:17 AM
Gedolah	12:31 PM	12:32 PM	12:32 PM	12:32 PM	12:33 PM	12:33 PM
Shkia	4:57 PM	4:58 PM	4:59 PM	5:00 PM	5:01 PM	
Tzait	5:37 PM	5:38 PM	5:39 PM	5:40 PM	5:41 PM	

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan. 28 - Special shiur, "The Ramifications of Others Violating Shabbat: From the Kitchen to the Battlefield", to be given by Rabbi Doron Podlashuk, of the Tzurba M'Rabanan English Halacha Series, 8:00 PM.

Jan. 30 - Shabbat Shira Dinner. RSVP: [Shira](#)

Jan. 31 - Tu B'shvat Green kiddush with cholents made from sustainable ingredients and compostable cutlery. Sponsor/Volunteer here: [Green](#).

Feb. 1 - A Tree-mendous Tu B'Shvat with GrowTorah, 10:00 AM.

Feb. 1 - Adi Karni, IDF Combat Engineer.

Feb. 7 - Super Bowl Kiddush. Sponsor here: [Go Team!](#)

Feb. 14 - Scholar-In-Residence, Rabbi Shlomo Brody, from Ematai.

Feb. 14 - Birthday/Anniversary Kiddush.

Feb. 21 - 4th Annual Comedy Night with Mike Fine, Sat.

night, Doors Open at 7:30 PM, show starts at 8:00 PM! Buy Tickets: [LAUGH A LOT!](#)

Feb. 22 - Journal Dinner.

Feb. 28 - Esther Chapter-by-Chapter Round-Robin Shiur. To sign up, click: [Esther](#).

Mar. 28 - Shir HaShirim Chapter-by-Chapter Round-Robin Shiur. To sign up, click here: [Song of Songs](#)

IN OUR FUTURE

Jan. 31 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Amy & Stephen Agress to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Amy's stepfather, הירש בן מאיר.

Feb. 14 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Amy & Stephen Agress to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Hyman Agress ז"ל, הרב חיים בן הרב יהושע.

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.

SHIURIM



- PESHAT OF 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.
- TORAH PODCAST FOR YOUR COMMUTE is available on Spotify or on other applications with an RSS code. Click here: [PODCASTS](#).
- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, alternates between examining the development of Halachot and analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs)
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush.
- 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 - **Studying Borer. [Eliana Kaplowitz's home on Jan. 26]**
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit - **Korbonot Part VI (R. Donin - p. 199-200, R. Munk - pp. 61-73).**

BOARD MEETINGS 8:15 PM

Jan. 27 - At shul w/Zoom option.

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

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH

To add a birthday or anniversary to our February list (next Kiddush on Shabbat, February. 14), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/ sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the February birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Sunday night, February. 8.

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

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>

GITA COOPERWASSER ת"ע YOUTH EVENTS

Feb. 7 - Parent-Child Learning.

Feb. 28 - Interactive Youth Purim program with dinner.

May 23 - Interactive Youth Shavuot program with dinner.

GITA COOPERWASSER ת"ע SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS:

3RD - 5TH: LETIZIA

K - 2ND: NICOLE & CASANDRA

3 YRS - PRE-K: ARNELLA & ABBY

- 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.

COMMUNITY NEWS!

Please welcome to our community, all the way from Argentina, Ifat & Elad Levy, and their children Yossi and Libi.



NAME	HEBREW DATE	CANDLE EVENING OF	DEDICATOR	RELATIONSHIP
Rebecca Malka	6	January 23	Ilana Schwitzer	Mother
Claire Greenberg	9	January 26	Janet Greenberg	Mother
Morris Bader	9	January 26	Sheree Kor	Father
Leonard Garfinkel	11	January 28	Shelly Winchester	Brother
Morton Goldstein	11	January 28	Deborah Kempin	Father
Harry Scheiner	14	January 31	Amy Agress	Step-Father
Gloria Bader	18	February 4	Sheree Kor	Mother
Naomi Levine	19	February 5	Kenny Levine	Mother
Herman Levine	20	February 6	Kenny Levine	Father
William Brody	21	February 7	Ron Sokoloff	Grandfather
Esther Rozenfeld	21	February 7	Zehava Baron	Mother
Isidore Irving Freilich	23	February 9	Eita Latkin	Father
Alan Hodes	23	February 9	Gail Plotnick	Father
Leo Weinraub	23	February 9	Barry Weinraub	Father
Greta Greenbaum	25	February 11	Eli Greenbaum	Mother
Goldi Smedresman	27	February 13	Steve Smedresman	Grandmother
Rabbi Hyman Agress	29	February 15	Stephen Agress	Father

**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.

Yahrzeit 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 David at dmgarfunkel@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.

SHEVAT (FROM OU.ORG)

On the first of the month, Moshe, inspired by prophecy from G-d, began to recite the words of the Book of Devarim to Israel. "On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moshe began explaining this law, saying..." (Devarim 1).

He reviewed many of the Laws that had been taught at Sinai and at the "Ohel Moed," the "Tent of Meeting," the gathering place of the Jewish People around the Mishkan, where they had come to learn Torah from Moshe. The Book of Devarim is called "Mishne Torah," "Review of Torah," for this reason. He also taught them many additional laws at that time.

Moshe rebuked the People of Israel there for all their rebellions against Hashem during the forty-year period in the desert. He told them of the great reward they would receive if they faithfully observed the Torah, and the terrible punishments they would suffer if they did not. One might have thought that Moshe was exaggerating in his description of the punishments; however, contemplating the Holocaust, which occurred in our own century, one realizes that Moshe fell not one iota short in his description of the torments our People would suffer in bad times throughout our history.

He prepared them for their entry into, conquest and possession of the land of Israel which, thank G-d, has also re-occurred in our time. He concluded by blessing them, before his death, with some of the most inspiring language in all of the Bible.

For thirty-seven days, Moshe spoke these words to all Israel. He began the first of Shevat and ended the seventh of Adar. His first words were: "You have dwelt long enough on this mountain. Turn and take your journey, and come to the Amorite mountain and all its neighbors, in the Aravah, on the mountain, and in the lowland, and in the south, and at the seacoast; the land of the Canaanite and the Lebanon, until the great river, the Euphrates River.

See! I have given the Land before you; come and possess the Land that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, to give them and their children after them."

His concluding words were: "There is none like G-d, O Jeshurun; He rides across heaven to help you, and in His majesty through the upper heights. That is the abode of G-d immemorial, and below are the world's mighty ones; He drove the enemy away from before you, and he said, 'Destroy!' Thus Israel shall dwell secure, solitary, in the likeness of Yaakov, in a land of grain and wine; even his heavens shall drip with dew."

"Fortunate are you, O Israel: Who is like you! O People delivered by Hashem, the Shield of your help, Who is the Sword of your grandeur; your foes will try to deceive you, but you will trample their haughty ones." (Devarim 33).

The later Sages have, therefore, said that the first of Shevat is comparable to the day of the giving of the Torah. Just as the sixth of Sivan, on which the Torah was given to Israel, remains forever suitable for the renewed acceptance of the Torah, similarly is the heart of the Jew newly receptive to the Torah on the first of Shevat, because on that day they began to receive the Book of Devarim from Hashem, through Moshe.

Because the period of transmission of the Book of Devarim was this thirty-seven day interval, all the days from the first of Shevat until the seventh of Adar are especially well suited for renewed inspiration in the study of Torah and the doing of Mitzvot.

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.]



“תַּכְמוֹת בְּנֵתָה בֵּיתָהּ חֲצֵבָה עֲמוּנֶיהָ שְׁבָעָה: טְבִיחָהּ טְבִיחָהּ מְסֻכָּה יִיגָה אֵף עָרְכָה שְׁלֹחָנָה: יִשְׁלַחַהּ נְעוּרֹתֶיהָ תִּקְרָא עַל-גַּלְפֵי מְרָמֵי קִרְתָּ: מִי-פְתִי יִסֵּר הַגָּזָה חֲסֵר-לֵב אֲמָרָה לּוֹ: לִכְבוֹ לַחֲמֹ בְּלִחְמֵי וְשִׁתּוֹ בְּיַיִן מְסֻכָּתִי: אֲעֻזְבוּ פִתְאִים וְחָגוּ וְאִשְׁרוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ בִּינָה: אִלֵּס לֵצַד לִקְחוֹ לּוֹ קִלְווֹ וּמִוִּכֵּית לְרַשָּׁע מוּמוֹ: אֶל-תּוֹכַח לֵצַד פְּוִי-שִׁנְאָהּ הוֹכַח לַחֲכָם וְיִאֲהַבֶּהּ: מִתּוֹ לַחֲכָם וְנִתְפַּם-עוֹד הוֹדַע לְצַדִּיק וְיוֹסֵף לְקַח: תִּחְזַלֵּת תַּכְמוֹהּ יִרְאֶת י-ה-ו-ה וְדַעַת קִדְשִׁים בִּינָה: אִפִּי-בִי יִרְבוּ יִמֶיךָ וְיוֹסִיפוּ לָךְ שָׁנוֹת חַיִּים: אִם-תַּכְמוֹת תַּכְמוֹת לָךְ וְלִצַּת לְבָדֶךָ תִּשָּׂא: אִשָּׁת פְּסִילוֹת הַמַּיָּה פְתִיּוֹת וּבִלְ-גִּדְעָה מָה: וְיִשְׁבָּהּ לִפְתַּח בֵּיתָהּ עַל-פֶּסֶס מְרָמֵי קִרְתָּ: מִי-לִקְרָא לְעַבְרֵי-דֶרֶךְ הַמַּיָּשׁוּרִים אֲרַחֲוֹתָם: מִי-פְתִי יִסֵּר הַגָּזָה וְחֲסֵר-לֵב וְאֲמָרָה לּוֹ: מִי-יִסֵּר-גִּנּוּבִים יִמְתַּקּוּ וְלִחֲם סִתְרִים יִנָּעַם: וְיִלְאֵ-יָדַע פִּי-רַפְּאִים שָׁם – בְּעַמְקֵי שְׁאוֹל קִרְאֶיהָ: –

1Wisdom has built her house; she has carved out her seven pillars. 2She has prepared a feast of meat; she has mixed her wine and set her table. 3She has sent her maidens to call out from the heights of the city: 4"Whoever is a simpleton, let him turn in here." To one devoid of sense, she says to him, 5"Come, partake of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. 6Leave [the path of the] simpleton and live; stride in the way of understanding." 7He who chastises a scoffer disgraces himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man brings on himself a blemish. 8Do not rebuke a scoffer as he will [just] hate you; [but] rebuke a wise man and he will love you. 9Enlighten a wise man and he will become wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. 10The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and knowledge of the sacred leads to understanding. 11For through me shall your days be increased adding years to your life. 12If you have become wise, you have become wise to your benefit, but if you scoff, you will suffer alone. 13The foolish woman bustles about; [she is] simple and knows nothing. 14She sits at the entrance of her house, [or] on a chair at the heights of the city, 15to call out to a passersby whose path is straight: 16"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here"; and to whoever is devoid of sense she says to him: 17"Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." 18But he does not know that shadows of the dead are there; her guests are in the depths of the netherworld.¹

A. The final chapter of the father-son discourses seems to play out as a street scene, which can be broken down into three parts:

- (1) The Beginning: Wisdom’s House and Her Invitation.
- (2) The Ending: Folly’s House and Her Invitation.
- (3) The Middle: People on the Street Contemplating Their Choice of House, and Influencers Trying to Encourage them Towards One House or the Other.

B. Looking at the middle section first, we spot the oft quoted pasuk (Mishlei 9:8): “Do not rebuke a scoffer as he will [just] hate you; [but] rebuke a wise man and he will love you.” A lesson in spiritual triage, don’t waste time rebuking a scoffer as he will just hate you (and presumably it will have no effect).

- At Yevamos 65b, this is presented as a mitzvah: “. . . **Just as it is a mitzva for a person to say that which will be heeded, so is it a mitzva for a person not to say that which will not be heeded.** . . . **Rabbi Abba says: ‘It is obligatory for him to refrain from speaking, as it is stated: “Do not reprove a scorner lest he hate you; reprove a wise man and he will love you” (Proverbs 9:8).’**”²
- At Vayikra 19:17, we are told that “. . . you shall surely rebuke your fellow . . .”, which seems to be contrary to Mishlei 9:8. This gives rise to attempts to reconcile the directives:
 - o Ritva says the Gemara refers to a group of people, but one always is obligated to rebuke an individual.
 - o Iyyun Ya’akov says that rebuking one who won’t accept it causes him to act willfully, and better for him that he remain an unwitting sinner, and we may not hate our brother in our hearts (Vayikra 19:17).
 - o The Shelach Kadosh sees this as a kiruv lesson, saying that everyone is part scoffer and part wise, but to get through you have to address him as a wise man and treat him with respect.

¹ Mishlei Chapter 9.

² Koren Talmud Translation.

C. Recall that Iyov 28:28 quoted Hashem: “[God] said to man, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord *is* wisdom; and to *shun evil* is understanding’.” At Mishlei 9:10 we are presented with a different viewpoint: “The *beginning* of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and *knowledge of the sacred* leads to understanding.” We appear to have two opposing world views, one that believes that philosophical examination is dangerous (*i.e.*, one should just fear Hashem and shun evil, as philosophical examination may lead to improper conclusions), while the other encourages philosophical reflection if one is grounded in fear of the Lord and knowledge of the sacred.

D. Also recall that we began these shiurim stating that we would operate as if the fundamental premise of all of Mishlei was set forth at Mishlei 1:7, namely “The fear of the Lord is the beginning (רֵאשִׁית) of *knowledge*; [but] skeptics despise wisdom and rebuke.” Tehillim 111:10 says that “The beginning (רֵאשִׁית) of wisdom is the fear of the Lord . . .” Here at Mishlei 9:10 we are told that fear of Lord is also the beginning (תְּחִלָּתָהּ) of wisdom. From what I can gather, commentators see the different words for “beginning” as indicating the following: (1) Dovid views fear of Hashem as the foundation of wisdom, while Shlomo sees it as the cornerstone of knowledge, and (2) Shlomo sees fear of Hashem as the start of the “path” towards obtaining wisdom, first being the foundation for obtaining knowledge, which leads to understanding, and concludes with obtaining wisdom.³

E. Just one quick note on the beginning portion of this chapter. Rashi provides that the term “house” in the first pasuk is a metaphor for the earth, saying “With wisdom has the Holy One, blessed be He, built the world.” And then the following reference to the “seven pillars” equated to “[t]he seven days of Creation. Another explanation [is that] this refers to the seven books of the Torah, since (Num. 10:35f.) ‘And it came about when the ark traveled...’ is an individual book, as is stated in tractate Shabbat (116a).”

F. As to the ending of the chapter discussing the foolish woman and her house, a few notes:

- The Ibn Ezra and Malbim see the description of the foolish woman as actually alluding to two different types of foolish woman, namely one that is eager to satisfy her appetite for the forbidden (and who wants to entice others towards evil), and one who does not grasp that what she is doing is improper.
- At Mishlei 9:17, we have another famous pasuk, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten secretly is pleasant.” The first part (most often quoted) relates to the power of the yetzer hara to make someone desire something they should not. In modern times, I think the expression “adrenaline rush” might best explain why the stolen waters are “sweeter”, as enjoying something you should not be doing while risking consequences for the action might increase adrenaline for those that crave it. On the complete opposite side of that idea perhaps is the second part of that pasuk, addressing people who seemingly want to sin even though they lack a desire for an adrenaline kick, and these people are very worried about getting caught. So if the sin is done in secret (and therefore you won’t face consequences for the sin from your fellows), these individuals find the forbidden act to be a relaxing pleasant experience.
- Wisdom offers wine and meat, while folly offers water and bread. One might wonder how “sweet stolen waters” must be to entice someone to choose water and bread over wine and meat. By contrast, in Incubus’s “Drive” they ask, “Will I choose water over wine, and hold my own and drive?” and later, “Would you choose water over wine... hold the wheel and drive,” treating water as clarity and self-direction, and wine as a surrender of control. Obviously, the metaphors do not align. In Mishlei, folly’s “water” is alluring precisely because it is stolen (and secret) with control ceded not to wine, but to impulse and forbidden desire, while wisdom’s meat and wine represent a righteous feast that sanctifies pleasure rather than denying it.

³ Unfortunately, if Kohelet was in fact written after Mishlei, this may have been a journey that Shlomo was not able to complete, as he states: “All this I probed with wisdom; I thought I could become wise, but it was far from me.” Kohelet 7:23.



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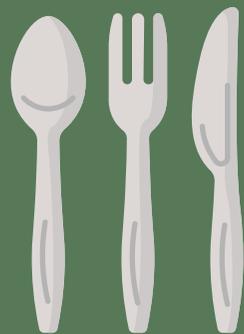
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FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ז"ל

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. "I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah. An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks

This year's series of essays were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks ז"ל in 5773 (2012–2013). These timeless messages are accompanied by a new [Family Edition](#) created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha.

Of Lice and Men

The dust of the earth was turned to lice all across Egypt. The magicians tried to produce lice with their sorcery, but they could not. Meanwhile the lice still infested people and animals alike.

"This," the magicians told Pharaoh, "is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was toughened, and – as the Lord had predicted – he would not listen to them.

Exodus 8:12-15

Too little attention has been paid to the use of humour in the Torah. Its most important form is the use of satire to mock the pretensions of human beings who think they can emulate God. One thing makes God laugh – the sight of humanity attempting to defy heaven:

The kings of the earth take their stand,
And the rulers gather together against
the Lord and His anointed one.

"Let us break our chains," they say,
"and throw off their fetters."
He who sits in heaven laughs,
God scoffs at them.

Psalm 2:2-4

There is a marvellous example in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people in the plain of Shinar decide to build a city with a tower that "will reach heaven." This is an act of defiance against the Divinely given order of nature ("The heavens are the heavens of God: the earth He has given to the children of men"). The Torah then says, "But God came down to see the city and the tower . . ." (Gen. 11:5). Down on earth, the builders thought their tower would reach heaven. From the vantage point of heaven, however,

it was so minuscule that God had to “come down” to see it.

Satire is essential in order to understand at least some of the plagues. The Egyptians worshipped a multiplicity of gods, most of whom represented forces of nature. By their “secret arts” the magicians believed that they could control these forces. Magic is the equivalent in an era of myth to technology in an age of science. A civilisation that believes it can manipulate the gods, believes likewise that it can exercise coercion over human beings. In such a culture, the concept of freedom is unknown.

The plagues were not merely intended to punish Pharaoh and his people for their mistreatment of the Israelites, but also to show them the powerlessness of the gods in which they believed (“I will perform acts of judgement against all the gods of Egypt: I am God”, Ex. 12:12). This explains the first and last of the nine plagues prior to the killing of the firstborn. The first involved the Nile. The ninth was the plague of darkness. The Nile was worshipped as the source of fertility in an otherwise desert region. The sun was seen as the greatest of the gods, Re (and Pharaoh was considered to be his child). Darkness meant the eclipse of the sun, showing that even the greatest of the Egyptian gods could do nothing in the face of the true God.

What is at stake in this confrontation is the difference between myth – in which

the gods are mere powers, to be tamed, propitiated or manipulated – and biblical monotheism in which ethics (justice, compassion, human dignity) constitute the meeting-point of God and humankind. That is the key to the first two plagues, both of which refer back to the beginning of Egyptian persecution of the Israelites: the killing of male children at birth, first through the midwives (though, thanks to Shifra and Puah’s moral sense, this was foiled) then by throwing them into the Nile to drown.

That is why, in the first plague, the river waters turn to blood. The significance of the second, frogs, would have been immediately apparent to the Egyptians. Heqet, the frog-goddess, represented the midwife who assisted women in labour. Both plagues are coded messages meaning: “If you use the river and midwives – both normally associated with life – to bring about death, those same forces will turn against you.” An immensely significant message is taking shape: Reality has an ethical structure. If used for evil ends, the powers of nature will turn against man, so that what he does will be done to him in turn. There is justice in history.

The response of the Egyptians to these first two plagues is to see them within their own frame of reference. Plagues, for them, are forms of magic, not miracles. To Pharaoh’s magicians, Moses and Aaron are people like themselves who practice “secret arts”. So they replicate them: they show that they too can turn

water into blood and generate a horde of frogs. The irony here is very close to the surface. So intent are the Egyptian magicians on proving that they can do what Moses and Aaron have done, that they entirely fail to realise that far from making matters better for the Egyptians, they are making them worse: more blood, more frogs.

This brings us to the third plague, lice. One of the purposes of this plague is to produce an effect which the magicians cannot replicate. They try. They fail. Immediately they conclude, “This is the finger of God” (Ex. 8:15).

This is the first appearance in the Torah of an idea, surprisingly persistent in religious thinking even today, called “the god of the gaps”. This holds that a miracle is something for which we cannot yet find a scientific explanation. Science is natural; religion is supernatural.

An “act of God” is something we cannot account for rationally. What magicians (or technocrats) cannot reproduce must be the result of Divine intervention. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that religion and science are opposed. The more we can explain scientifically or control technologically, the less need we have for faith. As the scope of science expands, the place of God progressively diminishes to vanishing point.

What the Torah is intimating is that this is a pagan mode of thought, not a Jewish one. The Egyptians admitted that Moses

and Aaron were genuine prophets when they performed wonders beyond the scope of their own magic. But this is not why we believe in Moses and Aaron. On this, Maimonides is unequivocal:

Israel did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the signs he performed. When faith is predicated on signs, a lurking doubt always remains that these signs may have been performed with the aid of occult arts and witchcraft. All the signs Moses performed in the Wilderness, he did because they were necessary, not to authenticate his status as a prophet . . . When we needed food, he brought down manna. When the people were thirsty, he cleaved the rock. When Korach’s supporters denied his authority, the earth swallowed them up. So too with all the other signs. What then were our grounds for believing in him? The Revelation at Sinai, which we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears . . .

Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 8:1

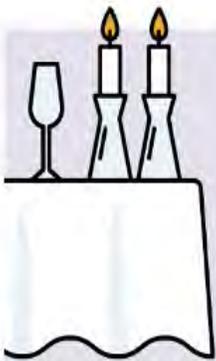
The primary way in which we encounter God is not through miracles but through His word – the Revelation – Torah – which is the Jewish people’s constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of God. To be sure, God is in the events which, seeming to defy nature, we call miracles. But He is also in nature itself. Science does not displace God: it reveals, in ever more intricate and wondrous ways, the

design within nature itself. Far from diminishing our religious sense, science (rightly understood) should enlarge it, teaching us to see “How great are Your works, O God; You have made them all with wisdom.” Above all, God is to be found in the Voice heard at Sinai, teaching us how to construct a society that will be the opposite of Egypt: in which the few do not enslave the many, nor are strangers mistreated.

The best argument against the world of Ancient Egypt was Divine humour. The cultic priests and magicians who thought they could control the sun and the Nile discovered that they could not even produce a louse. Pharaohs like Ramses II demonstrated their godlike status by creating monumental architecture: the great temples, palaces, and pyramids whose immensity seemed to betoken Divine grandeur (the Gemara explains that Egyptian magic could not function on

very small things). God mocks them by revealing His Presence in the tiniest of creatures. “I will show you fear in a handful of dust”, writes the poet, T. S. Eliot.

What the Egyptian magicians (and their latter-day successors) did not understand is that power over nature is not an end in and of itself, but solely the means to ethical ends. The lice were God’s joke at the expense of the magicians who believed that because they controlled the forces of nature, they were the masters of human destiny. They were wrong. Faith is not merely belief in the supernatural. It is the ability to hear the call of the Author of Being, to be free in such a way as to respect the freedom and dignity of others.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. Are there times when we fall into the same trap as the Egyptian magicians, assuming our modern capabilities mean we have mastered things that we don't truly understand?
2. Why do you think the Egyptian magicians tried to replicate, the plagues rather than stopping them?
3. How does the idea that God mocks human arrogance appear in other biblical stories?

● 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/vaera/of-lice-and-men/