As part of our Yovel (Jubilee) year journey down memory lane, a shul bulletin from 1994 is attached to the online version of this week's bulletin.

AHAVAT ACHIM AT 50
קהלת אהבת אחים
Yovel
THE FAMILY SHUL

CANDLE LIGHTING 4:12 PM | 18 KISLEV | NOVEMBER 28, 2026 | HAVDALA 5:15 PM

שבת פרשת וישלח
SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

Haftorah is Ovadiah 1:1-21.

FRIDAY EVENING	
MINCHA	**4:15 PM**
SHKIA	4:30 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	5:10 PM
SATURDAY	
HASHKAMA	**7:45 AM**
SHACHARIT	**9:00 AM**
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈9:30 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:22 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	≈11:30 AM
GEDOLAH	12:08 PM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	3:25 PM
MINCHA	**4:05 PM**
SHKIA	4:30 PM
MAARIV	**5:15 PM**

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Dina & Elliot Greene in memory of Dina's mother, זלדה בת צבי, Zelda Rubinowitz ע"ה, on her yahrzeit, and by Evi & Michael Dworkis commemorating the Shloshim of Evi's aunt, Elanie Levine ע"ה.

MAZEL TOV



Mazel tov to Stacey & Yitz Finkelstein on the birth of a granddaughter, Talia Ronit, born to Leora & Mikey Finkelstein.

יגדלוה לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים

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

PRE-CHANUKAH SHIUR & DINNER

Join us this Wednesday, December 2, at 7:30 PM, for our annual inspirational pre-Chanukah shiur and dinner, given by Rabbi Shestack. This year's topic: **"Chanukah Lighting in the Synagogue: Exploration & Explanation."** RSVP by Tuesday, December 1, here: SHIUR.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAY AND ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH IS NEXT SHABBAT



Next Shabbat, December 5, we celebrate December birthdays and anniversaries! To list a birthday or anniversary and sponsor ($36 per family for the month), click here: SIMCHA. Deadline is Sunday night, November 29.

BOKER TOV CHANUKAH

On Sunday, December 6, at 9:15 AM, join Ahavat Achim for a spiritually uplifting Shacharit with Musical Hallel, followed by Arts & Crafts for kids and a delicious bagel and sufganiyot brunch! RSVP here: BOKER TOV.

SHABBAT CHANUKAH DINNER

Mark your calendars for Friday night, December 11: a Shabbat Chanukah dinner filled with ruach, singing, great food and family! RSVP here: CHANUKAH DINNER.

ORTHODOX UNION תורה ומצוות Enhancing Jewish Life	SUNDAY 11/29	MONDAY 11/30	TUESDAY 12/1	WEDNESDAY 12/2	THURSDAY 12/3	FRIDAY 12/4
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	**4:18 PM**	**4:17 PM**	**4:17 PM**	**4:17 PM**	**4:17 PM**	**4:15 PM**
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit	5:59 AM	5:59 AM	6:00 AM	6:01 AM	6:02 AM	6:03 AM
Gedolah	12:08 PM	12:09 PM	12:09 PM	12:09 PM	12:10 PM	12:10 PM
Shkia	4:30 PM	4:29 PM	4:29 PM	4:29 PM	4:29 PM	
Tzait	5:10 PM	5:09 PM	5:09 PM	5:09 PM	5:09 PM	

UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec. 2 - Pre-Chanukah Shiur w/ Dinner, 7:30 PM. Rabbi Shestack on "Chanukah Lighting in the Synagogue: Exploration & Explanation." RSVP by Dec. 1 here: SHIUR.

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 Friday Night Dinner. RSVP here: CHANUKAH DINNER.

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



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

- **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).
- SHABBAT SHIUR, **SANHEDRIN CH. 1**, 40 minutes prior to mincha.
- TZURBA M'RABANAN w/ Zach Doberman, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, for 10 minutes after the 7:25 AM minyan.
- 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

Dec. 1, Tuesday - Inspired by Ilona presents "Navigating Invisible Grief," a panel discussion on pregnancy loss and infertility, 8:00 PM, at Congregation Shomrei Torah, 19-10 Morlot Avenue. Featuring Dr. Esther Rollhaus, Dr. Aimee Baron and Dr. Shira Billet. Livestream and more information: inspiredbyilona.com.

- For women interested in learning more about the new chevra kaddisha women's burial society, please fill out this form: WomenChevraKaddisha.

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

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ז YOUTH EVENTS

Dec. 5 - Chanukah Celebration, 4:00 PM: seudah shlishit dinner for children and an interactive Chanukah program, followed by glow-in-the-dark musical havdalah. $8/child, $15/family max. Sponsorship welcome. RSVP by Dec. 2 here: CHANUKAH.

Dec. 19 - Parent/Child Learning, Saturday night, 6:00 PM (1st grade and up). Rabbi Shestack on Part 2 of "Shema: When you say Shema each night, everything will be alright," and build your own flashlight. Pizza will be served! Hosted by the Cohen family. RSVP by Dec. 16 for the address, here: RSVP.

Dec. 19 - Teen Night Out at Humdingers, 7:30 PM: laser maze, arcade, bowling & batting cages. $15/teen (AA Youth to subsidize an additional $10/teen). RSVP by Dec. 16 here: TEENS.

Jan. 2 - Parent/Child Learning.

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ז YOUTH LEADERS

3rd & Up:	BELANA & SOPHIA
K-2nd:	DANIELLE, LE'ASIA & NICOLE
2 Yrs - Pre-K:	HAILEY, MAYA & PERRI

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ז 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 51 – The Generous (Good) Eye

ט טוֹב־עַיִן הוּא יְבֹרָךְ כִּי־נָתַן מִלַּחְמוֹ לַדָּל: י גָּרֵשׁ לֵץ וְיֵצֵא מָדוֹן וְיִשְׁבֹּת דִּין וְקָלוֹן: יא אֹהֵב טְהָר (כתיב טהור) ־לֵב חֵן שְׂפָתָיו רֵעֵהוּ מֶלֶךְ:
יב עֵינֵי יְ־ה־וָ־ה נָצְרוּ דָעַת וַיְסַלֵּף דִּבְרֵי בֹגֵד: יג אָמַר עָצֵל אֲרִי בַחוּץ בְּתוֹךְ רְחֹבוֹת אֵרָצֵחַ: יד שׁוּחָה עֲמֻקָּה פִּי זָרוֹת זְעוּם יְ־ה־וָ־ה יִפָּל
(כתיב יפול) ־שָׁם: טו אַוַּלַת קְשׁוּרָה בְלֵב־נָעַר שֵׁבֶט מוּסָר יַרְחִיקֶנָּה מִמֶּנּוּ: טז עֹשֵׁק דָּל לְהַרְבּוֹת לוֹ נֹתֵן לְעָשִׁיר אַךְ־לְמַחְסוֹר: –

9One with a generous eye will be blessed, because he gives of his own bread to the pauper. 10Drive out the scoffer and strife departs, and quarrels and shame cease. 11The pure-hearted friend with gracious lips, the king is his companion. 12The eyes of the Lord watch over knowledge, subverting the words of a transgressor. 13The lazy man says, "There is a lion outside! I will be killed if I venture out in the streets!" 14The mouth of strange women is like a deep pit; one with whom the Lord is angry will fall into it. 15Skepticism is bound up in the heart of a youth; the rod of discipline will drive it far from him. 16One who oppresses the poor to increase his own [wealth] or who sends gifts to the rich, will come only to want.[1]

A. As we conclude the "Proverbs of Solomon" section of Mishlei, before we begin the section on the "words of the wise", Shlomo continues to remind us of some important themes previously addressed.

B. Consequences of generosity, or lack thereof, are revisited.

- V. 9 → One with a generous eye will be blessed, because he gives of his own bread to the pauper.
  - Two things stand out in this formulation, namely the references to: (1) a טוֹב־עַיִן, a generous or literally "good eye", and (2) מִלַּחְמוֹ, his own bread.
  - Rabbeinu Yonah sees the reference to bread to indicate that the one giving is not necessarily rich, but Shlomo praises anyone that simply is giving from what he has.
  - Maharsha then understands the reference to the "eye" as the giver making sure to examine what the pauper is receiving, to ensure that the quality is not less than the giver is retaining.
- V. 16 → One who oppresses the poor to increase his own [wealth] or who sends gifts to the rich, will come only to want.
  - We previously discussed a person that could not be satiated.[2] Here the person with the insatiable appetite for wealth starts extracting it from the poor, only to find himself becoming even further from becoming satiated.
  - Rav Hirsch reminds us that when giving to the poor, the term used is צְדָקָה ("righteousness"), and we previously discussed generosity to the poor as in fact being loans to Hashem.[3] On the other hand, regardless of what you may have expected (*e.g.*, a similar gift to one day be reciprocated), the rich see gifts as their due, and there shall be no return.
  - Rashi, on the other hand, does not understand the pasuk with an "or", but sees the reference to "gifts to the rich" as referring to something akin to taxes paid to gentiles causing one to want, which Hashem caused to be imposed as a result of oppressing the poor.

C. Shlomo suggests that it is normal for a child to be a skeptic, but that it is the responsibility of his parent to make sure the child can overcome it.

- V. 15 → Skepticism is bound up in the heart of a youth; the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

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[1] Mishlei Chapter 22.
[2] *E.g.*, Mishlei 13:25, "A righteous man eats to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked is wanting", and Mishlei 21:25–26, dealing with "cravings".
[3] Mishlei 19:17.

  - At Mishlei 22:6, nine pasukim earlier, we were told to "Train a child in the way that befits him. . . ." Rav Hirsch therefore sees this as a "metaphorical" rod, that can consist of any of numerous disciplinary measures presumptively dependent on what will be most effective as relates to a given child.
- V. 12 → The eyes of the Lord watch over knowledge, subverting the words of a transgressor.
  - **The Sages taught** with regard to the verse: "**You shall do My ordinances**. . . ." (Leviticus 18:4), that "My ordinances", is a reference **to matters that**, even **had they not been written**, it would be **logical to write them**. **They are** the prohibitions against **idol worship, prohibited sexual relations, bloodshed, theft, and blessing God** (a euphemism for cursing the Name of God). Yoma 67b.
  - Skeptics have issues with mitzvot that cannot be explained logically. Malbim points out that Hashem therefore put in the minds of the masses certain intellectual truths, so that there will always be a common ground from which to educate the skeptic. From the above gemara at Yoma 67b, I would suggest that this could also be seen as relating to universail legal norms.
- V. 10 → Drive out the scoffer and strife departs, and quarrels and shame cease.
  - Before exhorting parents to drive the skepticism of a youth, Shlomo presented us with the outcome of the failure to do so, namely that once a skeptic becomes a scoffer it will be necessary to drive him out for the sake of shalom.

D. The sluggard and the זָרוֹת (strange or foreign woman) are referred to again.

- V. 13 → The lazy man says, "There is a lion outside! I will be killed if I venture out in the streets!"
  - Presumptively we would not be insulting the man as being lazy if there were in fact a lion outside. The Me'am Loez sees this as a valid concern/possibility, but one that normal people would realize the probability was remote and therefore it should not be having an impact on any decision making. It is only because of the sluggard's laziness that he has found a "justification" to not go out.
- V. 14 → The mouth of strange women is like a deep pit; one with whom the Lord is angry will fall into it.
  - Bnei Shlomo sees the lazy man of the previous verse as one who does not want to venture out in the service of Hashem (perhaps davening or going to learn Torah). While most people would tell the sluggard to forget about lions and get out of the house, not so the strange woman, who will provide validation even for the worst excuses of the sluggard to draw him close into her "deep pit".
  - Rabbeinu Yonah reminds us that once in the grip of such a woman, it will be hard to extricate oneself from her "deep pit" of a mouth.

E. We are reminded of how one truly becomes a companion of the king.

- V. 11 → The pure-hearted friend with gracious lips, the king is his companion.
  - At Mishlei 16:13, we were taught that "[r]ighteous lips are the delight of kings, and one who speaks uprightly is loved."
  - The Malbim sees the man of this verse as a contrast to the scoffer of verse 10, *i.e.*, unlike the scoffer in the prior verse who should be driven out, as for the "pure-hearted" with "gracious lips" even the king wishes to make him his companion.



שבת שלום
פרשת וישלח

Congregation Ahavat Achim

תשס"ו

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18

CANDLE LIGHTING	4:18P.M.
MINCHA	4:20P.M.

SHABBAT, NOVEMBER 19

SHACHARIT	8:45A.M.
JUNIOR MINYAN	9:00A.M.
SHIUR	3:20P.M.
MINCHA	4:05P.M.
HAVDALAH	5:25P.M.

SUNDAY MINCHA/MARIV	4:15P.M.
WEEKLY MARIV	8:00P.M.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 25

CANDLE LIGHTING	4:13P.M.
MINCHA	4:15P.M.

Announcements

Sisterhood News

1. Portrait day is tomorrow Nov. 20. Please keep your appointments. There are still a few open slots. Call Lori Garfunkel if you have not reserved a time and would like to sit for a portrait .
2. The next sisterhood book club will be meeting at the house of Linda Stock located at 15-15 Mandon Pl. on Dec. 10 at 3:00. The book to be discussed is *Nina Valatka* by Anthony Trollope. For a copy of this book please contact Natalie Stone.
3. On Dec. 19 at 8:00 p.m. Alan Teigman will present his presentation entitled *Holidays, Biblical Events and Spiritual Ideas.*

Youth News

1. The afternoon groups for grades 2, 3 and 4 girls will be held at the Kirschenbaum home located at 41-10 Matule Drive.
2. The afternoon groups for grades 2, 3 and 4 boys will be held at the shul from 3:00- 4:00.
3. There will be a junior minyan this Shabbos and next shabbos at 9:00 a.m.
4. There will be a Chanukah party for boys and girls in grades 1- 5 on Dec. 3 from 7:00- 8:30. Details to follow.

Birthday Kiddush

Today is the November birthday Kiddush. Anybody who is interested in next months birthday and anniversary kiddush should contact Randi Spier or Joyce Heller.

Condolences

Condolences to Merry Bodoff on the loss of her father. She will be sitting Shivah at her home until Sunday morning.

קדושת בית הכנסת

To maintainthe proper respect for our shul, please do not allow your children to eat in the בית הכנסת or on the stairs .

יום הולדת שמח

Happy Birthday To

Mitchell Goldstein
Doron Halpern
Joel Hyman
Esther Miller
Scott Smedresman
Victoria Stone
Dina Turk
Uri Turk

WARNING!!!

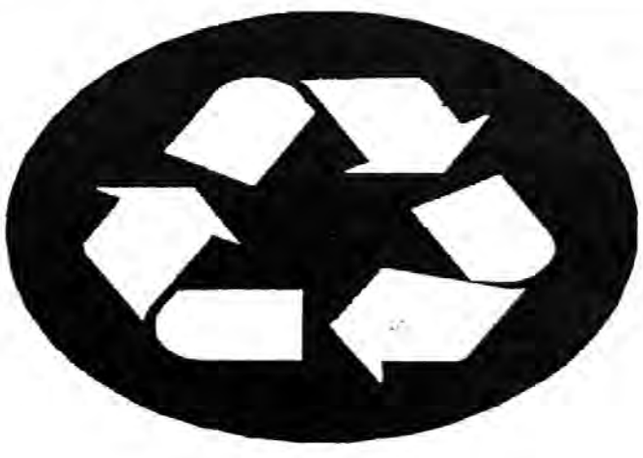
THE FENCE NEAR THE CREEK IS BREAKING PLEASE KEEP ALL CHILDREN AWAY FROM THAT AREA.

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



AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

CHANUKAH

5787

Wishing you eight days of light and joy!

CHANUKAH SHIUR

12/2 @ 7:30PM

Pre-Chanukah shiur on the topic of "Chanukah Lighting in the Synagogue: Exploration & Explanation"

FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER

12/4 @ ~5:00PM

Festive Chanukah dinner filled with ruach, singing, great food and family!

YOUTH PROGRAM

12/5 @ 4:00PM

Interactive Chanukah program followed by seudah shelishit and glow in the dar musical Havdalah

BOKER TOV CHANUKAH

12/6 @ 9:15AM

Uplifting Shacharit with musical Hallel followed by kids crafts, brunch and sufganiyot



AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

Join us for our annual

CHANUKAH SHIUR AND DINNER

ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2ND
AT 7:30PM

Join us for this year's inspirational Chanukah shiur given by Rabbi Shestack:

RSVP by 12/1!

"CHANUKAH LIGHTING IN THE SYNAGOGUE" EXPLORATION & EXPLANATION







tinyurl.com/AAChanukahShiur

events@ahavatachim.org

CHANUKAH CELEBRATION



SEUDAH SHLISHIT DINNER FOR CHILDREN, AN INTERACTIVE CHANUKAH PROGRAM FOLLOWED BY GLOW IN THE DARK MUSICAL HAVDALA!

DECEMBER 5TH
STARTING AT 4:00 PM

RSVP HERE BY 12/2
$8/CHILD, $15/FAMILY MAX

Sponsorship welcome!

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

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

JOIN US FOR

SHABBAT CHANUKAH FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11

AFTER DAVENING (~ 5:00 PM)

4:15 PM - KABBALAT SHABBAT

We invite you to join us on Shabbat Chanukah for a dinner filled with ruach, singing, great food, and family!

EARLY BIRD PRICING BEFORE 11/25:

ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $25
CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $10
CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $3
FAMILY MAX - $70

RSVP BY 12/7

PRICING AFTER 11/26:

ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $30
CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $13
CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $5
FAMILY MAX - $85

TINYURL.COM\AACHANUKAH2026

TEEN NIGHT OUT

TO HUMDINGERS FOR AN EVENING OF LASER MAZE, ARCADE, BOWLING & BATTING CAGES

$15/TEEN (AA YOUTH TO SUBSIDIZE AN ADDITIONAL $10/TEEN)

DECEMBER 19TH @ 7:30 PM

RSVP here by 12/16

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

PARENT CHILD LEARNING

SPONSORSHIP WELCOME!

DECEMBER 19TH AT 6:00 PM
1ST GRADE AND UP

RABBI SHESTACK ON PART 2 OF "SHEMA: WHEN YOU SAY SHEMA EACH NIGHT, EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT"

BUILD YOUR OWN FLASHLIGHT

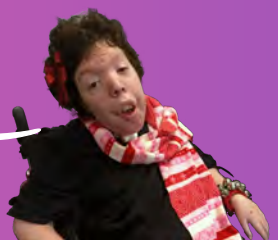
PIZZA TO BE SERVED!

HOSTED BY THE COHEN FAMILY

RSVP HERE BY 12/16 FOR THE ADDRESS!

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

Inspired by Ilona



NAVIGATING INVISIBLE GRIEF

A Panel Discussion on Pregnancy Loss and Infertility

TUESDAY NIGHT • DECEMBER 1ST, 2026 • 8:00 PM
at Congregation Shomrei Torah, 19-10 Morlot Avenue, Fair Lawn, NJ

EXPERT INSIGHTS ON PROCESSING REPRODUCTIVE TRAUMA, HEALING AND SUPPORTING OTHERS

Featuring



Esther Rollhaus MD
Reproductive Adult and Child Psychiatrist, with particular interests in women's mental health, in fertility and pregnancy loss, and peripartum mental health



Aimee Baron MD
Founder and Executive Director of I Was Supposed to Have a Baby (IWSTHAB), transforming how the Jewish community supports people facing infertility and loss through mental health support, resources, and a nurturing space



Shira Billet PhD
Shira Billet is Assistant Professor of Jewish Thought and Ethics at JTS. She lectures widely on topics related to Jewish thought and ethics — including parental grief and pregnancy loss

LIVESTREAM AT: WWW.INSPIREDBYILONA.COM

The Bravman family is honoring Ilona's blessed memory with this educational series.

For questions, visit **inspiredbyilona.com**

שומרי תורה
SHOMREI TORAH

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.

Vayishlach

WRITTEN BY RABBI SACKS IN 5768 (2007–2008)

Jacob Wrestling

The story of Jacob's wrestling match with an unnamed adversary, alone at night, is surely one of the most enigmatic in the entire Torah. With whom was Jacob wrestling? The text itself calls him "a man". According to the prophet Hosea, it was an angel. For the Sages, it was the guardian angel of Esau. Jacob himself had no doubt. It was God. He called the place of the encounter Peniel, "because I have seen God face-to-face, and yet my life has been spared" (Gen. 32:30) The adversary himself implies as much when he gives Jacob the name Israel, "for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28).

The passage resists easy interpretation, yet it holds the key to understanding Jewish identity. It is not we, the readers, who give it this significance but the Torah itself. For it was then, as dawn was about to break, that Jacob acquired the name that his descendants would bear throughout eternity. The people of the covenant are not the children of Abraham or Isaac but "the children of Israel." It was only with the division of the kingdom and the Assyrian conquest of the north, that those who remained were called generically Yehudah (the southern kingdom), and thus *Yehudim* or, in English, Jews.

Names in the Torah – especially a new name given by God – are not mere labels but signals of character or calling. The moment at which Jacob became Israel contains the clue to who we are. To be sure, our ancestors were later called on to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" but we never lost that earlier appellation. We are the people who struggled with God and with man and yet survived. What does this mean?

One way into the text (to be sure, only one of many) is to ask: what happened next? By reasoning backward, from effect to cause, we may gain an insight into what transpired that night.

The events of the next day are little short of astonishing. We have been prepared for a tense encounter. Hearing that Esau was coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men, Jacob was "acutely afraid and distressed" (Gen. 32:7). He made elaborate preparations. As the Sages said, he adopted three tactics: diplomacy (he sent lavish gifts of herds and flocks), prayer ("Rescue me, I pray, from my brother's hand, from the hand of Esav. I am afraid…") and readiness for war (dividing his household into two camps so that one at least would survive).

Yet when Esau finally appears, all the fears turn out to be unfounded. He "ran" to meet Jacob, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him and wept. There is no anger, animosity or threat of revenge in Esau's behaviour (to be sure, there are midrashic traditions that suggest otherwise, but we are concerned here with the plain sense of the narrative). That is not to say that Jacob's fears were irrational. They were not. After all, Esau had vowed revenge twenty-two years before.[1] Esau, however, is an impulsive man who lives in the mood of the moment. He has none of Cassius' "lean and hungry look" or Iago's cold calculation. He is quick to anger, quick to forget. The anticlimax when the

1 "The days of mourning for my father are approaching," he said to himself, "and then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41).

brothers meet reminds us of Roosevelt's famous words that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Second, and far more consequential, is Jacob's behaviour when the brothers meet. It is little short of extraordinary. First, he bows down to the ground seven times, prostrating himself before Esau. Each of his family members does likewise: "Then the maidservants and their children came forward and bowed down. Leah and her children came forward and bowed down. And last, Joseph and Rachel approached and bowed down" (Gen. 33:6-7). The threefold repetition is significant.

No less striking is Jacob's use of language. Five times he calls Esau *adoni*, "my lord" (in the previous chapter, he tells his servants three times to use the same word to Esau). Twice he calls himself Esau's *eved*, "servant," (and four times in the previous chapter tells his servants to do likewise). As with his physical gesture of sevenfold prostration, so with his sevenfold use of the words *adon* and *eved*, this is the choreography of self-abasement.

How are we to connect this with the wrestling match of the previous night? Surely Jacob had won a victory over his adversary. At the very least he had refused to let him go until he blessed him. The new name implied that henceforth Jacob should have no doubts about his ability to survive any conflict. A man who has "wrestled with God and with men and has overcome" is not one who needs to bow down to anyone or call him "my lord." We would have expected Jacob to show a new-found confidence rather than a wholly surprising servility.

Nor is this all. When Esau at first refuses the gifts (with the words, "I have plenty [*yesh li rav*]; let what is yours remain yours"), Jacob replies in the following extraordinary words:

> "No, please, if I have found favour in your eyes, accept this gift [*minchah*] from me, for seeing your face is like seeing the face of God, as you have shown me such favour. Please accept my present [*birchati*, literally "my blessing"] that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me, and I have everything [*yesh li kol*]."
>
> Gen. 33:10-11

Why has the "gift" become a "blessing"? In what conceivable way is seeing the face of Esau like "seeing the face of God"? And what exactly does Jacob mean by altering Esau's words, "I have plenty," into his own "I have everything"?

There are other resonances in the passage. The most significant has to do with the word *panim*, "face." Jacob's words to Esau, "to see your face is like seeing the face of God," clearly echo his remark after the wrestling match, "He named the place Peniel, saying, 'for I have seen God face-to-face and yet my life has been spared.'" Altogether, chapters 32 and 33 (the preparations for the meeting, the night-time struggle, and the meeting itself) echo time and again with variants on the word *panim*. This is missed in translation, because *panim* has many forms in Hebrew not evident in English. To take one example, verse 32:20 is often translated as follows:

> [Jacob said to his servants], "You shall say… 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us,' for he thought, 'I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.'"
>
> Gen. 32:20

There is nothing here to suggest that, in fact, the word *panim* appears four times in this verse alone. Literally, the second half of the verse should be translated: "for he thought, 'I will wipe [the anger from] his face with the gift that goes ahead of my face; afterward, when I see his face, perhaps he will lift up my face.'" There is a drama here and it has to do with faces: the face of Esau, of Jacob, and of God himself. What is going on?

The clue lies in Jacob's use of the word "blessing". This takes us back twenty-two years to another fateful moment (Bereishit chapter 27) in which Jacob, dressed in Esau's clothes, takes his brother's blessing (whether by accident or design, the term *b-r-ch*, "bless" or "blessing" occurs exactly twenty-two times in that chapter). Let us remind ourselves of what the blessing was:

> May God endow you with the dew of heaven, the cream of the land, much grain and wine. May nations serve you; may nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. A curse on those who curse you; on those

who bless you, blessing.

Gen. 27:28-30

The plain sense of these words is clear. They mean wealth and power. This is the blessing Jacob took, dressed in Esau's clothes, taking Esau's place. That is the first fact.

The second, whose importance cannot be overstated, is that there was a later blessing. Esau had married two Hittite women. This was a source of grief to both Isaac and Rebecca. Rebecca takes this as an opportunity to send Jacob away to her brother Laban, where he will be safe from Esau's desire for revenge. Before Jacob leaves, Isaac blesses him in these words:

> May God Almighty bless you, make you fertile, and multiply you so that you become a community of peoples. May He grant Abraham's blessing to you and your descendants, that you may possess the land where you live as a stranger, the land which God gave to Abraham.
>
> Gen. 28:3-4

This is a completely different blessing: for children and a land, the two key things God had repeatedly promised Abraham. These are the "covenantal blessings". They dominate the book of Bereishit, and have nothing to do with wealth or power. God promised Abraham that he would have children who would continue the covenant, and a land in which to do so. God never promises Abraham "the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth," nor does He use the language of power, "Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you." Before sending him away from home, Isaac gives Jacob the Abrahamic blessings, saying to him in so many words: it will be you who will continue the covenant into the future.

The third significant fact is that, at the time of the blessings, Isaac was blind. Jacob's impersonation of Esau was possible only because Isaac could not see. Bereishit 27 is almost an essay on the senses. Deprived of one (sight), Isaac uses the other four. He *tastes* the food, *touches* Jacob's hands (which Rebecca has covered with goatskins to make them feel rough) and *smells* his clothes ("Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field the Lord has blessed"). He also *hears* his voice ("The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau"). Eventually, after considerable doubt, Isaac trusts the evidence of taste, touch and smell over that of sound, and gives Jacob Esau's blessing. He does so only because he cannot see Jacob's face. These three facts are enough to allow us to decipher the mystery of the meeting between Jacob and Esau twenty-two years later.

The patriarchs were more than just founders of a new faith. They were also role-models. Their lives are significant not only for what they tell us about the past but also for what they tell us about the present – for their challenges are ours.

Abraham was the man who had the strength of conviction to stand apart from the culture of his time – to be different, to refuse to worship the idols of the age, to listen instead to the inner voice of the one God, even when it meant setting out on a long and risk-laden journey. What carried him through was love (*chessed*) – love of God and, yes, the love of humanity that shines through all his deeds and words.

Isaac was the man who knew the reality of sacrifice. He lived, he survived, but not without seeing the knife lifted against him. He knew to the core of his being that to be a child of the covenant is neither easy nor safe. What carried him through was courage (*gevurah*) – and for whatever reason, the historical record is clear: to remain Jewish takes courage.

In connection with Jacob, though, the prophet Micah speaks of truth ("You will give truth to Jacob"). He does not mean truth in a cognitive sense ('What are the facts? What is ultimately real?'). He means it in an existential sense ('Who am I? To which story do I belong and what part am I called on to play?'). The search for cognitive truth – scientific, metaphysical, artistic – is not specific to the Abrahamic covenant. It is the heritage of all humankind. There is no such thing as Jewish science or economics or psychology. What is, is; and it is given to homo sapiens as such to discover it (Rashi translates the phrase "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" to mean "with the capacity to understand and discern"). The truth with which Jacob spent much of his life wrestling was quite different. It was a truth about identity. Central to it are the words face (in which mirror do I look to see who I am?), name (by which term do I know myself?) and blessing (to what destiny am I called?).

One thing stands out about the first phase in Jacob's life. He longs to be Esau – more specifically, he desires

to occupy Esau's place. He struggles with him in the womb. He is born holding on to Esau's heel (this is what gives him the name Jacob, "heel-grasper"). He buys Esau's birthright. He dresses in Esau's clothes. He takes Esau's blessing. When Isaac cannot see and asks him who he is, he replies, "I am Esau, your firstborn."

Why? The answer seems clear. Esau is everything Jacob is not. He is the firstborn. He emerges from the womb covered in red hair (Esau means "fully made"). He is strong, full of energy, a skilled hunter, "a man of the fields." More importantly, he has his father's love. Esau is *homo naturalis*, a man of nature. He knows that *homo homini lupus est*, "man is wolf to man." He has the strength and skill to fight and win in the Darwinian struggle to survive and the Hobbesian war of "all against all." These are his natural battlegrounds and he relishes the contest.

Esau is the archetypal hero of a hundred myths and legends of the ancient world (and of action movies today). He is not without dignity, nor does he lack human feelings. His love for his father Isaac is genuine and touching. The Midrash, for sound educational reasons, turned Esau into a bad man. The Torah itself is altogether more subtle and profound. Esau is not a bad man; he is a natural man, celebrating the Homeric virtues and the Nietzschean will to power.

It is not surprising that Jacob's first desire was to be like him. That is the face he first saw in the mirror of his imagination, the face he presented to the blind Isaac when he came to take the blessing. But the face was not the face of Jacob, any more than were the hands.

Nor was the blessing he took the one that was destined for him. The true blessing was the one he received later when Isaac knew he was blessing Jacob, not thinking him to be Esau.

Jacob's blessing had nothing to do with wealth or power. It had to do with children and a land – children he would instruct in the ways of the covenant and a land in which his descendants would strive to construct a covenantal society based on justice and compassion, law and love. To receive that blessing Jacob did not have to dress in Esau's clothes. Instead, he had to be himself, not a man of nature but a person whose ears were attuned to a voice beyond nature, the call of the Author of all to be true to that which cannot be bought by wealth or controlled by power, namely, the human spirit as the breath of God and human dignity as the image of God.

It should now be clear exactly what Jacob was doing when he met Esau twenty-two years later. He was giving back the blessing he had taken all those years before. The herds and flocks he sent to Esau represented wealth ("the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth"). The sevenfold bowing and calling himself "your servant" and Esau "my lord" represented power ("Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you.") Jacob no longer wanted or needed these things ("I have everything" – meaning, "I no longer need either wealth or power to be complete"). He is explicit. He says, "Please take [not just] my "gift" [but also my] "blessing". He now knows the blessing he took from Esau was never meant for him, and he is returning it.

It is equally clear what was transacted in the wrestling match the previous night. It was Jacob's inner battle with existential truth. Who was he? The man who longed to be Esau? Or the man called to a different destiny, "the road less travelled," the Abrahamic covenant? "I will not let you go until you bless me," he says to his adversary. The unnamed stranger responds in a way that defies expectation. He does not give Jacob a conventional blessing (e.g. you will be rich, or strong, or safe). Nor does he promise Jacob a life free of conflict. The name Jacob signified struggle; the name Israel also signified struggle. But the terms of the conflict have been reversed.

It is as if the man said to him, "In the past, you struggled to be Esau. In the future you will struggle not to be Esau but to be yourself. In the past you held on to Esau's heel. In the future you will hold on to God. You will not let go of Him; He will not let go of You. Now let go of Esau so that you can be free to hold on to God."

The next day, Jacob did so. He let go of Esau by giving him back his blessing. And though Jacob had now renounced both wealth and power, and though he still limped from the encounter the night before, the passage ends with the words, *Vayavo Yaakov shalem*, "And Jacob emerged complete." That is the stunning truth at which Jacob finally arrived, and to which the name Israel is testimony. To be complete we do not need Esau's blessings of wealth and power. Ours is another face, an alternative destiny, a different blessing. The face we bear is the image we see reflected in the face of God when we wrestle with Him and refuse to let go.

Not by accident was this episode the birth of our identity (our "name") as Israel. At almost every significant juncture in our history we have wrestled with civilisations who worshipped the gods of nature: wealth

("the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth") or power ("may nations serve you and peoples bow down to you"). Israel never knew the wealth of ancient Greece or Rome, Renaissance Italy or aristocratic France. It never knew the power of great empires, their invincible armies and weapons of destruction. When it longed for these things (as in the days of Solomon) it lost its way.

Israel's strength never lay in itself but in that which was other and greater than itself: the power that transcends all earthly powers, and the wealth that is not physical but spiritual, a matter of mind and heart. Jews have often wished to be someone else, the 'Esaus' of the age. Too often, they knew what it was. In Shakespeare's words:

> . . . look upon myself, and curse my fate/Wishing me like to one more rich in hope/Featured like him, like him with friends possessed/Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope/With what I most enjoy contented least.
>
> Sonnet 29

That is a feeling we must ultimately reject. The Torah does not ask us to think badly of Esau. To the contrary, it commands us: "Do not hate an Edomite [i.e., a descendant of Esau], for he is your brother." It did, however, ask us to wrestle, as did Jacob, alone, at night, in the depths of our soul, and discover the face, the name and the blessing that is ours. Before Jacob could be at peace with Esau, he had to learn that he was not Esau but Israel – he who wrestles with God and never lets go.

Around the Shabbat Table



- Why are we sometimes tempted to become someone else, and what might help us discover and embrace the identity that is truly ours?
- Jacob's struggle with God gives him a new name, but not a life without struggle. What does this suggest about the nature of faith?
- Compare Jacob and Esau's reunion with Joseph's reunion with his brothers at the end of Genesis. What do these two encounters reveal about reconciliation and forgiveness?



Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY EDITION

INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

Vayishlach: Resilience

DEVELOPED BY SHOSH HILL



parsha recap

Yaakov is on his journey back to the Land of Canaan, having left Lavan's home along with his wives, children, and flocks. After 22 years away from home, it is time to make peace with his brother. He sends messengers to Eisav, but learns that Eisav is coming to meet him with 400 men. Fearing a battle, Yaakov divides his family into two camps for safety. He then prays to God for help, and sends Eisav a large gift of cattle.

That night, Yaakov wrestles with a mysterious figure until dawn. We understand this to be Eisav's guardian angel. The angel injures Yaakov's thigh, but Yaakov will not give up until he receives a blessing. The angel gives him a new name, Yisrael.

- Why did Yaakov want to make peace with Eisav now, after so many years?
- Why do you think an angel fought with Yaakov?
- Why did Yaakov want a blessing so badly that he wouldn't let go until he received it?



a closer look

לֹא אֲשַׁלֵּחֲךָ כִּי אִם־בֵּרַכְתָּנִי

"I will not let you go unless you bless me." (BEREISHIT 32:26)

RABBI SACKS TEACHES US:

'*I will not let you go until you bless me*: These words of Yaakov to the angel lie at the very core of surviving crisis. Each of us knows from personal experience that events that seemed disappointing, painful, even humiliating at the time, can be the most important in our lives. Through them we learned how to try harder next time; or they taught us a truth about ourselves; or they shifted our life into a new and more fruitful direction. We learn, not from our successes but from our failures. We mature and grow strong and become more understanding and forgiving through the mistakes we make. A protected life is a fragile and superficial life. Strength comes from knowing the worst and refusing to give in. Jacob/Israel has bequeathed us many gifts, but few more valuable than the obstinacy and resilience that can face hard times and say of them: "I will not let you go until you bless me." I will not give up or move on until I have extracted something positive from this pain and turned it into blessing.'

Source: *Surviving Crisis*, Vayishlach, Covenant & Conversation:



moral matters

LET'S DISCUSS!

- Do you think it is easier to learn from **success** or from **failure**? Why do you think this?
- Rabbi Sacks suggests that hard moments can teach us something about ourselves. What kinds of things might we **learn from struggles**?
- Why do you think Yaakov only gets his new name **after** a struggle?

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