

Please welcome back Rabbi Dov Goldzweig, our Yomim Noraim Ba'al Tefilah for over a decade, who will be at our shul to check mezuzas and tefillin this after Shacharit on Labor Day. If you have any questions, you can email the Rabbi beforehand at goldzweig@bezeqint.net.



CANDLE LIGHTING 7:05 PM | 23 ELUL | SEPTEMBER 5, 2026 | HAVDALA 8:07 PM

שבת פרשת נצבים-וילך SHABBAT PARSHAT NITZAVIM- VAYEILECH

Haftorah is Isaiah 61:10-63:9 (שוש אשיש). Pirkei Avot Chs. 5 & 6. We don't bless the month of Tishrei. We do say & יהי נועם ויהי קדוש after Shabbat.

FRIDAY EVENING

MINCHA **7:10 PM**

SHKIA 7:24 PM

TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 8:04 PM

SHABBAT

HASHKAMA **7:45 AM**

SHACHARIT - MAIN **9:00 AM**

POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR ≈9:30 AM

LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:41 AM

FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR ≈11:30 AM

PRE-MINCHA SHIUR 6:15 PM

MINCHA **6:55 PM**

SHKIA 7:22 PM

MAARIV **8:07 PM**

CAMP SHABBAT FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER

Camp Shabbat Friday Night Dinner is here. Thank you for everyone that made this happen.

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Agress family to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Amy's father, הרב ישראל, and by the Greene family to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Elliot's father, Harold Greene (Tzvi Hersch ben Shimon).

SIMCHAT TORAH KIDDUSH

To become a Platinum sponsor (\$180), Gold Sponsor (\$118) or a general sponsor (\$54), please email Steve at seplotnick@gmail.com. We also need donations of single malt Scotch.

התרת נדרים - HATARAT NEDARIM

After Shacharit on Friday we separate into two groups, one for English speakers and for those fluent in Hebrew, to effectuate hatarat nedarim, the annulment of vows. To be valid, hatarat nedarim must be said in a language one understands.

PRE-SELICHOT KUMZITZ/ D'VAR TORAH/SELICHOT

Motzei Shabbat at midnight, join our pre-selichot kumzitz, followed by a d'var Torah at 12:45 PM, and Selechet at 12:55 AM (Chatzot Halayla 12:56 AM).

MIKVAH CHAVA FAIGA OF FAIR LAWN/MEN'S HOURS

Book a time slot (starting 9/7) for Erev Rosh Hashanah here: [Mens Mikvah](#). For more info, go to page 2.

SUKKAH CONSTRUCTION AND SUKKAH HOP

We are looking for volunteers to help us assemble the Shul Sukkah on Sunday morning, September 20, at 9:00 AM. For our "Sukkah Hop" on the first day of Sukkot (September 26), we are looking for hosts. If you are available to assemble the Sukkah or be a Sukkah Hop host, contact Elliot Greene by voice or text at 201-519-7951.

CIDER AND SHIUR SOCIAL, WITH APPLE BAKING

Women only! Wednesday night, 8:30 PM. Details on page 2. RSVP here: [Apples](#).



SUNDAY
9/6

MONDAY
9/7

TUESDAY
9/8

WEDNESDAY
9/9

THURSDAY
9/10

FRIDAY
9/11

WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM

SHACHARIT	8:00 AM	6:20/8:00 AM	5:55 AM	5:55 AM	5:45 AM	5:30 AM
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM			7:00 AM	7:00 AM	7:00 AM	7:00 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV	7:09 PM	7:07 PM	7:05 PM	7:04 PM	7:02 PM	7:00 PM
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit	5:30 AM	5:31 AM	5:33 AM	5:34 AM	5:35 AM	5:36 AM
Gedolah	1:27 PM	1:26 PM	1:26 PM	1:25 PM	1:25 PM	1:24 PM
Shkia	7:21 PM	7:19 PM	7:17 PM	7:16 PM	7:14 PM	
Tzait	8:01 PM	7:59 PM	7:57 PM	7:56 PM	7:54 PM	

Rabbi Ely Shestack

President Jay Herman

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept. 9 - Cider and Shiur Social (women only), w/apple baking. 8:30 PM - 9:45 PM.

Sept. 19 - Kohelet Round Robin. Click here to sign up to discuss a chapter: [KOHELET](#).

Sept. 20 - Sukkah assembly and Etrog & Lulav sale.

Sept. 26 - Sukkah hop.

Oct. 10 - Birthday Kiddush.

Oct. 11 - Sukkah dismantling after Shacharit.

Nov. 7 - Birthday Kiddush.

Dec. 5 - Birthday Kiddush.

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



Sept. 19 - Birthday & Anniversary Kiddush

Sept. 27 - Kiddush is sponsored by the Winchester family on the Yartzeit of Steve's mother Helen Winchester ^{ע"ה}, Miriam Hendl bas Shimon.

Oct. 17 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by David & Lori Garfunkel in memory of both Jonathan ^{ע"ה} and Lori's mother רחל ברוניא ^{ע"ה}. Tootsie Markovitz ^{ע"ה}.

Oct. 24 - Kiddush is sponsored by Lori & David Garfunkel celebrating Uri's Auf Ruf and upcoming wedding to Abby Elson.

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH



To add a birthday/anniversary to upcoming lists (next Kiddush on Shabbat, Sept. 19), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the Sept. birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Sun. night, Sept. 13.

BOARD MEETINGS - 8:30 PM

- **October 13**
- **Nov. 24, Dec. 29, Jan. 26, Feb. 23, Mar. 30, May 11, June 29**

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](#).



CIDER AND SHIUR SOCIAL, WITH APPLE BAKING



This Wednesday night, 8:30 PM to 9:45 PM, join us for a relaxing pre-chag ladies night out at the Ahavat Achim Cider and Shiur Social, with apple baking! We'll start off sipping fresh apple cider while we dip into the Jewish history of the apple. You'll then be able to make and take home delectable oven-ready Yom Tov ready desserts! RSVP Here: [Apples](#).

MIKVAH CHAVA FAIGA OF FAIR LAWN/MEN'S HOURS

On Erev Rosh Hashana (Friday 9/11/26), the mikvah will be open for men's usage. Advance registration is strongly encouraged. Registration on our website fairlawnmikvah.org will open on the morning of Monday, September 7. Hours will be from 5:00 AM - 2:30 PM (no entry after 2:15 PM), men will be able to use the mikvah individually and privately, with appointments taking precedence over walk-ins. Each man (or family) will have a private changing room and will use the mikvah privately. Staff will be present to help facilitate a smooth operation. Bring your own towel, as towels and showers will NOT be provided or available.

GITA COOPERWASSER ^{ע"ה} YOUTH EVENTS

Sept. 5 - Pre-RH program/dinner, 3:30-5:30 PM

Sept. 13 - Youth playground meet up at 3:45 PM, followed by Tashlich for families with young children.

Sept. 19 - Shabbat Shuva Program, 3:30 PM, playground then dinner.

Sept. 20 - Donuts/Sukkah decoration 10 AM

Sept. 28 - Youth Sukkah Hop, with dinner at the last stop, 4:15 PM.

Oct. 3 - Simchat Torah Farewell to Sukkah & Kinderkafot.

Nov. 14 - Parent/Child Learning.

Dec. 5 - Chanukah program with children's seudah shlishit, followed by musical havdalah.

Dec. 19 - Parent/Child Learning.

Jan. 2 - Parent/Child Learning.

GITA COOPERWASSER ^{ע"ה} SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



• SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS:

3RD-5TH: ARIELYS & NICOLE

K-2ND: ABBY & BELANA

3 YRS-PRE-K: DANIELLE, DIAMOND & ZOE

- 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.

שְׁשֵׁנוּ וְשִׁמְחוּ בְּשִׂמְחַת הַתּוֹרָה



קהילת עץ חיים ד'פאסיק-קליפאון
Kehilas Eitz Chaim of Passaic-Clifton

**DEDICATED BY SHIRLEY E.
AND AVROM R. VANN**

IN MEMORY OF THEIR SON

לע"נ יצחק דוד ז"ל בן ר' אברהם הי"ו

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2026

כ"ד אלול תשפ"ו

כתיבת אותיות

AT THE VANN HOME

392 TERHUNE AVENUE, PASSAIC

STARTING AT 3:00 PM

הכנסת הספר

PROCESSION AT 5:00 PM

TO KEHILAS EITZ CHAIM

371 BROOK AVE, PASSAIC



Mishlei/Proverbs
Post-Hashkama Shiur 43 – Returning to Addressing His Son

כִּי־רַבּוֹת מַחְשְׁבוֹת בְּלִב־אִישׁ וְעֶצֶת ה'–ה'–ה' הִיא תִקְוָם: כִּי־תֵאֵת אֲדָם חֶסֶדוֹ וְטוֹב־רָשׁ מֵאִישׁ כָּזָב: כִּי־רָצָתָהּ–ה'–ה' לַחַיִּים וְשָׁבַע לְלֵין בַּל־יִפְקֹד רָע: כִּי־טָמֵן עֵצָל יָדוֹ בַּצִּלְחָת גַּם־אֶל־פִּיהוּ לֹא יִשְׁיבֶנָּה: כִּי־לֵץ תִּפְּהַ וּפְתִי יַעֲרֵם וְהוֹכִיחַ לִנְבוֹן יִבִּין דַּעַת: כִּי־מִשְׁדָּד־אָב יִכְרִים אָם בֶּן מִבִּישׁ וּמִחֲפִיר: כִּי־חֲדַל־בְּנִי לִשְׁמַע מוֹסֵר לְשׁוֹנוֹת מֵאֲמַר־יִדְעַת: כִּי־עַד בְּלִיעַל יִלְיֵץ מִשְׁפָּט וּפִי רָשָׁעִים יִבְלַע־אָנוֹן: כִּי־נִכְוֹנוֹ לַלְצִים שְׁפָטִים – אֲמַהֲלֵמוֹת לִגְוֹ פְּסִילִים: –

21Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's counsel that will prevail. 22What is desirable in a man is his kindness, but a poor man is better than a liar. 23Fear of the Lord leads to life; one who has it will rest satisfied, untouched by evil. 24A lazy man puts his hand into a serving bowl; but he will not even bring it back to his mouth. 25Strike a scoffer and a simple man will beware; reprove a man of understanding and he will understand knowledge. 26A son who ruins his father and drives away his mother causes shame and disgrace. 27Stop, my son, from straying from words of knowledge, and listen to instruction. 28A corrupt witness scoffs at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours wrongdoing. 29Punishments are in store for scoffers and blows for the backs of fools.¹

A. Man plans; God laughs.² The foundation of this Yiddish proverb might well be our V. 21 → Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's counsel that will prevail.

- Before Ashrei, in the Yehi Kavod section of Pesukei D'Zimra, we compare Hashem's plans to those of people, with v. 21 featured prominently. The relevant verses in Yehi Kavod in order are:
 - o Hashem frustrates the counsel of nations; He thwarts the plans of peoples.³
 - o **Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's counsel that will prevail.**⁴
 - o Hashem's counsel stands forever; His heart's designs endure from generation to generation.⁵
 - o For He spoke and it came into being; He commanded and it stood firm.⁶
- Rashi to Bereshit 37:20⁷, which involves the brothers' plan to kill Yosef followed by the declaration that they would then "see what will become of his dreams," offers an interpretation that this declaration was Hashem's thought, not the brothers', since if they killed Yosef it would be obvious that nothing could come of his dreams, and so why would they make this statement?

B. After making a comment about what is in a man's heart, the next three verses address certain positive and negative character traits, and consequences therefrom.

- V. 22 → What is desirable in a man is his kindness, but a poor man is better than a liar.
 - o This translation assumes that the first half of the couplet is putting forth a positive character trait, namely kindness. As the second half of the couplet refers to a "poor man", this perhaps suggests that the "kindness" being referred to in the first half of the couplet is charity, which the poor man has far less ability to provide. Nevertheless, the poor man is reminded that it is better to be poor than to give charity earned nefariously (e.g., by lying).
 - o Ralbag understands the word חֶסֶד to mean "disgrace", with the first half of the pasuk then understood to read: "A man's desires are his disgrace . . ." Ralbag perhaps sees this man as the man in verse 21 whose plans would not prevail, giving us insight into that man.

¹ Mishlei Chapter 19.

² Translation of the Yiddish saying "mentsh tracht, Gott lacht."

³ Tehillim 33:10.

⁴ Mishlei 19:21.

⁵ Tehillim 33:11.

⁶ Tehillim 33:9.

⁷ Which reads "So now, let us kill him, and we will cast him into one of the pits, and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him,' and we will see what will become of his dreams."

- V. 23 → Fear of the Lord leads to life; one who has it will rest satisfied, untouched by evil.
- V. 24 → A lazy man puts his hand into a serving bowl; but he will not even bring it back to his mouth.
 - o The Ikkarim points out that “fear” in any other context causes unrest. Only the fear of Hashem leads to a satisfying rest.
 - o In Mishlei 15:16 and 15:19, Shlomo earlier addressed laziness after a discussion of the merits of fearing Hashem. Assuming these pasukim relate back to the man whose plans will not prevail, we can contrast the lazy man who cannot even fulfill his plan to eat, to one who lets Hashem set the plan and is rewarded.

C. ArtScroll suggests reading the scoffer, simpleton, and one of understanding of verse 25 as three different children, perhaps in light of the father-son language in the next two verses.

- V. 25 → Strike a scoffer and a simple man will beware; reprove a man of understanding and he will understand knowledge.
- V. 26 → A son who ruins his father and drives away his mother causes shame and disgrace.
- V. 27 → Stop, my son, from straying from words of knowledge, and listen to instruction.
 - o The Metzudat Dovid sees no positive impact on the scoffer from being struck. The positive effect of striking the scoffer is only on the simpleton, *i.e.*, this sees the societal benefit of punishing the scoffer as relating to the simpleton who will now be “deterred” from committing the same act. The understanding man, however, needs no fear of consequences to move in the right direction, he simply needs proper instruction.
 - o If you follow the interpretation that the three men of verse 25 are all sons, then the logical connection would be that the scoffer is the son discussed in verses 26 and 27. For the first time since the father-son discourses of the first nine chapters of Mishlei do we have Shlomo addressing his son directly. Akin to “breaking the fourth wall” in theater or on screen, with the narrator speaking directly to the audience, Shlomo, perhaps seeing his son being struck (or that possibility) addresses his son directly.

D. If not for deterrence, why else would you punish?

- V. 28 → A corrupt witness scoffs at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours wrongdoing.
- V. 29 → Punishments are in store for scoffers and blows for the backs of fools.
 - o We previously discussed punishment for the scoffer as being for the benefit of simpleton, with no impact on the scoffer himself. What if there is no deterrence effect from the scoffer’s punishment? This suggests that he will still receive his punishment as retributive justice, *i.e.*, because justice requires it.
 - o Rabbeinu Yonah sees the “blows” to the “backs of fools” as being a different form of justice, *i.e.*, “rehabilitative punishment”. Unlike the scoffer, who cannot be made to see the error of his ways, the fool’s course can be corrected. The Torah tells us that for one who receives lashes: “Forty lashes shall he give him; he shall not exceed it, lest he continue to strike him beyond these with many blows, and your brother be degraded before your eyes.”⁸ And at Makkot 3:15 we are told: “Once he has been lashed, behold, he is as your brother.” So this would suggest that unlike the scoffer, there is hope for the fool.

⁸ Devarim 25:3.



WOMEN ARE INVITED TO A
PRE-ROSH HASHANAH

cider & shmir social

Dive into the apple's tale, sip cider with friends,
and take home a ready-to-bake apple treat!



SEPTEMBER 9TH | 8:30-9:45 PM

[RSVP here by 9/7](#)





EREV ROSH HASHANA 5787 MEN'S MIKVAH HOURS



Open to Men Only

Keilim mikvah closed all day

All patrons must shower at home and bring your own towel



Pricing for individual FL Residents:

\$30 pre-register; \$40 at door

Check, Zelle, or cash (exact change)

See website for non-resident or family pricing



Shomrei Torah

19-10 Morlot Ave, Fair Lawn, NJ

Enter at back



Friday, September 11

5:00 AM - 2:30 PM by appointment

No entry after 2:15

Registration opens 9/7/26
Register at:

www.fairlawnmikvah.org

Kesivah v'Chasima Tova,
The Fair Lawn Mikvah Association

Mikvah Chava Faiga
of Fair Lawn

HIGH HOLIDAY CHILDCARE

Drop off groups for children ages 2-12

Rosh Hashana @ 8:45 AM

Kol Nidre

Yom Kippur @ 8:45 AM

Mincha/Neilah

All groups end when davening ends

Shofar blowing for youth after mussaf.
Davening will take place during groups.

Sign up [here!](#)

Early bird (by August 30th): \$18

After August 30th: \$30

No prior registration: \$40

Use of the parent & me room is free for
those who only have child(ren) under 2

*must purchase seats to sign up



AHAVAT ACHIM

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY SHUL

KIDS PLAYGROUND

Meet Up!

**2ND DAY OF
ROSH
HASHANAH
9/13 @ 3:45 PM**

**@ the Ahavat Achim Playground
Followed by community-wide
Tashlich @ 4:45 PM**



AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

**Ahavat Achim Youth
invites children of all ages to**

Join Together for Shabbat Shuva

**RSVP here
by 9/14**

**Dairy &
Pareve
Dinner
Options!**



**Saturday
9/19
@ 3:30 PM**

**\$8/child
\$15 family
max**

**Join us for fun on
the playground at
3:30 followed by
a Shabbat Shuva
program and
dinner**





Join us for

DONUTS & SUKKAH DECORATIONS

SUNDAY, 9/20 FROM 10-11 AM

DAVID SCHWITZER SOCIAL HALL

CRAFT OPTIONS FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES!

BRING A PHOTO OF YOUR CHILD FOR
A SPECIAL PROJECT!

Sponsorship
opportunities
are available! E-mail
youth@ahavatachim.org
to learn more.

RSVP here
by 9/10

Youth Sukkah Hop

Monday, September 28th
4:20-6:30 PM

Kaplowitz-Czinn Home
4:20-5 PM



Head to stop 2 for dinner!
5-5:10 PM



Wigod Home
(dinner stop!)
5:10-5:50 PM



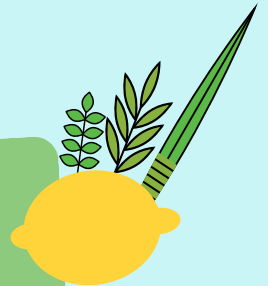
Head to stop 3!
5:50-6 PM



Shul Playground
6-6:30 PM



Chag Sukkot
Sameach!



RSVP [here](#) by 9/23 to obtain
the location details!



AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL



Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

NITZAVIM-VAYELECH • נצבים-ויילך

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.

To Renew our Days

The moment had come. Moses was about to die. He had seen his sister Miriam and brother Aaron pre-decease him. He had prayed to God – not to live forever, not even to live longer, but simply, 'Please let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and the Lebanon' (Deut. 3:25). His request was simple. Please let me complete the journey. Let me reach the destination. But God said no:

'It is enough!' the Lord said... 'Never speak to Me about this again!'

Deut. 3:26

God, who had acceded to almost every other prayer Moses prayed, refused him this.¹

What then did Moses do on these last days of his life? He told the people:

'At the end of every seventh year, the year of remission, of cancelling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that He will choose, you shall read out this law in the presence of all Israel, for them to hear. Assemble the people - men, women, and children, including migrants living in your towns - so that they may listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully keep all the words of this Law, and so that their children, who do not know it, may listen and learn to be in awe of the Lord your God, as long as you

¹ There is an important lesson here: It is the prayers we pray for others, and others pray for us, that are answered; not always those we pray for ourselves. That is why when we pray for the healing of the sick or the comfort of the mourners we do so specifically "in the midst of others" who are ill or bereaved. As Judah Halevi pointed out in *The Kuzari*, the interests of individuals may conflict with one another, which is why we pray communally, seeking the collective good.

live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.'

Deut. 31:10-13

There is no specific reference to this command in the later books of Tanach, but there are accounts of very similar gatherings, covenant renewal ceremonies, in which the king or his equivalent assembled the nation, reading from the Torah or reminding the people of their history, and calling on them to reaffirm the terms of their destiny as a people in covenant with God.

That, in fact, is what Moses had been doing for the last month of his life. The entire book of Deuteronomy is a restatement of the covenant, almost forty years and one generation after the original covenant at Mount Sinai. There is a similar occurrence in Tanach, after Joshua fulfils his mandate as Moses' successor, brings the people across the Jordan, leads them in their battles, and settles the land.² Another occurred many centuries later in the reign of King Josiah. His grandfather, Menasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years, was one of the worst of Judah's kings, introducing various forms of idolatry including child sacrifice. Josiah sought to return the nation to its faith, ordering (among other things) the cleansing and repair of the Temple. It was during this restoration that a copy of

the Torah was discovered,³ sealed in a hiding place to prevent it being destroyed during the many decades in which idolatry flourished and the Torah was almost forgotten. The king, deeply affected by this discovery, convened a *Hakhel*-type national assembly:

Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the Temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets - all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord - to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes, and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the Covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the Covenant.'

II Kings 23:1-3

The most famous *Hakhel*-type ceremony was the national gathering convened by Ezra and Nehemiah after the second wave of returnees from Babylon (Neh. 8-10).

² See chapter 24 of the Book of Joshua.

³ This is Radak and Ralbag's understanding of the event. Abarbanel finds it difficult to believe that there were no other copies of the Torah preserved even during the idolatrous periods of the nation's history and suggests that what was discovered sealed in the Temple was Moses' own Torah, written by his hand.

Standing on a platform by one of the gates to the Temple, Ezra read out the Torah, after positioning Levites throughout the crowd so that they could explain to the people what was being said. The ceremony that began on Rosh Hashanah culminated after Succot when the people collectively “bound themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord” (Neh. 10:29).

The other command from our parsha – the last Moses gave the people – was contained in the words: ‘Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites,’ understood by rabbinic tradition to be the command to write, or at least take part in writing, a Sefer Torah. Why specifically these two commands, at this time?

Something profound was being transacted here. Recall that God had seemed brusque in His dismissal of Moses’ request to be allowed to cross the Jordan. ‘Enough!... Never speak to Me about this again.’ Is this the Torah, and this its reward? Is this how God repaid the greatest of the prophets? Surely not.

In these last two commands, God was teaching Moses - and through him, Jews throughout the ages - what immortality is, on earth, not just in heaven. We are mortal because we are physical, and no physical organism lives forever. We grow up, we

grow old, we grow frail, we die. But we are not only physical. We are also spiritual. In these last two commands, we are taught what it is to be part of a spirit that has not died in four thousand years and will not die so long as there is a sun, moon, and stars.⁴

God showed Moses, and us, how to become part of a civilisation that never grows old. It stays young because it repeatedly renews itself. The last two commands of the Torah are about renewal: first collective, then individual.

Hakhel, the covenant renewal ceremony every seven years, ensured that the nation would regularly rededicate itself to its mission. I have often argued that there is one place in the world where this covenant renewal ceremony still takes place: the United States of America.

The concept of covenant played a decisive role in European politics in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, especially in Calvin’s Geneva and in Scotland, Holland, and England. Its longest-lasting impact, though, was on America, where it was taken by the early Puritan settlers and remains part of its political culture even today. Almost every Presidential Inaugural Address – every four years since 1789 – has been explicitly or implicitly a covenant renewal ceremony, a contemporary form of *Hakhel*. In 1987, speaking at the bicentennial celebration of the American Constitution, President Ronald Reagan described the constitution as a kind of

⁴ See Jeremiah 31.

“covenant we’ve made not only with ourselves but with all of mankind... It’s a human covenant; yes, and beyond that, a covenant with the Supreme Being to whom our founding fathers did constantly appeal for assistance.” America’s duty, he said, is “to constantly renew their covenant with humanity... to complete the work begun 200 years ago, that grand noble work that is America’s particular calling – the triumph of human freedom, the triumph of human freedom under God.”⁵

If *Hakhel* is national renewal, the command that we should each take part in the writing of a new Sefer Torah is personal renewal. It was Moses’ way of saying to all future generations: It is not enough for you to say, I received the Torah from my parents (or grandparents or great-grandparents). You have to take it and make it new in every generation.

One of the most striking features of Jewish life is that from Israel to Palo Alto, Jews are among the world’s most enthusiastic users of information technology and have contributed disproportionately to its development (Google, Facebook, Waze). But we still write the Torah exactly as it was done thousands of years ago – by hand, with a quill, on a parchment scroll. This is not a paradox; it is a profound truth. People who carry their past with them, can build the future without fear.

Renewal is one of the hardest of human undertakings. Some years ago, I sat with

the man who was about to become Prime Minister of Britain. In the course of our conversation he said, “What I most pray for is that when we get there (he meant, 10 Downing Street), I never forget why I wanted to get there.” I suspect he had in mind the famous words of Harold Macmillan, British Prime Minister between 1957 and 1963, who, when asked what he most feared in politics, replied, “Events, dear boy, events.”

Things happen. We are blown by passing winds, caught up in problems not of our making, and we drift. When that happens, whether to individuals, institutions, or nations, we grow old. We forget who we are and why. Eventually we are overtaken by people (or organisations or cultures) that are younger, hungrier, or more driven than us.

The only way to stay young, hungry, and driven is through periodic renewal, reminding ourselves of where we came from, where we are going, and why. To what ideals are we committed? What journey are we called on to continue? Of what story are we a part?

How precisely timed, therefore, and how beautiful, that at the very moment when the greatest of prophets faced his own mortality, that God should give him, and us, the secret of immortality – not just in heaven but down here on earth. For when we keep to the terms of the covenant, and making it new again in our lives, we live on

⁵ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, Ronald Reagan, 1987, 1040-43.

in those who come after us, whether through our children or our disciples or those we have helped or influenced. We “renew our days as of old” (Lamentations 5:21). Moses died, but what he taught, and what he sought, lives on.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. Why is renewal important?
2. How can remembering where we came from help us avoid losing sight of where we are going?
3. Is preserving tradition enough, or does every generation have a responsibility to renew and reinterpret it?

● 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/nitzavim/to-renew-our-days/>