בס"ד

Our shul logo in 1991

AHAVAT ACHIM AT 50
קהלת אהבת אחים
Yovel
THE FAMILY SHUL

CANDLE LIGHTING 4:22 PM | 4 KISLEV | NOVEMBER 14, 2026 | HAVDALA 5:24 PM

שבת פרשת תולדות
SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT

Haftorah is Malachi 1:1-2:7.

FRIDAY EVENING	
MINCHA	**4:25 PM**
SHKIA	4:40 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	5:20 PM
SATURDAY	
HASHKAMA	**7:45 AM**
SHACHARIT	**9:00 AM**
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈9:30 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:12 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	≈11:30 AM
GEDOLAH	12:06 PM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	3:30 PM
MINCHA	**4:10 PM**
SHKIA	4:39 PM
MAARIV	**5:24 PM**

VETERANS KIDDUSH

This Shabbat's Kiddush honors those who served in the US armed forces. Thank you to all who added a star to our board and donated in their name.

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick in memory of Betsy's mother, עלקא שיינדל בת צבי הירש, Elaine Perlmutter ע"ה.

MAZEL TOV



Mazel tov to Sara Molinksy & Steven Shtaynberger on the birth of a daughter.

יגדלוה לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים

May they raise her to Torah, chuppah and good deeds.

PARENT/CHILD LEARNING

Parent/Child Learning is this Saturday night, November 14, at 6:10 PM, for children in 1st grade and up. Rabbi Shestack will lead a discussion on "Shema: When we say Shema each night, everything will be alright," and we will design our own Shema bracha cards. Pizza dinner will be served!

BERGEN COUNTY CHANUKAH TOY DRIVE



We are proud to be participating in the Annual Bergen County Chanukah Toy Drive again this year! A donation box will be in the shul lobby through Thursday, November 19. Please drop off new, unwrapped gifts for children and teens. You can also donate directly from the toy drive's Amazon wish list by clicking here: TOY DRIVE.

ORTHODOX UNION	SUNDAY 11/15	MONDAY 11/16	TUESDAY 11/17	WEDNESDAY 11/18	THURSDAY 11/19	FRIDAY 11/20
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	**4:26 PM**	**4:25 PM**	**4:24 PM**	**4:24 PM**	**4:23 PM**	**4:20 PM**
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit	5:44 AM	5:45 AM	5:46 AM	5:47 AM	5:49 AM	5:50 AM
Gedolah	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM
Shkia	4:38 PM	4:37 PM	4:36 PM	4:36 PM	4:35 PM	
Tzait	5:18 PM	5:17 PM	5:16 PM	5:16 PM	5:15 PM	

Rabbi Ely Shestack

President Jay Herman

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 8-19 - Bergen County Chanukah Toy Drive: drop new, unwrapped gifts for children and teens in the box in the shul lobby, or donate from the Amazon wish list by clicking here: TOY DRIVE.

Nov. 26 - Thanksgiving Day Football & Pie Donation. Start the day off with community and gratitude! Flag Football, 9:30-11:30 AM; Pie Donation to Police and Volunteer Ambulance Corp, 12:00-1:00 PM. RSVP here: THANKSGIVING.

Dec. 2 - Chanukah Shiur w/ Dinner.

Dec. 6 - Boker Tov Chanukah, 9:15 AM. Join Ahavat Achim for a spiritually uplifting Shacharit w/ Musical Hallel, followed by Arts & Crafts for kids, and a delicious bagel and sufganiyot brunch! RSVP here: BOKER TOV.

Dec. 11 - Shabbat Chanukah Dinner.

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



Nov. 28 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Dina & Elliot Greene in memory of Dina's mother, זולדה 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, December 5), click here: SIMCHA. Listings/sponsorships are $36 per family per month. RSVP for the December birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Sun. night, Nov. 29.

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: **"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 - Fair Lawn Mikvah Association's Fourth Annual Mikvah Chava Faiga Dinner for all women, 7:30 PM, at Shomrei Torah. Speaker: Mrs. Chavah Kolakowski. $80 early bird; $95 after Nov. 9; $72 first-time. Register here: Mikvah.

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

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH EVENTS

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

Dec. 19 - Parent/Child Learning.

Dec. 19 - Teen event at Humdingers. Stay tuned for more details!

Jan. 2 - Parent/Child Learning.

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH LEADERS

3rd & Up:	ARIELYS & ZOE
K-2nd:	ABBY, CASSANDRA & HAILEY
2 Yrs - Pre-K:	ADIRA, DIAMOND & 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 49 – Victory Belongs to Hashem

כארֹדֵף צְדָקָה וָחָסֶד יִמְצָא חַיִּים צְדָקָה וְכָבוֹד: כבעִיר גִּבֹּרִים עָלָה חָכָם וַיֹּרֶד עֹז מִבְטֶחָהּ: כגשֹׁמֵר פִּיו וּלְשׁוֹנוֹ שֹׁמֵר מִצָּרוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ: כדזֵד יָהִיר לֵץ שְׁמוֹ עֹשֶׂה בְּעֶבְרַת זָדוֹן: כהתַּאֲוַת עָצֵל תְּמִיתֶנּוּ כִּי־מָאֲנוּ יָדָיו לַעֲשׂוֹת: כוכָּל־הַיּוֹם הִתְאַוָּה תַאֲוָה וְצַדִּיק יִתֵּן וְלֹא יַחְשֹׂךְ: כזזֶבַח רְשָׁעִים תּוֹעֵבָה אַף כִּי־בְזִמָּה יְבִיאֶנּוּ: כחעֵד־כְּזָבִים יאבֵּד וְאִישׁ שׁוֹמֵעַ לָנֶצַח יְדַבֵּר: כטהֵעַז אִישׁ רָשָׁע בְּפָנָיו וְיָשָׁר הוּא יָבִין (כתיב דרכיו) דַּרְכּוֹ (כתיב יכין): לאֵין חָכְמָה וְאֵין תְּבוּנָה וְאֵין עֵצָה לְנֶגֶד יְ־ה־וָ־ה: לאסוּס מוּכָן לְיוֹם מִלְחָמָה וְלַי־ה־וָ־ה הַתְּשׁוּעָה: –

21One who pursues justice [צְדָקָה] and kindness will find life, righteousness [צְדָקָה] and honor. 22A wise man prevailed over a city of warriors and brought down its trusted stronghold. 23One who guards [שֹׁמֵר] his mouth and his tongue keeps [שֹׁמֵר] his soul from troubles. 24The boastful arrogant man, scoffer is his name, commits villainy in a fit of rage. 25The cravings of a lazy man will kill him, for his hands refuse to work. 26All day long he craves and craves, while the righteous man gives and does not hold back. 27The offering of the wicked is an abomination, all the more so when he brings it with nefarious intent. 28A lying witness is doomed, but words from a man who listens will endure forever. 29A wicked man reflects brazenness on his face, but the upright man seeks to understand his path. 30No wisdom, no insight and no counsel can prevail against the Lord. 31Though the horse is ready for the day of battle, salvation belongs to the Lord.[1]

A. Following up on a series of verses dealing with cause and effect, the concluding verses of chapter 21 continue this theme from more of a positive universal perspective. [Verse 21:22 will be discussed at the end of the shiur.]

- V. 21 → One who pursues justice [צְדָקָה] and kindness will find life, righteousness [צְדָקָה] and honor.
    - We have seen a word/concept repeated in Mishlei to make a clear comparison between parts of a couplet, *e.g.*, in the last shiur, we distinguished between one that loves [אֹהֵב] pleasure and one that loves [אֹהֵב] wine and oil.[2] And verse 21:23, discussed below, follows a similar pattern.
    - However, something in verse 21 seems different. If you seek צְדָקָה and kindness, you instead find life, צְדָקָה and honor. At Bava Batra 9b, the Gemara seems to understand the repetition of the צְדָקָה here as having extra significance, as follows:
      And Rabbi Yitzĥak says: What** is the meaning of that **which is written: "He who pursues charity and mercy finds life, charity, and honor"**? Is this to say that **because one has pursued charity, he** himself **shall** [one day be poor and] **require charity? Rather,** the verse **tells you** that with regard to **anyone who pursues charity, the Holy One, Blessed be He, furnishes him with money with which to perform** his acts of **charity. Rav Naĥman bar Yitzĥak says: The Holy One, Blessed be He, sends him people who are deserving of charity, so that he will reap** his just **reward for** helping **them.
- V. 23 → One who guards [שֹׁמֵר] his mouth and his tongue keeps [שֹׁמֵר] his soul from troubles.
    - The Metzudot sees this as reinforcing the idea that it is not just harmful speech that must be guarded against (the tongue), but any speech (the mouth), as it says at Pirkei Avot 1:17 – "Shimon, his [Rabban Gamliel's] son, used to say: all my days I grew up among the sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence."
    - The Tanchuma to Parshat Metzorah sees the reference to the troubles of the soul as referring to Tzara'at.

B. After starting out on universal positive notes, Shlomo turns the lens on men whose behaviors should be rejected.

- V. 24 → The boastful arrogant man, scoffer is his name, commits villainy in a fit of rage.
    - Malbim sees this as a progression, from arrogance leading to scoffing at those deserving of respect, to a complete departure from normal behavior.

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[1] Mishlei Chapter 21.
[2] Mishlei 21:17.

- V. 25 → The cravings of a lazy man will kill him, for his hands refuse to work.
  V. 26 → All day long he craves and craves, while the righteous man gives and does not hold back.
    - These pasukim appear to be commonly understood together, on their face depicting the cravings (generally understood to be not of a wholesome type) of a sluggard, but he can't satisfy them due to being lazy.
    - As an alternative interpretation, perhaps the laziness is a result of satisfying the cravings, and not earning money for food, etc. In experiments performed in the 1960s and 1980s, isolated rats were found willing to endure electric shocks to reach cocaine, but not for food, even if it meant starvation, Similarly, they would often choose cocaine over food. Later experiments found that rats did not behave this way under normal unstressed conditions, but only under extreme isolation. Perhaps these experiments[3] offer insight as to why a righteous man who is "not holding back" what he is "giving" to others, can overcome his cravings as he is engaging positively with others in a positive societal environment.
- V. 27 → The offering of the wicked is an abomination, all the more so when brought up with nefarious intent.
    - The first half of the couplet at Mishlei 15:8 is virtually identical to here: "The offerings of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but He is pleased by the prayers of the upright."
    - Following verses 25 and 26, perhaps the sluggard we were dealing with is now trying to use korbonot to wash away his sins that were a result of his giving in to his cravings, instead of seeking to do teshuvah as well and controlling them.
- V. 28 → A lying witness is doomed, but words from a man who listens will endure forever.
    - Listening leads to truth, and Rav Saadiah Gaon says that leads to words that are established forever.
- V. 29 → A wicked man reflects brazenness on his face, but the upright man seeks to understand his path.
    - Wickedness is readily apparent on a man's face, and Rav Saadiah Gaon sees the second part of the couplet as indicating that the upright man will stay clear of his path.

C. The power of a wise man is addressed, and later at the end of the chapter, we are reminded of the power of Hashem.

- V. 22 → A wise man prevailed over a city of warriors and brought down its trusted stronghold.
    - Vayikra Rabbah 31:5 sees this as a series of metaphors: (1) the wise man is Moshe, (2) the city of warriors is the dwelling place of angels, and (3) the stronghold brought down is a metaphor for the Torah brought down from heaven by Moshe.
    - Vilna Gaon also sees the wise man as a metaphor for other prophets, such as Ezekiel and Isaiah whose visions of heaven have been incorporated into our liturgy.
- V. 30 → No wisdom, no insight and no counsel can prevail against the Lord.
  V. 31 → Though the horse is ready for the day of battle, salvation belongs to the Lord.
    - These verses are commonly understood as needing to be interpreted together.
    - Rabbeinu Yonah sees the readying of the horse as a positive thing. Even though nothing can get the better of Hashem, and even though all salvation is from him, we must still "ready our horse" and not rely on miracles.
    - The Me'am Loez reminds us that "horse" is written in the singular, to remind us that if Hashem wills victory with a single horse, victory it will be.

[3] You can find more about these and related experiments online.



Thank You to our Veteran's for their Courageous Service and Thank You to Our Veteran's Day Kiddush Sponsors

Sponsor	Honored Veteran
Larry Bernstein	Richard Silberman (Army)
Benji & Erica Cooper	Irving Cooper (US Paratroopers)
Mark Follender	Jonathan Follender(IDF); David Follender(US ARMY); Edward Liebowitz(USAF)
Lori & David Garfunkel	Rabbi Irving Elson (US Navy)
Alison Gordon	Matthew Root (US Air Force)
Elliot Greene	Jacob Lobel (Army); Harold Greene (Navy); Jacob Rabinowitz (Russian Army)
Jay Herman	Sam Nalbone (US Army)
Richard Mayer	All veterans of the US armed forces
Gail Plotnick	Steven Plotnick (US Army Reserve)
Ron Sokoloff	Benjamin Sokoloff (Army Infantry); William Brody (Army)
Michael Stock	Sam Stock (US Air Force)
Fern Leiboff-Strich	Jay Leiboff (Air Force)
Seymour Wigod	Harry Dorshay (Army); Charles Cooperwasser (Army)
Susan Zarabi	Myron Gottlieb (US Army)



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1994	
CANDLE LIGHTING	4:31P.M.
MINCHA	4:35P.M.
SHABBAT, NOVEMBER 5	
SHACHARIT	8:45A.M.
SHIUR	3:20P.M.
MINCHA	4:20P.M.
HAVDALAH	5:39P.M.
SUNDAY MINCHA/MARIV	4:30P.M.
WEEKLY MAARIV	8:00P.M.
FRIDAY NOVEMBER 12	
CANDLE LIGHTING	4:24P.M.
MINCHA	4:25P.M.

Announcements

Jr. NCSY News

upcoming events: 1. 11/12/94- TBY NETS game

For more information please consult the NCSY bulletin board.

Sr. NCSY News

upcoming events: 1. 11/5/94- Israel luncheon

2. 11/13/94- Grudge match

For more information please consult the NCSY bulletin board.

Sisterhood News

1. As part of a tzdaka program the children of the shul will be selling gift wrap. Those families without school age children were given the names of their sales representative to contact to place an order. The deadline is this Sun.
2. Portrait day is on Nov. 20 to make an appointment for a family or individual pictures or to get more information call Lori Garfunkel.

Youth News

1. The afternoon groups for grades 2, 3 and 4 girls will be held at the Gottlieb house located at 13-63 Henrietta Court.
2. There will be a junior minyan on the Shabbosim of משלוח and משב at 9:00 a.m.

Birthday Kiddush

Anybody who is interested in this months birthday and anniversary kiddush please send back your form to Randi Spier or Joyce Heller.

Decorum Committee

A decorum committee is being formed anybody interested contact David Graber.

סעודה שלישית

is

being sponsored by Seymour Wigod in honor of his father Abraham Wigod.

Reminder:
Board meeting on Tue. 8:30.

WARNING!!!

THE FENCE NEAR THE CREEK IS BREAKING PLEASE KEEP ALL CHILDREN AWAY FROM THAT AREA.

THE GRABER FAMILY
WILL BE PRINTING THE
WEEKLY BULLETIN.
IF YOU HAVE ANY
INFORMATION YOU
WOULD LIKE IN THE
BULLETIN PLEASE CALL
652-7915
(FAX)- 652-1780
BY WEDNESDAY NIGHT



Kiddush clean up

Krebs	Lewinson
Kustanowitz	Lewissohn
Kwestel	Leyvi
Lang	London
Latkin	Lubowicz
Levine	Matkowsky
Levy	

DESIGNED BY
Yehuda Graber

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

BOKER TOV CHANUKAH

- MUSICAL HALLEL
- KIDS ACTIVITIES
- FREE BREAKFAST



SUNDAY DEC. 6TH

9:15 AM SHACHARIT (Hallel at 9:40)

10:00 AM ARTS & CRAFTS for Kids 0-12

10:30 AM BREAKFAST

RSVP AT TINYURL.COM/BOKERTOVCHANUKAH26 BY 12/3

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

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TINYURL.COM/AATHXGIVING2026

EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG

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.

Toldot

WRITTEN BY RABBI SACKS IN 5768 (2007–2008)

Chosenness and its Discontents

It is one of the most emotionally affecting scenes in the Torah. Jacob, dressed in Esau's clothes, has taken Esau's blessing. He leaves and, shortly thereafter, Esau enters. What is remarkable is not what happens next but how the Torah describes it, its use of language and narrative art:

> Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had just left his father Isaac, when his brother Esau came back from the hunt. He too had prepared delicious food and he brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat some of his son's game, so that your soul may bless me."
>
> "Who are you?" asked his father Isaac.
>
> "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau," he replied.
>
> Isaac was seized with a violent fit of trembling. "Who then was it that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it all before you came, and I blessed him - and he will be blessed."
>
> When Esau heard his father's words, he burst into a loud and bitter cry. He said to his father, "Bless me, me too, my father!"
>
> "Your brother came in deceit and took your blessing," he replied.
>
> Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob [= heel-grasper]? Twice he has supplanted me. He took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing." And then, "Do you not have any blessing left for me?"
>
> … And Esau wept aloud.
>
> Gen. 27:30-38

In general, the Torah is sparing in its details, especially about the emotional state of its characters. Its descriptions are understated, leaving the reader to supply what the text omits (what the characters look like, their location, body language and so on). Emmanuel Levinas was surely correct in seeing this as an invitation to Midrash, summoning the reader to complete the text in dialogue with the written word. The Torah is more like radio than television, actively enlisting the imaginative participation of its hearers. So we are dealing here with a passage unusual in its literary explicitness and psychological depth of drama.

As readers, we feel with - and for - Isaac and Esau. We are drawn into their subjective states. We enter into Isaac's dawning realisation that he has been deceived. We identify too with Esau, whose first thought is not betrayal or desire for revenge but simple, sharp, and shocking disappointment ("Bless me - me too, my father"). Then comes Isaac's helplessness ("So what can I possibly do for you, my son?") and Esau's weeping - all the more poignant given what we know of him, that he is a man of the fields, rough in some ways, impetuous in others, not a man given (as Joseph will later be)

to tears. The scene of the two of them together, father and son, deceived and disappointed, robbed of what should have been a moment of great tenderness and intimacy (son feeding father, father blessing son) is deeply affecting. We can imagine the painting Rembrandt might have made of it.

Why this detail? The question is unavoidable. In Torah, form follows function. Nothing is accidental. If there is a marked stylistic feature to a given text, it is there for a reason. Our sympathies are drawn throughout the chapter to Esau, rather than Jacob. It is not that we feel that Esau was the rightful heir of the covenant; that history has taken a wrong turn; that things should have been otherwise. Manifestly this is not so. Rebecca favours Jacob, and in Bereishit, mothers know their children better than do their fathers. Esau - the hunter, the man who "despised his birthright" once he had sold it - was clearly not destined to be the faithful follower of an invisible, transcendent God. The Abrahamic covenant must surely pass through Jacob, the child described as "a quiet man, staying among the tents." Why then does the Torah go out of its way, using unusual stylistic devices, to enlist our sympathies with Esau, to enter his world and see things from his perspective? Before we can answer this, we must first take a wider look at what we know of him and his descendants from the rest of the Torah.

The first is that Esau does receive a blessing from Isaac:

> Of the cream of the land your home shall be, of the dew of heaven above. By your sword you will live, and your brother you will serve; but when you break loose, you will throw off his yoke from your neck.
>
> Gen. 27:39-40

The "cream of the land" and the "dew of heaven" are not so circumscribed, implies Isaac, that there will not be enough for both of you. This is a blessing both sons can enjoy without the one diminishing the other. As for Jacob's supremacy, it will last only as long as he does not misuse it. If he acts with unwarranted high-handedness, Esau will simply "throw his yoke off" his neck. There is a basis here for coexistence.

The second insight comes when Esau 'marries out,' taking two Hittite girls as wives. This was "a source of bitterness" to Isaac and Rebecca, and provides her with the necessary pretext to reconcile Isaac with Jacob, as well as giving Jacob a legitimate excuse to leave home.[1] Esau's reaction is interesting. He "understood that the Canaanite girls were displeasing to his father Isaac" and tries to ameliorate the situation by taking a third wife - Machlath, daughter of Ishmael. The gesture fails for two obvious reasons: he does not divorce the other wives, and he has not internalised the fact that Ishmael, too, has been rejected as an heir to the Abrahamic covenant. Esau is not overly endowed with intelligence, but he cares for his father and does not wish to cause him distress.

The third passage comes twenty-two years later, when the brothers finally meet again. This is one of the great passages of the Torah, full of depths and resonances. But the surface narrative is clear (and there is a rabbinic principle: "Scripture does not depart from its plain meaning"). Jacob is full of fear in advance of the encounter - fear that leads him to make elaborate preparations (involving prayer, diplomacy and war) as well as a wrestling match, alone at night, with an unnamed adversary. Yet when they finally meet, Esau runs to meet Jacob, embraces him, weeps, and shows none of the hostility he had once harboured. The internal drama is played out entirely within the soul of Jacob. Esau, true to character, is swift to anger, equally swift to forget. When Jacob, pleading with him to accept a gift of cattle and flocks, uses the deeply significant phrase, "please accept my blessing" - with its reference back to that event twenty-two years earlier - Esau shows no sign of understanding what he is hinting at. Esau does not harbour a grudge, not because he forgives but because he forgets. He is not an Absalom.

The fourth passage (in Bereishit 36) is the list of Esau's descendants. At first glance it is no different

1 "I loathe my life because of those Hittite women," she tells Isaac. "If Jacob marries such a Hittite woman like them … why should I go on living?" (Gen. 27:46).

from the many other genealogies in Bereishit, but it contains two significant pieces of information, one explicit, the other implicit. The first is the statement, "These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king reigned in Israel." The second is the contrast between the closing verse of chapter 36 and the opening verse of chapter 37: "These are the tribes of Esau, each with its own settlements in its hereditary lands [*eretz achuzatam*] . . . Meanwhile, Jacob lived in the land where his father had lived as an alien [*be-eretz megurei aviv*]." The implication could not be clearer. Esau's descendants establish themselves geographically and politically long before Jacob's. Not for them the twists and turns of covenantal history - exile, slavery, redemption, and the wilderness years. Both may eventually inherit the cream of the land and the dew of heaven, but for one the route is straightforward, for the other, anything but.

The fifth insight, much later, concerns the nature of the relationship between the Israelites and Edomites. Here two verses in particular stand out. The first is God's instruction to the Israelites:

> You are passing by the borders of your brothers, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. Although they fear you, be very careful not to provoke them. I will not give you even one foot of their land, since I have given Mount Seir as Esau's inheritance.
>
> Deut. 2:4–5

The second is the no less emphatic command:

> Do not abhor an Edomite, since he is your brother.
>
> Deut. 23:7

There is nothing in these commands to remind us of the eternal strife between the two nations predicted before their birth ("Two nations are in your womb . . . one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger"). During the biblical era there were periodic tensions and shifting fortunes in the relationship between Edom and Israel.[2] But normatively, the Israelites were commanded to respect both the Edomites and their land.

Putting these facts together, what are we to infer? At the simplest level, there is a humanity here that defies all stereotypes and conventional categorisations. Esau is a child loved by his father, who loves him in return. So striking is this that, despite the generally negative evaluation of Esau in the midrashic literature, this fact shines through:

> Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: no man ever honoured his father as I did mine, yet I found that Esau honoured his father even more than I did.

There is a marked tendency on the part of the Midrash to separate biblical characters into the wholly good and wholly bad, and for this there are good pedagogic reasons, as R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes points out in his *Mavo ha-Aggadot* (printed at the beginning of standard editions of *Ein Yaakov*). To serve effectively as role-models, biblical heroes must be seen as consistently heroic, and non-heroes as systematic villains.

Yet beneath this overlay of Midrash, the Torah teaches a different and equally important message, albeit one that demands a certain maturity to appreciate. Namely, even heroes have their faults and non-heroes their virtues, and those virtues are important to God. "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not withhold the reward of any creature," said the Sages. The Esau who emerges from the Torah has none of Abraham's faith, Isaac's steadfastness or Jacob's persistence. He is carved of an altogether coarser grain. But he is not without his humanity, his filial loyalty and a decent if quick-tempered disposition.

This too is part of the Torah's message. Just as we cannot predict God's actions in advance ("I will be who I will be," "I will have mercy and show kindness to whomever I desire"), so we cannot predict in advance where God's image will shine in the affairs of humankind. It was the sectarians of Qumran, not the rabbis, who divided humanity into the "children of light" and the "children of darkness".

2 See II Samuel 8:14; II Kings 8:20.

Such anthropological dualism is as alien to Judaism as is theological dualism.

There is, however, something far more fundamental at stake in the story of Esau. It has to do with the very concept of chosenness itself. The book of Bereishit is, among other things, a profound meditation on what it means to be chosen and what it means not to be chosen. There can be no doubt that chosenness has deep psychological consequences on both sides of the equation. To be chosen means - as Jacob discovers - a life of high demands and great hardship ("Few and evil have been the days of my life" he says to Pharaoh). But not to be chosen is also deeply disturbing. We see this time and again - on the two occasions in which Hagar is sent away, in the relations between Joseph and his brothers, but most explicitly in the case of Leah and Rachel:

> [Jacob] also married Rachel, and he loved Rachel more than Leah . . . [God] saw that Leah was hated [*senuah*]. . .

I have translated this last phrase literally to give it its full, shocking force in the Hebrew. Leah, of course, was not hated. She merely felt rejected. Yet the sense of rejection cuts deep, so deep that the Torah does not hesitate to compare it to the feeling of being hated. And one who feels rejected may hate in return. That is why the brothers "hate" Joseph (the verb is used three times - a significant repetition - in chapter 37).

Love chooses. But choice creates estrangement, which leads to tension, which can sometimes erupt into conflict and sometimes (potentially or actually) violence. This is a theme signalled almost at the beginning of the biblical narrative, where God's choice of Abel's offering and not Cain's leads to fratricide.

Something of the deepest possible consequence is being intimated in the story of Esau. The choice of one does not mean the rejection of the other. Esau is not chosen, but he is also not rejected. He too will have his blessing, his heritage, his land. He too will have children who become kings, who will rule and not be ruled. He too will have his virtues recognised, above all his love and respect for his father. It is no accident that our sympathies are drawn to him, as if to say for all time to all humanity: not all are chosen for the rigours, spiritual and existential, of the Abrahamic covenant, but all are precious to God, each has his or her place in the scheme of things, each has his or her virtues, talents, gifts, and each is precious in the eyes of God. As God will later tell Jonah: "You are concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow . . . Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:10-11)

Or as the Psalm puts it:

> "The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made."
>
> Ps. 145:9

To be chosen does not mean that others are unchosen. To be secure in one's relationship with God does not depend on negating the possibility that others too may have a (different) relationship with Him. Jacob was loved by his mother, Esau by his father; but what of God who is neither father nor mother, but both and more than both? In truth, we can only know our own relationship with our parents. We can never know another's. Am I loved more than my brothers or sisters? Less? Once asked, the question cannot but lead to sibling rivalry (one of the central themes of Bereishit). But the question is an invalid question. It should not need to be asked. A good parent loves all their children and never thinks of giving one 'less' love. Love is not quantifiable. It rejects comparisons. Jacob is Jacob, heir to the covenant. Esau is Esau, doing what he does, being what he is, enjoying his own heritage and blessing. What a simple truth and how beautifully, subtly, it is conveyed. It is one of the Torah's most profound messages to humanity - and how deeply (in an age of "the clash of civilisations") the world needs to hear it today.

Around the Shabbat Table



- If being chosen does not mean others are rejected, how should that shape the way Jews understand their place among other peoples?
- What does Esau teach us about recognising goodness in people whose values, choices, or religious commitments differ from our own?
- Why is it so difficult to accept that another person can be loved and blessed without diminishing what we have?



Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY EDITION

INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

Toldot: The Hero Within

DEVELOPED BY SHOSH HILL



parsha recap

After waiting a long time and praying to God, Yitzchak and Rivka are blessed with twin sons, Eisav and Yaakov. As they grow up, Yaakov becomes a scholar, while Eisav becomes a hunter.

Eisav impulsively sells his birthright to Yaakov for some red lentil soup. When Yitzchak is old and blind, he feels his life is nearing its end and wants to bless his sons. He sends Eisav to hunt and prepare a meal, planning to give him the firstborn blessing. Rivka overhears and tells Yaakov to disguise himself as Eisav. Yaakov does this, and he receives the blessing. When Eisav realises what has happened, he is heartbroken and asks his father for a blessing as well.

- → Why didn't Rivka just tell Yitzchak who she thought should get the blessing?
- → Since lying is wrong, why did Yaakov agree to trick his father, as Rivka suggested?
- → Can something good come from doing something wrong?



a closer look

הַבְּרָכָה אַחַת הִוא־לְךָ אָבִי

"Have you only one blessing, father."

(BEREISHIT 27:38)

RABBI SACKS TEACHES US:

"There is at times a tendency on the part of the Midrash to separate biblical characters into the wholly [completely] good and wholly bad, and for this there are good reasons. To serve effectively as role-models, biblical heroes must be seen as consistently heroic, non-heroes as villains. The Torah teaches a different and equally important message: Even heroes have their faults and non-heroes their virtues, and these virtues are important to God."

Source: *Toldot: Isaac and Esau (Covenant & Conversation: I Believe).*



moral matters

LET'S DISCUSS!

- → Why might it be important for the Torah to show that **even heroes make mistakes**?
- → What **good qualities** do you think were within Eisav?
- → How can knowing that even 'bad' people have good qualities help us **treat others more fairly**?

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