LIVING WISDOM:
ENGAGING, SOULFUL JEWISH LEARNING SERIES

MEMBERS OF THE TRIBE: CORNERSTONES OF JEWISH IDENTITY

COURSEBOOK

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THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

Melton

OUR ROOTS

Our founder, Florence Zacks Melton z"l (1911-2007), was an inventor, an innovator and an activist in many areas of her life. It was her vision to bring to life a comprehensive and sophisticated program of Jewish learning for adults. The Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning, a project of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was launched in 1986.

OUR PURPOSE

Melton engages learners in a life-enhancing study of Jewish texts and ideas that nurtures and deepens Jewish community worldwide.

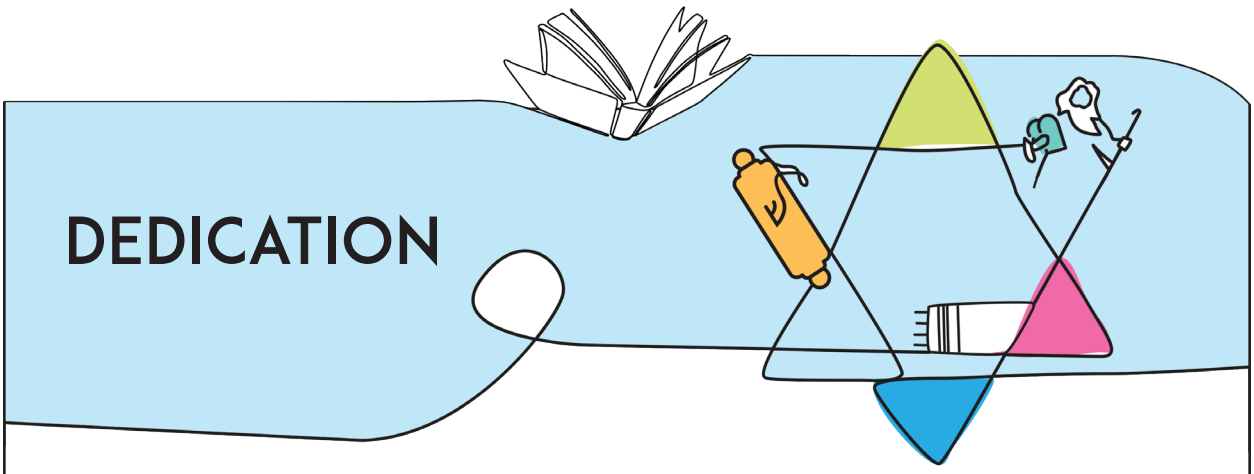
WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- **An Engaging Curriculum:** Developed by insightful scholars, taught by highly-skilled educators, and reviewed by experts at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- **Interactive Classes:** We encourage open dialogue and discussion between learners and educators as we approach every topic with curiosity and sincerity.
- **Wisdom For Life:** We make Jewish texts and ideas accessible, inspirational and enriching for our learners.
- **Jewish Community:** Through Melton, you become part of a worldwide movement of learners that spans many continents. Our online learning and travel seminars create meaningful global connections.

For more information, visit **MeltonSchool.org**.

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THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

DEDICATION



Just as my ancestors planted for me,
I too am planting for my descendants.
(Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 23a)

Dedicated to

OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

to support Jewish learning so that it may thrive,
generation after generation.

RUTH AND BROOKS HILLIARD

Phoenix, Arizona

THE MELTON FUNDERS COUNCIL

The Melton Funders Council is a philanthropic vanguard of donors committed to supporting The Florence Melton School as the organization takes major steps towards the implementation of its new bold strategic plan.

As Melton seeks to grow its circle of learners, strengthen Jewish community and revitalize the way it does business, the Melton Funders Council provides an important means for achieving the level of financial support Melton needs to realize these goals and objectives.

Melton is grateful to the following generous donors who as of March 2025 support our work as committed members of the Melton Funders Council:

Bobbie and Carl Blau
Los Angeles, California

Alan S. Edelman and Debbie Sosland-Edelman
Kansas City, Missouri
In Memory of Dr. William and Doris Edelman

Ann Elyachar
Leawood, Kansas
With gratitude to my teachers who inspire my learning

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Longmeadow, Massachusetts

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and in memory of Sam and Florence Melton

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On behalf of the Jewish learning community throughout the world

Anonymous

MEMBERS OF THE TRIBE: CORNERSTONES OF JEWISH IDENTITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Words of Welcome	8
A Word About Your Coursebook	9
A Tree of Life - Icon glossary	11
About the Author	12
Acknowledgements	13
Lesson 1 - Living a Jewish Life: Finding Purpose Through Reflection	14
Lesson 2 - Just Remember: Symbols and Reminders in Judaism	30
Lesson 3 - Let My People Grow: The Exodus from Egypt as a Jewish Calling	56
Lesson 4 - Chosen People, Chosen Purpose	82
Lesson 5 - Holy Guacamole: What Does It Mean to Keep Kosher?	112
Lesson 6 - Jerusalem if I forget you… Israel and the Diaspora	142

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WELCOME TO JEWISH LEARNING

Dear Melton Learner,

Welcome to a very special journey in Jewish learning.

The **Living Wisdom** series has been specially designed to give you the opportunity choose topics that interest you, Jewish concepts that have piqued your curiosity or that have particular relevance for you at this moment in your life.

As you venture into the exploration of these Jewish ideas, traditions, and values, we encourage you to seek within the texts and the robust discussions about them points of personal connection to a Judaism that feels authentically yours.

Our rabbis taught that the study of Torah, the study of Jewish texts, is a continual timeless enterprise, one that offers new insights and understandings with every re-examination.

> *Ben Bag Bag says: Search in it and search in it, for everything is in it.*
> —Mishnah Avot 5:22

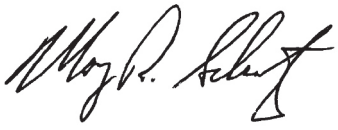
It is most certainly the case that revisiting Jewish texts can uncover for us new information not gleaned in earlier readings. But we believe this teaching of Ben Bag Bag points to something much deeper: Jewish learning is intended to help us reveal "everything" about ourselves, the learners of the texts.

In other words, as we change, we discover that the traditions, values, and stories found among our Jewish teachings speak to us differently, illuminating new perspectives on how we see ourselves and the world around us.

It is our hope that your study of **Living Wisdom** will offer you an engaging, soulful Jewish learning experience that will inspire you, enrich your thoughts and constantly renew your interest in continuing on a lifelong path of Jewish learning.



Rabbi Rachel Bovitz
Executive Director



Rabbi Morey Schwartz, EdD
International Director of Education and Innovation

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A WORD ABOUT YOUR COURSEBOOK

Welcome to what is going to be an exciting and engaging six week journey with the Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning!

The Coursebook comprises the texts for the Members of the Tribe: Cornerstones of Jewish Identity course. This curriculum has been designed not only to inform but also to challenge you, our learners. The goal is to encourage you to rethink many issues and subjects you may have already formed your own opinions about or developed your own personal perspectives on. We encourage you to approach your studies with a willingness to consider issues from new perspectives and grow in your appreciation of the complexity of Jewish thought and wisdom. Education is the result not of information absorption alone, but of an ongoing engagement in the act of reflecting, reconsidering, and revising one's own understanding on a regular basis.

> Despite the varieties of lifestyles and outlooks among Jews today, there are certain organizing principles that cut across many of these differences and underlie the sense of common destiny and interdependence that so many Jews feel…. The Jewish concepts of God and *mitzvah* (commandment) and the biblical narratives of creation and of history are interwoven into Jewish practice, producing a distinctive outlook that shapes Jewish identity.
>
> —Dr. David Hartman, I Am Jewish, 2004

Our hope is that our curriculum will stimulate much discussion in your class and at home as well. Please share what you have learned in class with others, and in that way, expand the circle of learning and understanding.

Please note that in a typical class you will not address all of the texts included for a given lesson. In most lessons, there are more texts than can be realistically covered in 90 minutes. Also, we leave it to the teacher's discretion to choose to emphasize and discuss certain texts more thoroughly than others. You are strongly encouraged to read through the omitted texts during the course of the week to broaden your understanding of each subject. Each text in the curriculum is accompanied by a short source description.

For the translation of the biblical text, this course uses The JPS Tanakh: Gender Sensitive Edition (2023). Melton has made efforts to present learners with original texts and as-close-

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as-possible translations, with minor or no modifications. The texts are a product of their time and place and their respective authors; in some instances their language reflects that. Where modern sensibilities differ with the language or content of these texts to one degree or another – such as some texts that refer to God in the masculine or use the term "Man" when referring to humanity as a whole – the analyses make note of that, and where they do not, Melton trusts that its instructors and learners will not let the dated language interfere with their appreciation of the message of the text.

We are interested in hearing from you. If at any time you would like to give us feedback on the Coursebook, its format or contents, we encourage you to contact our International Director of Education and Innovation at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Rabbi Dr. Morey Schwartz, at mschwartz@meltonschool.org.

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE – MEMBERS OF THE TRIBE: CORNERSTONES OF JEWISH IDENTITY

What does it mean to be a Member of the Tribe? When speaking about the Jewish people, there are so many different ways one can feel a sense of belonging: religious, cultural, philosophical, ethical, and more. Yet Jews are a very diverse group: they do not all look alike, pray alike, eat alike, dress alike, vote alike; many times they do not even share the same beliefs. How, then, can they all be of one Tribe? Paraphrasing Mark Twain, what is the secret of the immortality of this diverse group of people? In other words, how has the Jewish people weathered the vicissitudes of history and somehow remained a Tribe?

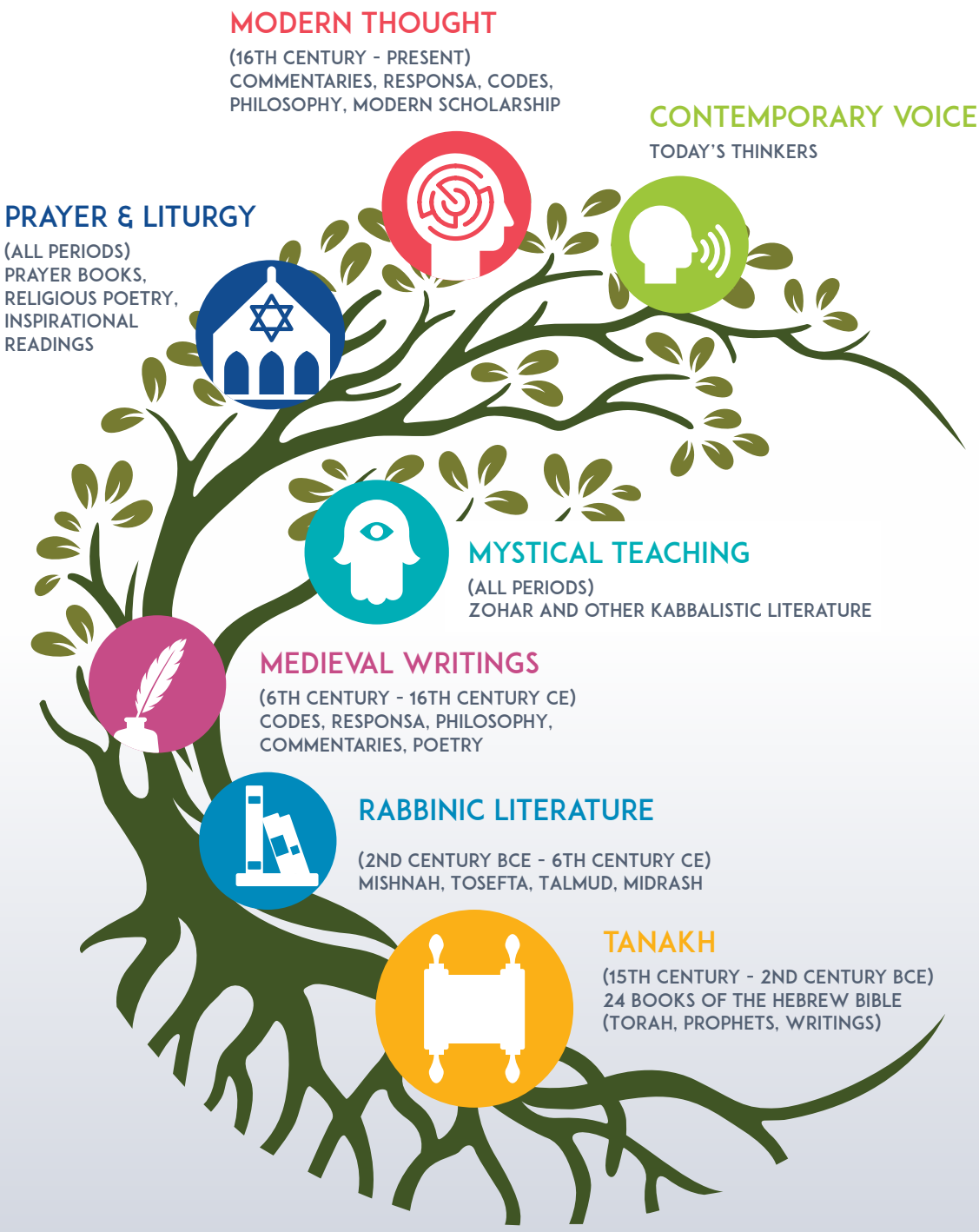
This course, **Members of the Tribe: Cornerstones of Jewish Identity,** raises some challenging questions Jews ask themselves in an effort to help learners find answers to the meaning and survival of this Tribe:

- What does it mean to live Jewishly and why should I choose to do so?
- Why do we continuously speak about the Exodus when it happened so long ago?
- What do symbols such as a *mezuzah*, *tallit*, or *tefillin* represent?
- "Chosen People" sounds elitist! How can one relate to this concept?
- Does keeping kosher have any benefit for contemporary Jews?
- Why is Israel important for those who do not live there?
-

What unifies these topics is the understanding that Jewish history informs and enriches both the nation's collective actions as well as individual responses to life's challenges; that the Jewish past matters for the Jewish present and for the Jewish future.

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A TREE OF LIFE



עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ (משלי ג:יח)

It is a tree of life for those who embrace it (Proverbs 3:18)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Sandra Lilienthal was born and raised in Brazil, where she received her MBA in Marketing and Strategic Planning. After almost 10 years in the business world, she pursued a major change in careers, and for the last 30 years has been working in Jewish education in many different capacities: from religious school teacher and Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutor, to Director of Education of two synagogues, to Director of Lifelong Learning. She has taught every age from preschool to adults, both in Brazil and in the USA (Texas and Florida). In the past 16 years, Sandra has focused on teaching adults in South Florida.

Sandra received her Master's degree in Jewish Studies and her doctorate in Jewish Education from Gratz College, writing her dissertation on Adult Jewish Education. She teaches for two Melton schools in South Florida, and is a frequent speaker on Jewish education themes at conferences, in synagogues, and elsewhere. She has written curricula for the Central Agency for Jewish Education and for the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Sandra recorded an ELI Talk in 2016 and was the recipient of the 2015 Covenant Award for Excellence in Jewish Education. Sandra has great enthusiasm for teaching Judaism as a living religion and infusing a true passion for it among her students.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning acknowledges the important contributions of the following individuals to the development of this course:

To Judy Snowbell Diamond, Coordinator of Educational Projects, for shepherding along this the project from start to finish, working patiently with all of the following contributors to assure the professional quality and smooth production of this course.

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LIVING A JEWISH LIFE: FINDING PURPOSE THROUGH REFLECTION

Note:
This lesson includes more texts than can be covered in a 90-minute session. We encourage you to explore the texts not covered in class on your own time.

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TEXT 1
RABBI SHIRA STUTMAN, *WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH* (2017)

(b. 1973) Ordained at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, her work focuses on cross-denominational Jewish experiences.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

TEXT 2
LEVITICUS (*VAYIKRA*) 18:1–4; 20:26

Chapter 18

1 GOD spoke to Moses, saying: **2** Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

I the ETERNAL am your God. **3** You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you; nor shall you follow their laws. **4** My rules alone shall you observe, and faithfully follow My laws: I the ETERNAL am your God.

Chapter 20

26 You shall be holy to Me, for I GOD am holy, and I have set you apart from other peoples to be Mine.

ויקרא יח, א-ד; כ, כו

א וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר. ב דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. ג כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יְשַׁבְתֶּם בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּכְמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵבִיא אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּבְחֻקֹּתֵיהֶם לֹא תֵלֵכוּ. ד אֶת מִשְׁפָּטַי תַּעֲשׂוּ וְאֶת חֻקֹּתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ לָלֶכֶת בָּהֶם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

כו וִהְיִיתֶם לִי קְדֹשִׁים כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' וָאַבְדִּל אֶתְכֶם מִן הָעַמִּים לִהְיוֹת לִי.

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TEXT 3
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 4:5–8

5 See, I have imparted to you laws and rules, as the ETERNAL my God has commanded me, for you to abide by in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. **6** Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, "Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people." **7** For what great nation is there that has a god so close at hand as is the ETERNAL our God whenever we call? **8** Or what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as all this Teaching that I set before you this day?

דְּבָרִים ד, ה-ח

ה רְאֵה לִמַּדְתִּי אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוַּנִי ה' אֱלֹהָי לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בָּאִים שָׁמָּה
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ. ו וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם כִּי הִוא חָכְמַתְכֶם וּבִינַתְכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּן אֵת כָּל חֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה
וְאָמְרוּ רַק עַם חָכָם וְנָבוֹן הַגּוֹי הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה. ז כִּי מִי גוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים קְרֹבִים אֵלָיו כַּה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ
בְּכָל קָרְאֵנוּ אֵלָיו. ח וּמִי גוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים צַדִּיקִם כְּכֹל הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן
לִפְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם.



TEXT 4
ISAIAH (*YESHAYAH*) 42:5–7

5 Thus said the ETERNAL God,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread out the earth and what it brings forth,
Who gave breath to the people upon it
And life to those who walk thereon:
6 I GOD, in My grace, have summoned you,
And I have grasped you by the hand.
I created you, and appointed you
A covenant people, a light of nations—
7 Opening eyes deprived of light,
Rescuing prisoners from confinement,
From the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

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יְשַׁעְיָה מב, ה-ז

ה כֹּה אָמַר הָאֵל ה' בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנוֹטֵיהֶם רֹקַע הָאָרֶץ וְצֶאֱצָאֶיהָ נֹתֵן נְשָׁמָה לָעָם עָלֶיהָ וְרוּחַ לַהֹלְכִים בָּהּ.
ו אֲנִי ה' קְרָאתִיךָ בְצֶדֶק וְאַחְזֵק בְּיָדֶךָ וְאֶצָּרְךָ וְאֶתֶּנְךָ לִבְרִית עָם לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם. ז לִפְקֹחַ עֵינַיִם עִוְרוֹת לְהוֹצִיא
מִמַּסְגֵּר אַסִּיר מִבֵּית כֶּלֶא יֹשְׁבֵי חֹשֶׁךְ.

TEXT 5
ISAIAH (*YESHAYAH*) 2:1–3

1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz prophesied concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
2 In the days to come,
The Mount of GOD's House
Shall stand firm above the mountains
And tower above the hills;
And all the nations
Shall gaze on it with joy.
3 And the many peoples shall go and say:
"Come,
Let us go up to the Mount of GOD,
To the House of the God of Jacob;
That He may instruct us in God's ways,
And that we may walk in God's paths."
For instruction shall come forth from Zion,
The word of GOD from Jerusalem.

יְשַׁעְיָה ב, א-ג

א הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר חָזָה יְשַׁעְיָהוּ בֶּן אָמוֹץ עַל יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלָם. ב וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים נָכוֹן יִהְיֶה הַר בֵּית ה'
בְּרֹאשׁ הֶהָרִים וְנִשָּׂא מִגְּבָעוֹת וְנָהֲרוּ אֵלָיו כָּל הַגּוֹיִם. ג וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לְכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל הַר ה' אֶל
בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיֹרֵנוּ מִדְּרָכָיו וְנֵלְכָה בְּאֹרְחֹתָיו כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וּדְבַר ה' מִירוּשָׁלָם.

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TEXT 6
RABBI SHIMSHON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, *ISRAEL* (1836)

(1808–1888) German Orthodox rabbi and scholar.

From the beginning of the passage of Isaiah you have comprehended the place which Israel should occupy in the course of the history of the nations. Because men had eliminated God from life, and even from nature, they found the basis of life in possessions and its aim in enjoyment. They deemed life the product of the multitude of human desires, and looked upon nature as the product of a multitude of gods. Thus it became necessary that one people be introduced into the ranks of the nations which, through its history and life, should declare that God is the only creative cause of existence, and that the fulfillment of His will is the only goal of life. This people was to bear as the motive and the incentive for its unity the revelation of His will, rejuvenated and renewed for its own sake, unto all parts of the world. This mission required for its execution a nation, poor in everything upon which the rest of mankind reared the edifice of its greatness and power; externally subordinate to the nations armed with proud self-sufficiency, but fortified inwardly by direct reliance upon God, so that, by the suppression of every enemy force, God might reveal Himself directly as the sole Creator, Judge and Master of nature and history.

Despite its position of political dependence, however, this people was to receive from the hands of its Creator all the means of both individual and national existence and prosperity, in order that it might dedicate all its wealth of resources to one sole purpose – the fulfillment of the will of God . . .

Such a mission imposed upon this people another duty, the duty of separation, of ethical and spiritual separateness. It could not join in the doings of the other peoples lest it descend to their level and perish in the abyss of their worship of wealth and pleasure. It must remain alone and do its work and live its life as a separate entity until, refined and purified by Israel's teachings and Israel's example, humanity as a whole might turn to God and acknowledge God as the sole Creator and Ruler. Once that is attained, Israel's mission will have been accomplished.

Hirsch, S. R. 1969. *The Nineteen Letters on Judaism* (Prepared by Jacob Breuer, based on the translation by Rabbi Dr. Bernard Drachman). Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 54–55.

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TEXT 7
THE CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY *MUSSAR*, *CULTIVATING THE SOUL: A CONTEMPORARY GUIDE TO MUSSAR PRACTICE AND UNDERSTANDING*

The autonomous individual was enshrined by the 18th century Enlightenment, which also gave birth to the Constitution and the legal system of the United States. In this Western world, we generally speak of rights, rather than responsibilities, of efficiency and productivity, rather than virtue. In a world where we see many things valued far above caring for others (such as material success and the drive that is required to achieve it), it is no wonder that many are turning back to the covenantal ethics of Torah to find a moral center. In a time that celebrates and even idolizes the self, *Mussar* is that necessary corrective . . . another meaning of the word *Mussar* is correction, and this is why each generation must define its own *Mussar* in order to correct its flaws . . . Torah, broadly understood, offers, through its weave of law and narrative, a set of standards for individual behavior.

Cultivating the Soul: A Contemporary Guide to Mussar Practice and Understanding. Philadelphia, PA: Center for Contemporary *Mussar*, 2020.

TEXT 8
RABBI MORDECAI KAPLAN, *BELIEVING, BEHAVING, BELONGING*

(1881–1983) American rabbi and founder of the Reconstructionist movement.

. . . Kaplan used to teach that there are three possible ways of identifying with a religious community: by behaving, by believing, or by belonging. Kaplan himself insisted that the primary form of Jewish identification is belonging – that intuitive sense of kinship that binds a Jew to every other Jew in history and in the contemporary world. Whatever Jews believe, and however they behave as Jews, serves to shape and concretize that underlying sense of being bound to a people with a shared history and destiny. When that connection disappears, Judaism too will disappear.

Gillman, N. 1990. *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew.* Philadelphia, PA: JPS, xvii.

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TEXT 9
GIL MANN, *THE E.S.P. OF THE JEWISH WAY OF LIFE*

Contemporary journalist and lecturer whose writing addresses questions about Jewish identity.

Judaism is a way of life consisting of these three separate sacred components: E.S.P. – ethics, spirituality, and peoplehood. They overlap like this . . . like the Olympic rings.

At first glance, this might seem complicated, but it's really not. It's like three interlocking pieces of art. Each piece or circle stands alone. Together, they add to each other's beauty. I think of it as richness. Judaism gives you a lot of wonderful options for finding meaning.

You can choose to enter the Jewish way of life through any of these circles. And from each circle you can access the other two circles. You can even spend most of your time in one of these circles and still be considered a Jew.

. . . I think most Jews most easily sense their Jewishness in the peoplehood circle. In other words, by feeling that they belong to a people or a community. Even the most unaffiliated Jews seem to feel this sense of belonging if there is a hint of anti-Semitism in the air . . . . Even without anti-Semitism, I think the peoplehood circle is the easiest to access and to find some meaning for yourself. But there are still two other circles. You can find meaning in the Jewish code of ethical behavior – like how Jews are supposed to treat a disadvantaged person – or as your parents used to say, "The Jewish thing to do." Finally, and the hardest for me, you can also find it through your belief or spiritual searching. . . . The simple part is that in Judaism there are just three components . . . The complex part is that you can choose to emphasize or deemphasize any or all of the three and still be considered a Jew. Plus, because the circles intersect and overlap, you can end up with a number of combinations that give Judaism meaning . . . . For me, directly entering the spirituality circle is a challenging thing to do. It's hard for me to understand and relate to God. On the other hand, I have an easy time entering the peoplehood circle. I mean, it's easy for me to feel I belong to the Jewish people. Sometimes, through my feeling of belonging to the Jewish people, I can also access the spirituality

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circle. A good example is attending a large Jewish rally or community celebration. For me, there is often an aura about these gatherings that is powerful and beyond explaining. To me it feels spiritual . . . . Judaism says we're supposed to do nice things for other people – like visit someone who's sick. Even though I certainly do not enjoy going to the hospital or, worse yet, a nursing home to see a friend or relative, something about making the effort is uplifting – at times I'd even call it spiritual. And if I am visiting a Jewish nursing home, I can also feel that I am part of the peoplehood circle. I can feel all three circles overlapping . . . . My point is that, alone or together, they are each considered sacred. Plus, they each can lead to or overlap one or both of the other two circles. Alone or together they can provide meaning.

Mann, G. 1996. *How to Get More Out of Being Jewish.* Minneapolis, MN: Leo & Sons Publishing, 28–30.

TEXT 10
RABBI BACHYA IBN PAKUDA, *CHOVOT HALEVAVOT (DUTIES OF THE HEART), GOD'S UNITY, INTRODUCTION*

(First half of the 11th century) Spanish rabbinical court judge and philosopher.

When we inquired as to what is the most necessary among the fundamental principles of our religion, we found that the wholehearted acknowledgement of God's unity – the root and foundation of the religion – is the very first of the Torah's gates. It is the acknowledgement of God's unity that separates the believer from the non-believer. It is the central truth of the religion. Whoever deviates from it will be unable to practice [his religious duties] nor will he retain his beliefs. For this reason, God's first words to us on Mount Sinai were: "I the ETERNAL am your God . . . . Do not have any other gods" (Exodus 20:2–3), and later on [God] exhorted us through [God's] prophet, saying: "Hear, Israel: The ETERNAL [that] is our God [is] one God" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

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TEXT 11
MIDRASH RABBAH, *LAMENTATIONS (EIKHAH), INTRODUCTION 2*

Midrash Aggadah to the book of Lamentations (*Eikhah*); compiled 5–6th century in the Land of Israel.

Rav Huna and Rabbi Yirmiyah said in the name of Rabbi Chiyya son of Abba, It is written (Jeremiah 16:11), "They have abandoned Me, and they have not observed My Torah" – if only they would have abandoned me but continued to observe my Torah, for through their involvement with it, its inner light would have returned them to the good [way].

אֵיכָה רַבָּתִי, פְּתִיחָתָא דַּחֲכִימִי ב

רַב הוּנָא וְרַבִּי יִרְמְיָה בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי חִיָּיא בַּר אַבָּא אָמְרִי כְּתִיב וְאוֹתִי עָזְבוּ וְאֶת תּוֹרָתִי לֹא שָׁמָרוּ הַלְוַאי אוֹתִי עָזְבוּ וְתוֹרָתִי שָׁמְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהָיוּ מִתְעַסְּקִין בָּהּ הַמָּאוֹר שֶׁבָּהּ הָיָה מַחֲזִירָן לַמּוּטָב.



TEXT 12
PROFESSOR YESHAYAHU LEIBOWITZ, *RELIGIOUS PRAXIS: THE MEANING OF HALAKHAH* (1953)

(1903–1994) Israeli philosopher and scientist known for his outspoken, often controversial, opinions on Judaism, ethics, religion, and politics.

The uniqueness of Judaism, the characteristic which distinguishes it from other faiths and religions, [is] namely, its embodiment in the Torah and the Mitzvoth . . . Judaism was embodied not in an abstract set of beliefs attained by many who had never heard of Abraham or of the Mosaic Torah, but in the Torah and the Mitzvoth . . .

. . . It was thus not beliefs or opinions that determined the identity of Judaism. Its continuity was that of its religious praxis. This is why the Hassidic movement, which neither intended to create a new *Halakhah* nor did so in fact, remained an integrated and live member of the Jewish body, despite the psychic distance and

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abyss of enmity which separated Hassidim from their opponents, who went so far as to attempt to excommunicate them. Compare this with the fate of the Sabbatean movement, which, owing to its defection from observance of Mitzvoth, was ejected from the body of Jewry, its ideology remaining beyond the pale.

Leibowitz, Y. 1992. *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State.* Trans. by Eliezer Goldman, Yoram Navon, Zvi Jacobson, Gershon Levi, and Raphael Levy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 5–6.

TEXT 13
RABBI JESSY DRESSIN, *ON HERSELF*

(b. 1980) American Reform rabbi and Director of Repair the World, Baltimore.

I believe that Judaism just offers an incredible platform of particular rituals, frameworks and obligations that help [people] to interact with the broader world and allows me to act within the world in a [beneficial] way.

I've always felt that Judaism has three goals: 1.) a sense of purpose and personal meaning; 2.) the imperative to be part of a collective community; and 3.) the responsibility to help make the world a better place. For me, everything about my Judaism is in pursuit of those three goals. I appreciate the kind of timelessness of those ideas, but [also the] generational interpretations and individual interpretations of how to work towards those goals.

J. Dressin. 2019. "Getting to Know . . . Rabbi Jessy Dressin." Interview by S. Kligman, *Baltimore Jewish Times*, 14 April. Available online at jewishtimes.com. Viewed June 2020.

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TEXT 14
DR. MAURICE M. MIZRAHI, *THE MISSION OF JUDAISM*

(b. 1949) Earned a PhD in theoretical physics, worked in the U.S. Defense Department, Jewish educator, and author of a series on the Torah portion and Jewish holidays.

Perhaps Torah is intentionally vague about the mission of Judaism so all of the above might apply, in proper balance: [spread Jewish teachings; excel for the benefit of humanity; perform tikkun olam].

Perhaps the most important thing is for Jews to continue to feel strongly that God chose them for SOME mission, so they can live their lives fully and passionately, and, with the help of Jewish observance and values, perform for the betterment of all mankind.

The Talmud summarizes it beautifully:
Lo 'alecha hamlacha ligmor, v'lo atta ven chorrin lehibatel mimmena
[לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לִגְמֹר וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶן חוֹרִין לִבָּטֵל מִמֶּנָּה]

You don't have to complete the task, but you may not desist from it entirely either. [Pirkei Avot 2:21]

Dr. Maurice Mizrahi, Congregation Adat Reyim, Lunch and Learn, Sept. 2011.

TEXT 15
RABBI DR. ABRAHAM TWERSKI, *ON PURPOSE* (2009)

(1930-2021) American Hasidic rabbi, scion of the Chernobyl Hasidic dynasty, and a psychiatrist specializing in substance abuse.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

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KEY TERMS

Mussar. This term covers a field of study defined by the terms "ethics" and "morals." In the 19th century, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter established the Mussar Movement, an effort to introduce into the regular course of yeshiva study a rigorous study of texts devoted to Mussar topics. The ulitmate aim of Mussar Movement was putting the study into practice. At the height of the original Mussar Movement, there were three developed schools of thought, each espousing its own approach to the topic, the way it was to be studied, and how it was to be put into practice.

Tikkun Olam. "Repair of the World." This concept, originating in the Mishnah, and in recent years becoming a primary guiding principle for the more liberal Jewish Movements, seeks to achieve social justice goals through religious (halakhic) legislation and through community-wide activism.

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KEY NAMES

Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pakuda. (First half of the 11th century) Spanish rabbinical court judge and philosopher, he was the author of the first Jewish system of ethics written in Arabic in 1040 under the title *Al Hidayah ila Faraid al-Kulub* (Guide to the Duties of the Heart), and translated into Hebrew by Yehudah Ibn Tibbon in the years 1161–80 under the title *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart), a work studied to this day.Nothing is known about his life.

Dressin, Rabbi Jessy. (b. 1980) American Reform rabbi recognized for her innovative approach to Jewish community engagement and education. She was ordained at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles in 2012. She founded Charm City Tribe, a nationally recognized model for young adult engagement. She also served as the Director of Jewish Life for the JCCs of Greater Baltimore. Later, as the Senior Director of Jewish Education for Repair the World, she played a central role in integrating Jewish learning with service initiatives, aiming to inspire a lifelong commitment to social justice among Jewish young adults.

Hirsch, Rabbi Shimshon (Samson) Raphael. (1808–1888) German pulpit rabbi and writer, and leading exponent of Neo-Orthodoxy, which attempted to combine European culture with strict adherence to traditional Judaism. The Neo-Orthodox movement advocated that a knowledge of Western culture and a certain degree of integration into German society, along with a commitment to *halakhah*, are both necessary for a meaningful Jewish life in modern times. Hirsch's writings include a commentary to the Torah, *Horeb: Essays on Israel's Duties in the Diaspora, a* and *Nineteen Letters on Judaism*.

Isaiah (*Yeshayah*). 8th century BCE prophet in the Kingdom of Judah (Yehudah). He made his first public appearance as a divinely inspired prophet in the year of King Uzziah's affliction with leprosy, and he ministered to the people for some sixty years, during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotam, Achaz, and Hezekiah. He preached justice and charity at a time of immoral behavior. He also preached courage and fortitude at a time when there was great fear from the threat of the new Assyrian Empire. He described in glowing terms the future glory of Israel, a vision that has sustained the faithful throughout the years of exile and oppression.

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Jeremiah (*Yirmiyah*). (645–582 BCE) Prophet during and following the last years of the monarchy of the Kingdom of Judah (609 BCE–586 BCE). He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and was ostracized by much of the nation as a result. He also prophesied to the Jews about the theological significance of the exile and forecast their return to the Land.

Kaplan, Rabbi Mordechai M. (1881–1983) Essayist and Jewish educator, ideologue of the Reconstructionist Judaism movement. In 1889, he immigrated with his mother and sisters to the United States to join his father in New York. From 1893 to 1902, he studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary and began his career as an Orthodox rabbi. From 1934 until 1970 he wrote a series of books in which he expressed his Reconstructionist ideology, centered on the "concept of Judaism as a civilization." He was a prolific writer, keeping a journal throughout most of his life.

Leibowitz, Professor Yeshayahu. (1903–1994) Born in Riga, Latvia, he studied chemistry and philosophy at the University of Berlin. After completing his doctorate in 1924, he went on to study biochemistry and medicine, receiving an MD in 1934 from the University of Basel. He immigrated to Mandatory Palestine in 1935 and settled in Jerusalem, joining the faculty of Hebrew University the following year. He became a professor of biochemistry in 1941 and was promoted to the position of senior professor of organic chemistry and neurology in 1952. After retiring in 1970, he continued to teach philosophy and the history of science. Aside from his scientific career, he is known primarily for his philosophical and religious writings, along with his scathing critique of Israeli values and national policy.

Mann, Gil. American author, journalist, and lecturer renowned for his engaging discussions on Jewish identity and contemporary issues. He has authored several books, including "How to Get More Out of Being Jewish Even If: A. You Are Not Sure You Believe in God; B. You Think Going to Synagogue Is a Waste of Time; C. You Hated Hebrew School" (1996) and "Sex, God, Christmas & Jews: Intimate Emails About Faith and Life Challenges" (2006). Through his writings and lectures, he addresses the complexities of modern Jewish life, aiming to make Jewish traditions and beliefs more accessible and relevant to diverse audiences.

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Mizrahi, Dr. Maurice. (b. 1949) Egyptian-born Jewish scholar, author, and physicist who earned a Ph.D. in theoretical physics from the University of Texas at Austin and subsequently built a 34-year career as a defense analyst in the U.S. Defense Department. Beyond his scientific endeavors, he has been deeply involved in Jewish education since 1984, teaching Judaism to teenagers and adults. He has authored a series of biblical commentaries titled "Commentaries on the Weekly Torah Portion and the Jewish Holy Day."

Stutman, Rabbi Shira. (b. 1973) Nationally recognized faith leader and change-maker with over two decades of experience in motivating and inspiring diverse groups. She graduated from Columbia University and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, where she was a Wexner Graduate Fellow. She is the founder of Mixed Multitudes, an organization dedicated to exposing diverse groups of Jews and fellow travelers to Jewish life. She has been named one of "America's Most Inspiring Rabbis" by *The Jewish Forward*.

Twerski, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua. (1930–2021) An American Hasidic rabbi, scion of the Chernobyl Hasidic dynasty, he was a psychiatrist that specialized in substance abuse. He founded and directed the Gateway Rehabilitation Center, Pittsburgh; was clinical director of the Department of Psychiatry at St. Francis Hospital in Pittsburgh; associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine; and the founder of the Shaar Hatikvah rehabilitation center for prisoners in Israel. He was a prolific writer of Jewish books and was co-spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Jehudah with his father from ordination until 1959.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

Ariel, D. 1996. *What Do Jews Believe? The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism.* New York: Schocken.

Blech, B. 1991. *Understanding Judaism: The Basics of Deed and Creed.* London: Jason Aronson Inc.

Borowitz, E. 1984. *Liberal Judaism.* New York: UAHC.

Dorff, E. I. 1998. *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Fackenheim, E. L. 1999. *What Is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Hirsch, S. R. 1969. *The Nineteen Letters on Judaism.* (Prepared by Jacob Breuer, based on the translation by Rabbi Dr. Bernard Drachman). Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers.

Mann, G. 1996. *How to Get More Out of Being Jewish.* Minneapolis, MN: Leo & Sons Publishing.

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LESSON 2

LET MY PEOPLE GROW: THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT AS A JEWISH CALLING

Note:
This lesson includes more texts than can be covered in a 90-minute session. We encourage you to explore the texts not covered in class on your own time.

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TEXT 1
MICHAEL LERNER, *HOW THE REVOLUTIONARY MESSAGE GOT REPRESSED AND ABANDONED*

(1943–2024) American political activist, editor of *Tikkun*, a progressive Jewish interfaith magazine based in Berkeley, California, and the rabbi of Beyt Tikkun Synagogue in Berkeley.

Every ruling elite of the ancient and medieval world, and many in the modern world, justified their rule by ideologies whose central message was that the world cannot be changed . . . Along came the Jews with a very different message: "The world can be fundamentally changed. Every system of oppression, no matter how powerful it appears to be, can be overthrown . . . We know it, because we did it ourselves."

Lerner, M. 1994. *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation*. New York: Putnam Adult, 129.

TEXT 2
EXODUS (*SHEMOT*) 13:3–4

3 And Moses said to the people,
Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how GOD freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten. 4 You go free on this day, in the month of Abib.

שְׁמוֹת יג, ג-ד

ג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם זָכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יְצָאתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים כִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיא ה'
אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה וְלֹא יֵאָכֵל חָמֵץ. ד הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב.

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TEXT 3
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 16:1–3

1 Observe the month of Abib and offer a passover sacrifice to the ETERNAL your God, for it was in the month of Abib, at night, that the ETERNAL your God freed you from Egypt. **2** You shall slaughter the passover sacrifice for the ETERNAL your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where GOD will choose to establish the divine name. **3** You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress – for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly – so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live.

דְּבָרִים יא, יח-כא

א שָׁמוֹר אֶת חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב הוֹצִיאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לָיְלָה.
ב וְזָבַחְתָּ פֶּסַח לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ צֹאן וּבָקָר בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' לְשַׁכֵּן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם. ג לֹא תֹאכַל עָלָיו חָמֵץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל עָלָיו מַצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֹנִי כִּי בְחִפָּזוֹן יָצָאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ.

TEXT 4
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 5:12–15

12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the ETERNAL your God has commanded you. **13** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **14** but the seventh day is a sabbath of the ETERNAL your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your donkey, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. **15** Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the ETERNAL your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the ETERNAL your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

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דְּבָרִים ה, יב-טו

יב שָׁמוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ. יג שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאכְתֶּךָ.
יד וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתֶךָ וְשׁוֹרְךָ
וַחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל בְּהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ כָּמוֹךָ. טו וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצִאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה עַל כֵּן צִוְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת.

TEXT 5
SHABBAT EVE *KIDDUSH*

The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken, ceasing on the seventh day from doing any of the work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy – having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done. (Genesis 2:1-3)

5

On wine:
Blessed are You, ETERNAL our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

10 **Blessed are You, ETERNAL our God, Ruler of the universe, who has set us apart through [the] commandments and has desired us. With love and desire, [God] has endowed us with the Shabbat that [God] has set apart, a reminder of Creation, for it is the first amongst the designated days that have been [so] set apart – a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. [God], You have chosen us and set us apart from the**
15 **nations, and the Shabbat that You set apart You have bequeathed unto us with love and desire. Blessed are You ETERNAL, the One who sets Shabbat apart.**

קִידּוּשׁ לֵיל שַׁבָּת

וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם: וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא
אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת: (בראשית ב:א-ג)

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עַל הַיַּיִן:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ זִכָּרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ זֵכֶר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. כִּי בָנוּ בָחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדַּשְׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשְׁךָ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת:

TEXT 6
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 24:17–22

17 You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. **18** Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the ETERNAL your God redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.

19 When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that the ETERNAL your God may bless you in all your undertakings.
20 When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. **21** When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. **22** Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.

דְּבָרִים כד, יז-כב

יז לֹא תַטֶּה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר יָתוֹם וְלֹא תַחֲבֹל בֶּגֶד אַלְמָנָה. **יח** וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּפְדְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם עַל כֵּן אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה. **יט** כִּי תִקְצֹר קְצִירְךָ בְשָׂדֶךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ עֹמֶר בַּשָּׂדֶה לֹא תָשׁוּב לְקַחְתּוֹ לַגֵּר לַיָּתוֹם וְלָאַלְמָנָה יִהְיֶה לְמַעַן יְבָרֶכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ. **כ** כִּי תַחְבֹּט זֵיתְךָ לֹא תְפַאֵר אַחֲרֶיךָ לַגֵּר לַיָּתוֹם וְלָאַלְמָנָה יִהְיֶה. **כא** כִּי תִבְצֹר כַּרְמְךָ לֹא תְעוֹלֵל אַחֲרֶיךָ לַגֵּר לַיָּתוֹם וְלָאַלְמָנָה יִהְיֶה. **כב** וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם עַל כֵּן אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה.

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TEXT 7
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 15:12–15

12 If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall set them free. 13 When you set them free, do not let them go empty-handed: 14 Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the ETERNAL your God has blessed you. 15 Bear in mind that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the ETERNAL your God redeemed you; therefore I enjoin this commandment upon you today.

דְּבָרִים טו, יב-טו

יב כִּי יִמָּכֵר לְךָ אָחִיךָ הָעִבְרִי אוֹ הָעִבְרִיָּה וַעֲבָדְךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת תְּשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ חָפְשִׁי מֵעִמָּךְ. **יג** וְכִי תְשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ חָפְשִׁי מֵעִמָּךְ לֹא תְשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ רֵיקָם. **יד** הַעֲנִיק תַּעֲנִיק לוֹ מִצֹּאנְךָ וּמִגָּרְנְךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִּתֶּן לוֹ. **טו** וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּפְדְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל כֵּן אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם.

BACKGROUND TEXT 8

The story of the Exodus from Egypt was used not only by Jews but by other groups who felt oppressed at one time or another. In the United States, the Exodus was evoked during the American Revolution (18th century), the Civil War (19th century), and the Civil Rights Movement (20th century). Dr. Scott Langston, professor of Religion and American History at Texas Christian University, writes,

> A couple of months after American colonists declared their independence from Great Britain, a committee composed of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams proposed a design for a national seal. It portrayed the Egyptian pharaoh leading his troops through a divided Red Sea in pursuit of the fleeing Israelites. Surrounding this scene were the words, "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God."[1]

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1 Available at Teaching in the Bible, a newsletter from the Society of Biblical Literature. Viewed January 2025.

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This is the seal seen in Text 8. Ultimately, Congress did not approve this design and the eagle became the central image of the national seal.

The committee did not make a drawing of their design, they only offered a written description of it. This description was penned by Franklin and edited by Jefferson. It read:

> Pharaoh sitting in an open Chariot, a Crown on his head and a Sword in his hand, passing through the divided Waters of the Red Sea in Pursuit of the Israelites: Rays from a Pillar of Fire in the Cloud, expressive of the divine Presence and Command, beaming on Moses who stands on the shore and extending his hand over the Sea causes it to overwhelm Pharaoh. Motto: Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.[2]

The drawing itself was made only many years later, in 1856, by Benson J. Lossing (1813–1891), a prolific and popular American historian, and published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Note that Lossing did not interpret in his drawing the rays that were supposed to emanate from the pillar of fire.

TEXT 8
PROPOSED AMERICAN NATIONAL SEAL DESIGN



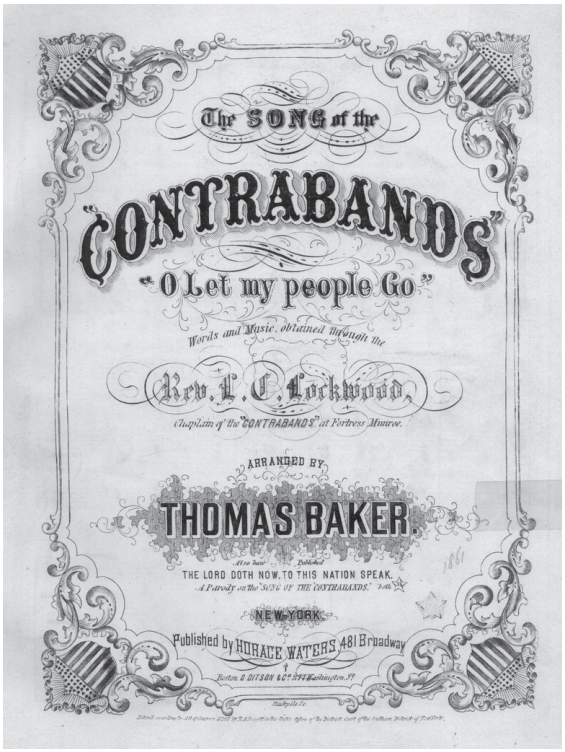
Benson John Lossing, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

2 Available at greatseal.com. Viewed January 2025.

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BACKGROUND TEXT 9

This spiritual was composed sometime in the 19th century. Some scholars believe it had been used as a rallying anthem for the contrabands (slaves who had escaped from the South to Union lines during the Civil War) at Fort Monroe in 1861. The first known sheet music of the song was copyrighted in that same year under the title, "The Song of the Contrabands – O Let my people Go." The chaplain of the contrabands, Reverend L. C. Lockwood, according to one source, stated that the song had been sung as early as 1853 in Virginia.



Available at wikimedia.org. Public Domain.

There are several different versions of the lyrics, but in all of them the Israelites of the biblical story represent the enslaved African Americans. According to some, the "going down" referred to "going down the river," in this case, the Mississippi.

This lesson presents two recordings for the faculty, who can select which one they would like to share with the learners in their class:
The first is an audio recording by singer, actor, social and political activist, lawyer, and athlete, Paul Robeson (1898–1976). Robeson made the song famous with his rendition recorded in 1953. Aside from his major accomplishments, he is also known for singing in Yiddish and even sang a song about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
Recording by Paul Robeson

The second recording is presented in a video by a Russian choir, originally established at the Moscow Choral Synagogue in 1990. They started out by singing Jewish music, both liturgical and popular, and have been instrumental in promoting interest in Jewish music and heritage throughout Russia. Over the years, their repertoire has expanded and now includes many genres in several different languages.
Recording by Russian choir

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TEXT 9
GO DOWN, MOSES (C. 1850–1870S)

Go Down, Moses

When Israel was in Egypt land,
Let my people go!
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go!

(Chorus)
(So the Lord said)
Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land,
Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go!

So Moses went to Egypt land
He made old Pharaoh understand
"Thus spoke the Lord," bold Moses said,
Let my people go!
"If not I'll smite your firstborn dead!"
Let my people go!
Go down . . .

(Not in the recording suggested above)
Your foes shall not before you stand,
Let my people go!
And you'll possess fair Canaan's land
Let my people go!
Go down . . .

You'll not get lost in the wilderness
Let my people go!
With a lighted candle in your breast.
Let my people go!
Go down . . .

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TEXT 10
RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, *RELIGION AND RACE*

(1907–1972) Religious philosopher in America, Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary. The speech below was delivered in 1963 as the opening address at the National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago.

At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses. Moses' words were: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me." While Pharaoh retorted: "Who is the Lord that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go."

5

The outcome of that summit meeting has not come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses.

Heschel, A. J. 1975. *The Insecurity of Freedom*. New York: Schocken Books, 85.

BACKGROUND TEXT 11

In Deuteronomy (*Devarim*), the Torah contrasts the ideal state of the land full of bounty (8:6–10) with the danger that can result from this abundance (8:11–18). In the excerpted text below, Sacks explains the link between these two biblical passages.

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TEXT 11
RABBI JONATHAN SACKS, *THE POLITICS OF MEMORY* (2019)

(1948–2020) Former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, philosopher, author, and thought leader.

Good things, says Moses to the next generation, will happen to you. The question is how you will respond. Either you will eat and be satisfied and bless G-d, remembering that all things come from Him – or you will eat and be satisfied and forget to whom you owe all this. You will think it comes entirely from your own efforts: "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." Although this may seem a small difference, it will, says Moses, make all the difference. On this alone will turn your future as a nation in its own land.

Moses' argument is both brilliant and unexpected. You may think, he says, that the tough times are behind you. You have wandered for forty years without a home. There were times when you had no water, no food. You were exposed to the elements. You were attacked by your enemies. You may think this was the test of your strength. It wasn't. The real challenge is not poverty but affluence; not slavery but freedom; not homelessness but home. Many nations have been lifted to great heights when they faced difficulty and danger. They fought battles and won. They came through crises – droughts, plagues, recessions, defeats – and were toughened by them. When times are hard, people grow. They come together. They bury their differences. There is a sense of community and solidarity, of neighbours and strangers pulling together. Many people who have lived through a war remember it as the most vivid time of their life.

The real test of a nation is not, can it survive a crisis? but, can it survive the lack of a crisis? Can it stay strong during times of ease and plenty, power and prestige? That is the challenge that has defeated every civilization known to history. Let it not, says Moses, defeat you.

Moses' foresight is little less than stunning. The pages of history are littered with the relics of nations that seemed impregnable in their day, but which eventually declined and fell and lapsed into oblivion – and always for the reason Moses prophetically foresaw. They forget. Memories fade. People lose sight of the values they once

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fought for – justice, equality, independence, freedom. The nation, its early battles over, becomes strong. Some of its members grow rich. They become lax, self-indulgent, over-sophisticated, decadent. They lose their sense of social solidarity. They no longer feel it their duty to care for the poor, the weak, the marginal, the losers. They begin to feel that such wealth and position as they have is theirs by right. The bonds of fraternity and collective responsibility begin to fray. The less well-off feel an acute sense of injustice. The scene is set either for revolution or conquest. Societies succumb to external pressures when they have long been weakened by internal decay. That was the danger Moses foresaw and about which he warned.

Available online at rabbisacks.org. Viewed July 2020.

TEXT 12
RABBI IRVING (YITZ) GREENBERG, *JUDAISM AS AN EXODUS RELIGION: PASSOVER*

(b. 1933) Contemporary Orthodox theologian and writer in America; served as the Chairman of the US Holocaust Museum.

Exodus morality meant giving justice to the weak and the poor. Honest weights and measures, interest-free loans to the poor, leaving part of the crops in the field for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, treating the alien stranger as a native citizen – these are all applications of the Exodus principle to living in this world. Thus, the Exodus, as articulated at Sinai, transformed the Jewish people and their religious ethical system. Inasmuch as Christianity and Islam adopted the Exodus at their core, almost half the world is profoundly shaped by the aftereffects of the Exodus event.

In modern times, the image of redemption has proven to be the most powerful of all. The rise of productivity and affluence has heightened expectations of the better life. Widely disseminated scientific ideas and conceptions of human freedom carry the same message: Do not accept disadvantage or suffering as your fate; rather, let the world be transformed!

Greenberg, I. 1988. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Touchstone, 64–65.

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TEXT 13
RABBI SHARON BROUS, *DON'T TELL ME, SHOW ME* (2015)

(b. 1973) Ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary, founding rabbi of IKAR, on the faculty of the Hartman Institute-North America, Wexner Heritage, and REBOOT, and is a Senior Fellow at Auburn Theological Seminary.

(9:50) Religious communities also need at their heart, a narrative, a raison d'etre, something beyond historical obligations and communal commitments and demographic fear and parental guilt. We need a story, a story that ultimately helps us articulate what it means to be alive in the world, what it means to be a human being . . . (10:13)

(10:24) We need a story that helps remind us what it means to actually dream of something that's bigger than us. And Jews have so many stories. We tell these stories all the time, and we tell them not to relay historical events, but we tell them to convey critical ideas, to instill values, to offer a sense of purpose in a chaotic world. (10:45)

(11:16) This is the story of our redemption, the Exodus from Egypt, *yetziat mitzrayim*. *Yetziat mitzrayim* – coming out from a narrow place, the triumph of freedom over slavery, of dignity over degradation, the movement from darkness into light, from paralysis into possibility, to self-determination from systematized oppression. The exodus is a story of plagues and wonders, but the central feature of this story that we tell and retell is actually an extraction process, it is a *Yetziya*, a story of people going on a journey, leaving behind tyranny and persecution, reclaiming their humanity.

The Exodus story is a testament to the inextinguishable yearning both human and divine for freedom. And it's timeless because it speaks to all people. It speaks to the powerless, telling those who are vulnerable, you matter, your struggle matters. (12:24)

(15:24) The single most important commandment in the Torah, by weight of verse alone, would clearly be the central obsession that our text has with the *ger*, with the stranger, the other, the vulnerable, mentioned 36 times throughout the Torah. Why

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is this stranger the centerpiece of Biblical legislation and imagination? Because the treatment of the vulnerable offers a newly freed slave the chance to create a counterculture, a counter-Egypt, to build a society that honours dignity, and recognizes humanity, and entrusts us with caring for one another.

The work of leaving Egypt is ongoing, it doesn't end once the Egyptian armies drown in that sea. It's an extraction process, it's ongoing, which is why one very powerful young Jewish woman once wrote the following words: "Until we are all free, we are none of us free."*

That later became the bedrock of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, when Martin Luther King wrote in Letter from a Birmingham Jail, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." (16:32)

* "Until we are all free, we are none of us free," is from Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) and appears in her series of articles titled "An Epistle to the Hebrews," in which she discusses the Jewish problems of her time.

This is an excerpt from a transcript of an oral presentation. The oral presentation can be heard and the entire transcript read at jdov.org. Viewed July 2020.

TEXT 14
BERL KATZNELSON, *THE INEXHAUSTIBLE WELLSPRINGS* (1934)

(1887–1944) One of the intellectual founders of Labor Zionism, instrumental to the establishment of the modern state of Israel, and the editor of *Davar*, the first daily newspaper of the workers' movement.

From parents to children, [down] through the generations, the Exodus from Egypt was transmitted as a personal memory that does not fade or dim. "In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see oneself as if they had [personally] come out of Egypt." In the world and through time, you have no grander historical consciousness than this, nor a greater merging of the individual and the collective than the one present in this ancient pedagogic instruction. I know of no other literary

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creation that teaches the abhorrence of slavery and the love of freedom more than the story of the subjugation and [subsequent] exodus from Egypt. And I know of no ancient memory that is entirely focused on the future, that is wholly symbolic of our present and our future, as "a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt."

How deep-seated is the impulse for freedom in the heart of this nation that was able to fashion such a brilliant creation in the flower of its age and to [succeed in] transmitting it down the generations! And this creation has no small share in the destiny of all those Jewish-born rebels and freedom fighters that hold freedom sacred.

בֵּרל כָּצֶנלְסוֹן, מְקוֹרוֹת לֹא אַכְזָב

מֵאָבוֹת אֶל בָּנִים, דֶּרֶךְ כָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת, נִמְסַר דְּבַר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כְּזִכָּרוֹן אִישִׁי, אֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ מַחֲזִיר וְאֵינֶנּוּ דֵּהֶה. "בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם". אֵין לְךָ שִׁיא שֶׁל הַכָּרָה הִיסְטוֹרִית מְרוּמֵם מִזֶּה, וְאֵין לְךָ הִתְמַזְגוּת שֶׁל יָחִיד וּכְלָל – בְּרַחֲבֵי כַּדּוּר־הָעוֹלָם וּבָעֲמָקֵי הַדּוֹרוֹת – גְּדוֹלָה מֵאֲשֶׁר בְּצַו פֻּדָגוֹגִי עַתִּיק זֶה. אֵינֶנִּי יוֹדֵעַ יְצִירָה סִפְרוּתִית יוֹתֵר מְחַנֶּכֶת לְתִעוּב הָעַבְדוּת וּלְאַהֲבַת הַחֵרוּת כְּסִפּוּר הַשִּׁעְבּוּד וִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם. וְאֵינֶנִּי יוֹדֵעַ שׁוּם זִכָּרוֹן עַתִּיק שֶׁכְּלוֹ מֻפְנֶה לִקְרַאת הֶעָתִיד, שֶׁכְּלוֹ סֵמֶל לַהֹוֶה שֶׁלָּנוּ וְלַעֲתִידֵנוּ, כְּ"זֵכֶר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם".

אֵיזֶה יֵצֶר־חֵירוּת עָמוֹק טָבוּעַ בְּלֵב עָם שֶׁיָּכוֹל הָיָה בַּאֲבִיב יָמָיו לִיצוֹר יְצִירָה גְּאוֹנִית כָּזֹאת וְלִמְסוֹר אוֹתָהּ מִדּוֹר לְדוֹר. וְלִיצִירָה זוֹ חֵלֶק לֹא קָטָן בְּגוֹרָלָם שֶׁל כָּל הַמּוֹרְדִים וְלוֹחֲמֵי הַחֵרוּת וּמְקַדְּשֵׁי שְׁמָהּ, אֲשֶׁר נוֹלְדוּ עַל בִּרְכֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל . . .

TEXT 15
RACHEL TRAVIS, *PARSHAT SHMOT 5771* (2010)

A consultant in PwC's Public Sector Practice, she believes that art can serve as a vehicle for social change.

"In every generation one is obligated to view him [or her] self as though s/he personally came out of Egypt." Though we recite these words at the Pesach seder each year, I find them difficult to practice. So too, as I studied *Parshat Shmot* and

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read about the descent of the Children of Israel into slavery and their immense suffering under Pharaoh, I struggled to envision myself in their place. As an American Jew, blessed to live in comfort and security and having never experienced true oppression, try as I might, I could not genuinely imagine what it would feel like to be a slave.

I was troubled by this realization, because personally relating to the Exodus from Egypt is a core tenet of Judaism, as well as a foundation for the assertion that social justice is an inherently Jewish value. The Torah reminds us dozens of times that we have the moral obligation to help others because we were slaves in Egypt. We are commanded to love the stranger precisely because we were strangers in Egypt. We are directed to aid the oppressed because we, as a people, understand what it means to suffer. The Torah seems to imply that understanding suffering is a prerequisite for remedying it.

But can we satisfy the Torah's commandments to aid the oppressed if we ourselves cannot relate to their suffering? Moreover, can we still find a meaningful social justice message in the Exodus story if we cannot identify with the experiences of our ancestors?

I believe we can . . . .

. . . The true raison d'être of the Exodus was to reach Sinai and to receive the Torah, thereby forming a nation with responsibilities toward God and toward each other – a nation bound no longer by slavery, but obligated by the mitzvot to create a just society . . .

Perhaps then, our contemporary social justice lesson is this: Because we are free, as the Israelites were once freed from Egypt, we are obligated to help the oppressed. Because we do not know what it feels like to be a stranger, we must love the stranger. In many ways, this is a more challenging imperative than the one culled from the traditional reading of the text. It requires that we continuously infuse our freedom with meaning through action.

Available on the website of the American Jewish World Service, ajws.org. Viewed July 2020.

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TEXT 16
RABBI AMNON RIBAK, *EVERY PERSON NEEDS EGYPT*

(b. 1955) Ordained in Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem and faculty at the Shalom Hartman Institute.

Everyone needs to have their own
Egypt
That they can draw themselves out of
With a strong hand
Or with the grinding of the teeth.

Everyone needs terror and great darkness,
And comfort, promise, and rescue,
That they should know to lift their eyes to the Heavens.
Everyone needs that one prayer
That would always be on their lips.
A person needs to give in [at least] once –
Everyone needs a shoulder.

Everyone needs to have their own
Egypt,
To redeem themselves from it, from the house of slaves,
To go out at midnight into the wilderness of fears,
To march straight into the waters,
To see them part before him unto both sides.
Everyone needs a shoulder,
To carry Joseph's bones upon it,
Everyone needs to stand erect.

Everyone needs to have their own
Egypt
And Jerusalem,
And one long trek,
Forever to remember it
In the soles of their feet.

Trans. A. Weschler

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אַמְנוֹן רִיפַּק, כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ מִצְרַיִם

כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לוֹ
אֵיזוֹ מִצְרַיִם,
לִהְיוֹת מִשֶּׁה עַצְמוֹ מִתּוֹכָהּ
בְּיָד חֲזָקָה,
אוֹ בַּחֲרִיקַת שִׁנַּיִם.

כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ אֵימָה וַחֲשֵׁכָה גְּדוֹלָה,
וְנַחֲמָה, וְהַבְטָחָה, וְהַצָּלָה,
שֶׁיֵּדַע לְשֵׁאת עֵינָיו אֶל הַשָּׁמַיִם.
כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ תְּפִלָּה
אַחַת,
שֶׁתִּהֵא שְׁגוּרָה אֶצְלוֹ עַל הַשְּׂפָתַיִם.
אָדָם צָרִיךְ פַּעַם אַחַת לְהִתְכּוֹפֵף-
כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ כְּתֵף.

כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לוֹ
אֵיזוֹ מִצְרַיִם,
לְגָאוֹל עַצְמוֹ מִמְּנָה מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים,
לָצֵאת בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיִל אֶל מִדְבַּר הַפְּחָדִים,
לִצְעוֹד הַיִּשֵּׁר אֶל תּוֹךְ הַמַּיִם,
לִרְאוֹתָם נִפְתָּחִים מִפָּנָיו לַצְּדָדִים.
כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ כָּתֵף,
לָשֵׂאת עָלֶיהָ אֶת עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף,
כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ לְהִזָּקֵף.

כָּל אָדָם צָרִיךְ שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לוֹ
אֵיזוֹ מִצְרַיִם.
וִירוּשָׁלַיִם,
וּמַסָּע אָרוֹךְ אֶחָד,
לִזְכּוֹר אוֹתוֹ לָעַד
בַּכַּפּוֹת הָרַגְלַיִם.

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KEY TERMS

Kiddush. (קִדּוּשׁ, Lit. sanctification) Prayer recited over wine or bread proclaiming the sanctity of Shabbat and festivals.

Pesach. (פֶּסַח) The Hebrew term used to refer to Passover. It is the first of the three pilgrimage festivals, and it commemorates God's passing over the homes of the Israelites during the plague striking the Egyptian firstborn. The biblical festival was celebrated on the day of 14 Nissan and the following evening, and it was marked by the sacrifice of the paschal lamb (*korban Pesach*). Today, however, *Pesach* refers to the festival that starts on 15 Nissan and lasts until 21 Nissan; it is marked by the eating of *matzah* (unleavened bread), and the prohibition against *chametz* (leavened products).

Tefillin. (תְּפִלִּין) Black, leather, cube-shaped boxes containing four biblical passages, worn on the arm and on the forehead during weekday morning prayers.

Yetziat Mitzrayim. (יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם) The Hebrew term used to refer to the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

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KEY NAMES

Brous, Rabbi Sharon. (b. 1973) Prominent American rabbi ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary, and served as a Rabbinic Fellow at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City. She is the founding leader of IKAR, a vibrant Jewish community in Los Angeles and a member of the International Council of the New Israel Fund and the rabbinic advisory council to American Jewish World Service. In 2013, The Daily Beast ranked her first on its list of America's most influential rabbis. She is a leading voice in reanimating religious life in America, working to develop a spiritual roadmap for soulful, multi-faith justice work.

Greenberg, Rabbi Irving. (b. 1933) Leading Orthodox theologian, founder of the Center for Learning and Leadership in New York, and author of a popular book on the Jewish holidays called *The Jewish Way*. He served as Chairman of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua. (1907–1972) A religious philosopher, he served as professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Author of numerous books on philosophy, Tanakh, *kabbalah*, and Hassidism including *The Prophets*, *A Passion for Truth*, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, *Man's Quest for God*, *The Sabbath*, and *God in Search of Man*.

Katznelson, Berl. (1887–1944) Leader of the Zionist Labor movement and a central figure of the Second Aliyah. Born in Belorussia, he was the son of a member of Hovevei Zion, and from childhood grew up with dreams of *aliyah*. He was strongly imbued with the ideal of physical labor and when he arrived in Israel in 1909, he worked on farms and served on several labor councils. He helped found the consumer cooperatives for the sale of food, known as "Hamashbir." He helped initiate Kuppat Holim, the Sick Fund. He was the editor of the Histadrut's newspaper *Davar*. He was one of the few voices in non-religious labor circles to press for the observance of the Sabbath and festivals, dietary laws in Histadrut kitchens, and the circumcision of children in the kibbutzim. He was instrumental in pressing for "illegal" immigration to Palestine and, under his guidance, his disciples parachuted into Nazi-held territory to try to aid Jewish survivors.

Lerner, Michael. (1943–2024) American political activist, psychotherapist, and author, renowned for his progressive views and efforts to integrate spirituality with social justice. In 1986, Lerner founded *Tikkun* magazine, serving as its editor. The publication became a leading voice for liberal and progressive Jewish thought, emphasizing the integration of spiritual wisdom with social and political activism.

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Moses. Lawgiver and prophet to whom the authorship of the Torah is traditionally attributed. Also called Moshe Rabbenu in Hebrew מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ, Lit. "Moses our Teacher/Rabbi"), he is the most important prophet in Judaism, his prophetic abilities being unsurpassed by any other, and is also considered an important prophet in Christianity and Islam, as well as a number of other faiths. According to the Torah, he led the Israelite nation out of Egyptian slavery and to Mt. Sinai where he facilitated their receiving of the Torah (known as the Five Books of Moses), and then continued as their leader during their forty years of wandering in the desert, but was not permitted to lead them into the Land of Israel.

Ribak, Rabbi Amnon. (b. 1955) A fellow in the Beit Midrash for the Israeli Rabbinate of the Hartman Institute and the Midrash in Oranim. He also serves as the rabbi of the reform community 'Ma'alot Tivon' in Kiryat Tivon. Before that, he served as acting rabbi in the Or Hadad community in Haifa. Before he turned to rabbinical pursuits and Judaism, he was a high-tech person and worked for over 26 years in the industry, most of them in the IBM research laboratory. He was ordained to the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem in 2021.

Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan. (1948–2020) An international religious leader, philosopher, award-winning author and respected moral voice, he was awarded the 2016 Templeton Prize in recognition of his "exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension." He was a frequent and sought-after contributor to radio, television, and the press both in Britain and around the world. After stepping down as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth – a position he served for twenty-two years between 1991 and 2013 – he held a number of professorships at several academic institutions including Yeshiva University, New York University, and King's College London. He authored more than 30 books. He received numerous awards for his contributions to presenting Judaism in a fresh and meaningful way.

Travis, Rachel. Consultant in PwC's Public Sector Practice, with a background in Jewish art and visual culture. She earned a master's degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary and has worked at various museums and Jewish institutions, reflecting her belief in art as a vehicle for social change. She has contributed to American Jewish World Service (AJWS) as an author, writing insightful pieces that explore the intersection of Jewish teachings and social justice. Her writings are featured in AJWS's Dvar Tzedek series, where she delves into weekly Torah portions to extract lessons on justice and human rights.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

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APPENDIX

[A] FRED HELLERMAN AND FRAN MINKOFF, *MAN COME INTO EGYPT*

Hellerman (1927–2016): American folk singer, guitarist, producer, and songwriter, and an original member of the American folk group The Weavers, together with Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, and Ronnie Gilbert. Frances "Fran" Minkoff (1915–2002): American lyricist.

ABOUT THE SONG:

This song was recorded by the American folk trio Peter, Paul, and Mary and was released in January 1963, as part of the album *Moving*, as a civil rights song. Click here to hear the song.

There is a man come into Egypt, and Moses is his name
When he saw the grief upon us in his heart there burned a flame
In his heart there burned a flame, oh Lord, in his heart there burned a flame
When he saw the grief upon us in his heart there burned a flame

There is a man come into Egypt, his eyes are full of light
Like the sun come up in Egypt, he's come to drive away the night
Come to drive away the night, oh Lord, come to drive away the night
Like the sun come up in Egypt, come to drive away the night

There is a man come into Egypt, he's come for you and me
On his lips a word is singing, and the word is "Liberty"
And the word is "Liberty," oh Lord, and the word is "Liberty"
On his lips a word is singing, and the word is "Liberty"

There is a man come into Egypt to stir the souls of Man
We will follow him to freedom, never wear those chains again
Never wear those chains again, oh Lord, never wear those chains again
We will follow him to freedom, and never wear those chains again.

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BACKGROUND APPENDIX TEXT B:

The following text is an excerpt from a sermon King delivered on May 17, 1956, Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving, Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. He delivered this sermon in an ecumenical program commemorating the second anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* concerning the desegregation *of schools.*



[B] MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., *THE DEATH OF EVIL UPON THE SEASHORE* (1956)

(1929–1968) An American Christian minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968, he is best known for advancing civil rights through nonviolence and civil disobedience, inspired by his Christian beliefs and the nonviolent activism of Mahatma Gandhi.

. . . You will remember that at a very early stage in her history, the children of Israel were reduced to the bondage of physical slavery under the gripping yoke of Egyptian rule. Egypt was the symbol of evil in the form of humiliating oppression, ungodly exploitation and crushing domination. . . .

. . . There are approximately 2,400,000,000 people in the world today. The vast majority of these people are found in Africa and Asia. More than 1,400,000,000 of the peoples of the world are found on these two continents. Fifty years ago most of these people were dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated and humiliated by some foreign power. There were 400,000,000 persons in India and Pakistan under the iron feet of British rule. There were 600,000,000 persons in China under the gripping yoke of British, Dutch and French rule. There were 100,000,000 persons in Indonesia under the oppressive hands of Dutch rule. There were 200,000,000 persons in Africa dominated and exploited by the British, the Belgium, the French, and the Dutch. The great struggle of the Twentieth Century has been between these exploited masses questing for freedom and the colonial powers seeking to maintain their domination. . . .

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. . . Many years ago the Negro was thrown into the Egypt of segregation, and his great struggle has been to free himself from the crippling restrictions and paralyzing effects of this vicious system. For years it looked like he would never get out of this Egypt. The closed Red Sea always stood before him with discouraging dimensions. There were always those Pharaohs with hardened hearts, who, despite the cries of many a Moses, refused to let these people go. But one day, through a world shaking decree by the nine justices of the Supreme Court of America and an awakened moral conscience of many White persons of good will, backed up by the Providence of God, the Red Sea was opened, and the forces of justice marched through to the other side. As we look back we see segregation caught in the rushing waters of historical necessity. Evil in the form of injustice and exploitation cannot survive. There is a Red Sea in history that ultimately comes to carry the forces of goodness to victory, and that same Red Sea closes in to bring doom and destruction to the forces of evil.

This is our hope. This is the hope and conviction that all men of goodwill live by. It is at bottom the conviction that all reality hinges on moral foundations and that the whole cosmic universe has spiritual control. It is therefore fitting and proper that we assemble here, just two years after the Supreme Court's momentous decision on desegregation, and praise God for His power and the greatness of His purpose, and pray that we gain the vision and the will to be His co-workers in this struggle.

Let us not despair. Let us not lose faith in man and certainly not in God. We must believe that a prejudiced mind can be changed, and that man, by the grace of God, can be lifted from the valley of hate to the high mountain of love.

Let us remember that as we struggle against Egypt, we must have love, compassion and understanding goodwill for those against whom we struggle, helping them to realize that as we seek to defeat the evils of Egypt, we are not seeking to defeat them but to help them, as well as ourselves.

God has a great plan for this world. His purpose is to achieve a world where all men will live together as brothers, and where every man recognizes the dignity and worth of all human personality. He is seeking at every moment of His existence to lift

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men from the bondage of some evil Egypt, carrying them through the wilderness of discipline, and finally to the Promised Land of personal and social integration. . .

Available at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project. Viewed January 2025.

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LESSON 4

CHOSEN PEOPLE, CHOSEN PURPOSE

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BACKGROUND TEXT 1

This short scene opens with Tevye (played by Israeli actor Chayyim Topol, 1935-2023) in a monologue with God. As he is returning home from celebrating the engagement of his eldest daughter, he receives news of an imminent pogrom – a scheduled government-sponsored attack on the Jewish community and turns to God with a question.



TEXT 1
VIDEO: *FIDDLER ON THE ROOF*

(1971) American musical comedy-drama.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

Transcript: Dear God, did you have to send me news like that today of all days? I know, I know we are the Chosen People, but once in a while, can't you choose someone else?



TEXT 2
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 7:6–8; 9:4–6

Chapter 7

6 For you are a people consecrated to the ETERNAL your God: of all the peoples on earth the ETERNAL your God chose you to be the treasured one. **7** It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that GOD grew attached to you and chose you – indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; **8** but it was because GOD favored you and kept the oath made to your fathers that GOD freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Chapter 9

4 And when the ETERNAL your God has thrust them from your path, say not to yourselves, "GOD has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues"; it is rather because of the wickedness of those nations that the GOD is dispossessing them before you. **5** It is not because of your virtues and your rectitude that you

LESSON 4

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will be able to possess their country; but it is because of their wickedness that the ETERNAL your God is dispossessing those nations before you, and in order to fulfill the oath that the GOD made to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

6 Know, then, that it is not for any virtue of yours that the ETERNAL your God is giving you this good land to possess; for you are a stiffnecked people.

דְּבָרִים ז, ו-ח; ט, ד-ו

ו כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּךָ בָּחַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּה מִכֹּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה. ז לֹא מֵרֻבְּכֶם מִכָּל הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק ה' בָּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בָּכֶם כִּי אַתֶּם הַמְעַט מִכָּל הָעַמִּים. ח כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת ה' אֶתְכֶם וּמִשָּׁמְרוֹ אֶת הַשְּׁבֻעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֵיכֶם הוֹצִיא ה' אֶתְכֶם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וַיִּפְדְּךָ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים מִיַּד פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם.

ד אַל תֹּאמַר בִּלְבָבְךָ בַּהֲדֹף ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֹתָם מִלְּפָנֶיךָ לֵאמֹר בְּצִדְקָתִי הֱבִיאַנִי ה' לָרֶשֶׁת אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבְרִשְׁעַת הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה ה' מוֹרִישָׁם מִפָּנֶיךָ. ה לֹא בְצִדְקָתְךָ וּבְיֹשֶׁר לְבָבְךָ אַתָּה בָא לָרֶשֶׁת אֶת אַרְצָם כִּי בְּרִשְׁעַת הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מוֹרִישָׁם מִפָּנֶיךָ וּלְמַעַן הָקִים אֶת הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב. ו וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי לֹא בְצִדְקָתְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ כִּי עַם קְשֵׁה עֹרֶף אָתָּה.

LESSON 4

TEXT 3
EXODUS (*SHEMOT*) 19:5-6

5 Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, **6** but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.

שְׁמוֹת יט, ה-ו

ה וְעַתָּה אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת בְּרִיתִי וִהְיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים כִּי לִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ.
ו וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

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TEXT 4
BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *SHABBAT* 88A

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

Rav Avdimi son of Chamma son of Chassa said, This teaches that the Holy Blessed One overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] vat, and said to them, "If you accept the Torah, it is well; if not, *there* shall be your burial place."

5 **Rav Acha son of Yaakov observed, This furnishes a strong protest against the Torah. Said Rava, Yet even so, they reaccepted it in the days of Achashverosh, for it is written, "[the Jews] confirmed, and took upon them…" (Esther 9:27), they confirmed what they had already taken upon themselves.**

תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מַסֶּכֶת שַׁבָּת דַּף פח, עַמּוּד א

אָמַר רַב אַבְדִּימִי בַּר חַמָּא בַּר חַסָּא מִלַּמֵּד שֶׁכָּפָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הָהָר כְּגִיגִית וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם אַתֶּם מְקַבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוּטָב וְאִם לָאו שָׁם תְּהֵא קְבוּרַתְכֶם

אָמַר רַב אַחָא בַּר יַעֲקֹב מִכָּאן מוֹדָעָא רַבָּה לָאוֹרַיְיתָא

אָמַר רָבָא אַף עַל פִּי כֵן הַדּוּר קִבְּלוּהָ בִּימֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ דִּכְתִיב קִיְּמוּ וְקִבְּלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים, קִיְּמוּ מַה שֶּׁקִּבְּלוּ כְּבָר.

TEXT 5
AMOS 3:1–2

1 Hear this word, O people of Israel,
That GOD has spoken concerning you,
Concerning the whole family that I brought up from the land of Egypt:
2 You alone have I singled out
Of all the families of the earth—
That is why I will call you to account
For all your iniquities.

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עָמוֹס ג, א-ב

א שִׁמְעוּ אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' עֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל כָּל הַמִּשְׁפָּחָה אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֵיתִי מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר. ב רַק אֶתְכֶם יָדַעְתִּי מִכֹּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאֲדָמָה עַל כֵּן אֶפְקֹד עֲלֵיכֶם אֵת כָּל עֲוֹנֹתֵיכֶם.

TEXT 6
RABBI JILL JACOBS, *TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF JEWISH CHOSENNESS*

(b. 1975) American Conservative Rabbi who is the Executive Director of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights.

The tension between the contrasting biblical and talmudic understandings of chosenness resurfaces in the writings of Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides, two prominent philosophers . . . Halevi adopts and expands upon the biblical portrayal of the Jews as the passive chosen people, while Maimonides develops the talmudic description of the Jews as active choosers.

For Halevi, the Jews are inherently different from other people. In his most famous work, the *Kuzari*, he introduces the idea that, at the time of the creation of human beings, God instilled in Adam a certain divine quality, which then passed to Adam's son Seth and then, through Seth's line, to the entire Jewish people (1:95). This divine essence, according to Halevi, is unlinked to any human behavior. A Jew who rejects Torah law cannot lose this essence, and a non-Jew who observes the commandments cannot acquire it.

In contrast, Maimonides, in accordance with the rabbinic understanding of chosenness as the result of human action, describes Abraham as a philosopher who is "chosen" only because he discovers God. Similarly, the Jewish people are "chosen" insofar as their acceptance of the Torah grants them a special relationship with God. . .

Early discussions of chosenness, then, follow two different – and opposite – paths. According to the traditional framework, the Jews are the chosen people either as a

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result of a unilateral – and seemingly arbitrary – divine decision, or as the result of an active decision on their part to initiate a relationship with God.

Available online at myjewishlearning.com. Viewed July 2020.

TEXT 7
WILLIAM GIBSON, *GOLDA*, ACT TWO

(1914–2008) American playwright and novelist. *Golda* (1977), a play about the late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, was not well-received by the critics, but the revised version, *Golda's Balcony* (2003), became very popular and set a record as the longest-running one-woman play in Broadway history.

The chosen people never meant to me God chose us, it meant we chose Him. It put us at the danger-point of everything human. Who knows more about suffering and love and exile and trying—we didn't always succeed—to live by the word we gave the world?

Gibson, W. 1977. *Golda - A Play in Two Acts*. New York: Samuel French, 107.

TEXT 8
RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, *MORAL GRANDEUR AND SPIRITUAL AUDACITY*

(1907–1972) Religious philosopher in America, Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

We have not chosen God; He has chosen us. There is no concept of a chosen God but there is the idea of a chosen people. The idea of a chosen people does not suggest the preference for a people based upon a discrimination among a number of peoples. We do not say that we are a superior people. The "chosen people"

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means a people approached and chosen by God. The significance of this term is genuine in relation to God rather than in relation to other peoples. It signifies not a quality inherent in the people but a relationship between the people and God.

A. J. Heschel. 1983. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 425–426.

TEXT 9
RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK, *CONFRONTATION*

(1903–1993) Philosopher and talmudic scholar; leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America.

We Jews have been burdened with a twofold task; we have to cope with the problem of a double confrontation. We think of ourselves as human beings, sharing the destiny of Adam in his general encounter with nature, and as members of a covenantal community which has preserved its identity under most unfavorable conditions, confronted by another faith community. We believe we are the bearers of a double charismatic load, that of the dignity of man, and that of the sanctity of the covenantal community. In this difficult role, we are summoned by God, who revealed himself at both the level of universal creation and that of the private covenant, to undertake a double mission – the universal human and the exclusive covenantal confrontation.

Soloveitchik, J. 1964. "Confrontation." *Tradition* 6 (2) Spring-Summer. Available online at traditiononline.org. Viewed July 2020.

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TEXT 10
THE ALEINU PRAYER

This prayer taken from the *siddur* is traditionally recited three times daily at the conclusion of each service and praises God for allowing the Jewish people to serve God. It expresses the hope that the whole world will recognize God and abandon idolatry in all its forms.

It is incumbent upon us to praise the Master of all, to ascribe greatness to the One who created at the start, that God did not make us like the nations of the lands and that God did not position us like the families of the earth; that God did not assign our portion like theirs, nor our fate like that of all the multitudes. [For they bow to nonsense and emptiness, and pray to a god who cannot afford salvation.] But we bend our knees and bow, and offer thanks before the King who is the king of kings, the Holy Blessed One. For it is God who spreads out the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, whose glorious abode is in the highest heaven, and the abode of [God's] might is in the loftiest heights. This is our God, there is no other. Our King is truth, any other is naught, as it is written in [God's] Torah, "Know this day and take it to heart that the Eternal is our God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other" (Deut 4:39).

So we express hope before You, Eternal our God, that we will soon see Your splendorous might in order to sweep idolatry from the earth, to utterly destroy false gods, and to perfect earth under the kingship of the Almighty so that all of humankind will invoke Your name, and cause all the earth's wicked to turn back to You. Then all the inhabitants of the world will know that to You every knee must bend, every tongue vow [loyalty]. Before You, Eternal our God, they will bend every knee and cast themselves down, and they will give honor to Your name. And everyone will accept the yoke of Your kingship, and You will reign over them, soon and forever more. For sovereignty is Yours, and may You reign in honor forever. Thus it is written in Your Torah, "God shall reign for ever and ever" (Exodus 15:18). And it says, "And God shall be King over all the earth, on that day God shall be One and [God's] name One" (Zechariah 14:9).

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תְּפִלַּת עָלֵינוּ

עָלֵינוּ לְשַׁבֵּחַ לַאֲדוֹן הַכֹּל, לָתֵת גְּדֻלָּה לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית, שֶׁלֹּא עָשָׂנוּ כְּגוֹיֵי הָאֲרָצוֹת, וְלֹא שָׂמָנוּ כְּמִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאֲדָמָה; שֶׁלֹּא שָׂם חֶלְקֵנוּ כָּהֶם, וְגוֹרָלֵנוּ כְּכָל הֲמוֹנָם. [שֶׁהֵם מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהֶבֶל וָרִיק, וּמִתְפַּלְלִים אֶל אֵל לֹא יוֹשִׁיעַ.] וַאֲנַחְנוּ כּוֹרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים וּמוֹדִים לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁהוּא נוֹטֶה שָׁמַיִם וְיוֹסֵד אָרֶץ, וּמוֹשַׁב יְקָרוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל, וּשְׁכִינַת עֻזּוֹ בְּגָבְהֵי מְרוֹמִים. הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֵין עוֹד. אֱמֶת מַלְכֵּנוּ. אֶפֶס זוּלָתוֹ. כַּכָּתוּב בְּתוֹרָתוֹ: וְיָדַעְתָּ הַיּוֹם וַהֲשֵׁבֹתָ אֶל לְבָבֶךָ כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת. אֵין עוֹד.

עַל כֵּן נְקַוֶּה לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לִרְאוֹת מְהֵרָה בְּתִפְאֶרֶת עֻזֶּךָ לְהַעֲבִיר גִּלּוּלִים מִן הָאָרֶץ, וְהָאֱלִילִים כָּרוֹת יִכָּרֵתוּן. לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שַׁדַּי וְכָל בְּנֵי בָשָׂר יִקְרְאוּ בִשְׁמֶךָ לְהַפְנוֹת אֵלֶיךָ כָּל רִשְׁעֵי אָרֶץ. יַכִּירוּ וְיֵדְעוּ כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל כִּי לְךָ תִכְרַע כָּל בֶּרֶךְ, תִּשָּׁבַע כָּל לָשׁוֹן. לְפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִכְרְעוּ וְיִפֹּלוּ, וְלִכְבוֹד שִׁמְךָ יְקָר יִתֵּנוּ. וְיקַבְּלוּ כֻלָּם אֶת עֹל מַלְכוּתֶךָ, וְתִמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיהֶם מְהֵרָה לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. כִּי הַמַּלְכוּת שֶׁלְּךָ הִיא וּלְעוֹלְמֵי עַד תִּמְלֹךְ בְּכָבוֹד. כַּכָּתוּב בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ: ה' יִמְלֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. וְנֶאֱמַר: וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד.

LESSON 4

TEXT 11
RABBI MORDECAI KAPLAN, *THE CHOSEN PEOPLE IDEA – AN ANACHRONISM*

(1881–1983) Rabbi, essayist, and Jewish educator; the ideologue of Reconstructionist Judaism.

The idea of Israel as the Chosen People, must, therefore, be understood as belonging to a thought-world which we no longer inhabit. It fits in with a set of ideas that were congruous and rational enough in their day. But it can no longer help us to understand relations, or to orient ourselves to conditions, as they exist today. The very notion that a people can for all time be the elect of God implies an epic or dramatic conception of history, a history predetermined in form and aim. Nowadays for any people to call itself "chosen" is to be guilty of self-infatuation. It is paradoxical for the Jewish people to be collectively guilty of self-infatuation, when individually so many Jews are guilty of self-hate. . . .

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In the Bible, the assumption of Israel's election merely implies that YHWH, the God whom Israel acknowledged as its god, was so incomparably greater than the gods of the other nations, that the Israelites might well consider themselves fortunate in being His people.

That belief acquired a deeper significance after the Babylonian exile. From that time on, it meant that the Jews were convinced that they alone were in possession of the Torah which contained all that a people needed to live by, in order to achieve wellbeing and perfection. Regarded as having been dictated by God, the Torah conferred upon the people that accepted it the title of "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Throughout the period of the Second Commonwealth, the accent in the doctrine of election was not on national self-awareness as such, but on being the most privileged of all peoples, by virtue of possessing God's Torah. . . .

There are many apologists for the doctrine who cling to the assertion of divine election, but compromise on its implied claims. They even confess to an awareness of the distaste which the assertion of divine election provokes in many modern-minded people. They seem to understand and even to admit that "extolling God for 'not having made us like other peoples' is grating." Nevertheless, they maintain that properly interpreted, the doctrine still remains valid and should not be discarded. Though the belief expresses a certain national pride, or a sense of national privilege, "it carries with it also a sense of consecration and responsibility." No one can question the fact that the belief of being divinely elect has long been associated in the Jewish mind with consecration and responsibility. However, we cannot ignore the other implications of that belief, especially those which are often sharply stressed, as in the Aleinu and the Havdalah prayers. In the latter, the invidiousness of the distinction between Israel and the nations is emphasized by being compared with the distinction between light and darkness. It is that invidiousness which is highly objectionable, and should be eliminated from our religion. . . .

. . . the essence of Jewish religion can no longer be made to depend upon the factual truth of the supernatural events which are recorded in the Torah and on the presumable conclusion that they prove the election of Israel. Jewish religion will have to be based on what objective study has shown to be the function of a religion in the life of a people. That function is so to inspire and direct the energies of a

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people as to help its individual men and women to achieve their destiny as human beings, or to make the best use of their lives. . . .

. . . What more important calling could a people have than to promulgate, by its way of life, the truth of the universal presence of God in all religions, and the universal obligation of every man to use his traditional sancta for glorifying not merely his own people or church, but mankind as a whole?

Kaplan, M. M. 1967. *The Future of the American Jew*. New York: Reconstructionist Press, 211–230. Used with permission of the publisher.

TEXT 12
RABBI LORD IMMANUEL JAKOBOVITS, *CHOSEN FOR WHAT?*

(1921–1999) Former Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue of Great Britain.

LESSON 4

Yes, I do believe in the Chosen people concept as affirmed by Judaism in its holy writ, its prayers, and its millennial tradition. In fact, I believe that every people—and indeed, in a more limited way, every individual—is "chosen" or destined for some distinct purpose in advancing the designs of Providence. Only, some fulfill their mission and others do not. Maybe the Greeks were chosen for their unique contributions to art and philosophy, the Romans for their pioneering services in law and government, the British for bringing parliamentary rule into the world, and the Americans for piloting democracy in a pluralistic society. The Jews were chosen by God to be 'peculiar unto Me' as the pioneers of religion and morality; that was and is their national purpose.

Eleff, Z. 2016. *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History.* Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 260–264.

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TEXT 13
RABBI BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON, *THE PEOPLE CHOSEN FOR WHAT?*

(b. 1959) American Conservative rabbi, author, speaker, and the occupant of the Abner and Roslyn Goldstine Dean's Chair of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles.

At the textual summit of the Book of Exodus is the encounter between God and the Jewish People at Mount Sinai. Here, God and the Jews meet and exchange promises of loyalty and love. Here, God and the people embrace the Ten Commandments – the first articulation of our sacred, mutual *berit*, our covenant.

Immediately preceding this momentous event, God speaks to Moses, contextualizing the ensuing revelation. For the first time, God clearly articulates a notion of the Jews as the Chosen People: "Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a nation of priests and a holy nation."

This one sentence indicates the tension inherent in the concept of "chosen people": How can the God of the Universe choose just one people? If God is truly omniscient, isn't the restriction of God's choice to one particular people an act of xenophobic idolatry? Doesn't God love everybody equally? The impetus behind these questions has caused some observant Jews to renounce any claim to chosenness. They argue that chosenness is an arrogant claim that denigrates the rest of humanity.

Is that appraisal the only way to understand this central biblical claim? After all, the Bible itself presents this assertion as the contextual underpinning for the Ten Commandments, and for all the profound teachings that follow. Doesn't denying the context result in uprooting the values and heroic figures of the biblical tradition?

Rather than rejecting such a pivotal idea, we would do well to try to understand it in a way that is consistent with both the divinity of all humanity, and of the uniqueness of the Jews. Viewed in that light, we must quickly echo the words of the Bible that the "chosenness" of the Jews is consistent with the assertion that God loves and cares for each human being. We are all precious.

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But chosenness implies a uniqueness, a particular purpose. The statement, "I was chosen today," is incomplete unless I specify what it is I was chosen for. Similarly, Jewish chosenness is a sentence fragment. It is grammatically and theologically incomplete.

What completes the chosenness of the Jews is the assertion that Jews were (and are) chosen to embody the life and values of the Torah and rabbinic tradition. By living a life centered on *mitzvot* and by constantly growing as Jews, we choose to be chosen. We allow the *berit* to live by the way we conduct our lives. As with any love relationship, both partners have the power to affirm or to rupture that relationship of their own free will. The idea of *berit* places that enormous responsibility in our hands, no less than in those of God.

In the words of the *Mekhilta*, the ancient rabbinic commentary to Exodus, the phrase "and you shall be Mine" means "you shall be turned to Me and be occupied with the words of the Torah." God doesn't love Jews better; God loves us differently. By immersing ourselves in the study and practice of Torah, we Jews renew our unique relationship with God. By living lives centered on God and mitzvot, we justify the claim, not of being God's only love, but of being God's first.

And in building communities of holiness and love, we assist our non-Jewish neighbors in cultivating their love relationship with God as well – joining hands together to build a world that is just, compassionate, and worthy of God.

Artson, B. S. 2001. *The Bedside Torah: Wisdom, Vision and Dreams*. New York: Contemporary Books, 122–123.

LESSON 4

BACKGROUND TEXT 14

The following is an excerpt from Buchdahl's 2016 Rosh Hashana Speech delivered in October 2016 at Central Synagogue. Earlier in the speech, she draws upon her experience of being born in South Korea to a Korean Buddhist mother and an American Ashkenazi Reform Jew. At the age of 21 she underwent a Reform conversion, which she views as a "reaffirmation ceremony."

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TEXT 14
RABBI ANGELA BUCHDAHL, *CHOSEN TO BE THE OTHER* (2016)

(b. 1972) American reform rabbi who was the first East Asian-American to be ordained as a rabbi and cantor.

[E]ven if you are quite secure in your Jewish identity, there may be no concept more unsettling and perhaps even embarrassing for the modern Jew than the idea of chosenness. In an age of increasing multiculturalism and diversity and intermarriage, thinking of ourselves as the chosen people seems unnecessarily exclusive and uncomfortably arrogant. Chosenness reeks of racial superiority or even supremacy. Unless we ask it as the question it is—chosen for what?

Jews were not chosen to be better, but to make things better. We were chosen to uphold the traditions and teachings of our Torah with our own particular Jewish language and customs and chutzpah. Now in a world that is increasingly celebrating the universal, embracing particularism can seem too narrow too provincial too tribal.

But tribalism is not all bad. Human beings need our tribes, our families, our congregations, our sports teams, our sororities. Tribes give us a sense of identity and belonging. They give us roots and a community. They help us find our own unique place and purpose. We Jews need our tribe so we can know our story, so we can know who we are, and what we were chosen to do.

Chosenness is not about being chosen above others. Jews were chosen to be the other. What do I mean by that? Jews were chosen to be the other. Well with apologies to Rabbi Hillel, if I had to sum up the entirety of the Jewish tradition while standing on one foot, I would say, you were a stranger therefore love the stranger as yourself all the rest is commentary go and learn it.

....

Our God has given every person and every tribe a light within-- a divine spark. If we fan that flame with fear and hatred, it will become a consuming fire. And if we hoard

LESSON 4

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that light, cultivating it only for ourselves only for our tribe, it will ultimately fade out. But if we take up our unique light as a tribe that knows the heart of the stranger, who will stand up for the other and love the stranger and shed light where it is most needed, then we will live up to the prophetic call to be in an *ohr la'goim*, a light to the nations—starting with our own great nation. We Jews were chosen for this; all the rest is commentary. Let us go and live it…

For the full sermon click here.



TEXT 15
VIDEO: RABBI KEN SPIRO, *WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHOSEN PEOPLE?*

Senior Lecturer and Researcher for Aish HaTorah, Jerusalem. In addition, he is a licensed tour guide from the Israel Ministry of Tourism.

Used with permisson of J-TV: Jewish Ideas. Global Relevance.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

LESSON 4

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KEY TERMS

***Aleinu* Prayer**. The name of a prayer recited at the conclusion of traditional synagogue services. In the context of its main theme – the kingdom of God – the prayer focuses on the idea of the "Chosen People."

Berit. (בְּרִית. A covenant, treaty, or pact.) A major biblical concept concerning the mutually binding, if unequal, partnership between God and the people Israel. The relationship between God and the Jewish people was concretized through the establishment of a covenant. The circumcision ritual has become known as *berit* (or *beris*) because it is a symbol of the Covenant.

Kadosh. (קָדֹשׁ. Object or person that is holy.) While the precise meaning of the English "holiness" is uncertain, the Hebrew term refers to things that are set apart or dedicated for specific uses or purposes. While "holy" refers generally to the attainment of God-like attributes (since God is described as "holy"), such as moral purity and perfection, the Hebrew term indicates a state of being separate from that which is forbidden by the Torah.

Mitzvot. (מִצְוֹת; sing. Mitzvah, מִצְוָה) According to rabbinic tradition, the Torah contains 613 mitzvot (248 positive commandments – *mitzvot aseh*, and 365 negative commandments – *mitzvot lo ta'aseh*) that God commanded the Jewish people to observe.

Mount Sinai. The mountain located along the route of the Exodus where God's Revelation took place.

Reconstructionist Judaism. Religious and social movement. The Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City was its first congregation founded in 1922 by Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan. He also founded the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Fellowships in 1955, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College opened in 1968. The movement teaches that Judaism is an evolving religious civilization with its own unique language, history, culture, body of customs and folkways, social organization, and attachment to the Land of Israel imbued by a religious core. In this view, Revelation is the continuing discovery, through nature and history, of truths about God and the world.

Segulah. (סְגֻלָּה; Lit., a treasured possession) Image employed in the Tanakh to describe the special relationship between God and the Israelites.

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KEY NAMES

Rav Acha son of Yaakov. (4th cent. CE) Babylonian *amora*; student of Rav Huna; taught Torah in a small city near Pumbedita.

Amos. An older contemporary of Hosea (Hoshea) and Isaiah (Yeshayah), he was active c. 760–755 BCE during the rule of kings Jeroboam (Yarov'am) II and Uzziah. Although he was from the southern Kingdom of Judah, he prophesied in the northern Kingdom of Israel. His major themes of justice, God's omnipotence, and divine judgment became staples of prophecy. The book Amos is attributed to him.

Artson, Rabbi Bradley Shavit. Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, Vice President of the University of Judaism, and teaches courses in Ancient & Medieval Jewish Philosophy, Modern & Contemporary Jewish Theology, as well as Homiletics. He is a member of the faculty of the Wexner Heritage Foundation and the Wexner Graduate Fellowship Program.

Rav Avdimi son of Chama (son of Chassa). *Amora* whose time and place is unclear.

Borowitz, Rabbi Eugene B. (1924–2016) American leader and philosopher in Reform Judaism, he is known largely for his work on Jewish theology and Jewish ethics. He also edited a Jewish journal, *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility*, and taught at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. A prolific author, he received numerous awards for his contributions. During the Korean War, he served as a chaplain for the US Navy.

Buchdahl, Rabbi Angela Warnick. (b. 1972) Pioneering American Reform rabbi and cantor. She is notably the first East Asian-American to be ordained as both a cantor and a rabbi. In 2006, she became the senior cantor at Central Synagogue in Manhattan. By 2013, she was appointed as the congregation's first female senior rabbi. Throughout her career, she has been an advocate for a more inclusive Jewish community, serving on the board of the Jewish Multiracial Network. She has been recognized among *Newsweek*'s "Most Influential Rabbis" and *The Forward*'s "Forward Fifty," highlighting her significant impact on the Jewish community and beyond.

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Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua. (1907–1972) A religious philosopher, he served as professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Author of numerous books on philosophy, Tanakh, kabbalah, and Hassidism including *The Prophets*, *A Passion for Truth*, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, *Man's Quest for God*, *The Sabbath, and God in Search of Man*.

Jacobs, Rabbi Jill. (b. 1975) Conservative rabbi and CEO of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, an organization that mobilizes rabbis and cantors to advocate for human rights. She served as the Rabbi in Residence at Jewish Funds for Justice and as the Director of Outreach and Education for the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs. She has been recognized multiple times on *Newsweek*'s list of the 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America and the Forward's list of 50 influential American Jews.

Jakobovits, Rabbi Immanuel. (1921–1999) Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1967 to 1991, prior to which he had served as Chief Rabbi of Ireland and as rabbi of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in New York City. He was regarded as an authority in medical ethics from a Jewish standpoint. He was knighted in 1981 and became the first Chief Rabbi to enter the House of Lords in 1988 as Baron Jakobovits.

Kaplan, Rabbi Mordechai M. (1881–1983) Essayist and Jewish educator, ideologue of the Reconstructionist Judaism movement. In 1889, he immigrated with his mother and sisters to the United States to join his father in New York. From 1893 to 1902, he studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary and began his career as an Orthodox rabbi. From 1934 until 1970, he wrote a series of books in which he expressed his Reconstructionist ideology, centered on the "concept of Judaism as a civilization." He was a prolific writer, keeping a journal throughout most of his life.

Soloveitchik, Joseph B. (1903-1993) A spiritual leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America, he taught Talmud and Jewish philosophy at Yeshiva University, and was the author of numerous halakhic treatises, responsa, sermons on the Torah and philosophical books and articles, including *Halakhic Man*, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, *On Repentance*, and *Kol Dodi Dofek*.

Spiro, Rabbi Ken. Senior Lecturer and Researcher for Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem, as well as a licensed tour guide certified by the Israel Ministry of Tourism. His insights have been featured on various media outlets, including BBC Radio and TV, the National Geographic Channel, the History Channel, and Arutz Sheva-Israel National Radio.

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APPENDIX

[A] ARYEH BERNSTEIN AND RACHEL SABATH BEIT-HALACHMI, *ARE JEWS CHOSEN?*

Bernstein is the coordinator of the Back-to-Basics program for the Mishkan community in Chicago. Sabath Beit-Halachmi is the national director of recruitment and admissions and a president's scholar at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati.

In an exchange of letters, Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi and Aryeh Bernstein discuss how their thinking about chosenness has changed over time – whether chosenness, today, is a notion that is instructive or detrimental to Jewish life. They consider how chosenness influences our relationships with Israel and the concept of peoplehood.

Shalom, Aryeh,

What does chosenness mean for us as Jews today? Should it still guide how we act? I believe that the idea of chosenness must remain central to how we understand ourselves. That we are a chosen people is a core aspect of what it means to be Jewish. It is rooted in the origins of our people, in the biblical narratives of Abraham (Genesis 12) and in the redemption and revelation that made us who we are. Exodus 19 says it in three different ways. First, we are an *am segulah*, precious to God, as well as *mamlekhet kohanim*, God's nation of priests, and a holy nation or people, a *goy kadosh*. It is significant that this is how God names us at the moment we are given the Torah with its commandments to create an ethical society. I understand these three statements to mean that from ancient times to the present era, whether we were celebrated or decimated, we understood ourselves to be precious, priestly, and holy.

Many Jewish thinkers have questioned this idea of chosenness – including the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan. And today, many who criticize the notion of chosenness for its particularist commitments – especially those on the far left who believe in a more universalist approach – are often the same people who most severely criticize the State of Israel. But I feel that a deep

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understanding of chosenness allows for a deeper understanding of the complexities of nationhood and statehood. Given our modern universal ethics and pluralist contexts, chosenness may seem foreign. But chosenness does not mean we see ourselves as superior to others. Rather, it affirms that we have a particular role to play and a particular relationship with God that demands creating and sustaining an ethical society. The command to protect the most vulnerable in the ancient world is no less essential today. And Israel, today, has the obligation and opportunity to be the nation that most protects the vulnerable and most ensures the rights of all its citizens. This is what it means to be a holy nation.

In order to maintain this possibility of both peoplehood and ethics, it is essential that all Jews understand their role as a chosen people, chosen to create and sustain Israel in all its struggles and in all its strivings. Whether we lovingly critique or more easily embrace the specific policies of any particular government, the value of supporting the state of the Jewish people should remain foundational.

For people who don't see the connection between chosenness and commitment to the State of Israel, is it a failure of understanding or a failure of education? Is it that their universal sense of ethics has trumped their particularist identities? And, if so, what does this discomfort with particularist Jewish commitments mean for Jewish peoplehood as the global realities continue to become more complex?

With respect for our friendship and chavruta, Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi

•••

Shalom, Rachel,

I agree that chosenness is integral to Jewish life and that chosenness should not be understood to imply superiority. However, some of your definitions seem to obscure more than reveal. For example, you say that chosenness "affirms that we have a particular role to play … that demands creating and sustaining an ethical society." But is creating and sustaining an ethical society the Jewish people's particular role? Isn't it our general role, one that we share with all peoples?

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The state of Israel "has the obligation …to be the nation that most protects the vulnerable and most ensures the rights of all its citizens." Why most? I agree that Israel has no less obligation than anyone else, but why *more*? And why is protecting citizens' rights "what it means to be a holy nation"? Isn't that just what it means to be a nation?

By contrast, you then distinguish peoplehood from ethics and identify chosenness with "creat[ing] and sustain[ing] Israel in all its struggles and … strivings." You situate chosenness in tension with a universal sense of ethics that has perhaps "trumped" the "particularist identities" of those who don't connect their sense of chosenness to a commitment to the State of Israel. How do you understand chosenness – as our universal ethics or our particular nationalism?

You express concern that many Jews are not sufficiently embracing Israel and they are eschewing chosenness; perhaps this is because they understand the current conception of chosenness as chauvinistic, and that it is this chosenness that creates the vulnerability to abuse for the most unprotected people in Israel: asylum-seekers, foreign workers, and Palestinians. Terms such as "precious," "priestly," and "holy" are often associated with feelings of superiority – among those who embrace chosenness as well as those who don't. If we want to promote a non-chauvinistic sense of chosenness, we need to articulate that vision more clearly.

Here's my stab at it: The association of chosenness with superiority reflects the faulty assumption that what I know is all there is to be known, that since I can testify to our chosenness because I remember Sinai, and since I have no personal knowledge of anyone else's chosenness, therefore, we must be the only people to have been chosen. However, other peoples know things we don't know and have their own inspiration. Our covenant is no evidence of superiority. The reason non-Jews cannot testify to Sinai is simply that they weren't there. I mean that poetically; I'll translate this into prose: Culture exists and inheritors of a culture have something unique to contribute to the world. It would be spiritually colonialist for me to testify to any other people's chosenness or revelation. My role is to listen and take people at their word, at their testimony to their experience, just as I hope they'll take my word and listen to my testimony of my experience.

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The character of this chosenness is our unique, particular story. When we are called to the Torah, we say, "Praised are You …God …Who chose us from among the nations by giving us the Torah." But all nations – all humanity – are responsible for a *universal* ethic as encapsulated by the seven Noahide laws that ordain core guidelines of civilized, human life.

Every nation must sustain an ethical culture. As Jews, we must sustain the particular ethical culture shaped by having been slaves in Egypt, guided through the desert, etc. We are chosen to serve as we are and it seems as though everyone else probably is, too.

With regard to the State of Israel, I wonder: Does Israel magnify or compromise our application of a particular, ethical culture? If it manifests a chauvinist understanding of chosenness, how should nonchauvinists interact with it?

B'vrakhah, Aryeh Bernstein

•••

Dear Aryeh,

I am grateful for your responses and your questions, because they highlight chosenness as what God uniquely commanded us to be. This notion is essential to our identity, because it defines our uniqueness and our particular and universal mission as a people. Without a particular commitment to the sacred narratives, ethics, and commandments that are at the core of our identity and spirituality, we have little that is unique to us through which we can ground our identity. God still wants us to create in our contemporary world the society of justice and ethics that we were once chosen to create.

This does not mean that the unique foundations of other peoples are less worthy, and we must vigilantly guard against perspectives that use chosenness to devalue or demonize other people.

Yes, our simultaneous commitment to both universal and particular ethics certainly includes – perhaps, even necessitates – both ancient and contemporary forms

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of nationalism. And though we have survived historically as a people without sovereignty, we are told in the Bible to create and steward an ethical society. Carrying out this obligation is dependent on some form of national existence. But that sovereignty is dependent upon our ethical behavior. We have to earn the right to live in the Land of Israel every day. Deuteronomy 11:12 and Leviticus 18:28 crudely warn us that we will be vomited out of the land for not observing the commandments that God chose for us to receive about creating and sustaining an ethical society in the Land of Israel. We thus learn that we must be very careful as a nation and as individuals in the State of Israel today. While we have a right to defend ourselves as well as the land, it is clear that it is conditional upon moral behavior.

If we are not creating an ethical society in the ancient Land of Israel or in the sovereign State of Israel, we must repent. We must engage in the necessary self-scrutiny and *cheshbon hanefesh* (accounting of the soul) to reorient ourselves, to recalibrate and do whatever we can to ensure that we are worthy of our chosenness, worthy of being God's partners, worthy of the gift of God's Torah, and worthy of residing in the Land of Israel. I do not believe that there can ever be a point at which one can relinquish such a gift or its responsibilities.

With respect for our friendship and *chavruta*, Rachel

Available online at the website of *Sh'ma*, a journal of Jewish ideas – shma.com. Viewed July 2020.

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[B] *ALEINU PRAYER*, RECONSTRUCTIONIST VERSIONS

Taken from the siddur, *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*.

Version 1

It is up to us to offer praises to the Source of all,
to declare the greatness of the author of Creation,
who gave to us teachings of truth
and planted eternal life within us.

עָלֵינוּ לְשַׁבֵּחַ לַאֲדוֹן הַכֹּל
לָתֵת גְּדֻלָּה לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית
שֶׁנָּתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת
וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵינוּ.

Version 2

It is up to us to offer praises to the Source of all,
to declare the greatness of the author of Creation,
who created heaven's heights and spread out its expanse,
who laid the earth's foundation and brought forth its offspring,
giving life to all its peoples,
the breath of life to all who walk about.

עָלֵינוּ לְשַׁבֵּחַ לַאֲדוֹן הַכֹּל
לָתֵת גְּדֻלָּה לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית
בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנוֹטֵיהֶם
רֹקַע הָאָרֶץ וְצֶאֱצָאֶיהָ
נֹתֵן נְשָׁמָה לָעָם עָלֶיהָ
וְרוּחַ לַהוֹלְכִים בָּהּ.

Wyncote, PA: Reconstructionist Press, 1996, 120–121.

LESSON 4

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[C] RABBI YEHUDAH HALEVI, *KUZARI* 1:95

(1075–1141) Poet and philosopher in Muslim Spain. The *Kuzari* was originally written in Arabic.

Bear with me a little while that I show the lofty station of the people. For me it is sufficient that God chose them as His people from all nations of the world, and allowed His influence to rest on all of them, and that they nearly approached being addressed by Him. It even descended on their women, among whom were prophetesses, whilst since Adam, only isolated individuals had been inspired till then. Adam was perfection itself, because no flaw could be found in a work of a wise and Almighty Creator, wrought from a substance chosen by Him, and fashioned according to His own design . . . The soul with which he was endowed was perfect; his intellect was the loftiest which it is possible for a human being to possess, and beyond this he was gifted with the divine power of such high rank, that it brought him into connexion with beings divine and spiritual, and enabled him, with slight reflection, to comprehend the great truths without instruction. We call him God's son, and we call all those who were like him also sons of God. He left many children, of whom the only one capable of taking his place was Abel, because he alone was like him. After he had been slain by Kain through jealousy of this privilege, it passed to his brother Seth, who also was like Adam, being [as it were] his essence and heart, whilst the others were like husks and rotten fruit. The essence of Seth, then, passed to Enosh, and in this way the divine influence was inherited by isolated individuals down to Noah. They are compared to the heart; they resembled Adam, and were styled sons of God. They were perfect outwardly and inwardly, their lives, knowledge and ability being likewise faultless. Their lives fix the chronology from Adam to Noah, as well as from Noah to Abraham. There were some, however, among them who did not come under divine influence, as Terah, but his son Abraham was the disciple of his grandfather Eber, . . . Thus the divine spirit descended from the grandfather to the grandchildren . . . The essence of Abraham passed over to Isaac, to the exclusion of the other sons who were all removed from the land, the special inheritance of Isaac. The prerogative of Isaac descended on Jacob, whilst Esau was sent from the land which belonged to Jacob. The sons of the latter were all worthy of the divine influence, as well as of the country distinguished by the divine spirit. This is the first instance of the divine influence descending on a number of people, whereas it had previously only been vouchsafed to isolated

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individuals . . . If disobedient men existed among them, they were hated, but remained, without doubt, of the essence inasmuch as they were part of it on account of their descent and nature, and begat children who were of the same stamp . . .

HaLevi, J. 1964. *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld. New York: Schocken Books, 64–67.

[D] MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *EPISTLE TO YEMEN*

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

Remember, that ours is the true and authentic Divine religion, revealed to us through Moses, the master of the former as well as the later prophets, by means of which God has distinguished us from the rest of mankind, as Scripture says, "Yet it was to your ancestors that God was drawn in love for them, so that God chose you, their lineal descendants, from among all peoples" (Deuteronomy 10:15). This did not happen because of our merits, but rather as an act of Divine grace, and on account of our ancestors who were cognizant of God and submitted to God, as we read, "It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that God desired you and chose you . . . but it was because God favored you and kept the oath God made to your ancestors . . ." (Deuteronomy 7:7–8). God has made us unique through laws and precepts, and our pre-eminence is manifested in God's rules and statutes, as Scripture says, in narrating God's mercies to us, "what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as all this Teaching that I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:8). Therefore all the nations instigated by envy and impiety rose up against us, and all the kings of the earth motivated by injustice and enmity applied themselves to persecute us. They wanted to thwart God, but God cannot be thwarted. Ever since the time of Revelation, every despot or slave that has attained to power, be he violent or ignoble, has made it his first aim and his final purpose to destroy our law, and to vitiate our religion, by means of the sword, by violence, or by brute force, such as Amalek, Sisera, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Hadrian, may their bones be ground to dust, and others like them. . .

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[E] MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH, HILKHOT SHEMITTAH VEYOVEL* 13:13

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

[A]ny human being whose spirit moves them, and whose awareness leads them to stand apart in the service of God, to come to know God, and who walks uprightly as God made them to be, and who has cast off their neck the yoke of many a cunning wile that humanity has contrived, has thereby sanctified themselves to the highest levels of the sacred, and God will forever be their portion and heritage . . .

רַב מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מַיְמוֹן, מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת שְׁמִיטָּה וְיוֹבֵל יג, יג
. . . אֶלָּא כָּל אִישׁ וְאִישׁ מִכָּל בָּאֵי הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר נָדְבָה רוּחוֹ אוֹתוֹ וֶהֱבִינוּ מַדָּעוֹ לְהִבָּדֵל לַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי ה' לְשָׁרְתוֹ וּלְעָבְדוֹ לְדַעָה אֶת ה' וְהָלַךְ יָשָׁר כְּמוֹ שֶׁעֲשָׂהוּ הָאֱלֹהִים וּפָרַק מֵעַל צַוָּארוֹ עַל הַחֶשְׁבּוֹנוֹת הָרַבִּים אֲשֶׁר בִּקְשׁוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הֲרֵי זֶה נִתְקַדֵּשׁ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים וְיִהְיֶה ה' חֶלְקוֹ וְנַחֲלָתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וּלְעוֹלְמֵי עוֹלָמִים . . .

[F] RABBI EUGENE BOROWITZ, *THE CHOSEN PEOPLE CONCEPT AS IT AFFECTS LIFE IN THE DIASPORA*

(1924–2016) American leader and philosopher in Reform Judaism, known largely for his work on Jewish theology and Jewish ethics. He also edited a Jewish journal, *Sh'ma*, and taught at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

The concept of chosenness, theologically considered, ought to affect the life of the Jew in six ways. Four are inner-directed and emphasize the life of holiness and the assurance of redemption – the uniqueness of the Torah and commandments. The other two are outer-directed and include separation and service, and activism – the idea that Jews have a high calling and must set a "high example of personal conduct before humanity." Supposedly, the inner aspects of chosenness have a higher priority than the outer. For the State of Israel this is so, but for diaspora Jews the "outer aspects of chosenness are highly significant."

LESSON 4

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Secularization is a crucial category of diaspora Jews and has produced both a social and an intellectual change. Socially, Jews have willingly adopted non-Jewish lifestyles, producing a strong emphasis on humanity, with accompanying ethical expectations. It also accounts for the rejection by the average American Jew of the traditional concept of being chosen, in contrast to the State of Israel, due to the reality of the experiential differences. The intellectual change accompanying secularization has also affected the diaspora Jew's sense of chosenness. This change consists in a de-emphasis on God's action and an increased emphasis on human activity and creativity. Naive, optimistic humanism is ruled out.

This new attitude toward chosenness strongly affects the lives and attitudes of diaspora Jews. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform have reacted in different ways, partly admirably and partly despicably. There is a transformed religious impulse. If we look carefully, we can trace in secularists a displaced religiosity, which comes out particularly in the interest on the part of an overwhelming number of diaspora Jews in high culture and achievement, in high ethical ideals and behavior, in embarrassment and shame at improper behavior on the part of individual Jews, and in intense involvement in the behavior of the State of Israel. These are "signals of transcendence."

Finally, a theological renewal of the concept of chosenness is possible. It can best be seen as an emphasis on covenant rather than on chosenness – the relationship between Jews and God, and the potentially universal characteristics of this relationship.

Borowitz, E. 1975. "The Chosen People Concept as It Affects Life in the Diaspora." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12: 553–568. Viewed June 2020.

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JERUSALEM IF I FORGET YOU... ISRAEL AND THE DIASPORA

Members of the Tribe: Cornerstones of Jewish Identity
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BACKGROUND TEXT 1: OPTION A

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is a bipartisan organization of US citizens committed solely to strengthening, protecting, and promoting economic and security cooperation between the United States and the State of Israel. AIPAC holds an annual conference in Washington, DC, bringing together thousands of people from all walks of life. Speeches are usually delivered by political leaders of both countries, among others.

Koolulam (קוּלוּלָם) is an Israeli social-musical initiative aimed at strengthening the fabric of society. In the main, it brings together masses of people, often from disparate backgrounds, to join in song. Occasionally, the songs performed are original compositions. Participants enter as individuals, but usually leave feeling part of a greater whole. The name of the initiative is a contraction of two words – קוּלוּלוּ (*kululu*), a Hebrew slang word for the act of "ululation," the production of a long, wavering, high-pitched vocal sound using the tongue and the uvula, and כֻּלָּם (*kulam*), "everybody."

In 2019, Koolulam organized such an event by virtually bringing together the 18,000 participants of the AIPAC conference that year with another 1,000 people standing at the Tower of David in the Old City of Jerusalem to join in singing an original musical piece composed for the occasion. The intent was to send a message – linking the communities of these two countries is "an unbreakable bond."

TEXT 1 : OPTION A
VIDEO: KOOLULAM, *ISRAEL AND THE USA IN A DUET (AIPAC & THE TOWER OF DAVID)*, 2019

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

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BACKGROUND TEXT 1: OPTION B

On May 24, 2018, 2,000 young Jews from around the world arrived at Ben Gurion Airport as part of Birthright Israel's 18th year. Marking 85 years of activity, the Jewish Academy of Music and Dance decided to celebrate Israel's 70th anniversary and surprise them with a warm welcome. Birthright's mission is "to provide all young Jewish adults with opportunities for transformative and immersive shared experiences in Israel and a foundation for ongoing Jewish connection."



TEXT 1 : OPTION B
VIDEO: FLASHMOB AT BEN GURION AIRPORT

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)



TEXT 2
GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 12: 1–9

1 GOD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house
to the land that I will show you.
2 I will make of you a great nation,
And I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you
And curse him that curses you;
And all the families of the earth
Shall bless themselves by you."
4 Abram went forth as GOD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. **5** Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, **6** Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

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7 GOD appeared to Abram and said, "I will assign this land to your offspring." And he built an altar there to GOD who had appeared to him. **8** From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to GOD and invoked GOD by name. **9** Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.

בְּרֵאשִׁית יב, א-ט

א וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֶךְ לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ. ב וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי
גָּדוֹל וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ וֶהְיֵה בְּרָכָה. ג וַאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרֲכֶיךָ וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת
הָאֲדָמָה. ד וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו ה' וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ
מֵחָרָן. ה וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו וְאֶת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ וְאֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ
בְחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן. ו וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בָּאָרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֶם עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרֶה
וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז בָּאָרֶץ. ז וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' הַנִּרְאֶה
אֵלָיו. ח וַיַּעְתֵּק מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית אֵל וַיֵּט אָהֳלֹה בֵּית אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעַי מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' וַיִּקְרָא
בְּשֵׁם ה'. ט וַיִּסַּע אַבְרָם הָלוֹךְ וְנָסוֹעַ הַנֶּגְבָּה.

TEXT 3
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 30:1–5

1 When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you – and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the ETERNAL your God has banished you, **2** and you return to the ETERNAL your God, and you and your children heed God's command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, **3** then the ETERNAL your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. You will be brought together again from all the peoples where the ETERNAL your God has scattered you. **4** Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the world, from there the ETERNAL your God will gather you, from there you will be fetched. **5** And the ETERNAL your God will bring you to the land that your ancestors possessed, and you shall possess it; and you will be made more prosperous and more numerous than your ancestors.

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דְּבָרִים ל, א-ה

א וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ וַהֲשֵׁבֹתָ אֶל לְבָבֶךָ בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִדִּיחֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה. ב וְשַׁבְתָּ עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְקֹלוֹ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם אַתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשֶׁךָ. ג וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרִחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבֶּצְךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הֱפִיצְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה. ד אִם יִהְיֶה נִדַּחֲךָ בִּקְצֵה הַשָּׁמָיִם מִשָּׁם יְקַבֶּצְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקָּחֶךָ. ה וֶהֱבִיאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יָרְשׁוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וִירִשְׁתָּהּ וְהֵיטִבְךָ וְהִרְבְּךָ מֵאֲבֹתֶיךָ.

TEXT 4
PSALMS (*TEHILLIM*) 137:1–6

1 By the rivers of Babylon,
there we sat,
sat and wept,
as we thought of Zion.
2 There on the poplars
we hung up our lyres,
3 for our captors asked us there for songs,
our tormentors, for amusement,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”
4 How can we sing a song of God on alien soil?
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither;
6 let my tongue stick to my palate
if I cease to think of you,
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory
even at my happiest hour.

תְּהִלִּים קלז, א-ו

א עַל נַהֲרוֹת בָּבֶל שָׁם יָשַׁבְנוּ גַּם בָּכִינוּ בְּזָכְרֵנוּ אֶת צִיּוֹן. ב עַל עֲרָבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ תָּלִינוּ כִּנֹּרוֹתֵינוּ. ג כִּי שָׁם שְׁאֵלוּנוּ שׁוֹבֵינוּ דִּבְרֵי שִׁיר וְתוֹלָלֵינוּ שִׂמְחָה שִׁירוּ לָנוּ מִשִּׁיר צִיּוֹן. ד אֵיךְ נָשִׁיר אֶת שִׁיר ה' עַל אַדְמַת נֵכָר. ה אִם אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ יְרוּשָׁלִָם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי. ו תִּדְבַּק לְשׁוֹנִי לְחִכִּי אִם לֹא אֶזְכְּרֵכִי אִם לֹא אַעֲלֶה אֶת יְרוּשָׁלִַם עַל רֹאשׁ שִׂמְחָתִי.

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TEXT 5
SIFREI, DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 12:29

Midrash Halakhah to the books of Numbers (*BeMidbar*) and Deuteronomy (*Devarim*); compilation of teachings of *tanna'im*; edited in 4th–5th century in the Land of Israel.

It is recounted regarding Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteirah, Rabbi Matya ben Charash, Rabbi Chananyah the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Yonatan that were leaving the Land of Israel and when they reached Platana [in Syria], and recalled the Land of Israel, they raised their eyes and shed tears, they rent their clothing, and
5 **recited this verse, "And you shall possess it and dwell in it, and you shall observe to do all the statutes..." [Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 11:31–32]. They declared, "Dwelling in the Land of Israel is weighted against all the rest of the commandments in the Torah."**

סִפְרֵי, דְּבָרִים יב, כט

מַעֲשֶׂה בְּרַבִּי יְהוּדָה בֶּן בְּתֵירָה וְרַבִּי מַתְיָא בֶּן חָרָשׁ וְרַבִּי חֲנַנְיָה בֶּן אֲחִי רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי יוֹנָתָן שֶׁהָיוּ יוֹצְאִים חוּצָה לָאָרֶץ וְהִגִּיעוּ לְפַלָּטוּם וְזָכְרוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל קָקְפוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וְנָלְגוּ דִּמְעוֹתֵיהֶם וְקָרְעוּ בִּגְדֵיהֶם וְקָרְאוּ אֶת הַמִּקְרָא הַזֶּה וִירִשְׁתֶּם אֹתָהּ וִישַׁבְתֶּם בָּהּ וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל הַחֻקִּים ... אָמְרוּ יְשִׁיבַת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁקוּלָה כְּנֶגֶד כָּל הַמִּצְוֹות שֶׁבַּתּוֹרָה.

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TEXT 6
RABBI YEHUDAH HALEVI, *O SCENIC BEAUTY! JOY OF THE WORLD!* (*YEFEI NOF, MESOS TEVEL*)

(1075–1141) Poet and philosopher in Muslim Spain; author of an important work of medieval Jewish philosophy, the *Kuzari*.

O scenic beauty! Joy of the world! City of the Exalted King!
For you, from [earth's] far western end, my spirit yearns.
Compassion stirs in me when I remember the days of yore,
Your glory that has been exiled, and your splendor which has been destroyed.
Would that on an eagle's wings I could fly,
To soak your parched clay with my tears, and it will be sweet!
I seek you out, and although you have no king, and where once
Grew your balm of Gilead, snakes and scorpions [scuttle],
Would I not caress and kiss your stones,
And would not your clods of earth taste better than honey in my mouth?

רַב יְהוּדָה הַלֵּוִי, יְפֵה נוֹף מְשׂוֹשׂ תֵּבֵל

יְפֵה נוֹף מְשׂוֹשׂ תֵּבֵל קִרְיָה לְמֶלֶךְ רָב.
לָךְ נִכְסְפָה נַפְשִׁי מִפְּאַתֵי מַעֲרָב!
הֲמוֹן רַחֲמַי נִכְמָר כִּי אֶזְכְּרָה קֶדֶם,
כְּבוֹדֵךְ אֲשֶׁר גָּלָה וְנָוֵךְ אֲשֶׁר חָרָב.
וּמִי יִתְּנֵנִי עַל כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים, עַד
אֲרַוֶּה בְּדִמְעָתִי עֲפָרֵךְ וְיִתְעָרֵב!
דְּרַשְׁתִּיךְ, וְאִם מַלְכֵּךְ אֵין בָּךְ וְאִם בִּמְקוֹם
צְרִי גִּלְעָדֵךְ - נָחָשׁ שָׂרָף וְגַם עַקְרָב.
הֲלֹא אֶת אֲבָנַיִךְ אֲחוֹנֵן וְאֶשָּׁקֵם
וְטַעַם רְגָבַיִךְ לְפִי מִדְבַּשׁ יֶעְרָב!

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TEXT 7
DR. MALKA ZEIGER SIMKOVICH, *JEWISH ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LAND OF ISRAEL DURING THE TIME OF THE SECOND TEMPLE* (2015)

Director and Editor-in-Chief of The Jewish Publication Society.

Most observant Jews today assume that the desire to return to Israel and live in it was a dominant feeling among virtually all pious Jews from the time of the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.). Many of us have been taught that from this point forward, all Jews have "cried by the rivers of Babylon" (see Psalm 137), longing to return to Zion. While there is no doubt that many Jews did wish to return to Judah, and even took the opportunity when it presented itself some 50 years later, most Jews of the Second Temple period did not return to the land of Israel and adjusted to diasporan life remarkably well.

By the last two centuries of the Second Temple Period, Jews were living in cities all over the world. Some of these cities were major cosmopolitan centers, such as Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Rome in Italy. In these communities, Jews preserved their religious identities while simultaneously embracing many of the cultural and social aspects that surrounded them. Their attitudes towards the land of Israel and the Jerusalem Temple were complex, varied, and sometimes contradictory. . . .

In short, there appears to have been three main attitudes towards the land of Israel, and the Jerusalem Temple in particular, among Second Temple period diasporan Jews. The first consists of great devotion to the land of Israel coupled with a total rejection of the Hellenist world. The second is an attempt to balance devotion for the land of Israel with loyalty to one's host country. While Jews who adopted this attitude expressed a profound connection to the land of Israel by regularly sending donations to support the Jerusalem Temple, there is no evidence that they intended to move there, or felt guilty for not doing so. The third attitude was that the Temple in Jerusalem could be replaced by other, newer temples (in Egypt).

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The first and third attitudes represent opposite extremes of one spectrum; it is the second attitude that was the most dominant during this period. It is these Jews who felt a powerful connection to the Jerusalem Temple and the land of Israel, but did not move there.

. . . [In] the very centuries that the Jewish religion was concretized, the majority of Jews were living in the diaspora and were faithfully practicing their traditions outside of the land of Israel. Most of these Jews were content to live with the tension of ideological commitment and love for the land of Israel with their choice to remain rooted in the diaspora.

Available online at thetorah.com. Viewed July 2020.

TEXT 8
THEODOR HERZL, *THE JEWISH STATE* (1896)

(1860–1904) The founder of modern political Zionism.

We are a people—one people.

We have honestly endeavored everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities and to preserve the faith of our fathers. We are not permitted to do so. In vain are we loyal patriots, our loyalty in some places running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens; in vain do we strive to increase the fame of our native land in science and art, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers, and often by those whose ancestors were not yet domiciled in the land where Jews had already had experience of suffering....It is useless, therefore, for us to be loyal patriots....If we could only be left in peace....

But I think we shall not be left in peace. . . .

Because I have drawn this conclusion with complete indifference to everything but the quest of truth, I shall probably be contradicted and opposed by Jews who are in easy circumstances. . . .

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. . . if all or any of the French Jews protest against this scheme on account of their own "assimilation," my answer is simple: The whole thing does not concern them at all. They are Jewish Frenchmen, well and good! This is a private affair for the Jews alone.

Herzl, T. 1988. *The Jewish State*. New York: Dover Publications, 76–80. Available online at gutenberg.org. Viewed July 2020.

TEXT 9
EMET VE-EMUNAH, STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM (1988)

A joint statement from The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The Rabbinical Assembly United Synagogue of America, The Women's League for Conservative Judaism, and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs.

Various Centers of Jewish Life

We view it as both a misinterpretation of Jewish history and a threat to Jewish survival to negate the complementary roles of *Eretz Yisrael* [the Land of Israel] and the Diaspora. Currently there are various important centers of Jewish life in the Diaspora. Diaspora Jewry furnishes vital economic, political, and moral support to Israel; Israel imbues Diaspora Jewry with a sense of pride and self-esteem. Some see the role of *Medinat Yisrael* [the State of Israel] as the cultural and religious center of world Jewry. Others insist that since the days of the Prophets, various foci or centers of Jewish life and civilization, in both Israel and the Diaspora, have sustained the creative survival of *Am Yisrael* [the Jewish people] and *Torat Yisrael* [the Jewish tradition]. *Eretz Yisrael* produced most of the Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud of *Eretz Yisrael*, the major Midrashim, liturgy, and other great works, while the Diaspora gave us the Babylonian Talmud, Hebrew poetry, philosophical writings, commentaries, law codes, and other lasting creations. The various communities interacted in a continual symbiotic process of mutual enrichment.

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We realize that Israel and the Diaspora enjoy different advantages while facing unique challenges. Only in Israel may a Jew lead an all-encompassing Jewish life. There, Shabbat, *Yom Tov*, and *kashrut* are officially observed in varied degrees by the civilian organs of state and by the military; there Hebrew is the nation's language, and the Bible is studied in every school. Paradoxically, the very ease with which Jewish identity may be expressed in the Jewish state may give the false impression that religion is not needed in Israel for Jewish survival as it is in the Diaspora. We do not believe that Jewish identity can be replaced by Israeli identity or the ability to speak Hebrew. We are convinced that Jewish religion is essential as a source of ethical and moral values. . . .

Both the State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry have roles to fill; each can and must aid and enrich the other in every possible way; each needs the other. It is our fervent hope that Zion will indeed be the center of Torah and Jerusalem a beacon lighting the way for the Jewish people and for humanity.

Dorff, E. N. 2018. *JPS Anthologies of Jewish Thought: Modern Conservative Judaism – Evolving Thought and Practice.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

TEXT 10
ALAN WOLFE, *AT HOME IN EXILE: WHY DIASPORA IS GOOD FOR THE JEWS*

(b. 1942) Professor of political science and director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College.

. . . the Diaspora remains the place where universalistic Judaism will thrive best. Its Judaism will become more complex and vibrant as its culture intermingles with other cultures. Its religion, far from dissolving into meaningless syncretism, will be enriched by its encounter with other faiths. Its ethnicity will no longer be defined by the vulgarity of Jackie Mason, the claustrophobia of *Fiddler on the Roof*, or the determination to prevent Yiddish from breathing its last breath, but instead will be free to find new forms of expression in a world that values individual freedom more than group attachment. In one sense Jews are like everyone else: they must manage

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to find ways to be true to their heritage in an ever-changing world. In another sense they are relatively unique: their character as a diasporic people gives them a powerful advantage for meeting that challenge, even if their current inclination is not to use it. . . .

. . . [Just] as Israel is a fact of life, and, in my opinion, has every right to exist, . . . the Diaspora also is here to stay, and with it the universalism that was so much part of its history. Now that the events of the 1930s and 1940s are beginning to lose their hold on the consciousness of younger generations, Jews in both Israel and the Diaspora need each other more than ever.

Wolfe, A. 2014. *At Home in Exile: Why Diaspora Is Good for the Jews.* Boston: Beacon Press, 8–9.

BACKGROUND TEXT 11

The following text is the concluding section of Wertheimer's article based on news articles, op-eds, reports, and blogposts that have appeared since October 7. In addition, he conducted over 55 interviews with professionals at 19 Jewish philanthropic federations and 15 national Jewish agencies during the summer of 2024 to learn how their organizations and supporters have responded to new challenges.

In the fuller text, Wertheimer addresses the following questions:

Why were most American Jews so unprepared for the surge of domestic anti-Israel and antisemitic activities? How did rank-and-file Jews and their communal organizations respond to the dual crises in Israel and the United States? What were some of the most and least successful responses? And are assumptions guiding communal strategies in need of rethinking?

After outlining how American Jewry mobilized both financially[1] and through activism and participation in Jewish life[2] in support of Israel, he concludes by looking at the concerning elements of anti-Zionism among the younger generation of American Jewry.

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TEXT 11
PROFESSOR JACK WERTHEIMER, *WHAT AMERICAN JEWS GAVE AFTER OCTOBER 7, PART IV THE FAILINGS* (2024)

(b. 1948) Professor of American Jewish History at The Jewish Theological Seminary and founding director of the Joseph and Miriam Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism from 1987 to 2008.

…

Among the disheartening developments since October 7, one of the more painful has been the very public activities of Jews who join forces with haters of Israel. This is not the place to trace the long, sordid history of Jewish anti-Zionism, a history going back to the very beginnings of the Zionist enterprise at the end of the 19th century. What sets current anti-Zionists apart is their unbridled activism during a military campaign defined by Israel as an existential war against Iranian proxies attempting to assault Israelis from multiple directions. Demonstrating in public and often joining pro-Hamas encampments and marchers, anti-Israel Jews proudly claim they are acting in accordance with the highest values of Judaism. Organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace, If Not Now, and assorted other groups proudly denounce Israel. Their adherents malign Israel "as Jews."

It's hard to know what proportion of the American Jewish population identifies as anti-Zionist, but some surveys offer preliminary figures. The political scientist Eitan Hersh has been surveying college students in recent years and concluded in 2022: "the percentage of Jewish students who believe there should not be a Jewish state in Israel-Palestine [is] fairly constant, at around 10-15 percent." A survey he conducted after October 7 showed no change in those numbers, though some of the undecided students had become more supportive of Israel. Significantly, nearly 25 percent of Jewish students were uncertain "whether Israel as a Jewish state should continue to exist." This means that roughly one-third of Jewish college students cannot bring themselves to say they support the only state Jews have. As for the adult population, a survey conducted by JFNA found that 90 percent supported Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, while 17 percent identified as non-Zionists, 5 percent as anti-Zionists, and 36 percent claimed they did not know.

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What are we to make of the large gap between Jewish college students and the adult population? And why do so many Jews fail to identify as Zionists, that is, as supporters of the right of Jews to sovereignty in their own state? It's possible that many of the latter may not know what Zionism means. The same JFNA survey found high percentages of Jews eager to learn more about Zionism and Israel because they had never been educated about either. Some have attributed the gap between college students and older adults to their different stages of life, claiming that as the former mature, they will come around to valuing the Jewish state.

No single explanation can capture why some Jews have turned on Israel. Surely how Jews are educated and socialized by the American Jewish community is a contributing factor. For decades, educators, rabbis and communal leaders have provided a dumbed-down version of Judaism as fundamentally about being a good person. . . .

After October 7, American Jews can no longer afford the skewed priorities of the past decades. Daniel Kane, a Reform rabbi, bluntly assessed what is broken in American Jewish life that now must be fixed: "In many ways, we failed our young people in teaching them too much about the conscience of the prophets and too little about the passion of the priesthood. We rooted the majority of their Jewish identities in the universal call of social justice and put less emphasis on balancing it with a particular pride in and obligation toward Jewish peoplehood."

One might add too that Jewish education in many sectors of the community failed to teach about the commandments of Judaism that are specific to the Jewish people or to impart that observance of mitzvot guides Jews to moral behavior, spiritual connection to God, and a love for the Jewish people. Instead, as Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, the leading advocate for Israel and the needs of the Jewish people in the Reform movement, has put it: "We thought we were sensitizing young Jews to the Jewish obligation of social repair. We thought we were conveying the principles of Jewish universalism. We thought we were teaching g'milut hasadim – acts of lovingkindness. . . . We did not expect the Jewish spirit to dribble away while we thought we were passing it on."

Compare the American Jewish mantra of tikkun olam to what Israeli society imparts to its youths. From a young age, Israeli Jews are socialized to value service to

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their people. When they join the military, men and some women risk (and tragically too often lose) life and limb while protecting their people, their state, their Jewish way of life. It's not that Israelis care only about fellow Jews: Israel too has a strong environmental movement, sends volunteers with alacrity to far-flung lands when catastrophe strikes, and has a vibrant movement to build bridges with Arab communities in Israel and the West Bank. It is taken for granted that the Israeli healthcare system will treat terrorists wounded while they tried to murder Israeli citizens. Israeli Jews combine their primary commitment to their own people with secondary efforts to help others around the world in need. Many younger American Jews, by contrast, rarely if ever learn about their special responsibility to care for their own – and what that might mean in practice.

That failing has many deleterious consequences for the lives of American Jews. Jewish youth especially pay a price in that they are deprived of a greater purpose. As Dan Senor and Saul Singer write in their recent book *The Genius of Israel*, "the act of bringing people together, . . . defending the county against a common threat gives a feeling of being needed and creates resilience." Put differently, Israelis find meaning in their lives by furthering a great Jewish cause, the building of a sovereign Jewish state. In the absence of a compelling Jewish cause, recent generations of younger Jews in the United States have played at being "social-justice warriors."

Now that American Jewish life is challenged more severely than at any time since the Second World War, multiple Jewish needs beg for their attention. Perhaps after this year of travail, American Jews of all ages will focus more energy on rebuilding domestic Jewish life by attending to Jewish human-service needs, Jewish victims of anti-Semitism, and Jews who lack a proper Jewish education, along with their efforts on behalf of Israel. If that shift in priorities occurs, October 7, indeed, will have been an inflection point of great significance for American Jewish life.

Available at mosaicmagazine.com. Viewed February 2025.

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TEXT 12
LINDA MIRELS, *REIMAGINING PHILANTHROPY FOR THE START-UP NATION* (2024)

Philanthropist and business leader, President of UJA-Federation of New York since July 1, 2023.

…

[T]he events of and since October 7 have made clear that Israel cannot go it alone. Though the Israeli people have demonstrated extraordinary heroism and resilience, we can no longer take for granted that Israel by itself can repel the many threats arrayed against it. Its military efforts to subdue and defeat Hamas have come with enormous human and economic costs for Israel . . .

This much is clear: Israel's security and the safety of Jews in the Diaspora are intertwined. When Israel is on the defensive, so are we; when Israel is wounded, so are we. And vice versa: Never have more Israelis understood the connections between their fate and that of global Jewry; never have I heard more offers of support or more of a sense that our fates are shared . . .

Our new understanding of reality must lead to new approaches to meet our collective challenges. Diaspora Jewry and major donors, as well as Israeli government officials and nongovernment leaders, must act with new urgency and creativity. It's time to reinvent the model of philanthropic partnership between Israel and the Diaspora in a way that is equal to the moment.

Let's begin our work by acknowledging the obvious.

First, continued philanthropy is essential to Israel's long-term existence. Disengagement is simply not practical or possible if we want to ensure Israel's survival.

And second, the welfare and prosperity of Israel are directly linked to the well-being of global Jewry, and vice versa. Israel is the largest Jewish community in the world.

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It is the center of Jewish culture, Jewish learning, and Jewish life, not to mention a source of remarkable innovation in a broad range of industries. The Diaspora draws strength from Israel. Our destiny and Israel's are closely linked . . .

In short, Israel doesn't need donors – it needs investors and partners. This goes far beyond the financial. We should offer advice from our experience in other societies, including over matters that affect the long-term character of the nation, such as its democratic systems and its religious institutions and policies. We should have a voice on how Israel tells its own story to the world and share with Israel what we know about those global audiences. We are important stakeholders with a shared destiny. We share the core Zionist mission to not only return Jews to their ancestral land but also to revivify Jewish communities worldwide.

. . .

Through this kind of partnership and the relationships it will engender, Diaspora Jews will learn new things about Israel – and about themselves. In the days following October 7, a generation of young Israeli men and women raised in relative prosperity and security reacted with courage and heroism. More reservists responded after the attacks than had been called up; even those who had aged out of service or were ineligible for a variety of reasons wanted to fight for their homeland. Creative and tireless civilian volunteers also stepped up, ready and willing to meet the needs of the moment.

There is a lesson here for Diaspora Jews who feel besieged on their campuses and in their communities by antisemitic attacks and vitriol. The example set by Israelis should embolden us. Their willingness to sacrifice and fight when it matters most is an inspiration and a reminder of the stakes involved.

The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks once wrote:

> To be a Jew is to be part of the most remarkable story ever lived, by any people, covering more countries, more adverse circumstances, more triumph and tragedies than any other story. Every one of us has a chapter to write in that story and hand the book on. That is what it is to be a Jew.

The surge in antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment following October 7 has made it clearer than ever that the fates of Israel and global Jewry are intertwined. We

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all need to participate in what happens next. We all have a role to play: donating, volunteering, investing, learning Hebrew, becoming activists, and living proud and vibrant Jewish lives, wherever we live.

This is an extraordinary time in Jewish history, when Israel exists as a sovereign nation. Israel needs our support and partnership as much as it ever has – and we need Israel just as much.

Available at Sapirjournal.org. Viewed February 2025.

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CONCLUDING TEXT FOR THE COURSE



TEXT 13 RABBI KERRY M. OLITZKY, *TEN ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION "WHY BE JEWISH?"*

(b. 1954) American Reform rabbi, educator, administrator, and author.

1. **As a Jew, the collective story of the Jewish people becomes my personal story.** My own life's story contributes to the collective memory of the Jewish people. The Jewish historical narrative of the Jewish people evolves as the Jewish people march forward in history and will eventually bring us into the messianic period.
2. **The doing of mitzvot brings me closer to the Divine.** In the refracted Divine light, I am able to see myself more clearly.
3. **The emphasis of deed over creed encourages the individual (irrespective of personal belief or doubts of faith) to help build a better world through acts of social justice** (*tikkun olam*) and provides the individual with a variety of opportunities to do so. The doing of these good deeds, which emerge from a foundation of positive Jewish values, brings me closer to others and to humanity.
4. **The affirmation of one God is the unity principle that is the foundation of Jewish faith.** Judaism encourages questioning and debate. Faith comes through struggle. The result of this struggle helps to define Jewish theology.
5. **The Jewish community provides support to the individual (and family) during life's liminal moments**, including those times in which we soar, as well as those that bring us into the deepest, darkest moments of our lives.
6. **Judaism transforms daily routine (the long haul of life) into sacred moments and sacred opportunities**, especially through the application of ritual, helping to moor us in what is sometimes an anchorless world.
7. **Judaism emphasizes lifelong educational growth of all kinds.** Jewish education helps us to morally navigate the world. (The Talmud requires parents to teach their children "how to swim.") Judaism also provides a framework for teaching children their moral responsibility to the world.
8. **Judaism has a variety of spiritual disciplines that elevate the soul,** including daily prayer, the study of sacred texts, dietary standards, and Shabbat (the Sabbath).

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9. **The beauty of Judaism and the accomplishments of the Jewish people foster Jewish pride**, as well as a connection to fellow Jews that transcends any geographic border or time and space.
10. **Jews have a home in Israel.** Its capital, Jerusalem, is the center of the Jewish spiritual world, where according to rabbinic teaching, is the place where heaven and earth touch.

Available on-line at ejewishphilanthropy.com. Viewed July 2020.

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KEY TERMS

Am Yisrael. (עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל) The Jewish nation or people.

Diaspora. (Heb. תְּפוּצוֹת, *tefutzot*) Greek word for "dispersion," used to refer to areas of Jewish settlement outside of the Land of Israel.

Eretz Yisrael. (אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל) The Land of Israel. Name of the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants.

Galut. (גָּלוּת) Exile. Generally refers to the enforced dwelling of the Jews outside of the Land of Israel. It has connotations of alienation, degradation, and persecution.

Ge'ulah. (גְּאֻלָּה) Redemption. In the context of the Jews, it is a religious concept that refers primarily to the fulfillment of the prophetic vision regarding the reestablishment of the Jewish people in the Land promised to them by God. In the context of the entire world, it marks the arrival of the Messianic Era that ushers in a period of universal peace and knowledge of God.

Medinat Yisrael. (מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל) The modern State of Israel.

Yishuv ha'aretz. (יִשּׁוּב הָאָרֶץ) A reference to the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel. The question of when and under what conditions Jews are obligated in this mitzvah, as well as what one does to fulfill it, are ongoing issues of halakhic debate.

Zion. (Heb. צִיּוֹן, *Tziyyon*) One of the names for the city of Jerusalem (or a part of it). Later used to designate all of the Land of Israel.

Zionism. (Heb. צִיּוֹנוּת, *Tziyonut*) Political and ideological movement aimed at restoring Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel; later, refers to support of the State of Israel. The modern movement was founded by Theodor Herzl in 1897 at the first World Zionist Congress in Basel.

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KEY NAMES

Abraham (*Avraham*). Born Abram (Avram) in the city of Ur in Babylonia, he was the son of Terach, and the husband of Sarah. He is credited with (re)introducing monotheism into the world. According to the biblical text, after demonstrating his loyalty and devotion to God, God contracted a covenant with him and with his descendants following him – they would keep God's law and God would be their God and allot them a territory of their own. Through his son Isaac (Yitzchak) the Israelites came to be according to all Abrahamic faiths, and through his son Ishmael (Yishmael), the Arab peoples came to be according to Muslim and Jewish traditions.

HaLevi, Rabbi Judah (Yehudah). (c. 1075–1141) A great medieval Jewish theologian and Hebrew poet. Born in Spain, he migrated to the Land of Israel shortly before his death. His most famous work is the *Kuzari*. Written in the form of a dialogue, it is a long defense of Judaism against Christianity, Islam, and Greek philosophy.

Herzl, Theodor. (1860–1904) Founder of modern political Zionism. Originally a journalist, he was stirred by the Dreyfus affair and began to formulate his Zionist ideology. In 1897, he convened the First Zionist Congress, which called for the establishment of a Jewish national home in the Land of Israel.

Kaplan, Rabbi Mordecai M. (1881–1983) Essayist and Jewish educator, he became the ideologue of the Reconstructionist Judaism movement. Born in Russia, in 1889, he immigrated with his mother and sisters to the United States to join his father in New York. From 1893 to 1902 he studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and began his career as an Orthodox rabbi. From 1934 until 1970 he wrote a series of books in which he expressed his Reconstructionist ideology, centered around the "concept of Judaism as a civilization." He was a prolific writer, keeping a journal throughout most of his life.

Mirels, Linda. Philanthropist and business leader, President of UJA-Federation of New York since July 1, 2023. She chairs a diversified global investment company with holdings in food distribution and real estate. She has been actively involved with UJA-Federation since 1999, previously serving as Chair of the Board, and she is an honorary lifetime member. Additionally, she serves on the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee and the Metropolitan Opera of New York.

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Simkovich, Dr. Malka Z. Director and Editor-in-Chief of The Jewish Publication Society. She is the author of several books, including, *Letters From Home: The Creation of Diaspora in Jewish Antiquity* (2024). She held the Crown-Ryan Chair of Jewish Studies and served as the Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She is also a Leon Charney Fellow at the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies and a Kogod Research Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. She frequently lectures across North America and beyond on topics related to the Hebrew Bible, Jewish history, and contemporary Jewish-Christian relations.

Wertheimer, Professor Jack. (b. 1948) Professor of American Jewish History at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). His focus is on trends in American Jewish religious, educational, and organizational life since World War II. He has authored or edited over a dozen volumes. Notably, his book *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* won the National Jewish Book Award in 1994 for the best study on contemporary Jewish life. In addition to his scholarly work, Wertheimer served as provost of JTS from 1997 to 2007 and was the founding director of the Joseph and Miriam Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism from 1987 to 2008.

Wolfe, Prof. Alan. (b. 1942) American political scientist and sociologist renowned for his extensive contributions to the study of religion, politics, and American society. He held academic positions at various institutions, including Boston College, where he served as a professor of political science and directed the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life. In addition to his scholarly publications, Wolfe has contributed to various prominent magazines and newspapers, including *The New Republic*, *The Wilson Quarterly*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. He has also served as an advisor to political figures, notably assisting President Bill Clinton in preparing for the 1995 State of the Union Address.

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ENDNOTES

1 Within weeks, over $300 million dollars were raised, a figure that eventually rose to $833 million collected by the federation system alone in the first six months after October 7.

2 Based on a survey it conducted in February and March 2024, the Jewish Federations of North America reported "an explosion in Jewish belonging and communal participation that is nothing short of historic. Jews are feeling more invested in their identity and community and looking for ways to connect, creating an opportunity for a sector-wide focus on driving engagement and membership." This "surge," as it was named, was especially noticeable among the previously least engaged segments of the American Jewish population. "Of the 83 percent of Jews who were 'only somewhat,' 'not very,' or 'not at all engaged' prior to October 7, a whopping 40 percent are now showing up in larger numbers in Jewish life," the report continued. "This group [is] equal to 30 percent of all Jewish adults and nearly double the proportion of Jews who identify as 'deeply engaged.'" It's particularly noteworthy that Jews between the ages of 18 and 34 and between 55 and 74 years old – meaning adults least likely to get involved primarily for the sake of their children – were the most eager to increase their participation.

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LIVING WISDOM:
ENGAGING, SOULFUL JEWISH LEARNING SERIES

PRESS PAUSE: REST, ASSURED

COURSEBOOK

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THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

Pilot Edition

Melton

OUR ROOTS

Our founder, Florence Zacks Melton z"l (1911-2007), was an inventor, an innovator and an activist in many areas of her life. It was her vision to bring to life a comprehensive and sophisticated program of Jewish learning for adults. The Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning, a project of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was launched in 1986.

OUR PURPOSE

Melton engages learners in a life-enhancing study of Jewish texts and ideas that nurtures and deepens Jewish community worldwide.

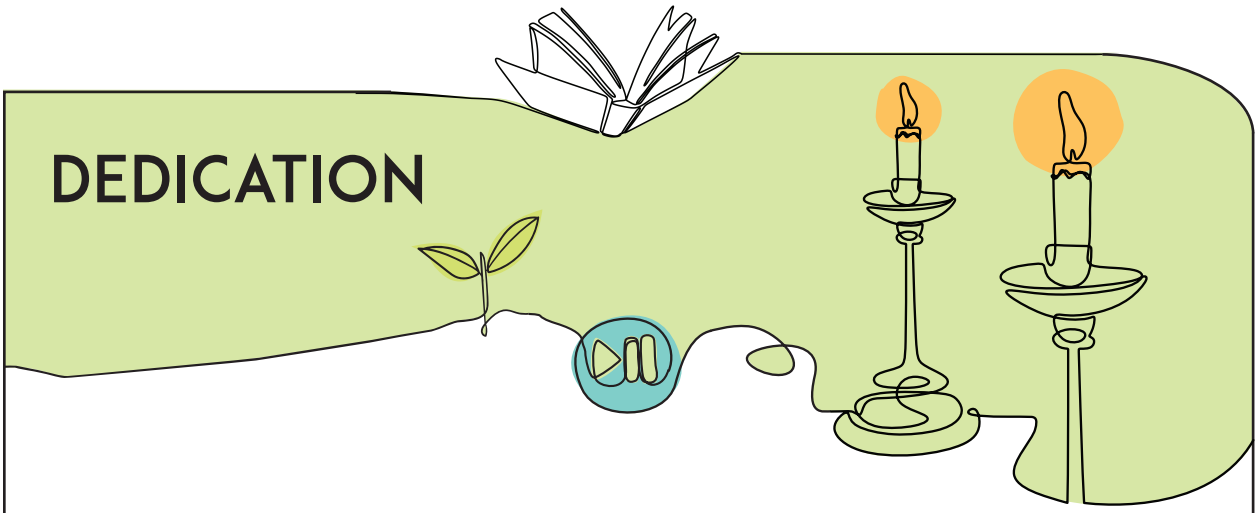
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- **Interactive Classes:** We encourage open dialogue and discussion between learners and educators as we approach every topic with curiosity and sincerity.
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- **Jewish Community:** Through Melton, you become part of a worldwide movement of learners that spans many continents. Our online learning and travel seminars create meaningful global connections.

For more information, visit **MeltonSchool.org**.

האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

DEDICATION



A person who quickly angers causes trouble,
but patience brings peace and calm.

(Proverbs 15:18)

In Loving Memory of

RONALD W. GOLDSMITH

(1944-2021)

Devoted husband, father, grandfather and friend.

SUSAN GOLDSMITH AND FAMILY

THE MELTON FUNDERS COUNCIL

The Melton Funders Council is a philanthropic vanguard of donors committed to supporting The Florence Melton School as the organization takes major steps towards the implementation of its new bold strategic plan.

As Melton seeks to grow its circle of learners, strengthen Jewish community and revitalize the way it does business, the Melton Funders Council provides an important means for achieving the level of financial support Melton needs to realize these goals and objectives.

Melton is grateful to the following generous donors who stepped forward to become founding members of the Melton Funders Council:

Alan S. Edelman and Debbie Sosland-Edelman
Kansas City, Missouri
in Memory of Dr. William and Doris Edelman

Ann Elyachar
Leawood, Kansas
With gratitude to my teachers who inspire my learning

Bill and Susan Firestone
Longmeadow, Massachusetts

Ron and Susie Goldsmith
Naples, Florida
For 40 years of Melton Learning

Samuel Mendel Melton Foundation
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in appreciation of the Board and Staff of the Florence Melton School
and in memory of Sam and Florence Melton

Al and Sherrie Weiss
Riverwoods, Illinois
on behalf of the Jewish learning community throughout the world

Those interested in learning more about the Melton Funders Council are encouraged to contact Executive Director Rabbi Rachel Bovitz (rbovitz@meltonschool.org) or International Director Rabbi Dr. Morey Schwartz (mschwartz@meltonschool.org) for more information.

PRESS PAUSE: REST, ASSURED

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Words of Welcome	8
A Word About Your Coursebook	9
A Tree of Life - Icon glossary	11
About the Author	12
Acknowledgements	13
Lesson 1 - Let There Be Life: The Beginning	14
Lesson 2 - Shabbat: Much more than a Day Off	32
Lesson 3 - R&R: A Day of Rest and Ritual	50
Lesson 4 - A Break in the Bounty: A Year to Deepen Roots	74
Lesson 5 - Tending to the Garden: Preserving Planet Earth	94
Lesson 6 - Recalculating: Finding the Right Way after Taking the Wrong Turn	112

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WELCOME TO JEWISH LEARNING

Dear Melton Learner,

Welcome to a very special journey in Jewish learning.

The **Living Wisdom** series has been specially designed to give you the opportunity choose topics that interest you, Jewish concepts that have piqued your curiosity or that have particular relevance for you at this moment in your life.

As you venture into the exploration of these Jewish ideas, traditions, and values, we encourage you to seek within the texts and the robust discussions about them points of personal connection to a Judaism that feels authentically yours.

Our rabbis taught that the study of Torah, the study of Jewish texts, is a continual timeless enterprise, one that offers new insights and understandings with every re-examination.

> *Ben Bag Bag says: Search in it and search in it, for everything is in it.*
> —Mishnah Avot 5:22

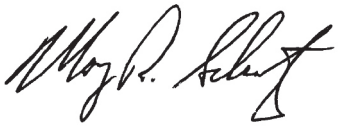
It is most certainly the case that revisiting Jewish texts can uncover for us new information not gleaned in earlier readings. But we believe this teaching of Ben Bag Bag points to something much deeper: Jewish learning is intended to help us reveal "everything" about ourselves, the learners of the texts.

In other words, as we change, we discover that the traditions, values, and stories found among our Jewish teachings speak to us differently, illuminating new perspectives on how we see ourselves and the world around us.

It is our hope that your study of **Living Wisdom** will offer you an engaging, soulful Jewish learning experience that will inspire you, enrich your thoughts and constantly renew your interest in continuing on a lifelong path of Jewish learning.



Rabbi Rachel Bovitz
Executive Director



Rabbi Morey Schwartz, EdD
International Director

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A WORD ABOUT YOUR COURSEBOOK

Welcome to what is going to be an exciting and engaging six week journey with the Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning!

The Coursebook comprises the texts for the *Press Pause: Rest, Assured* course. This curriculum has been designed not only to inform but also to challenge you, our learners. The goal is to encourage you to rethink many issues and subjects you may have already formed your own opinions about or developed your own personal perspectives on. We encourage you to approach your studies with a willingness to consider issues from new perspectives and grow in your appreciation of the complexity of Jewish thought and wisdom. Education is the result not of information absorption alone, but of an ongoing engagement in the act of reflecting, reconsidering, and revising one's own understanding on a regular basis.

> Despite the varieties of lifestyles and outlooks among Jews today, there are certain organizing principles that cut across many of these differences and underlie the sense of common destiny and interdependence that so many Jews feel…. The Jewish concepts of God and *mitzvah* (commandment) and the biblical narratives of creation and of history are interwoven into Jewish practice, producing a distinctive outlook that shapes Jewish identity.
>
> —Dr. David Hartman, I Am Jewish, 2004

Our hope is that our curriculum will stimulate much discussion in your class and at home as well. Please share what you have learned in class with others, and in that way, expand the circle of learning and understanding.

Please note that in a typical class you will not address all of the texts included for a given lesson. In most lessons, there are more texts than can be realistically covered in 90 minutes. Also, we leave it to the teacher's discretion to choose to emphasize and discuss certain texts more thoroughly than others. You are strongly encouraged to read through the omitted texts during the course of the week to broaden your understanding of each subject. Each text in the curriculum is accompanied by a short source description.

Melton has made efforts to present learners with original texts and as-close-as-possible translations, with minor or no modifications. The texts are a product of their time and place and their respective authors; in some instances their language reflects that. Where modern sensibilities differ with the language or content of these texts to one degree or another – such as some texts that refer to God in the masculine or use the term "Man" when referring to humanity as a whole – the analyses make note of that, and where they do not, Melton trusts

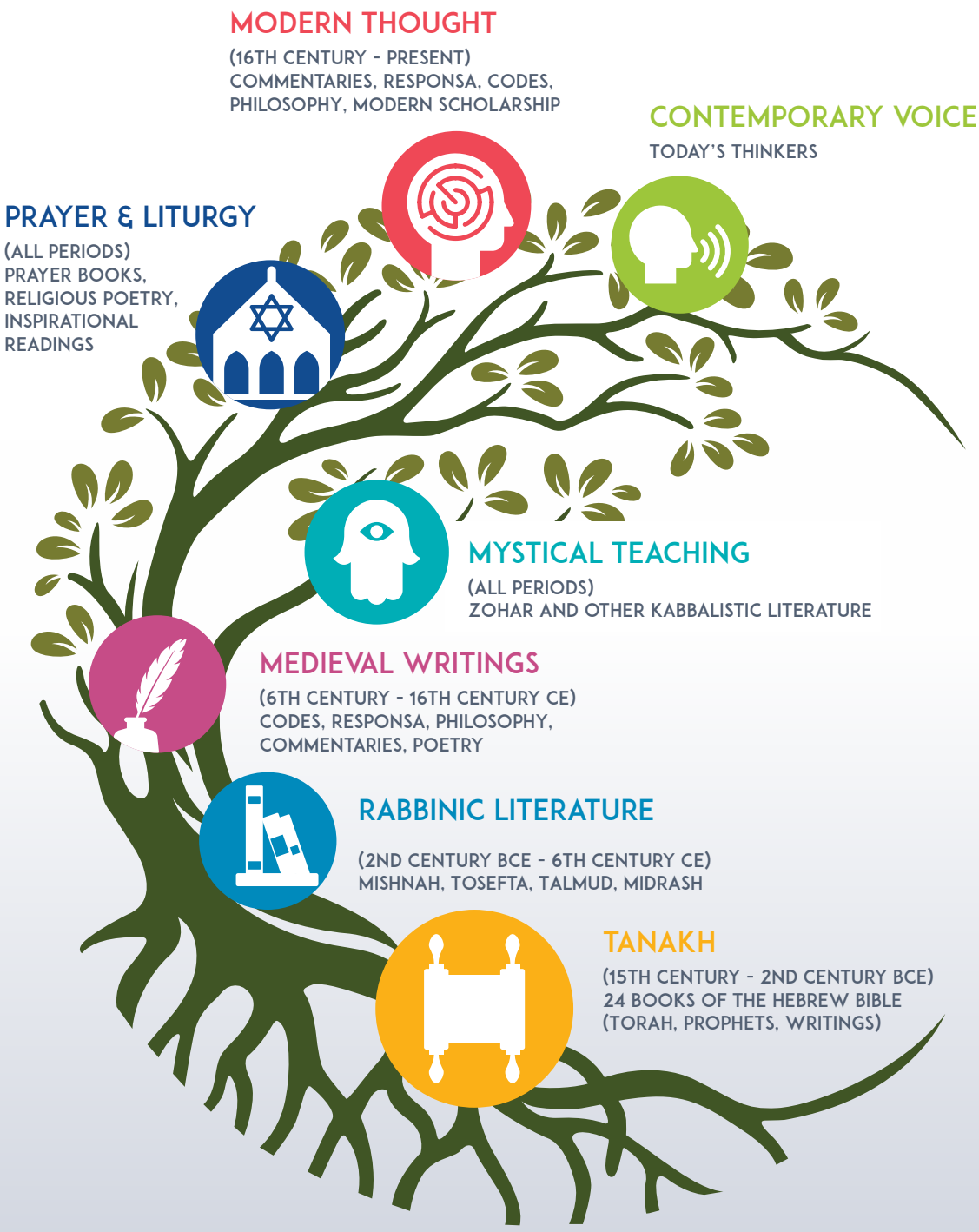
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that its instructors and learners will not let the dated language interfere with their appreciation of the message of the text.

We are interested in hearing from you. If at any time you would like to give us feedback on the Coursebook, its format or contents, we encourage you to contact our International Director at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Rabbi Dr. Morey Schwartz, at mschwartz@meltonschool.org.

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A TREE OF LIFE



MODERN THOUGHT

(16TH CENTURY - PRESENT)
COMMENTARIES, RESPONSA, CODES,
PHILOSOPHY, MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

CONTEMPORARY VOICES

TODAY'S THINKERS

PRAYER & LITURGY

(ALL PERIODS)
PRAYER BOOKS,
RELIGIOUS POETRY,
INSPIRATIONAL
READINGS

MYSTICAL TEACHING

(ALL PERIODS)
ZOHAR AND OTHER KABBALISTIC LITERATURE

MEDIEVAL WRITINGS

(6TH CENTURY - 16TH CENTURY CE)
CODES, RESPONSA, PHILOSOPHY,
COMMENTARIES, POETRY

RABBINIC LITERATURE

(2ND CENTURY BCE - 6TH CENTURY CE)
MISHNAH, TOSEFTA, TALMUD, MIDRASH

TANAKH

(15TH CENTURY - 2ND CENTURY BCE)
24 BOOKS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE
(TORAH, PROPHETS, WRITINGS)

עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ (משלי ג:יח)

It is a tree of life for those who embrace it (Proverbs 3:18)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Sandra Lilienthal was born and raised in Brazil, where she received her MBA in Marketing and Strategic Planning. After almost 10 years in the business world, she pursued a major change in careers, and for the last 30 years has been working in Jewish education in many different capacities: from religious school teacher and Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutor, to Director of Education of two synagogues, to Director of Lifelong Learning. She has taught every age from preschool to adults, both in Brazil and in the USA (Texas and Florida). In the past 16 years, Sandra has focused on teaching adults in South Florida.

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LET THERE BE LIFE: THE BEGINNING

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TEXT 1
VIDEO: *SOMETHING OF NOTHING*

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

TEXT 2
GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 1:1–2:3

1 When God began to create heaven and earth— **2** the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water— **3** God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. **4** God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

6 God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." **7** God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. **8** God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

9 God said, "Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear." And it was so. **10** God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good. **11** And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. **12** The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. **13** And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

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14 God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; **15** and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. **16** God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. **17** And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, **18** to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. **19** And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

20 God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” **21** God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good. **22** God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” **23** And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24 God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. **25** God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. **26** And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” **27** And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. **28** God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

29 God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. **30** And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. **31** And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2:1 The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. **2** On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. **3** And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.

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בְּרֵאשִׁית א, א – ב, ג

א בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ. ב וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם. ג וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר. ד וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי
טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ. ה וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָאוֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לָיְלָה וַיְהִי עֶרֶב
וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד.
ו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמָּיִם וִיהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לָמָיִם. ז וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל
בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי כֵן. ח וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָרָקִיעַ שָׁמָיִם
וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי.
ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקָּווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מָקוֹם אֶחָד וְתֵרָאֶה הַיַּבָּשָׁה וַיְהִי כֵן. י וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים
לַיַּבָּשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב. יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תַּדְשֵׁא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא
עֵשֶׂב מַזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר זַרְעוֹ בוֹ עַל הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי כֵן. יב וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא
עֵשֶׂב מַזְרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זַרְעוֹ בוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב. יג וַיְהִי עֶרֶב
וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי.
יד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלָּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים
וּלְיָמִים וְשָׁנִים. טו וְהָיוּ לִמְאוֹרֹת בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי כֵן. טז וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת
שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת הַמָּאוֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמֶמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת הַמָּאוֹר הַקָּטֹן לְמֶמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת
הַכּוֹכָבִים. יז וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמָיִם לְהָאִיר עַל הָאָרֶץ. יח וְלִמְשֹׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל
בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב. יט וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי.
כ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שֶׁרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל הָאָרֶץ עַל פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמָיִם. כא
וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַתַּנִּינִם הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת אֲשֶׁר שָׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֵת כָּל
עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב. כב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הַמַּיִם
בַּיַּמִּים וְהָעוֹף יֵרֶב בָּאָרֶץ. כג וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם חֲמִישִׁי.
כד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וָרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ אֶרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי כֵן. כה וַיַּעַשׂ
אֱלֹהִים אֶת חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים
כִּי טוֹב. כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה
וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ. כז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא
אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם. כח וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ
וְכִבְשֻׁהָ וּרְדוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל הָאָרֶץ. כט וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי
לָכֶם אֶת כָּל עֵשֶׂב זֹרֵעַ זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת כָּל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ פְּרִי עֵץ זֹרֵעַ זָרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה
לְאָכְלָה. ל וּלְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וּלְכָל עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכֹל רוֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת כָּל יֶרֶק

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עֲשֹׂב לְאָכְלָה וַיְהִי כֵן. לא וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי.

ב, א וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם. ב וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. ג וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת.

TEXT 3
PANGU AND THE CREATION

Chinese Creation Myth, some versions datedating back to the second century CE.

In the beginning there was darkness everywhere, and Chaos ruled. Within the darkness there formed an egg, and inside the egg the giant Pangu came into being. For aeons, safely inside the egg, Pangu slept and grew. When he had grown to gigantic size he stretched his huge limbs and in so doing broke the egg. The lighter parts of the egg floated upwards to form the heavens and the denser parts sank downwards, to become the earth. And so was formed earth and sky, the Yin and the Yang.

Pangu saw what had happened and he was pleased. But he feared that heaven and earth might meld together again, so he placed himself between them, his head holding up the sky and his feet firmly upon the earth. Pangu continued to grow at a rate of ten feet a day for 18,000 years, so increasing the distance between heaven and earth, until they seemed fixed and secure, 30,000 miles apart. Now exhausted, Pangu went back to sleep and never woke up.

Pangu died, and his body went to make the world and all its elements. The wind and clouds were formed from his breath, his voice was thunder and lightning, his eyes became the sun and moon, his arms and his legs became the four directions of the compass and his trunk became the mountains. His flesh turned into the soil and the trees that grow on it, his blood into the rivers that flow and his veins into paths men travel. His body hair became the grass and herbs, and his skin the same, while precious stones and minerals were formed from his bones and teeth. His sweat became the dew and the hair of his head became the stars that trail

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throughout heaven. As for the parasites on his body, these became the diverse races of humankind. Although Pangu is dead, some say he is still responsible for the weather, which fluctuates according to his moods.

T. Moorey. 2012. *Understanding Chinese Mythology.* London: Hodder Education.

TEXT 4
NACHMANIDES (RAMBAN), *BERESHIT* 1:1–2

(1194–1270) (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman) Bible commentator and legal scholar in Spain.

It was essential to begin the Torah with "In the beginning God created . . ." for it is the essence of faith. One who does not believe in this and is of the belief that the world is eternal is a heretic and is not an [observer] of the Torah . . .

God created the world from absolute nothingness. To express such creation ex nihilo, [biblical] Hebrew uses the root b.r.a. However, nothing that exists in the world was formed directly out of nothingness. First, God created out of the absolute nothingness a very fine substance, which although it lacks material being, it does have energy, and is able to receive form. This is the very first substance and is what the Greeks called *hyle*. After creating the hyle, God created nothing else; rather God took it and gave this substance form and developed them . . . The hyle is called in biblical Hebrew *tohu*.

רַב מֹשֶׁה בֶּן נַחְמָן (רַמְבַּ"ן), בְּרֵאשִׁית א, א-ב

כִּי צָרֵךְ גָּדוֹל הוּא לְהַתְחִיל הַתּוֹרָה בִּבְרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, כִּי הוּא שֹׁרֶשׁ הָאֱמוּנָה, וְשֶׁאֵינוֹ מַאֲמִין בָּזֶה וְחוֹשֵׁב שֶׁהָעוֹלָם קַדְמוֹן, הוּא כּוֹפֵר בָּעִקָּר וְאֵין לוֹ תּוֹרָה כְּלָל . . .

הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא בָּרָא כָּל הַנִּבְרָאִים מֵאַפִּיסָה מֻחְלֶטֶת וְאֵין אֶצְלֵנוּ בִּלְשׁוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּהוֹצָאַת הַיֵּשׁ מֵאַיִן אֶלָּא לָשׁוֹן בָּרָא וְאֵין כָּל הֶנַּעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ אוֹ לְמַעְלָה, הַוֶּה מִן הָאַיִן הַתְחָלָה רִאשׁוֹנָה אֲבָל הוֹצִיא מִן הָאֶפֶס הַגָּמוּר הַמֻּחְלָט יְסוֹד דַּק מְאֹד, אֵין בּוֹ מַמָּשׁ, אֲבָל הוּא כֹּחַ מַמְצִיא, מוּכָן לְקַבֵּל הַצּוּרָה, וְלָצֵאת מִן הַכֹּחַ אֶל הַפֹּעַל, וְהוּא הַחֹמֶר הָרִאשׁוֹן, נִקְרָא לַיְוָנִים הִיוּלִי וְאַחַר הַהִיוּלִי לֹא בָּרָא דָּבָר, אֲבָל יָצַר וְעָשָׂה, כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ הִמְצִיא הַכֹּל וְהִלְבִּישׁ הַצּוּרוֹת וְתִקֵּן אוֹתָם . . . וְהַחֹמֶר הַזֶּה, שֶׁקָּרְאוּ הִיוּלִי, נִקְרָא בִּלְשׁוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ תֹּהוּ.

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TEXT 5
DR. JEFFREY TIGAY, *GENESIS AS ALLEGORY* (1987)

(b. 1941) Modern biblical scholar and ordained rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

In showing that the universe had a beginning, science has come closer than ever before to the teachings of the Bible. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable distance between current scientific thought and the details of the Biblical account of creation. According to the latter, the physical world and separate species of living things were created essentially as we know them less than six thousand years ago over a period of seven days. Astronomy, geology, biology, and related sciences indicate that the process was a gradual one that took billions of years. Earlier geological strata of the earth's surface show the different stages through which the earth passed and approximately how long they lasted, while fossils and remains of extinct species such as dinosaurs show that the different species of living creatures evolved slowly from a common ancestor. These conclusions are denied by adherents of a doctrine known as "scientific creationism," who are campaigning to require that any public school that teaches evolution must also teach what they call "creation science" as a scientifically respectable alternative to evolution. . . .

The feverish concern of the "scientific creationists" to protect a literal reading of the story in Genesis 1 reflects a conviction that devotion to the Bible requires one to interpret it – particularly Genesis 1 – literally and **accept** it in its literal sense. But, as Steven Katz notes . . ., "In Jewish religious thought Genesis is not regarded as meant for a literal reading, and Jewish tradition has not usually read it so." In fact, . . . even the compilers of the Bible do not seem to have been concerned with a literal reading of the text. They were prepared to have at least parts of it read non-literally. . . .

. . . In other words, these stories are regarded as poetic statements of certain basic truths, not as literal scientific accounts of how the universe developed. What matters in Judaism is the **concepts** shared by all these stories: that the world was created by God, that He planned it carefully and designed it to be hospitable to man. These are the very conclusions to which astronomy now points. The other details of the Biblical accounts should not be taken literally but metaphorically or poetically. To give but one example: the six days of creation culminating in the Sabbath on the seventh symbolize how God guided the development of the world

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stage by stage according to a well-thought-out plan. The process is described as taking place over a period of seven days because seven was regarded in the ancient world as the number of perfection and seven days were regarded as the ideal length of a process. The seven days are more a statement about the perfection of the process than a chronological statistic.

Available online at sas.upenn.edu. Viewed May 2021.



TEXT 6
RABBI LAURA NOVAK WINER, *ASK THE RABBIS RELIGION & SCIENCE* (2014)

Director of Clinical Education at the Hebrew Union College's Rhea Hirsch School of Education at HUC-JIR's Skirball Campus in Los Angeles.

As an undergraduate in a religious studies course, I wrote a paper on creation and evolution, asking whether creation could really have happened the way it is described in the Torah. It was at that point that I learned about day-age theory, which states that a day of creation was perhaps not 24 hours but, instead, hundreds of thousands or even millions of years. If we read the creation story with that lens, we can see that the order of creation described in the Torah symbolizes the scientific process of evolution.

For progressive Jews, science and Judaism do not have to conflict. We do not have to read Torah literally. Torah and Judaism are meant to teach us values and ethics, which give us a framework to guide our lives. Judaism provides us ways to express awe, wonder and appreciation for the mysteries of the universe and give thanks for the human mind, which is able to seek new understandings of that universe through scientific exploration and experimentation. For many, that scientific process enhances the appreciation of God's miraculous creation.

Available online at momentmag.com. Viewed May 2021.

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BACKGROUND TEXT 7

In 1961, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson exchanged correspondence on the subject of Torah and Science with Professor Cyril Domb. Domb was professor of Theoretical Physics at King's College, London, and served as professor of Physics at Bar-Ilan University from 1981 to 1989. He was also president of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists. Domb wrote an article for London's *Jewish Chronicle* concerning the work of English radio astronomer Martin Ryle (1918–1984) in the field of cosmology. Domb asserted that the Torah's views could coexist with Ryle's theories, and he explained his reasoning. Schneerson disagreed.

TEXT 7
RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON, *ON SCIENCE AND ITS TRUTHS* (1961)

(1902–1994) Seventh and last rebbe of the Chabad/Lubavitch chasidic movement; studied Natural Philosophy, to include mathematics, physics, and philosophy, at the University of Berlin between 1928 and 1932.

. . . the fact that scientific laws are only probable, and are merely statements of the most likelihood, reflects not only on future predictions, but also on deductions relating to the past, which must remain in the realm of probability based on observation. Where no observation/experiment is possible, deductions are purely conjectural. Hence science can never challenge the veracity of the Genesis account from the viewpoint of the evolutionary theory or any other theory, and it would be just as "scientific" to accept the account verbally as to reinterpret it allegorically to harmonize it with any particular cosmological theory.

. . . Here is where religious beliefs and practices have the "advantage" over science, for it is only the Torah, Toras Chayyim, that gives certitude to human deductions arrived at in the proper way, giving them the stamp of truth not only within the rational and sensible world, but also in a transcending way . . .

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. . . I must disagree with the statement you made in the said article to the effect that from the Torah viewpoint it is possible also to accept the evolutionary theory . . . This is not so, and the test of the matter is Halachah. Where Halachah is concerned there can be no alternatives, for the rule of Halachah is the rule of reality. So long as the Halachah is not infringed, we are at liberty to interpret the Biblical verses on any level of P'shat, Remez, Drash and Sod. But this prerogative ends where Halachah has ruled - this rule must be accepted "on top" of all interpretations. Now, according to the Halachah our world came into being 5721 years ago, and the age of the world is reaffirmed on such Torah legal documents as Gittin, and the like; Shabbos is the seventh day of the week, which the Halachah connects with the six days of creation that preceded it (T.B. Shabbos 69b), and so on. The literal acceptance of the Genesis account does not conflict with the doctrine in Midrash, Kabbalah and the Zohar that G-d "created worlds and destroyed them", since the latter refers to spiritual worlds as amply explained in these disciplines . . .

Available online at chabad.org. Viewed May 2021.

TEXT 8
BERESHIT RABBAH 11:6

Homiletic and midrashic material compiled on the biblical text, mainly in Israel, from the 3rd to the 10th centuries.

Everything that was created during the six days of creation needs further work. For example, the mustard seed needs to be sweetened and the lupine needs to be sweetened, wheat needs to be ground, and even a person needs more work.

בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה יא, ו

כָּל מַה שֶּׁנִּבְרָא בְּשֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי בְרֵאשִׁית צְרִיכִין עֲשִׂיָּה כְּגוֹן הַחַרְדָּל צָרִיךְ לִמְתֹּק הַתְּרְמוֹסִים צָרִיךְ לִמְתֹּק הַחִטִּין צְרִיכִין לְהִטָּחֵן אֲפִלּוּ אָדָם צָרִיךְ תִּקּוּן.

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TEXT 9
RABBI DR. JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK, *HALAKHIC MAN*

(1903–1993) Philosopher and talmudic scholar; leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America.

The peak of religious ethical perfection to which Judaism aspires is man as creator. When God created the world, He provided an opportunity for the work of His hands—man—to participate in His creation. The Creator, as it were, impaired reality in order that mortal man could repair its flaws and perfect it. God gave the Book of Creation—that repository of the mysteries of creation—to man, not simply for the sake of theoretical study but in order that man might continue the act of creation. . .

. . . Man, the creature, is commanded to become a partner with the Creator in the renewal of the cosmos; complete and ultimate creation—this is the deepest desire of the Jewish people . . . Just as the Almighty constantly refined and improved the realm of existence during the six days of creation, so must man complete that creation and transform the domain of chaos and void into a perfect and beautiful reality.

J. B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man,* trans. by Lawrence Kaplan. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983, 101, 105–106.

TEXT 10
TAMAR BIALA, *VAYEKADESH OTO, AND HE SANCTIFIED IT*

Lecturer and author on the intersection of Judaism and feminism.

"The heavens and the earth and all their array were complete. And God completed on the seventh day the work that [God] had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that [God] had done" (Bereshit 2:1–3).

Why does the verse need to repeat that God *completed* the work on the seventh day? [Rather, understand the first verse as] teaching that the first [creations],

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heavens and the earth and all their array, began to *deteriorate* (a play on the word *veyechulu*). For until the seventh day they lasted, but on the seventh day cracks developed and they began to fall apart.

God was taken aback and ceased the work, saying, "How long will I continue to create these, while they go on to deteriorate and fall apart?"

God sat, as it states, "and God rested on the seventh day," and considered all that God had declared to be good beforehand and all that God had declared to be very good.

God saw that each creation that was created was good, and yet it deteriorates, and that each action God took was fleeting and yet it was good, and God was sad for the creations and for GodGod. God sought an idea for how to preserve and maintain the world that God created, a world that was returning to being in a state of chaos, until God came up with something.

What did God come upon? God invented the concept of *kiddush*, "sanctification," as it states, "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." God said, "Let the blessings and the sanctifications come and highlight all the good and all the vigor in every thing and every act of Creation, and by recalling that aspect of Creation, it will be fortified, as will we. In this way, some of the ongoing devastation of the world will be delayed somewhat, as will some of the decay of our souls." And so it says, "[God] sat and restored to life" (Shemot 31:17).

N. Weingarten-Mintz and T. Biala, eds. *Dirshuni – Israeli Women Writing Midrash.* Tel Aviv: Miskal, Yedioth Ahronoth Books, 2009.

תָּמָר בִּיאַלֶה, וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אוֹתוֹ

'וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם. וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה'.

עַל שׁוּם מָה חָזַר הַכָּתוּב וְשָׁנָה שֶׁכְּלָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִמְּלַאכְתּוֹ? לְלַמֶּדְךָ שֶׁרֹאשׁוֹנִים הֵחֵלּוּ כֵּלִים שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ מֵעַצְמָם. שֶׁעַד אוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם הָיוּ עוֹמְדִים וּמִתְקַיְּמִים. הִגִּיעַ הַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, סְדָקִים נִתְּנוּ בָּהֶם וְהֵם הוֹלְכִים וְנִשְׁבָּרִים.

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נִבְהַל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא וּפָסַק מִמְּלַאכְתּוֹ. אָמַר בִּלְבּוֹ: 'עַד מָתַי אֲנִי בּוֹרֵא אֶת אֵלֶּה, וְהֵם הוֹלְכִים לָהֶם וּמִתְכַּלִּים מֵעַצְמָם?'

יָשַׁב בְּמְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר 'וַיִּשְׁבֹּות בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי', וְהִתְבּוֹנֵן בְּכָל מַה שֶּׁאָמַר עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא טוֹב וּמַה שֶּׁאָמַר עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא טוֹב מְאֹד.

רָאָה שֶׁכָּל בְּרִיאָה וּבְרִיאָה שֶׁבָּרָא הֵיא טוֹבָה וְהִיא מִתְכַּלִּית, וְכָל מַעֲשֶׂה וּמַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁעָשָׂה הוּא כָּלָה וְהוּא טוֹב, וְהָיָה צַר לוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם וְצַר לוֹ עַל עַצְמוֹ. בִּקֵּשׁ עֵצָה כֵּיצַד לִשְׁמֹר וּלְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם שֶׁבָּרָא, שֶׁהוֹלֵךְ וְשָׁב לוֹ לְתֹהוּ וָבוֹהוּ, עַד שֶׁמָּצָא.

מַהוּ אוֹתוֹ הַדָּבָר שֶׁמָּצָא? שֶׁהִמְצִיא אֶת הַקְּדוּשׁ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר 'וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אוֹתוֹ'. אָמַר: יָבוֹאוּ בְּרָכוֹת וְקִדּוּשִׁים וְיַרְאֶה כָּל דָּבָר וְדָבָר וְכָל מַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּעוֹלָם, צַד חִיּוּת שֶׁבּוֹ וְצַד טוֹב שֶׁבּוֹ, וְעַל יְדֵי שֶׁנִּזְכַּר בּוֹ אוֹתוֹ הַצַּד, נִתְחַזֵּק אוֹתוֹ הַדָּבָר וְנִתְחַזֵּק אֲנַחְנוּ בְּעַצְמֵנוּ, וְתִתְעַכֵּב בְּמַשֶּׂהוּ כְּלָיָה שֶׁבָּעוֹלָם, וְיִתְעַכֵּב בְּמַשֶּׂהוּ כְּלָיוֹן שֶׁבְּנַפְשֵׁנוּ. וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר 'שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפַשׁ'.

TEXT 11
RABBI ARYEH KAPLAN, *GOD'S REST*

(1934–1983) A noted Orthodox scholar, author, and trained physicist.

What does the Torah mean when it says that G-d rested?

Was He tired? Had He worked too hard? Was Creation an exhausting task?

Is the Torah so naïve that it looks at G-d in such anthropomorphic and human terms? Does it really assume that G-d needed a rest after six days of hard work, just like any other laborer?

Of course not. The Bible itself says (*Isa.* 40:28), "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The L-rd, the everlasting G-d, Creator of the wide world, grows neither weary nor faint."

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G-d did not rest because He was tired or overworked. Even creating a universe is not hard work for G-d. Our sages teach us that it involved less effort than to pronounce a single letter.

G-d rested in another sense. He rested when He stopped creating—when He no longer interfered with His world. . . .

During the six days of Creation, G-d asserted His mastery over the universe by actively changing it. On the Sabbath, He "rested" by no longer asserting this mastery. . . .

Work, in the Sabbath sense, is an act that shows . . . mastery over the world by means of . . . intelligence and skill. . . .

Rest, in the Sabbath sense, is not interfering with nature nor exhibiting mastery over it. It is a state of peace [with] nature. . . .

. . . In the account of creation, the Torah says (*Gen.* 2:2), "G-d finished on the seventh day."

The Midrash asks an obvious question. If G-d rested on the seventh day, how could He have finished on the very same day? If He did nothing on the Sabbath, then obviously, He finished on the sixth day.

. . . [The Midrash] gives us a most profound answer. It says that *on the Sabbath, G-d created Rest.* . . .

. . . [The world] was no longer in a process of change, and therefore was able to partake of G-d's serenity. . . .

The Sabbath thus brought about an integral harmony between G-d and His world. Rather than continuing to change the universe, G-d brought it into harmony with Himself.

A. Kaplan. 1974. *SABBATH: Day of Eternity.* New York, NCSY.

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KEY TERMS

Halakhah. [הֲלָכָה, **Guidance**] The central body of Jewish law. The content of classical Jewish law as well as the process for determining that law, both initially established by the talmudic Rabbis.

Kedushah. [קְדוּשָׁה, **Holiness or sanctity**] A major biblical concept expressing the quality of things that are Godlike or set apart for particular closeness to God. *Kedushah* is attained through the observance of mitzvot and the emulation of God who is regarded as the ultimate source of holiness.

KEY NAMES

Kaplan, Aryeh. (1934–1983). Noted rabbi and author, who had a background in both physics (he was listed in Who's Who in Physics) and Judaism. He was a prolific and original teacher; his work ranged from studies of the Torah, Talmud, and works of mysticism to outreach and philosophy.

Nachmanides. (1194–1270) Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman; also known as Ramban. He was a Spanish biblical exegete, kabbalist, talmudist, poet, and physician. His works include a commentary on the Torah, novellae on the Talmud, and other halakhic and philosophic writings. After his famous disputation in Barcelona with a Christian convert in 1263, he moved to the Land of Israel, where he died.

Novak Winer, Laura. Director of Clinical Education at the Hebrew Union College's Rhea Hirsch School of Education at HUC-JIR's Skirball Campus in Los Angeles. She has been published in a variety of academic and online journals, is a regular contributor to *Moment Magazine*'s Ask the Rabbis column, and was the editor of several curricula, including Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics (2005 and 2007). She is also past president of the Association of Reform Jewish Educators.

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Schneerson, Menachem Mendel. (1902-1994). Known to many simply as "The Rebbe," he was the seventh leader in the Chabad-Lubavitch dynasty, an industrious and unique Torah scholar, and a leading voice in promoting Jewish values among Jews and non-Jews alike. As leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, he took a Chasidic group that almost came to an end with the Holocaust and transformed it into one of the most influential movements in religious world Jewry, with an international network of over 3,000 educational and social centers. His published teachings fill more than 300 volumes, and he is noted for his contributions to Jewish continuity and religious thought.

Soloveitchik, Joseph B. (1903-1993). A spiritual leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America, he taught Talmud and Jewish philosophy at Yeshiva University, and was the author of numerous halakhic treatises, responsa, sermons on the Torah, and philosophical books and articles, including *Halakhic Man*, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, *On Repentance*, and *Kol Dodi Dofek*. His students number in the thousands.

Tigay, Jeffrey. (b. 1941) 1995 winner of the Lindback Award for distinguished teaching, he is Emeritus A.M. Ellis Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and Literatures in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania. From 1995-1998 he was Chair of the Jewish Studies Program. He retired in 2010 after teaching at Penn since 1971. His specialty is the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation, particularly in its original ancient Near Eastern context.

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APPENDIX

CHART OF CREATION STORY IN *BERESHIT* 1

DAY	What was created?	What was created?	DAY
1			4
2			5
3			6
7			
SHABBAT (Ceasing or Stopping)			

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LESSON 2

SHABBAT: MUCH MORE THAN A DAY OFF

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BACKGROUND TEXT 1

In the *Book of Esther*, 3:8, Haman requests permission from the king to kill the Jews throughout the empire. In the text below, the Talmud offers an expansion of what was possibly going through Haman's mind as he spoke, and what were his criticisms of the Jews.



TEXT 1
BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *MEGILLAH* 13B

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6–7th centuries.

"And their laws are diverse from those of every people" (Esther 3:8), as they do not eat from our food, nor do they marry our women, nor do they marry off their women to us.

5 **"Nor do they keep the king's laws" (Esther 3:8), as they spend the entire year in *she"hi pe"hi**.**

"Therefore it does not profit the king to tolerate them" (Esther 3:8), as they eat and drink and scorn the throne.

* Understood to be reference to laziness--an abbreviation for "today is Shabbat" (Shabbat hayom) and "today is Passover" (Pesach hayom).

תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מַסֶּכֶת מְגִלָּה דַּף יג עַמּוּד ב

וְדָתֵיהֶם שׁוֹנוֹת מִכָּל עָם דְּלָא אָכְלִי מִינַן וְלָא נָסְבִי מִינַן וְלֹא מִנְסְבֵי לָן.

וְאֶת דָּתֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים דְּמַפְקִי לְכֻלָּא שַׁתָּא בִּשְׁהֵ"י פְּהֵ"י.

וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין שׁוֶה לְהַנִּיחָם דְּאָכְלוּ וְשָׁתוּ וּמְבַזּוּ לֵהּ לְמַלְכוּת.

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PERCEPTIONS OF JEWISH SHABBAT OBSERVANCE IN THE ANCIENT NON-JEWISH WORLD

Seneca the Younger (Roman philosopher, 1st century CE) wrote that Shabbat encouraged indolence among Jews.

The Roman poet Juvenal (1st–2nd century CE) described the Jews as those who – "gave up every seventh day to laziness, separate from all the concerns of life."

Tacitus (1st–2nd century CE), considered one of the greatest Roman historians, wrote: "We are told that the rest of the seventh day was adopted because this day brought with it a termination of their toils; after a while, the charm of indolence beguiled them into giving up the seventh year also to inaction."



TEXT 2
ACHAD HAAM (ASHER GINZBURG), *SHABBAT AND ZIONISM* (1898)

(1856–1927) Hebrew essayist, known as the founder of cultural Zionism.

One need not be a Zionist or scrupulous about the commandments in order to recognize the value of Shabbat . . . One who feels in his heart a true tie with the life of the nation throughout the generations will not be able to imagine the Jews without the "Shabbat Queen," even if he does not acknowledge a world to come or a Jewish State. One may say without exaggeration, that more than the Jews have maintained the Shabbat, the Shabbat has maintained the Jews. And were it not for the Shabbat restoring the "souls" of the people and renewing their spiritual lives each week, the hardships of the workweek would pull them down lower and lower until they would descend to the very lowest levels of "materialism," and ethical and intellectual inferiority.

אַחַד הָעָם, שַׁבָּת וְצִיּוֹנוּת

אֵין צֹרֶךְ לִהְיוֹת צִיּוֹנִי אוֹ מְדַקְדֵּק בְּמִצְוֹת בִּשְׁבִיל לְהַכִּיר עֶרֶךְ הַשַּׁבָּת . . . מִי שֶׁמַּרְגִּישׁ בְּלִבּוֹ קֶשֶׁר אֲמִתִּי עִם חַיֵּי הָאֻמָּה בְּכָל הַדּוֹרוֹת, הוּא לֹא יוּכַל בְּשׁוּם אֹפֶן – אֲפִלּוּ אִם אֵינוֹ מוֹדֶה לֹא בָּעוֹלָם הַבָּא

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וְלֹא בְּמִדִּינַת הַיְּהוּדִים - לְצַיֵּר לוֹ מְצִיאוּת עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּלִי „שַׁבָּת מַלְכְּתָא". אֶפְשָׁר לֵאמוֹר בְּלִי שׂוּם הַפְרָזָה, כִּי יוֹתֵר מִשִּׁישְׂרָאֵל שָׁמְרוּ אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת שָׁמְרָה הַשַּׁבָּת אוֹתָם, וְלוּלֵא הִיא שֶׁהֶחֱזִירָה לָהֶם „נִשְׁמָתָם" וְחִדְּשָׁה אֶת חַיֵּי רוּחָם בְּכָל שָׁבוּעַ, הָיוּ הַתְּלָאוֹת שֶׁל „יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה" מוֹשְׁכוֹת אוֹתָם יוֹתֵר וְיוֹתֵר כְּלַפֵּי מַטָּה, עַד שֶׁהָיוּ יוֹרְדִים לְבַסּוֹף לְדִיּוֹטָא הָאַחֲרוֹנָה שֶׁל „חֻמְרִיּוּת" וְשִׁפְלוּת מוּסָרִית וְשִׂכְלִית.

Available online at benyehuda.org. Viewed May 2021.

TEXT 3
EXODUS (*SHEMOT*) 20:8–11

8 Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

שְׁמוֹת כ, ח-יא

ח זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ. ט שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאכְתֶּךָ. י וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתֶךָ וּבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ. יא כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל כֵּן בֵּרַךְ ה' אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ.

TEXT 4
EXODUS (*SHEMOT*) 31:12–17

12 And the LORD said to Moses: 13 Speak to the Israelite people and say: Nevertheless, you must keep My sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I the LORD have consecrated you. 14 You shall keep the sabbath, for it is holy for you . . . 16 The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time: 17 it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed.

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שְׁמוֹת לא, יב-יז

יב וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר. יג וְאַתָּה דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אַךְ אֶת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ כִּי אוֹת הִוא בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם לָדַעַת כִּי אֲנִי ה' מְקַדִּשְׁכֶם. יד וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הִוא לָכֶם . . . טז וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם. יז בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹת הִוא לְעֹלָם כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפַשׁ.

TEXT 5
RABBI NOAH WEINBERG, *SHABBAT – HEAVEN ON EARTH*

(1930–2009) Dean and founder of Aish HaTorah.

. . . Once every seven days, we step back from the world and make a statement to ourselves and humanity that we are not in charge of this world. We stop all creative work and acknowledge that it is God's world, not ours. We can manipulate the world, but we don't own it. God gives us clear guidelines for how we may shape the world, but it's not ours to do with as we see fit all the time.

When we refrain from work on Shabbat, we regain clarity and understanding as to Who is the true Creator.

Once we've extracted ourselves from the illusions of our own power and prominence (i.e. once we realize we're not God), we free ourselves to reach out and experience the primary goal of Shabbat: getting in touch with God. While it is true that we can get in touch with God and spirituality during the week, it only happens if we make a particular effort to partake of these experiences. We have to fight off the influences of the mundane workday in order to break through to the spiritual.

Available online at aish.com. Viewed May 2021.

TEXT 6
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 5:12–15

12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the

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seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. **15** Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

דְּבָרִים ה, יב-טו

יב שָׁמוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ. יג שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאכְתֶּךָ. יד וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתֶךָ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל בְּהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ כָּמוֹךָ. טו וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצִאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה עַל כֵּן צִוְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת.

TEXT 7
RACHEL ELIOR, *THE HOLINESS OF TIME AND THE SANCTIFICATION OF FREEDOM* (2001)

(b. 1949) Israeli professor of Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Shabbat rest is juxtaposed with the memory of enslavement in Egypt . . .

This conceptualization, that sanctifies the Shabbat, developed in the ancient world in which slavery was commonplace and in which slaves who had no rights tasted the burden of an existence without rights, without having a fixed time for rest, nor a promise of release and freedom. Sanctifying Shabbat means ensuring the preference for freedom over the fixed rhythms of slavery, a preference for God's festivals over "by the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat." This conceptualization sanctifies the preference for rest and freedom by seven days, by seven weeks, by seven months, by seven years, and by seven sevens of years over any servitude that humanity so often and so quickly imposes on itself.

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רָחֵל אֶלִיאוֹר, קְדֻשַּׁת הַזְּמַן וְקִדּוּשׁ הַחֵרוּת
מְנוּחַת הַשַּׁבָּת נִסְמֶכֶת לְזִכְרוֹן הָעֲבְדוּת בְּמִצְרַיִם . . .

תְּפִיסָה זוֹ, הַמְקַדֶּשֶׁת אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, הִתְפַּתְּחָה בָּעוֹלָם הָעַתִּיק שֶׁהָעֲבְדוּת רָוְחָה בּוֹ, וַעֲבָדִים נִטּוּלֵי זְכוּיוֹת טָעֲמוּ אֶת עֻלּוֹ הַמְשַׁעְבֵּד שֶׁל קִיּוּם נִטּוּל זְכוּיוֹת, שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ מֶרְחָב שֶׁל מְנוּחָה קְצוּבָה בַּזְּמַן וְהַבְטָחָה שֶׁל שִׁחְרוּר וְחֵרוּת. קִדּוּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת מַשְׁמָעוֹ הַבְטָחַת עֲדִיפוּת הַחֵרוּת עַל הַשִּׁעְבּוּד בְּמִקְצָב קָבוּעַ, וַעֲדִיפוּת מוֹעֲדֵי ה' עַל פְּנֵי "בְּזֵעַת אַפֶּיךָ תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם". תְּפִיסָה זוֹ מְקַדֶּשֶׁת אֶת עֲדִיפוּת הַמְּנוּחָה, הַשְּׁבִיתָה וְהַחֹפֶשׁ מִדֵּי שָׁבוּעַ, מִדֵּי שְׁבָעָה שָׁבוּעוֹת, מִדֵּי שְׁבָעָה חֳדָשִׁים, מִדֵּי שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וְשֶׁבַע שְׁבִיעִיּוֹת שָׁנִים – כְּנֶגֶד הַשִּׁעְבּוּד, שֶׁפִּעָמִים כֹּה רַבּוֹת וּבְמִהִירוּת כֹּה רַבָּה מֵשִׁית אָדָם עַל עַצְמוֹ וְעַל רֵעֵהוּ.

"שבת: קדושת הזמן וקידוש החירות", בתוך: *היום השביעי, יוצרים ישראלים כותבים על השבת שלהם* (עורכים מ' גרזי וב' צימרמן), תל אביב: משכל 2001: 189-199.

TEXT 8
MIDRASH OTIYOT DERABBI AKIVA

Midrashic exposition of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

When God said to the Israelites, "I am giving you the Torah," [God also] asked, "Will you observe the commandments whereby which I grant you the World to Come?"

The Israelites replied, "O Master of the world, show us an example of the World to Come in this world."

God said, "That's Shabbat which is one sixtieth of the World to Come . . ."

אַלְפָּא בֵּיתָא דְּרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא
[בְּשָׁעָה] שֶׁאָמַר לָהֶם הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָכֶם אֶת הַתּוֹרָה אָמַר הַאִם מְקַיְּמִים אַתֶּם אֶת הַמִּצְוָה שֶׁבָּהּ אֲנִי מַנְחִיל לָכֶם אֶת הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הָיוּ מְשִׁיבִין וְאוֹמְרִים לְפָנָיו רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם הַרְאֵנוּ דְּגְמָא שֶׁל עוֹלָם הַבָּא בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה
אָמַר לָהֶם זוֹ שַׁבָּת שֶׁהִיא אַחַת מִשִּׁשִּׁים מִשֶּׁל עוֹלָם הַבָּא. . .

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TEXT 9
RABBI IRVING GREENBERG, *THE DREAM AND HOW TO LIVE IT: SHABBAT*

Contemporary American Orthodox theologian and writer.

According to the Genesis account, this world originally was and is still meant to be a paradise. But only when there is peace, with abundant resources and an untrammeled right to live, will the world be structured to sustain the infinite value of the human being. This is the heart of Judaism, the dream.

Jewish existence without the dream is almost inconceivable. The drawing power of the vision has kept Jews faithful to their mission over several millennia. Expulsion, persecution, and destruction have assaulted but never obliterated the dream. Jews have repeatedly given everything, including their very lives, to keep it alive. And when catastrophe shattered the vision, Jews spent their lives renewing it. The question is: From where can these people draw the strength to renew their dream again and again? The answer of Jewish tradition is: Give people just a foretaste of the fulfillment, and they will never give it up. The Shabbat is that taste. . . .

The world of the Shabbat is totally different than the weekday universe: There is no work to do, no deprivation. On Shabbat, there is neither anxiety nor bad news. Since such a world does not yet exist in space, it is first created in time, on the seventh day of the week. Jews travel through time in order to enter a perfect world for a night and a day. The goal is to create a reality so complete and absorbing that these time travelers are caught up in its values and renewed.

The Shabbat is the foretaste of the messianic redemption. But even as this enclave of perfection is carved out in the realm of time, the world goes on as usual in the realm of surrounding space. This is why Shabbat needs a community in order to be credible. By an act of will, the community creates this sacred time and space, and agrees to live by its rules. . .

The Shabbat comes to an end weekly, but it creates an appetite and a satisfaction that lasts through the week until it is renewed again.

I. Greenberg, 1988. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: Touchstone Book published by Simon & Schuster, 127–130.

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TEXT 10
RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, *THE SABBATH*

(1907–1972) Religious philosopher in the United States.

He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self. . . .

The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of Sabbath. It is not an interlude but the climax of living. . . .

What is so luminous about a day? What is so precious to captivate the hearts? It is because the seventh day is a mine where spirit's precious metal can be found with which to construct the palace in time, a dimension in which the human is at home with the divine; a dimension in which man aspires to approach the likeness of the divine. . . .

The Sabbath is the most precious present mankind has received from the treasure house of God. All week we think: The spirit is too far away, and we succumb to spiritual absenteeism, or at best we pray: Send us a little of Thy spirit. On the Sabbath the spirit stands and pleads: Accept all excellence from me. . . .

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature—is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath?

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The solution of mankind's most vexing problem will not be found in renouncing technical civilization, but in attaining some degree of independence of it. . . .

The seventh day is the armistice in man's cruel struggle for existence, a truce in all conflicts, personal and social, peace between man and man, man and nature, peace within man . . . The seventh day is the exodus from tension, the liberation of man from his own muddiness, the installation of man as a sovereign in the world of time. . . .

The Sabbath . . . is a profound conscious harmony of man and the world, a sympathy for all things and a participation in the spirit that unites what is below and what is above. All that is divine in the world is brought into union with God. This is Sabbath, and the true happiness of the universe.

A. J. Heschel. *The Sabbath.* Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Canada Ltd., 1979, 13–14, 16, 18, 28.

TEXT 11
RABBI JANET BURDEN, *SHABBAT – THE HEART OF JEWISH LIFE* (2006)

In the United Kingdom, she is Liberal Judaism's rabbinic advisor on issues of social justice.

Ethical monotheism is indisputably the foundation of Judaism, its intellectual core. No matter how pure and grand that concept is, however, I do not believe that it alone would have sustained the Jewish people throughout the centuries of exile, hardship and persecution.

Something else has held the people together and nourished their souls: Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath. Throughout our generations, the Jewish people have kept Shabbat as a sign of our covenantal relationship with the Eternal One. In so doing, we introduced into the world the concept of 'sacred time'. After the ethical teachings of the Bible, I would say this is the most important gift our tradition has given us.

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Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, is a day of stopping both business and 'busyness'. It is a day intended to recall the final Divine act of Creation: to cease from work and to be at rest.

It is a day on which we refrain from interfering with the world around us and instead take time out to appreciate the gifts that we have. To an untrained eye, Shabbat observance can seem to be all about restrictions: traditionally, Jews don't work, shop, or travel on this day. But one can just as easily understand these as 'freedoms'.

We are free to enjoy the economic armistice Shabbat affords those who keep it. We are free from the society's manufactured desires to acquire and to possess. We are free to spend time with our loved ones, to share meals with our family or community, to sing, to study and to pray. All of these things go to make Shabbat a real delight. . . .

Although I have never supported the idea of religious observance being imposed by 'blue laws', I do think we miss out on something if we fail to make and mark sacred time. I believe that the world could be radically transformed if we learned to say, at least once a week, 'It is enough.'

Our rabbinic sages understood Shabbat to be a foretaste of the day when the world would be perfected, when all would live in harmony and peace. Even if that day seems but a distant dream, it is a dream that Jewish tradition demands we keep alive. Shabbat is one of the most important ways we do this.

Available online at liberaljudaism.org. Viewed May 2021.

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TEXT 12
RABBI ANGELA WARNICK BUCHDAHL, BE THE ARCHITECT OF YOUR TIME (2018)

Senior rabbi of Central Synagogue in New York City, the first woman to lead the large Reform congregation in its over 180-year history.

. . . The Jewish view of time is refreshingly countercultural. In today's culture, our most common understanding of time is in terms of Productivity. Accomplishment. "Time is Money." But Judaism does not judge time like this. Judaism divides time into two distinct categories: the sacred and the ordinary.

In ordinary time, we go to our jobs, do homework, do the dishes, tone our triceps, do volunteer work. We are encouraged to busy ourselves with the important work that enables us to be fed and sustained, healthy and constantly growing.

But sacred time is completely different. Sacred time is designed to slow us down, to make us fully present, to enable us to see ourselves and the world around us as Whole.
Perfect.
Finished.
Sacred time is a time to just *be*.

Holy time certainly includes our annual sacred holidays. But our tradition also understood that we needed a regular practice of sacred time in our lives—our ancestors called it Shabbat. There is a time for building–but there is also a time to STOP. Shabbat was a radical and beautiful innovation our ancestors brought to humanity. We are not meant to build and create and work, day in and day out. Shabbat is how we build what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel called our "*sanctuary in time.*"

Building a sanctuary in time doesn't just happen. Ironically, rest requires purposeful action. An active release of the hammering and sawing, the noise and competition, the desire for more stuff over the basic human need for more meaning.

So, here's the blueprint: Create and build, renovate and improve for six days, but then, one day a week—create a true Shabbat. Forbid the desiring and considering of

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what is missing. Allow yourself to feel satisfied with who and what you are, without trying to improve it.

Be the architect of your days and create your Sanctuary in time. . . .

Judaism . . . gives us a Sabbath blueprint for our most important building project–which is constructing a life rich in meaning and purpose.

Available online at thriveglobal.com. Viewed May 2021.



TEXT 13
RABBI JAY HENRY MOSES, THE GIFT OF SHABBAT IS TUNING IN (2018)

Vice President of The Wexner Foundation.

When I was a child in the 1970s, I received a transistor radio as a birthday gift one year. The little box came with AM and FM dials and an earpiece that plugged in to a jack on the side. With it, I could listen to music of all kinds . . . If I had just the right touch, the loud, grating static that occupied the space between frequencies would gradually give way to a smooth, clear signal and the comforting tones of a legendary announcer describing a lazy summer evening game.

Today, in the digital age, we've lost that experience. Satellite radio, cable TV, and the internet provide instantaneous and nearly infinite entertainment. But they have masked the tuning process; we have been trained to believe that the signal is smooth, constant, and uninterrupted . . .

And so it is with the pace and feel of our lives in the twenty-first century. The distinction between work and rest, creativity and reflection, ambition and humility, has been significantly blurred. We are taught to believe that we can be "on" 24/7 — always striving, always connected. We sense that there is a deeper rhythm to life, but the illusion of unbroken connectedness obscures it from us. . . .

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How might we recapture the frequency of that rhythm? How can we reclaim the meaning of the distinction between signal and noise?

The Hebrew Bible and the Jewish tradition that has evolved from it over the last 3000 years offer us one simple, profound tool to address this challenge: We call it Shabbat . . .

Shabbat is the greatest gift of the ancient Jewish people to human civilization. In its simplest form, Shabbat is a day set apart from the other days of the week, a day of cessation from work. In the place of striving and commerce, creativity and productivity, we are instructed simply to be: to rest, rejoice, be with family and friends, eat and drink for pleasure, talk about what really matters, sing, pray, and give thanks for our blessings. It is a radio frequency completely free of static, one where the music and the wisdom and the connectedness come through with crystal clarity. . . .

Available online at thriveglobal.com. Viewed May 2021.

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KEY TERMS

Kedushah. [קְדֻשָּׁה. **Holiness or sanctity**]. A major biblical concept expressing the quality of things that are Godlike or set apart for particular closeness to God. *Kedushah* is attained through the observance of mitzvot and emulation of God who is regarded as the ultimate source of holiness.

Kevod Shabbat. [כְּבוֹד שַׁבָּת. **Honor of Shabbat**]. *O*ne of the central concepts of Shabbat, one honors Shabbat through special preparations including: washing and bathing, cleaning the house, putting on special clothing, and saving one's appetite for the Shabbat meals.

***Oneg Shabbat*. [עֹנֶג שַׁבָּת. Shabbat delight**]. One of the central concepts of Shabbat, one delights in the Shabbat by purchasing and preparing the best foods, consuming three meals over the course of the day, and conjugal relations.

Shabbat. [שַׁבָּת, **Sabbath**]. The seventh day of the week. The Torah describes how God refrained from creative activity on the seventh day of Creation and that the Jewish people are commanded to follow God's example and refrain from work (*melakhah*) on this day.

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KEY NAMES

Achad HaAm. (1856–1927) (Pen name of Asher Ginsberg) Russian Jewish writer and thinker who envisioned Zionism as the catalyst for the cultural revitalization of the Jewish people.

Buchdahl, Angela Warnick. Serves as the senior rabbi of Central Synagogue in New York City, the first woman to lead the large Reform congregation in its more than 180-year history. Born in Korea to a Jewish American father and a Korean Buddhist mother, she is the first Asian American to be ordained as cantor or rabbi in North America.

Burden, Janet. Ordained Reform rabbi who studied at the Leo Baeck College, London. Prior to becoming a rabbi, she worked for the development agency, OXFAM. She acts as Liberal Judaism's rabbinic advisor on issues of social justice.

Elior, Rachel. (born 28 December 1949). An Israeli professor of Jewish philosophy and mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her specialties include early Jewish Mysticism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Messianism, Chasidism, Chabad, and the role of women in Jewish culture. She has been a visiting professor at Princeton University, UCLA, Yeshiva University, the University of Tokyo, Doshisha University in Kyoto, Case Western University in Cleveland, and at the University of Michigan.

Greenberg, Irving ("Yitz"). An ordained Orthodox rabbi, a Harvard Ph.D. and scholar, he has been a seminal thinker in confronting the Holocaust as a historical transforming event and Israel as the Jewish assumption of power and the beginning of a third era in Jewish history. He is the president of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation whose mission is to create new institutions and initiatives to enrich the inner life (religious, cultural, institutional) of American Jewry. From 1974 through 1997, he served as founding President of CLAL – The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. (1907–1972). A religious philosopher, he served as professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Author of numerous books on philosophy, Bible, *kabbalah*, and Chasidism including *The Prophets*, *A Passion for Truth*, *The Earth Is the Lord's, Man's Quest for God*, *The Sabbath,* and *God in Search of Man*.

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Moses, Jay Henry. Vice President of The Wexner Foundation, having served for many years as Director of the Wexner Heritage Program, North America's premier Jewish leadership education program.

Weinberg, Noah. (1930–2009). Rabbi, dean, and founder of Aish HaTorah, an Orthodox Jewish organization dedicated to education and outreach.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

Greenberg, I. 1988. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 127-181.

Heschel, A. J. 1979. *The Sabbath.* Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Canada Ltd.

Pinson, D. 2020. *The Mystery of Shabbos: Shabbat Rediscovered*. New York: IYYUN Publishing.

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LIVING WISDOM:
ENGAGING, SOULFUL JEWISH LEARNING SERIES

OMG, CAN YOU BELIEVE?!

COURSEBOOK

Curriculum Author: Dr. Sandra Lilienthal
Developmental Editor: Rabbi Abe Weschler
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THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

Melton

OUR ROOTS

Our founder, Florence Zacks Melton z"l (1911-2007), was an inventor, an innovator and an activist in many areas of her life. It was her vision to bring to life a comprehensive and sophisticated program of Jewish learning for adults. The Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning, a project of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was launched in 1986.

OUR PURPOSE

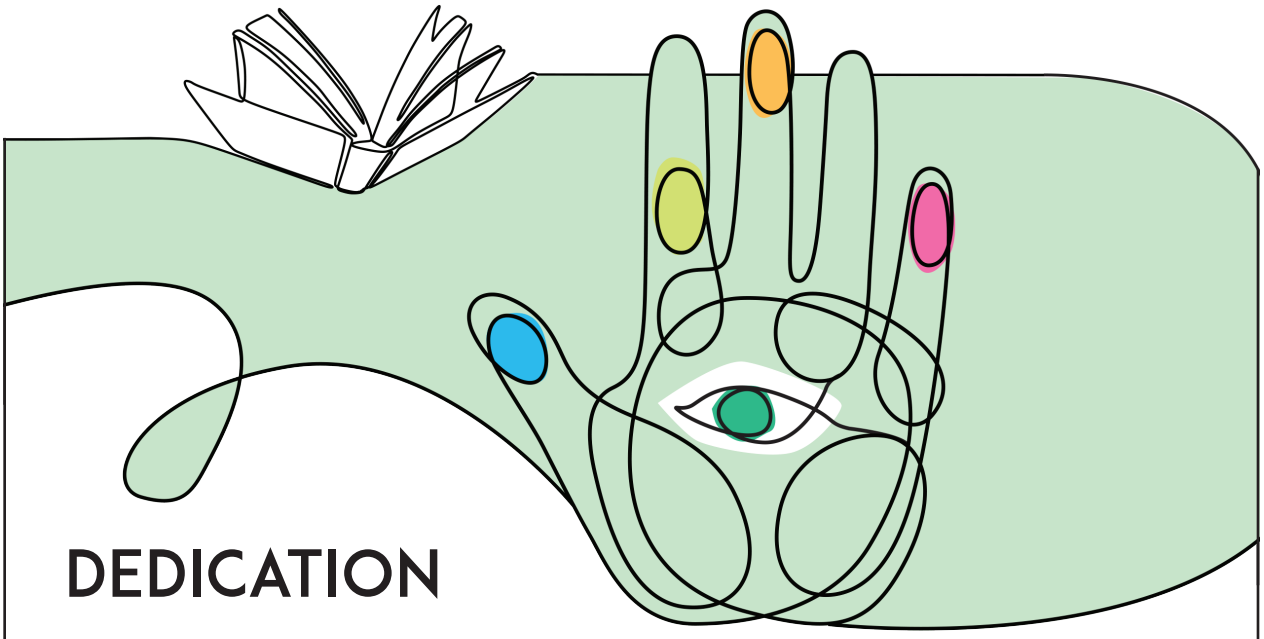
Melton engages learners in a life-enhancing study of Jewish texts and ideas that nurtures and deepens Jewish community worldwide.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- **An Engaging Curriculum:** Developed by insightful scholars, taught by highly-skilled educators, and reviewed by experts at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- **Interactive Classes:** We encourage open dialogue and discussion between learners and educators as we approach every topic with curiosity and sincerity.
- **Wisdom For Life:** We make Jewish texts and ideas accessible, inspirational and enriching for our learners.
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For more information, visit **MeltonSchool.org**.

האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM



DEDICATION

In memory of our parents,

BRUNETTE AND IRWIN BAMBERGER
AND HERMAN AND MYRTLE KATZ

and in memory of our ancestors,

many of whose names we do not know,

who brought us to this day.

We are grateful, and pleased to share this Melton course with you.

With appreciation to all

PHYLLIS AND DON KATZ
BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

2021 / 5781

THE MELTON FUNDERS COUNCIL

The Melton Funders Council is a philanthropic vanguard of donors committed to supporting The Florence Melton School as the organization takes major steps towards the implementation of its new bold strategic plan.

As Melton seeks to grow its circle of learners, strengthen Jewish community and revitalize the way it does business, the Melton Funders Council provides an important means for achieving the level of financial support Melton needs to realize these goals and objectives.

Melton is grateful to the following generous donors who as of June 2025 support our work as committed members of the Melton Funders Council:

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With gratitude to my teachers who inspire my learning

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On behalf of the Jewish learning community throughout the world

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OMG, CAN YOU BELIEVE?!

OMG, Can You Believe?!
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Words of Welcome	8
A Word About Your Coursebook	9
A Tree of Life - Icon glossary	11
About the Author	12
Acknowledgements	13
Lesson 1 - God-ness Gracious	14
Lesson 2 - The Human Journey: Are we there yet?!	36
Lesson 3 - If not-for-Prophets...	52
Lesson 4 - Guided by Grace: Exploring Divine Providence	74
Lesson 5 - Wins and Sins: Do God and Free Will go Together?	92
Lesson 6 - There's a Mitzvah for that!	116

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WELCOME TO JEWISH LEARNING

Dear Melton Learner,

Welcome to a very special journey in Jewish learning.

The **Living Wisdom** series has been specially designed to give you the opportunity choose topics that interest you, Jewish concepts that have piqued your curiosity or that have particular relevance for you at this moment in your life.

As you venture into the exploration of these Jewish ideas, traditions, and values, we encourage you to seek within the texts and the robust discussions about them points of personal connection to a Judaism that feels authentically yours.

Our rabbis taught that the study of Torah, the study of Jewish texts, is a continual timeless enterprise, one that offers new insights and understandings with every re-examination.

> *Ben Bag Bag says: Search in it and search in it, for everything is in it.*
> —Mishnah Avot 5:22

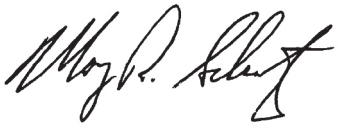
It is most certainly the case that revisiting Jewish texts can uncover for us new information not gleaned in earlier readings. But we believe this teaching of Ben Bag Bag points to something much deeper: Jewish learning is intended to help us reveal "everything" about ourselves, the learners of the texts.

In other words, as we change, we discover that the traditions, values, and stories found among our Jewish teachings speak to us differently, illuminating new perspectives on how we see ourselves and the world around us.

It is our hope that your study of **Living Wisdom** will offer you an engaging, soulful Jewish learning experience that will inspire you, enrich your thoughts and constantly renew your interest in continuing on a lifelong path of Jewish learning.



Rabbi Rachel Bovitz
Executive Director



Rabbi Morey Schwartz, EdD
International Director of Education and Innovation

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A WORD ABOUT YOUR COURSEBOOK

Welcome to what is going to be an exciting and engaging six week journey with the Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning!

The Coursebook comprises the texts for the OMG, Can You Believe?! course. This curriculum has been designed not only to inform but also to challenge you, our learners. The goal is to encourage you to rethink many issues and subjects you may have already formed your own opinions about or developed your own personal perspectives on. We encourage you to approach your studies with a willingness to consider issues from new perspectives and grow in your appreciation of the complexity of Jewish thought and wisdom. Education is the result not of information absorption alone, but of an ongoing engagement in the act of reflecting, reconsidering, and revising one's own understanding on a regular basis.

> Despite the varieties of lifestyles and outlooks among Jews today, there are certain organizing principles that cut across many of these differences and underlie the sense of common destiny and interdependence that so many Jews feel…. The Jewish concepts of God and *mitzvah* (commandment) and the biblical narratives of creation and of history are interwoven into Jewish practice, producing a distinctive outlook that shapes Jewish identity.
>
> —Dr. David Hartman, I Am Jewish, 2004

Our hope is that our curriculum will stimulate much discussion in your class and at home as well. Please share what you have learned in class with others, and in that way, expand the circle of learning and understanding.

Please note that in a typical class you will not address all of the texts included for a given lesson. In most lessons, there are more texts than can be realistically covered in 90 minutes. Also, we leave it to the teacher's discretion to choose to emphasize and discuss certain texts more thoroughly than others. You are strongly encouraged to read through the omitted texts during the course of the week to broaden your understanding of each subject. Each text in the curriculum is accompanied by a short source description.

For the translation of the biblical text, this course uses The JPS Tanakh: Gender Sensitive Edition (2023). Melton has made efforts to present learners with original texts and as-close-as-possible translations, with minor or no modifications. The texts are a product of their

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time and place and their respective authors; in some instances their language reflects that. Where modern sensibilities differ with the language or content of these texts to one degree or another – such as some texts that refer to God in the masculine or use the term "Man" when referring to humanity as a whole – the analyses make note of that, and where they do not, Melton trusts that its instructors and learners will not let the dated language interfere with their appreciation of the message of the text.

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE – *OMG, CAN YOU BELIEVE?!*

For many Jews, God is rarely discussed. And if God is spoken about, it is often in the context of their Jewish formal education as a child – oftentimes, never to be revisited in their adult years. This unfortunate reality leaves many feeling uncomfortable discussing God and troubled by their own unsophisticated childhood concept of the divine that does not speak to the complicated world they are experiencing.

This course explores the many different understandings of God and of God's relationship to humanity in Jewish thought through classic and modern texts reflective of the perspectives of many different Jewish thinkers.

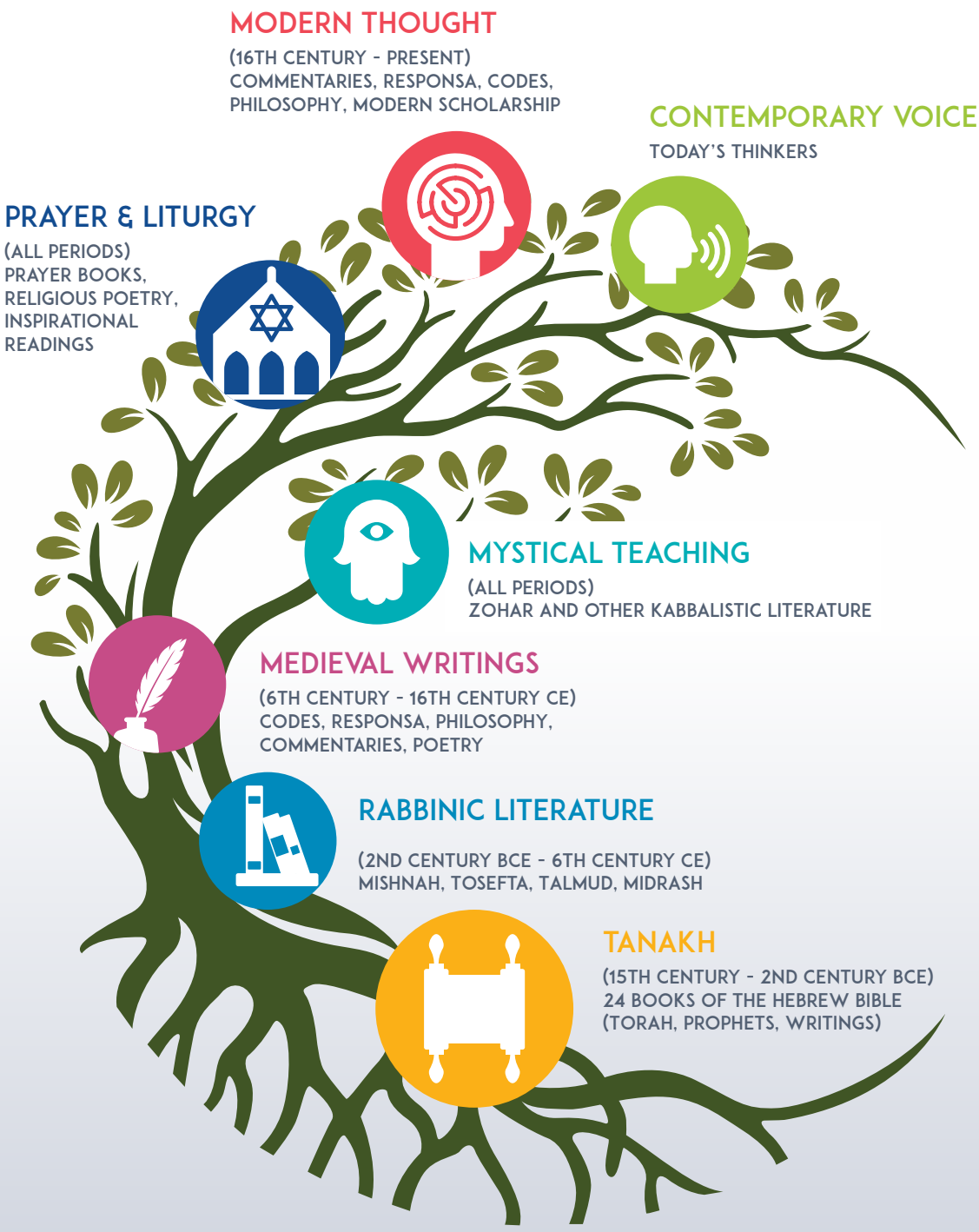
OMG, Can You Believe?! raises some of the challenging questions Jews ask themselves and supports learners in asking their own deep faith questions as they search for personal answers to the "God questions" that confront people all through their lives:

- What are Jewish understandings of God?
- How does one understand the relationship between God and humankind in Judaism?
- What was the role of prophecy in the development of the relationship between God and humankind?
- Does God intervene in people's daily lives?
- How does free will impact one's relationship with God?
- How does Judaism understand "sin"?
- How are mitzvot (commandments) a link between Jews and God?

What unifies these topics is the ongoing attempt to understand the bilateral relationship between God and humanity, encouraging learners to delve into their own assumptions and to simultaneously expand their understandings of Jewish theology by becoming acquainted with multiple, differing perspectives.

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A TREE OF LIFE



עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ (משלי ג:יח)

It is a tree of life for those who embrace it (Proverbs 3:18)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Sandra Lilienthal was born and raised in Brazil, where she received her MBA in Marketing and Strategic Planning. After almost 10 years in the business world, she pursued a major change in careers, and for the last 30 years has been working in Jewish education in many different capacities: from religious school teacher and Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutor, to Director of Education of two synagogues, to Director of Lifelong Learning. She has taught every age from preschool to adults, both in Brazil and in the USA (Texas and Florida). In the past 16 years, Sandra has focused on teaching adults in South Florida.

Sandra received her Master's degree in Jewish Studies and her doctorate in Jewish Education from Gratz College, writing her dissertation on Adult Jewish Education. She teaches for two Melton schools in South Florida, and is a frequent speaker on Jewish education themes at conferences, in synagogues, and elsewhere. She has written curricula for the Central Agency for Jewish Education and for the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Sandra recorded an ELI Talk in 2016 and was the recipient of the 2015 Covenant Award for Excellence in Jewish Education. Sandra has great enthusiasm for teaching Judaism as a living religion and infusing a true passion for it amongst her students.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To our editor, Rabbi Abe Weschler, for working directly with the author, bringing his wealth of Judaic knowledge, passion for research, and writing expertise throughout the editing process.

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GOD-NESS GRACIOUS

Note:
This lesson includes more texts than can be covered in a 90-minute session. We encourage you to explore the texts not covered in class on your own time.

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TERMS RELATED TO BELIEF IN GOD

Agnosticism - (Greek - not knowing). A general term to indicate suspension of judgment regarding the existence of God. An agnostic does not know that God exists or that God does not exist.

Atheism - (Greek - no deity). A general term for the position that there is no God/deity. An atheist does not believe in God.

Deism - A system of belief that posits God's existence as the cause of all things and admits God's perfection but rejects Divine revelation and government, proclaiming the all-sufficiency of natural laws. A deist believes in God that set things into motion but is not involved.

Theism - The position that affirms the existence of a deity. A theist believes in (at least one) God who interacts with humans and the known universe via methods of divine intervention.

Pantheism - A doctrine that identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God. A pantheist considers God identical to the Universe or Nature.

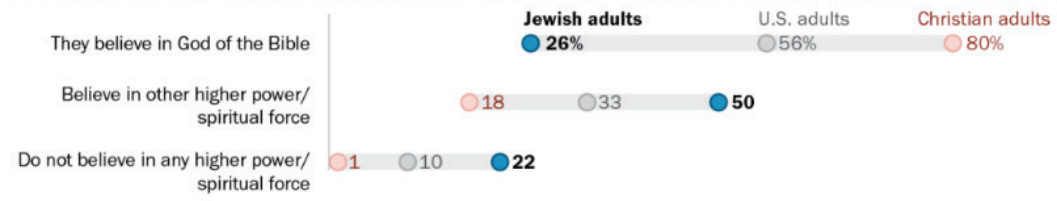
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PEW STUDY ON JEWS AND BELIEF IN GOD

I. COMPARING JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN GOD IN U.S.

U.S. Jews less likely than Christians to believe in God



Note: Jewish adults include both Jews by religion and Jews of no religion.
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. Jews, and Jan. 21-Feb. 3, 2020 (belief in God), and Aug. 3-16, 2020 (importance of religion and attendance), among U.S. adults overall.
"Jewish Americans in 2020"

Available at pewresearch.org. Viewed April 2025.

II. JEWISH BELIEF IN GOD ACROSS THE DENOMINATIONS IN THE U.S.

Vast majority of Orthodox Jews say religion is very important to them, but few Reform Jews say the same

% of U.S. Jews who say ...

	All U.S. Jews	Jews by religion	Jews of no religion	Orthodox Jews	Conservative Jews	Reform Jews
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Religion is very important to them	21	28	2	86	33	14
Somewhat important	26	33	6	9	46	33
Not too/not at all important	53	38	91	4	20	53
They attend religious services ...						
Weekly	12	16	<1	73	14	4
Once or twice a month	8	12	<1	11	19	10
A few times a year	27	33	8	13	42	38
Seldom/never	52	38	91	3	25	48
They believe in God of the Bible	26	33	7	93	37	18
Believe in other higher power/ spiritual force	50	51	48	6	50	59
Do not believe in any higher power/ spiritual force	22	14	44	1	9	21

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults.
"Jewish Americans in 2020"
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Available at pewresearch.org. Viewed April 2025.

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SUMMARY POINTS BASED ON PEW SURVEYS FROM 2013 AND 2020 (BELIEF IN GOD)

Based on 2013 and 2020

- 76% U.S. Jews believe in God or a universal spirit.
- 84% Jews by religion say they believe in God or a universal spirit.
- 55% Among Jews of no religion say they believe in God or a universal spirit.
- Most Jews see no conflict between being Jewish and not believing in God; two-thirds say that a person can be Jewish even if he or she does not believe in God.
- Belief in God is much more common among the general public than among Jews. Even among Jews by religion, belief in God is less common than among members of other major U.S. religious groups. And Jews of no religion are more skeptical of God's existence than is the religiously unaffiliated general public.
- 27% of Jewish adults do not identify with the Jewish religion, according to the 2020 Pew Research Center study. They identify as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular" religiously. That's up from 22% from the 2013 Pew study.
- Though most Jews express some doubt about God's existence, certainty about God is nearly universal among Orthodox Jews, 89% of whom say they are absolutely convinced of God's existence. Far fewer Jews from other denominational backgrounds share this level of conviction.

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TEXT 1
OPTION 1 - ELIANA LIGHT, *SKYMAN*

Jewish educator, musician, and prayer leader dedicated to making Jewish liturgy and spirituality accessible and meaningful.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

Dear Skyman, up in the sky,
Are You friends with all the birds flying by
Or are You too high up to see them?
Dear Skyman, looking on us below,
Is there anything that You don't already know,
Like where I will go, why, what and when?

My teachers tell me all of Your stories
Of the miracles that You can do.
Arks and floods and a bush that is burning,
I can only assume it's all true.

They say I should love You,
They say I should talk to You,
And I try!
I close my eyes
And imagine a Dude in the sky.
Dear Skyman, who created us all,
Can You really lift me up when I fall
Or are You too tall to reach down here?
Dear Skyman, do You like when I pray?
Can You listen to every word that I say
From so far away, does it sound clear?
My teachers tell me all of Your powers,
How You give people things they ask for.
Healing the sick and feeding the hungry,
You could do all of this and do more.

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They say I should love You,
They say I should talk to You,
And I try!
I close my eyes
And imagine a Dude in sky.

Now I know You're not really a man (per se)
But the image still forms in my mind.
I've tried to change it,
I'm not sure that I can
'Cause it's been this way for a long time.

I want to be near you,
I want to be close to you,
And I try!
But when I close my eyes…
I still picture a Dude in the sky.



OPTION 2 - ELIANA LIGHT, *EXCERPT FROM ELI TALKS- THE GOD GAP*

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

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TEXT 2
EXODUS (*SHEMOT*) 3:13–15

13 Moses said to God, “When I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘By which name?’ what shall I say to them?” **14** And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh,” continuing, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’” **15** And God said further to Moses, “Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: GOD [YHVH], the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you:

This shall be My name forever,
This My appellation for all eternity.

שְׁמוֹת ג, יג-טו

יג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָא אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ לִי מַה שְּׁמוֹ מָה אֹמַר אֲלֵהֶם. יד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם. טו וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם זֶה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זִכְרִי לְדֹר דֹּר.



TEXT 3
EXODUS (*SHEMOT*) 20:1–6

1 God spoke all these words, saying:
2 I the ETERNAL am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage:
3 You shall have no other gods besides Me. **4** You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the ETERNAL your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, **6** but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

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שְׁמוֹת כ, א-ו

א וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר. ב אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים. ג לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פָּנָי. ד לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וַאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת וַאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ. ה לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תָעָבְדֵם כִּי אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבֹת עַל בָּנִים עַל שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל רִבֵּעִים לְשֹׂנְאָי. ו וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לַאֲלָפִים לְאֹהֲבַי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי.

TEXT 4
RABBI NACHMAN OF BRATSLAV, *LIKUTEI MOHARAN* 33:2

(1772–1810) Founder of the Breslov Chasidic movement; great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov; not writing his own works, the books containing his teachings and sayings were compiled and edited by his student Rabbi Natan Sternhartz (1780–1844).

One ought to know that "[God's] glory fills the whole earth" (Isaiah 6:3), and there is no space empty of God, God filling all the worlds, and surrounding all the worlds.

רַבִּי נַחְמָן מִבְּרֶסְלֶב, לִקּוּטֵי מוֹהֲר"ן לג, ב

צָרִיךְ לָדַעַת שֶׁמְּלֹא כָל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ וְלֵית אֲתַר פָּנוּי מִינֵיהּ וְאִיהוּ מְמַלֵּא כָל עָלְמִין וְסוֹבֵב כָּל עָלְמִין.

TEXT 5
DR. ERICH SELIGMANN FROMM, *SECULAR HUMANISM*

(1900–1980) German-American Jewish social psychologist, psychoanalyst, and humanistic philosopher.

Humanistic religion, on the contrary, is centered around man and his strength. Man must develop his power of reason in order to understand himself, his relationship to his fellow men and his position in the universe. He must recognize the truth, both

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with regard to his limitations and his potentialities. He must develop his power of love for others as well as for himself and experience solidarity of all living beings. He must have principles and norms to guide him in this aim. Religious experience in this kind of religion is the experience of oneness with the All, based on one's relatedness to the world as it is grasped with thought and with love. Man's aim in humanistic religion is to achieve the greatest strength…God is a symbol of man's own power which he tries to realize in his life, and is not a symbol of force and domination, having power over man. . . .

God is not a symbol of power over man but of man's own powers…

…in humanistic religion God is the image of man's higher self, a symbol of what man potentially is or ought to become.

Fromm, E. 1961. *Psychoanalysis and Religion.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 37, 49.

TEXT 6
RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, *GOD IN SEARCH OF MAN*

(1907–1972) A religious philosopher in the United States and Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

If I had to make a statement about God, one that is fundamental in Judaism, it would be that God is in search of man. It is the fundamental statement about God in Judaism. It is the fundamental statement in the inner life of a human being in relation to God in the world. If I were to summarize all of human history as seen in the Bible, it would be a simple formula: God in search of man. It is a paradoxical formula, to be sure. It is not a Hellenistic formula. It is a biblical formula. It is a rabbinic formula. . . .

Heschel, A., ed. 1996. *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 158.

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TEXT 7
RABBI DEBRA ORENSTEIN, *AT HOME WITH GOD*

Alumna of the first entering class at The Jewish Theological Seminary to include women. Acclaimed Scholar-in-residence and editor of the *Lifecycles* series.

The night before the Passover of my first spring in Los Angeles, I "hid" some stale crackers in several places around the apartment. As I reached for my ritual feather and spoon, I tried to meditate on the spiritual meaning of *hametz*: That there are things, perfectly allowable and appropriate in our lives at a certain point, which, at another time, are no longer fitting. They need to be cleaned out and perhaps ritually or metaphorically burned. I contemplated what I needed to let go—including certain attachments to my parents' home—and imagined this release as a form of Passover liberation.

But these enlightened thoughts did not cure my homesickness nor my sense that I was, in the current ritual, quite ridiculous. How pathetic to hide leaven and then pretend to find it yourself! I was lonely.

Suddenly, some strange, disconcerting words came into my head: "This must be how God feels." The experience of hiding bread and then going through the ironic exercise of "discovering" it is a metaphor for God's position in the universe. God sows away light for the righteous, only to recover it and bestow it as a gift (Psalms 97:11; Ex. *Rabbah* 35:1); God disseminates broken vessels through the process of creation, that they and the world might be repaired. God plants the seeds of redemption, knowing the end already at the beginning and yet playing the game. In a profound and mysterious twist, God hides God, and relies on humanity to do the looking. . . .

. . . There is only a kind of loving game—like the game of "here I am" one plays with a baby, first hiding behind one's hands, then popping out. Or perhaps the game is hide-and-seek, after all . . .

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Sometimes God needs to be found—and sometimes we do, too. Sometimes God turns the corner to find only the divine plan and Self—no partner at all . . . And all through the hiding and the seeking, God dwells on high and in our hearts, and we live in our ancestral and our private homes. And God and home are wherever we let them in.

Orenstein, D. and J. R. Litman, eds. 1997. *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Biblical Themes in Contemporary Life, volume 2*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 40–43. With permission of Turner Publishing Company, LLC.



TEXT 8
DR. REBECCA GOLDSTEIN, *WHY IS A JEWISH ATHEIST DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER ATHEISTS?* (2024)

(b. 1950) Distinguished American philosopher, novelist, and public intellectual.

I don't think I have to name the tune humming beneath my title. Even if you are, like me, a Jewish atheist, you've probably attended a seder recently.

That the ghost of the seder's Four Questions haunts my title encapsulates the paradox I'd like to explore. It's the paradox embodied in those I'd call – and, more important, in those who would call themselves – Jewish atheists. The paradox begins with giving both words equal importance, making it more an exclusive term than an inclusive one: Not all non-believing Jews qualify as Jewish atheists in my sense.

To narrow the class down even further, here are Four Questions, sung accordingly:

While other atheists don't identify themselves with their birth religion, why does a Jewish atheist continue to actively identify as Jewish?

While other atheists don't necessarily highlight ethics, why are ethics of such central concern to a Jewish atheist?

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While other atheists don't necessarily emphasize the primacy of reason in human endeavor, why does a Jewish atheist see reason as redemptive?

While other atheists may be indifferent to the flourishing of those who share their birth religion, why does the well-being of Jews remain of paramount concern to the Jewish atheist?

These questions indicate a type of atheist with a pronounced ethical sensibility, committed to a reasoned moral universalism that would eliminate all boundaries between peoples, and yet who is acutely responsive to the particularism that goes by the name of "Jewish identity." Jewishness matters to such atheists, in a way not logically entailed by – perhaps not even entirely reconcilable with – robust universalism, despite their abiding faith in the redemptive value of reason. The tension of quasi-paradox lives within the Jewish atheist, and tensions are known to inspire creative resolutions . . .

. . .

And so it is that, without having one thought too many, we Jewish atheists religiously (so to speak) attend our yearly seders, perhaps making cynical jokes in the spirit of Heine, maybe objecting in the spirit of Spinoza to the narrative of miracles that a supernatural God supposedly performed on behalf of a chosen people. But we are there to celebrate an almost fanatical love of justice and desire for personal independence. We are there to sing, in the spirit of love and eternal hopefulness, "Next year in Jerusalem."

Available at sapirjournals.org. Viewed March 2025.

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TEXT 9
RABBI AMY EILBERG, *WHERE IS GOD FOR YOU? A JEWISH FEMINIST FAITH*

(b. 1954) The first woman ordained as a Conservative rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, she serves as the director of Kol Haneshamah, the Jewish Hospice Program of Ruach Ami, the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center.

. . . We do not think about God as an immediate, caring, comforting presence to be called on at moments of personal need. We do not think of God as a resource at moments of deep feeling. Most of us do not think about God at all. Until, that is, we are really in trouble, really in need, when we are hurting too much to play by the old rules. Then we often find ourselves looking for something more. . . .

[When], as an adult, I experienced private pain and struggle, the spirituality I had known had failed me. I needed something that would be available to me between rallies, between legislative campaigns. For all the richness of Jewish ritual, I still lacked a way to relate to God between Jewish holidays, between Sunday and Friday, when there was no major life passage at hand, when it wasn't time to daven *Minhah* (pray the daily afternoon service) nor *Ma'ariv* (daily evening service). I needed a spiritual discipline that could speak to the private places of pain and joy within me. I needed a God who could envelop me when I suffered shame or grief or loneliness, a God who could celebrate with me when life was full of beauty and blessing. . . .

. . . I learned that I did *not* believe in [the] Sunday school version of God, the God who is the answer to the question, "Is there Someone sitting up there in heaven?" God was becoming for me an answer to a different set of questions: What is it that makes life worth living? What is it that allows people to find meaning in the midst of unspeakable suffering, to find strength in times of pain and loss? How do I cultivate a sense that life is good, that I am cared for, that I am not alone, even in difficult times? What can I do to nourish sanctity in my life?

Orenstein, D. and J. R. Litman, eds. 1997. *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Biblical Themes in Contemporary Life, volume 2*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 104–110. With permission of Turner Publishing Company, LLC.

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TEXT 10
RABBI DR. MORDECAI M. KAPLAN, *THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION*

(1881–1983) American rabbi and founder of the Reconstructionist movement.

January 15, 1931 - After all the years of thinking on the problem of religion, I am still at a loss how to connect the conclusions I hold with the actual situation in which we find ourselves. I know very well what I mean by God. God to me is the process that makes for creativity, integration, love and justice. The function of prayer is to render us conscious of that process. I can react with a sense of holiness and momentousness to existence because it is continually being worked upon by this divine process. I am not troubled in the least by the fact that God is not an identifiable being; for that matter neither is my Ego an identifiable being. Nor am I troubled by the fact that God is not perfect. He [*sic*] would have to be static to be perfect. Nothing dynamic can be perfect since to be dynamic implies to be in the state of becoming.
But how shall I relate all these ideas to the problem of Jewish religion?

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation. 2000. "Mordecai Kaplan's Diary and the Search for Meaning." *Reconstructionism Today* 7(3).

. . . as far as Jewish religion, with its teachings and rituals, is concerned, it matters very little how we conceive of God, as long as we so believe in God that belief in Him makes a tremendous difference in our lives.

Kaplan, M. 1956. *Questions Jews Ask*. New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 87.

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TEXT 11
RABBI DAVID AARON, VIDEO: HOW CAN WE DESCRIBE GOD?

Founder and Dean of Isralight, an international organization dedicated to inspiring a renaissance in Jewish life.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

TEXT 12
RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL MORGENSZTERN OF KOTZK, *GOD'S DWELLING*

(1787–1859) Chasidic rabbi and leader in Poland, better known as the Kotzker Rebbe.

"Where is the dwelling of God?"

This was the question with which the rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned men who happened to be visting him.

They laughed at him: "What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of his glory!" Then he answered his own question:

"God dwells wherever man lets him in."

Buber, M. 1948. *Tales of the Hasidim – The Later Masters*. New York: Schocken, 277.

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KEY TERMS

Chasidut. **[חֲסִידוּת]**
1. [Piety] An abstract noun form of the Hebrew word *chesed* indicating the collection of traits and attitudes associated with righteous, devout living.
2. A Jewish mystical, ascetic movement in the German Rhineland during the 12th and 13th centuries.
3. A mystical-spiritual movement that developed in southern Poland at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries. The movement emphasized the importance of joy and *devekut* (דְּבֵיקוּת, lit. "cleaving") to God in Jewish life. Each particular group of Chasidim gather around a teacher or charismatic leader, known as a rebbe or *tzaddik*. The movement was faced with opposition in its first century of existence, and some tensions still remain between adherents of the movement and their opponents (*mitnagdim*).

Humanistic Judaism. A human-centered philosophy that combines the celebration of Jewish culture and identity with an adherence to humanistic values and ideas. Established by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine (1928–2007) in 1963 in Detroit, Michigan, it offers a non-theistic alternative in contemporary Jewish life.

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KEY NAMES

Aaron, Rabbi David. Educator, spiritual leader, and author, renowned for his deep exploration of Jewish mysticism and his commitment to making Torah teachings accessible. In 1986, he founded Isralight, an organization dedicated to inspiring a worldwide Jewish renaissance through innovative educational solutions that empower Jews to experience the relevance, wisdom, and joy of Jewish living.

Eilberg, Rabbi Amy. (b. 1954) First woman ordained as a Conservative rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. She serves as the director of the Pardes Rodef Shalom Communities Program, helping synagogues and Jewish organizations place the pursuit of peace in interpersonal relationships at the center of their communal mission. She also serves as a spiritual director and interfaith activist in the San Francisco Bay area.

Fromm, Erich Seligman. (1900–1980) A German-American Jewish social psychologist, psychoanalyst, humanistic philosopher, and democratic socialist, he was associated with what became known as the Frankfurt School of critical theory. He studied Talmud as a young man while working toward his doctorate in sociology, but turned away from Orthodox Judaism in 1926 toward secular interpretations of scriptural ideals.

Goldstein, Rebecca Newberger. (b. 1950) Distinguished American philosopher, novelist, and public intellectual. Throughout her academic career, she has taught philosophy at institutions including Barnard College, Columbia University, Rutgers University, Trinity College, Harvard University, and New York University. Her writings include "Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity" (2006). In 1996, she received a MacArthur Fellowship, often referred to as the "Genius Grant." She was awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2014 by President Barack Obama. Additionally, she was named Humanist of the Year in 2011 by the American Humanist Association.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. (1907–1972). A religious philosopher. Served as professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Author of numerous books on philosophy, Bible, *kabbalah*, and Chasidism including *The Prophets*, *A Passion for Truth*, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, *Man's Quest for God*, *The Sabbath*, and *God in Search of Man*.

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Kaplan, Mordecai M. (1881–1983) Essayist and Jewish educator, ideologue of the Reconstructionist Judaism movement. In 1889, he immigrated with his mother and sisters to the United States to join his father in New York. From 1893 to 1902 he studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Kaplan began his career as an Orthodox rabbi. From 1934 until 1970 Kaplan wrote a series of books in which he expressed his Reconstructionist ideology, centered on the "concept of Judaism as a civilization." He was a prolific writer, keeping a journal throughout most of his life.

Light, Eliana. Jewish educator, musician, and prayer leader dedicated to making Jewish liturgy and spirituality accessible and meaningful. Raised in a nurturing Jewish home in Memphis, Tennessee, by her parents—a rabbi and a Jewish educator—she developed a deep love for Jewish ritual, culture, and sacred music. She is the founder and head "T'fillahsopher" of The Light Lab, a center dedicated to prayer education and transformative t'fillah experiences. Additionally, she co-hosts The Light Lab Podcast, exploring various facets of Jewish prayer and spirituality.

Maimonides. (1135–1204) Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Moses Maimonides, was born in Spain, but he lived most of his life in Egypt, where he served as a physician and leader of the Jewish community. He is one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and codifiers of all time. His *Mishneh Torah* became one of the central works of halakhic literature and his Guide for the Perplexed (*Moreh Nevukhim*) is one of the most important Jewish philosophical treatises ever written.

Morgensztern, Menachem Mendel (Kotzker Rebbe). (1787–1859) A Chasidic rabbi and leader, he was born to a non-Chasidic family in Goraj near Lublin, Poland, and became attracted to Chasidim in his youth. He was known for having acquired impressive talmudic and kabbalistic knowledge at a young age. He is known for his incisive and down-to-earth philosophies and sharp-witted sayings. From 1839 until the end of his life twenty years later, he lived in seclusion.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. (1772 –1810) The founder of the Breslov Chasidic movement, he was a great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov. He breathed new life into the Chasidic movement by combining classic teachings with insightful psychological interpretations. He attracted thousands of followers during his lifetime and his influence continues until today.

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Orenstein, Rabbi Debra. Seventh-generation rabbi and a member of the first class at The Jewish Theological Seminary to ordain women. She has been serving as the spiritual leader of Congregation B'nai Israel in Emerson, New Jersey, since 2010. Previously, she taught at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles for twenty years, instructing in various programs including rabbinical and continuing education. She has contributed to six books, notably the award-winning "Lifecycles" series, which explores Jewish women's experiences with life passages and personal milestones. Recognized by *The Jewish Forward* as "One of America's Most Inspiring Rabbis," she is a sought-after speaker and scholar-in-residence, bringing the relevance of Jewish tradition to audiences across North America.

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APPENDIX

The Appendix of the lesson presents two texts that address the debate among Jewish medieval philosophers on how to understand the physical descriptions of God in the Torah.

TEXT A
MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH, FOUNDATIONS OF TORAH* 1:8–9

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

8. Indeed, it is clearly indicated in the Torah and in the Prophets that God has no body, as it says, "that the Lord, (your God) is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Deuteronomy 4:39), and a corporeal being cannot be in two places simultaneously. It also says, "For you did not see any physical substance" (Deuteronomy 4:15) and "To whom would you liken Me, for Me to be their equal?" (Isaiah 40:25)—had God been corporeal, God would be like other corporeal entities.

9. If that is so, what does it mean when it is written in the Torah, "beneath [God's] feet" (Exodus 24:10), "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18), "the hand of God" (Exodus 9:3), "the eyes of God" (Deuteronomy 11:12), "the ears of God" (Numbers 11:18), and more like expressions? All [these expressions] are in keeping with what people – that are familiar with corporeal entities – know, and [so], the Torah used terminology [familiar] to people. [In reality, though,] all of these are [just] euphemisms . . . . for [God] has no image or form, and everything [described by the verse are things seen only] in prophetic visions. The truth, however, is that the human mind is incapable of understanding, nor can it grasp or comprehend [God]. This is as the verse says, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7).

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רַב מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מַיְמוֹן (רְמְבַּ"ם), מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת יְסוֹדֵי הַתּוֹרָה א, ח-ט

ח. הֲרֵי מְפֹרָשׁ בַּתּוֹרָה וּבַנְּבִיאִים שֶׁאֵין הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא גּוּף וּגְוִיָּה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר כִּי ה' (אֱלֹהֵיכֶם) הוּא אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת וְהַגּוּף לֹא יִהְיֶה בִּשְׁנֵי מְקוֹמוֹת וְנֶאֱמַר כִּי לֹא רְאִיתֶם כָּל תְּמוּנָה וְנֶאֱמַר וְאֶל מִי תְדַמְּיוּנִי וְאֶשְׁוֶה וְאִלּוּ הָיָה גּוּף הָיָה דּוֹמֶה לִשְׁאָר גּוּפִים.

ט. אִם כֵּן מַהוּ זֶה שֶׁכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה וְתַחַת רַגְלָיו כְּתוּבִים בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים יַד ה' עֵינֵי ה' אָזְנֵי ה' וְכַיּוֹצֵא בִּדְבָרִים הָאֵלּוּ הַכֹּל לְפִי דַּעְתָּן שֶׁל בְּנֵי אָדָם הוּא שֶׁאֵינָן מַכִּירִין אֶלָּא הַגּוּפוֹת וְדִבְּרָה תּוֹרָה כִּלְשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם וְהַכֹּל כְּנוּיִם הֵן . . . . שֶׁאֵין לוֹ דְּמוּת וְצוּרָה אֶלָּא הַכֹּל בְּמַרְאֵה הַנְּבוּאָה וּבְמַחֲזֵה וַאֲמִתַּת הַדָּבָר אֵין דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מֵבִין וְלֹא יְכוֹלָה לְהַשִּׂיגוֹ וּלְחָקְרוֹ וְזֶה שֶׁאָמַר הַכָּתוּב הַחֵקֶר אֱלוֹהַּ תִּמְצָא אִם עַד תַּכְלִית שַׁדַּי תִּמְצָא.

TEXT B
RA'AVAD, *MISHNEH TORAH, LAWS OF REPENTANCE 3:7*

(1125–1198) Rabbi Abraham ben David from Provence, mystic, commentator on Talmud and halacha including the Mishne Torah of Maimonides.

"One who admits there is only one master [of the universe], but that [this master] has a body and physical substance." Says Avraham: Why would [Rambam] call a [person who believes] this a heretic? [After all,] many are there that are greater and better than he that held this view [of God] based on what they saw in the biblical verses, and even more, based on what they saw in the rabbinic *aggadot* that confuse the minds.

רַב אַבְרָהָם בֶּן דָּוִד (רַאֲבַ"ד), מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה ג, ז

וְהָאוֹמֵר שֶׁיֵּשׁ שָׁם רִבּוֹן אֶחָד אֶלָּא שֶׁהוּא גּוּף וּבַעַל תְּמוּנָה. אָמַר אַבְרָהָם: וְלָמָּה קָרָא לְזֶה מִין וְכַמָּה גְּדוֹלִים וְטוֹבִים מִמֶּנּוּ הָלְכוּ בְּזוֹ הַמַּחְשָׁבָה לְפִי מַה שֶּׁרָאוּ בַּמִּקְרָאוֹת וְיוֹתֵר מִמַּה שֶּׁרָאוּ בְּדִבְרֵי הָאַגָּדוֹת הַמְּשַׁבְּשׁוֹת אֶת הַדֵּעוֹת.

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LESSON 2

THE HUMAN JOURNEY: ARE WE THERE YET?!

Note:
This lesson includes more texts than can be covered in a 90-minute session. We encourage you to explore the texts not covered in class on your own time.

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INTRODUCTORY TEXT
RABBI YOETZ KIM KADISH RAKATZ, *SIACH SARFEI KODESH* I, 233

(Early 20th century) Publisher and Chasidic writer.

I further heard in the name [of Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Peshischa (Poland, 1765–1827)], that he said every person must have two pockets to use when they need it. In one pocket [a note that reads], "For me the world was created" (Mishnah, Tractate *Sanhedrin* 4:5). In the other [a note that reads], "I am dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27).

רַב יוֹעֵץ קִים קַדִּישׁ, שִׂיחַ שַׂרְפֵי קֹדֶשׁ א, רלג

עוֹד שָׁמַעְתִּי בִּשְׁמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר שֶׁכָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד צָרִיךְ לִהְיוֹת לוֹ שְׁנֵי קעשינעס לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בּוֹ בְּעֵת צָרְכּוֹ.
בקעשינע אֶחָד בִּשְׁבִילִי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם ובהקעשינע הַשֵּׁנִי אָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר.

TEXT 1
GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 1:26–28

26 And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." **27** And God created humankind in the divine image,
creating it in the image of God—
creating them male and female. **28** God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."

בְּרֵאשִׁית א, כו-כח

כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ. כז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם. כח וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְכִבְשֻׁהָ וּרְדוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל הָאָרֶץ.

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TEXT 2
MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MOREH NEVUKHIM (GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED)* 1:1

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

Some have been of the opinion that by the Hebrew ẓelem, the shape and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led men to believe in the corporeality [of the Divine Being]: for they thought that the words "Let us make man in our ẓelem" (Gen. i. 26), implied that God had the form of a human being, i.e., that He had figure and shape, and that, consequently, He was corporeal . . . I hold that the Hebrew equivalent of "form" in the ordinary acceptation of the word, viz., the figure and shape of a thing, is toär . . . The term ẓelem, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing, . . . and in the phrase "Let us make man in our ẓelem" (Gen. i. 26), the term signifies "the specific form" of man, viz., his intellectual perception, and does not refer to his "figure" or "shape."

Maimonides, M. 1904. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 13–14.

TEXT 3
RABBI W. GUNTHER PLAUT, *BERESHIT* 1:27, *IN THE IMAGE OF GOD*

(1912–2012) Canadian Reform rabbi and theologian.

The creature called man is formed in the image of God, in His likeness. These words reflect the Torah's abiding wonder over man's special stature in creation, over his unique intellectual capacity, which bears the imprint of the Creator. Marveling at man's powers, the Bible finds him to be "little less than divine" (Ps. 8:6).

This likeness also describes man's moral potential. Man's nature is radically different from God's, but man is capable of approaching God's actions: His love, His mercy, His justice. Man becomes truly human as he attempts to do godly deeds.

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Man's likeness to the Divine has a third and most important meaning: it stresses the essential holiness and, by implication, the dignity of all men, without any distinctions.

Plaut, G. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981, 22.



TEXT 4
RABBI LAWRENCE TROSTER, *IN THE IMAGE: PESHAT*

(1953–2019) Conservative Rabbi and founder of Shomrei Bereshit: Rabbis and Cantors for the Earth and GreenFaith's Fellowship program; he also taught in the Florence Melton School at the UJA Federation of Northern New Jersey.

The Hebrew term for "image" (*tzelem*) has a cognate word in Old Akkadian and Old Babylonian that throws significant light upon the original nuance of the term used in Genesis. The cognate word (*tzalmu*) can mean a statue, a bodily shape, a figurine, or a relief drawing. The term sometimes refers to a statue or an image of the king, which is placed in a captured city or elsewhere in the kingdom as an extension of the king's presence and the king's law. In other words, it is as if the king were present wherever the king's *tzalmu* is placed. The king rules wherever his *tzalmu* stands.

Seen in this light, humanity is the *tzalmu* of God. Wherever humans are, the presence of God is reflected. This cannot be said of any other creature. Indeed, the command to multiply and spread over the earth is none other than a desire to spread the presence of God and to actualize God's power throughout creation, rather than a desire for mere numerical increase. It is as if God could not function in the world without humanity . . . This is certainly in accord with the Rabbinic idea of human beings as "partners of God in the work of Creation."

Troster, L. *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001, 178.

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TEXT 5
GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 2:7, 15–23

7 the ETERNAL God formed a Human from the soil's humus, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being.

15 The ETERNAL God settled the Human in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. **16** And the ETERNAL God commanded the Human, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat;
17 but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die." **18** The ETERNAL God said, "It is not good for the Human to be alone; I will make a fitting counterpart for him." **19** And the ETERNAL God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the Human to see what he would call them; and whatever the Human called each living creature, that would be its name. **20** And the Human gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but no fitting counterpart for a human being was found. **21** So the ETERNAL God cast a deep sleep upon the Human; and, while he slept, [God] took one of his sides and closed up the flesh at that site. **22** And the ETERNAL God fashioned the side that had been taken from the Human into a woman, bringing her to the Human. **23** Then the Human said,
"This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called the Woman,
For from the Man was she taken."

בְּרֵאשִׁית ב, ז, טו-כג

ז וַיִּיצֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.

טו וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ בְגַן עֵדֶן לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ. טז וַיְצַו ה' אֱלֹהִים עַל הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכֹּל עֵץ הַגָּן אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל. יז וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת. יח וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ. יט וַיִּצֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן הָאֲדָמָה כָּל

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חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת מַה יִּקְרָא לוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא לוֹ הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ. כ וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁמוֹת לְכָל הַבְּהֵמָה וּלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכֹל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וּלְאָדָם לֹא מָצָא עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ. כא וַיַּפֵּל ה' אֱלֹהִים תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אַחַת מִצַּלְעֹתָיו וַיִּסְגֹּר בָּשָׂר תַּחְתֶּנָּה. כב וַיִּבֶן ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַצֵּלָע אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִן הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבִאֶהָ אֶל הָאָדָם. כג וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הַפַּעַם עֶצֶם מֵעֲצָמַי וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקָּרֵא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לֻקֳחָה זֹּאת.



TEXT 6
PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *ON THE CREATION OF THE WORLD*

(20 BCE–50 CE) A Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who spanned two cultures, the Greek and the Hebrew.

After this, Moses says that "God made man, having taken clay from the earth, and he breathed into his face the breath of life." And by this expression he shows most clearly that there is a vast difference between man as generated now, and the first man who was made according to the image of God. For man as formed now is perceptible to the external senses, partaking of qualities, consisting of body and soul, man or woman, by nature mortal. But man, made according to the image of God, was an idea, or a genus, or a seal, perceptible only by the intellect, incorporeal, neither male nor female, imperishable by nature. But he asserts that the formation of the individual man, perceptible by the external senses is a composition of earthy substance and divine spirit.

The Works of Philo Judeaus, translated from the Greek by C.D. Yonge. London: Feorge Bell and Sons, 1800.

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TEXT 7
RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK, *THE LONELY MAN OF FAITH*

(1903–1993) Philosopher and talmudic scholar; leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America.

. . . However, the answer lies . . . in a real contradiction in the nature of man. The two accounts deal with two Adams, two men, two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity, and it is no wonder that they are not identical . . . . Let us portray these two men, Adam the first and Adam the second, in typological categories.

There is no doubt that the term "image of God" in the first account refers to man's inner charismatic endowment as a creative being. Man's likeness to God expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a creator. Adam the first who was fashioned in the image of God was blessed with great drive for creative activity and immeasurable resources for the realization of this goal, the most outstanding of which is the intelligence, the human mind, capable of confronting the outside world and inquiring into its complex workings. . . .

Man of old who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques, and saves lives is blessed with dignity. Man of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who needed several days to travel from Boston to New York was less dignified than modern man who attempts to conquer space, boards a plane at the New York airport at midnight and takes several hours later a leisurely walk along the streets of London . . . Civilized man has gained limited control of nature and has become, in certain respects, her master, and with his mastery, he has attained dignity, as well . . .

Hence, Adam the first is aggressive, bold, and victory-minded. His motto is success, triumph over the cosmic forces . . . .

Adam the second is, like Adam the first, also intrigued by the cosmos. Intellectual curiosity drives them both to confront courageously the *mysterium magnum* of Being. However, while the cosmos provokes Adam the first to quest for power and

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control, thus making him ask the functional "how" question, Adam the second responds to the call of the cosmos by engaging in a different kind of cognitive gesture. He does not ask a single functional question. Instead his inquiry is of a metaphysical nature and a threefold one. He wants to know: "Why is it?" "What is it?" "Who is it?" (1) He wonders: "Why did the world in its totality come into existence? Why is man confronted by this stupendous and indifferent order of things and events?" (2) He asks: "What is the purpose of all this? What is the message that is embedded in organic and inorganic matter, and what does the great challenge reaching me from beyond the fringes of the universe as well as from the depths of my tormented soul mean?" (3) Adam the second keeps on wondering: "Who is He who trails me steadily, uninvited and unwanted, like an everlasting shadow, and vanishes into the recesses of transcendence the very instant I turn around to confront this numinous, awesome, and mysterious 'He'? Who is He who fills Adam with awe and bliss, humility and a sense of greatness, concurrently? . . . Who is He whose life-giving and life-warming breath Adam feels constantly and who at the same time remains distant and remote from all?"

In order to answer this triple question, Adam the second does not apply the functional method invented by Adam the first. He does not create a world of his own. Instead, he wants to understand the living, "given" world into which he has been cast . . . He encounters the universe in all its colorfulness, splendor, and grandeur, and studies it with the naïveté, awe, and admiration of the child who seeks the unusual and wonderful in every ordinary thing and event... He looks for the image of God not in the mathematical formula or the natural relational law but in every beam of light, in every bud and blossom, in the morning breeze and the stillness of a starlit evening.

Soloveitchik, J. B. 1965. *The Lonely Man of Faith*. New York: Doubleday, 10–22. With Permission of Penguin Random House.

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TEXT 8
RABBI DAVID KIMCHI (RADAK), GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 1:27

(1160–1235) Biblical commentator, grammarian, and philosopher from Provence. He knew philosophy and the sciences, and was particularly interested in the ethical component of biblical stories.

God created the human in [God's] image: this act of creation refers [specifically] to the [creation of the] soul, as the verse says, _in [God's] image_ (and only the soul can be said to have been created in God's image). Thus the verse uses [the verb], "created," to [help] distinguish between the body and the soul. When the verse tells of the manufacture of the body, it says, _God formed the human, dust from the earth_ (Genesis 2:7), [using the verb] "formed," for that verb cannot be used in connection to the soul, for it is not corporeal. But the verb "created," and so too the verb "to make," can be used in conjunction with the incorporeal and the corporeal.

רַב דָּוִד קִמְחִי (רַדַ"ק), בְּרֵאשִׁית א, כז

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ – בְּרִיאָה זוֹ עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ נֶאֱמְרָה כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר בְּצַלְמוֹ לְפִיכָךְ אָמַר וַיִּבְרָא לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַגּוּף וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ כִּי בַּסִּפּוּר יְצִירַת הַגּוּף אָמַר וַיִּיצֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה כִּי אֵין לְשׁוֹן יְצִירָה נוֹפֵל עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ כִּי אֵינָהּ גּוּף אֲבָל לָשׁוֹן בְּרִיאָה וְכֵן לְשׁוֹן מַעֲשֶׂה נוֹפֵל בֵּין עַל מַה שֶּׁאֵינוֹ גּוּף בֵּין עַל מַה שֶּׁהוּא גּוּף.

TEXT 9
BERESHIT RABBAH 8:1

Homiletic and midrashic material compiled on the biblical text, mainly in Israel, from the 3rd to 10th centuries.

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar said, When God created the first human, it was created [as an] _androgynos_ (possessing both male and female sexual organs); thus is it written, _male and female did God create them_ (Genesis 5:2).

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Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said, When God created the first human, God created it with two faces, and then split it and made a back for each one.

[The other rabbis] challenged him: But it is written, And God took one of his ribs (*mitzal'otav*) [and thereby created Chavah (Eve)]" (ibid. 2:21)?!

He replied to them, [*Mitzal'otav* does not mean "one of his ribs"], it means one of its two sides, as it states, *and for the* tzela *of the tabernacle* (Exodus 26:20), which is translated into Aramaic as "for the side of the tabernacle."

בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה ח, א

אָמַר רַבִּי יִרְמְיָה בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס בְּרָאוֹ

הֲדָא הוּא דִכְתִיב זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בְּרָאָם.

אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן דְּיוֹ פַּרְצוּפִים בְּרָאוֹ

וּנְסָרוֹ וַעֲשָׂאוֹ גַּבַּיִים גַּב לְכָאן וְגַב לְכָאן.

אֵיתִיבוּן לֵיהּ וַהֲכְתִיב וַיִּקַּח אַחַת מִצַּלְעֹתָיו?

אֲמַר לְהוֹן מִתְּרֵין סִטְרוֹהִי הֲוָה מָה דְּאַתְּ אָמַר וּלְצֶלַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן דִּמְתַרְגְּמִינַן וְלִסְטַר מַשְׁכְּנָא וגו'.

TEXT 10
BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *NIDDAH* 45B

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

It is written in the verse (Genesis 2:22), "And the Lord God *vayiven* the side (or the rib)" – this teaches that God endowed the woman with more understanding (binah) than the man.

תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מַסֶּכֶת נִדָּה דַּף מה עַמּוּד ב

דִּכְתִיב וַיִּבֶן ה' [אֱלֹהִים] אֶת הַצֵּלָע מִלַּמֵּד שֶׁנָּתַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא בִּינָה יְתֵירָה בָּאִשָּׁה יוֹתֵר מִבָּאִישׁ.

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TEXT 11
RABBI DON YITZCHAK ABRAVANEL, GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 2:21

(1437–1508) Statesman and scholar, financial adviser to the king of his native Portugal, financial agent to Queen Isabella of Castile.

[God] did not create woman from the legs, which are the lowest portion [of the body], so she should not be in his eyes as a slave-woman, nor did [God] create her from the head so she should not be in her own eyes as master of the house. However, [God] created her from the rib, which is in the middle of the body, so she should be in the house just like him.

רַב דּוֹן יִצְחָק אַבְּרַבַנְאֵל, בְּרֵאשִׁית ב, כא

וְהִנֵּה לֹא בָרָא אֶת הָאִשָּׁה מִן הָרַגְלַיִם שֶׁהוּא הַחֵלֶק הַיּוֹתֵר שָׁפָל כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא תִּהְיֶה בְּעֵינָיו כְּשִׁפְחָה וְלֹא בְרָאָהּ מִן הָרֹאשׁ כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא תִּהְיֶה בְּעֵינֶיהָ כִּגְבֶרֶת הַבַּיִת אֲבָל בְּרָאָהּ מִן הַצֶּלַע שֶׁבָּאֶמְצַע הַגּוּף לִשֶּׁתִּהְיֶה בַּבַּיִת כְּמוֹתוֹ.

TEXT 12
MISHNAH, TRACTATE *SANHEDRIN* 4:5

Compilation of teachings of 3rd century BCE–3rd century CE scholars in Eretz Israel (*tanna'im*); compiled and edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi.

. . . This is why the human being was created as a sole creature at first, . . . to maintain peace among members of the human race, so that none should say to another, My progenitor is greater than yours. And also so that heretics not say, There are many authorities in Heaven. And to relate the greatness of God – for when a person mints several coins with one press, they are all similar to each other, but God "minted" all humans with the press of the first human, and yet none are similar to another.

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מִשְׁנָה, מַסֶּכֶת סַנְהֶדְרִין ד, ה

לְפִיכָךְ נִבְרָא אָדָם יְחִידִי . . . וּמִפְּנֵי שְׁלוֹם הַבְּרִיּוֹת שֶׁלֹּא יֹאמַר אָדָם לַחֲבֵרוֹ אַבָּא גָּדוֹל מֵאָבִיךָ וְשֶׁלֹּא יְהוּ מִינִין אוֹמְרִים הַרְבֵּה רָשׁוּיוֹת בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּלְהַגִּיד גְּדֻלָּתוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁאָדָם טוֹבֵעַ כַּמָּה מַטְבְּעוֹת בְּחוֹתָם אֶחָד וְכֻלָּן דּוֹמִין זֶה לָזֶה וּמֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא טָבַע כָּל אָדָם בְּחוֹתָמוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן וְאֵין אֶחָד מֵהֶן דּוֹמֶה לַחֲבֵרוֹ.

TEXT 13
RABBI LINDA BERTENTHAL, *REFLECTING GOD'S IMAGE*

Congregational rabbi who served as the Associate Director of the Pacific Southwest Council of the Union for Reform Judaism.

The parallel structure of Genesis 1:27 links the two phrases that describe how God created humanity: "in the image of God" and "male and female." This could simply suggest that male and female are equally created in the image of God. However, "male and female" need not be read only literally, but can also be read as a metaphor for the various types of diversity God creates in humanity.

The linkage between "image of God" and "male and female" . . . leads us to believe that humanity's diversity is a crucial component of its godliness. So, humanity is created in the image of God precisely because we are created male and female; black, white, Asian, and racially mixed; short and tall; straight, gay, and bisexual; and with an infinite variety of abilities. To choose this reading has profound moral implications, for if it is humanity as a whole, in all its multiplicity, that reflects God's image. . .

Available online at Reformjudaism.org. Viewed September 2020.

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KEY TERMS

Adam the first, Adam the second. Terms coined by Soloveitchik referring to two different aspects and purposes of human being as he derived it from the two differing accounts of creation in the first and second chapters of Genesis (*Bereshit)*.

Adamah. Dirt, earth.

Tzela. Rib, side.

***(Be)Tzelem Elohim*.** "(In) the image of God." The infinite value of each human being is a function of having been created "in the image of God."

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KEY NAMES

Abravanel (Abarbanel) Don Isaac (Yitzchak). (1437–1508) Statesman, communal leader, philosopher, and biblical exegete. While living in Portugal (before 1483) and then in Spain, Yitzchak Abravanel served the local rulers as a tax-farmer and performed financial transactions for the crown. He also served as Queen Isabella's loan agent; she borrowed vast sums of money for her personal and political needs. When his efforts to revoke the Edict of Expulsion failed, Yitzchak Abravanel left Spain for Italy.

Bertenthal, **Rabbi Linda.** Reform Jewish leader ordained by the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR). Before entering the rabbinate, she pursued a career in public interest law, serving as a federal district court law clerk and as a Legal Services attorney for low-income clients. Following her ordination, she worked with the Union for Reform Judaism for eleven years, assisting congregations across the Western United States and Canada. She is deeply committed to interfaith dialogue and social justice.

Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Peshischa. (c. 1765–1827) Hasidic leader and spiritual innovator in early 19th-century Poland. Known for his profound intellect, emphasis on a rational approach to spirituality, he became one of the most influential figures in the Peshischa (Przysucha) Hasidic movement. Originally trained in both Talmudic and secular studies—including philosophy and medicine—Rabbi Simchah Bunim worked briefly as a pharmacist before fully dedicating himself to religious leadership. Under his guidance, Peshischa Hasidism emphasized critical thinking, inner truth, and individual self-awareness, encouraging disciples to seek God through honest introspection and moral integrity rather than through external piety or miracle-working.

Philo of Alexandria. (20 BCE–50 CE) A Hellenized Jew, a figure that spans two cultures, the Greek and the Hebrew. Philo produced in his writings a synthesis of both cultures. Long studied in the Christian world, Philo is being rediscovered in the Jewish world.

Maimonides. (1135–1204) Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Moses Maimonides, was born in Spain, but he lived most of his life in Egypt, where he served as a physician and leader of the Jewish community. He is one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and codifiers of all time. His *Mishneh Torah* became one of the central works of halakhic literature and his *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Moreh Nevukhim*) is one of the most important Jewish philosophical treatises ever written.

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Plaut, Rabbi W. Gunther. (1912–2012) He was considered the leading historian, scholar, and representative of the Reform Movement. He wrote more than 25 books, and is best known as the editor of the UAHC's *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (often referred to as "the Plaut"), one of the most commonly used Chumashim in the world today. Born in Germany, he was trained in law and received his Doctorate in Jurisprudence from the University of Berlin in 1934. Arriving in the United States as a refugee, he was ordained a rabbi at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1939. He has written on theology, philosophy, and history, and has produced three works of fiction and two volumes of autobiography. He has held many major posts, including the presidency of both the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Canadian Jewish Congress and served as Vice-Chair of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Radak, Rabbi David Kimchi. (c. 1160–1235) Prominent medieval Jewish biblical commentator, grammarian, and philosopher, active in southern France, particularly in Narbonne. He is best known for his influential commentaries on the Prophets and the Writings (Nevi'im and Ketuvim), in which he combined linguistic precision with theological insight. In his commentaries, he often emphasized the *peshat* (plain meaning) of the biblical text, aligning with the trend of rationalist exegesis that characterized the Provençal school. He also addressed philosophical and theological issues, engaging with the ideas of contemporaries such as Maimonides.

Soloveitchik, Joseph B. (1903–1993) The pre-eminent spiritual leader, philosopher, and talmudic scholar of modern Orthodoxy in America; taught Talmud and Jewish philosophy at Yeshiva University; is the author of numerous books and articles.

Troster, Rabbi Lawrence. (1953–2019) Pioneering Jewish eco-theologian and a leading voice in religious environmentalism. He founded and coordinated *Shomrei Breishit: Rabbis and Cantors for the Earth*, a coalition dedicated to integrating environmental stewardship within Jewish spiritual life. Throughout his career, he held numerous influential positions, including Rabbinic Scholar-in-Residence at GreenFaith, Rabbinic Fellow for the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), and advisor to Hazon. He was also a member of Al Gore's Climate Reality Project Leadership Corps and participated in interfaith environmental initiatives.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

Soloveitchik, J. 1965. “The Lonely Man of Faith.” *Tradition* 7, No. 2.

Urbach, E. E. 1979. “Man.” *The Sages*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 214–254.

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LESSON 5

WINS AND SINS: DO GOD AND FREE WILL GO TOGETHER?

Note:
This lesson includes more texts than can be covered in a 90-minute session. We encourage you to explore the texts not covered in class on your own time.

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DEFINITIONS AND ANCIENT JEWISH POSITIONS

Absolute determinism is the general view that all events, including human actions, are produced by prior conditions, which make those events and actions inevitable. The predetermined influences can be either internal biological and psychological drives, or scientific-environmental rules, or metaphysical-divine forces.

By contrast, the notion of **absolute freedom of the mind** assumes that the human being is able to reach decisions while completely independent of either natural or metaphysical controlling forces.

Among the ancient Jews, three sects were segregated on the basis of fundamental theological disagreements:

The Essenes were extreme proponents for an absolute fatalistic (determinism) theory.

The Sadduceans believed in absolute free will with no divine providence, thus ascribing every action to mere chance.

The Pharisees accepted a theory that combines human free choice together with divine providence… According to this theory, God determines the rules and actions in the universe and supervises human deeds, but there exists a definite and extensive range of human freedom of mind.

(From: A. Steinberg. 1991. "Free Will vs. Determinism in Bioethics: Comparative Philosophical and Jewish Perspectives." ASSIA – Jewish Medical Ethics 2(1): 17-20)

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BACKGROUND TO INTRODUCTORY TEXT

Born in Vienna in 1905, Viktor Frankl studied psychology from an early age, while still a high school student. He corresponded with Freud throughout his teenage years. After graduating high school, he studied medicine and specialized in neurology and psychiatry. He was able to work in his field until 1942, when he was deported along with his parents and his wife. Having been in four concentration camps from 1942 to 1945, he was the only one in his family to survive. After the war, Frankl wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he proposed that the primary motivation of human beings was realizing meaning in life.



INTRODUCTORY TEXT
VIKTOR FRANKL, *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING*

(1905–1997) Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, he was the founder of logotherapy (lit., "healing through meaning"), a meaning-centered school of psychotherapy.

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

Frankl, V. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006, 66.

LESSON 5

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TEXT 1
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 30:15–20

15 See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. **16** For I command you this day, to love the ETERNAL your God, to walk in God's ways, and to keep God's commandments, laws, and rules—that you may thrive and increase, and that the ETERNAL your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. **17** But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, **18** I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. **19** I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live— **20** by loving the ETERNAL your God, by heeding God's commands, and by holding fast to [God]. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that GOD swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

דְּבָרִים ל, טו-כ

טו רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת הָרָע. טז אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם
לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָלֶכֶת בִּדְרָכָיו וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְחָיִית וְרָבִית וּבֵרַכְךָ ה'
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בָא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ. יז וְאִם יִפְנֶה לְבָבְךָ וְלֹא תִשְׁמָע וְנִדַּחְתָּ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ
לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַעֲבַדְתָּם. יח הִגַּדְתִּי לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אָבֹד תֹּאבֵדוּן לֹא תַאֲרִיכֻן יָמִים עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר
אַתָּה עֹבֵר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן לָבוֹא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ. יט הַעִדֹתִי בָכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים
וְהַמָּוֶת נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה וּבָחַרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה אַתָּה וְזַרְעֶךָ. כ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה'
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקֹלוֹ וּלְדָבְקָה בוֹ כִּי הוּא חַיֶּיךָ וְאֹרֶךְ יָמֶיךָ לָשֶׁבֶת עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ
לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לָתֵת לָהֶם.

LESSON 5

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TEXT 2
RABBI MOSHE CHAYYIM LUZZATTO, *DEREKH HASHEM (THE WAY OF GOD)* 1:3:1

(1707–1747) Known by the acronym Ramchal; kabbalist, poet, playwright, and author of ethical works in Italy and Amsterdam.

. . . man is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to God. He is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will and desire. If he were compelled to choose perfection, then he would not actually be its master, and God's purpose would not be fulfilled. It was therefore necessary that man be created with free will.

Man's inclinations are therefore balanced between good and evil, and he is not compelled toward either of them. He has the power of choice, and is able to choose either side, knowingly and willingly, as well as to possess whichever one he wishes.

Man was therefore created with both a Good Urge (Yetzer Tov) and an Evil Urge (Yetzer Hara). He has the power to incline himself in whichever direction he desires.

Translated by A. Kaplan. Jerusalem, New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1983, 45.

רַב מֹשֶׁה חַיִּים לוּצַאטוֹ, דֶּרֶךְ ה' א:ג:א

. . . הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם אוֹתָהּ הַבְּרִיָּה הַנִּבְרֵאת לְדָבֵק בּוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמוֹ, וְהִיא הַמּוּטָלֶת בֵּין הַשְּׁלֵמוּת וְהַחֲסָרוֹנוֹת, וְהַיְכוֹלֶת בְּיָדוֹ לִקְנוֹת הַשְּׁלֵמוּת.

וְאוּלָם צָרִיךְ שֶׁיִּהְיֶה זֶה בִּבְחִירָתוֹ וּרְצוֹנוֹ, כִּי אִלּוּ הָיָה מוּכְרָח בְּמַעֲשָׂיו לִהְיוֹת בּוֹחֵר עַל כָּל פָּנִים בַּשְּׁלֵמוּת, לֹא הָיָה נִקְרָא בֶּאֱמֶת בַּעַל שְׁלֵמוּתוֹ, וְלֹא הָיְתָה הַכַּוָּנָה הָעֶלְיוֹנָה מִתְקַיֶּמֶת.

עַל כֵּן הוּכְרַח שֶׁיּוּנַח הַדָּבָר לִבְחִירָתוֹ, שֶׁתִּהְיֶה נְטִיָּתוֹ שְׁקוּלָה לִשְׁנֵי הַצְּדָדִים וְלֹא מוּכְרַחַת לְאֶחָד מֵהֶם, וְיִהְיֶה בּוֹ כוֹחַ הַבְּחִירָה לִבְחוֹר בְּדַעַת וּבְחֵפֶץ בְּאֵיזֶה מֵהֶם שֶׁיִּרְצֶה, וְהַיְכוֹלֶת גַּם כֵּן בְּיָדוֹ לִקְנוֹת אֵיזֶה מֵהֶם שֶׁיִּרְצֶה.

עַל כֵּן נִבְרָא הָאָדָם בְּיֵצֶר טוֹב וּבְיֵצֶר רַע, וְהַבְּחִירָה בְּיָדוֹ לְהַטּוֹת עַצְמוֹ לַצַּד שֶׁהוּא רוֹצֶה.

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TEXT 3
MISHNAH, *AVOT* 3:15

Compilation of teachings of 3rd century BCE scholars–3rd century CE scholars in Israel (*tanna'im*): compiled and edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi.

Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is granted . . .

מִשְׁנָה, מַסֶּכֶת אָבוֹת ג, טו
הַכֹּל צָפוּי, וְהָרְשׁוּת נְתוּנָה . . .

TEXT 4
MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH, LAWS OF REPENTANCE* 5:5

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

Should you ask, does God know everything that will happen before it has happened, so God knows whether a particular person will be righteous or wicked, or does God not know? If [God] knows that such a person will be righteous, then it will be impossible for that person not to be righteous. And if [God] knows that the person will be righteous but it is possible for them to be wicked, then [God] does not know everything clearly . . . God does not know with a knowledge that is external, like humans, whose knowledge and selves are two. Rather, [God], whose name should be praised, and [God's] knowledge are one. The human mind cannot comprehend this concept clearly, for just as it is beyond the potential of the human being to comprehend and discover the essential nature of the Creator . . . so, too, is it beyond their potential to comprehend and discover the Creator's knowledge . . . And since this is so, we do not have the capability to know how God knows all creations and events, but we know without doubt that a person's actions are in their control and that God does not tug or decree upon them to do [anything] . . . It has been said because of this . . . that a person is judged according to all their actions . . .

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רַב מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מַיְמוֹן (רמב"ם), מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה ה, ה

שֶׁמָּא תֹּאמַר וַהֲלוֹא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא יוֹדֵעַ כָּל מַה שֶּׁיִּהְיֶה וְקֹדֶם שֶׁיִּהְיֶה יֵדַע שֶׁזֶּה יִהְיֶה צַדִּיק אוֹ רָשָׁע אוֹ לֹא יֵדַע אִם יֵדַע שֶׁהוּא יִהְיֶה צַדִּיק אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה צַדִּיק וְאִם תֹּאמַר שֶׁיֵּדַע שֶׁיִּהְיֶה צַדִּיק וְאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּהְיֶה רָשָׁע הֲרֵי לֹא יֵדַע הַדָּבָר עַל בָּרְיוֹ . . . שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ מִדֶּעָה שֶׁהִיא חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּבְנֵי אָדָם שֶׁהֵם וְדַעְתָּם שְׁנַיִם אֲבָל הוּא יִתְעַלֶּה שְׁמוֹ וְדַעְתּוֹ אֶחָד וְאֵין דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם יְכוֹלָה לְהַשִּׂיג דָּבָר זֶה עַל בָּרְיוֹ וּכְשֵׁם שֶׁאֵין כּוֹחַ בָּאָדָם לְהַשִּׂיג וְלִמְצֹא אֲמִתַּת הַבּוֹרֵא . . . כָּךְ אֵין כּוֹחַ בָּאָדָם לְהַשִּׂיג וְלִמְצֹא דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל בּוֹרֵא . . . וְכֵיוָן שֶׁכֵּן הוּא אֵין בָּנוּ כּוֹחַ לֵידַע הֵיאַךְ יֵדַע הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא כָּל הַבְּרוּאִים וְהַמַּעֲשִׂים אֲבָל נֵדַע בְּלֹא סָפֵק שֶׁמַּעֲשֵׂה הָאָדָם בְּיַד הָאָדָם וְאֵין הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹשְׁכוֹ וְלֹא גוֹזֵר עָלָיו לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּךְ . . . וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה נֶאֱמַר . . . שֶׁדָּנִין אֶת הָאָדָם עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו כְּפִי מַעֲשָׂיו.

BACKGROUND TEXT 5

When the Torah describes God's plan to create humankind, it reveals God's plan for humanity, "And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image of God . . ." (Genesis 1:27). What does it mean to be created in the image of God? In the following text, Rabbi Meir Dvinsk explains his understanding of being created in the image of God.

TEXT 5
RABBI MEIR SIMCHA OF DVINSK (KNOWN BY THE NAME OF HIS BOOK, *MESHECH CHOCHMAH*), *MESHECH CHOCHMAH ON GENESIS 1:27*

(1843–1926) Rabbinic leader in Latvia known for his writings on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah titled *Ohr Somayach*, as well as his commentary on the Torah, titled *Meshech Chochmah*.

To be created in the image of God (b'tzelem Elokim) is to be created with freedom of choice, unbound by compulsory instinct, with independent will and intellect. For the purpose of providing us with freedom of choice, God holds back His divine power. The Holy One, Blessed be, allows room for God's creations to do that which they so
5 **choose, and keeps what would be God's decree or decision out of their personal**

LESSON 5

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choice. [God allows] humankind the freedom to choose to do good or bad as his soul desires, the ability to do things against his own natural disposition, and in opposition to that which is right in the eyes of God.

Rav M. S. Kohen. 1978. *Meshech Chochmah*. Jerusalem: Export Book Project.



TEXT 6
RABBANIT YEMIMA MIZRACHI, *DIVINE PROVIDENCE OR FREE WILL?*

(b. 1967) Israeli author, teacher, inspirational speaker, attorney by training, and a Rabbinical Court advocate.

How does this work? After all, God's providence is on every little thing we do, and still we have the ability to make choices!

So there are many answers offered by the greatest philosophers, [but] with God, this duality is possible. In other words, [it is as if God said,] "I know what you will choose in the end, I know, and still I am giving you the chance to choose. The fact that I know does not mean that I am influencing your choice."

There is one thing said in Judaism, and this is revolutionary: "All is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven" (Berakhot 33b). "There is one matter wherein I seemingly clear the path for you," says God to you, "and now it is on you to choose left or right. I beg you, as a father begs his daughter, to 'choose life' (Deuteronomy 30:19) – please choose correctly. And I also know, because of my divinity, what you will choose in the end, and still this does not contradict your freedom to choose."

This close [divine] providence – what does it mean? How do the Sages describe it? God shows you the good and the evil, and God puts your hand on the good. In other words, how does this Providence become manifest? In that always, always, will your heart lean toward God and toward the good more than to the not so good. In this way God interferes – by God putting your hand on that which is good.

You will always have the feeling that, "Oh, I am very conflicted because I would like to do either this or that…" That is a lie. For you will always feel in your heart what is the right thing to do. You will always say, "I know that I need this, but I really want that…"

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In this way, we do not have true free will. We never, ever have two choices before our eyes where we can say, "it's fifty-fifty" ([although] we lie to ourselves). At most it will be 51 percent or 50.5 percent [in favor of the good] because we were created to turn toward the good. "The inclination of a person is toward evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). He will always tell you, "no, no, [choose] this one, this one," but you have this [sign] that always marks the way for you, like Waze telling you to turn right. If you want to reroute and to go another way, [God] will reroute for you, but you know the road, it's been shown to you.

(Translation by Rabbi Abe Weschler)

רַבָּנִית יְמִימָה מְזָרְחִי, הַשְׁגָּחָה פְּרָטִית אוֹ בְּחִירָה חָפְשִׁית?

אֵיךְ זֶה מִסְתַּדֵּר? הֲרֵי הוּא מַשְׁגִּיחַ עַל כָּל פִּיפְּס שֶׁאֲנַחְנוּ עוֹשִׂים, וַעֲדַיִן יֵשׁ בָּנוּ הַיְכוֹלֶת לִבְחוֹר.

אָז, יֵשׁ הָמוֹן הֲמוֹן תְּשׁוּבוֹת שֶׁל גְּדוֹלֵי הַפִּילוֹסוֹפִים.

אֲצֶל רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם הַשְּׁנִיּוּת הַזּוֹ מִתְאַפְשֶׁרֶת.

זֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת, אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ מַה תִּבְחֲרִי בַּסּוֹף, אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ, וַעֲדַיִן אֲנִי מְאַפְשֵׁר לָךְ לִבְחוֹר. זֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת, זֶה שֶׁאֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ, זֶה לֹא אוֹמֵר שֶׁאֲנִי מַשְׁפִּיעַ עַל בְּחִירָתֵךְ.

יֵשׁ דָּבָר אֶחָד, וְזֶה מַהְפִּכָנִי בַּיַּהֲדוּת, שֶׁאוֹמֵר: "הַכֹּל בִּידֵי שָׁמַיִם, חוּץ מִיִּרְאַת שָׁמַיִם".

יֵשׁ מַשֶּׁהוּ אֶחָד שֶׁבּוֹ, כִּבְיָכוֹל, אֲנִי מְפַנֶּה אֶת הַדֶּרֶךְ, רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, וְאוֹמֵר לָךְ: "שֶׁלָּךְ. עַכְשָׁו אַתְּ מַחְלִיטָה יָמִינָה אוֹ שְׂמֹאלָה. אֲנִי עוֹמֵד וּמִתְחַנֵּן אֵלַיִךְ, כְּאַבָּא אֶל בַּת, 'וּבָחַרְתְּ בַּחַיִּים'. בְּבַקָּשָׁה, תִּבְחֲרִי נָכוֹן. אֲנִי גַּם יוֹדֵעַ מִכֹּחַ אֱלוֹהוּתִי שֶׁיּוֹדֵעַ הַכֹּל בַּמֶּה תִּבְחֲרִי בַּסּוֹף, וַעֲדַיִן זֶה לֹא סוֹתֵר אֶת הַחָפְשִׁיּוּת שֶׁבַּבְּחִירָה שֶׁלָּךְ".

הַהַשְׁגָּחָה הַצְּמוּדָה הַזּוֹ – מָה הַמַּשְׁמָעוּת שֶׁלָּהּ? אֵיךְ זֶה מִכְנֶה בַּמִּדְרָשׁ בַּחֲזַ"ל: הוּא מַרְאֶה לָךְ אֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הָרַע, וְהוּא שָׂם אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַחֵלֶק הַטּוֹב. זֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת, בַּמֶּה מִתְבַּטֵּאת הַהַשְׁגָּחָה? בָּזֶה שֶׁתָּמִיד תָּמִיד – לְצַד הַנָּכוֹן וְהַטּוֹב – תִּהְיֶה לָךְ בַּלֵּב נְטִיָּה אֵלָיו יוֹתֵר מֵאֲשֶׁר לַדָּבָר הַלֹּא טוֹב. תָּמִיד.

בָּזֶה הוּא מִתְעָרֵב, שָׂם אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַחֵלֶק הַטּוֹב, זֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת, אַתְּ תָּמִיד תָּמִיד תַּרְגִּישִׁי: "וואי, אֲנִי מַמָּשׁ מִתְלַבֶּטֶת, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת זֶה אוֹ אֶת זֶה..?" זֶה תָּמִיד שֶׁקֶר בְּנַפְשֵׁךְ, כִּי הַדָּבָר הַטּוֹב לְעוֹלָם יָרַגֵּשׁ בַּלֵּב.

אַתְּ תָּמִיד תַּגִּידִי: "אֲנִי יוֹדַעַת שֶׁזֶּה מַה שֶּׁאֲנִי צְרִיכָה, אֲבָל אֶת זֶה אֲנִי כָּל כָּךְ רוֹצָה".

בָּזֶה – הַבְּחִירָה שֶׁלָּנוּ הִיא לֹא לַחֲלוּטִין חָפְשִׁית, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאַף פַּעַם, אַף פַּעַם (וַאֲנַחְנוּ מְשַׁקְרִים לְעַצְמֵנוּ), אֲבָל אַף פַּעַם לֹא יִהְיוּ מוּלֵךְ שְׁתֵּי בְּחִירוֹת וְאַתְּ תַּגִּידִי: "זֶה חֲמִשִּׁים חֲמִשִּׁים" – זֶה לֹא נָכוֹן!

לְטוֹבָה יוֹתֵר – תִּהְיֶה אֶצְלֵךְ מִשְׁקָל שֶׁל חֲמִשִּׁים וְאַחַת אָחוּז, חֲמִשִּׁים וָחֵצִי, כִּי נִבְרֵאנוּ לִנְטוֹת לַטּוֹב.

"יֵצֶר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעָרָיו". תָּמִיד יַגִּיד לָךְ, "לֹא, לֹא, הִנֵּה, הִנֵּה". אֲבָל יֵשׁ בָּךְ אֶת הַמִּשְׁקוֹלֶת הַזּוֹ, שֶׁתָּמִיד תְּסַמֵּן לָךְ, בְּסִמּוּן כָּזֶה שֶׁל הַוּוּיז, "פְּנֵה יָמִינָה".

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אִם תִּרְצִי לְחַשֵּׁב מַסְלוּל מֻחְדָּשׁ, לִפְנוֹת לְמָקוֹם אַחֵר, הוּא יְחַשֵּׁב לָךְ מַסְלוּל מֻחְדָּשׁ, אֲבָל אַתְּ יָדַעְתְּ בַּהַתְחָלָה אֶת הַכְּבִישׁ, הֶרְאוּ לָךְ אוֹתוֹ!

Available at ashira.co.il. Viewed April 2025.



TEXT 7
RABBI NOACH WEINBERG,
FREE WILL – OUR GREATEST POWER

(1930–2009) Founder and dean of Aish HaTorah.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

Unlike other creations, the human being has free will. Within this divine spark lies our potential to shape and change the world.

Proper use of free will beautifies and perfects. Misuse of free will plunders and destroys.

It is a uniquely human endeavor to learn how to use free will properly. . . . Is picking chocolate over the vast array of other flavors a "free will choice?" No. It is simply the exercise of a preference, just as a cow chooses to eat hay instead of grass.

"Free will" refers to the type of decision which is uniquely human: a moral choice. But don't mistakenly think that morality is the choice between "good and evil." *Everyone* chooses to be "good" – even the most evil, immoral people. Hitler rationalized that the Jews were the enemies of the world, so in his mind he justified that as doing "good."

Rather, free will is the choice between life and death. As the Torah says: "I have put before you, life and death… Choose life so that you may live." (Deut. 30:19)

Available online at Aish.com. Viewed September 2020.

LESSON 5

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TEXT 8
GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 4:3–13

3 In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to GOD from the fruit of the soil; **4** and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. GOD paid heed to Abel and his offering, **5** but paid no heed to Cain and his offering. Cain was much distressed and his face fell.

6 And GOD said to Cain,
"Why are you distressed,
And why is your face fallen?
7 Surely, if you do right,
There is uplift.
But if you do not do right
Sin couches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master."

8 Cain said to his brother Abel … and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. **9** GOD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" **10** "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! **11** Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth." **13** Cain said to GOD, "My punishment is too great to bear!

בְּרֵאשִׁית ד, ג-יג

ג וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַה'. ד וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַּם הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמֵחֶלְבֵהֶן
וַיִּשַׁע ה' אֶל הֶבֶל וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ. ה וְאֶל קַיִן וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו. ו וַיֹּאמֶר ה'
אֶל קָיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ. ז הֲלוֹא אִם תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ
וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ. ח וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו
וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ. ט וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי. י וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל
דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאֲדָמָה. יא וְעַתָּה אָרוּר אָתָּה מִן הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת פִּיהָ לָקַחַת אֶת דְּמֵי
אָחִיךָ מִיָּדֶךָ. יב כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה לֹא תֹסֶף תֵּת כֹּחָהּ לָךְ נָע וָנָד תִּהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ. יג וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל ה'
גָּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי מִנְּשׂוֹא.

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TEXT 9
ECCLESIASTES (*KOHELET*) 7:20

For there is not one good man on earth who does what is best and doesn't err.

קֹהֶלֶת ז, כ

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יֶחֱטָא.

TEXT 10
MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH, LAWS OF REPENTANCE* 5:1–2

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

(1) Free will is granted to all people: If one wanted to turn oneself to a good path and to be righteous, they have the free will [to do so], and if one wanted to turn oneself to an evil path and be wicked, they have the free will [to do so] . . .

(2) Do not let this thing that the simpletons of the nations of the world and that most of the Jewish fools say cross your mind, that God decrees for a person to be righteous or wicked from the moment of conception. The matter is not so; rather, every person is capable of being righteous like Moses our teacher or wicked like [King] Jeroboam, [to be] wise or foolish, compassionate or cruel, stingy or wasteful, and so on for all of the character traits . . . And again he said, since the choice is in our hands, and we perpetrated all the evils, it is appropriate for us to repent and abandon our wickedness, since we now have free will, as is written afterward, "Let us search and try our ways, and return [to God]" (Lamentations 3:40).

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רַב מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מַיְמוֹן (רמב"ם), מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה ה, א-ב

א רְשׁוּת לְכָל אָדָם נְתוּנָה אִם רָצָה לְהַטּוֹת עַצְמוֹ לְדֶרֶךְ טוֹבָה וְלִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק הָרְשׁוּת בְּיָדוֹ וְאִם רָצָה לְהַטּוֹת עַצְמוֹ לְדֶרֶךְ רָעָה וְלִהְיוֹת רָשָׁע הָרְשׁוּת בְּיָדוֹ. . .

ב אַל יַעֲבֹר בְּמַחֲשַׁבְתְּךָ דָּבָר זֶה שֶׁאוֹמְרִים טִפְּשֵׁי אֻמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם וְרֹב גָּלְמֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא גּוֹזֵר עַל הָאָדָם מִתְּחִלַּת בְּרִיָּתוֹ לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק אוֹ רָשָׁע אֵין הַדָּבָר כֵּן אֶלָּא כָּל אָדָם רָאוּי לוֹ לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק כְּמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ אוֹ רָשָׁע כְּיָרָבְעָם אוֹ חָכָם אוֹ סָכָל אוֹ רַחֲמָן אוֹ אַכְזָרִי אוֹ כִילַי אוֹ שׁוֹעַ וְכֵן שְׁאָר כָּל הַדֵּעוֹת . . . וְחָזַר וְאָמַר הוֹאִיל וּרְשׁוּתֵנוּ בְיָדֵינוּ וּמַדְּעוֹתֵנוּ עָשׂינוּ כָּל הָרָעוֹת רָאוּי לָנוּ לַחֲזֹר בִּתְשׁוּבָה וְלַעֲזֹב רִשְׁעֵנוּ שֶׁהָרְשׁוּת עַתָּה בְיָדֵינוּ הוּא שֶׁכָּתוּב אַחֲרָיו נַחְפְּשָׂה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנַחְקֹרָה וְנָשׁוּבָה וגו'.

TEXT 11
RABBI ELIZABETH DUNSKER, *DREAM TO REALITY*

Ordained at Hebrew Union College, Rabbi at Congregation Kol Ami, Vancouver, Washington.

Very often, I find myself unexpectedly in conversations discussing God's omnipotence and omniscience in relation to our free will. While there are many wonderful and very deep works written on the subject, for the sake of time and energy, I generally boil it down to two sentences. "We have complete free will. Also, God knows which choices we are going to make and maintains hope that we will make the better choices." The reasonable next question is always about punishment. There are plenty of moments in the Torah where one can point and show that the wrong decision brought punishment from God. And so, if God will punish us for our bad choices, is that actually free will? I maintain that the answer to that is still "yes."

Free will does not mean an absence of consequences. We all make decisions all the time, knowing that some form of punishment might be the outcome, and we accept those risks. When I exceed the speed limit and receive a ticket, I am exercising my free will and I accept the possible consequence as I put my foot down hard. The authorities punish me for my action and maintain the hope that I will have learned something before the next time I get behind the wheel. Some days I do and some

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days I don't, and sometimes it seems that those radar guns are kind of omnipotent, but I accept my responsibility and I understand that all action (or inaction) has consequences, and I always have choices.

Sometimes we actively bring those consequences onto ourselves. The people in the world who lived after the flood may have done just that. They said, "Come, let us build us a city with a tower that reaches the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over all the earth!" (Genesis 11:4). They were afraid that their inaction would cause them to be scattered, and so they made a choice to build the tower in order to maintain their unity. God responds to their act by saying, "Look—these are all one people with one language, and this is just the beginning . . . of their doings; now no scheme of theirs will be beyond their reach!" (Genesis 11:6). God decides to "confuse" their speech, and without the ability to communicate with each other they are scattered throughout the earth. As it turned out, their action brought exactly the situation they feared. It was because of their tower that they were scattered. The people were so concerned about being spread out that it is as if they were compelled to do the one thing that would cause this event to occur. . . .

If God is omniscient and omnipresent in the ways we so often hope, wouldn't God then know what we want, and if God loved us, wouldn't God help bring those things to fruition? Of course the answer to that is "no." We have considerable power over our own lives. We are able to choose every day. Our choices are not just about good and evil—things would be much easier if that's all they were. We can choose between red and yellow, we can choose to buy a house this year or next, to take this job or that. We have so many choices, so much free will; sometimes it seems like too much. We make our best choices when we look up and envision the future we hope to have and when we act in a way that will lead us to that future. I believe those are the choices God waits and hopes for us to make.

Available online at reformjudaism.org. Viewed September 2020.

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TEXT 12
RABBI JONATHAN SACKS, *FREE WILL*

(b. 1948) Former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, philosopher, author, and thought leader.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

Isaac Bashevis Singer said it best: "*Vee* have to have freedom; we have no choice!" And of course, he was right, because Judaism is predicated on freedom. The truth is that in the ancient world, the polytheistic world, all the gods were part of nature and therefore they were subject to the laws of nature. Along comes Judaism and for the first time discovers a transcendent God Who stands outside the universe, Who is free to create or not to create. And when He makes Humanity "in our image," he bestows on us that gift of freedom. It cost God a great deal to give us freedom; because if we didn't have it we could never rebel against Him, we could never sin, we could never threaten the future of the world He created. But so precious is freedom, that God gave it to us.

How do we know that we have freedom? And the answer lies in a single concept called teshuva in Judaism – repentance. And here it is: you find yourself in a certain situation and, for some reason – temptation, weakness, fear, who knows what – you do something wrong. Comes Yom Kippur, you feel bad about it, you do teshuva, you say "forgive me God, I recognize I made a mistake. Then some later time in your life, you find yourself in exactly the same situation and this time you don't make that mistake. That proves that you have changed; that proves that it was not a combination of the environment and genetics that determined your action. Your action was determined by your choice; the first time you chose one way, the second time you chose another way. That means we are free.

Many people have tried to deny freedom because it's a scary thing. Some people held that our fate was in the stars; Marx said our fate is in the economic system; Freud said our fate is in the hands of primal, repressed, unconscious drives. Darwin said it's all in genetics. None of that explains the fact that actually we can change our way of life, whatever our economic status, whatever our unconscious drives, whatever our genetically coded instincts. The truth is we are free. Bashevis Singer was right – we have no choice but to be free.

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TEXT 13
RABBI ADIN STEINSALTZ, *THE LONGER SHORT WAY: DISCOURSES ON CHASIDIC THOUGHT*

(1937–2020) Israeli Chasidic rabbi, teacher, philosopher, social critic, author, translator, and publisher.

What is most incredible about all this [the descent of holiness from the Godhead to our world] is the role of man. Placed at the end of the series of contractions, together with gross matter and the evil impulse, man is also the purpose of it all. Having been granted a Divine Soul in a material body, man stands between light and darkness, between good and evil; and in choosing the light and the good, he raises himself to holiness. By doing so he justifies the emanation of all the worlds; he gives the creative process a meaning. Because in themselves, the higher worlds are, to a large degree, totally dependent on God; they are built and are made to function, according to set laws of Divine unfolding. Only man has the freedom to choose and to change the otherwise fixed course of events...

Steinsaltz, A. *The Long Shorter Way: Discourses on Chasidic Thought.* Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2014, 329.

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KEY TERMS

Chet, chattat. [חֵטְא, חַטָּאת]. "Sin." The term *chattat* also refers to the sin offering, that offering brought to the Temple for particular violations under certain circumstances, the most essential circumstance being that the sin was not committed intentionally.

Foreknowledge. Having an awareness of events yet to transpire. God is usually thought of as having foreknowledge of all human and cosmic events.

Free will. [בְּחִירָה חָפְשִׁית. *bechirah chofshit*]. The idea that one has control over the choices one makes in life. Free will may mean for some in the absolute sense, meaning total control, or it could be understood as being limited by one or more factors such as personality traits and the environment.

Omniscience. In the context of the divine, this term is usually taken to mean complete knowledge, although it does not need to mean that and it could mean maximal knowledge.

Teshuvah. [תְּשׁוּבָה]. "Repentance." The root means "to return" or "to turn away from." Both of these meanings are used in the context of repentance – to turn away from one's wayward tendencies and to return the path of good and righteousness.

Yetzer haRa. [יֵצֶר הָרַע]. "Impulse for evil." That inclination to engage in activity deemed by the Torah or by the Rabbis to be sinful or to avoid behaviors that are deemed virtuous.

Yetzer Tov. [יֵצֶר טוֹב]. "Impulse for good." That inclination to engage in activity deemed by the Torah or by the Rabbis to be virtuous or to avoid behaviors that are deemed sinful.

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KEY NAMES

Beruria. One of only several women of wisdom quoted in the Talmud. She was the wife of the *tanna* Rabbi Meir and the daughter of Rabbi Chananiah son of Teradion, who is listed as one of the "Ten Martyrs" killed by the Romans in Hadrianic persecutions in the aftermath of the failed Bar Kokhba revolt of 135 CE. She is greatly admired for her breadth of knowledge in matters pertaining to both *halakhah* and *aggadah*.

Dunsker, Rabbi Elizabeth. Reform rabbi who has served as the spiritual leader of Congregation Kol Ami in Vancouver, Washington. She served congregations in Austin, Texas, and Suffern, New York. She is known for her commitment to social justice, LGBTQ inclusion, and interfaith dialogue, and has contributed writings to ReformJudaism.org and the Central Conference of American Rabbis' RavBlog.

Frankl, Viktor. (1905–1997). Prominent Austrian Jewish psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and neurologist in Vienna. Prior to his deportation to the concentration camps, he helped numerous patients avoid the Nazi euthanasia program that targeted the mentally disabled. He developed the psychological approach known as logotherapy, widely recognized as the "third school" of Viennese psychotherapy, after the "first school" of Sigmund Freud and the "second school" of Alfred Adler. He is the author of many books, most noted for his best-selling book *Man's Search for Meaning* based on his experiences in various Nazi concentration camps.

Maimonides. (1135–1204). Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Rambam, was born in Spain, but he lived most of his life in Egypt, where he served as a physician and leader of the Jewish community. He is one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and codifiers of all time. His *Mishneh Torah* became one of the central works of halakhic literature and his *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Moreh Nevukhim*) is one of the most important Jewish philosophical treatises ever written.

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***Meshech Chochmah* [Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk].** (1843–1926). Prominent Lithuanian rabbi, halachic authority, and Torah scholar, best known for his influential works *Meshech Chochmah* on the Torah and *Ohr Sameach* on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. Born in Lithuania, he served for over 40 years as the rabbi of Dvinsk (now Daugavpils, Latvia), where he was deeply respected by both the traditional and more modern segments of the Jewish community. His writings display a rare combination of deep halachic analysis and philosophical insight. *Meshech Chochmah* is particularly noted for its broad conceptual approach and often prophetic commentary on Jewish history and exile.

Mizrachi, Rabbanit Yemima. (b. 1967). Renowned author, teacher, and inspirational speaker, since 2001, she has given weekly lectures in Jerusalem that are now attended by thousands of women of all ages and affiliations, and her classes are disseminated virtually throughout the world. An attorney and rabbinical court advocate by training, she speaks on a wide variety of topics: the weekly *parashah*, faith, prayer, marriage and relationships, family, holidays, and more. She also hosts a weekly program on Kan, Israel's public radio station.

Ramchal. Acronym for Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707–1746). Rabbi Luzzato was an Italian kabbalist and the author of ethical works and poetry. Two of his major works are *Mesillat Yesharim* (Path of the Just) and *Derech Hashem* (Way of God).

Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan. (1948–2020). An international religious leader, philosopher, award-winning author and respected moral voice, he was awarded the 2016 Templeton Prize in recognition of his "exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension." He was a frequent and sought-after contributor to radio, television, and the press both in Britain and around the world. After stepping down as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth – a position he served for twenty-two years between 1991 and 2013 – he held a number of professorships at several academic institutions including Yeshiva University, New York University, and King's College London. He authored more 30 books. He received numerous awards for his contributions to presenting Judaism in a fresh and meaningful way.

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Steinsaltz, Rabbi Adin Even-Israel. (1937–2020). Educator, philosopher, social critic, and prolific author, his lifelong work in Jewish education earned him the Israel Prize, Israel's highest honor. Of his most significant works are the full translation and commentary of the entire Babylonian Talmud, and of the Tanakh, much of which he authored himself. In 1965, he began his monumental translation of the Talmud; its completion was commemorated in 2010 by the inaugural Global Day of Jewish Learning, which has since become an annual international event in over 40 countries.

Weinberg, Rabbi Yisrael Noach. (1930–2009). Pioneering Orthodox rabbi and visionary educator, best known as the founder and Rosh Yeshiva of Aish HaTorah, a global Jewish outreach organization. His approach emphasized empowering students to become outreach educators themselves, aiming to reconnect Jews worldwide with their heritage. Under his leadership, Aish HaTorah expanded to over 30 branches globally, offering programs like the Discovery Seminar, Jerusalem Fellowships, and Hasbara Fellowships. His teachings, including "The 48 Ways to Wisdom" and "The 5 Levels of Pleasure," have inspired countless individuals.

Zeldman, Rabbi Moshe. Canadian-born Orthodox rabbi, educator, and speaker renowned for his dynamic approach to Jewish outreach and education. He has lectured extensively on Torah, Jewish philosophy, ethics, and personal development in over 25 countries. He has been a senior lecturer at Aish HaTorah and was the founder of Core18 Leaders Lab. Currently, he directs "Meet the Israelis," a program fostering dialogue across Israel's diverse communities, and hosts the "Shmoozing" podcast. He is also the author of *Why Listen to the Rabbis?: The Authenticity of the Oral Law*, which explores the foundations of Jewish tradition.

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APPENDIX

A biblical text and its interpretation that suggest examining one's attitude toward sins and sinners.



[A1]
PSALMS (*TEHILLIM*) 104:35

May sinners disappear from the earth,
and the wicked be no more.
Bless GOD, O my soul.
Hallelujah.

תְּהִלִּים קד, לה

יִתַּמּוּ חַטָּאִים מִן הָאָרֶץ וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם בָּרְכִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת ה' הַלְלוּ יָהּ.



[A2]
BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *BERAKHOT* 10A

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

There were once some lawless people in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir who caused him a great deal of trouble. Rabbi Meir accordingly prayed that they should die. His wife, Beruria, said to him, On what basis do you feel that such a prayer is permitted? Do you base yourself on the verse, "Let sins (*chatta'im*) cease from the
5 **land" (Psalms 104:35)? But is it written, "Let sinners (*chot'im*) cease"? Further, look at the end of the verse, "and they will no longer be wicked." If the sinners will cease (i.e., die), does that mean they will no longer be considered wicked? Rather pray for them that they should repent, and then they will no longer be wicked. He prayed for them, and they repented.**

תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מַסֶּכֶת בְּרָכוֹת דַּף י עַמּוּד א

הָנְהוּ בְּרִיוֹנֵי דְּהָווּ בִּשְׁכָבוּתֵיהּ דְּרַבִּי מֵאִיר וְהָווּ קָא מְצַעֲרוּ לֵיהּ טוּבָא הֲוָה קָא בָּעֵי רַבִּי מֵאִיר רַחֲמֵי עֲלַוְיְהוּ כִּי הֵיכִי דְּלֵימוּתוּ אֲמַרָה לֵיהּ בְּרוּרְיָא דְּבֵיתְהוּ מַאי דַּעְתָּךְ מִשּׁוּם דִּכְתִיב יִתַּמּוּ חַטָּאִים מִן כְּתִיב חוֹטְאִים חֲטָאִים כְּתִיב וְעוֹד שְׁפֵיל לְסֵיפֵיהּ דִּקְרָא וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם כֵּיוָן דְּיִתַּמּוּ חַטָּאִים וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם אֶלָּא בְּעֵי רַחֲמֵי עֲלַוְיְהוּ דִּלְהֱדְרוּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי עֲלַוְיְהוּ וַהֲדְרוּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה.

LESSON 5

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[B] RABBI MOSHE ZELDMAN, *WHAT IS THE NATURE OF FREE WILL*

Philosopher and rabbi.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

One of the classic philosophical questions that people ask is that if we believe in a God who is all knowing, how do we have free will?

If God knows the future, which He **has to** because He is God, He knows everything, He is omniscient. If God is omniscient and knows everything, He knows what I am going to eat for breakfast tomorrow morning. He knows what I'm going to name my child. He knows if I am going to rob the bank. He knows how successful I am going to be in business. That seems to mean that we don't have any free will. If God knows exactly what I am going to do, then I don't really have a choice whether I am going to do it or not, it is basically inevitable.

How did Judaism deal with that question? Maimonides, the classical Jewish philosopher, the 12th Century Jewish philosopher asks exactly that question—how do we understand God's foreknowledge and our free will as both co-existing?

Maimonides says the whole difficulty we have is that we don't really understand the idea of a being that is outside of time. What does it mean that God knows the future? We don't know what it means to know the future. We don't know what it means to transcend time. From God's perspective, He is not living in the present moment. For God, who transcends time, past and present and future are all really one.

It is almost like looking at a strip of a film and standing and looking at the whole thing: there is *that* moment and there is *this* moment and there is *this* [other] moment and seeing them all together. So therefore, in order for us to understand the resolution, we have to understand the idea of transcending time.

So let's look at an example. Let's say you, the viewer, were watching me, and I was about to make a choice. I am either going to pick up my left hand or pick up my right

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hand. And you don't know which one I am going to do. So I have a choice to either pick up my left hand or my right hand.

Let's say you, watching me, could actually go into the future. Let's say right now it was 4:00, I had both hands here, and I hadn't made up my mind. Let's say you could go into a time machine, and in the time machine you go forward to the moment called 4:15. So you zoom forward to 4:15, you come back into the room, I'm holding up my right hand. Now you know what I chose. You go back into your time machine, you press the buttons that say 4:00, you come back to the moment called 4:00, and here I am, I haven't made up my mind yet; welcome back to 4:00.

Now you went into the future, you **know** that between now and 4:15 I will have decided to pick up my right hand, but right now I haven't. Does your knowledge affect my choice? Would we say that because you know I am going to pick up my right hand, therefore I am going to pick up my right hand? Is your knowledge affecting my choice?

So if we think about it—it is a little complex—but if we think about it, we realize: your knowledge is not affecting my choice at all. As a matter of fact, it's the exact opposite. The only reason you have the knowledge that I picked up my right hand is because I chose to pick up my right hand. Your knowledge isn't affecting my choice, it is my choice that is affecting your knowledge.

We can only understand that by understanding that God is outside of time. We can understand that God knows what we are going to do, but it is us doing it, God knows that tomorrow morning I'm going to eat the Cheerios, but that's because God observes that in the future I will make that choice.

So God's knowledge doesn't affect our choices at all. It is our choices that really affect God's knowledge. At the end of the day, as much as God is in control of the entire world, He knows what we are going to do; He still allows us to make those choices, and those are the choices that we are responsible for in life.

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LIVING WISDOM:
ENGAGING, SOULFUL JEWISH LEARNING SERIES

PRAY IT FORWARD: GOD, GRATITUDE, AND GATHERING TOGETHER

COURSEBOOK

Curriculum Author: Dr. Sandra Lilienthal
Developmental Editor: Rabbi Abe Weschler
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האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

Pilot Edition

Melton

OUR ROOTS

Our founder, Florence Zacks Melton z"l (1911-2007), was an inventor, an innovator and an activist in many areas of her life. It was her vision to bring to life a comprehensive and sophisticated program of Jewish learning for adults. The Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning, a project of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was launched in 1986.

OUR PURPOSE

Melton engages learners in a life-enhancing study of Jewish texts and ideas that nurtures and deepens Jewish community worldwide.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- **An Engaging Curriculum:** Developed by insightful scholars, taught by highly-skilled educators, and reviewed by experts at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- **Interactive Classes:** We encourage open dialogue and discussion between learners and educators as we approach every topic with curiosity and sincerity.
- **Wisdom For Life:** We make Jewish texts and ideas accessible, inspirational and enriching for our learners.
- **Jewish Community:** Through Melton, you become part of a worldwide movement of learners that spans many continents. Our online learning and travel seminars create meaningful global connections.

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האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

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The Melton Funders Council is a philanthropic vanguard of donors committed to supporting The Florence Melton School as the organization takes major steps towards the implementation of its new bold strategic plan.

As Melton seeks to grow its circle of learners, strengthen Jewish community and revitalize the way it does business, the Melton Funders Council provides an important means for achieving the level of financial support Melton needs to realize these goals and objectives.

Melton is grateful to the following generous donors who stepped forward to become founding members of the Melton Funders Council:

Alan S. Edelman and Debbie Sosland-Edelman
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With gratitude to my teachers who inspire my learning

Bill and Susan Firestone
Longmeadow, Massachusetts

Ron and Susie Goldsmith
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For 40 years of Melton Learning

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Al and Sherrie Weiss
Riverwoods, Illinois
on behalf of the Jewish learning community throughout the world

Those interested in learning more about the Melton Funders Council are encouraged to contact Executive Director Rabbi Rachel Bovitz (rbovitz@meltonschool.org) or International Director Rabbi Dr. Morey Schwartz (mschwartz@meltonschool.org) for more information.

PRAY IT FORWARD: GOD, GRATITUDE, AND GATHERING TOGETHER

Pray It Forward
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Words of Welcome	8
A Word About Your Coursebook	9
A Tree of Life - Icon glossary	11
About the Author	12
Acknowledgements	13
Lesson 1 - On a Wing and a Prayer: Why People Pray	14
Lesson 2 - *Minyans*, *Mishkan*, and the Mobile Community	32
Lesson 3 - Breathing *Berakhot* into Life, and Life into *Berakhot*	56
Lesson 4 - Intention, Connection, and Introspection	76
Lesson 5 - Praying the Part: Special Prayers for Ordinary Days	100
Lesson 6 - Shal-Ohm: Mysticism, Meditation and Meaning	124

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WELCOME TO JEWISH LEARNING

Dear Melton Learner,

Welcome to a very special journey in Jewish learning.

The **Living Wisdom** series has been specially designed to give you the opportunity choose topics that interest you, Jewish concepts that have piqued your curiosity or that have particular relevance for you at this moment in your life.

As you venture into the exploration of these Jewish ideas, traditions, and values, we encourage you to seek within the texts and the robust discussions about them points of personal connection to a Judaism that feels authentically yours.

Our rabbis taught that the study of Torah, the study of Jewish texts, is a continual timeless enterprise, one that offers new insights and understandings with every re-examination.

> *Ben Bag Bag says: Search in it and search in it, for everything is in it.*
> —Mishnah Avot 5:22

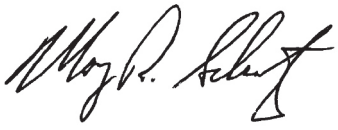
It is most certainly the case that revisiting Jewish texts can uncover for us new information not gleaned in earlier readings. But we believe this teaching of Ben Bag Bag points to something much deeper: Jewish learning is intended to help us reveal "everything" about ourselves, the learners of the texts.

In other words, as we change, we discover that the traditions, values, and stories found among our Jewish teachings speak to us differently, illuminating new perspectives on how we see ourselves and the world around us.

It is our hope that your study of **Living Wisdom** will offer you an engaging, soulful Jewish learning experience that will inspire you, enrich your thoughts and constantly renew your interest in continuing on a lifelong path of Jewish learning.



Rabbi Rachel Bovitz
Executive Director



Rabbi Morey Schwartz, EdD
International Director

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A WORD ABOUT YOUR COURSEBOOK

Welcome to what is going to be an exciting and engaging six week journey with the Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning!

The Coursebook comprises the texts for the *Pray It Forward: God, Gratitude, and Gathering Together* course. This curriculum has been designed not only to inform but also to challenge you, our learners. The goal is to encourage you to rethink many issues and subjects you may have already formed your own opinions about or developed your own personal perspectives on. We encourage you to approach your studies with a willingness to consider issues from new perspectives and grow in your appreciation of the complexity of Jewish thought and wisdom. Education is the result not of information absorption alone, but of an ongoing engagement in the act of reflecting, reconsidering, and revising one's own understanding on a regular basis.

> Despite the varieties of lifestyles and outlooks among Jews today, there are certain organizing principles that cut across many of these differences and underlie the sense of common destiny and interdependence that so many Jews feel…. The Jewish concepts of God and *mitzvah* (commandment) and the biblical narratives of creation and of history are interwoven into Jewish practice, producing a distinctive outlook that shapes Jewish identity.
>
> —Dr. David Hartman, I Am Jewish, 2004

Our hope is that our curriculum will stimulate much discussion in your class and at home as well. Please share what you have learned in class with others, and in that way, expand the circle of learning and understanding.

Please note that in a typical class you will not address all of the texts included for a given lesson. In most lessons, there are more texts than can be realistically covered in 90 minutes. Also, we leave it to the teacher's discretion to choose to emphasize and discuss certain texts more thoroughly than others. You are strongly encouraged to read through the omitted texts during the course of the week to broaden your understanding of each subject. Each text in the curriculum is accompanied by a short source description.

Melton has made efforts to present learners with original texts and as-close-as-possible translations, with minor or no modifications. The texts are a product of their time and place and their respective authors; in some instances their language reflects that. Where modern sensibilities differ with the language or content of these texts to one degree or another – such as some texts that refer to God in the masculine or use the term "Man" when referring to

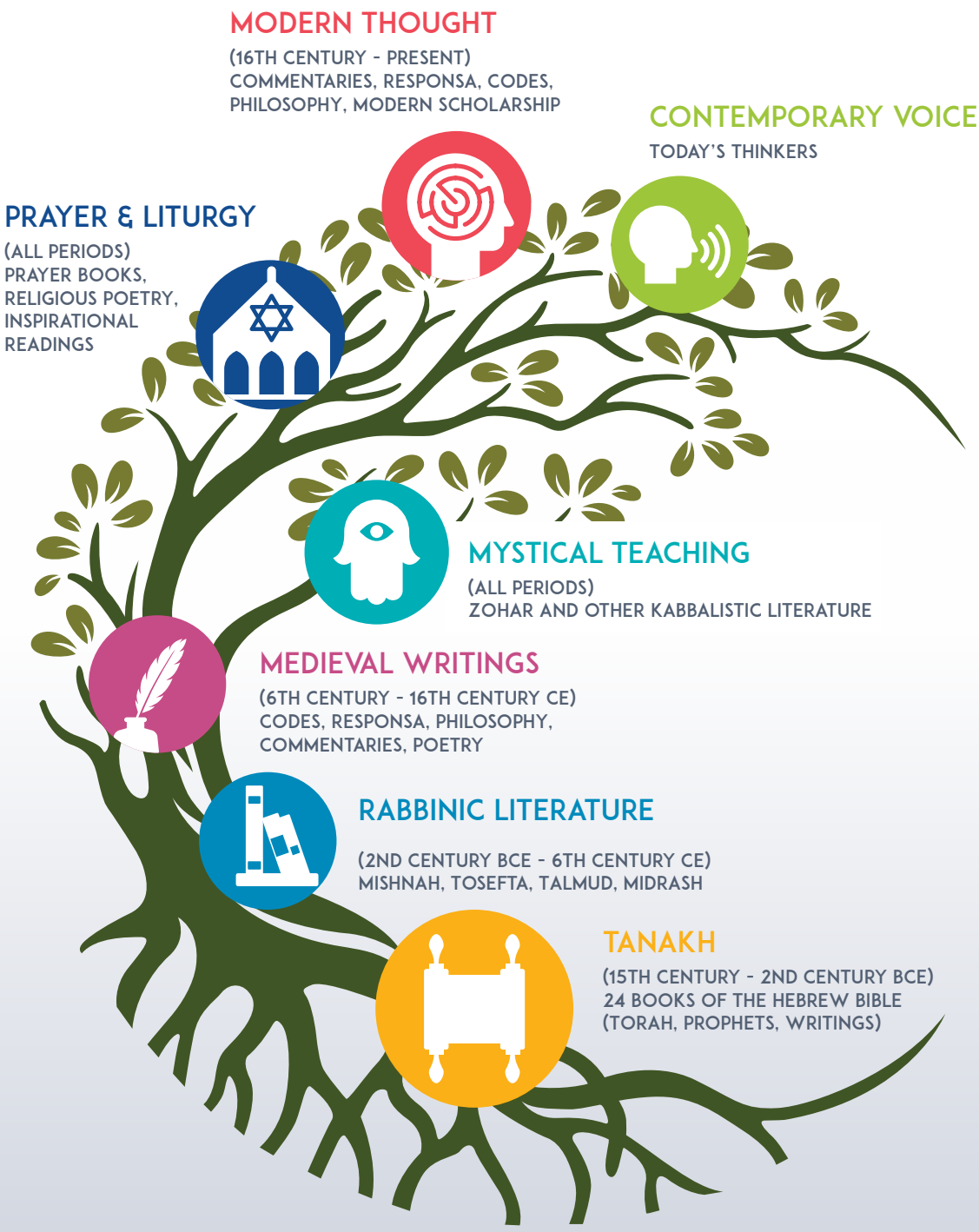
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humanity as a whole – the analyses make note of that, and where they do not, Melton trusts that its instructors and learners will not let the dated language interfere with their appreciation of the message of the text.

We are interested in hearing from you. If at any time you would like to give us feedback on the Coursebook, its format or contents, we encourage you to contact our International Director at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Rabbi Dr. Morey Schwartz, at mschwartz@meltonschool.org.

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A TREE OF LIFE



MODERN THOUGHT

(16TH CENTURY - PRESENT)
COMMENTARIES, RESPONSA, CODES,
PHILOSOPHY, MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

CONTEMPORARY VOICES

TODAY'S THINKERS

PRAYER & LITURGY

(ALL PERIODS)
PRAYER BOOKS,
RELIGIOUS POETRY,
INSPIRATIONAL
READINGS

MYSTICAL TEACHING

(ALL PERIODS)
ZOHAR AND OTHER KABBALISTIC LITERATURE

MEDIEVAL WRITINGS

(6TH CENTURY - 16TH CENTURY CE)
CODES, RESPONSA, PHILOSOPHY,
COMMENTARIES, POETRY

RABBINIC LITERATURE

(2ND CENTURY BCE - 6TH CENTURY CE)
MISHNAH, TOSEFTA, TALMUD, MIDRASH

TANAKH

(15TH CENTURY - 2ND CENTURY BCE)
24 BOOKS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE
(TORAH, PROPHETS, WRITINGS)

עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ (משלי ג:יח)

It is a tree of life for those who embrace it (Proverbs 3:18)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Sandra Lilienthal was born and raised in Brazil, where she received her MBA in Marketing and Strategic Planning. After almost 10 years in the business world, she pursued a major change in careers, and for the last 30 years has been working in Jewish education in many different capacities: from religious school teacher and Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutor, to Director of Education of two synagogues, to Director of Lifelong Learning. She has taught every age from preschool to adults, both in Brazil and in the USA (Texas and Florida). In the past 16 years, Sandra has focused on teaching adults in South Florida.

Sandra received her Master's degree in Jewish Studies and her doctorate in Jewish Education from Gratz College, writing her dissertation on Adult Jewish Education. She teaches for two Melton schools in South Florida, and is a frequent speaker on Jewish education themes at conferences, in synagogues, and elsewhere. She has written curricula for the Central Agency for Jewish Education and for the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Sandra recorded an ELI Talk in 2016 and was the recipient of the 2015 Covenant Award for Excellence in Jewish Education. Sandra has great enthusiasm for teaching Judaism as a living religion and infusing a true passion for it amongst her students.

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ON A WING AND A PRAYER: WHY PEOPLE PRAY

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TEXT 1
LES MISÉRABLES, *BRING HIM HOME*

Sung by Josh Groban, an American singer, songwriter, musician, actor, and record producer.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

God on high
Hear my prayer
In my need
You have always been there

He is young
He's afraid
Let him rest
Heaven blessed.
Bring him home
Bring him home
Bring him home.

He's like the son I might have known
If God had granted me a son.
The summers die
One by one
How soon they fly
On and on
And I am old
And will be gone.

Bring him peace
Bring him joy
He is young
He is only a boy

You can take
You can give
Let him be
Let him live
If I die, let me die
Let him live
Bring him home
Bring him home
Bring him home.

Available online at musixmatch.com. Viewed August 2021.

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TEXT 2
PROFESSOR YESHAYAHU LEIBOWITZ, *OF PRAYER*

(1903–1994) Israeli philosopher and scientist known for his outspoken, often controversial, opinions on Judaism, ethics, religion, and politics.

The sole meaning of prayer as a religious institution is the service of God by the person who accepts the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. Their acceptance becomes real through their assumption of the burden of Torah and Mitzvoth. Only the prayer which one prays as the observance of a Mitzvah is *religiously* significant. The spontaneous prayer ("when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before God") a person prays of their own accord is, of course, halakhically permissible, but, like the performance of any act which has not been prescribed, its religious value is limited. As a religious act it is even faulty, since the one who prays to satisfy their needs sets themselves up as an end, as though God were a means for promotion of their welfare. As in the case of any Mitzvah, prayer - especially prayer - is religiously significant only if it is performed because it is a Mitzvah. Its religious value is minimal when it is performed out of free inclination.

Available online at leibowitz.co.il. Viewed August 2021.

TEXT 3
PROFESSOR ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL, *AN INVITATION TO GOD*

(1907–1972) Religious philosopher in America, Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The focus of prayer is not the self. A man may spend hours meditating about himself, or be stirred by the deepest sympathy for his fellow man, and no prayer will come to pass. Prayer comes to pass in a complete turning of the heart toward God, toward His goodness and power. It is the momentary disregard of our personal concerns, the absence of self-centered thoughts, which constitute the art of prayer. Feeling becomes prayer in the moment in which we forget ourselves and become aware of God. When we analyze the consciousness of a supplicant, we discover that

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it is not concentrated upon his own interests, but on something beyond the self. The thought of personal need is absent, and the thought of divine grace alone is present in his mind. Thus, in beseeching Him for bread, there is one instant, at least, in which our mind is directed neither to our hunger nor to food, but to His mercy. This instant is prayer. . . .

Prayer is an invitation to God to intervene in our lives, to let His will prevail in our affairs; it is the opening of a window to Him in our will, an effort to make Him the Lord of our soul.

Praise is our first response. Aflame with inability to say what His presence means, we can only sing, we can only utter words of adoration.

This is why in Jewish liturgy praise rather than petition ranks foremost. It is the more profound form, for it involves not so much the sense of one's own dependence and privation as the sense of God's majesty and glory. In praising Him all that is specious, all that is false, is dispelled. We rise to a higher level of living.

A. J. Heschel. 1954. *Man's Quest for God.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 14, 15, 63–64.

TEXT 4
RABBI SHIMSHON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, *PRAYER AND PRAYERS*

(1808–1888) German Orthodox rabbi and scholar.

Hithpallel (התפלל), from which '*tefillah*' (תפלה) is derived, originally meant to deliver an opinion about oneself, to judge oneself—or an inner attempt at so doing, such as the *hithpa'el* form of the Hebrew verb frequently denotes . . . Thus it denotes to step out of active life in order to attempt to gain a true judgment about oneself . . . about one's relationship to God and the world, and of God and the world to oneself . . . In English we call *tefillah* 'prayer,' but this word only incompletely expresses the concept, for 'to pray,' *i.e.*, to ask for something, is only a minor section of *tefillah*.

S. R. Hirsch. 1962. *Horeb*. Trans by I. Grunfeld. New York: Soncino, 472.

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TEXT 5
RABBI JACOB STAUB PHD, *HOW TO PRAY* (2017)

Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Spirituality at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, PA.

Prayer is a practice, a spiritual practice. The objective of prayer practice is to increase one's awareness of God, to use traditional language. The medieval teacher Rambam (Maimonides) explained that in prayer, we pour out our hearts like water before the Holy One of Blessing. Not only when we are in pain or in need. He recommends that we pour out our hearts every day, even when there is nothing bothering us.

In English, the word "pray" connotes asking for something—praying for good health, for example, or praying to win the lottery. While there are certainly petitionary prayers in our prayer books, most of our great teachers did not encourage the expectation that if you pray for something, you will be given what you are praying for. . . .

Many of us, however, can't imagine praying because we don't believe in a God to whom we can direct our prayers. The good news is that lack of belief in God is not such an obstacle to developing a prayer practice.

The Bratslaver Hasidim have a practice called *Hitbodedut*. You walk out in the field and you talk to . . . God? The Universe? The Ground of Being? The Void? You talk as if there is someone listening. "I'm really stuck in my job. I need to get up the courage to change. I need help." "My life partner and I aren't communicating anymore. We're like strangers sharing a house." "I'm still angry at my father, and he's been dead for years. I need to try to let go. I don't know how." "I'm so overcommitted. I don't know how I'm going to make it through the week."

This is pouring your heart out. You dig a bit and notice what you are feeling and you offer it up. Not because you believe anyone is listening. But because when you pour out your heart, all that stuff is no longer tied up tight and pressing against your chest from within. And when you let it go, you are no longer all alone in your predicament. You are reaching out to the world around you.

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So if you find yourself in synagogue not knowing what to do, don't worry about finding the place in your prayer book. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply a few times. Get in touch with what you are feeling. Reflect on what you need help with, what you can't cope with all by yourself. Ask for what you need to make yourself more at ease, more at peace, more joyous. Ask whether or not you know whom you are asking.

Pour out your heart like water. Take a prayerful leap, and see what happens.

Available online at reconstructingjudaism.org. Viewed August 2021.



TEXT 6
RABBI ELIE KAUNFER, *PRAYER AS POETRY*

Co-founder, *Rosh Yeshivah*, and Executive Director of Mechon Hadar.

How can I pray what I don't believe? So much of Jewish prayer seems wrapped up in a religious worldview that takes God's active role in this world for granted: "God, heal the sick"; "God, grant us a year of plenty." What if I am not sure if God has a role in my life? Or worse—what if I actively disagree with assertions in the prayer ("God, bring the Messiah")? What if my very faith in God is uncertain? How can I possibly utter the words of the traditional siddur?

These objections have animated most of the alterations to the prayer book in many Jewish communities during the past two centuries. In 1945, Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan called on prayer book editors to "eliminate from the traditional text statements of beliefs that are untenable." But this strategy fundamentally misses the point.

Let me state my approach up front: Prayer is not meant to be seen as a flat statement of belief. It is a literary creation with all the power, nuance and complexity of literary creations. It is perhaps most useful to think of prayer as poetry.

. . . . [A]n interpretive approach to prayer yields a tremendous amount of nuance to an enterprise that, on the surface, may feel like a piling-on of praise after praise for God. The experience of prayer is greatly enhanced if the siddur is treated like so many other texts in Jewish heritage, as a starting point for interpretation rather than

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a surface statement of dogma. We have the tendency to run down the words of the siddur and make a mental list of the phrases that do and—more significantly—don't speak to us.

But just as we engage in interpretation for Torah, we can hold the siddur in the same light. Seen as a book of poetry, with myriad allusions waiting to be unlocked, the question of "How can I pray what I don't believe?" becomes somewhat misplaced. We have not even begun to unlock the words of the siddur, so perhaps the real question is: "How can I interpret what I am praying?"

The Jewish Week, 2 September 2009. Available online at hadar.org. Viewed August 2021.

TEXT 7
PSALMS (*TEHILLIM*) 150, 100, AND 13

Psalm 150

1 Hallelujah.
Praise God in His sanctuary;
praise Him in the sky, His stronghold.
2 Praise Him for His mighty acts;
praise Him for His exceeding greatness.
3 Praise Him with blasts of the horn;
praise Him with harp and lyre.
4 Praise Him with timbrel and dance;
praise Him with lute and pipe.
5 Praise Him with resounding cymbals;
praise Him with loud-clashing cymbals.
6 Let all that breathes praise the LORD.
Hallelujah.

תְּהִלִּים קנ

א הַלְלוּיָהּ הַלְלוּ אֵל בְּקָדְשׁוֹ הַלְלוּהוּ בִּרְקִיעַ עֻזּוֹ. **ב** הַלְלוּהוּ בִּגְבוּרֹתָיו הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גֻּדְלוֹ. **ג** הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֵקַע שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵבֶל וְכִנּוֹר. **ד** הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֹף וּמָחוֹל הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעֻגָב. **ה** הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי שָׁמַע הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה. **ו** כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יָהּ הַלְלוּיָהּ.

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Psalm 100

1 A psalm for praise.

Raise a shout for the LORD, all the earth;
2 worship the LORD in gladness;
come into His presence with shouts of joy.
3 Acknowledge that the LORD is God;
He made us and we are His,
His people, the flock He tends.
4 Enter His gates with praise,
His courts with acclamation.
Praise Him!
Bless His name!
5 For the LORD is good;
His steadfast love is eternal;
His faithfulness is for all generations.

תְּהִלִּים ק

א מִזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה הָרִיעוּ לַה' כָּל הָאָרֶץ. ב עִבְדוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה בֹּאוּ לְפָנָיו בִּרְנָנָה. ג דְּעוּ כִּי ה' הוּא אֱלֹהִים הוּא עָשָׂנוּ ולא {וְלוֹ} אֲנַחְנוּ עַמּוֹ וְצֹאן מַרְעִיתוֹ. ד בֹּאוּ שְׁעָרָיו בְּתוֹדָה חֲצֵרֹתָיו בִּתְהִלָּה הוֹדוּ לוֹ בָּרְכוּ שְׁמוֹ. ה כִּי טוֹב ה' לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ וְעַד דֹּר וָדֹר אֱמוּנָתוֹ.

Psalm 13

1 For the leader. A psalm of David.

2 How long, O LORD; will You ignore me forever?
How long will You hide Your face from me?
3 How long will I have cares on my mind,
grief in my heart all day?
How long will my enemy have the upper hand?
4 Look at me, answer me, O LORD, my God!
Restore the luster to my eyes,
lest I sleep the sleep of death;
5 lest my enemy say, “I have overcome him,”
my foes exult when I totter.

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6 But I trust in Your faithfulness,
my heart will exult in Your deliverance.
I will sing to the LORD,
for He has been good to me.

תְּהִלִּים יג
א לַמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד. ב עַד אָנָה ה' תִּשְׁכָּחֵנִי נֶצַח עַד אָנָה תַּסְתִּיר אֶת פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי. ג עַד אָנָה אָשִׁית עֵצוֹת בְּנַפְשִׁי יָגוֹן בִּלְבָבִי יוֹמָם עַד אָנָה יָרוּם אֹיְבִי עָלָי. ד הַבִּיטָה עֲנֵנִי ה' אֱלֹהָי הָאִירָה עֵינַי פֶּן אִישַׁן הַמָּוֶת. ה פֶּן יֹאמַר אֹיְבִי יְכָלְתִּיו צָרַי יָגִילוּ כִּי אֶמּוֹט. ו וַאֲנִי בְּחַסְדְּךָ בָטַחְתִּי יָגֵל לִבִּי בִּישׁוּעָתֶךָ אָשִׁירָה לַה' כִּי גָמַל עָלָי.

TEXT 8
BLU GREENBERG, *DAILY PRAYER AND BLESSINGS*

(b. 1936) American writer specializing in modern Judaism and women's issues, Greenberg is the Founding President of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA).

Prayer serves many functions, in fact, every function and its opposite:

It is a safety hatch when one is overcome by fear or dread, anger or need.

It calls forth a generosity of the human spirit. Prayer reminds us not to take totally for granted that which we all must presume as we go about our business—the gifts of life, health, love, and good fortune. . . .

Prayer is a sensation of community; but it is also a feeling of intense loneliness and aloneness with God. . . .

Prayer adds routine and organization to life; it is also orientation away from everyday life, a momentary stepping out of time and of motion.

B. Greenberg. 1983. *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 137.

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TEXT 9
RABBI AVRAHAM YITZCHAK HAKOHEN KOOK, *AYN AYAH*, *BERAKHOT* 7A (#67)

(1865–1935) Ashkenazi chief rabbi in pre-state Israel, the founder of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav, halakhist, kabbalist, and renowned Torah scholar.

The idea is that the purpose of prayer, as we see it, is for the elevation of the soul, so that the soul becomes ready to operate on a higher level than that to which it is accustomed. Thus prayer also works towards acquiring what one desires. For in being better, a person becomes more fit to have their needs met. After all, there is nothing stopping God from pouring out a wealth of good, except that the recipients must be ready to receive it. And all the right way to live as ordered by the Torah and the mitzvot, and all the right personality characteristics, are all meant to ready the person to receive the good ordained for them.

רַב אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק הַכֹּהֵן קוּק, עֵין אַיָּה, בְּרָכוֹת ז עַמּוּד א, סז

צִיּוּר הַדָּבָר, תַּכְלִית הַתְּפִלָּה אֶצְלֵנוּ הִיא לְהִתְרוֹמְמוּת הַנֶּפֶשׁ שֶׁתִּהְיֶה מוּכֶנֶת לְהִתְנַהֵג בְּמַעֲלָה יוֹתֵר רוֹמֵמָה מִשֶּׁהִיא מִתְנַהֶגֶת, עַל כֵּן פּוֹעֶלֶת הַתְּפִלָּה גַּם כֵּן עַל הַשָּׂגַת הַמְּבֻקָּשׁ, שֶׁבְּהְיוֹתוֹ מְעֻלֶּה יוֹתֵר, רָאוּי הוּא לְמִלּוּי חֶסְרוֹנוֹ. וְהִנֵּה לְפָנָיו יִתְבָּרֵךְ אֵין מַעֲצוֹר לְהַשְׁפִּיעַ רַב טוּב, אֲבָל צָרִיךְ שֶׁיִּהְיוּ הַמְּקַבְּלִים מוּכָנִים. וְכָל הַהַנְהָגָה הַמְסֻדֶּרֶת בַּתּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת וְכָל מִדָּה נְכוֹנָה, הִיא רַק לְהַכְשִׁיר אֶת הַמְּקַבְּלִים לְקַבֵּל הַטּוֹב הַמְּתֻקָּן לָהֶם.

TEXT 10
RABBI LAWRENCE HOFFMAN, *PRAYER REMINDS US OF LIFE'S TRUTHS* (2000)

(b. 1942) Professor of liturgy at the New York campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Perhaps first and foremost, prayer is a delivery system for committing us to the great ideas that make life worth living, because ideas that are ritually construed empower us to do what we would otherwise never have the courage to do.

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Prayer moves us to see our lives more clearly against the backdrop of eternity, concentrating our attention on verities that we would otherwise forget. It imparts Judaism's canon of great concepts and moves us to live our lives by them.

From "Why Pray? A Variety of Jewish Answers." Available online at myjewishlearning.com. Viewed August 2021.

TEXT 11
RABBI AMY SCHEINERMAN, *APPROACHING PRAYER*

Former trustee of CCAR and a member of its Responsa Committee, teacher, writer, and hospice chaplain.

Prayer has many faces, reflecting diverse motivations that inspire it. For one, prayer can arise from inner spiritual longing and a desire to connect with, and establish coherence with, that which is beyond us (often expressed as "a power above" or "something greater") . . . Whether God is perceived as a Being or in more abstract terms, prayer provides access to God as the worshiper perceives and understands God.

A second motivation derives from the understanding that prayer fulfills a mitzvah, a sacred obligation to God. Jewish tradition has deemed prayer a communal ritual and personal obligation – most prayer in Jewish tradition is statutory. The Rabbis determined long ago that prayer would fill the void created by the destruction of the Second Temple, which brought an end to the sacrificial cult. No longer able to serve God through sacrifices, Jews would now serve their Creator by offerings of the heart expressed with the tongue . . .

A third motivation is found in the opportunity prayer provides for self-reflection and self- exploration.

A. Scheinerman. 2018. "Approaching Prayer: Mishnah Berakhot 4:2 and the Accompanying Gemara from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds." In *The Talmud of Relationships, vol. 1: God, Self, and Family.* University of Nebraska Press, Jewish Publication Society. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Jewish Publication Society.

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TEXT 12
RABBI YEHUDAH HALEVI, *KUZARI* III:5

(1075–1141) Poet and philosopher in Muslim Spain. The Kuzari was originally written in Arabic.

This moment forms the heart and fruit of his time, whilst the other hours represent the way which leads to it. He looks forward to its approach, because while it lasts he resembles the spiritual beings, and is removed from merely animal existence. Those three times of daily prayer are the fruit of his day and night, . . . Prayer is for his soul what nourishment is for his body. The blessing of one prayer lasts till the time of the next, just as the strength derived from the morning meal lasts till supper. The further his soul is removed from the time of prayer, the more it is darkened by coming in contact with worldly matters . . . During prayer he purges his soul from all that passed over it, and prepares it for the future.

J. Halevi. 1964. *The Kuzari*. Trans. by H. Hirschfeld. New York: Schocken Books, 139–140.

TEXT 13
RABBI NAOMI LEVY, *TALKING TO GOD*

Conservative rabbi, author and speaker, Levy is the founder and spiritual leader of Nashuva, a groundbreaking Jewish community, based in Los Angeles.

Prayer is not a passive activity. Prayer alters us. It awakens us. Our eyes begin to notice beauty where we used to see nothing. Our hearts begin to feel compassion where we used to feel nothing. Our priorities shift. As we talk to God, we receive the encouragement to live up to the potential inside us. Soon we start to see beyond ourselves into the world that is waiting for our help.

Prayer is a way to reach out to God, to share our deepest yearnings, secret wishes, even our unspeakable sins. Prayer not only connects us to God, it also forces us to become intimately acquainted with our own souls. Most of all, prayer helps us to remember our hopes—for ourselves, for our loved ones, for this world—and gives us the strength and courage to realize whatever we most desperately long to achieve.

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But prayer is not an end in itself. It is a beginning. An opening up. A hardened heart beats with renewed passion, a dream is revived, a hope is rekindled, a soul starts to believe, a body soon begins to stir. Prayer ignites us to act. Instead of proceeding in a state of numb acceptance, prayer rouses us out of our indifference, it resurrects our outrage, our anger, our longing, our faith, our strength. There are those who dismiss prayer as a palliative, a substitute for action. But they could not possibly be more mistaken. A prayer that leads nowhere is a prayer in vain. True prayer inspires us to become God's partners in repairing this wondrous, imperfect world.

N. Levy. 2002. *Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and Celebration.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 13–14.

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KEY TERMS

***Bakashah* [בַּקָּשָׁה].** "petition". One of the components of prayer is petition or supplication before God. It involves calling out to God for assistance, and a recognition and acceptance of the need for God's help.

***Hitbodedut* [הִתְבּוֹדְדוּת].** "self-isolation." A style of tefillah that involves direct, private, and open communication with God. It was first popularized by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov and can be seen as a form of meditation.

***Hoda'ah* [הוֹדָאָה]**. "thanks". One of the components of prayer is expressing gratitude for that which God has done for the individual, their family, and their community.

***Shevach* [שֶׁבַח].** "praise". One of the components of prayer is praise of God. It is a recognition that everything one encounters in the world, whether nature or people, was created by God and is sustained by God.

***Tefillah* [תְּפִלָּה].** "prayer." Jewish prayer is comprised of three main elements – praise, petition, and thanksgiving – and is written primarily in the first-person plural, reflecting Jewish collective responsibility. The preeminent Jewish prayer is the *amidah*.

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KEY NAMES

Greenberg, Blu. Contemporary author and lecturer who has published widely on the issues of feminism, Orthodoxy, and the Jewish family. Since 1973, she has been active in the movement to bridge feminism and Orthodox Judaism and was the founder of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA).

HaLevi, Rabbi Judah (Yehudah). (c.1075–1141) A great medieval Jewish theologian and Hebrew poet. Born in Spain, he migrated to the Land of Israel shortly before his death. His most famous work is the *Kuzari*. Written in the form of a dialogue, it is a long defense of Judaism against Christianity, Islam, and Greek philosophy.

Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua. (1907–1972) A religious philosopher, he served as professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Author of numerous books on philosophy, Tanakh, *kabbalah*, and Hassidism including *The Prophets*, *A Passion for Truth*, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, *Man's Quest for God*, *The Sabbath*, and *God in Search of Man*.

Hirsch, Rabbi Shimshon (Samson) Raphael. (1808–1888) German pulpit rabbi and writer, and leading exponent of Neo-Orthodoxy, which attempted to combine European culture with strict adherence to traditional Judaism. The Neo-Orthodox movement advocated that a knowledge of Western culture and a certain degree of integration into German society, along with a commitment to *halakhah*, are both necessary for a meaningful Jewish life in modern times. Hirsch's writings include a commentary to the Torah; *Horeb: Essays on Israel's Duties in the Diaspora,* and *Nineteen Letters on Judaism*.

Hoffman, Rabbi Lawrence A. American Reform rabbi and a prominent scholar of Jewish liturgy, he is a professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union College in New York City. He is a prolific author whose writing examines means of improving the quality of praying for Jews.

Kaunfer, Rabbi Elie. President and CEO of the Hadar Institute. A graduate of Harvard College, he completed his doctorate in liturgy at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was also ordained. He co-founded the independent *minyan* Kehilat Hadar and has been named multiple times to *Newsweek*'s list of the top 50 rabbis in America. He is the author of *Empowered Judaism: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about Building Vibrant Jewish Communities* (Jewish Lights, 2010).

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Kook, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen. (1865–1935) Ashkenazi chief rabbi in British Mandate Palestine, the founder of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav in Jerusalem, halakhist, kabbalist, and a renowned Torah scholar. His willingness to engage in joint-projects (for instance, his participation in the Chief Rabbinate) with the secular Zionist leadership differentiated him from many of his traditionalist peers. His sympathy toward the Zionist movement can be seen as a major stepping-stone to the Religious Zionist movement gaining momentum and legitimacy after his death.

Leibowitz, Professor Yeshayahu. (1903–1994) Born in Riga, Latvia, he studied chemistry and philosophy at the University of Berlin. After completing his doctorate in 1924, he went on to study biochemistry and medicine, receiving an MD in 1934 from the University of Basel. He immigrated to Mandatory Palestine in 1935 and settled in Jerusalem, joining the faculty of Hebrew University the following year. He became a professor of biochemistry in 1941 and was promoted to the position of senior professor of organic chemistry and neurology in 1952. After retiring in 1970, he continued to teach philosophy and the history of science. Aside from his scientific career, he is known primarily for his philosophical and religious writings, along with his scathing critique of Israeli values and national policy.

Levy, Rabbi Naomi. Member of the first class of women admitted to the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1984. After ordination, she became the first female Conservative rabbi on the West Coast. She founded Nashuva, an experimental outreach synagogue for unaffiliated and previously disengaged Jews. Regularly named to both the *Forward* 50 and *Newsweek*'s 50 most influential rabbis, she teaches both laypeople and rabbis to craft personal prayer at Nashuva as well as at the Academy of Jewish Religion in Los Angeles.

Scheinerman, Rabbi Amy. Teacher, writer, and hospice chaplain, she is a former trustee of CCAR and a current member of its Responsa Committee, as well as editor of the Torah Commentary column of the CCAR newsletter.

Staub, Rabbi Jacob J. Rabbi, author, and poet, in 1977 he was ordained by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC). He was Academic Dean of the College from 1989 to 2004 and the editor of the Reconstructionist magazine from 1983 to 1989. In 2009, he was Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Spirituality and Chair of the Department of Medieval Jewish Civilization at the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College. In 1998, he founded at RRC the first program in Jewish Spiritual Direction at a rabbinical seminary, and he continues to direct it.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

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LESSON 4

INTENTION, CONNECTION, AND INTROSPECTION

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TEXT 1
CLAUDIA CHERNOV AND DR. CAROL DIAMENT, *PRAY TELL, INTRODUCTION*

Chernov: Author and editor of many study guides on Judaism and women; Diament: Teacher and lecturer who has edited numerous books on Judaism and women.

Chernov: How can we invest ourselves in the words of prayer when, to us, the words make no sense or, worse, are obviously untrue? How do we bring our heart and soul into the words of a formula when that formula violates the dictates of our heart and soul? . . . Poet Marcia Falk, author of an alternative prayer book, asks: "Why should we be willing to hold one set of beliefs as our truths while we articulate something very different in worship? If we do not try to touch our deepest faith—or most truthful truths—in prayer, then where?" [1]

Diament: . . . Although I, and other Jewish feminists, welcome changes in the English translations and though I welcome original prayers and new feminist rituals . . . I believe that public, communal Hebrew prayer should remain largely fixed . . . [Traditional] Hebrew prayer, even today, is shared by Jews in all countries of the world. I pray with greatest intensity when the words are familiar and link me to earlier generations and to Jews in Israel and elsewhere.

J. Harlow, with T. Cohen, R. Furstenberg, D. Gordis, and L. Tanenbaum. 2003. *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer,* ed. C. Chernov and C. Diament. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, ix–xvii.

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TEXT 2
MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH, LAWS OF PRAYER* 1:1, 3, 4

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

1. It is a positive commandment to pray every day, as it states [Exodus 23:25]: "You shall serve the Lord, your God." Oral tradition teaches us that this service is prayer, as it states [Deuteronomy 11:13]: "And serve Him with all your heart," and our Sages said: Which is service that is in the heart? This is prayer. The number of prayers is not [prescribed] by the Torah. The formula for this prayer is not [prescribed] by the Torah. Also, prayer does not have a fixed time [prescribed] by the Torah.

3. If he was accustomed, he would offer abundant prayers and requests. If words came to him with difficulty he would speak as well as he could and whenever he desired. Similarly, the number of prayers was dependent on each person's ability . . . This was the ongoing practice from [the time of] Moshe Rabbenu until Ezra.

4. When Israel was exiled in the time of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, they became interspersed in Persia and Greece and other nations. Children were born to them in these foreign countries and those children's language was jumbled. The speech of each and every one was a jargon of many tongues. No one was able to express himself coherently in any one language . . . Consequently, when someone would pray, he would be limited in his ability to request his needs or to praise God in Hebrew without blending in other languages. When Ezra and his court saw this, they established eighteen blessings in sequence . . . Thus, the prayers could be set in the mouths of everyone. They could learn them and the prayer of those unable to express themselves would be as complete as the prayer of the most eloquent. It was because of this matter that they set all the blessings and prayers so that they would be ordered in the mouths of all Israel, so that each blessing would be arranged in the mouth of each person unable to express himself.

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רַב מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מַיְמוֹן (רַמְבַּ"ם), מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת תְּפִילָה א: א, ג-ד

א. מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִפִּי הַשְּׁמוּעָה לָמְדוּ שֶׁעֲבוֹדָה זוֹ הִיא תְּפִלָּה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אֵי זוֹ הִיא עֲבוֹדָה שֶׁבַּלֵּב זוֹ תְּפִלָּה וְאֵין מִנְיַן הַתְּפִלּוֹת מִן הַתּוֹרָה וְאֵין מִשְׁנָה הַתְּפִלָּה הַזֹּאת מִן הַתּוֹרָה וְאֵין לִתְפִלָּה זְמַן קָבוּעַ מִן הַתּוֹרָה.

ג. אִם הָיָה רָגִיל מַרְבֶּה בִּתְחִנָּה וּבַקָּשָׁה וְאִם הָיָה עֲרַל שְׂפָתַיִם מְדַבֵּר כְּפִי יְכָלְתּוֹ וּבְכָל עֵת שֶׁיִּרְצֶה, וְכֵן מִנְיַן הַתְּפִלּוֹת כָּל אֶחָד כְּפִי יְכָלְתּוֹ . . . וְכֵן הָיָה הַדָּבָר תָּמִיד מִמֹּשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ וְעַד עֶזְרָא.

ד. כֵּיוָן שֶׁגָּלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּימֵי נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר הָרָשָׁע נִתְעָרְבוּ בְּפָרַס וְיָוָן וּשְׁאָר הָאוּמוֹת וְנוֹלְדוּ לָהֶם בָּנִים בְּאַרְצוֹת הַגּוֹיִם וְאוֹתָן הַבָּנִים נִתְבַּלְבְּלוּ שְׂפָתָם וְהָיְתָה שְׂפַת כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מְעוֹרֶבֶת מִלְּשׁוֹנוֹת הַרְבֵּה וְכֵיוָן שֶׁהָיָה מְדַבֵּר אֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לְדַבֵּר כָּל צָרְכּוֹ בְּלָשׁוֹן אַחַת אֶלָּא בִּשְׁבוּשׁ . . . וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה כְּשֶׁהָיָה אֶחָד מֵהֶן מִתְפַּלֵּל תִּקְצַר לְשׁוֹנוֹ לִשְׁאוֹל חֲפָצָיו אוֹ לְהַגִּיד שֶׁבַח הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא בִּלְשׁוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ עַד שֶׁיֶּעֱרְבוּ עִמּוֹ לְשׁוֹנוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת וְכֵיוָן שֶׁרָאָה עֶזְרָא וּבֵית דִּינוֹ כָּךְ עָמְדוּ וְתִקְּנוּ לָהֶם שְׁמֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה בְּרָכוֹת עַל הַסֵּדֶר . . . כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּהְיוּ עֲרוּכוֹת בְּפִי הַכֹּל וְיִלְמְדוּ אוֹתָן וְתִהְיֶה תְּפִלַּת אֵלּוּ הָעִלְגִים תְּפִלָּה שְׁלֵמָה כִּתְפִלַּת בַּעֲלֵי הַלָּשׁוֹן הַצָּחָה וּמִפְּנֵי עִנְיָן זֶה תִּקְּנוּ כָּל הַבְּרָכוֹת וְהַתְּפִלּוֹת מְסוּדָרוֹת בְּפִי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּהֵא עִנְיָן כָּל בְּרָכָה עָרוּךְ בְּפִי הָעִלֵּג.

TEXT 3
MISHNAH, TRACTATE *BERAKHOT* 4:4

Compilation of teachings of 3rd century BCE–3rd century CE scholars in Eretz Yisrael (*tanna'im*); compiled and edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi.

Rabbi Eliezer says, If a person makes prayer a set task, the prayer is not [genuine] supplication.

מִשְׁנָה, בְּרָכוֹת ד, ד

רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר הָעוֹשֶׂה תְּפִלָּתוֹ קֶבַע אֵין תְּפִלָּתוֹ תַּחֲנוּנִים.

LESSON 4

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BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *BERAKHOT* 29B

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

What is meant by "a set task"?

Rabbi Yaakov bar Idi said in the name of Rabbi Osha'ya, Any whose prayer appears to them like a burden.

The Rabbis say, Any prayer not formulated as a supplication.

Rabbah and Rav Yosef both say, Any [prayer] into which one cannot introduce something new.

תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מַסֶּכֶת בְּרָכוֹת דַּף כט עַמּוּד ב

מַאי קֶבַע?

אָמַר רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב בַּר אִידִי אָמַר רַבִּי אוֹשַׁעְיָא כָּל שֶׁתְּפִלָּתוֹ דּוֹמָה עָלָיו כְּמַשּׂוי.

וְרַבָּנָן אָמְרִי כָּל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ אוֹמְרָהּ בְּלְשׁוֹן תַּחֲנוּנִים.

רַבָּה וְרַב יוֹסֵף דְּאָמְרִי תַּרְוַיְיהוּ כָּל שֶׁאֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לְחַדֵּשׁ בָּהּ דָּבָר.

LESSON 4

BACKGROUND TEXT 4

The biblical book of *Shmuel* opens with the story of Chanah. Married to Elkanah, she is his favored wife, but remains childless. Like other biblical women before her, she watches Elkanah's other wife, Peninah, with her many children. Her hope of a child burns within her and forms the topic of her prayer offered at her annual visit to the Temple.

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TEXT 4
I SAMUEL (*SHMUEL*) 1:10–16

10 In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. **11** And she made this vow: "O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head."

12 As she kept on praying before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth. **13** Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. **14** Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!" **15** And Hannah replied, "Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the LORD. **16** Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress."

שְׁמוּאֵל א א, י-טז

י וְהִיא מָרַת נָפֶשׁ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל ה' וּבָכֹה תִבְכֶּה. יא וַתִּדֹּר נֶדֶר וַתֹּאמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אִם רָאֹה תִרְאֶה
בָּעֳנִי אֲמָתֶךָ וּזְכַרְתַּנִי וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת אֲמָתֶךָ וְנָתַתָּה לַאֲמָתְךָ זֶרַע אֲנָשִׁים וּנְתַתִּיו לַה' כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו
וּמוֹרָה לֹא יַעֲלֶה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ. יב וְהָיָה כִּי הִרְבְּתָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי ה' וְעֵלִי שֹׁמֵר אֶת פִּיהָ. יג וְחַנָּה הִיא
מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל לִבָּהּ רַק שְׂפָתֶיהָ נָעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשָּׁמֵעַ וַיְחְשְׁבֶהָ עֵלִי לְשִׁכֹּרָה. יד וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ עֵלִי עַד
מָתַי תִּשְׁתַּכָּרִין הָסִירִי אֶת יֵינֵךְ מֵעָלָיִךְ. טו וַתַּעַן חַנָּה וַתֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲדֹנִי אִשָּׁה קְשַׁת רוּחַ אָנֹכִי וְיַיִן
וְשֵׁכָר לֹא שָׁתִיתִי וָאֶשְׁפֹּךְ אֶת נַפְשִׁי לִפְנֵי ה'. טז אַל תִּתֵּן אֶת אֲמָתְךָ לִפְנֵי בַּת בְּלִיָּעַל כִּי מֵרֹב שִׂיחִי
וְכַעְסִי דִּבַּרְתִּי עַד הֵנָּה.

LESSON 4

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TEXT 5
DR. ALIZA LAVIE, *HANNAH'S PRAYER*

Israeli academic, politician, author, publicist, media personality, and social activist.

Significantly, Judaism's entire conception of prayer originated with a woman. After the destruction of the Temple, a fixed prayer formula was set down to replace the daily Temple sacrifices. Many of the laws and details pertaining to this prayer formula were derived from the biblical account of the supplication of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, for a son. Out of all the instances of prayer in the Bible, the rabbis chose this woman's heartfelt, personal appeal to God as the paradigm for the individual, whispered prayer that is at the heart of every public prayer service . . .

Hannah knew how to pray without any external guidance. The pure expression of her pain and bitterness of spirit, together with her manifest faith in the power of the Creator of the universe, are together the essence of the power of her prayer.

A. Lavie. 2008. *A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book.* New York: Spiegel and Grau, xix.

TEXT 6
DR. CAROL OCHS AND RABBI KERRY M. OLITZKY, *WHY DO WE PRAY?*

Ochs is a retired Professor of Jewish Religious Thought at HUC-JIR, and Olitzky served as the Executive Director of Big Tent Judaism (formerly known as the Jewish Outreach Institute).

If we start out with the understanding that prayer is an occasion for an encounter with God, we can never confuse praying with saying prayers. It would be like confusing a genuine conversation with repeating a set piece. There are texts in the prayer service, but it is not on the literal level that they function for the person praying. Some parts of the institutionalized service, repeated once or several times a day, keep the conscious mind occupied while some more hidden aspect of ourselves opens up to an encounter. The words drop away and a deeper engagement occurs.

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During the time of the Bible, our people had no prayer books, no collected body of texts that a person referred to when it was time to pray. Even the psalms, the earliest known prayers of our people, whose texts can be found scattered throughout our prayer books, were generally used only in public assembly at the Temple in Jerusalem. As a result, no one could confuse the simple rote recitation of words in the prayer book with the act of praying (a distinction that is often lost today). Real prayer involves opening our self to the reality of God's presence. In the midst of prayer, we can learn to talk to God about everything – our needs, our fears, our sense of shame and guilt, our gratitude and wonder. We are able to transcend the words of the prayer text. Our capacity to do so – to "fly" – is based in part on our deep rootedness in the tradition. We are familiar with this language, these images, the world view presupposed by the tradition. That comfort is precisely what allows our thoughts the freedom to use the given text as a springboard for a wordless relationship.

C. Ochs and K. M. Olitzky. 1997. *Jewish Spiritual Guidance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 31-32, 35.

TEXT 7
RABBI DR. ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL, *PRAYER: EXPRESSION AND EMPATHY*

(1907–1972) American philosopher of religion, leading Jewish theologian of the 20th century.

Prayer is an event that comes to pass between the soul of man and the word. It is from this point of view that we have to distinguish between two main types of prayer: prayer as *an act of expression* and prayer as *an act of empathy*.

The first type comes to pass when we feel the urge to set forth before God a personal concern. Here the concern, and even the mood and the desire to pray, come first; the word follows. It is the urge to pray that leads to the act of praying.

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While it is true that the prayer of expression is a common and universal phenomenon, it is inaccurate to assume, as most people do, that prayer occurs primarily as an act of expression. The fact is that the more common type of prayer is *an act of empathy*. There need be no prayerful mood in us when we begin to pray. It is through our reading and feeling the words of the prayers, through the imaginative projection of our consciousness into the meaning of the words, and through empathy for the ideas with which the words are pregnant, that this type of prayer comes to pass. Here the words come first, the feeling follows. . . .

In the prayer of empathy, we begin by turning to the words of the liturgy. At first, the words and their meaning seem to lie beyond the horizon of the mind. How remote is the meaning of *Blessed be Thou* to thoughts in which we are usually immersed. We must, therefore, remember that the experience of prayer does not come all at once. It grows in the face of the word that comes ever more to light in its richness, buoyancy, and mystery. Gradually, going out to meet its meaning, we rise to the greatness of prayer. On the way to the word, on its slopes and ridges, prayer matures – we purify ourselves into beings who pray. . . .

In the prayer of expression, we often arrive at thoughts that lie beyond our power of expression. In the prayer of empathy, we often arrive at words that lie beyond our power of empathy. It is in such tensions that our worship gains in strength and our knowledge in intuitive depth. . . .

Those who plead for the primacy of the prayer of expression over the prayer of empathy ought to remember that the ability to express what is in the heart is a rare gift, and cannot be counted upon by all men. What, as a rule, makes it possible for us to pray is our ability to affiliate our own minds with the pattern of fixed texts, to unlock our hearts to the words, and to surrender to their meanings. The words stand before us as living entities full of spiritual power, of a power which often surpasses the grasp of our minds. The words are often the givers, and we the recipients. They inspire our minds and awaken our hearts.

A. J. Heschel. 1959. *Between God and Man.* New York: The Free Press, 203–205.

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TEXT 8
RABBI ELIEZER BERKOVITS, *PRAYER*

(1908–1992) Orthodox rabbi and theologian in the United States and Israel.

It is easy to acknowledge the religious importance of the spontaneity of free personal prayer. It is unparalleled in intensity of emotion and sincerity of devotion. Yet, such immediate and free praying, brought on by specific occasions, has its pitfalls and shortcomings. In the case of supplication, this is quite obvious. That a human being, in a situation of crisis, should seek the nearness of God is understandable enough. That he should seek it only in such a situation is also understandable, but not necessarily right in the context of a broader God-oriented interpretation of human existence. To seek God only in a time of trouble implies that one needs Him only when in trouble. The free outpouring of the heart may indeed be felt very deeply but, however genuine, it is a crisis prayer. God, however, is not just a crisis God....

Turning to God spontaneously in times of trouble may cast a reflection on the value of such prayer, if it represents a small island of God-seeking in the midst of an ocean of God-forgetting...; those who remember God in their troubles are concerned only with themselves....

[I]f supplication means turning to God in one's need, man is never without his creaturely needfulness; his need is not occasion-conditioned but existential. Man is never without it, and therefore, he is never without the need of turning to God in creaturely dependence. There is no time in human life which is not an occasion for prayer.

In view of the ever-present appropriateness of prayer, the free occasional prayer becomes problematic. But can one pray all the days of one's life? And since, obviously, this is impossible, how is the dilemma to be resolved? In Judaism, it is done by means of the institution of obligatory prayer.

E. Berkovits. 1962. *Studies In Torah Judaism*. New York: Yeshiva University Press, 37.

LESSON 4

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BACKGROUND TEXT 9

At first, prayer was private and individually formulated, as the many biblical examples cited in previous lessons showed. It was after the destruction of the Temple, when sacrifices could no longer be offered, and when Hebrew ceased to be a commonly spoken language that many fixed, formulated prayers were introduced to be recited regularly in prayer services. Yet, these prayers were never intended to be a replacement for personal, individual prayers. The Talmud includes many examples of private prayers.

Jewish medieval literature also provides many examples of prayers composed by individuals for others to use in their personal prayers. It was especially common to see women writing prayers for general use or for other women to use, as there were instances in which they wanted to thank God or praise God for things the rabbinic writers had not considered when composing the fixed prayers.

Prayers for women or by women can be found in collections known as *tekhines* in Yiddish (*tekhinot* in Hebrew). The first known *tekhinah* was published in 1577 in Cracow. In the 17th century, such collections were published in Amsterdam and in Venice. In book form, they appeared in the early 18th century.

Each *tekhinah* was usually written in the singular, having been composed by specific women as their own way to talk to God. One can see how different the *tekhinot* sound from many of the ancient rabbinic prayers found in a siddur. Apart from the language in which the prayer was composed (the Rabbis wrote their prayers in Hebrew, while the women prayed in the vernacular and wrote them in the language they spoke, mostly Yiddish or Ladino), the traditional (Orthodox) siddur makes reference only to the patriarchs, whereas the *tekhinot* are likely to mention the matriarchs. Additionally, if a siddur is generally organized by the time of day or time of year in which the prayers are to be recited, the *tekhinot* are usually organized by theme, mostly around those experiences lived by women in their daily lives.

Newer collections of *tekhinot* have been prepared recently. Examples of *tekhinot* follow.

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TEXT 9
PRAYER FOR A BABY'S FIRST TOOTH

Author unknown

O Great God. Your wonders and Your providence over Your creations cannot be told about. As the child has to go on its own, and be weaned, You prepared teeth for him to chew his food.

I thank and praise Your beloved name for his dear present, this kosher find, this pearl that I have found in my child's mouth. And I beg Your mercy that You not remove Your kindness further, help it cut through easily, and the remaining teeth until the last one.

May he be able to do Your will, to eat and gather strength, to go to cheder, to learn Your holy Torah. I beseech You, O God, strengthen his heart and help us, that we may protect him, heaven forfend, so that with his teeth he not eat any forbidden food - only that he be good and observant.

May God and man be happy with him. Amen.

R. Zakutinsky. 1999. "Shas Techina Chadasha." In *Techinas: A Voice from the Heart*, vol. 3. New York: Aura Printing, Inc.

BACKGROUND TEXT 10

In 1916, the Hebrew Publishing Company published the first volume of *tekhinot* in New York. The prayers were written in Yiddish, the language spoken by the majority of the Jewish immigrants, and took into consideration the reality of their lives in the new country. One woman recalls that when she received the book from her aunts, she was told, "It has everything a woman needs to say here in America."2

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TEXT 10
AARON DAVID AGUZ, *NEW TKHINE FOR SABBATH CANDLE LIGHTING FOR AMERICA*

(1865–1943) Russian American Jewish journalist; member of the editorial staff of the Jewish Morning Journal.

Today we are in exile, where the trouble of making a living, the worry for a livelihood, is great. Circumstances are often such that we cannot keep the Sabbath and holidays according to Jewish law. . . . Making a living here [in America] is very hard, and because of our many sins, Jewish children have no choice but to desecrate the Sabbath and holidays. I accuse no one, heaven forbid, of doing this simply to anger You, to blaspheme Your Holy Name. But time and circumstances have brought this about. They do it first out of need and later out of habit.

(The prayer continues by asking God to protect the supplicant, her husband, and her children from Shabbat desecration and to give all Jews an abundant livelihood so that they will not have to desecrate the holy day.)

J. D. Baumel-Schwartz. 2017. *My Grandmother's Tkhine: Immigrant Jewish Women's Lives, Identities and Prayers in Early Twentieth-Century America*. Indiana University Press, 146-168.

BACKGROUND TEXT 11

In modern times, there have been many instances in which people wished for a prayer to recite but could not find a traditional one. Modern liturgists write and publish their prayers for others to use and these prayers often end up becoming part of the service of specific synagogues or specific movements, which might even ultimately include them in their prayer books. For Solovy, a modern liturgist living in Israel, the removing of a wedding ring is an emotional moment in one's life. So many thoughts and feelings are present at such a time, and yet often one is at a loss for words.

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TEXT 11
ALDEN SOLOVY, *THIS RING: AN ENDING*

Poet, liturgist, and CCAR Press author of a trilogy of new Jewish prayers, most recently *This Precious Life: Encountering the Divine with Poetry and Prayer*.

When I put this ring on my finger
I wrapped it around my heart.

In removing this ring from my finger
I release my heart
With grief and joy,
Uncertainty and faith,
In unequal measures.

Ancient One,
God of compassion and grace,
Let this moment be a blessing
So that healing continues
To flow into my hours and days.
Grant me the strength and insight
To honor the past and embrace the future
With dignity and passion,
Wisdom and thanksgiving,
Kindness and charity.
Then, God of wholeness and healing,
I will return to song and dance,
Laughter and praise,
As a beacon of Your light,
A source of joy, hope and love.

A. Solovy. 2017. *This Grateful Heart: Psalms and Prayers for a New Day.* Chicago: CCAR Press.

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BACKGROUND TEXT 12

This prayer reflects another turning point in one's life that many want to mark: sending a child off to college, an experience not reflected in traditional Jewish prayers.



TEXT 12
MARK S. KRAM, *A NEW TRAVELER'S PRAYER*

American Reform rabbi and life coach.

Holy One of Blessing, Master of All things, may this young man enter this new stage of his life with blessing, with strength, with joy, and with a thirst of knowledge. Even as we were freed from responsibility for his Jewish life at his bar mitzvah, today, he more fully takes charge.

May it be Your will, O God, and God of our ancestors, to direct his steps and guide his life with peace, and lead him to ever-fuller life. Deliver him from every enemy, pitfall, harm on his way, and from all misfortune and trouble that he may find on his own journey in life. Send a blessing to empower the work of his hands. May he continue to attain kindness, a loving attitude, compassion, and tolerance for all with whom he comes in contact. You are the God who listens to prayer. Praised are You, God, who hears our prayers.

Praised are You, God, Master of the Universe, who makes the young responsible for their own lives. AMEN.

From "Blessing a Child Leaving for College" by D. N. Cohen and available online at forward.com. Viewed August 2021.

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TEXT 13
ALDEN SOLOVY, *THE ROLE OF THE MODERN JEWISH LITURGIST*

Poet, liturgist, and CCAR Press author of a trilogy of new Jewish prayers, most recently *This Precious Life: Encountering the Divine with Poetry and Prayer*.

We are the inheritors of two traditions of prayer: the fixed prayers of our *siddur* and spontaneous prayer. Spontaneous Jewish prayer – which appears to cycle in and out of popularity and acceptance – has two main traditions. The *paytanim*, prayer poets, composed both on paper and from the *bima*, making them the spoken-word artists of their day. *Hitbodedut* – pioneered by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov – is our tradition of unstructured, spontaneous, individual prayer. Both practices are making a resurgence in the current wave of rediscovered Jewish spirituality.

The tradition of communal prayer from the *siddur* can overwhelm the tradition of personal prayer. We can forget how to pray in our own voices. The role of a modern Jewish liturgist is to invite others to pray in their own words, in two ways. First, by creating new prayer, the liturgist shows by example that it's a legitimate Jewish practice to pray in our own words. Second, in creating prayers that address the ancient yearnings of our people – and filling in gaps in the traditional liturgy – the new liturgist offers prayer resonant with current needs and language. Examples from my work range from meditations on *Shema*, Torah, and Shabbat, to prayers addressing Covid, infertility (for men and women), loss of a beloved pet, infidelity, and social justice.

The new liturgist often draws on our inherited tradition to create new prayer. An example from my work is "Hallel in a Minor Key," written for times when sorrow and loss occur simultaneously with the requirement to recite *Hallel*. Another is "Come, Beloved," inspired by *Yedid Nefesh*. But when our tradition is silent on a painful topic, such as miscarriage, the resulting text is a pouring out of the soul, thus calling on others to add their own words to the text.

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There's one more goal of the contemporary Jewish liturgist: inviting individuals back to reconsider the traditional liturgy, renewing their relationship with our classic text. The liturgist must both respond to the yearnings of people disaffected from traditional prayer and create a bridge back into the historic prayers of the Jewish people.

Text written especially for this lesson.

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KEY TERMS

Amidah. [עֲמִידָה]. The central Jewish prayer of the three daily services, also known as the *Shemoneh Esreh*, שמנה עשרה, "Eighteen" (because the early compilation of the prayer consisted of eighteen benedictions). The term *Amidah* derives from the Hebrew word meaning "standing," because the prayer is recited while standing.

Kavvanah. [כַּוָּנָה]. Direction or intention in prayer or action through which one offers words or deeds coupled with a strong sense of inner devotion and purpose.

Keva. [קֶבַע]. Fixed aspects of liturgy, this refers to the fixed prayers to be recited at specific times of the day or year.

Maariv. [מַעֲרִיב]. The daily evening prayer service.

Minchah. [מִנְחָה]. The daily afternoon prayer service, the title derives from the name of the daily afternoon offering, the *tamid shel bein haArbayim*, brought in the Temple.

Shacharit. [שַׁחֲרִית]. The daily morning prayer service, the title derives from a Hebrew word meaning "morning" and also corresponds to the morning offering, the *tamid shel shachar*, brought daily in the Temple. It is the longest of the three daily services.

Shemoneh Esreh. See ***Amidah***.

Siddur. [סִדּוּר]. Lit. order, i.e., of prayer. Pl. *siddurim*) The Jewish prayer book, it contains the regular synagogue and home services, as well as prayers for special occasions. There are many different *siddurim* used today, reflecting the various ideologies and customs of Jews from diverse geographic and ethnic backgrounds and denominations.

Tefillah. [תְּפִלָּה]. Prayer. Jewish prayer is comprised of three main elements: praise, petition, and thanksgiving. It is written primarily in the first person plural, reflecting Jewish collective responsibility. The preeminent Jewish prayer is the *Amidah*.

Tekhinah. [תְּחִנָּה]. (pl. *tekhinot*). Personal supplication prayer written by and/or for women.

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KEY NAMES

Aguz, Aaron David. (1865–1943) Russian American journalist and member of the editorial staff of the *Jewish Morning Journal*. Translator of both religious and secular books into Yiddish, he was commissioned to write prayers for the immigrant generation in the United States.

Berkovits, Eliezer. (1908-1992). A major Jewish religious thinker of the 20th century who employed classical rabbinic teaching in tandem with serious philosophical reasoning to address contemporary challenges to Jewish faith and law. A "Modern" Orthodox rabbi, he was born in Romania, studied in Germany, taught for years in the United States, and moved to Israel late in life. Among his many works are *God, Man and History*, *Faith after the Holocaust*, and *Not in Heaven: The Nature and Function of Halakhah*.

Chernov, Claudia. The senior editor of the National Department of Jewish Education at Hadassah, she is the author and editor of many study guides on Judaism and women.

Diament, Carol. Director of the National Department of Jewish Education at Hadassah from 1986 to 2004. She served as Professor of Jewish History at Queens College before joining Hadassah, and was the first woman to have completed a doctorate in Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University . She received the Simon Rockower Award for Excellence in Journalism and edited numerous Hadassah books and study guides.

Rabbi Eliezer [son of Hyrkanus]. (1st–2nd century CE). *Tanna* in the Land of Israel, he is also known as Eliezer HaGadol and Eliezer Rabbah. He was a disciple of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, rival of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah, and teacher of Rabbi Akiva. He served on the *sanhedrin* at Yavneh until he was excommunicated as a result of the debate over the "oven of Akhnai" (Tractate *Bava Metzia* 59b). He established an academy in Lod.

Ezra. Scribe and scholar, he came to Jerusalem with the second wave of returnees after the destruction of the First Temple in approximately 457 BCE, and publicized knowledge of the Torah's text and laws among the Jews in the Land of Israel.

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Falk, Marcia. Professor of Hebrew and English literature, Jewish studies, Tanakh, and creative writing at Stanford, the State University of New York at Binghamton, and the Claremont Colleges. Her groundbreaking prayerbook, *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival* re-creates Hebrew and English liturgy in poetic forms from a contemporary, gender inclusive perspective.

Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua. (1907–1972). A religious philosopher, he served as professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Author of numerous books on philosophy, Tanakh, *kabbalah*, and Hassidism including *The Prophets*, *A Passion for Truth*, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, *Man's Quest for God*, *The Sabbath*, and *God in Search of Man*.

Rabbi Yaakov ben Idi. (3rd century CE). An *amora* in the Land of Israel.

Kram, Rabbi Mark. American Rabbi, he was ordained by the Hebrew Union College. He currently coaches and consults.

Lavie, Aliza. Israeli academic and politician, she served as a member of the Knesset, and is a senior lecturer at the School of Communication at Bar-Ilan University. She is a well-known author, publicist, media personality, and social activist.

Maimonides. (1135–1204). Also known as Rambam, an acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, he was born in Spain, but lived most of his life in Egypt, where he served as a physician and leader of the Jewish community. He is one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and codifiers of all time. His *Mishneh Torah* became one of the central works of halakhic literature and his *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Moreh Nevukhim*) is one of the most important Jewish philosophical treatises ever written.

Ochs, Carol. (b. 1939). Served as Director of the Graduate School and Adjunct Full Professor of Jewish Religious Thought at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York. Her area of expertise is in Jewish spirituality, comparative religion, and Jewish feminism.

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Olitzky, Kerry M. (b. 1954). Served as the Executive Director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, a national independent organization dedicated to bringing Judaism to interfaith families and the unaffiliated. Formerly, he served as vice president of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, the premier adult Jewish learning and Jewish leadership program in North America. Previously, he was national Dean of Adult Jewish Learning and Living of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Rabbi Oshaya. 4th-century *amora* born in Babylonia, he studied there in Nehardea, and moved to the Land of Israel together with his brother Chananiyah. He is often mentioned together with the great teachers of that generation, Rav Assi and Rav Ami.

Solovy, Alden. American Israeli liturgist, poet, author, and educator, as well as the Liturgist-in-Residence for the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. He is the author of five books, including a trilogy of contemporary prayer from CCAR Press:

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SUGGESTED READINGS

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APPENDIX

A PRAYER UPON SENDING A CHILD TO SERVE IN THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCE (IDF)

Prayer composed by *Tzohar*, an advocacy organization in Israel providing Jewish programs and services. It aims to bridge the gaps between religious and secular Jews in Israel.

Master of All Worlds, the King to whom peace belongs, on this day on which we escort our child to serve the Jewish people and all who dwell in Israel through army service, we throw before You our pleas that You will spread Your canopy of peace upon him/her and upon all soldiers of the IDF.

Grant them the energy, agility, and joy to fulfill the commandment, "the help of Israel from the hands of the enemies," and give them courage, insight, and strength.

Protect them from all danger or peril, injury or obstacle, and return them to their homes and families safe and whole, in body and in spirit, and through them may the verse be fulfilled: "It is God who girds me with valor, who makes my path perfect."

And may it be manifest through our son/daughter and through all of the IDF: "God will protect you from all evil, God will protect your being; God will protect your comings and goings from now through eternity.

(One may add)

May God bless and protect you.
May God shine His light upon you and favor you.
May God place His face toward you and grant you peace.

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ENDNOTES

1 M. Falk. 1999. *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival*. Boston: Beacon, 421.

2 L. F. Joffe. 2017. "New Historical and Socio-Legal Perspectives on Jewish Divorce." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 31(1): 146–168.

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LESSON 3

BREATHING *BERAKHOT* INTO LIFE, AND LIFE INTO *BERAKHOT*

Pray it Forward
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TEXT 1
VIDEO: *SHEHECHEYANU BLESSING* (2021)

A blessing marking special moments as performed by the Academy for Jewish Religion Cantorial Students for the 2021 AJRCA Graduation.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all,
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

TEXT 2
ALAN MINTZ, *BLESSING AND AFFIRMATION*

(1947–2017) Professor of Hebrew Literature at The Jewish Theological Seminary.

One of the key features of the fixed part of the *berakhah* . . . is the double way God is addressed. When God is addressed as "You," implied is an intimate relationship with an individual pray-er, a relationship that is accessible and personal. When God is referred to as the "King of the universe," the perspective shifts to a vast
5 **cosmic plane over which God is the absolute ruler. The simultaneous immanence of God *within* the world and His transcendence *of* the world expresses the rabbis' conviction of the fundamental nature of the divine mystery . . .**

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The purpose of the *berakhah* is to acknowledge the primary connection between God and a phenomenon or process in the world . . . To praise God or to say, "Praised are You," "Blessed art Thou," is not simply to release an emotional outpouring or to describe some beatific aspect of God's nature. It means making a connection between a phenomenon and its source; "praised" means "deserving to be acknowledged" for this reason.

A. Mintz. "Prayer and the Prayerbook," in *Back to the Sources,* ed. Barry W. Holtz, 407. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1984.



TEXT 3
MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH, LAWS OF BLESSINGS* 1:4

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

All the blessings can be divided into three categories:
a) blessings over enjoyment;
b) blessings over mitzvot;
c) blessings recited as expressions of praise and thanks to God and as a means of petition.

רַב מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מַיְמוֹן (רַמְבַּ"ם), מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרָה, הִלְכוֹת בְּרָכוֹת א, ד
נִמְצְאוּ כָּל הַבְּרָכוֹת כֻּלָּן שְׁלֹשָׁה מִינִים
בִּרְכוֹת הֲנָיָה
וּבִרְכוֹת מִצְוֹת
וּבִרְכוֹת הוֹדָאָה שֶׁהֵן דֶּרֶךְ שֶׁבַח וְהוֹדָיָה וּבַקָּשָׁה.

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TEXT 4
DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 8:7–10

7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; 9 a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. 10 When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

דְּבָרִים ח, ז-י

ז כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מָיִם עֲיָנֹת וּתְהֹמֹת יֹצְאִים בַּבִּקְעָה וּבָהָר. ח אֶרֶץ
חִטָּה וּשְׂעֹרָה וְגֶפֶן וּתְאֵנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵית שֶׁמֶן וּדְבָשׁ. ט אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְמִסְכֵּנֻת תֹּאכַל בָּהּ לֶחֶם
לֹא תֶחְסַר כֹּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַבָנֶיהָ בַרְזֶל וּמֵהָרָרֶיהָ תַּחְצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת. י וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת ה'
אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ.

TEXT 5
BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *BERAKHOT* 35A

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

From where do we derive the principle [of reciting a blessing before partaking of food]? . . . We infer it from the more lenient case: If a person is obligated to recite a blessing when they are full, all the more ought they do so when they are hungry! . . . Actually [even without a logical argument], it is reasonable to suppose that it is forbidden for a person to derive any benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing. Our Rabbis taught: It is forbidden for a person to derive benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing, and whoever derives benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing is guilty of embezzlement . . . Rabbi Levi contrasted two verses: On the one hand, Scripture says that "The earth and all that it contains are God's" (Psalms 24:1), but on the other hand, Scripture says that "The heavens

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are God's, but He has given the earth to human beings" (Ibid. 115:16). This, however, is not a contradiction. The first verse speaks of the situation prior to the recitation of a blessing, and the second speaks of the situation after a blessing has been recited.

תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מַסֶּכֶת בְּרָכוֹת דַּף לה עַמּוּד א

מְנָא הָנֵי מִילֵי . . . דְּאָתְיָא בְּקַל וָחוֹמֶר כְּשֶׁהוּא שָׂבֵעַ מְבָרֵךְ כְּשֶׁהוּא רָעֵב לֹא כָּל שֶׁכֵּן . . . אֶלָּא סְבָרָא הוּא אָסוּר לוֹ לְאָדָם שֶׁיֵּהָנֶה מִן הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא בְּרָכָה תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן אָסוּר לוֹ לְאָדָם שֶׁיֵּהָנֶה מִן הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא בְּרָכָה וְכָל הַנֶּהֱנֶה מִן הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא בְּרָכָה מָעַל . . . רַבִּי לֵוִי רָמֵי כְּתִיב לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ וּכְתִיב הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַה' וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי אָדָם לָא קַשְׁיָא כָּאן קֹדֶם בְּרָכָה כָּאן לְאַחַר בְּרָכָה.

LESSON 3

TEXT 6
BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *PESACHIM* 7B

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

Rav Yehudah says in the name of Shmuel, In the case of all mitzvot, a blessing is recited immediately prior to their performance.

תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מַסֶּכֶת פְּסָחִים דַּף ז עַמּוּד ב

[אָמַר] רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת מְבָרֵךְ עֲלֵיהֶן עוֹבֵר לַעֲשִׂיָּתָן.

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TEXT 7
RABBI CHERYL PERETZ, *THANK YOU GOD* (2019)

Associate Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, where she also received her ordination.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Haolam – Blessed are You, Adonai, Sovereign of the universe . . . If you look at the words of our blessings, the six-word formula that the rabbis implore us to say 100 times a day, nowhere is the word thanks or gratitude even mentioned. In fact, if anything, our blessings are a statement of theological truth, an acknowledgement that without God's active participation, the bread that is in front of us would not be. And so we say, *Baruch Atah Adonai* – Blessed are you Adonai Our God, sovereign of the universe, who brings bread from the earth. Yet, blessings are our way of expressing delight, and gratitude, and appreciation.

The Talmud teaches us that each time we benefit from something in this world, it should be preceded by the recitation of a blessing – lest we be labeled a thief, stealing from God and/or from the society in which we live. Intentional gratitude transfers ownership from God to the one who says the blessing. So, we bring to the words of the blessing formula the feeling of thanks, and that changes our experience; it changes us. Perhaps it is for this reason that Midrash Vayikra Rabbah teaches: "In the World to Come all sacrifices will be annulled, but the Thanksgiving Sacrifice will not be annulled. All prayers will be annulled, but prayers of thanksgiving will not be annulled." (9:7)

We cannot really live, even in the utopian state of the world to come, without gratitude. Our lives are enriched, our experience more meaningful, when we acknowledge with gratitude the bounty we receive – health, food, shelter, the ability to make a living and live in comfort. On the other hand, failure to acknowledge or living as if these blessings are our expectations lead us to apathy or worse, living with a sense of entitlement.

Available online at aju.edu. Viewed July 2021.

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TEXT 8
LILAH PECK, *"A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS": THE POWER OF OUR WORDS* (2020)

In 2020, Peck was a junior at Charlotte County Day School in Charlotte, North Carolina.

We often think about the impact that our voices can have on a large scale, but it's equally important to think about the power of our words on a personal and immediate level. Judaism teaches that speech distinguishes humans from other animals and helps us to emulate G-d. My Judaism guides me to use my words in order to lead a mindful life of gratitude. In fact, the word "Jew," is related to "*lehodot*" which means to thank. Jews are a people defined by gratitude. . . .**

My words also sanctify the things around me and help me recognize everything I have to be grateful for. Throughout the day I try to say blessings over my food and use my words to bring holiness and mindfulness into my life. It takes two seconds to say a blessing that will remind me that my food is not something to take for granted. I shouldn't feel entitled to anything . . . Saying a simple and quick phrase every time I eat or drink dramatically changes the way I view seemingly trivial things. Judaism also asks one to say a prayer of gratitude after using the bathroom. It's easy for me to take for granted the miraculous systems of the body that allow me to do something as small (but important) as using the bathroom. Saying the blessing "*Asher yatzar . . .*" takes under a minute, but the impact lasts much longer.

**The word Jew in Hebrew, *Yehudi*, shares the same root as the word *lehodot*, "to thank."

Available online at jwa.org. Viewed July 2021.

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TEXT9
RABBI REUVEN LEUCHTER, *ORAL COMMENTS ON THE BERAKHOT* (2012)

Leading teachers of *mussar* in Israel and rabbi in the Ner LeElef training and placement organization for leadership in Education and Outreach.

The world is full of many details, and in order for us to be able to recognize God in this world we need to learn to focus on those details. Our senses do not relate to "big things" such as the creation of the world, but rather to small details like the beauty of an apple, its smell, its texture. Small things can create awareness; generalizations cannot.

This is the purpose of Brachot – to develop a consciousness of God. Brachot are the tools to build our awareness of God. They are the tools to help us change our perspective of God from "out there," to bring Him closer to our senses, to be able to perceive Him in our own lives. . . .

This is the reason we need to say one hundred Brachot every day. We need to focus on a hundred different facets of the goodness bestowed upon us by God. This is what develops an awareness of Him.

The Concept and Practice of Brachot. Ner Le'Elef resource sheet. Available online at nleresources.com. Viewed Aug 2021.

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TEXT 10
RABBI BEN GREENFIELD, *WHAT BLESSING DOES ONE SAY FOR THE COVID VACCINE?* (2020)

Contemporary Modern Orthodox Rabbi and founder of the Upper West Side Moishe House.

One must offer words of praise and blessing to Hashem upon the amazing event of receiving this vaccine! That is clear. The question is if one should do so using one of the official, canonical brachot of our tradition, which would entail uttering God's sacred name.

Here, too, the short answer is yes, complicated only by the fact that there are so many brachot which apply that it is hard to know which one is correct! Shehecheyanu, recited upon occasional events that spark gratitude (e.g., buying new furniture, eating new fruit, important rain falling on one's field) seems, at first glance, to easily qualify. On the other hand, ha-Tov v'ha-meitiv (who is good and causes good) should be recited if the event is shared by multiple people (e.g., rain falling on a shared field, a couple buying furniture, new wine brought out to the dinner table), and receiving a vaccine is of both personal and public health benefit. Finally, ha-Gomel (who rewards the undeserving with goodness, and who has rewarded me with goodness) is recited upon rescue from an illness. A strong argument can be made for this blessing, too.

My master and teacher, Rabbi Dov Linzer, addresses all these possibilities and advises reciting HaTov, and to do so before receiving the first shot.

COVID has been a dark reminder of an eternally true fact: Our lives and our health are connected with those of strangers we will never meet. To have the opportunity to protect ourselves and, in doing so, grant protection to others is a gift from God worthy of a most heartful "HaTov v'ha-meitiv."

Cited by L. E. Adkins and available online at jta.org. Viewed July 2021.

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TEXT 11
DR. MARCIA FALK, *THE BOOK OF BLESSINGS*

(b. 1946) Writer, poet and feminist, former university professor of Hebrew and English literature, Jewish studies, Tanakh, and creative writing at Stanford, the State University of New York at Binghamton, and the Claremont Colleges.

A rabbinic invention based on a biblical form, the traditional blessing is a statement consisting of two parts: an opening clause declaring God "blessed" and a content-specific phrase or phrases relating this declaration to the occasion being marked. In the latter half of the *b'rakhah*, the rabbis have explored a variety of life experiences. The first half, in contrast, is a formula: *Barukh atah, adonay elohéynu, mélekh ha'olam*, "Blessed are you [masc., sing.], Lord our God, king of the world." . . . .

Of course, the heavily patriarchal imagery of the rabbinic formula makes it particularly problematic. Yet it is not a satisfying solution merely to replace the direct address of the Lord-God-king with address of a female image or images (as in *B'rukhah at, sh'khinah*, "Blessed are you [fem.], Shekhinah," one proposal that has circulated widely in alternative liturgies). While it is refreshing to see images other than the single rabbinic icon, the retention of the formulation "Blessed are you" has its own limitations. This passive construction is ultimately disempowering in that it masks the presence of the speaking self (whether personal or communal) that is performing the act of blessing. Perhaps most important, the statement "Blessed are you" leaves the traditional view of God as Other unchallenged—and this theology is clearly problematic for many Jews today. . . .

. . . I have to say that the image of God as Person is not one I find helpful, and I believe that, in this regard, I speak for many others. It is not at all true for me that "it is primarily as Person" that I know God; I experience the divine in many ways, ways that are better represented by nonpersonal images, as well as by other, less direct modes of expression that do not attempt to locate divinity in specific images at all. . . .

LESSON 3

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The **Blessing Before the Meal** was one of the first new blessings I composed, and in doing so I established the fundamentals of my liturgical-poetic process. In creating it, I replaced the phrase *barukh atah*, "blessed are you [masc., sing.]," with an active, first-person plural, gender-inclusive form, *n'vareykh*, "let us bless." With this word, the community exhorts itself to experience oneness with the whole in the very act of blessing. The speech that follows this opening is unrestricted; unlike the word *barukh*, "blessed," which is gender-specific, *n'vareykh* may introduce images in either gender, drawn from any number of contexts.

Thus in this first of my blessings I followed the word *n'vareykh* with the first of my images to replace the rabbinic Lord-God-king. I derived that new image from an ancient text, Deuteronomy 8:7: *éretz náḥaley máyim, ayanot ut'homot yotz'im babik'ah uvahar*, "a land of watercourses, wellsprings, and depths emerging from valleys and from hills." In the wellsprings that rise from the land, pouring their waters back into the land, I found what seemed to me the perfect metaphor for my Blessing Before the Meal: *áyin*, "wellspring" or "fountain," with the figurative meaning of "source."

Let us bless the source of life that brings forth bread from the earth.

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים הַמּוֹצִיאָה לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

M. Falk. 1996. *The Book of Blessings*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 16-17, 417–419, 422, 429–430.

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TEXT 12
SHELDON HARNICK, *TRADITION*

(b. 1924) An American lyricist and songwriter, well-known for composing the lyrics to the music in the 1971 movie based on the 1964 Broadway hit, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

And, most important of all,
our beloved rabbi.
Rabbi, may I ask you a question?
Certainly, Leibesh.
Is there a proper blessing . . . for the Tzar?
A blessing for the Tzar?
Of course.
May God bless and keep the Tzar
far away from us!

Available online at script-o-rama.com. Viewed Aug 2021.

The video from Fiddler on the Roof that portrays this scene is hyperlinked to the title.

TEXT 13
RABBI LAURA GELLER, *CREATING BLESSINGS FOR WOMEN*

One of the first female rabbis ordained in the United States, rabbi emerita of Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills, California.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

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KEY TERMS

Berakhah. [בְּרָכָה]. (pl. *berakhot*) Blessing or benediction. Jewish liturgy and daily life are replete with *berakhot.* The different categories include *Birkot shevach veHoda'ah*, *Birkot haNehenin*, and *Birkot haMitzvot.*

Birkat HaGomel. [בִּרְכַּת הַגּוֹמֵל] A blessing recited when one survives a potentially life-threatening experience. The text of the blessing is: *Blessed are You, O God, . . . Who bestows kindness on the undeserving, and who has bestowed goodness to me.* Upon hearing this blessing, the congregation responds with a refrain requesting that God continues to reward the individual with bounty.

Birkat HaMazon. [בִּרְכַּת הַמָּזוֹן]. Grace after meals. Traditionally consists of four *berakhot* praising God for food, the Land of Israel, King David and Jerusalem, and for everything. Abridged versions exist.

Birkot HaMitzvot. [בִּרְכוֹת הַמִּצְוֹת]. Blessings recited upon the fulfillment of mitzvot. These include the formula *asher kideshanu beMitzvotav veTzivanu* (who sanctified us with his mitzvot and commanded us to). Examples of this category are the blessings recited upon lighting the Shabbat lights, upon the performance of a *berit milah* (circumcision), and when donning *tallit* and *tefillin.*

Birkot haNehenin. [בִּרְכוֹת הַנֶּהֱנִין]. Blessings for enjoyment or pleasure. Examples of this category are the blessings recited prior to drinking wine or eating bread.

Birkot shevach veHoda'ah. [בִּרְכוֹת שֶׁבַח וְהוֹדָאָה]. Blessings of praise and thanksgiving. An example of this category is the *Birkat haMazon*.

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KEY NAMES

Falk, Marcia. For fifteen years she was a university professor, teaching Hebrew and English literature, Jewish studies, Bible, and creative writing at Stanford, the State University of New York at Binghamton, and the Claremont Colleges. Her work has been published widely in magazines and anthologies in the United States and abroad. In addition to pursuing her own poetry, she has devoted her creative energy to discovering and translating old and new voices of other women poets, in particular, those writing in Hebrew and in Yiddish. Her groundbreaking prayerbook, *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival*, re-creates Hebrew and English liturgy in poetic forms from a contemporary, gender-inclusive perspective.

Geller, Rabbi Laura. The only woman rabbinical student among men classmates and teachers in the early 1970s at Hebrew Union College, she was ordained in 1976. She came to see that women rabbis could offer all congregants a different relationship to the sacred, opening new possibilities in Jewish life. She is the Rabbi Emerita of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, was twice named one of *Newsweek*'s 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America, and was named by PBS *Next Avenue* as one of the fifty 2017 Influencers in Aging.

Greenfield, Rabbi Ben. Rabbi of the Greenpoint Shul, he studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion, Yeshiva University, Oxford University, and Johns Hopkins, before receiving ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. He is a founder of the Upper West Side Moishe House, where he coordinated 200+ Jewish communal events for over 2,500 Manhattan Jews.

Leuchter, Rabbi Reuven. A leading *mussar* personality in Israel today, he is the author of *Meshivas Nefesh* on the *Nefesh HaChaim*, an annotated commentary on Rav Yisrael Salanter's *Ohr Yisrael*, and *The Pesach Hagaddah – Living Our History*.

Maimonides. (1135–1204). Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Rambam, acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, was born in Spain, but he lived most of his life in Egypt, where he served as a physician and leader of the Jewish community. He is one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and codifiers of all time. His *Mishneh Torah* became one of the central works of halakhic literature and his *Guide for the Perplexed (Moreh Nevukhim)* is one of the most important Jewish philosophical treatises ever written.

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Mintz, Alan. (1947–2017). Professor of Hebrew Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 2001 to 2017, and was one of the preeminent scholars of Hebrew Literature of the 20th century. Founder of *RESPONSE* magazine and of *PROOFTEXTS*, a preeminent journal in the field, he won several awards for his scholarship.

Peretz, Rabbi Cheryl. Associate Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, where she also received her ordination, she is a regular contributor to Today's Torah, the School's virtual Torah learning program. She served as a pulpit rabbi in Los Angeles area synagogues such as Sinai Temple, Adat Shalom in West Los Angeles, and Burbank Temple Emanuel. She also worked for United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism before embarking on a full-time career in marketing consulting for Fortune 500 companies.

Rabbi Levi. 3rd century *amora* in *Eretz Yisrael*. His principal interest was in the field of *aggadah*.

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APPENDIX

A. EXAMPLES OF *BERAKHOT* RECITED OVER TYPES OF ENJOYMENT

All these blessings begin with the standard formula:
Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe… בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

1. ... Who brings forth bread from the earth.	**א.** ... הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.
2. ... Who creates all manner of nourishing foods.	**ב.** ... בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי מְזוֹנוֹת.
3. ... Who creates the fruit of the tree.	**ג.** ... בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ.
4. ... Who creates the produce of the earth.	**ד.** ... בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה.
5. ... by whose word all things come into being.	**ה.** ... שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיֶה בִּדְבָרוֹ.
6. ... Who creates the fruit of the vine.	**ו.** ... בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.
7. ... Who creates all manner of fragrant spices.	**ז.** ... בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי בְשָׂמִים.
8. ... Who gives a pleasant scent to fruit.	**ח.** ... הַנּוֹתֵן רֵיחַ טוֹב בַּפֵּרוֹת.

B. EXAMPLES OF *BERAKHOT* RECITED UPON THE FULFILLMENT OF A MITZVAH

All these blessings begin with the standard formula:
Blessed are You ...Who has sanctified us
with the commandments and Who has commanded us

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ

1. ... to affix a mezuzah.	**א.** ... לִקְבֹּעַ מְזוּזָה.
2. ... to light Shabbat candles.	**ב.** ... לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת.
3. ... to wash hands.	**ג.** ... עַל נְטִילַת יָדָיִם.
4. ... to light the *Chanukkah* candles.	**ד.** ... לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.
5. ... to enwrap [ourselves] with the *tzitzit*.	**ה.** ... לְהִתְעַטֵּף בַּצִּיצִית.
6. ... to eat *matzah*.	**ו.** ... עַל אֲכִילַת מַצָּה.
7. ... to hear the sound of the *shofar*.	**ז.** ... לִשְׁמֹעַ קוֹל שׁוֹפָר.
8. ... to perform circumcision.	**ח.** ... עַל הַמִּילָה.

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C. EXAMPLES OF *BERAKHOT* OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

The following chart illustrates specific circumstances and their respective blessings.

All these blessings begin with the standard formula:
Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe… בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Blessing in English	Blessing in Hebrew	Circumstance
…Who performs the work of Creation.	... עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית.	when seeing lightning
… Whose strength and might fill the universe.	... שֶׁכֹּחוֹ וּגְבוּרָתוֹ מָלֵא עוֹלָם.	when hearing thunder
… Who remembers the Covenant, faithfully maintains it, and fulfills His word.	... זוֹכֵר הַבְּרִית וְנֶאֱמָן בִּבְרִיתוֹ וְקַיָּם בְּמַאֲמָרוֹ.	when seeing a rainbow
… Who has fashioned the great sea.	... שֶׁעָשָׂה אֶת הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל.	when seeing the ocean
… Who has such creatures as these in the world.	... שֶׁכָּכָה לּוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ.	when seeing an exceptionally beautiful creature—animal, tree, bird…
… Who varies the forms of creatures.	... מְשַׁנֶּה הַבְּרִיּוֹת.	when seeing an exceptionally strange-looking creature
… Who shared His wisdom with those that revere Him.	... שֶׁחָלַק מֵחָכְמָתוֹ לִירֵאָיו.	when seeing an outstanding Torah scholar
… Who gave of His wisdom to mortals.	... שֶׁנָּתַן מֵחָכְמָתוֹ לְבָשָׂר וָדָם.	when seeing an outstanding secular knowledge scholar
… Who gave of his glory to mortals.	... שֶׁנָּתַן מִכְּבוֹדוֹ לְבָשָׂר וָדָם.	when seeing a non-Jewish king
… the just Judge.	... דַּיַּן הָאֱמֶת.	when receiving bad tidings, especially news of a person's passing

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ENDNOTES

1 There are a number of ways to understand the debate.

a. Simply, Shmuel wishes to broaden the range of acceptable formulations for *berakhot* to include more than just one biblical usage. It is not that you cannot utter *attah* according to Shmuel, it is just that you do not need to.

b. On a more conceptual level, Shmuel may be arguing with Rav about who is the intended audience of the *berakhah*. The biblical verses that do not use *attah* in their formulations generally have one person speaking to another about God, rather than having one person speaking directly to God, and for that reason the third person is used in the verse. It could be that for Rav, in reciting *berakhot* one is speaking directly to God, while for Shmuel one is more likely speaking to others about God, and so the third person language is more appropriate.

c. In a third understanding, the one adapted by Mintz (Text 2; although he does not reference the talmudic debate in the excerpt here), Rav has no issue addressing God in the second person, while Shmuel can be taken as raising issues with addressing God in such a fashion. For those that apply this understanding, *attah* reflects Gods' immanence and closeness, God's accessibility, the personal nature of one's relationship with God, and sees prayer as being in conversation with God, while those that advocate for using the third person intend to stress God's transcendence, God's complete otherness, and considers the "vast cosmic plane over which God is the absolute ruler."

Those that endorse the third interpretation above, also see the accepted formulation of the *berakhot* as containing a compromise between the two views, for while *attah* is a grammatical second person term, many berakhot go on to include third person language, viz. אשר קדשנו (*asher kid'shanu*, who sanctified us); a second person term would have been אשר קדשתנו (*asher kidashtanu*, you have sanctified us). In the *sheHecheyanu* blessing as well, the pronouns in the words *sheHecheyanu*, *kiymanu*, and *higi'anu* are all in the third person. Such a compromise, to use both second and third person formulations together like this, is also reflected in the Tanakh, in Avraham's accusation of God: "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? . . . Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (*Bereshit* 18:23, 25).

2 This approach to the *berakhah* would fit well with the view of Shmuel discussed in the endnote above that when reciting a *berakhah* one is likely speaking to others (or to themselves) about God, as in this approach one takes the time to remind oneself and others all around that a mitzvah is about to be performed.

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3 See E. Russell and D. Fosha. 2008. "Transformational Affects and Core State in AEDP: The Emergence and Consolidation of Joy, Hope, Gratitude, and Confidence in (the Solid Goodness of) the Self." *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration* 18(2): 167–190.

4 For more on this see *Tosefta*, Tractate *Berakhot* 6:5.

5 For an ever-relevant essay on the *asher yatzar* blessing, see K. M. Prager's "For Everything a Blessing," available online at daat.ac.il.

6 Available online at biblestudytools.com.

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