



CANDLE LIGHTING 8:13 PM | 12 TAMUZ | JUNE 27, 2026 | HAVDALA 9:18 PM

שבת פרשת חקת-בלק SHABBAT PARSHAT CHUKAT-BALAK

Haftorah is Micah 5:6-6:8. Pirkei Avot Chap. 5. Final time for Kiddush Levanah in Fair Lawn, NJ is all Sunday night, June 28 (14 Tamuz) until the following daybreak.

FRIDAY EVENING

MINCHA 6:47 PM

EARLIEST CANDLES 6:58 PM

SHKIA 8:33 PM

TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 9:13 PM

SHABBAT

HASHKAMA 7:45 AM

SHACHARIT - MAIN 9:00 AM

POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR ≈ 9:13 AM

LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:13 AM

FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR ≈ 11:30 AM

PRE-MINCHA SHIUR 7:25 PM

MINCHA 8:05 PM

SHKIA 8:33 PM

MAARIV 9:18 PM

KIDDUSH



Kiddush is sponsored by Audrey & Jack Bickel with gratitude to Hashem for their children and grandchildren, and Jalen Brunson and the NY Knicks' historic win.

TODAH RABBAH

Thank you to trustees of the shul and a former president that are completing their terms of office: Shifra Caruso, Farnaz Gorelik, and Steven Winchester, and past president Richie Mayer. Yasher Koach!



JULY 3 SHABBAT DINNER/BBQ



Please join us next Friday night for our Independence Day Shabbat Dinner/BBQ to express our הכרת הטוב for this great nation that is our home, and to express appreciation for all the people that risked their lives and gave their lives so that the United States could be formed, grow and prosper. To RSVP, click here: [250 Years!!](#)

MAZEL TOV

Mazal tov to Janie & Hymie Kirschenbaum on their son Stephen's marriage to Rachel Sarah Jacobs.

יעלה הזיווג יפה ויבנו בית נאמן בישראל

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



תענית שבעה עשר בתמוז SHIVA ASAR B'TAMUZ

Thursday, July 2, is a public fast day. Fast begins at 4:17 AM and ends at 9:12 PM. For information on the "Three Weeks", go to Page 3. For more information on the Fast of Tamuz, go to Page 4.



	SUNDAY 6/28	MONDAY 6/29	TUESDAY 6/30	WEDNESDAY 7/1	THURSDAY 7/2	FRIDAY 7/3
WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM						
SHACHARIT	8:00 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM	6:25 AM	6:00 AM	6:20/8:00 AM
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:10 AM	
MINCHA/MAARIV	8:21 PM	8:20 PM	8:20 PM	8:20 PM	8:05 PM	6:47 PM
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit	4:15 AM	4:15 AM	4:16 AM	4:16 AM	4:17 AM	4:18 AM
Gedolah	1:37 PM	1:38 PM	1:38 PM	1:38 PM	1:38 PM	1:38 PM
Shkia	8:33 PM	8:32 PM	8:32 PM	8:32 PM	8:32 PM	
Tzait	9:13 PM	9:12 PM	9:12 PM	9:12 PM	9:12 PM	

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 3 - Friday Night Independence Day

BBQ /Shabbat Dinner. RSVP here: [250 Years](#)

July 8 - Blood Drive. To sign up, click here: [Blood](#)

July 12 - Summer Hike, Ramapo Valley. 10:00 AM. RSVP: [Take a Hike](#)

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



July 4 - Birthday and anniversary kiddush.

Aug. 15 - Kiddush is sponsored by Seymour Wigod in honor of Tali & Neal Wigod, Moshe, Shua and Shy, to wish them bracha, hatzlacha & yishuv tov on moving to Israel.

Aug. 22 - Kiddush is sponsored by Chana & Rabbi Shestack in celebration of Adira Nechama's Bat Mitzvah.

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH



To add a birthday or anniversary to upcoming lists (next Kiddush on Shabbat, July 4), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the July birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Sunday night, June 28.

SHIURIM



- PESHAT OF THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM, click here: [Parsha](#).
- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via Whatsapp, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at rabbishestack@gmail.com.
- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs).
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush.
- SHABBAT SHIUR, **SANHEDRIN CH. 1**, 40 minutes prior to mincha.
- TZURBA M'RABANAN w/ Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit.
- BEGINNER CLASS ON HOW TO READ HEBREW, Monday nights, 8:45 PM, at the shul. To sign up, click here: [Hebrew](#).



GITA COOPERWASSER ת"ע YOUTH EVENTS

June 27 - Perek in the Park, 4:15 PM.

July 4 - Perek in the Park, 4:15 PM.

GITA COOPERWASSER ת"ע SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- **SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS:**
3RD-5TH: ARIELYS, ARNELLA & ISABELLA
K-2ND: ABBY & BELANA
3 YRS-PRE-K: DANIELLE & RIHANNA
- 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.
- **HIATUS UNTIL FALL** - 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.

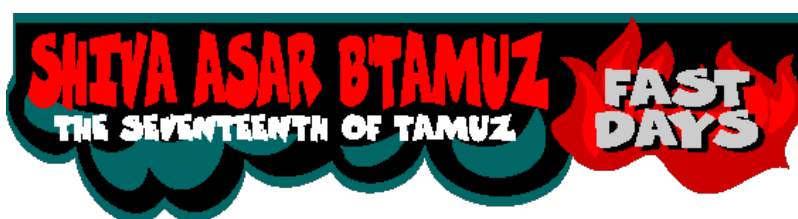
18-25 Saddle River Road
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
201.797.0502
<http://www.ahavatachim.org>

THE THREE WEEKS (FROM THE EZRAS TORAH LUACH)

The period between the Seventeenth of Tamuz until after Tisha B'Av is called "בין המצרים" — "between the straits" (based upon the verse in Lamentations 1:3) because of the multiple tragedies that have occurred to the Jewish people throughout the ages during these three weeks.

Among the worst of the tragedies are the destruction of both Holy Temples, the end of Jewish Sovereignty for almost 2,000 years, and the exile from Eretz Yisroel. The custom is for us to manifest some signs of mourning during this period. Therefore, we do not make weddings or take haircuts during these three weeks.

Because it is a time of national catastrophe, we do not make the Bracha שהחיינו (so as to avoid the Bracha שהחיינו we do not eat a new fruit [unless that fruit would be unobtainable afterward] or purchase an expensive article of clothing that would require the Bracha שהחיינו, during these three weeks [the custom is to make the Bracha on Shabbat].



DAVID SCHWITZER ע"ה SOCIAL HALL

Contact Lori at garfmom@gmail.com to book the David Schwitzer ע"ה Social Hall for an event or occasion. \$250 (members), \$325 (Associates), or \$400 paid in advance for non-members, plus the cost of clean up (and a \$150 refundable security/cleaning deposit). Private caterers must be approved by the Rabbi.

CHESED TEAM

If you or someone you know needs assistance, email us at chesed@ahavatachim.org.

YAHRTZEIT PLAQUES

Memorialize a loved one with a plaque, \$300 for members/\$450 for nonmembers. We will strive to send you written notice of upcoming yahrzeit and announce name during public Yizkor. Email Amy at yahrzeit@ahavatachim.org to arrange.

DONATE A SEFER, ETC.

Donate Siddurim & Machzorim (\$40), and Chumashim (\$60). Contact 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 Yahrzets, 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.

THE 17TH OF TAMUZ (FROM OU.ORG)

The 17th day in the Jewish month of Tamuz, Jews the world over fast and lament to commemorate the many calamities that have befallen our people on this ominous day. The purpose of such fasts in the Jewish calendar is, according to Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov's Book of Our Heritage, "to awaken hearts towards repentance through recalling our forefathers' misdeeds; misdeeds which led to calamities..."

Going all the way back to Biblical times, Moses descended Mount Sinai on this day and, upon seeing the Golden Calf broke the first set of Tablets carrying the Ten Commandments (Shemot 32:19, Mishna Taanit 28b). In the First Temple Era: The priests in the First Temple stopped offering the daily sacrifice on this day (Taanit 28b) due to the shortage of sheep during the siege and the next year 3184 (586 BCE), the walls of Jerusalem were breached after many months of siege by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian forces.

In Melachim II 21:7 we find that King Menashe, one of the worst of the Jewish kings, had an idol placed in the Holy Sanctuary of the Temple, according to tradition on this date. The Talmud, in Masechet Taanit 28b, says that in the time of the Roman persecution, Apostomos, captain of the occupation forces, did the same, and publicly burned the Torah - both acts considered open blasphemy and desecration. These were followed by Titus and Rome breaching the walls of Jerusalem in 3760 (70 CE) and Pope Gregory IX ordering the confiscation of all manuscripts of the Talmud in 4999 (1239). In later years this day continued to be a dark one for Jews. In 1391, more than 4,000 Jews were killed in Toledo and Jaen, Spain and in 4319 (1559) the Jewish Quarter of Prague was burned and looted. The Kovno ghetto was liquidated on this day in 5704 (1944) and in 5730 (1970) Libya ordered the confiscation of Jewish property.

Other occurrences on this day include Noah sending out the first dove to see if the Flood waters had receded, (Bereishit 8:8) in 1650 (2100 BCE); Moshe Rabbeinu destroying the golden calf, (Shemot 32:20, Seder Olam 6, Taanit 30b - Rashi), and then ascending back up Har Sinai for the second time where he spent the next forty days pleading for forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, (Shemot 33:11, Rashi). The Mishna in Ta'anit 4:8 associates the 17th of Tamuz as the "Fast of the Fourth Month" mentioned by the prophet Zechariah. According to this Mishna, the 17th of Tamuz will be transformed in the messianic era in a day that "shall be joy to the House of Judah" full of "gladness and cheerful feasts".

The fast of the 17th of Tamuz is observed from the break of dawn until night (as defined by halacha), one of four Jewish fasts to be observed in this manner - 3 Tishrei, 10 Tevet, 13 Adar and 17 of Tamuz. Expecting or nursing mothers and those who are ill are expected to observe the fast but with lenience, refraining from meat, luxurious food and hard liquor. Minors that are old enough to understand, though exempt from fasting, should also be fed only simple foods as a manner of education. Unlike the two Jewish fast days Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, washing and wearing leather are permitted on this day. Special prayers (vayechal and anenu) are added to the morning and afternoon prayers. Ashkenazim add the latter only in the afternoon service (mincha). This day is the beginning of the Three Weeks, an annual period of mourning over the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem.

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](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ahavatachim/albums)

BULLETIN DEDICATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHUL CALENDAR

Email seplotnick@gmail.com for an announcement of a simcha, refuah or life cycle event in the bulletin or to dedicate a bulletin for \$36 (\$54 w/Photo).

COMMUNITY SECURITY



To become part of our community security service, email Margo at security@ahavatachim.org.

HOW TO DONATE TO THE SHUL USING PAYPAL

Please do not simply pay the shul using PayPal, as that incurs a 3% service charge that will get charged to the shul. Instead, please use our fee-free dedicated PayPal link <http://paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/1444321>. PayPal will email you a receipt for your charitable donation and the shul will receive 100% of your donation. [Make sure you click the "SHARE MY NAME" box so the shul will know who paid so that we can credit your account.]



כִּי־צוּף־דְּבַשׁ אִמְרֵי־נָעִם מְתוּק לִנְפֹשׁ וּמִרְפָּא לְעַצְמוֹ: כִּי־יֵשׁ דֶּרֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי־אִישׁ וְאַחֲרֵיתָהּ דֶּרֶךְ־מָוֶת: כִּי־נֶפֶשׁ עֲמֹל עֲמֹלָה לֹא כִי־אֶכֶף עָלָיו פִּיהוּ: כִּי־אִישׁ בְּלִיעַל כֶּהָה רַעְיָה וְעַל־שִׁפְתָּיו (כְּתִיב שִׁפְתָּיו) בָּאֵשׁ צָרָבָת: כִּי־אִישׁ תִּהְפְּכּוֹת יִשְׁלַח מִדֹּוֹן וְנִרְגָּז מִפְּרִיד אֱלֹוֹף: כִּי־אִישׁ חָמָס יִפְתָּה רַעְיָהוּ וְהוֹלִיכּוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא־טוֹב: לַעֲצָה עֵינָיו לִחֲשֹׁב תִּהְפְּכּוֹת קִרְצֵן שִׁפְתָּיו כָּלָה רַעְיָה: כִּי־עֲטָרַת תִּפְאָרֶת שִׁיבָה בְּדֶרֶךְ צִדְקָה תִּמְצָא: כִּי־טוֹב אֶרֶץ אֲפִים מִגִּבּוֹר וּמִשָּׁל בְּרוּחוֹ מִלֵּכָד עִיר: כִּי־בַחֲקִי יוֹטֵל אֶת־הַגּוֹרֵל וְאִמִּי־הֵן־הֵן כָּל־מִשְׁפָּטוֹ: —

23The heart of a wise man teaches his mouth and increases learning on his lips. 24Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. 25The road ahead may seem right to a man, but in the end it is a road to death. 26[If] the appetite of a laborer [overcomes him] he labors just for it, compelled by his hunger. 27The lawless man digs up evil, and on his lips is a searing fire. 28A perverse man incites strife, and a whisperer alienates his friend. 29A violent man entices his companion, leading him in a way that is not good. 30He closes his eyes to devise deception; he bites his lip to allow evil to pass. 31Old age is a crown of glory; attained by the way of righteousness. 32One who is slow to anger is better than a mighty man, and one who rules over his passions [is better] than one who conquers a city. 33The lot is cast in one's lap, but the decision is from the Lord.¹

A. We begin with reminders as to the positive effect words can have.

- V. 23 → The heart of a wise man teaches his mouth and increases learning on his lips.
 - o Artscroll, setting out a general principle in the name of the Z'Chus Avos, provides one understanding of this verse based on the idea that “teaching” one’s mouth means controlling it and thereby limiting words spoken, because when one uses up the lifetime quota of words assigned to him, he will die. To that end, in analyzing Tehillim 58:2², Chullin 89a says that while one should “render himself like a mute”, this is not the case with “regard to words of Torah”, which ties nicely into the second half of the couplet about speaking with learning on the lips (presumably such words not counting towards one’s lifetime allotment).
- V. 24 → Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.
 - o Malbim sees this as a continuation of the previous pasuk, explaining how “learning on the lips” should be transmitted to others pleasantly, for the most positive effect.

B. We come to our first proverb repeated in Mishlei verbatim.

- V. 25 → The road ahead may seem right to a man, but in the end it is a road to death.
 - o This pasuk is identical to Mishlei 14:12, and is the first to be repeated verbatim.
 - o We previously discussed the statement at Bava Basra 14b-15a that “Chizkiyahu and his men wrote Yeshayahu, Mishlei, Shir HaShirim, and Kohelet.” Consistent therewith, Rabbi Yosef ben Yosef ibn Nachmias, a 14th century Spanish Rishon, states that “different people each knew a different mashal, and Chizkiyahu instructed . . . [their gathering] to decode their allusions and . . . Chizkiyahu hid some material that was too obscure.”³
 - o Artscroll’s commentary does not address the possibility that Mishlei is a collection of different groupings of proverbs from different sources. Instead, Artscroll suggests that “[i]nterpretations vary as to why it is repeated here,” in each case giving a different reason for why the verse that first appeared in chapter 14 now appears here (e.g., R. Saadiah Gaon says that when it appeared at v. 14:12 it related to spiritual matters – v. 14:11 mentions the house of the wicked/tent of the righteous - but that here it relates to the mundane).

¹ Mishlei Chapter 16.

² “Is it true that you were silent about the righteousness that you should have spoken, the equities [with which] you should have judged the children of men?”

³ <https://www.otzar.org.il/מה-פרק-כח-המשלי-משה-הנביא>. The last “major” subdivision of Mishlei begins at 25:1 with: “These too are Solomon’s proverbs, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, maintained.” Note that Rabbi Yosef may only be referring to this part.

C. After mentioning a man who chose the road to death, four more men (perhaps five, as discussed below) are now mentioned: A laborer with a voracious appetite, a lawless man, a perverse man, and a violent man.

- V. 26 → [If] the appetite of a laborer [overcomes him] he labors just for it, compelled by his hunger.
 - o On the premise that vv. 25 - 30 all deal with men who've made bad choices, I chose/elucidated this translation as referring to a glutton. Others see כּחץ ("compel") as a positive term, indicating control of one's hunger, stemming from the discipline created as a result of having to provide for oneself.
- V. 27 → The lawless man digs up evil, and on his lips is a searing fire.
- V. 28 → A perverse man incites strife, and a whisperer alienates his friend.
 - o Vv. 27 & 28 have obvious similarities. As for the lawless man, commentators seem to see him as a capable orator that can entice men towards evil (*i.e.*, digging a pit for them to fall into). The perverse man, on the other hand, does not have the power of persuasion, but compels his fellows to do evil by inciting quarrels through gossip-mongering.
- V. 29 → A violent man entices his companion, leading him in a way that is not good.
 - o Following up the previous two verses, the common perception that I pick up from the meforshim is that the violence that is being addressed relates to robbery and similar criminal activity, and that this man's charisma allows him to attract others to his criminal enterprise.
- V. 30 → He closes his eyes to devise deception; he bites his lip to allow evil to pass.
 - o We've just described three evil men. Many (*e.g.*, Rabbeinu Yonah and the Vilna Gaon) see this as elaborating on the foregoing men. Others (*e.g.*, Ralbag, Malbim and Metzudat David) see this as another person in the list of evil men, namely, "one" that devises deception with intense focus and refuses to call out evil.

D. After describing men worthy of being chastised, chapter 16 of Mishlei concludes by discussing righteous men.

- V. 31 → Old age is a crown of glory; attained by the way of righteousness.
 - o Meiri sees this pasuk as informing us that a sin by an elderly person is far worse than by a young person, as people respect the elderly (the "crown of glory"), but that allows the crown to be lost by a lack of righteousness.
- V. 32 → One who is slow to anger is better than a mighty man, and one who rules over his passions [is better] than one who conquers a city.
 - o We have discussed "self-control" before with respect to Mishlei in the context of anger⁴, and it parallels the verse Kohelet 7:9 "[d]o not be quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools." Here self-control is set forth as a quintessential positive attribute.
- V. 33 → The lot is cast in one's lap, but the decision is from the Lord.
 - o The use of lots appears in many places in Tanach, including Megillat Esther, where Haman casts lots; the Yom Kippur service, where lots determine the goat for Hashem and the goat for Azazel; the division of Eretz Yisrael among the tribes; Yonah, where lots identify Yonah as the cause of the storm; and elsewhere, including lots used to allocate roles, cities, and communal obligations. Here Mishlei 16:33 reminds us that even when man casts lots (flips a coin, rolls dice, etc.), the outcome is from Hashem.

⁴ Mishlei 14:29: "Being slow to anger shows insight, but a hothead elevates foolishness".



AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

SPRING-SUMMER EVENTS

**FRI-SAT
MAY 22-23**

SHAVUOT

SUN, MAY 24

**COMMUNITY
SOFTBALL GAME**
FOLLOWED BY PIZZA

SUN, JUNE 14

BOWLING NIGHT
FOR ADULTS

TUES, JUNE 23

ANNUAL MEETING
+ ICE CREAM SOCIAL

FRI, JULY 3

BBQ SHABBAT DINNER

SUN, JULY 12

SUMMER HIKE
AT RAMAPO VALLEY
COUNTY RESERVATION

For More Information Visit:

www.ahavatachim.org/aa-events/upcoming-events/

Perek in the Park

JUNE 27 & JULY 4 @ 4:15
Edison Park

Enjoy time at the playground.
At 4:15, we'll offer a relaxed 10-minute
parent-child learning activity for anyone
interested.

Led by Tzahi Cohen & Jay Herman (6/27)
and Sara Santacruz & Josh Brooks (7/4).

SNACKS AND FRUIT
WILL BE SERVED



AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY CENTER

For kids of all ages!





AHAVAT ACHIM
— קהלת אהבת אחים —
THE FAMILY SHUL

CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM INVITES YOU TO A

SHABBAT FRIDAY BBQ DINNER

Join us for a very special Shabbat,
as we celebrate with a themed
dinner and BBQ halachot shiur.
Celebrate 250 years of American
independence with your Ahavat
Achim family!

07.03.2026 | AFTER MAARIV

Early Bird Pricing:

RESERVATIONS MADE BEFORE 6/11:

ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - \$25

CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - \$10

CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - \$3

FAMILY MAX - \$70

RESERVATIONS MADE AFTER 6/11:

ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - \$30

CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - \$13

CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - \$5

FAMILY MAX - \$85

RSVP NOW!



Summer Hike at Ramapo Valley County Reservation

**SUNDAY,
JULY
12**

10:00 AM
Meet at the main
parking lot

Ramapo Valley Rd
(Route 202),
Mahwah, NJ

- Only ~20 minutes away from Fair Lawn!



HIKE OPTIONS:

A. SCARLET OAK POND TRAIL

- STROLLER FRIENDLY!
- PAVED LOOP AROUND THE POND
- PICNIC AREAS FOR RELAXING AND ENJOYING THE VIEWS

B. RIDGE LOOP - VISTA LOOP TRAIL

- ADVANCED OPTION, ~3 MILES
- SCENIC VIEWS WITH A RIVER
- A UNIQUE VIEW POINT WITH NATURAL CACTUS!

**RSVP HERE
BY 7/10**

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/SUMMERHIKE26](https://tinyurl.com/summerhike26)





PLEASE JOIN US AT
Ahavat Achim

BLOOD DRIVE

A few minutes out of your day
can save a life!

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8
1:45 PM – 7:45 PM



YOUR DONATION MATTERS

Thank You





Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

BALAK • בלק

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.

The Hardest Word to Hear

The story of Bilaam, the pagan prophet, begins with a bewildering set of non-sequiturs. It involves a sequence of events that seems to have no logic.

First, the background. The Israelites are approaching the end of their forty years in the wilderness. Already they have fought and won wars against Sihon, King of the Amorites and Og, King of Bashan. They have arrived at the plains of Moab - today, southern Jordan at the point where it touches the Dead Sea. Balak, King of Moab is concerned, and he shares his distress with the elders of Midian. The language the Torah uses at this point is precisely reminiscent of the reaction of the Egyptians at the beginning of the book of Exodus.

[The Egyptian Pharaoh] said to his people: *"Here, the children of Israel are more numerous and powerful than us..."* and he was disgusted at the Children of Israel. (Exodus 1:9-12)

[Balak, the King of Moab] was very fearful because of the people, because it was numerous, and Moab was disgusted at the Children of Israel.

(Numbers 22:3)

The strategy Balak adopts is to seek the help of the well-known seer and diviner, Bilaam. Again there is a literary evocation, this time of the words of God to Abraham:

God to Abraham: *"I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse."*

(Genesis 12:3)

Balak to Bilaam: *"I know that whoever you bless is blessed and whoever you curse is cursed."* (Numbers 22:6)

This time the parallel is ironic (indeed the Bilaam story is full of irony). In the case of

Abraham, it was God who blessed. In the case of Bilaam, the power was thought to reside in Bilaam himself. In fact the earlier statement of God to Abraham already prefigures the fate of Moab - one who tries to curse Israel will himself be cursed.

The historical background to the Bilaam narrative is well-attested. Several Egyptian pottery fragments dating from the 2nd millennium BCE have been found containing execration texts - curses - directed against Canaanite cities. It was the custom among pre-Islamic Arabs to hire poets thought to be under Divine influence to compose curses against their enemies. As for Bilaam himself, a significant discovery was made in 1967. A plaster inscription on the wall of a temple at Deir Alla in Jordan was found to make reference to the night vision of a seer called Bilaam - the earliest reference in archaeological sources to a named individual in the Torah. Thus, though the story itself contains elements of parable, it belongs to a definite context in time and place.

The character of Bilaam remains ambiguous, both in the Torah and subsequent Jewish tradition. Was he a diviner (reading omens and signs) or a sorcerer (practising occult arts)? Was he a genuine prophet, or a fraud? Did he assent to the Divine blessings placed in his mouth, or did he wish to curse Israel? According to some midrashic interpretations he was a great Prophet, equal in stature to Moses. According to others, he was a pseudo-prophet with an "evil eye" who sought Israel's downfall. What I want to examine here is neither Bilaam nor his blessings, but

the preamble to the story, for it is here that one of the deepest problems arises, namely: what did God want Bilaam to do? It is a drama in three scenes.

In the first, emissaries arrive from Moab and Midian. They state their mission. They want Bilaam to curse the Israelites. Bilaam's answer is a model of propriety: Stay the night, he says, while I consult with God. God's answer is unequivocal:

But God said to Bilaam, "*Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed.*"

(Numbers 22:12)

Obediently, Bilaam refuses the emissaries. Balak then redoubles his efforts. Perhaps more distinguished messengers and the promise of significant reward will persuade Bilaam to change his mind? He sends a second set of emissaries and gifts. Bilaam's reply is exemplary:

"Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord, my God."

(Numbers 22:18)

However, he adds a fateful rider:

"Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the Lord will tell me." (Numbers 22:19)

The implication is clear. Bilaam is suggesting that God may change His mind. But this is impossible. That is not what God does. Yet to our surprise, that is what God seems to do:

That night God came to Bilaam and said, *“Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you.”*

(Numbers 22:22)

Problem 1: first God had said, “Do not go.” Now He says, “Go.” Problem 2 appears immediately:

Bilaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Bilaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.

(Numbers 22:21-22)

God says, “Go.” Bilaam goes. Then God is very angry. Does God change His mind - not once but twice in the course of a single narrative? The mind reels. What is going on here? What is Bilaam supposed to do? What does God want? There is no explanation. Instead the narrative shifts to the famous scene of Bilaam’s donkey - itself a mystery in need of interpretation:

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road

into a field. Bilaam beat it to get it back on the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Bilaam’s foot against it. So he beat it again.

Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Bilaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. Then the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth, and it said to Bilaam, *“What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?”*

Bilaam answered the donkey, *“You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.”*

The donkey said to Bilaam, *“Am I not your own donkey, whom you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?”*

“You have not,” he said.

Then the Lord opened Bilaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn.

So he bowed low and fell facedown.
(Numbers 22:23-31)

The commentators offer various ways of resolving the apparent contradictions between God's first and second reply. According to Nahmanides, God's first statement, "*Don't go with them*" meant, "Don't curse the Israelites." His second – "*Go with them*" – meant, "Go but make it clear that you will only say the words I will put in your mouth, even if they are words of blessing." God was angry with Bilaam, not because he went but because he did not tell them of the proviso.

In the nineteenth century, Malbim and R. Zvi Hirsch Mecklenberg suggested a different answer based on close textual analysis. The Hebrew text uses two different words for "*with them*" in the first and second Divine replies. When God says, "Don't go with them" the Hebrew is *imahem*. When He later says "Go with them" the corresponding word is *itam*. The two prepositions have subtly different meanings. *Imahem* means "with them mentally as well as physically," going along with their plans. *Itam* means "with them physically but not mentally," in other words Bilaam could accompany them but not share their purpose or intention. God is angry when Bilaam goes, because the text states that he went *im* – with -them - in other words, he identified with their mission. This is an ingenious solution. The only difficulty is verse 35, in which the angel of God, having opened Bilaam's eyes, finally tells Bilaam, "*Go with the men.*" According to Malbim and Mecklenberg, this is precisely what God did not want Bilaam to do.

The deepest answer is also the simplest. The hardest word to hear in any language is the word "No". Bilaam had asked God once. God had said "No". That should have sufficed. Yet Bilaam asked a second time. In that act lay his fateful weakness of character. He knew that God did not want him to go. Yet he invited the second set of messengers to wait overnight in case God had changed His mind.

God does not change His mind. Therefore Bilaam's delay said something not about God but about himself. He had not accepted the Divine refusal. He wanted to hear the answer "Yes" – and that is indeed what he heard. Not because God wanted him to go, but because God speaks once, and if we refuse to accept what He says, God does not force His will upon us. As the Sages of the Midrash put it: "*Man is led down the path he chooses to tread.*"

The true meaning of God's second reply, "Go with them," is, "If you insist, then I cannot stop you going – but I am angry that you should have asked a second time." God did not change His mind at any point in the proceedings. In scenes 1, 2 and 3, God did not want Bilaam to go. His "Yes" in scene 2 meant "No" – but it was a "No" Bilaam could not hear, and was not prepared to hear. When God speaks and we do not listen, He does not intervene to save us from our choices. "Man is led down the path he chooses to tread." But God was not prepared to let Bilaam proceed as if he had Divine consent. Instead He arranged the most

elegant possible demonstration of the difference between true and false prophecy.

The false prophet speaks. The true prophet listens. The false prophet tells people what they want to hear. The true prophet tells them what they need to hear. The false prophet believes in his own powers. The true prophet knows that he has no power. The false prophet speaks in his own voice. The true prophet speaks in a voice not his (*"I am not a man of words"* says Moses; *"I cannot speak for I am a child"* says Jeremiah).

The episode of Bilaam and talking donkey is pure humour - and, as I have pointed out before, only one thing provokes Divine laughter, namely human pretension. Bilaam had won renown as the greatest prophet of his day. His fame had spread to Moab and Midian. He was known as the man who held the secrets of blessing and curse. God now proceeds to show Bilaam that when He so chooses, even his donkey is a greater prophet than he. The donkey sees what Bilaam cannot see: the angel standing in the path, barring their way. God humbles the self-important, just as He gives importance to the humble. When human beings think they can dictate what God will say, God laughs. And, on this occasion, so do we.

Some years ago, I was making a television programme for the BBC. The problem I faced was this. I wanted to make a documentary about *teshuvah*, repentance, but I had to do so in a way that would be intelligible to non-Jews as well as Jews, indeed to those who had no religious belief at all. What example

could I choose that would illustrate the point?

I decided that one way of doing so was to look at drug addiction and recovery. Addicts develop behaviours that they know are self-destructive, but they are part of their lifestyle. To break these habits involves immense reserves of will. An addict looking to address these self-destructive behaviours must acknowledge that the life they have led is harmful to them and to others, and needs to change. That seemed to me a secular equivalent of *teshuvah*, which could illustrate the message to viewers.

I spent a day in a rehabilitation centre, and it was heartbreaking. The young people there - they were aged between 16 and 18 - all came from broken families. Many of them had suffered abuse. Other than the workers at the centre, they had no networks of support. The staff were exceptional people. Their task was astonishingly difficult. They would succeed in getting the addicts to break the habit for days, weeks at a time, until then they would relapse and the whole process would have to begin again. I began to realise that their patience was little less than a human counterpart of God's patience with us. However many times we fail and have to begin again, God does not lose faith in us, and that gives us strength. Here were people doing God's work.

I asked the head of the centre - a social worker - what it was that she gave the young people to make a difference to their lives and give them the chance to change. I will never

forget her answer, because it was one of the most beautiful I ever heard. ‘We are probably the first people they have met who care for them unconditionally. And we are the first people in their lives who cared enough to say “No.”’

“No” is the hardest word to hear, but it is also often the most important - and the sign that someone cares. That is what Bilaam, humbled, eventually learned and what we, too, must discover if we are to be open to the Voice of God.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. Why is it easier to listen to people who tell us what we want to hear, rather than what we need to hear?
2. Thinking back to a time when you received a “no” when you really wanted a “yes”, did the refusal you help you in some way?
3. What is the most graceful way to accept a no?

● 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/balak/the-hardest-word-to-hear/>