

AHAVAT ACHIM AT 50
קהלת אהבת אחים
Yovel
THE FAMILY SHUL

CANDLE LIGHTING 5:37 PM | 20 CHESHVAN | OCTOBER 31, 2026 | HAVDALA 6:38 PM

שבת פרשת וירא
SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA

Haftorah is II Kings 4:1-37.

FRIDAY EVENING	
MINCHA	**5:40 PM**
SHKIA	5:55 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	6:35 PM

SATURDAY	
HASHKAMA	**7:45 AM**
SHACHARIT	**9:00 AM**
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈9:30 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	10:03 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	≈11:30 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	4:45 PM
MINCHA	**5:25 PM**
SHKIA	5:53 PM
MAARIV	**6:38 PM**

BARUCH DAYAN HA'EMET

We regret to inform you of the passing of Olga Jaeger, beloved mother of Debbie Lang.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

THE EVOLUTION OF WOMAN IN JUDAISM

The Role, Expectations, and Exceptions. Women of the community are invited to a night filled with words of Torah, delicious snacks and a craft event, this Saturday night, October 31, 8:00-9:00 PM. Location sent upon RSVP. RSVP here: EVOLUTION.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH

Next Shabbat, November 7, we celebrate November birthdays and anniversaries! To list a birthday or anniversary and sponsor ($36 per family for the month), click here: SIMCHA. Deadline is Monday, November 2.

FALL INTO EARLY SHABBAT DINNER

Join us on Friday, November 6, after davening, for the first early Shabbat dinner of the year! We will kick off the season of early Shabbat dinners with a festive community meal. RSVP by Sunday, November 1, here: DINNER.

VETERANS KIDDUSH

Honor those who served in the US armed forces by adding a star to our board and donating in their name to our special Kiddush on Shabbat, November 14. Submit names of veterans and sponsorships by November 10, here: VETERANS.

ORTHODOX UNION Enhancing Jewish Life	SUNDAY 11/1	MONDAY 11/2	TUESDAY 11/3	WEDNESDAY 11/4	THURSDAY 11/5	FRIDAY 11/6
WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM						
SHACHARIT	**8:00 AM**	**6:15 AM**	**6:25 AM**	**6:25 AM**	**6:15 AM**	**6:25 AM**
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**
MINCHA/MAARIV	**4:40 PM**	**4:39 PM**	**4:38 PM**	**4:37 PM**	**4:36 PM**	**4:30 PM**
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit	5:29 AM	5:30 AM	5:32 AM	5:33 AM	5:34 AM	5:35 AM
Gedolah	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:05 PM	12:05 PM	12:05 PM
Shkia	4:52 PM	4:51 PM	4:50 PM	4:49 PM	4:48 PM	
Tzait	5:32 PM	5:31 PM	5:30 PM	5:29 PM	5:28 PM	

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 6 - Fall Into Early Shabbat Friday Night Dinner, after davening. RSVP by Nov. 1 here: DINNER.
Nov. 26 - Thanksgiving Flag Football & Pie Donation. Start your Thanksgiving Day with community and gratitude! RSVP here: THANKSGIVING.
Dec. 2 - Chanukah Shiur w/ Dinner.
Dec. 11 - Shabbat Chanukah Dinner.

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



Nov. 7 - Birthday Kiddush.
Nov. 14 - Veterans Kiddush. Add a star to our board in honor of those who served. Submit names and sponsorships by Nov. 10 here: VETERANS.
Nov. 14 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick in memory of Betsy's mother, עלקא שיינדל בת צבי הירש, Elaine Perlmutter ע"ה.
Nov. 28 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Dina & Elliot Greene in memory of Dina's mother, זלדה בת צבי, Zelda Rubinowitz ע"ה, on her yahrzeit.
Dec. 5 - Birthday Kiddush.

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH



To add a birthday/anniversary to upcoming lists (next Kiddush on Shabbat, November 7), click here: SIMCHA. Listings/sponsorships are $36 per family per month. RSVP for the November birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Monday, Nov. 2.

BOARD MEETINGS - 8:30 PM

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

SHIURIM



- NEW FACETS ON 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, discussing fascinating halachic topics on Shabbat (weather permitting, at the playground tables through Thanksgiving weekend). This week: **"Hanging and Adjusting Hammocks and Swings on Shabbat"**
  - Nov. 7: "Watching Bar Mitzvahs Videoed on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 14: "Washing Dishes with Steel Wool on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 21: "Paying a Babysitter for Work on Shabbat"
- 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.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Nov. 21, Saturday night - The Fair Lawn Mikvah Association's Fourth Annual Mikvah Chava Faiga Dinner, a community evening of unity for all women, at Congregation Shomrei Torah. Guest speaker: Mrs. Chavah Kolakowski, "A Woman's Journey to Judaism."
7:30 PM - Doors open.
8:00 PM - Reception and raffle prizes.
8:30 PM - Parve/dairy dinner and program.
$80 early bird; $95 after Nov. 9; $72 for first-time registrants. To register, click here: Mikvah.

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

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH EVENTS

Nov. 5 - Hashem Imadi - Yachad Siddur Program for teens (6th grade and up), 5:30-7:00 PM, at the Mendel Balk Yachad Center, 259 Cedar Lane, Teaneck. Learning about the Siddur, meeting Yachad participants and other Fair Lawn teens. Dairy dinner included.
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 YOUTH LEADERS

3rd & Up:	ARIELYS & ALEXA
K-2nd:	ABBY, ADIRA & ISABELLA
2 Yrs - Pre-K:	DIAMOND, LE'ASIA & PERRI

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- All groups start at 9:00 AM:
  – Tot Shabbat (new name for Parent & Me), birth-2 years old
  – 2 years old-Pre-K
  – K-2nd Grade
  – 3rd Grade and up
- 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.

Shirley Vann has dedicated the attached Covenant & Conversation (used with permission of The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust) in memory of her beloved mother נעמא בת יצחק ע"ה.

Mishlei/Proverbs

Post-Hashkama Shiur 47 – Everything is in Heaven's Hand But Fear of Heaven, Except For Kings

א פַּלְגֵי־מַיִם לֵב־מֶלֶךְ בְּיַד־יְ–ה–וָ–ה עַל־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַחְפֹּץ יַטֶּנּוּ: ב כָּל־דֶּרֶךְ־אִישׁ יָשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו וְתֹכֵן לִבּוֹת יְ–ה–וָ–ה: ג עֲשֹׂה צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט
נִבְחָר לַי–ה–וָ–ה מִזָּבַח: ד רוּם־עֵינַיִם וּרְחַב־לֵב נֵר רְשָׁעִים חַטָּאת: ה מַחְשְׁבוֹת חָרוּץ אַךְ־לְמוֹתָר וְכָל־אָץ אַךְ־לְמַחְסוֹר: ו פְּעֻל אוֹצָרוֹת
בִּלְשׁוֹן שֶׁקֶר הֶבֶל נִדָּף מְבַקְשֵׁי־מָוֶת: ז שֹׁד־רְשָׁעִים יְגוֹרֵם כִּי מֵאֲנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט: ח הֲפַכְפַּךְ דֶּרֶךְ אִישׁ וְזָךְ וְיָשָׁר פָּעֻלּוֹ: ט טוֹב לָשֶׁבֶת
עַל־פִּנַּת־גָּג מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים וּבֵית חָבֶר: י נֶפֶשׁ רָשָׁע אִוְּתָה־רָע לֹא־יֵחַן בְּעֵינָיו רֵעֵהוּ: –

1Like channeled water is a king's heart in the hand of the Lord, directing it wherever He wishes. A man's every way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord probes hearts. 3Doing righteousness and justice is more pleasing to the Lord than an offering. 4Haughty eyes and a proud heart are the sinful cultivation of the wicked. 5The plans of the diligent lead to profit alone, but everyone who acts in haste comes only to want. 6Treasures gained by a lying tongue are a fleeting vapor heading one towards extinction. 7The robbery of the wicked will sweep them away, for they refused to do justice. 8A man's way may be crooked and strange, but the conduct of the pure is upright. 9It is better to dwell in a corner of an attic than with a quarrelsome wife in a spacious house. 10The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.[1]

A. **And Rabbi Ĥanina said: Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven. As it is stated: "And now Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you other than to fear** the Lord your God . . . ."[2]

- V. 1 → Like channeled water is a king's heart in the hand of the Lord, directing it wherever He wishes.
    - The Malbim reminds us that since the decisions of kings impact the masses, their free will cannot be unfettered. Recall that at first Pharaoh hardened his own heart,[3] but later it was Hashem that hardened Pharaoh's heart[4] when that was necessary for the required outcome.
- V. 2 → A man's every way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord probes hearts.
    - At Mishlei 16:2, we were taught: "All the ways of a man are clean (זַךְ) in his own eyes, but the Lord examines motivations." There we understood it as Shlomo letting us know that we have blind spots when it comes to evaluating ourselves, and that one's thoughts can be set aright by trusting in Hashem's direction (per the following verse, Mishlei 16:3).
    - The Bnei Shlomo sees our pasuk as being written in the singular form to address the "will" of a person, and not his singular actions.
    - The Meiri translates "תֹּכֵן" not as "probes", but as "calculates". While a man has free will to make his own theological conclusions, thereby establishing his "way", reaching those conclusions as a result of our own analysis must fall short due to our own limitations. But even with free will, Hashem is available to assist in our calculations of the heart.
- V. 3 → Doing righteousness and justice is more pleasing to the Lord than an offering
    - One of the most common sentiments expressed throughout Nevi'im and Ketuvim.[5] Shlomo reminds us here of one of the most repeated "miscalculations" of man.
- V. 4 → Haughty eyes and a proud heart are the sinful cultivation of the wicked.
    - Here Shlomo reminds us that man's "miscalculations" are commonly a result of arrogance.

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[1] Mishlei Chapter 21.

[2] Berachot 33b, referencing Devarim 10:12.

[3] Shemot 8:11 – "When Pharaoh saw that there was relief [from the frogs], he hardened his heart, and he did not hearken to them [Moshe and Aharon], as the Lord had spoken."

[4] Shemot 10:1 – "The Lord said to Moses: 'Come to Pharaoh for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants [after the plague of hail], in order that I may place these signs of Mine in his midst'." Compare to Shemot 9:12, where it is said that Hashem strengthened Pharaoh's heart.

[5] *E.g.*, I Shmuel 15:22 – "But Samuel said: 'Does GOD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to GOD's command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams'."

B. After establishing free will, and its limitations as it relates to reaching a correct assessment without Hashem's assistance, Shlomo sets forth how this limitation applies to the means of accumulation.

- V. 5 → The plans of the diligent lead to profit alone, but everyone who acts in haste comes only to want.
    - At Mishlei 11:14 we were told: "Without strategy the people fall, but with many counselors there is victory." Taking our pasuk together with Mishlei 11:14, perhaps being "diligent" in the economic sense refers to consulting with advisors, while "haste" refers to making rash decisions without the help of advisors.
- V. 6 → Treasures gained by a lying tongue are a fleeting vapor ("הֶבֶל") heading one towards extinction.

  V. 7 → The robbery of the wicked will sweep them away, for they refused to do justice.
    - This is the second time we come across the term הֶבֶל, vapor, vanity or futility, in Mishlei.[6] At Mishlei 13:11 we were told that wealth earned through הֶבֶל will be lost. Here we are told that wealth gleaned by deceit will be like fleeting vapor, and perhaps the liars and robbers themselves (or their neshamot) are destined for extinction or to be swept away, respectively.

C. Shlomo now shifts from "free will" to the choice of a man's "way".

- V. 8 → A man's way may be crooked and strange, but the conduct of the pure is upright.
    - The term "הַפַּכְפַּךְ" or crooked, which makes its sole appearance in Tanach here, is understood by Rabbeinu Yonah as "inconsistent" and by Rabbi Steinsaltz as "erratic".[7]
    - Our translation follows Rashi's understanding that "וְזָר" means "and strange", meaning foreign, as with the "זָרָה", the strange woman, of the father-son discourses.[8]
- V. 9 → It is better to dwell in a corner of an attic than with a quarrelsome wife in a spacious house.
    - The Ibn Ezra sees the reference to the roof's corner as being a very sturdy place (as opposed to the center of the roof that is more likely to collapse), albeit a location that requires one to bear even more discomfort than simply confining oneself to the attic.
    - While many see this as actual marital advice to those having to bear quarrelsome wives (*e.g.*, Daat Sofrim), many others see the nagging wife as a metaphor for distractions from worthwhile endeavors (*e.g.*, Vilna Gaon, who sees the reference to the nagging wife as a metaphor for people who engage in Torah disputes only for the sake of winning an argument).
- V. 10 → The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.
    - Based on the Ralbag's understanding, I would suggest that Shlomo sees this as an observation about one who has made a theological decision that would constitute what we would call "strange" or "foreign" based on verse 8. If this person's conclusions were truly reached with an unbiased mind and an open heart, he would naturally gravitate to people reaching similar conclusions and having the same worldview. On the other hand, if he rejects his fellows who seemingly have the same value system, it would indicate that he chose the "foreign" path as a means to fulfill evil desires.

[6] Its next and last use in Mishlei will appear in Eishet Chayil, Mishlei 31:30, in the context of fading physical beauty.
[7] Artscroll Tanach Series, Mishlei Vol. 2, footnote 1 on page 420, suggests a possible connection of the word hypocrite to the term "הַפַּכְפַּךְ", albeit the term hypocrite is more commonly understood to have derived from the Greek word "hypokritēs" (ὑποκριτής).
[8] *E.g.*, Mishlei 2:16.

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

THE EVOLUTION OF WOMAN IN JUDAISM:

THE ROLE, EXPECTATIONS, AND EXCEPTIONS

Saturday October 31, 2026
8pm - 9pm
Location sent upon RSVP

Women of the community are invited to a night filled with:


words of Torah

delicious snacks



a craft event

RSVP HERE:
tinyurl.com/evolutionwoman2026

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

FALL INTO EARLY SHABBAT WITH US!

RSVP by 11/1!

Join us for the first early Shabbat dinner of the year as we *fall* into the Shabbat spirit!

Friday, November 6th after davening (~5:30pm)

Early Bird Pricing before 10/22:	**Pricing after 10/23:**
ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $25	ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $30
CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $10	CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $13
CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $3	CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $5
FAMILY MAX - $70	FAMILY MAX - $85

tinyurl.com/AAFall2026

events@ahavatachim.org

CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM

PRESENTS

VETERAN'S DAY KIDDUSH

WE INVITE YOU TO HONOR THOSE WHO SERVED IN THE US ARMED FORCES BY ADDING A STAR TO OUR BOARD AND DONATING IN THEIR NAME TO OUR SPECIAL KIDDUSH ON NOVEMBER 14TH.

Since 1926, November 11th has been a day to remember both living veterans and those who have passed on. Join us as we honor and celebrate the selfless service of millions of veterans who have defended our freedoms and way of life by sharing the names of those who have served. The names will be displayed at the Kiddush.

SUBMIT NAMES OF VETERANS OR SPONSORSHIPS HERE.
TINYURL.COM/AAVETERANS2026

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

FOURTH ANNUAL
MIKVAH CHAVA FAIGA DINNER

A Community Evening of Unity

FAIR LAWN
MIKVAH
ASSOCIATION

November 21, 2026
8-10 PM
Doors open 7:30

Congregation
Shomrei Torah

$80 Early Bird
$95 After 11/9
NEW!
$72 for first time registrants

Sponsorship Opportunities Available

bit.ly/flmikvah2026

DINNER COMMITTEE

Stephanie Botvinik Carol Cohen Hodayah Felzenberg Lori Garfunkel Avigayil Geller Zahava Ginsberg Dani Goldberg Chaiy Haimovich Tziporah Koslowsky Dodi Lamm Jessica Listhaus Denise Miller Pamela Pollack Hendel Rosenfeld Shira Teichman Leora Weitzen Leora Vinagray

SCFL SEPHARDIC CENTER OF FAIR LAWN
YOUNG ISRAEL
ANSHEI LUBAVITCH אנשי ליובאוויטש
AHAVAT ACHIM קהלת אהבת אחים THE FAMILY SHUL
SHOMREI TORAH שומרי תורה
CONGREGATION DARCHEI NOAM OF FAIR LAWN, NJ

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

Start the day off with community and gratitude!









THANKSGIVING DAY FOOTBALL & PIE DONATION

November 26, 2026

9:30am – 11:30am:
Flag Football

12:00pm – 1:00pm:
Pie Donation to Police and Volunteer Ambulance Corp

TINYURL.COM/AATHXGIVING2026

EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG

CHILDREN'S CORNER
@
SEUDAH SHLISHIT

1ST-5TH GRADERS

10 QUESTIONS IN 10 MINUTES!

EXCLUSIVE KIDS TABLE
FEATURING TORAH QUESTIONS
WITH RABBI SHESTACK!
EARN TICKETS FOR PARTICIPATING!

RUNNING FROM 10/24 UNTIL PESACH

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

For kids of All Ages

EARN TICKETS! REDEEM PRIZES!

12 05693 3053 4

Earn tickets for attending groups & other shul events with your friends!
Bonus tickets from Rabbi Shestack for asking questions, giving Divrei Torah & more!

2nd grade & under can redeem a prize for each 25 tickets!

3rd grade + can redeem an amazon gift card for each 50 tickets!

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FOURTH ANNUAL
MIKVAH CHAVA FAIGA DINNER

A Community Evening of Unity

FAIR LAWN MIKVAH ASSOCIATION

Mrs. Chavah Kolakowski
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SCFL SEPHARDIC CENTER OF FAIR LAWN

YOUNG ISRAEL

ANSHEI LUBAVITCH אנשי ליובאוויטש

AHAVAT ACHIM קהלת אהבת אחים THE FAMILY SHUL

SHOMREI TORAH שומרי תורה

CONGREGATION DARCHEI NOAM OF FAIR LAWN, NJ דרכי נעם

Covenant & Conversation

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

Vayera

WRITTEN BY RABBI SACKS IN 5768 (2007–2008)

The Music of Ambivalence

The Torah does not have a word for ambivalence (the nearest is Elijah's question to the Baal-worshipping Israelites: "How long will you waver between two opinions?"). It does, however, have a tune for it. This is the rare note known as the *shalshelet*. It appears three times in Bereishit, each time at a moment of crisis for the individual concerned.[1] In each case it signifies an existential crisis. The agent is called on to make a choice, one on which his whole future will depend, but he finds that he cannot. He is torn between two alternatives, both of which exercise a powerful sway on him. He must resolve the dilemma one way or another, but either way will involve letting go of deeply felt temptations or deeply held aspirations. It is a moment of high psychological drama.

The *shalshelet* is an unusual note. It goes up and down, up and down, as if unable to move forward to the next note. It was the 16th century commentator Rabbi Joseph Ibn Caspi (in his commentary to Bereishit 19:16) who best understood what it was meant to convey, namely a psychological state of uncertainty and indecision. The graphic notation of the *shalshelet* itself looks like a streak of lightning, a "zigzag movement" (*tenuah me'uvetet*), a mark that repeatedly moves backwards and forwards. It conveys frozen motion — what Hamlet called *the native hue of resolution sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought* — in which the agent is torn by inner conflict. The *shalshelet* is the music of ambivalence.

One instance occurs in Genesis 24:12. Abraham has sent his servant (not identified in the text but taken by the commentators to be Eliezer) to find a wife for his son Isaac. He goes to the city of Haran where Abraham's family remained while Abraham himself went on to the land of Canaan. Arriving at the town's well, Eliezer proposes a test: the woman who comes to draw water, offers some to the traveller, and in addition gives water to his camels, will be the one chosen by God for his master's son. Over the "and he said" introducing his request of God that this test should succeed, the Masoretic tradition has placed a *shalshelet*.

The commentators identify multiple sources of ambivalence at this point. First, was the test permitted? Jewish law forbids relying on "omens" (Deut. 18:10, Hullin 95b), and Eliezer may have felt that his test was dangerously close to pagan practice.[2] Ibn Caspi himself suggests that Eliezer was unsure as to whether a single test like this was sufficient grounds on which to base so fateful a

1 The *shalshelet* note does appear a fourth time in the Torah — in Vayikra 8:23, where its significance is less apparent — but we will be focusing on the implication of the three occurrences in Sefer Bereishit.

2 Ran to Hullin 95b, however, states that Eliezer's conduct was legitimate; he sought not an omen but a sign of the woman's character.

decision as the choice of a marriage partner for Isaac.

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 59:9), however, offers the most insightful explanation. Eliezer had mixed feelings not about the test but about the whole mission itself. Until that point, says the Midrash, he had been 'sitting and weighing whether his own daughter was suitable for Isaac.' He had hoped, in other words, that one way or another, Abraham's estate would pass to him.

There are two cues that led the Midrash to this hypothesis. The first is that when Abraham first spoke to God about his childlessness, he said: 'My Lord God, what will You have given me if I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' (Gen. 15:2). Eliezer, at that time, had reason to hope that he would be Abraham's heir.

The second is that when Abraham charges him with the mission to find a wife for his son, he replies, 'What if [*ulai*] the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land?' As Ibn Ezra notes (Commentary to Psalm 116:16), the word *ulai* is not always neutral. Sometimes it signifies an eventuality one does not want to happen, but at others it indicates an event one does wish for. Eliezer's "what if" may have been an unconscious expression of the fact that, with half his mind, he wanted the mission to fail. That would once again place him or his daughter in a position to be Abraham's heir.

It was therefore with profoundly mixed feelings that he prayed for a woman to appear who would be God's choice of Isaac's wife.

More dramatic still is the case of Joseph. Child of a shepherd (Jacob), an almost youngest son, hated by his brothers and sold by them into slavery, he finds himself in Egypt as head of household to one of its prominent citizens, Potiphar. Left alone with his master's wife, he finds himself propositioned by her:

> Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph. "Lie with me," she said. But he refused …
>
> Bereishit 39:6-8

Over 'he refused', tradition has placed a *shalshelet*.

We can imagine the conflict in Joseph's mind at that moment. On the one hand, his entire moral sense said 'No'. It would be a betrayal of everything his family stood for: their ethic of sexual propriety and their strong sense of identity as children of the covenant. It would also be, as Joseph himself says, a betrayal of Potiphar himself: 'With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?'

And yet, the temptation must have been intense. He was in an urban civilisation of a kind he had not seen before. It was his first experience of "bright lights, big city." He was far from home. No one could see him. After all the hostility he had suffered in his childhood, being propositioned by Potiphar's wife must have been flattering as well as seductive. It was a decisive moment. A slave, with no realistic hope of rescue, was he to become an Egyptian, with all the sexual laissez faire that implied? Or would he remain faithful to his past, his conscience, his identity?

The Talmud gives a graphic description of his inner torment:

> The image of his father appeared to him in the window and said, "Joseph, your brothers' names are destined to be inscribed on the stones of the [High Priest's] *ephod*, and you will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased? Do you want to be called an adulterer?"

The *shalshelet* is an elegant commentary to Joseph's crise de conscience. In the end, Joseph refuses, but not without deep inner struggle.

Which brings us to the third case (chronologically the first) in Vayera. Here the conflict is explicit. Two of the angels who had visited Abraham now come to Lot in Sodom. They tell him the city and

its inhabitants are about to be destroyed. He and his family must leave immediately. But Lot delays:

> The visitors said to Lot, "Who else do you have here — children-in-law, sons, or daughters, or anyone else in the city? Bring them out of here, because we are about to destroy this place. So great is the outcry against them before the Lord that He has sent us to destroy it."
> Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, the men who were betrothed to his daughters, and told them, "Get up and leave this place: the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought him laughable.
> As dawn was breaking, the angels hurried Lot, "Get up!" they said. "Take your wife and your two daughters here, or you will be swept away amid the city's sin." Still *he hesitated*. So the men seized him, his wife, his two daughters by the hand, and led them safely outside the city, for the Lord had mercy upon him.
>
> Gen. 19:12-16

Over 'he hesitated' is a *shalshelet*.

Lot's hesitation goes to the core of his identity. We recall that earlier, when he and Abraham agreed to separate to end the quarrel between their herdsmen, 'Lot raised his eyes and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan up to Tzoar was well-watered. It was like the garden of the Lord... So Lot chose for himself the entire plain of the Jordan. He travelled eastward…' (Gen. 13:10-11). He chose to make his home in Sodom, despite the fact that - as the Torah states - at that point its inhabitants 'were evil, great sinners against the Lord' (Gen. 13:13).

When we see Lot in chapter 19, he and his family have already become profoundly assimilated. His daughters are set to marry local men. On the phrase at the beginning of the chapter, 'Lot was sitting in the city gate,' the Sages said that 'he had just been appointed as a judge' - the gate of the city being the place where, in Abrahamic times, the judges and elders sat to resolve disputes. Lot does not see himself, as did Abraham, as a 'stranger and temporary resident'. He has decided to put down roots in the Jordan valley and the cities of the plain. This is henceforth where he belongs — so much so that the visitors have to physically drag him away.

Lot's sense of belonging, however, is either naiveté or self-deception. The text makes this clear at three points. The first is the attempted sexual assault on Lot's visitors (Gen. 19:4-5). Evidently the people of Sodom do not take kindly to strangers. This is the first hint that perhaps Lot too is, in their eyes, a stranger. In fact, he is. The Torah, in its second indication, is brutally explicit:

> "Get out of our way," they replied [to Lot, when he begged them to respect his visitors. Then they said,] "This fellow came here as a migrant, and now he is setting himself up as a judge! We'll treat you worse than them."
>
> Gen. 19:9

The third comes when he tells his daughters' husbands that they must escape because the city is about to be destroyed, 'But his sons-in-law thought him laughable' (Gen 19:14). Lot's elaborate new identity is about to come crashing down about him - not only because of the impending destruction but because he has discovered in successive blows that he has not been accepted in this place. Sodom hates strangers, they still consider Lot 'a migrant', and his sons-in-law regard him as a fool.

Yet despite this, he hesitates. He has invested too much of himself in the project of making his home among the people of the plain. He is a prime example of what Leon Festinger called 'cognitive dissonance'. According to Festinger, the need to avoid dissonance is fundamental to human beings, otherwise it creates unbearable tension. It is this tension that Lot cannot resolve - and which is signalled by the *shalshelet* over 'he hesitated'. It was the ultimate existential question, 'Who am I?' Having tried so hard to become one-of-them, he finds it almost impossible to tear himself away. (There were, tragically, many Jews in Germany and Austria in the 1930s who refused to leave because they would not or could not believe the evidence around them, that Hitler was serious in his threats to destroy Jews).

Incidentally, Festinger's theory also explains the behaviour of Lot's wife who 'looked back', against

the explicit instruction of the angels, 'and was turned into a pillar of salt.' Festinger called this syndrome 'post-decision dissonance'. He predicted that the more important the issue, the longer the person delays a decision and the harder it is to reverse, the more he or she will agonise over whether they have made the right choice. They have second thoughts; they need reassurance; they 'look back'.

The *shalshelet* over Lot's hesitation is no mere detail of the biblical text. It is, in a real sense, the story of the modern Jew. Entering mainstream society for the first time, and yet encountering overt or covert antisemitism, many nineteenth-century European Jews became ambivalent about their identity. They tried to hide it and to assimilate. They became secular Marranos. It did not work. The more they strove to be like everyone else, the more conspicuous they were, and the stronger antisemitism grew. They themselves lost much in the process - not only their Jewish heritage itself, but also the simple capacity to know and take pride in who they were.

The lives of Lot and Abraham exemplify for all time the contrast between ambivalence and the security that comes from knowing who one is and why. Lot, who tried to become someone else, found himself regarded by his neighbours as an alien, an arriviste, an interloper, a parvenu. To his own sons-in-law he was 'laughable'. Abraham lived a different kind of life. He fought a war on behalf of his neighbours. He prayed for them. But he lived apart, true to his faith, his mission and his covenant with God. What did they think of him? Early in the next sedra – Chayei Sarah - the Hittites call him 'a prince of God in our midst' (Gen. 23:6).

That equation has not changed. Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They are embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism. Never be ambivalent about who and what you are..

Around the Shabbat Table



- When does the desire to belong become a danger to our Jewish identity, and how can we distinguish between reasonable integration and maintaining our Judaism?
- Eliezer, Joseph, and Lot each experience a moment of inner conflict. What helps a person act on their deepest convictions when powerful competing desires pull them elsewhere? ?

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Vayera: The Message and the Messengers

DEVELOPED BY SHOSH HILL

parsha recap

Avraham is visited by three strangers who are in fact angels in disguise, sent by God. Although he is in pain from his brit milah, Avraham hurries to welcome them and gives them a fine meal. One of the angels has come to heal Avraham. Another comes to tell Avraham and his wife Sarah that they will soon have a son. The third angel is on the way to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Amorrah.

As the angels leave, God wonders whether Avraham should be told what will happen to Sodom and Amorrah. He decides that because Avraham will become a great leader who teaches people to do what is right and fair, he deserves to know.

→ What does Avraham's behaviour teach us? Is it possible to be kind even when we are not feeling great ourselves?

→ Why do you think God wanted Avraham to know about the cities before they were destroyed?

a closer look

לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט

"I have chosen him so that he may direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just."
(BEREISHIT 18:19)

RABBI SACKS TEACHES US:

'The Bible tells us very little about Avraham that might explain why he is chosen for the mission he undertakes. It does not call him righteous, as it does in the case of Noach. It does not portray him as a miracle worker, as it does Moshe. The only place in the Bible to explain why Avraham is chosen is this verse. He is chosen because he will hand his way of life on to future generations.'

Source: *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?*, ch. 2.

moral matters

LET'S DISCUSS!

→ How will Avraham 'hand his way of life on to '**future generations**'?

→ How do you think Avraham's example of '**doing what is right and just**' (לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט) can help people today?

→ How can you follow Avraham's example **in your own life**?

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