



*The Agress family expresses their heartfelt thanks for the comfort and support given to Amy after the passing of her mother.*

**CANDLE LIGHTING 6:50 PM | 3 NISAN | MARCH 21, 2026 | HAVDALA 7:55 PM**

**שבת פרשת ויקרא  
SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYIKRA**  
Haftorah is Isaiah 43:21-44:23.  
We do not say אב הרחמים or צדקתך צדק.

**FRIDAY EVENING**

**MINCHA 6:55 PM**  
SHKIA 7:09 PM  
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 7:49 PM

**SHABBAT**

**HASHKAMA 7:45 AM**  
**SHACHARIT - MAIN 9:00 AM**  
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR ~ 9:30 AM  
LAST KRIAT SHEMA 10:01 AM

FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR ~11:30 AM

PRE-MINCHA SHIUR 6:05 PM

**MINCHA 6:45 PM**  
SHKIA 7:10 PM

**MAARIV 7:55 PM**

**SEUDAH SHLISHIT**

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Garfunkel family for the Yahrzeit of David's mother, Edith Garfunkel פייגא אמו של דוד, רבקה בת ר' חיים הלוי, ע"ה.

**FROM THE RABBI**

Rabbi Shestack is available to become your agent for selling Chametz as follows: (1) Sun., Mar. 22, after Shacharit (~8:35 AM); (2) Wed., Mar. 25, after Mincha-Maariv (~7:25 PM); (3) Thu., Mar. 26, after Mincha-Maariv (~7:25 PM); (4) Sat. night, March 28, after Havdalah (~8:15 PM); (5) Sun., Mar. 29, 9-11 AM (during kashering); (6) Sun., Mar. 29, after Mincha-Maariv (~7:30 PM); (7) Mon., Mar. 30, after Mincha-Maariv (~7:30 PM); (8) Tue., Mar. 31, after 7:25 Shacharit (~8:10 AM); and (9) Tue., Mar. 31, after Mincha-Maariv (~7:30 PM).

**MAOT CHITIM**

To facilitate the minhag of Maot Chitim, "wheat monies", providing wheat/matzah to the poor on Pesach, donate here: [Maot Chitmim](#).

**HAGGADAH MARATHON**

This year only recordings will go out on WhatsApp next week

**PRE-PESACH LUNCH NEXT WEEK**

Sponsorship levels are: Tzafun: \$180; Maggid: \$118; Karpas: \$72; and Kadesh: \$54. To become a sponsor click here: [CHOMETZ](#). Hope to see the entire community at this lunch next Shabbat!

**COMMUNITY SEDER**

Rabbi & Rebbetzin will host their annual 2nd night community seder for all interested. Please reach out to the Rabbi & Rebbetzin if you would like to attend; they would LOVE to have you!

**BARUCH DAYAN HA'EMET**

We regret to inform you of the passing of Yitz Vann, beloved son of Shirley & Avrom Vann. Shiva will be observed at 392 Terhune Ave., Passaic, on Motzei Shabbat 8:30 PM - 11:00 PM; Sunday 9:00 AM - noon, 1:00 PM - 5:30 PM, and 6:30 PM - 10:00 PM; and Monday 9:00 AM - noon. On Monday afternoon, shiva moves to 13-35 Henrietta Court, Fair Lawn, 3:00 PM - 5:30 PM and 6:30 PM - 10:00 PM; Tuesday 9:00 AM - noon, 1:00 PM - 5:30 PM and 6:30 PM - 10:00 PM. Davening times were sent separately. Shiva ends on Wednesday after Shacharit.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

ORTHODOX UNION Enhancing Jewish Life	SUNDAY 3/22	MONDAY 3/23	TUESDAY 3/24	WEDNESDAY 3/25	THURSDAY 3/26	FRIDAY 3/27
<b>WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM</b>						
<b>SHACHARIT</b>	<b>8:00 AM</b>	<b>6:15 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>	<b>6:15 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>
<b>2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM</b>		<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>
<b>MINCHA/MAARIV</b>	<b>6:59 PM</b>	<b>7:00 PM</b>	<b>7:01 PM</b>	<b>7:02 PM</b>	<b>7:03 PM</b>	<b>7:00 PM</b>
<b>ZMANIM</b>						
<b>Earliest Talit</b>	6:02 AM	6:00 AM	5:58 AM	5:57 AM	5:55 AM	5:53 AM
<b>Gedolah</b>	1:34 PM	1:34 PM	1:34 PM	1:34 PM	1:33 PM	1:33 PM
<b>Shkia</b>	7:11 PM	7:12 PM	7:13 PM	7:14 PM	7:15 PM	
<b>Tzait</b>	7:51 PM	7:52 PM	7:53 PM	7:54 PM	7:55 PM	

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Mar. 28** - Pre-Pesach Luncheon. RSVP here: Lunch.

**Mar. 28** - Shir HaShirim Chapter-by-Chapter Round-Robin Sign up here: [Song of Songs](#).

**Mar. 29** - Hagolas Kelim/Pesach Kashering, 9:00 - 11:00 AM, at the shul.

**April 1** - Seraifat (Burning) Chometz, 8:00 AM to 11:30 AM, at the Norton residence, 20-11 Hunter Pl. No foil, plastic, paper, cardboard, pasta, sauces or liquids. Bread, cereal, crackers and dry items only.

**Apr. 1** - Latest to eat Chometz: 10:51 AM

**Apr. 1** - Latest to own Chometz: 11:55 AM

**Apr. 25** - Rabbi Binny Freedman SIR.

## IN OUR FUTURE - KIDDUSH, SEUDAH SHLISHIT, & ETC.

**Apr. 2** - Dessert kiddush sponsored by Deborah & Mitchell Kempin to celebrate the birth of their granddaughter Emma Sophia, אמונה, born to Elissa & Michael Schachter, and the birth and baby naming of a granddaughter born to Arielle & Ian Hecht.

**Apr. 18** - Yom Ha'atzmaut Kiddush. To sponsor, click here: [Independence](#).

**Apr. 25** - Birthday and Anniversary Kiddush

**June 20** - Kiddush is sponsored by Shelly & Steve Winchester celebrating Daniel's Avuf Ruf and upcoming wedding to Yael Simons.

- Enjoying Scotch at Kiddush, please donate a bottle 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 April list (next Kiddush on Shabbat, April 25), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the April birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Sunday night, April 19.

## SHIURIM



- PESHAT OF THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM (<https://zoom.us/j/7291311899>, PW: 112233).
- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via Whatsapp, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at [rabbishestack@gmail.com](mailto: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.
- HALACHA SHIUR FOR WOMEN, Monday nights, 8:15 PM on Zoom - **HIATUS**
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit - **MIZMOR SHIR CHANUKAT HABAYIT - R. DONIN PP. 176-178, RABBI MUNK 76-77.**



## BOARD MEETINGS 8:15 PM

**Mar. 24** - At shul w/Zoom option.

**Apr. 28, May 26, & June 30**

## OU WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

**Apr. 19** - Count & Cultivate - A Powerful Sefirat HaOmer Program, exploring what real growth looks like and how we cultivate it during the days of Sefirah, 7:30 PM. Location to be provided.

## GITA COOPERWASSER נ"ע YOUTH EVENTS

**Apr. 9** - Playdate in the Park (Pesach Edition), 3:45 PM.

**May 23** - Interactive Youth Shavuot program with dinner.

## GITA COOPERWASSER נ"ע SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- **SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS:**  
**3<sup>RD</sup> - 5<sup>TH</sup>: SOPHIA & LETIZIA**  
**K - 2<sup>ND</sup>: ARIELYS, ABBY, & ZOE**  
**3 YRS - PRE-K: ARNELLA & NICOLE**
- Youth groups for 3rd through 5th Graders starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on left on entering the social hall.
- Youth group for children 4 years old through 1st Grade starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on the right upon entering the social hall.
- Parent & Me, 9:00 AM in the Beit Midrash.
- Rabbi Meet & Greet, Friday night, kids can come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!
- Children earn tickets for coming to minyan (Friday night and/or Shabbat day), asking the rabbi questions or attending parent-child learning programs! Tickets can be redeemed for prizes.
- Children's corner at Seudah Shlishit, 1st to 5th graders will get 10 Torah questions in 10 minutes from Rabbi Shestack, with special snacks, tickets and more.

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

Mishlei/Proverbs  
Post-Hashkama Shiur 23 – Speech Makes the Man

”בְּפִשֶׁע שְׁפִתַיִם מוֹקֵשׁ רָע וְנִצָּא מִצָּרָה צְדִיק: ”מִפְרֵי פִי־אִישׁ יִשְׁבַּע־טוֹב וּגְמוּל יְדִי־אָדָם [יָשׁוּב] יָשִׁיב לוֹ: ”יִגְדֹּף אֲוִיל יִשָּׂר בְּעֵינָיו וְשִׁמְעַ לְעֵצָה חֲכָם: ”אֲוִיל בְּיוֹם יִנְדַע כִּעֶסוֹ וְכִסָּה קֶלֶוֹן עָרוֹם: ”יִפְיֵחַ אַמוּנָה יִגִּיד צְדָק וְעַד שְׁקָרִים מִרְמָה: ”יִגִּשׁ בּוֹטָה כְּמִדְקָרוֹת חָרֵב וְלִשׁוֹן חֲכָמִים מִרְפָּא: ”שְׁפֵת־אֱמֶת תִּכּוֹן לְעַד וְעַד־אֲרָגִיעָה לְשׁוֹן שְׁקָר: ”מִרְמָה בְּלִב־תְּרָשִׁי רָע וְלִיעֲצִי שָׁלוֹם שְׁמֵחָה: ”אֵל־אִי־אֵגֶה לְצְדִיק כִּלְ־אֲנִי וְרָשָׁעִים מְלֵאוּ רָע: ”בִּתְוַעֲבַת יָהּ—וְהָיָה שְׁפֵת־שְׁקָר וְעֵשִׂי אַמוּנָה רְצוּנוֹ: ”אָדָם עָרוֹם כָּסָה דַעַת וְלֵב כְּסִילִים יִקְרָא אֲנֶלֶת: ”יִד־חַרוּצִים תִּמְשָׁוֵל וְרַמְיָה תִּהְיֶה לְמָס: ”דִּאֲגָה בְּלִב־אִישׁ יִשְׁחַנָּה וְדָבָר טוֹב יִשְׁמַחָהּ: ”יִתֵּר מִרְעֵהוּ צְדִיק וְדָרָף רָשָׁעִים מִתְּעַם: ”יֵלֵא־יִתְרָף רַמְיָה צִידוֹ וְהוֹן־אָדָם יִקָּר חַרוּץ: ”בְּאֶרֶץ־צְדָקָה חַיִּים וְדָרָף נְתִיבָה אֶל־מָוֶת: —

13The wicked are snared by sinful lips, but the righteous escape calamity. 14A man is satisfied by the fruit of his mouth, and he will be repaid in kind for his handiwork. 15A fool’s [sceptic’s] way is right in his own eyes, but it is he who listens to advice that is a wise man. 16A fool [skeptical] displays anger immediately, but a clever man conceals his shame. 17He who speaks the truth will testify justly, but a deceitful person will bear false witness. 18There is [a kind of] person who speaks bluntly like the jabs of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. 19A true tongue[‘s words] will be established forever, but a lying tongue[‘s words are] just for a moment. 20Deceit [lurks] in the heart of those who plot evil, but for those that counsel peace there is gladness. 21No stumbling [accidental sins] shall happen to the righteous, but the wicked will have their fill of misfortune. 22False lips are an abomination of the Lord, but those who act faithfully are His delight. 23A cunning man hides knowledge, but from a fool’s heart come proclamations of folly. 24The hand of the diligent will rule, but deceit will lead to subjection. 25If there is anxiety in a man’s heart let him banish it, and let a good word gladden it. 26A righteous person guides his neighbor, but the ways of the wicked will lead them astray. 27The slothful man does not roast a catch, but the wealth of an honest man is precious. 28The road of righteousness leads to life, and [in] their path there is no death.<sup>1</sup>

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A. In modern culture, we often emphasize that “actions speak louder than words” and that “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Speech is deemphasized, perhaps to try to limit its psychological impact, or to just place emphasis on the objective reality than the subjective consequences. Mishlei, on the other hand, consistently views speech as an independent “action”, and even if it would be wise for a listener to disregard harsh words, Mishlei makes it clear that the words that emanate from a speaker’s lips reveal much about a person. In that regard, the most common theme among the pasukim in the latter part of chapter 12 is the idea that speech is intertwined with a person’s essence.

- V. 13 → The wicked are snared by sinful lips, but the righteous escape calamity.
- V. 14 → A man is satisfied by the fruit of his mouth. . . .
- V. 17 → He who speaks the truth will testify justly, but a deceitful person will bear false witness.
  - o The Vilna Gaon suggests that וְעַד is singular and שְׁקָרִים is plural because a single false witness will lie to many people to ingratiate himself to others.
- V. 18 → There is [a kind of] person who speaks bluntly like the jabs of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- V. 19 → A true tongue[‘s words] will be established forever, but a lying tongue[‘s words are] just for a moment.
- V. 20 → Deceit [lurks] in the heart of those who plot evil, but for those that counsel peace there is gladness.
  - o Metzudot sees the person of peace as being glad because he is not worried that his actions will be discovered and connected to him, while those that plot evil fear detection.
- V. 22 → False lips are an abomination of the Lord, but those who act faithfully are His delight.
- V. 23 → A cunning man hides knowledge, but from a fool’s heart comes proclamations of folly.
- V. 25 → If there is anxiety in a man’s heart let him banish it, and let a good word gladden it.

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<sup>1</sup> Mishlei Chapter 12.

B. Many of the pasukim among these latter verses of chapter 12 address self-awareness (or the lack thereof) and self-mastery.

- V. 15 → A fool's way is right in his own eyes, but it is he who listens to advice that is a wise man.
  - o Even though I've followed the common translation of this pasuk as discussing a fool, recall that when we established buzzwords to look out for, we defined לְיָסוּר as a skeptic, *i.e.*, an intelligent person making foolish choices based on preferred results. In that regard, note that Rav Yonah sees the fool mentioned here as one whose poor choices are based on his desires, and not a person of limited mental capacity.
  - o When setting up one's profile Facebook once had a section for favorite quotes. Mine was “. . . the trouble is that in the modern world the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt”. Bertrand Russell, from his 1933 essay “Stupidity Rules”. Bertrand's starting premise is the same as Shlomo's, *i.e.*, that fools are confident in their state of folly. But while Bertrand discusses the doubts of a wise person, Shlomo instead reminds us that wise people will act wisely, and notes that a wise person would not allow himself to wallow in doubt but would instead seek out advice.
- V. 16 → A fool displays anger immediately, but a clever man conceals his shame.
  - o Rashi interprets this verse as follows: “And the Midrash Aggadah states: On the day the first man was created, his sin was known, but the Holy One, blessed be He, Who is clever, did not wish to destroy His creatures. He concealed his shame and postponed His decree from Adam's day to His day, which is one thousand years.”
  - o Compare to Kohelet 7:9 → Don't let your spirit become angered quickly, for anger rests in the breast of fools.
- V. 24 → The hand of the diligent will rule, but deceit will lead to subjection.
- V. 26 → A righteous person guides his neighbor, but the ways of the wicked will lead them astray.
- V. 27 → The slothful man does not roast a catch, but the wealth of an honest man is precious.

C. The last pasuk of chapter 12 seems to provide a conclusive summary for the chapter: “The road of righteousness leads to life, and [in] their path there is no death.” The previous verses have been illustrating this principle in concrete forms: (a) truthful speech gives stability, (b) wise restraint prevents harm, (c) diligence produces strength, and (d) righteousness benefits both oneself and others.

Rashi reads this pasuk more narrowly by understanding חַסְדֵּי to mean charity, and in that vein recall “but charity will save from death”.<sup>2</sup> So Rashi understands this pasuk to be of a more limited scope.

- Recall that we previously discussed verses in Kohelet and Iyov to the contrary, *e.g.*: (1) As for Kohelet, “I have seen everything in the days of my vanity; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his wickedness.”<sup>3</sup> And (2) as for Iyov, “Why do the wicked live on, grow strong and powerfully rich? Their children are well established in their sight with them, and their children's children are before their eyes. Their houses have peace from fear, and God's rod is not upon them. His bull impregnates and does not fail; his cow bears young and does not abort. They send forth their infants like sheep, and their children dance. They raise [their voice] with the tambourine and the harp, and they rejoice to the sound of the flute. They end their days in prosperity, and in a moment they descend to the grave.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mishlei Chapter 10:2.

<sup>3</sup> Kohelet 7:15.

<sup>4</sup> Iyov 21:7-13.

## Authorization

I, the undersigned, fully empower and permit Rabbi Ely Shestack or his designee to act in my place and stead, and on my behalf to sell all chametz possessed by me knowingly or unknowingly, as defined by Torah and rabbinic law, except for chametz designated for burning after the sale, and except for chametz designated for consumption on the upcoming Sabbath meals, and to lease all places in which chametz owned by me may be found, especially at:

(Address) \_\_\_\_\_

(Auxiliary Address\*: work, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

The chametz I possess includes the following: (note chametz in aux. location with ‘\*’)

	Type of Chametz (groceries, liquor, medicine, toiletries, etc.)	Where Stored	Approximate Value
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

If you or your Chametz will be in Europe/Israel for Pesach, please initial here \_\_\_\_\_ to indicate your interest in an earlier sale time.

If you or your Chametz will be on the west coast, please initial here \_\_\_\_\_ to indicate your interest in a later buy-back time.

***Complete this part only if you will be away for all Pesach:***

I specifically authorize Rabbi Ely Shestack or person designated by him to sell all chametz located anywhere in my home at the above address, and to lease my entire home (except for \_\_\_\_\_). The keys to my home can be found with:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Residing at (address): \_\_\_\_\_

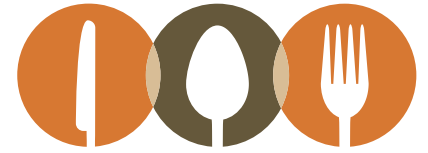
### Concise Document of Sale

I, the undersigned hereby sell all my chametz via Rabbi Ely Shestack or his designee. I also lease the place where such chametz is found at the above address(es) for a period of ten (10) days. This sale and rental are to take effect on Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026 corresponding to 14 Nissan 5785, before 11:30am. Further details concerning all of the above are recorded in the above power of attorney form and lengthier document for sale.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL



**CABINETS BARE BEFORE PESACH?  
JOIN US FOR ONE LAST KIDDUSH!**

# PRE-PESACH COMMUNITY LUNCHEON

**IT'LL BE  
CHAMETZ-ING!**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 28**

SIGN UP TO SPONSOR OR VOLUNTEER TO  
MAKE A CROCKPOT DISH!

## **SPONSORSHIPS:**

KADESH: \$54

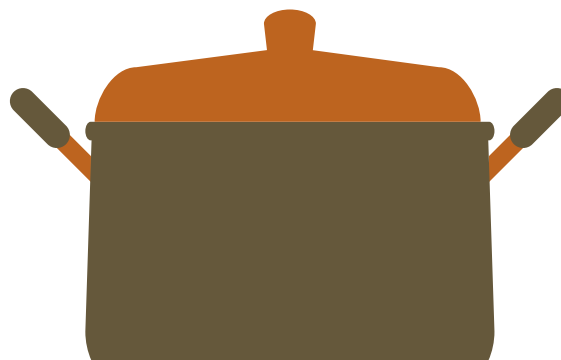
KARPAS: \$72

MAGGID: \$118

TZAFUN: \$180

**SIGN UP BY 3/24!**

[TINYURL.COM/AAPRE-PESACH](https://tinyurl.com/aapre-pesach)



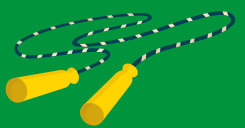


Save the Date!

# Playdate in the Park: Pesach Edition



Join us at Edison Park on  
Thursday, April 9th at 3:45 P.M.



Fruit & snacks will be provided!  
Bring your own water.

\*please do not bring snacks containing nuts\*



AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים

718.224.1111



AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL



Ahavat Achim invites you to join us for

# YOM HA'ATZMAUT KIDDUSH

on Saturday, April 18 following davening  
for a special Israeli inspired kiddush!  
From falafel to Prigat, this kiddush will leave  
you with a taste of home in your mouth!

## **SPONSORSHIP LEVELS:**

Chaim Weizmann: \$54

Golda Meir: \$72

Theodore Herzl: \$118

David Ben Gurion: \$180

[TINYURL.COM/ISRAELIKIDDUSH](https://tinyurl.com/israelikiddush)





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# AHAVAT ACHIM

PRESENTS A SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE SHABBATON WITH

## RABBI BINNY FREEDMAN

SAVE THE DATE

**SHABBAT PARASHAT  
ACHAREI MOT-KEDOSHIM  
APRIL 24–25, 2026**



**Rabbi Binny Freedman** is Rosh Yeshiva, founder, and Dean of Yeshivat Orayta. He is a highly engaging and inspiring educator who has the gift for synthesizing difficult, sophisticated material in a way that inspires both the novice and the scholar. His proficiency in applying Jewish concepts to contemporary life in a personal and meaningful manner has made him a sought-after speaker and educator around the world. Rav Binny is an IDF Company Commander who came to Israel as a lone soldier in 1982.

**Israel360** reflects Israel's international reach and Mizrachi's mission of spreading Torat Eretz Yisrael across the world. To celebrate Israel during the month of Iyar, Mizrachi brings inspiring Israeli speakers and thinkers to 360 communities all around the globe. [www.mizrachi.org/israel360](http://www.mizrachi.org/israel360)



# Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

VAYIKRA • ויקרא

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.

## Between Destiny and Chance

The third book of the Torah is known in English as Leviticus, a word deriving from Greek and Latin, meaning, "pertaining to the Levites". This reflects the fact that in Judaism the priests – all direct descendants of Aaron – were from the tribe of Levi, and that the ancient rabbinic name for the book was *Torat Kohanim*, "the law of the Priests". It is an appropriate title. Whereas *Shemot* and *Bamidbar* are shot through with narrative, the book between them is largely about sacrifices and the rituals associated, first with the Tabernacle and later with the Temple in Jerusalem. It is, as the name *Torat Kohanim* implies, about the priests and their function as guardians of the sacred.

By contrast, the traditional name *Vayikra*, "And He called", seems merely accidental. *Vayikra* just happens to be the first word of the book, and there is no connection between it and the subjects with which it deals. The truth, I will argue here, is otherwise. There is a deep connection between the word *Vayikra*

and the underlying message of the book as a whole.

To understand this, we must note that there is something unusual about the way the word appears in a *Sefer Torah* in this particular instance. Its last letter, an aleph, is written small – almost as if it barely existed. The standard-size letters spell out the word *vayikar*, meaning, "he encountered" or "he chanced upon." Unlike *vayikra*, which refers to a call, a summons, a meeting by request, *vayikar* suggests an accidental meeting, a mere happening.

With their sensitivity to nuance, the Sages noted the difference between the call to Moses with which the book begins, and God's appearance to the pagan prophet Bilaam, which does not use the same form of the word. This is how the Midrash puts it:

What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the pagan nations of the world? . . . R. Hama ben Hanina said: The Holy One blessed be

He reveals Himself to the pagan nations by an incomplete form of address, as it is said, “And the Lord appeared to Bilaam”, whereas to the prophets of Israel He appears in a complete form of address, as it is said, “And He called to Moses.”

Rashi is more explicit:

All [God’s] communications [to Moses], whether they use the words “speak” or “say” or “command” were preceded by a call [*keri’ah*] which is a term of endearment, used by the angels when they address one another, as it is said, “And one called to the other” [*vekara zeh el zeh*, Isaiah 6:3). However, to the prophets of the nations of the world, His appearance is described by an expression signifying a casual encounter and uncleanness, as it says, “And the Lord appeared to Bilaam.”

The Baal HaTurim goes one stage further, commenting on the small *aleph*:

Moses was both great and humble, and wanted only to write *Vayikar*, signifying “chance”, as if the Holy One blessed be He appeared to him only in a dream, as it says of Bilaam [*vayikar*, without an *aleph*] – suggesting that God appeared to him by mere chance. However, God told him to write the word with an *aleph*. Moses then said to Him, because of his extreme humility, that he would only write an *aleph* that was smaller than the other *alephs* in the Torah, and he did indeed write it small.

Something of great significance is being hinted at here, but before taking it further, let us turn to the end of the book. Just before the end, in the *sedra* of Bechukotai, there occurs one of the two most terrifying passages in the

*Torah*. It is known as the *tochachah* (the rebuke: the other appears in Devarim 28), and it details the terrible fate that will befall the Jewish people if it fails to keep its covenant with God:

As for the survivors, I will bring such insecurity into their hearts in their enemies’ lands that the sound of a windblown leaf will make them run as if they fled the sword; and they will fall, though no one is chasing them. They will stumble over one another as if fleeing the sword, when no one chases them. You will have no power to stand before your enemies. You will perish among the nations; your enemies’ lands will devour you.

Lev. 26:36-38

Yet despite the shocking nature of the forewarning, the passage ends with a note of consolation:

I will remember My covenant with Jacob; and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Avraham I will also remember, and I will remember the land . . . Yet even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them nor despise them and annihilate them, will not break My covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God.

Lev. 26:42-44

The keyword of the passage is the word *keri*. It appears exactly seven times in the *tochachah* – a sure sign of significance. Here are two of them by way of example:

If, despite all this, you still do not listen to Me – if still you walk contrary to Me – then I, in My fury, will walk contrary to you. I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

Lev. 26:27-28

What does the word *keri* mean? I have translated it here as “contrary”. There are other suggestions. The Targum reads it as “harden yourselves”, Rashbam as “refuse”, Ibn Ezra as “overconfident”, Saadia as “rebellious”.

However, Rambam gives it a completely different interpretation, and does so in a *halachic* context:

A positive scriptural command prescribes prayer and the sounding of the alarm with trumpets whenever trouble befalls the community. For when Scripture says, “Against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets” the meaning is: Cry out in prayer and sound an alarm . . . This is one of the paths to repentance, for when the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when threatened by trouble, everyone realises that evil has come on them as a result of their own wrongdoing . . . and that repentance will cause the trouble to be removed.

If, however, the people do not cry out in prayer and do not sound an alarm but merely say that it is the way of the world for such a thing to happen to them, and that their trouble is a matter of pure chance, they have chosen a cruel path which will cause them to continue in their

wrongdoing, and thus bring additional troubles on them. For when Scripture says, “If you continue to be *keri* towards Me, then in My anger I will be *keri* towards you”, it means, “If, when I bring trouble upon you in order to cause you to repent, you say that the trouble is purely accidental, then I will add to your trouble the anger of being-left-to-chance”

Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot, 1:1-3.

Rambam understands *keri* to be related to the word *mikreh*, meaning “chance”. The curses, in his interpretation, are not Divine retribution as such. It will not be God who makes Israel suffer, rather it will be other human beings. What will happen is simply that God will withdraw His protection. Israel will have to face the world alone, without the sheltering presence of God. This, for Rambam, is simple, inescapable measure-for-measure (*middah kenegged middah*). If Israel believe in Divine Providence, they will be blessed by Divine Providence. If they see history as mere chance – what Joseph Heller, author of *Catch-22*, called “a trash bag of random coincidences blown open by the wind” – then indeed they will be left to chance. Being a small, vulnerable nation, chance will not be kind to them.

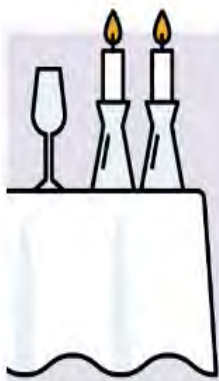
We are now in a position to understand the remarkable proposition linking the beginning of *Vayikra* to the end – and one of the most profound of all spiritual truths. The difference between *mikra* and *mikreh* – between history as God’s call and history as one event after another with no underlying purpose or meaning – is, in the Hebrew language, almost imperceptible. The words sound the same. The only difference is that the former has an

*aleph* while the latter does not (the significance of the *aleph* is obvious: the first letter of the alphabet, the first letter of the Ten Commandments, the “I” of God). The letter *aleph* is almost inaudible. Its appearance in a *Sefer Torah* at the beginning of *Vayikra* (the “small *aleph*”) is almost invisible. Do not expect – the Torah is intimating – that the presence of God in history will always be as clear and unambiguous as it was during the Exodus from Egypt and the division of the Red Sea. For much of the time it will depend on your own sensitivity. For those who look, it will be visible. For those who listen, it can be heard. But first you have to look and listen. If you choose not to see or hear, then *Vayikra* will become *vayikar*. The call will be inaudible. History will seem mere chance.

There is nothing incoherent about such an idea. Those who believe it will have much to justify it. Indeed, says God in the *tochachah*: if you believe that history is chance, then it will

become so. But in truth it is not so. The history of the Jewish people – as even non-Jews such as Pascal, Rousseau, and Tolstoy eloquently stated – testifies to the presence of God in their midst. Only thus could such a small, vulnerable, relatively powerless people survive, and still say today – after the Holocaust – *Am Yisrael Chai*, the Jewish people lives. And just as Jewish history is not mere chance, so it is no mere coincidence that the first word of the central book of the *Torah* is *Vayikra*, “And He called”.

To be a Jew is to believe that what happens to us as a people is God’s call to us – to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. Why is humility essential for hearing God’s call?
2. Think of an event in your own life. Can you see it as both a random chance event and as a Divine call? What changes when you look at it from each perspective?
3. Rambam suggests that if we believe our lives are governed by chance, God will leave us to chance. Do you think our beliefs shape our reality in this way?

● These questions come from this week’s **Family Edition** to Rabbi Sacks’ *Covenant & Conversation*. For an interactive, multi-generational study, check out the full edition at <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-family-edition/vayikra/between-destiny-and-chance/>