



## **TOLMM WEEKLY Newsletter for 7-23-22**

### ***Ministry News***

***IF YOU HAVE A PRAYER REQUEST YOU WOULD LIKE PEOPLE ON THE LIST TO PRAY FOR YOU CAN SEND THEM TO US AT [TOLMM@ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG](mailto:TOLMM@ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG) OR BY TEXT MESSAGE TO 575 644-7706 AND I WILL SEND THEM BY EMAIL ONLY.***

Remember that you can support the work of Tree of Life Messianic Ministries with a donation made via PayPal or by check to PO Box 467, Organ, NM 88052. Your donation helps our continued outreach to inmates and the time it takes to put this Newsletter together.

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**Tree of Life Messianic Ministries primarily focuses on its Prison Ministry and helping form groups in the prisons. TOLMM also seeks to help Home Groups and offers a covering for Home Groups and the combined experience of leadership from Rabbi Philip Hammond and Rabbi Mordecai Silver. Group leaders can receive recognition as Elders under TOLMM, which will help in an advisory role.**

Your support is needed for the Prison Ministry due to continuing rising costs.  
We now have an Affiliate in Australia.

## **HOME GROUPS, CONGREGATIONS AND PEOPLE SEEKING FELLOWSHIP...**

Shawn Warren lives in Arizona. If you know of someone who is looking for a group in that area, please let me know and I will send the information to Shawn.

Marcia Hedrick would like to host a group on the west side of El Paso in her home. She also needs someone to lead the group while she will be the host. If you are interested let me know and I will send her the information.

Gabriel Martinez has a home group in El Paso (different area). If interested let me know and I will send him the information.

Rabbi Phillip Hammond has a Zoom Bible Study and a Erev Shabbat and Shabbat Service on Zoom Friday evening and Saturday morning at 11:00am. Rabbi Hammond is in Australia and the time difference would be 5:00pm Friday Mountain Time. Rabbi Hammond is looking into starting a men's group focused in the United States. You can contact Rabbi Hammond at [Philip@etz-chayim.org](mailto:Philip@etz-chayim.org). Rabbi Hammond is now affiliated with Rabbi Mordecai Silver and his ministry, Tree of Life Messianic Ministries. Check out Rabbi Hammond at <https://www.etz-chayim.org/australia-affiliate/>.

We thank you for your support.

Blessings in Messiah Yeshua,  
Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph. D., and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D.

## **General News**

TO SEARCH FOR MY BOOKS ON AMAZON ENTER "**BOOKS BY RAV MORDECAI SILVER**". MINE ARE AVAILABLE IN PRINT FORMAT ONLY. I HAVE TWO NEW BOOKS ON AMAZON: RAV SHA'UL AND REFLECTIONS ON TORAH.

FOR RABBI HAMMOND'S BOOK GO TO AMAZON.COM AS WELL.

# **MESSIANIC TEACHING ON THE WEEKLY TORAH, HAFTARAH, AND APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE PORTIONS...**



## ***Message for 7-23-22***

***Message Originally Shared 7/3/99***

***Pinchas - Phineas (dark-skinned)***

***Numbers-Bamidbar 25:10-29:40***

***1 Kings 18:46-19:21***

***Yochanan 2:13-22, 13:1, 1Cor. 5:6-8***

In the Sidra or Parashah Pinchas (Numbers-Bamidbar 27), five sisters whose father has died come before Moses and plead for the right to inherit: God tells Moses that their plea is just. At a time when it was not obvious that women ought to be equal before the law, Moses, with God's guidance, sees them as real persons.

The Eternal One also sets His festivals and the offerings that are to be given on these days. The list of Appointed Times that are important to Him is as follows: There were to be two daily offerings every day. There was the Sabbath offering of two lambs, the same as the daily offerings. The New Moon-Rosh Chodesh, Pesach (Passover), Unleavened Bread-Matzo, First Fruits, Shavuot, Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, Succot and Shemini Atzeret. These were the Days of the Lord, and they are emphasized throughout Scripture as Holy Times of convocation or assembly.

Then, in contemplation of a change of leadership, Moses says: Let the Eternal One, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community (27:15).

If the Eternal is the “Source of the breath of all flesh,” we are kin to “all flesh.” We need to see this always.

Numbers-Bamidbar 27:15-18

**15: Moses spoke to YAHVEH, saying, 16: “May YAHVEH, God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly, 17: who will go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and bring them in; and let the assembly of the YAHVEH not be like sheep that have no shepherd.” 18: YAHVEH said to Moses, “Take to yourself Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him...**

The interesting comment on the part of Moses is that he desires that God appoint a leader over the people so that they will not be like sheep without a shepherd, who would have a tendency to stray. This is exactly in line with What the Messiah Y’shua saw as He likened the people to sheep without a shepherd.

1 Kings-Malachim 19:11-12

**11: [The word of God] then said, “Go out [of the cave] and stand on the mountain before YAHVEH,” And behold, YAHVEH was passing, and a great, powerful wind, smashing mountains and breaking rocks, went before YAHVEH. “YAHVEH is not in the wind!” [Elijah was told]. After the wind came an earthquake. “YAHVEH is not in the earthquake.” 12: After the earthquake came a fire. “YAHVEH is not in the fire.” After the fire came a still, thin sound.**

וַיֹּאמֶר צֶא וְעַמְדָּתָ בְּהָר לְפָנַי יְהוָה

This sentence translates and the Word of Yahveh. Interesting that the Hebrew scribes translate this as The Word of God then said. What we clearly see here are the three parts of God. The Word of God who is Y’shua, the Father, YAHVEH Himself and the *kol*, the voice of God, embodied in the Ruach, the Spirit of God.

The Hebrew commentary says about this still, thin sound that God was teaching Elijah that He does not administer indiscriminate, harsh justice to sinners. Rather, with silent restraint and patience, He awaits their repentance. The word that is translated as sound also is translated as voice-*kol*.

Did you know that pet rocks were the rage about 20 years ago? And why not? You could take your pet rock anywhere and not have to worry about it disturbing anyone or making a mess. There weren't any expenses involved once you'd purchased your pet rock-no food, no kitty litter, no license, just you and your pet rock. And even better than a virtual pet, you could forget about your pet rock for weeks or even months and it would still be there for you when you decided to renew the relationship.

There was only one drawback with pet rocks. They never responded to their owners' outpouring of love and attention. Pet rocks simply had hearts of stone!

Perhaps, though, in the Pet Rock Era, we were the ones with hearts of stone. Perhaps the pet rocks, and any rocks for that matter did respond but we just didn't hear them!

All of God's creation animate and inanimate, will one day no longer be mute. They will reveal all that they heard and saw.

At first glance this might seem a bit far-fetched especially in regard to the inanimate part of His creation. However, one need not look any further than forensic science to realize how credible the above scenario truly is.

At the scene of a crime, detectives may dust for fingerprints. Even the cleanest fingers leave traces. The fingerprints are there but we don't see them. At least not until the environment is changed which allows the fingerprints to be revealed.

### **John-Yochanan 2:13-22**

**13: It was almost time for the festival of Pesach in Y'hudah, so Y'shua went up to Yerushalayim. 14: In the Temple grounds He found those who were selling cattle, sheep and pigeons, and others who were sitting at tables exchanging money. 15: He made a whip from cords and drove them all out of the Temple grounds, the sheep and cattle as well. He knocked over the money-changers' tables, scattering their coins; 16: and to the pigeon-sellers He said, "Get these things out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" 17: (His talmidim later recalled that the Tanakh says, "Zeal for your house will devour me [Psalm 69:10(9)]. 18: So the Judeans confronted Him by asking Him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove you have the right to do all this?" 19: Y'shua answered them, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." 20: The Judeans said, "It took 46 years to build this Temple, and you're going to raise it in three days?" 21: But the "temple" He had spoken of was His body. 22: Therefore, when He was raised from the dead, His talmidim**

***remembered that He had said this, and they trusted in the Tanakh and in what Y'shua had said.***

This was not just a matter of His cleansing the House of His Father. It was an example of His devotion not only to His Father but also to those who would come to place their faith in Him.

We find this confirmed in the following Scripture.

**John-Yochanan 13:1**

***1: It was just before the festival of Pesach, and Y'shua knew that the time had come for Him to pass from this world to the Father. Having loved His own people in the world, He loved them to the end.***

And once again this desire to cleanse us so that we could be made one with the Father is shown in this passage of Scripture.

**1 Corinthians 5:6-8**

***6: Your boasting is not good. Don't you know the saying, "It takes only a little chametz to leaven a whole batch of dough?"***

***7: Get rid of the old chametz, so that you can be a new batch of dough, because in reality you are unleavened. For our Pesach lamb, the Messiah, has been sacrificed. 8: So let us celebrate the Seder not with leftover chametz, the chametz of wickedness and evil, but with the matzah of purity and truth.***

The festivals that YAHVEH commands us to keep forever are just that, to be kept forever. They have not been replaced. They have not been changed. They are perpetual, even in some of their fulfillment, because they teach us about Him. They teach us about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are a constant reminder of Him. That is why Scripture tells us that the festivals will be kept even in the Messianic Age. We need the constant reminder of who He is. His festivals tell us of His love for us, His creation, all of His creation. His word teaches us about His anger with us when we turn away from Him. It shows us His justice, when we do not listen to Him. But most important of all, we are shown His righteousness, His mercy, and His grace towards us. YAHVEH desires to lead us. He knows that without a shepherd we will wander. He gave us His Torah, first through Moses, to show us His ways. Then He gave His Torah to us in Y'shua, so

that we could see His Word come alive, not just written on stone. Y'shua is the living Torah who shows us the way to the Father.

We need to learn to follow His ways. Our actions - good or otherwise - leave spiritual prints, so to speak. Though we can't see them, they are there. Today, a fingerprint on an object "talk" when dusted with a special powder. One day soon, the prints left on rocks, beams and walls will talk as the Godly energy within everything is revealed. The Shepherd desires that you follow Him so that you will not lose your way. The day is coming soon when He will return to gather His sheep, not for the slaughter but for the festival. May it take place immediately.

***From the Midrash: God says: make yourself like Me. When I created the world, I strove not to hurt a single one of My creatures, and I did not make known to any human being the name of the tree of which Adam ate [in the Garden of Eden, so that even the tree should not be put to shame].***



We include a Traditional Torah Commentary and my Messianic Commentary. The reason for this is so you can see a Messianic Perspective and a Traditional Jewish one. Remember to use discernment in approaching Traditional Jewish teachings as they do not recognize Yeshua as the Messiah. There are various ideas in traditional Jewish circles about the Messiah and even that there is no Messiah, the thinking in Reform Judaism. So, please be careful to balance the teachings.

I do not agree with the Jewish position on Yeshua, but Believers need to know the Jewish thinking on Yeshua and not buy into this thinking and forsake faith in our Messiah. For those who say they would never do this, we must beg to differ, because we have seen it over our lives as Jewish Believer's in Yeshua. We have been Believer's in Messiah Yeshua for decades. We have seen a lot and had many discussions with our fellow Jews and non-Jews who ultimately turned away from Yeshua because they steeped themselves in Jewish teachings. One does not come out of either traditional Judaism or Christianity and come into the Messianic walk, and then going back, or into, traditional Judaism. *There are many good things in Judaism but denying Yeshua as Messiah is not one of them.* Berachot (Blessings), Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph.D., and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D.

## **A TRADITIONAL JEWISH PARASHAH AND HAFTARAH COMMENTARY**



### **Parashat Pinchas: Summary Num. 25:10-30:1**

***God gives Pinchas a covenant of peace; God explains the apportionment of the Land of Israel; the daughters of Tzelophehad petition to inherit their father's portion; Moses appoints Joshua his successor.***

God said to Moses, "The priest Pinchas turned My anger away from the sons of Israel by bringing My rights to bear in their midst. Therefore, I shall give to him My covenants of Peace and everlasting priesthood."

After the death of the idolatrous Israelites, God told Moses to take a count of the entire community of the sons of Israel from 20 years old and upward, according to their father's houses. Each of the families was counted and numbered as God commanded.

After the people were counted, God told Moses, "The land shall be apportioned as an inheritance according to the number of names. To the numerous, you shall give a large inheritance, and to the few, a small inheritance. By lot this land shall be divided, and it shall be received as a possession according to the names of the tribes of the fathers."

Now during this counting and apportionment of land, the five daughters of Zelophehad, came near and placed themselves before Moses and Eleazar the priest and the entire community in the entrance of the Tent of Appointed Meeting. They said, "Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among the company that banded together against God. He was not among Korah's allies, but he died because of his own sin, and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father disappear from the midst of his family, just because he did not have a son? Please give us a possession too."

Moses brought their legitimate claim before God. And God responded, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak justly. Certainly, you shall give them, according to the legal right of males, a hereditary possession, and you shall cause their father's inheritance to pass to them. And to the

sons of Israel, you shall say: if a man dies and he has no son, you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, you shall give his inheritance to his kin that is closest to him from among his family. This shall remain for Israel as a legal norm.”

God then said to Moses, “Go to the Mountain of Transitions and look at the land that I have given to the sons of Israel. And when you have seen it, you too shall be gathered to your people as your brother Aaron was gathered. For you acted against My words in the wilderness of Tzin.”

Moses responded, “Let God appoint a man over the community who will lead them so that the community of God should not be like sheep who have no shepherd.”

God said to Moses, “Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man to whom there is spirit, lean your hand upon him and present him to Eleazar the priest and to the entire community, and charge him before their eyes. You will thus place some of your prestige upon him so that the entire community and the sons of Israel will obey him.” Moses did with Joshua as God commanded.

God spoke to Moses and commanded him to have the sons of Israel bring offerings to God in each season of appointed meeting. Fire offerings, homage offerings and ascent offerings are noted for each of the festivals, including Passover, the Sabbath, the New Moon, the Festival of Weeks, and the Day of Atonement. Each offering, whether of animal sacrifice, flour, incense, libations or human rest, is made to express compliance to God. Moses explained these exact offerings to the Children of Israel according to everything that God had commanded Moses.

#### Parshat Pinchas Discussion Questions:

- 1) **The daughters of Zelophehad are given rights to their deceased father’s land. Describe how important this ruling is for women then and now.**
- 2) **Moses, knowing it was his time to die, asked God to appoint a leader for the Israelites. Is there one leader of the Jewish people today? If so, who? If not, why? Would it be helpful to have one leader for the entire Jewish people today?**
- 3) **Why do you think God chose Joshua, son of Nun, to follow in Moses’ footsteps as leader of the Israelites? Name some qualities of leadership and loyalty Joshua has shown thus far in the Torah. Which of these qualities do you share with Joshua?**
- 4) **Name some Jewish leaders in your community. How did they become leaders? How do you think they are doing as leaders of your Jewish community?**

## **Haftarah for Pinchas 1 Kings 18:46-19:21**

***The prophet Elijah is so zealous for God, he loses his job.***

The haftarah for Parashat Pinchas features the last, and perhaps most famous, biblical story about Elijah the prophet. Living during the reign of the evil Israelite King Ahab and his even-

worse queen, Jezebel, Elijah gained a reputation for working miracles and crusading against idolatry. The haftarah begins just after Elijah has slaughtered 450 worshipers of Ba'al.

Jezebel gets word of the massacre Elijah perpetrated, and she is furious. She vows that on the very next day Elijah's fate will be the same as those he killed. Frightened, Elijah runs for his life. He stops under a bush in the wilderness, feeling defeated. "Enough! Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers," he mutters in despair (19:4).

Elijah falls asleep but is awakened by an angel urging him to eat cake and drink water which had just miraculously appeared at his side. Elijah eats, but again he falls asleep. The angel is persistent and wakes Elijah a second time, telling him to eat and drink because there is a long journey ahead of him.

### Elijah in the Wilderness

With the strength he gained from that meal, Elijah walks for 40 days in the wilderness, to the mountain of God at Horeb. He finds a cave there and spends the night.

While asleep in the cave, God appears to Elijah and asks him a powerful, existential question: "Why are you here, Elijah?" (19:9)

Elijah responds with a monologue defending his zealotry: "I am moved by zeal for the Lord, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life" (19:10).

Instead of replying directly to Elijah's claim, God takes Elijah out of the cave and shows him some miracles. First God sends a mighty wind, splitting mountains and rocks—but, the text tells us, God was not in the wind. Then God creates a forceful earthquake. Again, the text specifies that God was not in the earthquake. Then God sets a powerful fire—but, once again, we learn that the fire did not contain God's presence. Finally, God brings about a still, small voice.

"Why are you here, Elijah?" (19:13)—God poses this question a second time. But Elijah is unchanged even after experiencing the wind, earthquake, fire, and small voice. He responds to God's question with precisely the same self-important words he used before: "I am moved by zeal for the Lord, for the Israelites have forsaken...I alone am left..." (19:14).

In Elijah's unchanged response, we can see the tragedy of his life. The still, small voice had been God's attempt to teach Elijah that zealotry and grand miracles are not always the best way to serve God's purpose. But Elijah is a man who only knows to act with fire and brimstone; he could not learn the lesson.

In the final verses of the haftarah, God has Elijah appoint a new king in Aram, a new king in Israel, and a new prophet in Israel—Elisha. By appointing Elisha, Elijah effectively surrenders his position as prophet. At the end of the haftarah, when Elisha asks to kiss his parents' goodbye before following Elijah, we are left hopeful that perhaps Elisha will embody a more human, balanced kind of leadership for Israel.

### Connection to Parashat Pinchas

Pinhas and Elijah are, famously, the Bible's two zealots for God. Elijah describes himself as a zealot in this week's haftarah, and the Torah text describes Pinhas as a zealot for bringing a bloody end to the public copulation of the Israelite man and the Midianite woman. Though the Torah seems to support Pinhas' zealotry, perhaps the choice of this Elijah story as haftarah is meant to remind us that zealotry is not always the best approach.

Some Jewish traditions not only compare these two personalities, and actually go so far as to say that Pinhas and Elijah were the same person. Since the Torah never reports on Pinhas' death, and Elijah is described as going up in a chariot to heaven, but not actually dying, it has been suggested that neither really died, and that Elijah was a later incarnation of Pinhas. This could explain their shared characteristics, as well as the choice of this haftarah for Parashat Pinhas.

***From the Desk of  
Rabbi Philip Hammond  
Coming Soon...***

## ***Can You Believe It?***



### **What the “Writing on the Wall” in the Book of Daniel Really Means**

***The phrase shows up in popular culture as synonymous with fatalistic warning, but it has a much deeper meaning for Jews.***

Super-star rappers French Montana, Post Malone and Cardi B made it the title of their 2019 hit. Rock artist Paul Simon mentioned it in his hit single, *Kodachrome*. Rembrandt immortalized it in his painting, *Belshazzar’s Feast*, and he included in that work a “word puzzle” from the rabbis of the Talmud. It’s been satirized, politicized, popularized, set to music, made into the title of scores of books, bands and tunes. For more than 2,000 years, its imagery has terrified and mesmerized readers, even though most people, I suspect, don’t understand what it truly means or where it comes from. What is this mysterious idea striking fear in people’s hearts and making huge dents in high and low culture for centuries? It’s the timeless story of the writing on the wall.



“Belshazzar’s Feast” by Rembrandt via Wikimedia Commons.

When we use it in everyday speech, we might say, “You need to read the writing on the wall,” or “I can read the writing on the wall.” We generally mean by this that we can detect

something terrible that will happen in the near future. There seems to be universal agreement that to read the writing on the wall means to brace oneself, soberly and stoically, for the worst. However, this popular use of the phrase distorts its original meaning. In the Book of Daniel, the source of the phrase, something quite different is happening.

Some background is in order before we look at the original story of the writing on the wall. Daniel is a Jew exiled to Babylonia during the military campaign of King Nebuchadnezzar against the Judean State in 586 BCE. According to the first four chapters of his eponymous book, he and his three friends are part of an elite corps of exiles pressed into a royal training program to serve the king and state. The four young men distinguish themselves with a string of divinely aided successes, demonstrating extraordinary gifts of dream interpretation and intelligence, all while fiercely maintaining their Jewish identities and personal integrity. With strong echoes of the “exile-to-palace” climbs of Joseph (and, to some degree, Esther), Daniel and his friends twice interpret the king’s ominous dreams of personal and imperial disaster and apocalyptic regime change, while also exhorting him to repent before God. The “hat trick” that secures their high status with the king is when the three friends are thrown into a fiery furnace but survive the ordeal with nary a scratch on them. (The story of Daniel in the lion’s den, a similar miraculous escape from a pit of death, comes later in the book.)

With this in mind, we enter the scene of a huge party being held by Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, who takes over when his father is banished. What do we first notice?

Under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar ordered the gold and silver vessels that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple at Jerusalem to be brought so that the king and his nobles, his consorts and his concubines could drink from them ... They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.

*(Daniel 5:2-4)*

This was, for the ancient Jews watching, truly vile. It was bad enough that the Babylonians, under the leadership of Belshazzar’s father, exiled the Jewish people, destroyed their holy Temple, and stole the sacred vessels ... but using them to get more drunk and to worship false gods? Even God, who according to biblical theology used the Babylonians as a means by which to punish the Jews for their sins, would have no reason to want that. Enter the writing on the wall:

Just then, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace opposite the lampstand, so that the king could see the hand as it wrote.

*(Daniel 5:5)*

The king calls for his magicians and wise men to read and interpret the writing but, predictably, they can’t. Only that magnificent court Jew, Daniel, is able to. After excoriating

Belshazzar for his arrogance and impudence before God, he reads the now-famous words on the wall:

***Mene Mene Tekel U-Pharsin***

Our hero decodes God's dire warning to the king:

God has numbered [the days of] your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting; your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

*(5:26-28)*

Spoiler alert: That night, Belshazzar is killed, presumably the victim of a military campaign that brings his enemies, the Medes, to power. The writing on the wall foretold truly.

There are clearly similarities between the biblical story and our pop culture appropriation of it. However, the contrasts are what fascinate me.

First, in the popular versions, we usually talk about a person reading the writing on the wall him or herself, to come to terms with a terrible, inevitable reality. But in Daniel, the king and all his advisors can't read the writing on the wall. Its message is utterly lost to them until Daniel explains it to them.

Second, we generally use the phrase "the writing on the wall" to refer to something which is ominous, but morally neutral. Something bad is going to happen, but it could be deserved or undeserved by us, depending upon our behavior or other circumstances. Yet Daniel's explanation to the king makes clear that his ruin is the result of his arrogance and hunger for power.

Third, reading the writing on the wall entails preparing for an unpleasant future with no necessary reference to the past that might have brought us there; Daniel's ominous prediction to Belshazzar is preceded by a harsh admonishment for his miserable past and his villainous deeds.

Daniel is more a classical prophet than a futurist. His job, in this scene, is to reveal Belshazzar's fate; but even more so, he's there to offer a damning critique of the king and his society, to force them "to read" the truth about who they have become and where it is leading them.

My teacher, Rabbi Gordon Tucker, wrote about how our revered teacher, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, understood the nature of biblical prophecy:

*Heschel...argued that the special aptitude of the prophets was not an ability to predict the future, but rather the deep intuitive sense they had of the devastating effect that earthly injustice has on God's inner emotional life. As he put it, whoever imagines that God is unaffected by injustice by and to humans, is denying the very essence of religious faith. In this view, what caused prophets to shriek was a shattering and undeniable empathy with the suffering of the Creator.*

Daniel is no Jeremiah; he doesn't shriek at state and society from the margins, he serves them from within, indeed from high within as a member of court. Yet as a passionate lover of God and God's oppressed people, he refuses to sugarcoat the message of the wall's writing to appease the king and court. With an empathic rage barely restrained by formality and eloquence, he condemns *and* supports them by unpacking the dire message written by God's "hand."

The story of the handwriting on the wall occupies the realm of biblical mythology and miracle. Removing this literary dressing, we're left with a message and a mission, a "writing on the wall" of contemporary life, which we Jews are obligated to place incessantly before society: we must speak truth to power. This is difficult to do, especially when it places us at great potential risk; it has always been a fraught endeavor for us, especially in the Diaspora. Like Daniel, we Jews have struggled over many centuries to survive with political cunning under regimes that tolerated us, used us, were hostile to us, and most horribly, tried to destroy us. Even Jewish life in democratic America comes with complicated strings attached. They present us with huge political and moral choices between self-protection and fighting for what is right in the greater society. That's why Daniel can be such a powerful model for us. He rises so high in the court of the king that the latter calls upon his wisdom and good counsel before all his nobility. Yet the favor that Daniel curries with Belshazzar doesn't prevent him from severely chastising Belshazzar for his wrongdoing. Daniel serves the king, but he serves God and God's truth even more.

Particularly in our current American-Jewish Diaspora, we have never felt so well integrated and so fearful for our future and the future of the country. Cast over us is a foreboding that our society is actually *writing* its own slow demise on our American wall; ironically, it can't — or it refuses — to read what it has written. Daniel teaches us that, however risky it may be, we Jews must be on the frontlines of using our accrued power, privilege and presence to speak out, protesting what we know are the growing injustices and hatreds that threaten to shatter America in angry, warring, pieces.

Daniel demands of us that we help our society to read the writing on the wall before it's too late to repair what is broken.

# **Prayer Points**



## **Kavanah, Or Intention**

***In the words of one sage, "Prayer without kavanah is like a body without a soul."***

Kavanah is the Hebrew word for direction, intention, or purpose. In its simplest meaning, it refers to concentrating the mind in the performance of a religious act, ensuring that it doesn't devolve into rote, mechanical action. It is most commonly associated with concentration and intention in Jewish prayer, but the concept of kavanah applies to all mitzvot.

Jewish authorities generally consider that proper kavanah is essential to the performance of mitzvot. The Mishnah rules that if someone happens to be passing by a synagogue at the time that the shofar was blown on Rosh Hashanah, they do not fulfill the mitzvah of shofar because they heard it only incidentally, not purposefully. Similarly, the medieval code of the Jewish law the Shulchan Aruch, while noting that some authorities contend that proper intention is not required for the performance of mitzvot, asserts that this view is incorrect, and that proper intention is indeed required.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his classic work *God in Search of Man*, explains that performing a mitzvah without proper kavanah is inadequate because while it might have a positive effect on the world, it leaves the doer of the mitzvah unaffected. The purpose of Jewish practice, he writes, is transformation of the soul.

"A moral deed unwittingly done may be relevant to the world because of the aid it renders unto others. Yet a deed without devotion, for all its effects on the lives of others, will leave the life of the doer unaffected. The true goal for man is *to be* what he *does*."

While kavanah is considered an essential part of all Jewish religious activity, much of the discussion of kavanah concerns prayer. A famous saying of the 11th century philosopher Bahya Ibn Pakudah is often quoted in this regard: "Prayer without kavanah is like a body without a soul."

In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides includes kavanah as one of five essential elements of proper prayer (the others are clean hands, a covered body, a clean space and the removal of distractions). Maimonides writes that if a person finds they are distracted or confused, they must first regain their composure before praying. If they are tired from a journey, they should not recite prayers until the mind is calm. Kavanah requires both freedom from extraneous thoughts and distractions and the cognizance that a person is standing before the divine presence. Maimonides advises that one sit for a while before beginning prayers, approvingly citing the practice of the pious to meditate for an hour both before and after praying.

Jewish mystics, who devoted much energy to the goal of transforming and directing human consciousness, naturally had much to say about kavanah, expanding it from the general idea of concentration and intent to specific meditations — kavannot, in plural — on the various manifestations of divine energy or the esoteric meanings of particular prayers. Kavanah is intended not merely to ensure mitzvot are performed with proper intention, but to elevate consciousness itself and achieve connection, or d'vekut, with God and the unity of the divine essence.

## ***Hebrew Word (s) of the Week***

יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ (Isa. 54:5 WTT)

Lord of Hosts is His Name

## ***Chicken Soup or What???***



## **How to Make Krembos, the Most Addictive Israeli Sweet**

***These classic Israeli treats will disappear fast.***

Whether or not you've ever heard of krembos, there's no better time to try making these sweet treats at home. The name "krembo" means "cream in it" which is true of this decadent sweet. While originally a Danish delicacy, krembos are massively popular and mass-produced in Israel today. Krembos consist of a buttery cookie base topped with a swirl of marshmallow cream and coated in a thin layer of chocolate. They provide the perfect balance of textures, with a lighter than air marshmallow cream and crunchy cookie. Because of the soaring temperatures in Israel, krembos are often sold during the cooler, winter months but they are delicious anytime of the year.



Photo credit Micah Siva

**Notes:** When piping your marshmallow cream, be sure that your cookies have fully cooled. You can make the cookie base 1-2 days in advance if necessary. The finished krembos can be stored in an airtight container for up to two days. They also freeze well.

## Ingredients

For the cookie base:

- ½ cup unsalted butter or vegan butter
- ⅓ cup powdered sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 Tbsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp sea salt
- 1 ⅓ cup flour
- 1-2 Tbsp water, as needed

For the marshmallow cream:

- ¾ cups sugar
- ½ cup water
- 3 large egg whites, at room temperature
- ¼ tsp cream of tartar
- 1 Tbsp vanilla

For the chocolate shell:

- 1 cup chocolate chips
- ½ cup coconut oil

## Directions

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1. To make the cookie base: Combine the butter and powdered sugar with a stand or hand mixer until fluffy. Add the egg yolk, vanilla extract and sea salt until combined. Add the flour and 1-2 Tbsp water, as needed until a crumbly dough forms.
2. Shape into a disc, cover and refrigerate for at least 20 minutes, or overnight.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking tray with parchment paper. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to ¼ inch thickness. Cut 2 ½ inch circles out of the dough, re-roll the scraps to cut into circles. Transfer to the baking tray and refrigerate for 10 minutes.

4. Bake for 11-13 minutes, or until golden.
5. Transfer to a cooling rack until they cool to room temperature.
6. To make the marshmallow cream: In a small saucepan, heat the sugar and water to 240°F over medium heat. Once the sugar mixture reaches 200°F, begin whipping the egg whites and cream of tartar in a stand mixer to stiff peaks.
7. Once the sugar mixture reaches 240°F, pour the sugar syrup into the whipping egg whites, beating on high for 5-7 minutes, or until stable and shiny.
8. Transfer to a piping bag fitted with a large, round tip. Holding the piping bag vertically, pipe a tall mound on each cookie.
9. Transfer to the fridge until set.
10. To make the chocolate shell: Melt the chocolate in a double boiler (or in the microwave in 30-second increments). Add the coconut oil, mixing to combine. It should be the consistency of heavy cream.
11. Spoon the chocolate coating over the marshmallow. Return to the fridge to set.

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