

Origins of the *Tikkun Leyl Shavuot*

The origins of the *Tikkun Leyl Shavuot* are somewhat mysterious, which perhaps is appropriate for a ritual steeped in Kabbalah (Jewish Mysticism). The tradition is first mentioned in the *Zohar*, the thirteenth century compendia of mystical thought (See below, Appendix).¹ While there is no direct evidence, some have suggested that the circle of mystics who created the *Zohar*, actually observed the *Tikkun*.² It is however, the only text from the Medieval period that mentions the custom.

The first description of an actual *Tikkun* is found in a remarkable letter (found in the Appendix) dating from the mid 16th Century. The letter was written by the mystic Solomon Halevi Alkabetz, the author of *L'kha Dodi* which is part of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service.³ It describes a *Tikkun* held early in the 1500's by Joseph Karo in the city of Solonika.

Karo, born in Spain before the expulsion in 1492, had found refuge in the Ottoman empire. While Karo is well known as a prominent Halakhist (Jewish Legal authority) – he was the author of the *Shulhan Arukh* – he was also a prominent Kabbalist. Karo invited Alkabetz and other likeminded sages to prepare for *Shavuot* with a night of study.

Karo and his companions began the evening with the recitation of verses from the *Tanakh*, and then turned to the *Mishnah*. All at once, Karo fell into a trance and then began to speak in tongues (to speak with words that had no meaning to those who listened). Though initially they could not understand what he said, his words were beautiful and comforting to all listeners. He then began to speak in an understandable manner, speaking in the name of the *Mishnah*, he addressed all those who were present⁴.

The voice praised them, telling them that through their study they were restoring God's crown, and it depicted a God in exile and distress, greatly comforted by their words of Torah. It taught them mystical secrets of the Torah, urged them to continue to study, engage in mystical practices and, to make *aliyah* to Israel. It also told them, however, that the full secrets of Torah could not be revealed to them because they had failed to gather a *minyan* for study.

Karo and his fellows vowed not to sleep even on the next day but study during the second night of *Shavuot*. This time, gathering a *minyan* of seekers, they heard the voice twice. It continued to teach mystical secrets and to plead with the participants to make

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1. The *Zohar* describes the study on the night of the *Tikkun* as the adornment of the Bride (The *Shekhinah* – also seen as the household of Israel) with the King (the *Sefirah Tiferet* – also know as the Holy Blessed One).
 2. Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stamford University Press: 2004) p. 71.
 3. The *Kabbalat Shabbat* Service itself is one of the most prominent of mystical rituals that has entered mainstream Jewish practice.
 4. The “*Mishnah*” or “*Oral Torah*” in Kabbalistic symbolism refers to the *Shekhinah* (Gods tangible presence on earth, and the lowest of the mystical *Sefirot*). In essence it is the *Shekhinah* itself that addresses the participants in Karo’s voice.

aliyah. It told them that the coming of the Messiah was not far off, and that their work would aid in the redemption of God Himself.

Alkabetz's vivid account of this extraordinary *Tikkun* was published across Europe and served to publicize the practice. It became popular both in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire. Soon afterwards, both Alkabetz and Karo made *aliyah*, and moved to Safed in the north of the land of Israel.

Over the years it became customary to spend the entire night of Shavuot in the study of Torah. This study was seen as an act of mystical *tikkun*, repair, both because it helped to recreate harmony in the supernal realm (the heavenly spheres), but also because it helped to repair the damage caused by sins of the past. The mystics noted that the Israelites slept through the night before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and that God had to wake them up with thunder and the call of the *shofar*. If, the mystics believed, they had remained awake and had prepared themselves, then Sinai would have marked the redemption of humanity. The *Tikkun*, where Jews remain awake in study and preparation, therefore also repairs the damage caused by this ancient sin.

As the popularity of the *Tikkun* spread, its study became ritualized. While it is impossible to study the entirety of Torah in one night, a ritual developed which symbolically accomplished this feat. During the *Tikkun* the first and last verse of each *parashah* in the Torah, and each book of the *Tanakh* were read, and in addition the first and last *mishnah* of each of the tractates of the Talmud were also studied. Thus study of both the oral and written Torah's was symbolically completed during a *Tikkun*. A book containing these verses was called a *Seder Tikkun Leyl Shavuot*.

In modern times the *Tikkun* remains a night of study, though for many the traditional ritualized study of the entirety of Torah has been abandoned for more meaningful focused study. This *Seder Tikkun Leyl Shavuot* attempts to harmonize both the modern and ancient traditions. In this book, each *parashah* of the Torah is presented in turn with study material and questions for discussion. The study material are quotations drawn from diverse texts -- mystical, halakhic, midrashic, philosophic, hasidic -- written over the last two thousand years. Together, the weekly *parshiyyot* and the supplementary material represent Torah, in the broadest sense of the word.

A Note on Use

While the *Seder Tikkun Leyl Shavuot* can be used with little or no preparation, most programs work best with careful planning. This material will be most effective if discussion leaders review the material before Shavuot, and select the discussion questions that they wish to use. Some of the texts are quite difficult, and some of the discussion questions may require preparation on the part of the facilitator.

Bereishit

בראשית

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי־אֹר וַיְהִי־אֹר: וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל
אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. (Gen.1:3-4)

Rabbi Yitzhak said, "The light created by God in the act of creation flared from one end of the universe to the other and was hidden away, reserved for the righteous in the world to come, as it is written: 'Light is sown for the righteous' (Psalm 97:11). Then the worlds will be fragrant, and all will be one. But until the world to come arrives, it is stored away."

Rabbi Yehudah responded, "If the light were completely hidden, the world would not exist for a moment. Rather, it is hidden and sown like a seed, giving birth to seeds and fruit. Thereby the world is sustained. Every single day, a ray of that light shines into the world, animating everything, with that ray God feeds the world. And everywhere that Torah is studied at night, one thread-thin ray appears from that hidden light and flows down upon those absorbed in her. Since the first day, the light has never been fully revealed, but it is vital to the world, renewing each day the act of creation." (Zohar 1, 31b)

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why does the Zohar -- following earlier midrashim -- differentiate between the light that we experience in the world, and the light created on the first day?
2. How can we find meaning in the concept of the "hidden light"?
3. How does the Zohar understand the concept of creation? Was it a one time event, or is it a continuous process?
4. How and why does Torah study make this light shine upon the world?

No'ah



וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֶבֶה | נִבְנֶה-לָּנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה-לָּנוּ שֵׁם
פֶּן-נִפְּוֹץ עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ:

“Come let us build a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered across the whole earth.” (Gen. 11:4)

Why was the generation of the flood destroyed while that of Babel was merely dispersed? The Babylonians said to one another: Come, let us build. They worked together, in peace and harmony. This distinguished them from the people of the flood who committed violence against one another and were, therefore, destroyed. The generation of the Tower (of Babal) defied God openly, yet, because they practiced brotherhood toward each other, they were merely scattered. (*Talmud*)

The tower had seven levels on its east and seven on its west. The builders brought the bricks up one side and came down the other. If a man fell down and died, no heed was given him. But, when a brick fell down, they stopped work and wept, saying, “Woe unto us! When will another be brought up in its stead?” (*Gen R.* 38:8)

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Are these answers convincing? Do you think they reflect the plain meaning of the text?
2. How can we understand the punishment meted out in this Biblical story? In what ways does it fit the crime?
3. How do these rabbinic interpretations challenge the way our modern society functions?
4. How might the rabbis who wrote the passage from the Talmud view the fractures and even hostility between movements found in the modern Jewish community?

Lekh Le'kha

לך לך

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
אֶל-הָאֲרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרַאֲךָ:

The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen. 12:1)

In what way did God's choice of Abraham differ from the earlier choices of Adam and Noah? The blessing of Adam and the blessing of Noah were natural, bestowing natural gifts, promising fertility alone, whereas this third blessing [to Abraham] is dialogic, promising and demanding at the same time; promising the formation of a people and imposing obligations on a people, addressing the people in the person of its father and demanding in his person from it to "become a blessing" a blessing for the world of nations. (Buber, *Prophetic Faith*, p. 88)

If a person wishes to be a convert, but says, "I am too old at this time to convert." Let him learn from Abraham, who when he was ninety-nine years old, entered God's Covenant. (*Tanh.*, Buber Edition, 40b)

Every Israelite should actively endeavor to bring people under the wings of the Shekhinah, even as Abraham did. (*Avot DeRabbi Nathan* (vers. 1), XII, 27a)

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why was Abraham chosen to be the father of the people of Israel?
2. How does the concept of covenant fit into our own relationships with God?
3. Should the Jewish community actively seek converts?
4. How does Sarah fit into the picture/relationship as portrayed in these texts?

Va'yera

וִירָא

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתָּ
אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אַרְצַי הַמֹּרִיָּה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים
אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am." And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you." (Gen 22:1-2)

"It came to pass after" the lowest of all upper rungs. Who is that? *Devarim* [words or things], as it is said: "I am not a man of *divarim* [words]." (Ex 4:10). Who came after this rung? God (Elohim) tested Abraham, for the evil impulse came to accuse him in the presence of the Blessed Holy One.

Here we should contemplate: God tested Abraham. The verse should read: tested Isaac, since Isaac was already 37 years old and his father was no longer responsible for him. If Isaac had said, "I refuse," his father would not have been punished. So why is it written: "God tested Abraham" and not "God tested Isaac?"

But Abraham precisely! For he had to be encompassed by judgement, since previously Abraham contained no judgement at all. Now water was embraced by fire. Abraham was incomplete until now when water was completed by fire, fire by water.

So God tested Abraham, not Isaac, calling him to be embraced by judgement. When he did so, fire entered water becoming complete. One was judged, one executed judgement, encompassing one another.

Come and see the mystery of the word: Although we have said that Abraham is written, not Isaac, Isaac is encompassed by this verse through the mysterious wording. "God tested *et* Abraham – *et* precisely! This is Isaac, for at that time he dwelled in low power. As soon as he was bound on the altar, initiated into judgement fittingly by Abraham, fire and water encompassing one another, ascending. Then the division became apparent: water verses fire.

Who would have created a compassionate father who turned cruel? It was only so division would be manifest: water verses fire crowned in their realms, until Jacob appeared and everything harmonized, triad of patriarchs completed, above and below arrayed. (*Zohar*, Vol 1, 119b)

Questions for Discussion

1. Who do you think was being tested in the Akedah story?
2. The Zohar uses the Patriarchs as symbols to help understand the inner nature of God. What does this teach us about the attributes of justice and righteousness?
3. In this text the attributes of justice and righteousness are balanced in Jacob. What can this teach us about our own inner lives?

Hayyei Sarah

חיי שרה

וַיְבִיאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה
וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּנְחָם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ:

“Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah. And he took Rebekah to be his wife, and Isaac loved her and was comforted after his mother.” (Gen 24:67)

“Isaac brought her into the tent [and behold, she was like] his mother Sarah.” As long as Sarah lived a cloud of glory hovered over the entrance to her tent. After she died the cloud disappeared. But when Rebecca came, the cloud returned. As long as Sarah lived, her doors were wide open to wayfarers; at her death such openness ceased. But when Rebecca came, openness returned. As long as Sarah lived, a lamp was alight from one Sabbath eve till the next; at her death the light ceased, but when Rebecca came the light returned...Isaac brought her into the tent and behold she was like his mother Sarah. (*Gen R.* 60:16)

Eliezer tested only Rebecca’s quality of generosity and kindness...Our sages stated, ‘If the bride has beautiful eyes you need not look further’. This cannot be meant literally...How could the sages call for an examination of external beauty...What they obviously meant was that one should look for good deeds to test if she has a “beautiful eye,” that is to say, that she has a generous and kindly disposition and a kind heart. For if she looks at people with a kindly and unjaundiced eye then she is undoubtedly endowed with all other sterling moral qualities. Our sages learned this from the example of Eliezer who tested Rebecca for only this quality, since it is the linchpin of all others. (*Keli Yakar*)

Questions for Discussion

1. How can we interpret the qualities that the two midrashim assign to Rebecca?
2. Are these midrashim sexist? If they were examining a man would they stress other qualities?
3. How is Isaac viewed in the first text? What is the significance that Abraham sent a servant (rather than Isaac himself) to find a bride?

וַיְהִי כִּי-זָקֵן יַצְחָק וַתִּכְהֶינּוּ עֵינָיו מִרְאֵת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-עֵשָׂו | בְּנֵוֹ הַגָּדֹל וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנְנִי:

“When Isaac was old and his eyes were to dim to see, he called Esau, his older son, and said to him ‘my son,’ and he said to him, ‘here I am.’” (Gen 27:1)

Why was Isaac so insistent on blessing Esau? Did he not know that Esau was a man of the field, and Jacob a simple man? Furthermore, could he not have blessed them both equally? (Malbim)

There is no doubt that Isaac should have given thought to Esau’s character, his wickedness and that of his wives, and the likelihood that his children would follow their father’s bad example. He should have prayed to God for guidance as to whether he should bless the eldest or the most deserving. Affection, however, ruins one’s power of judgement. His affection for Esau blinded him to his faults. That is the implication of the phrase: “When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim” (Gen 27:1). His power of judgement grew dim and he was not able to see reality. (Abravanel)

Questions for Discussion

1. How would we answer Malbim’s questions?
2. What is the difference between being “a man of the field,” and a “simple man”?
3. How can we (or should we) balance affection and judgements in our dealings with our loved ones?
4. Do you think that Rebecca was equally blind in her dealings with Esau, and her favoritism of Jacob?

Va'yetze

ויצא

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַהֲנִיחַ הָיָא לְיָאָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-לְבָן מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא בְרַחֲלִי
עֲבַדְתִּי עֲמֹד וְלָמָּה רָמִיתָנִי:

“Came the morning, behold, it was Leah. and he (Jacob) said to Laban, ‘what it is this you have done to me, was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why have you deceived me?’” (Gen. 29:25)

All that night she (Leah) acted the part of Rachel. As soon as he rose in the morning “behold it was Leah.” He said to her, “daughter of a deceiver! Why did you trick me?” She said to him, “And you, why did you deceive your father? When he said to you, ‘Are you Esau?’ You said to him, ‘I am Esau your first-born.’ Yet you say, ‘why then have you tricked me?’ And your father, did he not say of you, ‘your brother came with trickery?’” (*Tanh.*)

[Laban said], It is perhaps true in your place, that such things are done; that the younger is given precedence over the firstborn, and that his portion is taken away and given to another, and the younger is given the name “firstborn.” But such things are not done “in our country to give the younger before the firstborn.” (R. Eliezer Ashkenazi, *Ma’aseh Hashem*)

Questions for Discussion

1. What message does the Midrash convey through the justification used by Leah?
2. Does Jacob’s trickery justify the trickery perpetuated on him by Laban and Leah?
3. Do you think that the punishment alluded to in these texts fits Jacob’s crime?
4. How do you think the rabbis view Jacob in these texts?

Va'yishlah

וישׁלח

וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיִּאָּבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר:

“Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.” (Gen. 32:25)

The mysterious figure represents both elements of a conflict – the dangerous forces of the id and the strength of the superego. Therefore he is both man and angel at the same time. Even as within himself Jacob experiences the battle between different aspects of his personality, so the figure with whom he struggles is a mirror-like reflection of the self, with the forces of good and evil engaged in dramatic intrapsychic conflict. Jacob was wrestling with his own projected image of himself. (Dorothy Zeligs, *Psychoanalysis and the Bible*, p. 52)

The Angel asks Jacob, “What is your name?” The last time he sought a blessing -- when his father asked him, “Who are you?” -- he answered that question falsely. “Now that you are prepared to testify truthfully as to who you are, you have shed that previous identity and are prepared to take on a new one, Israel.” (*Etz Hayim*, p. 202. Based on Rashi.)

Questions for Discussion

1. Is it helpful to see the struggle in this text as an internal conflict in Jacob's psyche?
2. Are there other ways to understand this wrestling match? what do they teach us?
3. What does it mean to receive a new name?
4. Israel is interpreted as meaning “one who struggles with God?” What does this name teach us about Jacob? What does it teach about ourselves?

וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת-יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מְצַלֵּחַ וַיְהִי בְּבַיִת אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרָיִם:

“And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master.” (Gen. 39: 2)

Human friends can always be found when a man is successful, but in times of trouble they tend to forsake him. Not so God. God was with Joseph when he was a slave, when he was in prison, and also when he was viceroy. (*Torah Shelma* 39:18)

The phrase, “And the Lord was with Joseph” is found four times in Genesis 39, God’s name is connected an additional time in the chapter with the events surrounding Joseph’s life as a slave. This adds meaning to events that seem random. They also help us to understand how “a spoiled lad of 17, alone in a foreign land and in dire adversity, begins to mature and acquire great strength of character.” (Based on *Etz Hayim* p. 238)

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways did Joseph change? Was Joseph still the “spoiled youth” when his brothers met him as Egypt’s Prime Minister?
2. Imitation of God’s actions is an essential element of the rabbinic world view. This text gives a model for friendship. What are some of the other divine actions that we should use as models for Jewish living (think of the Biblical texts on which they are based)?

Mi'ketz



וְאֶת־אֶחִיכֶם קַחוּ וְקוּמוּ שׁוּבוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ:

“Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man.” (Gen. 43:13)

“Take also your brother.” A story is told of two pious men who went on sea journey on a sacred mission. A huge wave threatened to sink their ship. One of them said, “this is the worst!” His friend replied, “it could still be much worse.” The other asked, “we are at the very gates of death, can there be anything worse?” Said his friend, “yes there could, the day when your son says to you: ‘give me a morsel of bread,’ and you have none to give him. You may know this from Jacob our father. As long as the bin was full of bread, he said, ‘my son will not go with you.’ As soon as his stock was exhausted he said, ‘take also your brother.’ And he began to pray for them.” (*Midrash Hagadol*)

Questions for Discussion

1. Does this text teach us anything about our obligations towards the starving in our communities, or across the world?
2. What does this text teach us about human relationships?

Va'yiggash

ויגַשׁ

וַיַּאֲסֹר יוֹסֵף מִרְפָּבְתּוֹ וַיַּעַל לְקָרְאֵת־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו גְּשָׁנָה וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וַיִּפֹּל
עַל־צַוְאָרְיוֹ וַיִּבְכֶּךָ עַל־צַוְאָרְיוֹ עוֹד:

“And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went to meet Israel his father, to Goshen; and he appeared to him, and he fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck for a good while.”
(Gen 46:29)

Joseph, not Jacob wept. Joseph wept liberally, but Jacob's tears had long since dried up. Joseph continued to weep even after Jacob began conversing with him. These little touches mirror the true situation. Jacob had lived lonely and isolated and his whole life had been centered on mourning for Joseph. Joseph had experienced many changes of fortune. These had not let him dwell on his homesickness. But the encounter with his father as he fell on his neck aroused in him nostalgic memories of home twenty years earlier and all these pent-up feelings surged out in his tears. (Rabbi S.R. Hirsch)

Questions for Discussion

1. Does this text reflect the reality of the mourning process?
2. Is there only one proper way to mourn?
3. How does the Jewish mourning process serve the needs of mourners with differing needs?

Va'yehiy

וידי

וַיִּצְוּ אֶל-יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אָבִיךָ צִוָּה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר: כֹּה-תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף
אֲנִי שָׂא נָא פָּשַׁע אַחִיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי-רָעוּהָ גְמִלוּךְ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפָשַׁע
עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ וַיִּבְדַּח יוֹסֵף בְּדַבְרָם אֵלָיו:

So they sent this message to Joseph, “before his death your father left this instruction: So shall you say to Joseph, ‘Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.’ Therefore please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him. (Gen. 50:16-17)

The brothers deviated from the truth for the sake of peace; for Jacob had given no such command, since Joseph was not suspect by him of having a reason for committing any injury to them. (Rashi)

It seems to me that the plain meaning of the text is that Jacob was never told of the sale of Joseph by his brothers, but imagined that he got lost in the fields and was sold by his finders to Egypt. His brothers did not wish to divulge their misconduct, especially for fear of his curse and anger. Joseph out of his good nature also did not tell his father. Had Jacob known all the time, they should have begged their father to command Joseph to forgive them and not violate his word. They would not then have had to fabricate the message. (Ramban on Gen. 45:27)

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think that the brothers were justified in lying to Joseph in order to gain forgiveness from him?
2. Hillel teaches that ‘every bride is beautiful on her wedding day,’ while Shammai teaches that some brides are beautiful and others are not, and that one should not lie. Which rabbi is right?
3. Is it ever right to lie ‘for the sake of peace?’
4. Is there such a thing as a ‘white lie?’
5. Does this text teach us anything about the process of *teshuvah* (repentance)?

Shemot

שְׁמוֹת

וַתִּירֶאֱנָן הַמִּיּוֹלְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
וַתַּחְיֶינָן אֶת־הַיְלָדִים:

“The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.” (Exod. 1:17)

Our rabbis teach that the children of Israel were redeemed for the sake of four pious women: Shifra and Puah, the midwives of the Hebrew women who refused, despite Pharaoh’s command, to kill the Hebrew babies. Yochevet, who watched over and preserved the baby Moses, and Miriam his sister, who helped lead the children of Israel from slavery to freedom. (*Sotah* 11b)

Questions for Discussion

1. Women play a central role throughout the Moses cycle of stories. What other women were also significant in the Exodus from Egypt?
2. How can we rediscover the lost voices of the women in our ancient traditions?
3. There are many significant, but less well known female figures in the Bible -- the daughters of Zelophehad, the unnamed mother of Samson, Michal daughter of King Saul, and Hulda the Prophetess, to name but a few -- what were their contributions to our people?
4. Who are some of the women that have played a prominent role in Jewish history?

Va'era

וַאֲרָא

וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יְדֵי לְתַת אֶתָּה לְאַבְרָהָם
לְיִצְחָק וְלְיַעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֶתָּה לְכֶם מְוֹרָשָׁה אֲנִי יְהוָה:

"I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I am the Lord." (Exod. 6:8)

Israel merited redemption from Egypt because they remained distinct from the Egyptians. As it is said, Israel deserved the Exodus from Egypt because they did not change their names, did not change their language, did not engage in evil talk and retained their morality.

They did not change their names: they came to Egypt as Reuven and Shimon, and as Reuven and Shimon they left Egypt. Reuven did not become Rufus, Judah did not become Julian, Joseph did not become Justus, and Benjamin did not become Alexander. (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 4,24)

Questions for Discussion

1. The names in this text are drawn from the Roman world in which the rabbis lived at the time of its writing. What names might we substitute today?
2. What advice do the rabbis give as about assimilation and acculturational?
3. How can the use of Hebrew names help to preserve our identity?
4. What is the importance of the other factors identified by the rabbis?
5. Why would these factors enable our ancestors to achieve their freedom from slavery in Egypt?

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה נִטֵּה יָדְךָ עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ עַל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם
וַיִּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched.’” (Exod 10:21)

Generally, darkness is merely the absence of light and can be dispelled by lighting fire. But this darkness was so thick it could be touched. It was a darkness of a deeper nature. (Seforno)

The darkness was so dense that people could not see one another. That is the worst of all darknesses: when people are unable to “see” their neighbors, that is, note their distress and help them. (Hassidic)

When a person does not see others or want to see them, there is darkness in the world. (*Ketav Sofer*)

Questions for Discussion

1. How do these texts reinterpret the concept of ‘darkness?’
2. Can the darkness be reinterpreted to teach us something about the mind set of the Egyptians?
3. How can we combat the plague of darkness within our own hearts?
4. Can any of the other plagues be reinterpreted to teach us about the mental/moral condition of the Egyptians?

Beshalah

בשׁלַח

אָז יִשִּׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאֹמֶר
אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֵה גָאֵה סוּס וְרֹכֵבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם:

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. They said: I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.”
(Exod. 15:1)

Rabbi Yohanan asked, “How do we know that the Holy One does not rejoice in the suffering of the wicked? The heavenly hosts wanted to break into song when the Egyptians were drowning in the sea. God silenced them and said: My children lie drowned in the sea and you would sing?” (*Meg.* 10b)

From the day that God created the world until this moment, no one had sung praises to God -- not Adam after having been created, not Abraham after being delivered from the fiery furnace, not Isaac when he was spared the knife, or Jacob when he escaped after wrestling with an angel and from Esau. But when Israel came to the sea and it parted for them, “then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.” And God said, “for this I have been waiting.” (*Exod. R.* 23:4)

Questions for Discussion

1. How can we balance rejoicing for our survival and the consequent death and suffering of others?
2. When we focus on ourselves it is easy to perceive that God loves us best. What does the text from the Talmud (*Meg.* 10b) teach us about God’s relationship to all humanity?
3. What role does praise of God serve in our worship? Why are prayers of praise necessary? Does God need them?
4. What are some other types of prayer aside from praise of God?
5. How do the differing types of prayer function together to create a prayer experience?

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאִמֹּר:

“*And God spoke all these words, saying . . .*” (Exod. 20:1)

Come and see how the voice went forth to all Israel, to each and everyone in keeping with his particular capacity – to the elderly in keeping with their capacity, to young men in keeping with their capacity, to the little ones in keeping with their capacity, and to women according to their capacity.

Now, if the manna, which was all the same kind, changed into so many kinds to provide for the particular need of each individual, was it not possible for the voice (of God), in which there is such a divine strength, to vary according to the capacity of each individual so that no harm should befall him? (*Exod. R.*)

Rabbi Yohanan asked: What is implied in the verse “The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.” (Psalm 68:12)? That each and every word that issued from the mouth of the Almighty divided itself into seventy languages.* Accordingly, citing the verse “As a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces” (Isaiah 23:29), the school of Rabbi Ishmael taught: just as a hammer that strikes the rock causes sparks to fly off in all directions, so each and every word that issued from the mouth of the Holy One divided itself into seventy languages. (*Shabbat* 88b)

Secret of secrets for those who know wisdom: The moment these letters came forth, secretly circling as one, a spark flashed to engrave. A flowing measure extended ten cubits on this side, and out shot comets inside comets, seventy-one. Sparks burst into flashes, up high, down below, quieting down, rising up high, beyond, beyond. The flow measured out ten cubits on the other side, and comets shot out in colors as before. And so on every side...Now they came forth, these carved, flaming letters flashing like gold when it dazzles. Like a craftsman smelting silver and gold: when he takes them out of the blazing fire, all is bright and pure; so the letters came forth, pure and bright from the flowing measure of the spark. So it is written: “The word of YHVH is refined” (Psalm 18:31), as silver and gold are refined. When these letters came forth, they were all refined, carved precisely, sparkling, flashing. All Israel saw the letter flying through space in every direction, engraving themselves on the tablets of stone. (*Zohar*)

Questions for Discussion

1. What do these texts teach us about the nature of the revelation at Sinai?
2. Is there one meaning of Torah for all time? Or can Torah be understood in many different ways -- all of which are correct? What are the complications of living in a religious tradition where there can be many different “correct” answers?
4. What can we learn from R. Yohanan and R. Ishmael’s view that the Torah was given in seventy different languages?

Mishpatim

משפטים

וְגֵר לֹא-תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי-גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: כָּל-אֶלְמָנָה
וְיָתוּם לֹא תַעֲנוּן:

“You shall not wrong the stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat the widow or orphan.” (Exod. 22:20-21)

A man ought to be especially heedful of his behavior towards widows and orphans, for their souls are exceedingly depressed and their spirits low. Even if they are wealthy, even if they are the widow and orphan of a king, we are especially enjoined concerning them.

How are we to treat them? One may not speak to them otherwise than tenderly. One must show them unvarying courtesy; not hurt them physically with hard toil, nor wound their feelings with hard speech. One must take greater care of their property than of one's own. Whoever irritates them, provokes them to anger, pains them, tyrannizes over them...is guilty of a transgression. (Rambam, *Hilchot De'ot* 42:10)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Maimonides (Rambam) go to such lengths to protect the rights of widows and orphans?
2. What lessons are we asked to learn from the history of our people?
3. What ills can befall a society that does not have a concern for social justice?
4. What do we do, and can we do to help the disadvantaged of our society?
5. Texts from the Torah on Shavuot remind us that we should leave the corners of our fields for the disadvantaged of our society. Today, when we are no longer farmers, how can we observe this *mitzvah*?

Terumah

תרומה

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ־לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבוֹ
תִּקְחוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמָתִי:

“Tell the Israelite people to take Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him.” (Exod. 25:2)

All contributions to the tabernacle were voluntary except the half shekel, which was required of all. Contributions in kind were left to generosity, money was not. (Ibn Ezra on 25:3)

God said: “take me gifts” for when Israel acquires Torah and Tabernacle it acquires Me too. Hence, “Take Me...” (Exod. R. 33:6)

“Tell the Israelites to take me gifts” is the heart and substance of Torah, namely tzedakah and good deeds. (*Iture Torah*, p. 202)

Questions for Discussion

1. Rabbi Akiba taught that “loving ones neighbor as oneself” was the essence of Torah. Do he and the *Iture Torah* agree on the Torah’s central message?
2. Why do you think the half-shekel was a mandatory contribution?
3. What kind of obligation do we have to support our communal institutions?
4. Do our institutions have obligations towards members of the community that don’t support them?
5. What do you think is meant by Midrash’s assertion that our people acquired God?

Tetzaveh

תְּצַוֶּה

וְאַתָּה תִּצְוֶנָה | אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן זַיִת זָךְ כְּתִיב לְמֵאֹר
לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד:

“You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamp continually.” (Ex. 27:20)

See how words of Torah give light to man when he is occupied with them. but whoever is not so occupied and is ignorant will stumble. It may be compared to one who is standing in the dark. He feels his way, comes upon a stone and stumbles on it, or comes upon a gutter, falls, his face striking the ground. Why did this happen? Because he went out without a light. So it is with the ignorant one who knows no words of Torah. He comes upon a transgression and stumbles on it. Regarding him, the Holy Spirit cries, “He shall die for lack of instruction.” (Prov. 5:23)...But those who are occupied with Torah give light everywhere. This may be compared to one standing in the dark who came upon a stone and did not stumble, he saw a gutter and did not fall in. Why? Because he had a lamp with him, as it is said, “Your words are a lamp to my feet”, and “Though you run, you shall not stumble.” (Prov. 4:12) (*Exod. R. 36:3*)

What is the meaning of the text: “For the commandment is a lamp?” Whoever performs a *mitzvah* has kindled, as it were, a lamp before the Holy One Blessed be God and revives his soul, as it is stated, “The soul of a man is the lamp of the Lord.” (*Exod. R. 36:3*)

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the metaphorical meaning of the lamp in these midrashim? Is it the same in both texts?
2. Should the Torah be seen as a practical guide, to prevent us from stumbling, or should it be seen as a guide for the spiritual refinement of the soul?
3. Are there other symbolic means that we can assign to the lamp in the ancient sanctuary, and indeed to the *Ner Tamid*, the eternal light, found in our synagogues?

Ki Tissa

כִּי תִשָּׂא

וְהִלָּחַת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הַמָּה וְהַמְּכֻתָּב מִכְּתָב אֱלֹהִים הוּא חֲרוּת
עַל-הַלְּחָת:

“The tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing, incised upon the tablets.” (Exod. 32:16)

Rabbi Joshua b. Levi said: A heavenly voice issues from Horeb every day saying: ‘Woe unto those who neglect the study of Torah.’ for anyone who neglects the study of Torah is punished by God, as it says “And the writing was God’s writing, incised (*haruth*) upon the tablets.” What is the meaning of *haruth*? This was discussed by R. Judah, R. Jeremiah and the Sages. R. Judah said: read not *haruth* (inscribed) but *heyryuth* (freedom) from captivity. R. Jeremiah stated that it means freedom from the Angel of Death. The sages held that it means freedom from suffering. (*Exod. R.* 41:7)

Thus man must know that he is tempted from time to time for the sake of his freedom. He must learn to believe in his freedom. He must believe that his freedom, limited though it may be everywhere else, is limitless vis-a-vis God. The very commandments of God, “graven on stone tablets,” must be for him, as in an untranslatable rabbinic play on words, “freedom on tablets.” Everything, it says in the same source, everything is in God’s hands except for one thing: the fear of God. (F. Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, p. 266-267)

Questions for Discussion

1. How do the different rabbis in the midrash use the pun on *heyryuth* to understand the verses from the Torah?
2. How does Rosenzweig transform the pun from a negative to a positive understanding of the word “freedom”?
3. What role should autonomy play in our religious lives?

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָּכֶם קָדֹשׁ שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן
 לַיהוָה כֹּל־הַעֲשֶׂה בּוֹ מְלָאכָה יוּמָת: לֹא־תִבְעְרוּ אֵשׁ בְּכָל מְשֻׁבְּתֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם
 הַשַּׁבָּת:

“On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day.” (Ex 35:2-3)

Though you may be engaged in a work dedicated to divine purposes, be on guard not to perform any work on the Sabbath. (Ibn Ezra on 35:3)

The prohibition highlights man’s acknowledgment that his ability to master matter (represented by fire) is lent to him by God and is to be used only in His service. (S.R. Hirsch)

The rule applies figuratively as well. Do not add “fire” to your talk on the Sabbath by adding to dissent, gossip and negative criticism. (Hassidic)

The mythical mind would expect that after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place -- a holy mountain or a holy spring -- whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first. when history began, there was only one holiness in the world, holiness in time. When at Sinai the word of God was about to be voiced, a call for holiness in man was proclaimed: “Thou shalt be unto me a holy people.” It was only after the people had succumbed to the temptation of worshipping a thing, the golden calf, that erection of a Tabernacle, of holiness in space was commanded. (Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man*, pp. 9-10.)

Questions for Discussion

1. How do these texts understand the nature of forbidden work on Shabbat?
2. What can we learn about our relationship with God and the earth from the types of work that are not permitted on Shabbat.
3. How does the rest commanded for Shabbat enhance our sense of the holiness of the day?
4. What does Heschel’s distinction between the “holiness of time,” and the “holiness of space” teach us about the Jewish world view?

Pekudei

פקודי

כִּי עָנָן יְהוָה עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ לְעֵינֵי כָל-בֵּית-יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּכָל-מַסְעֵיהֶם:

“For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.” (Exod. 40:38)

Here (in the Tabernacle) we have another symbol of unity, for while the Tabernacle was made up of many parts yet it says “so that the Tabernacle becomes one whole” (Ex 26:6) [the Hebrew wording echoes the Sh’ma] Now just as the human body possesses many organs, higher and lower, some being internal and not visible, while others are external and visible, yet they all form one body, so also it was with the Tabernacle: all its individual parts were formed in the pattern of that above, and when they were properly filled together “the Tabernacle was one.”

Of the commandments of the Torah the same is true: they are each and all members and limbs in the mystery above, and, when they all unite as one whole, they all ascend into the one mystery. The mystery of the Tabernacle, which thus consists of members and limbs all ascending into the mystery of the Heavenly man, is after the pattern of the commandments of the Torah, which are all also in the mystery of the Heavenly man, both male and female, which, when united, form the one mystery of Man. (*Zohar IV, 162b*)

Questions for Discussion

1. Kabbalistic thought attributes correspondences between the material world and the divine realm. What truth does the Tabernacle teach us about the nature of the Divine?
2. To the Kabbalist, the *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle) represents the dwelling place of the *Shekhinah* (God’s indwelling and female presence) on earth. What can we do to feel the presence of God in our lives?
3. How does it add to our understanding of God, to see the divine using both male and female metaphors?

Va'yikra

ויקרא

וְקָרְבוּ וּכְרָעוּ יָרְתֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַכֹּל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֲלֶיהָ אִשָּׁה
רִיח־נִיחֻחַ לַיהוָה:

“Its entrails and legs shall be washed with water, and the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the alter as a burnt offering, a gift of pleasing odor to the Lord.” (Lev 1:9)

The Almighty has no need of sacrifices: “Do I eat flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” (Psalm 50:13). Noah’s sacrifice’s were burnt offerings and their flesh was completely burnt and not partaken of. The only thing that reached the throne of God was the savor, a thing of no substance. The actual smell of burnt meat is certainly not alluded to here since this is by no means “sweet”. But something more important is intended.

The phrase, “to smell a sweet savor” had already lost its literal meaning in Hebrew and had acquired a metaphorical application alluding to the acceptance and approval of the inner intentions of the worshipers. In Psalm 50 after the verse we have quoted we encounter the passage: “Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving” implying that the offering approved of by God was that which expressed the thanksgiving and gratitude of the worshiper. Such an offering was Noah’s and therefore it was acceptable to God. (Cassuto, *From Adam To Noah*, p. 81)

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the true sacrifices that God requires?
2. If it were possible, and the Temple were rebuilt, should Judaism return to animal sacrifice?
3. How can we ensure that our prayers are true sacrifices to God?
4. Why do we pray -- and why in ancient times did we offer sacrifices -- was it for God, or for ourselves?
5. Isaiah teaches that sacrifices and fasting have to be reflected by the actions of our lives, is the same true for the prayers and rituals that form modern Judaism?

Tzav



אִם עַל־תּוֹדָה יִקְרִיבֶנּוּ וְהִקְרִיב | עַל־זֶבַח הַתּוֹדָה חֲלֹת מִצּוֹת בְּלוֹלֹת
בְּשֶׁמֶן וְרִקִּיקֵי מִצּוֹת מְשַׁחִים בְּשֶׁמֶן וְסֹלֶת מְרֻבֶּכֶת חֲלֹת בְּלוֹלֹת בְּשֶׁמֶן:

“If he shall offer it as a thanksgiving, he shall offer together with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, well soaked.” (Lev. 7:12)

All the precepts are aimed at cultivating our faith in God and a sense of gratitude to Him who created us. This is the aim of the creation that man should acknowledge his Creator and give thanks to Him. This is the aim of all our prayers, of the synagogue where men gather publicize this fact and proclaim: “We are Your creatures.” (Ramban on Lev. 7:12)

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the function of prayers of thanksgiving?
2. Why is it important to give thanks?
3. In ancient times a sacrifice was made to give thanks, in what ways, aside from prayer, can we show our thanks today?

Shemini

שמיני

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה תַּעֲשׂוּ וַיֵּרָא אֲלֵיכֶם כְּבוֹד יְהוָה:

“Moses said: This is the thing which the Lord commanded that you should do, that the glory of the Lord will appear to you.” (Lev. 9:6)

Said Moses to Israel: “Eradicate the evil inclination from your heart and all of you should be inspired by the same awe and be of one mind to serve the Omnipotent. Just as He is one, unique in the world, so should your service be directed uniquely to Him alone, as it is said, “you shall circumcise the foreskins of your hearts” (Deut. 10:10). Why? “For the Lord your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of Lords” (Deut. 10:17). Act in this way, then “the glory of the Lord will appear to you.” (*Sifra* on Shemini)

Questions for Discussion

1. Is or should an experience of the “glory of God” the aim of our prayer services?
2. What can we do to increase the spirituality of Jewish worship?
3. Are there ways, outside of worship, in which we can experience the “glory of God”?

וּבְמִלַּאת | יְמֵי טְהוֹרָה לְבֵן אִו לְבֵית תְּבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן־שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה וּבֶן־יוֹנָה
אוֹתָר לְחֻטָּאת אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן:

“On the completion of her period of purification, for either son or daughter, she shall bring to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or turtledove for purification offering.” (Lev. 12:6)

Rabbi Levi said: in the ways of the world, if a man deposits a purse of silver secretly with his neighbor and he returns to him a *litra* of gold in public, will he not be grateful to him? So it is with the Blessed Holy One. Humanity deposits with him a drop of fluid in private, and the Blessed Holy One returns to him a complete and perfect human being in public. Is this not a matter for praise? (*Lev. R. 14:2*)

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: in the ways of the world, if a man takes a purse of money and places it face downwards, will the money not completely scatter? Yet the embryo dwells in its mother's womb and the Blessed Holy One watches over it that it should not fall and die. Is this not a matter for praise? (*Lev. R. 14:3*)

Questions for Discussion

1. Our tradition teaches that the creation of a new baby is a partnership between the mother, father and God. How do we celebrate the miracle of new human life?
2. Brit Milah, circumcision, is ordained in the Torah as a ceremony to welcome a new baby boy into the Covenant, what are ways the we can celebrate and mark the entrance of a new baby Girl into the Covenant with God?
3. How can we ensure that science does not hide the miracle of each unique new human life?
4. What are appropriate modern ways that we can give thanks for the safe birth of our children?

Metzora

מצרע

זֹאת תְהִי־הַתּוֹרַת הַמְצֻרֶע בַּיּוֹם טְהַרְתּוֹ וְהוֹבֵא אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן:

“This shall be the ritual for a leper at the time that he is to be purified. when it has been reported to the priest.” (Lev 14:2)

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Yose ben Zimra: All gossip and evil talk is tantamount to denying God, as it is stated, “Who have said, with our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?” (Psalm 12:5). Rabbi Yose further said: all who gossip and give in to evil talk are subject to plagues. Rash Lakish said: what is the implication of the verse, “this is the law of the leper (*metzora*)”? This is the law of he who spreads evil talk (*motzi shem ra*).

Once there was a peddler who used to go around the towns in the vicinity of Sepphoris, crying out: ‘Who wishes to buy the elixir of life?’ He drew great crowds around him. Rabbi Jannai was sitting and expounding in his room and heard the peddler calling out. He said to him: ‘Come here, and sell me it.’ The peddler said: ‘Neither you, nor people like you require what I have to sell.’ The rabbi pressed him, and the pedlar brought to him the Book of Psalms and showed him the passage, “Who is the man that desires life?” and what is written right after this? “Keep thy tongue from evil, depart from evil and do good.” Rabbi Jannai said, ‘All of my life I have been reading this passage, but did not know how to explain it, until this peddler came and made it clear. *Who is the man that desires life?...keep thy tongue from evil* [speech]. (Lev. R. 16:2)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did the rabbis make an analogy between leprosy and gossip?
2. Are there any other types of activities which are as dangerous to a community?
3. In the Midrash the rabbi learns from a peddler, from whom are we willing to learn?

Aharei Mot

אַחֲרֵי מוֹת

כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
תְּטַהֲרוּ:

“For on this day expiation shall be made for you to purify you of all your sins; you shall be pure before the Lord.” (Lev. 16:30)

One who says: I shall sin and then repent will not be granted the opportunity of repentance; I shall sin and Yom Kippur will atone, Yom Kippur does not atone. For the transgressions between a person and God, Yom Kippur atones; for the transgressions between a person and a person, Yom Kippur does not atone until (s)he seeks forgiveness from his/her fellow. (*Mishnah Yoma* 8:9)

Rabbi Jose b. Tartos said, “From where can it be proved that he who repents is regarded as if he had gone up to Jerusalem, built the Temple and the alter, and offered upon it all the sacrifices mentioned in the Law? from the verse, ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit (Ps. 31:17).’” (*Lev. R.* 7:2)

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the Mishnah rank the sins against humanity vis-a-vis sins against God?
2. Why is it so important on Yom Kippur to do *teshuvah* for the sins we commit against our fellows?
3. What constitutes true repentance in the Jewish tradition?
4. If some one comes to me repentant for what they have done to me, what is my obligation?
5. Why is the broken heart the most effective sacrifice?

Kedoshim

קְדוּשִׁים

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־כָּל־עַדְת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

“the Lord spoke to Moses saying: speak to the whole Israelite people and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (Lev. 19:1-2)

God is the absolute authority over the world because He is separate from it and transcends it but he is not withdrawn from it. Israel must in imitating God by being a holy nation similarly not withdraw from the world of the nations but rather radiate a positive influence on them through every aspect of Jewish living. (Buber, *Behirat Yisrael*, p. 96)

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”(Lev 19:8) Rabbi Akiva said, this verse is the great principal of the Torah. Ben Azzai said: *“This is the book of the generations of man.”(Gen. 5:1)* is a fundamental principal superior to this. (*Sifra* on Lev. 19:8)

Questions for Discussion

1. When we hear the word “holy” what are our the first thoughts that come into our minds?
2. Does holiness require us to separate ourselves from the everyday world?
3. What kinds of actions constitute ‘holy’ actions?
4. Do Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai’s selections help us to understand the nature of holiness?
5. Why might Ben Azzai believe that the text from Genesis is the fundamental principal of Torah?
6. What text would you choose as the fundamental principal?

וְשׁוֹר אִו־שָׂה אֶתֹו וְאֶת־בְּנוֹ לֹא תִשְׁחָטוּ בְיוֹם אֶחָד:

“However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.” (Lev. 22:28)

The reason for the prohibition of slaying the mother and the young on the same day as well as the ordinance of sending away the mother bird is to eradicate cruelty and pitilessness from the human heart...not that God had pity on the mother bird or on the mother and young. Were that the case, God would have entirely forbidden the eating of meat. But the real reason is to cultivate within us the quality of mercy. (Ramban, on Lev. 22:28)

We are told that our teacher (R. Yehudah Hanasi) was studying Torah in front of the Babylonian Synagogue in Sepphoris when a calf passed by on its way to be slaughtered. The calf cried out, “save me.” R. Yehudah said to the calf, “What can I do for you? For this you were fashioned.” For his heartlessness, Rabbi⁵ was punished with toothaches for thirteen years...At a later time, a creeping thing ran past his daughter. She was about to kill it, when Rabbi said, “My daughter, let it be for it is written, ‘His tender mercies are over all his works.’” Because he prevented an act of cruelty to an animal, Rabbi’s health was restored. (*Gen. R.* 33:3)

Questions for Discussion

1. How can kashrut cultivate the concept of mercy, while animals still are killed?
2. How can we explain the importance of kashrut to a new generation of Jews?
3. If a more merciful form of killing should be found, should this replace the traditional form of shechita?
4. Can milk fed veal be kosher (a very cruel way of raising a calf)?
5. Is vegetarianism the ultimate form of kashrut?

5. Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi’s name is often shortened to the honorific “Rabbi” in rabbinic sources.

Be'har

בהר

וְכִי־יָמִיד אָחִיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחֵי עִמָּךְ:

“And if your brother grows poor and his hand failed with you, you shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or settler, he shall live with you.” (Lev. 25:35)

“You shall strengthen him”. Don’t let him fall and become impoverished so that it will be hard for him to recover, but strengthen him the moment his “hand fails”. To what may this be compared? To a burden on an ass’s back. While it is still on the ass, one man can get hold of it and right it, but once it has fallen to the ground, five men cannot lift it up.” (Rashi)

There are eight degrees of charity, one higher than the other. the highest degree, exceeded by none, is that of the person who assists a poor Jew by providing him with a gift or loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment -- in a word, by putting him where he can dispense with other people’s aid. With reference to such aid, it is said, “You shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or a settler, he shall live with you” (Lev. 25:35), which means strengthen him in such a manner that his falling into want is prevented. (Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah*)

Questions for Discussion

1. Is it fair to rank differing levels of tzeddakah?
2. What are the implications of the Rambam’s choice for the highest level of tzeddakah?
3. What is the difference between tzeddakah and charity?
4. Does our obligation to help our neighbor refer only to Jews, or all the people of the world?
5. Does the obligation of tzeddakah rest only on individuals, or should we use it to shape the society in which we live?

Be'hukkotai

בְּחֻקֹּתַי

אִם־בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעַשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם: ... וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ וְשָׁכַבְתֶּם וְאֵין מִחֲרִיד וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי חַיָּה רָעָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ וְחָרַב לֹא־תַעֲבֹר בְּאֶרְצְכֶם:

“If you follow my laws and faithfully observe My commandments...I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will give the land respite from vicious beasts, and no sword shall cross your land.” (26:3,6)

“And I will grant peace in the land” – in case you might argue: food and drink is all very well but if there is no peace there is nothing! The text therefore adds, “And I will give peace in the land”. From here we may learn that peace outweighs everything else. Isaiah makes the same point: “He that makes peace and creates all” (45:7). (Rashi)

It is written, ‘Seek peace and pursue it’ (Ps. 34:14). The Torah does not order you to run after, or pursue, the commandments, but only to fulfill them, when the appropriate occasion comes. When the occasions come for the commandments, then you are enjoined to fulfill them. But peace you must seek in your own place, and run after it to another. (*Num. R.* 19:27)

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you agree that peace is the highest blessing bestowed by God?
2. Tzeddakah is also considered to be a mitzvah with no specific time, what do shalom and tzeddakah have in common?
3. Shalom comes from the root שלם meaning to make whole. What can this teach us about the Jewish concept of peace?
4. What steps can we take to “seek peace and pursue it”?

Be' midbar

במדבר

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּאַחַד לַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁנִי
בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיית לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:

“On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting.” (Num. 1:1)

Why was the Torah given in the wilderness? Because the desert is open and accessible to all humanity. As it is said, “Let everyone who is thirsty come for water” (Isa. 55:1). Why was the Torah not given in the Promised Land? So that no tribe would have a preferred claim. (*Num. R. 1:7*)

שָׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עַדְת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפָּר
שְׁמוֹת כָּל־זָכָר לְגִלְגֻלְתָּם:

“Take a census of the whole Israelite community...every male, head by head.” (Num 1:2)

So not everyone is included in this number. The women, the children under twenty, and probably those too old or unfit for service (although significantly, no upper age limit or physical condition is set for fighting men) are left out. In addition, nothing is said here of the *erev rav*, the mixed multitude that accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt...

As a result of this census, the women now disappear from view, uncounted – like their children and the mixed multitude. Although the actual population of Israelites...must have amounted to several million people, the rabbis always talk about the “600,000 who stood at Sinai,” not acknowledging that they are including only the men numbered in this census. The rest of us are still waiting to be counted. (Ellen Frankel, *The Five Books of Miriam*, p. 198)

Questions for Discussion

1. How can we insure that every human is counted?
2. Are we as inclusive a society as we should be, where do we fall short?
3. How can we rediscover the lost voices of our uncounted ancestors?
4. How can we understand the concept of “chosenness” if the Torah is God’s gift to all of humanity?

Naso

נְשִׂיא

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל-אֶהֱרֹן וְאֶל-בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה תְבַרְכוּ
אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמֹר לָהֶם: ס יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׂמְרֶךָ: ס יָאֵר יְהוָה |
פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְךָ: ס יִשָּׂא יְהוָה | פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּשֵּׁם לָךְ שָׁלוֹם: ס וַשְּׂמוּ
אֶת-שְׁמִי עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֶם: ס

“Thus shall you bless the children of Israel, saying unto them: May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; may the Lord lift up His face upon you and grant you peace. And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.” (Num.6:22-27)

The House of Israel said to the Blessed Holy One: God of the Universe, you order the priests to bless us? We need only your blessing. Look down from Your holy habitation and bless your people. The Blessed Holy One replied to them: Though I ordered the priests to bless you I stand with them together and bless you. (*Tanh.*)

How do we know that Israel should not say: Their blessings are dependant on the priests? And the priests should not say: We shall bless Israel? The Torah states, “And I will bless them.” (*Sifrei* on Naso)

You might think that if the priests decided to bless Israel then they would be blessed and if they did not, they would not be blessed? The Torah states, “And I will bless them.” Whether or not they (the priests) decide to bless them, “I will bless them” from heaven. (*Sifrei Zota*)

Questions for Discussion

1. What role do the Kohanim play in the ‘Priestly Benediction’?
2. Does (or can) *duchining* enhance our services?
3. Is the priesthood (the special status of Kohanim and Livi'im relevant for modern Judaism?
4. In Israel duchining is done each Shabbat, and in Jerusalem each day. What can this teach us about holiness and the religious importance of Eretz Yisrael?

וַיֵּרָץ הַנְּעָר וַיֵּגֵד לְמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְדָּד וּמֵדָד מִתְנַבְּאִים בַּמַּחֲנֶה:
וַיַּעַן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נּוּן מִשְׁרֵת מֹשֶׁה מִבְּחָרָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי מֹשֶׁה כָּלְאִים:
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה הֲמִקְנִיא אֶתְּךָ לִי וּכְמִי יִתָּן כָּל-עַם יִהְיֶה נְבִיאִים כִּי-יִתֶּן
יְהוָה אֶת-רוּחוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם:

“The youth ran out and told Moses, saying, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!’ And Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, ‘My lord Moses, restrain them!’ But Moses said to him, ‘Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord put His spirit upon them.’”
(Num. 11:27-29)

The ecstatic wishes to experience ecstasies. He is in a quest of what is not promised and what does not spontaneously communicate itself, and he must ever anew strive to attain his goal by means of various stimulants...The prophet, on the other hand, is not moved by a will to experience prophecy. What he achieves comes against his will. He does not pant for illumination. He does not call for it; he is called upon. God comes upon the prophet before the prophet seeks the coming of God.

Ecstasy is motivated by man’s concern for God, and by his will to be illumined. Prophecy, to the prophet’s mind, is motivated by God’s concern for man, by God’s will that the prophet illumine his people. (Heschel, *Prophets*, p. 358)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Joshua wish to stop Eldad and Medad? Why does Moses disagree?
2. What is special or differentiates Hebrew prophecy from the seers and prophets of Greece?
3. Is the age of prophecy over, or does prophecy still exist in our times?
4. How would we react if we heard God’s voice?
5. Are there any dangers engendered by prophecy in a normative religious system? Could these dangers be the motivation for Joshua’s response, as well as for the rabbinic rejection of prophecy as an authoritative voice for modern halakhic decision making?

Shelah Le'kha

שֵׁלַח לְךָ

אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי אִם-לֹא | זֹאת אֶעֱשֶׂה לְכָל-הָעֵדָה הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַנּוֹעְדִים
עָלַי בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יִתָּמוּ וְשָׁם יָמָתוּ:

"I the Lord have spoken: Thus will I do to all that wicked band that has banded together against Me, in this very wilderness they shall die to the last man." (Num 14:35)

All Israelites over twenty years of age were condemned to die in the desert, even those who had silently disagreed with the majority and favored Joshua and Caleb. Why? Because they did not speak out. (*Num. R.* 16:23)

The spies said: "We cannot attack the people for it is stronger than we" (Num 13:31). "Then we" (mimenu), could also be understood as "than He." What the spies suggested was that even God could not overcome the Canaanites. Israel was punished for this lack in faith in God, not for disbelief in its own strength. (*Sotah* 35a)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why were those who remained loyal, but silent, punished?
2. This midrash builds on the concept, "You shall not idly stand by the blood of your neighbor." What are the implications from this rule in how we live our lives?
3. Nations often fail to take action, even if they can, when terrible events occur in distant parts of the globe. What would the rabbis demand of us and the nations in which we live?

Korah

קֹרַח

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן־יִצְחָר בֶּן־קֹהַת בֶּן־לֵוִי וְדָתָן וְאַבִּיָרָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן־פֶּלֶת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן: וַיִּקְמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וְאַנְשֵׁים מִבְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאָתַיִם נְשִׂאֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד אֲנָשֵׁי־שָׁם:

“Now Korach, son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, betook himself, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth – descendants of Reuben – to rise up against Moses, together with two-hundred and fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute.” (Num. 16:1-2)

Every controversy that is pursued in a heavenly cause, is destined to be perpetuated; and that which is not pursued in a heavenly cause is not destined to be perpetuated. Which can be considered a controversy pursued for the sake of heaven? This is the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And that not pursued for the sake of heaven? This is the controversy of Korach and his congregation. (*Avot* 5:17)

R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: For three years there was a dispute between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel, the former asserting, ‘The halakhah is in agreement with our views’ and the latter contending, ‘The halakhah is in agreement with our views’. Then a bat kol (voice from heaven) issued announcing, ‘[The utterances of] both are the words of the living God, but the halakhah is in agreement with the rulings of Bet Hillel’. Since, however, both are the words of the living God’ what was it that entitled Bet Hillel to have the halakhah fixed in agreement with their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of Bet Shammai, and were even so [humble] as to mention the actions of Bet Shammai before their own. (*Eruvin* 13b)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does the Torah go out of its way to mention the pedigree of the rebels?
2. What is the difference between the arguments of Hillel and Shammai, and Moses and Korach?
3. What are the implications of the decision that the law should follow Hillel? What does this teach us about the nature of ‘right answers?’
4. Do these texts teach us anything about how segments within the modern Jewish community should address their disagreements?

זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתְּנוּחָה אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה לֵאמֹר דַּבֵּר | אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ
אֵלֶיךָ פָּרָה אֲדָמָה תְּמִימָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין-בָּהּ מוּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָלָה עָלֶיהָ עֹל:

“This is the ritual law that the Lord has commanded: Instruct the Israelite people to bring you a red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid.” (Num. 19:2)

Solomon was wiser than all men, but when it came to the section of the red cow he admitted, “I said, I will get wisdom, but this still is far from me.” (*Num. R. 19:3*)

A certain non-Jew asked R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, ‘The rites that you perform in connection with the Red Heifer smell of witchcraft! You bring a heifer, burn it, grind it and take its ashes. You sprinkle one or two drops on one of you who is contaminated with corpse defilement and declare to him, you are clean.’ R. Yohanan b. Zakkai said to him, ‘Have you never been possessed by a demon?’ He answered ‘No.’ The rabbi then asked, ‘Have you never seen a man possessed by a demon?’ To which he answered, ‘Yes.’ ‘What do you do for them?’ The rabbi asked. ‘We bring herbs and make them smoke beneath him, and throw water on him and the demon is exorcised.’ The rabbi then responded, ‘Let your ears hear what your mouth has spoken. The spirit of defilement is the same as the demon. We sprinkle on it and the water of purification and it is exorcised.’

After the non-Jew had left, R. Yohanan’s students said to him, ‘Him you have put off with straw, but what answer will you give us?’ he replied to them, ‘By your life, neither does the dead defile nor the water purify, but the Holy One blessed be God said, ‘It is a statute I have laid down, a decree that I have decreed and you are not authorized to violate my decree.’ (Talmud)

Questions for Discussion

1. What does R. Yohanan b. Zakkai’s statement teach us about the nature of the *mitzvah* of the Red Heifer?
2. There are a whole series of mitzvot with no rational explanation called *hukkim*, does this category of mitzvot serve a useful purpose?
3. Is there a danger when mitzvot which seem to have explanations which no longer work?

Balak

בלק

וַיִּפְתַּח יְהוָה אֶת־פִּי הָאֲתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבַלְעָם מָה־עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ כִּי הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים:

“Then the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said to Balaam, ‘What have I done that you have beaten me three times?’” (Num. 22:28)

The usual specific Hebrew root concerning human speech is not used here. This may indicate that the ass did not actually utter any words, but made a plaintive sound which implied protest, as if it had really said, “What have I done to you”. Balaam in his anger answered the ass, much as a man might shout at his beast of burden...the Almighty did indeed open the mouth of the ass and it brayed in an unusual manner....there was a miracle but it was a hidden one. (S.D. Luzzatto)

From a recognition of large-scale historic miracles, man is led to acknowledge the hidden ones, which constitute the foundation of the whole Torah. For no man has any portion in the law of Moses our teacher, until he is convinced that all our affairs and chance occurrences and the routine workings of the universe, both in the private and in the public field, are miracles and are not to be attributed merely to nature. (Ramban)

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the different ways we can understand the speaking donkey?
2. What is the difference in the approach to miracles in the two commentaries?
3. Do miracles still occur?
4. The Baal Shem Tov taught that everywhere we look we can see a bush burning, unconsumed. How can this help us to understand the concept of miracles?

Pinhas

פִּינָחַס

וּתְקַרְבָּנָהּ בָּנוֹת צִלְפָּחַד בְּרֵ-חֲפָר בְּרֵ-גִלְעָד בְּרֵ-מְכִיר בְּרֵ-מִנְשֶׁה לְמִשְׁפַּחַת
מִנְשֶׁה בְּרֵ-יוֹסֵף וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֹתָיו מַחֲלָה נָעָה וְחִגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה וְתִרְצָה:
וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְפָנֵי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְפָנֵי הַנְּשִׂאִים וְכָל-הָעֵדָה פָּתַח
אֱהֵל-מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:

“The daughters of Zelophehad...Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirtzah stood before Moses and Eleazar the Priest, the chieftains and the whole assembly at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” (Num. 27:1-2)

Can we understand this story as a valuable lesson for us all, teaching us that Jewish law has the flexibility to expand and embrace women, giving us increasingly more rights and a fairer share of our common legacy. (*Five Books of Miriam*, p. 236).

“Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad.” When the daughters of Zelophehad heard that the Land was about to be divided among the tribes -- but only for the males and not for females -- they gathered to take counsel. They decided that the mercies of flesh and blood are not like the mercies of Him who is everywhere. Flesh and blood is apt to be more merciful to males than to females. but He who spoke and the world came into being is different -- His mercies are for females as well as males, His mercy being for all, “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Ps. 145:9). (*Sifre Num.* 133)

Questions for Discussion

1. Are there ways that Judaism still falls short in the movement towards equality?
2. Are there ways we still need to expand equality in our synagogues?
3. How can we help the women of our congregations to feel comfortable leading a service and wearing tefillin or tallit?
4. How can Judaism deal with the Agunah problem, and with the fact that only men can still authorize a Get?

Mattot

מטות

וַיִּקְצֹף מֹשֶׁה עַל פְּקוּדֵי הַחַיִּל שָׂרֵי הָאֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמֵּאוֹת הַבָּאִים מִצָּבָא הַמִּלְחָמָה:

“And Moses became angry with the commanders of the army, the officers of the thousands, and the officers of the hundreds, who had come back from the military campaign.” (Num. 31:14)

Why did Moses become angry with the officers and not with the common soldiers? To teach us that in every generation corruption is the responsibility of the leaders. (*Sifre Num. 157*)

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the qualities needed for a good leader?
2. Are the failings of a group its leader's responsibility?
3. Was Moses a good leader?
4. Which figure in the Bible was most effective as a leader?

Masei

מסעי

וְהִקְרִיתֶם לָכֶם עָרִים עָרֵי מִקְלָט תִּהְיֶינָה לָכֶם וְנָס שָׂמָה רֹצֵחַ מִכַּה־נֶפֶשׁ
בְּשִׁגָּגָה:

“You shall provide yourselves with places to serve you as cities of refuge to which a manslayer who has killed a person unintentionally may flee.” (Num. 35:11)

There were six cities of refuge and altogether forty-eight levitical cities. This compared to the Shema, the six words of the sentence “Hear O Israel,” and the forty-eight of the paragraph, “And you shall love the Lord your God...” which follows. Just as ancient man could find refuge in the levitical cities when he had sinned, so today one may find refuge in the “city of the Shema.” (*Ma’ayanah Shel Torah*, Vol IV, p. 155).

Questions for Discussion

1. What can these texts teach us about the vision of a just society as found in the Torah?
2. Why does the commentator connect the concept of the levitical city with the Shema?

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בַּמִּדְבָּר
בְּעֶרְבָה מִזֶּה סוּף בֵּין-פָּאֶרָן וּבֵין-תֹּפֵל וְלִבְנוֹ וְחֶזְרֵת וְדִי זָהָב:

*“These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.
-- Through the wilderness, in Arabah near Suph. between Paran and Tophel, Laban,
Hazereth, and Di-zahab.” (Deut. 1:1)*

The opening word of Deuteronomy is אֵלֶּה (these). The gematria of this word adds up to thirty-six (א=1, ל=30, ה=5). Tradition has it that the world is sustained by thirty-six righteous persons even as it is sustained by “these” words of Torah. (Itture Torah)

One evening several of the Kasover Rebbe’s hasidim sat together in his House of Study and told one another stories of the Baal Shem Tov. As they told the stories one hasid lamented, “Where could we find such a man today?” At that moment Rabbi Hayyim came into the room and said, “Fools, he is present in every generation, only now he is hidden.” (Based on Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, Book Two, p. 99)

Questions for Discussion

1. In folk tales the thirty-six righteous ones are often pictured as simple people. What can this teach us?
2. How does righteousness sustain the world?
3. Mystical Jewish thought embraces the concept of reincarnation. Discuss this and other Jewish views about the afterlife.
4. What can we learn from the traditions of hidden righteous ones, teachers and leaders that are found in every generation?

Va'et'hanan

וַאֲתַחֲנֵן

שְׁמֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

“Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you.”
(Deut 5:12)

“Remember” and “Observe” were both miraculously pronounced by God, though the human ear and mouth cannot duplicate it. (Rashi)

“Keep” and “Remember” were uttered as one by our creator beyond comparison. Adonai is One and His name One, reflected in glory, in fame and in praise. (L’kha Dodi, *Sim Shalom* p. 21)

The word זָכוֹר means “keep in mind”. All week one should keep the Sabbath in mind.
(Hassidic)

The Sabbath is the feast of creation, but of a creation wrought for the sake of redemption. The feast instituted at the close of creation is creation’s meaning and goal. (Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, p.315)

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the differing implications of “remember” and “observe”?
2. How can we enhance our Shabbat observance so that it becomes both a feast celebrating creation, but looking to redemption?
3. How can we ensure that our Shabbat services create a closer connection between the participants and God?

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׂאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אִם-לִירְאָה אֶת-יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָלֶכֶת בְּכָל-דַּרְכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וּלְעַבְדוֹ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ: לְשֹׂמֵר אֶת-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וְאֶת-חֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
 מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם לְטוֹב לָךְ:

“And now Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul; keeping the Lord’s commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good.” (Deut: 10:12-13)

The phrase “what does the Lord require of you” must be understood in relation to the closing phrase “for your good”. In other words, God does not require things of you for His good but only for yours. (Ramban)

Freewill is granted to every person. If he desires to follow the good path and be righteous, he is free to do so, and if he desires to follow an evil one and be wicked, he is likewise free to do so...This constitutes a fundamental principle and pillar of Torah and its precepts...The creator does not force His will on any person, nor pre-ordain him to do good or evil, but everything is entrusted to him. (Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuva* 5:1-3)

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the limits on human free will?
2. If we have free will, what role does God play in the world?
3. What does the concept of free will teach us about human evil, and human responsibility?
4. Does free will work with the concept of reward and punishment?

Re'eh

ראה

שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים | בְּשָׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל־זְכוּרָךְ אֶת־פָּנָי | יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמָקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר בְּתֹג הַמִּצּוֹת וּבְתֹג הַשְּׂבִיעוֹת וּבְתֹג הַסִּכּוֹת וְלֹא יִרְאֶה אֶת־פָּנָי
יִהְיֶה רִיקִים:

“Three times a year – on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths – all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose. they shall not appear before the Lord empty handed.” (Deut. 16:16)

Why do we find that not even one expression of rejoicing is used regarding Pesach? Because on Pesach the produce of the field is judged and humanity does not know the fate of its harvest. “Rejoicing” is therefore omitted.

Another explanation: On account of the fact that the Egyptians died. Similarly you find that on the seven days of Sukkot we recite the whole Hallel, but on Pesach we do this only on the first day. Why? Because “rejoice not when your enemy falls” (Proverbs 24:17). (*Yalkut Shemoni*)

Questions for Discussion

1. In ancient times our festivals were tied to the agricultural cycles of nature. How can we use the festivals to remind ourselves that we are still dependant on nature?
2. Sacrifices to help the disadvantaged were often part of festival observances, how can we ensure that we remember the disadvantaged on Jewish holidays and throughout the year?
3. What message can we learn from the rabbinic reminder that “rejoicing” is inappropriate even when enemies perish?

Shof'tim

שופטים

צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדּוּף לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶיהָ וְיִרְשֶׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ

“Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” (Deut. (16:20))

This principle applies both to judgement and to a compromise, the latter too must be guided by justice. (*Sanh. 32b*)

The double emphasis means: Justice under any circumstance, whether to your profit or loss, whether in word or action, whether Jew or non-Jew. It also means: Do not use unjust means to achieve justice. (*Bachya Ben Asher on 16:20*)

Justice is repeated because in matters of justice one may never stand still. (*Hasidic*)

Questions for Discussion

1. Have we created a society guided by the principals of justice?
2. What implications does the concept of a just society -- for all -- have for modern countries in the post 9/11 era?
3. How can we ensure that our justice system is just both for the rich and the poor?
4. Can “unjust means” ever be justified in the creation of a just society?

Ki Tetze

כִּי תֵצֵא

לֹא-תִרְאֶה אֶת-שׁוֹר אֶחָיֶךָ אוֹ אֶת-שֵׂיׁוֹ נִדְחִים וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם הַשָּׂב תָּשִׁיבֵם לְאֶחָיֶךָ:

“If you see your fellow’s ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your fellow.” (Deut 22:1)

It is related that a man passed the door of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa’s house and mistakenly left there some hens which were found by Rabbi Hanina’s wife. The former said to her: do not eat the eggs. The eggs and the hens accumulated causing them inconvenience. Whereupon he sold them, and with the money brought some goats. Some time latter the man who had lost the hen passed by again. He said to his fellow: I think I lost my hen near here. Rabbi Hanina overhead the remark and gave him the goats. (*Ta’anit 25a*)

It is related of Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair that when he was living in a city of the south some men came there to seek their livelihood. They had with them two measures of barley which they deposited with the rabbi, and then quickly forgot. Rabbi Pinhas sowed the barley year by year and harvested it and stored it. After the lapse of seven years these men returned to that place to claim back their grain. As soon as Rabbi Pinhas recognized them, he said to them: Come take these, your granaries (full of grain). (*Deut. R. 3:5*).

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does the Torah stress our obligations towards the property of our fellows?
2. Do you think that the rabbis in the texts went beyond the letter of the law?
3. What are modern circumstances where this law would come into force?

Ki Tavo

כִּי תָבוֹא

וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁמֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתָיו
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם וּנְתַתֶּנְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ עַל כָּל-גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ:

“Now, if you obey the Lord your God, to observe faithfully all His commandments which I enjoin upon you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.”(Deut 28:1)

And now if you will diligently hearken, that is, take it (the mitzvot) on yourself, it will henceforth be easy for you, since only the beginning is difficult. (Rashi)

The more a person is drawn after the paths of wisdom and justice, the more he longs for them and desires them (Rambam, *Hilchot Tesh.* 4:6)

Questions for Discussion

1. It has been taught that the observance of a commandment leads to further observance, and that sinning leads to further sins. Do you think that this is true?
2. Do you feel that the mitzvot are “commanded” by God, or “suggested” by God?
3. How can (or should) our movement better communicate the concept of mitzvah as commandment?

Nitzavim

נִצְבִּים

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לֹא־נִפְלְאת הוּא מִמֶּךָ
וְלֹא־רְחֹקָה הוּא: לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה־לָּנוּ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְיִקְחֶהָ
לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמַעֵנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה:

“Surely, this instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, ‘Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it.’” (Deut. 30:11-12)

“It is not in heaven”. Said Rava, “You will not find it in one who lifts his intellect over it as the heavens”. Rabbi Yohanan said, “It is not in heaven” – you do not find it in those who are proud. (*Eruvin* 55a)

“For this commandment is not in heaven”. Said Moses to them, “This means that you should say, Moses will go and bring us another Torah from Heaven. I hereby notify you that “it is not in heaven”, that nothing of the Torah has remained in Heaven.” (*Deut. R.* 8:6)

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the different implications of Rava and Rabbi Yohanan’s explanations?
2. What do these texts teach us about the search for enlightenment?
3. How does this text liberate human intellect vis-a-vis Torah?
4. What are the implications of this text in connection with the halakhah?

Va'yelekh

ויֵלֶךְ

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֵן קָרְבָנוּ יָמַיךָ לְמוֹתֹת קְרָא אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְהִתְנַצְּבוּ
בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאַצְוֶנּוּ וַיֵּלְךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּתְנַצְּבוּ בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:

“The Lord said to Moses: The time is drawing near for you to die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the Tent of meeting, that I may instruct him. Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the Tent of Meeting.” (Deut. 31:14)

Moses said to God, “Master of the universe, must I die after my eyes have witnessed all Your glory and power?” God replied, “What man can live and not see death (Ps 89:49)? Were there men comparable to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Yet they had to die.” And though there was none like Moses who spoke to the Creator face to face, God said, “The time is drawing near for you to die.” (*Deut. R. 9:7*)

Moses did not want to die. But, when at the investiture of Joshua the two men went into the Tabernacle and the Cloud separated them, God spoke to Joshua alone. Afterwards Moses asked him, “What did God say to you?” Joshua replied, “When God spoke with you, did I come to know?” Thereupon Moses turned to God and told Him he was ready to die. “Better to die a hundred times than to experience even one moment of envy,” he said. That is what Solomon meant, “Jealousy is cruel as the grave.” (*Song of Songs 8:6*) (*Deut. R. 9:7*)

Questions for Discussion

1. How do we face our mortality?
2. What can these texts teach us about the transition of leadership?
3. What does this text teach about jealousy and envy? Can this relate to the commandment not to covet found in the Ten Commandments.

Ha'azinu

הַאֲזִינוּ

הַאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֲדַבְּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי־פִי: יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחֵי תִזְלַל
כִּטְל אִמְרֹתַי כְּשָׁעִירִם עַל־דָּשָׁא וְכַרְבִּיבִים עַל־עֵשֶׂב:

“Give ears, O heaven, let me speak; let the earth hear the words I utter! May my discourse come down as rain; my speech distill as the dew, like showers on young growth, like droplets on the grass.” (Deut 32:1-2)

Of the discourse, Moses says that it should come down as rain, that is with abundance; but of speech, that it should “distill.” Torah is discourse par excellence and it should be plentiful, but its teaching should be short and “distilled.” Thus the Talmud says, “One should always teach with brevity.” (Abravanel)

The sages said, “A *momzer* who is a scholar takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest ... Of all the precepts, none is equal to the study of Torah. Rather, study of Torah equals all the others, for study leads to practice. (Rambam, Hilkhos Talmud Torah 3:2-3)

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you agree that the best lessons are short and concise?
2. How would you define “discourse” and “teaching”?
3. Why do the Sages give such status to Torah scholars?
4. Does study always lead to practice? How can we ensure that it does?

V'zot Ha'berakha

וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה

וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ:

“And this is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death.” (Deut 33:1)

When Moses saw that he was about to die he said to Israel: “I have given you much trouble by teaching you Torah and Mitzvot – forgive me. They said to him, “Our teacher and master, you are forgiven.” Then they said, “We too have angered you often and given you much trouble, forgive us too.” He said, “You are forgiven.” (*Deut. R.*)

1: Since every human being has free will, a person should strive to repent (make verbal confession of his sins) and renounce them, so that he may die penitent and thus be worthy of life in the world to come.

2: A person should always regard him/herself as if his/her death were imminent and think that (s)he would die in this very hour, while still in a state of sin. (S)He should therefore repent of his/her sins immediately and not say, “When I grow old I shall repent,” for (s)he may die before (s)he becomes old. (Rambam, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 7:1-2)

Questions for Discussion

1. What does this text teach us about forgiveness?
2. Does this text have a message concerning the importance of *teshuvah* (repentance)?
3. What are the steps of teshuvah outlined by our tradition?
4. Is the High Holiday season the only time that we should focus on repentance?

Appendix

The Tradition of the Tikkun Leyl Shavuot

If a man reaches this day (Shavuot) in purity and has not lost count, then it behooves him on this night to study the Torah and to preserve the special purity which he has attained on this night. We have learned that the Torah which he ought to study on this night is the Oral Torah, and afterwards in daytime the Written Torah can come and he can attach himself to it, so that both may be interlocked above. Then proclamation is made concerning him, saying, "And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord; My spirit which is upon you and my words which I have put in your mouth" (Isa 59:21). Therefore the pious ones of old used not to sleep on this night, but they used to study the Torah...When the companions gathered around on this night Rabbi Shimon used to say, "Let us go and prepare the ornaments of the Bride, that tomorrow she may appear before the King fitly adorned and bedecked. (Zohar, Emor 98a)

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Excerpt of a letter from the Kabbalist, Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz*

The pious one (Rabbi Yosef Caro) and I agreed to make a mighty effort on Shavuot night to keep sleep from our eyes, and not to stop learning for even one second. Thank God we were successful. Indeed, when you hear what transpired, it will enliven your souls.

For the night of *Shavuot*, this is the order of study I prepared. Verses from Scripture:.... All this we chanted aloud in a spirit of great fear and awe, with melody and trepidation. But what will be told next won't be believed.

After all the verses, we recited aloud all the *mishnayot* of *Zeraim* (the first of the Six Orders) and then we started again, learning it in the way of true learning, and we completed two tractates. At that moment, the Creator graced us and we heard a great voice coming from Rabbi Caro. Many of the words were unintelligible, the syllables chopped short. The people nearby heard but could not understand. The voice was very pleasing but at the same time was growing continually stronger and we fell on our faces from the great awe; no one dared to lift his eyes and face to see.

The voice spoke, "Listen my beloved, those who most glorify the Creator, my loved ones, peace to you. Happy are you and happy those that bore you. Happy are you in this world and happy you will be in the World to Come, because you took it upon yourselves to crown Me on this night. It has been many years since my crown has fallen, and there has been no one to comfort Me. I had been cast to the dust embracing the filth, but now you have restored the crown.

“Strengthen yourselves my dear ones; forge ahead my beloved; be happy and joyous, and know that you are among the exalted. You merited to be in the King's palace. The voice of your Torah and breath of your mouths arose before God and pierced through the surroundings and many firmaments, until the messenger-angels on high were quieted, and the fire-angels hushed and all God's lofty army listened to your voices.

“I am the *Mishna* that admonishes mankind. I have come to speak to you. If only there were ten of you, you would have ascended higher. Even so, you have elevated yourselves, and those who bore you. You are fortunate, my dear ones, for because of you, sleep passed from the eyes of those who bore you . I have been summoned this night through those gathered in this great and prestigious city. You are not like those lying on their beds, sleeping a sleep that is 1/60th of death, besmirching their beds. You cleaved to the One and have pleased Him. Therefore, my children, strengthen yourselves and strive forth in my love, my Torah, and my fear.

“If you could imagine even one thousandth myriad of my pain, no joy could enter your hearts, no laughter could escape your mouths, considering that on your account I have been cast to the dust. Therefore, strengthen and fortify yourselves my children, my dear ones who glorify Me. Do not halt your efforts, for the thread of kindness is drawn to you, and your Torah is sweet before Him. Therefore, stand my sons, my dear ones, on your feet and elevate me. With a loud voice, as on Yom Kippur, declare, '*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'Olam Va'Ed.*'”

We stood up and recited aloud, as bidden. The voice then resumed, "Happy are you, my children. Return to your learning and do not stop one minute. Go up to the Land of Israel, because not all times are equal, and there is no preventing salvation, whether by much or by a little. Do not value your belongings, for you will partake of the best of the supernal levels. And if you desire and will obey, the choicest of that land you will consume. Therefore, hurry and move there for I am the cause that sustains you, and will continue to sustain you. Peace to you in your houses, and peace in all there is to you. Eternal God gives strength to His people and blesses them with peace'.”

All these things were spoken to us, and our ears did hear. Additional matters of wisdom were shared, and great were the promises that brought us all to tears from so much joy. We also heard of the *Shechina's* suffering, due to our sins, and the Voice was as a sick person imploring us. Then we strengthened ourselves until daybreak, reciting verses unceasingly with joy and trembling.

When morning came, we went to immerse, as we did the two previous days, and there we met the three others that had been absent the night before. We reprimanded them and told them the favour God had wrought us. Their hearts melted and they turned their faces and wept, as did we. At the same time, we maintained a harsh facade, since it was because of them that we had not merited greater revelations. The lack of a *minyan* had imposed a severe limitation, as we were told. They answered that they would afford us this opportunity on the second night (of *Shavuot*): we would join and be ten. We consented even though we had slept not a wink the first night. During the day, we also had not rested because after the *mincha* prayer Rabbi Caro had delivered a sermon. Still, we

girded our loins, performing the same rites as the night before, and did do with much joy because now we were ten.

On this occasion, however, the voice did not wait until we started to recite the *Mishna*. Nor did it wait until midnight (as it had the night before, when it began exactly at midnight), but it made itself heard immediately. As we were reading the verses of *Shma*, the voice of our cherished one knocked and began, "Listen my dear ones, those most glorifying God. Arise! And raise those who are lying in dust, through the mystical secret "of the dust from Above."

Many matters of wisdom He taught, and afterwards said, "Happy are you, my dear ones that raise me. How high you have been elevated now that you are ten, as is proper in all matters of holiness. Happy are you in the future world. Fear not the reproach of man or his goading because you elevate all of Israel. Know that you are among the exalted, that glory rinses your hands and that the thread of kindness is drawn to you. If permission were granted, your eyes would behold the fire surrounding this house. Therefore, strengthen yourselves and do not break the bond with Above. Say aloud, '*Shma Yisrael...Baruch Shem Kevod...*'"

After another half an hour, we returned to studying the secrets of Torah. Exactly at midnight the Voice returned a second time, teaching for over an hour and a half. It praised the learning and said,

"See and hear this voice speaking? Ask your elders and know that for hundreds of years you are the only ones to merit such an experience. Therefore, from now on, be alert to help each other, and to strengthen the weak. Hold yourselves as leaders, for you are the princes of the king's palace, and you have merited to enter the hallway. Now strive to enter the inner chamber, but do not forsake the entry, for he who leaves the gate—his blood is on his head.

"Wake up my sons and understand what I am explaining to you. Wake up, my dear ones, and strive to be sons of valor... Behold the day is coming when men will abandon the Exile and their silver and worldly pleasures, and gods of gold, and desires of wealth, and travel to the Holy Land. It is possible, except that you are sinking in the mire of worldly vanities... Behold! You have merited what others, for many generations, have not."

These matters continued at great length. All who were present, resolved to turn to God with all their might.

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Rabbi Alkabetz also wrote that the following Shabbat the Voice again came to Rabbi Caro, whereupon he again gathered the ten together to warn them and to urge them to enter the "inner place". They agreed to set aside every desire, to refrain from meat and wine, and to mourn the exile of the Divine Presence, and the causes of Exile. Rabbi Alkabetz left immediately for Israel, and soon afterwards both Rabbi Caro and he established residence in Safed.

Glossary of Sources

Abравanel, Isaac ben Judah (1437 - 1598) A philosopher and bible commentator. He lived in Spain and Portugal.

Avot A tractate of the Mishnah, often called Pirkei Avot (The Ethics of the Fathers).

Avot de-Rabbi Nathan An 6th century commentary on Mishnah Avot. Two versions have come down to modern times.

Bahya ben Asher (13th century) A Spanish kabbalist and biblical commentator.

Buber, Martin (1878 - 1965) A philosopher and Zionist. Buber lived in Germany and Israel.

Cassuto, Umberto (1883 - 1951) A biblical scholar who lived in Italy and Israel.

Etz Hayim The Torah commentary produced by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly. It was published in 2001.

Frankel, Ellen (Modern) Author of *The Five Books of Miriam*, a modern feminist commentary on the Torah

Hassidic Quotations from a variety of sources stemming from Hasidic traditions and teachings.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua (1907 - 1972) Rabbi, theologian, faculty member of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Hirsch, Samson Raphael (1808 - 1888) Leading figure of German Orthodoxy and author of many books including a biblical commentary.

Ibn Ezra, Abraham (1089 - 1164) Medieval Spanish poet, grammarian and Bible commentator.

K'li Yakar Torah commentary by the Polish rabbi, Shlomo Efrayim of Lunshitz (1550 -1619).

Malbim Acronym for Meir Loeb ben Yehiel Michael (1809 - 1879), an Eastern European rabbi, preacher and commentator.

Midrash Ha-Gadol A 13th century Yemenite midrash on the Torah.

Midrash Rabba A 6th century ten-volume midrash on the Torah and the *Five M'gillot*.

Ramban Acronym of Rabbi Moses ben Naḥman (1194 - 1270), also known as Nachmanides; a Spanish philosopher, mystic and commentator on the Bible and Talmud.

Rambam Acronym of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1135 - 1204), also known as Maimonides; a philosopher, halakhic codifier and doctor. Maimonides was born in Spain and later lived in Egypt.

Rashi Acronym of Rabbi Abraham ben Isaac (1040 - 1105), a French commentator on the Bible and Talmud.

Rosenzweig, Franz, German Jewish philosopher, author of *Star of Redemption*.

Sforno, Obadiah Jacob (c.1470 - c.1550) An Italian Bible commentator.

Sifra 4th century midrash on Leviticus.

Sifrei 4th century midrash on Numbers and Deuteronomy/

Sim Shalom Prayer book of the Conservative Movement, published in 1998.

Talmud Central work of Rabbinic Judaism comprising the Mishnah and Gemara. It contains law, lore and dialectic material. The Talmud is written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Two separate compilations of the Talmud were completed, the Babylonian Talmud (c.500 C.E.) and the Jerusalem Talmud (c.400 C.E.). The following tractates of the Talmud are quoted in the *Tikkun*: Eruvin, Megillah, Sanhedrin, Shabbat, Sotah, and Ta'anit.

Tanḥuma A 4th century homiletical midrash on the Torah.

Yalkut Shimoni A 13th century midrashic anthology on the Torah.

Zeligs, Dorothy (Modern) Psychoanalyst and author of *Psychoanalysis and the Bible*.

Zohar The central text of Kabbalah written in the 13th century. A major segment of the Zohar is written in the form of a mystical midrash on the Torah.