



TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 12-3-22 VAYETZE

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 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.

Donate



Tree of Life Messianic Ministries is an approved Giving Charity by PayPal. To donate go to etz-chayim.org and click on the PayPal Link.

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. Gabriel is an Elder affiliated with TOLMM as is his Home Group, Ohr Ha'Brit Messianic Assembly.

There is a new Home Group in Las Cruces. For more information email tolmm@etz-chayim.org.

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. 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/>.

Elder Shawn Warren is an Elder affiliated with TOLMM and helps with one-on-one correspondence with inmates in our Prison Ministry Outreach. He also encourages people to contact us about affiliating with TOLMM through Home Groups and our help to group leaders.

There is a new Home Group in Idaho.

We thank you for your support. Blessings in Messiah Yeshua,

Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph. D., and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D. and our team

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 12-3-22 VAYETZE

Message originally shared 12/5/97

Vayetse – And He Went Out

Genesis 28:10-32:2

Hosea 11:7-14:9

Revelation 7:1-17

Genesis 28:10-15

*Jacob departed from Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place, which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place. And he dreamt and behold! A ladder was set earthward, and its top reached heavenward; and behold! Angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold! The Lord was standing over him, and He said, "I am the Lord, God of Abraham your father and God of Isaac; the ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants. Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward; **and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and by your offspring.** Behold, I am with you; I will guard you wherever you go, and I*

will return you to this soil; for I will not forsake you until I will have done what I have spoken about you.”

Hosea 14:5-10

I will rectify their waywardness; I will love them gratuitously; for My anger has turned away from them. I will be to Israel like the dew, and he will blossom like a rosebush, and his roots will strike out like the (cedars of) Lebanon. His tender branches will go forth, and his glory will be like (that of) the olive tree and his fragrance like that of Lebanon. Those who dwell in his shade will return; they will revive (like) grain and blossom like a vine; their repute (will be) like the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim (will say), ‘What more need have I of idols?’ I will respond and I will gaze upon him. I am like an ever-fresh cypress tree; your fruit will be provided from Me. Who is wise and will understand these things; (who is) understanding and will know them? For the ways of the Lord are straight; the righteous walk in them and sinners will stumble over them.

Jewish commentary says this about this passage: An essential part of repentance is that one feels remorse for his past failings and sincerely resolves to improve. Thus, the penitent begins by begging God to look favorably upon his good intentions and to accept the prayers, confession, and pledges of his lips in place of, and as more worthy than, fatted bull offerings, which may look superficially impressive but are lacking in inner content.

Revelation 7:16-17

“They will never again be hungry, they will never again be thirsty, the sun will not beat down on them, nor will any burning heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them, will lead them to springs of living water; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There is a passage in the Midrash that describes our relationship with God as that of a child to his father, a sister to her brother, a bride to her groom, a vineyard to its watchman, and so on.

Each of these examples expresses another part of the relationship: the inherent bond between God and those who believe in Him, the love and affection, God's guardianship over us, our being a source of joy to Him, etc.

But what does the sheep/shepherd example represent?

If the point is that God provides for us and protects us, or that we are subservient and devoted to Him, these elements also exist in the father/child relationship. What unique aspect of our relationship with God can be expressed only by describing us as His sheep?

The sheep's dominant trait is its meekness and obedience. The child obeys his father but does so for many reasons; the sheep does not obey for any reason - it is simply obedient by nature. It is this element of our relationship with God that the sheep represents: an unquestioning subservience which derives not from our understanding of His greatness and our feelings toward Him (in which case it would be defined by the limits of our understanding and feelings), but from the recognition that "I am His sheep."

To be a follower of God you must become like a sheep, because our self-negation and unquestioning obedience to God is the foundation of our walk of faith.

Of course, we are not only God's sheep - we are also His children, His bride, His sister, and His vineyard.

Being a believer in God means studying His Word, developing a passionate love and reverent awe for God, and teaching His wisdom and implementing His will in an oft-times hostile world. But the foundation of it all – the base from which all these derive and upon which they are all based - is our simple commitment to God, a commitment that transcends reason and emotion.

Isaiah 49:10 echoes the passage from Revelation 7:

They will not hunger, and they will not thirst; heat and sun will not afflict them, for their Merciful One will lead them, and along streams of water will He guide them.

I want to close with this passage from Isaiah 25:9

And they will say on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we hoped to Him that He would save us; this is the Lord to Whom we hoped, let us exult and be glad in His salvation.'

His Y'shua...

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.

We 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 Vayetzei: Summary Gen:28:10-32:3

Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's household and lives there for several years, marrying Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel, and building a large family.

On his way to his uncle Laban's, Jacob dreams of a ladder that stretches up from earth to heaven. There are angels of God ascending and descending the ladder.

God stands behind Jacob and says, "I am God, the God of your father Abraham and the God of your father Isaac. I will give to you and your seed the land where you are sleeping. And your seed will be as dust of the earth and spread in all directions, and through you will all the families on earth be blessed. I am with you and will guard you. I will not leave you until I have accomplished what I have promised."

Jacob and Rachel Meet

Jacob awoke from his sleep, saying, "Truly, God is in this place, and I did not know it. This is a house of God. This is a gate of heaven."

The next morning, Jacob anointed a memorial stone with oil and named the place Beth El. Then Jacob made a vow, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this path and give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and I will return in peace to the house of my father, then God shall be God to me. And this memorial stone shall be a house of God, and all that God will give to me, I will tithe to God repeatedly."

Jacob continued his journey. He saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there. There was a rock that was to be moved from the well in order to access the water. Jacob said to the men gathered there, "Do you know Laban?"

"Yes," they answered. "He is well and his daughter, Rachel, the shepherdess, will soon be coming with her sheep."

Soon, Rachel did come with her father's sheep. When Jacob saw Rachel, he caused the rock to roll from the mouth of the well in order to water the sheep. Jacob kissed Rachel, then wept. Thereupon Jacob told Rachel that he was her kinsman, and she ran and told her father. Jacob ended up staying with Laban for a month.

Laban and Jacob Make a Deal

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Even if you are my kinsman, should you serve me without compensation? What shall your wages be?"

Now, Laban had two daughters. The older daughter was Leah, and the younger daughter was Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel and said to Laban, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter, Rachel." Laban agreed. So, Jacob served for Rachel seven years, but they were only a few days in his eyes because of his love for her. And Jacob said to Laban, "My working days are complete. Give me my wife."

Laban threw a big feast. When it was evening, he took his eldest daughter Leah, and brought her to Jacob for their wedding night. But when morning came and Jacob saw it was Leah, he said, "What have you done to me? Did I not serve you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?"

Laban responded, "It is not our tradition to give the younger daughter before the elder. Complete the wedding week with Leah and we shall give you Rachel for another seven years of work."

The Tribes are Born

Jacob served another seven years, and Laban gave him Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. When God saw that Leah was the hated one, God opened her womb. Leah conceived and bore a son, Reuben, for, "God has looked into my affliction! Now my husband will love me!" She conceived another son, Shimeon, saying, "God has heard that I am the hated one and has given me another son." Then she had another son, Levi, saying, "Now my husband will attach himself to me for I have borne him three sons." Next, she had Judah, saying, "Now I shall give thanks to God." Then Leah stopped conceiving children.

When Rachel saw she had not born Jacob any children, she envied her sister. She said to him, "Give me children or else I will die."

But Jacob was angry with Rachel saying "Am I in God's place? Who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

So, Rachel gave Jacob her maidservant, Bilhah. Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Rachel said, "God has judged me and has heard my weeping and given me a son," and called him Dan. Bilhah then bore Jacob another son, Naphtali, for "I have fought a Divine struggle with my sister, and I have prevailed."

When Leah saw she was no longer bearing children, she gave her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob. Zilpah bore Jacob a son, Gad, saying, "Good fortune has come." Zilpah then bore Jacob another son, Asher, for Leah said, "I am happy in my progress, for women have praised my progress."

Then Leah conceived a fifth son for Jacob. She called him Yissakhar, saying, "God has given me my wages because I gave my maidservant to my husband." Leah conceived a sixth son, Zebulun, for Leah said, "God has given me a good portion, now my husband will make his home with me, for I have borne him six sons." Leah also bore Jacob a daughter, Dinah.

God Remembered Rachel

Then God remembered Rachel. God opened her womb and she bore Jacob a son, saying, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph, adding, "May God give me yet another son."

At this time, Jacob said to Laban. "I want to go home."

Laban answered, "I believe that God has blessed me for your sake. What shall I give you?"

They agreed upon an arrangement where Laban's animals were divided. God tells Jacob in a dream that it is time for him to return to his homeland.

While Laban is away from the house, Rachel steals her father's idols and Jacob leaves without saying good-bye. When Laban heard that Jacob had fled, he came after them. But God came to Laban in a dream saying, "Do not speak to Jacob either good or bad."

Stolen Idols

The next day, Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have robbed my heart, taking my daughters like prisoners of war. Why did you flee in secret? I would have sent you away with joy and songs. It is within my power to hurt you, but your God told me not to. I can see you wanted to go home, but why did you steal my gods?"

"I left secretly because I was afraid you might take your daughters from me by force. But with whomever you find your idol gods, he shall not remain alive." Now, Jacob did not know that it was Rachel who had taken the idols. Rachel had them underneath her on the cushion of the camel, so when Laban searched, he could not find them.

Now this made Jacob angry. He said, "What is my crime and what my sin that you pursued me? For twenty years, I have worked for you, serving fourteen years for your two daughters, six years for your flock and you changed my pay ten times. Had it not been for my God, you would now have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my misery and proved it in your dream last night."

Laban answered, "Now, all that is here is mine. Let us make a covenant, between us. If you should cause my daughters to suffer or if you take wives besides my daughters, God is our witness." And they took stones and raised it high as memorial stones and then had a feast.

The next day, Laban rose early and blessed them and returned home. Jacob went upon his way and angels of God met him. Jacob then called this place, Mahanayim, "a camp of God."

Parashat Vayetzei Discussion Questions

- 1. Do you believe that God determines who shall conceive children and who shall be barren? Why or why not?**
- 2. After deceiving his father, Isaac, Jacob then becomes deceived by his mother's brother, Laban, with his marriage. Do you believe people get what they give? If so, does it always work as clearly as with Jacob? Can you give an example of it happening in your life?**
- 3. Why do you think Rachel stole the idols? Have you ever stolen anything? If so, why did you steal?**
- 4. The mothers in the story are very specific with the naming of their children, with each name having meaning. What does your name mean?**

Haftarah for Vayetzei Hos: 12:13-14:10

Hosea tells the Israelite kingdom: God's punishments will be harsh, but repentance is possible.

This week's Torah portion tells of Jacob fleeing his home and agreeing to work for seven years for the right to marry Rachel. Haftarah Vayetze begins with an allusion to this event.

Hosea mentions this part of Jacob's life story as he speaks about the sinful ways of Jacob's descendants—the northern tribes of Israel, which he refers to by the name of one major tribe, "Ephraim."

Hosea explains their iniquity: "When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he was lifted high in Israel, but through an idol he incurred guilt and died" (13:1). He then adds: "They [the people] add sin to sin, making for themselves molten images" (13:2). Ever since the northern kingdom of Israel split from Judah, under the reign of King Jeroboam I, the people of Israel had been guilty of idolatry. Generations later, while Hosea prophesies, this problem still exists.

Hosea uses metaphors from nature to describe how God will punish Israel. Israel will disappear like the morning clouds and the dew (13:3). God will act violently, like a lion, leopard, and bear—and Israel will be the prey (13:8). Hosea mocks the people of Israel, "Where now is your king? Let him save you!" (13:10). The message is clear: God will punish harshly, and salvation can come from nowhere but God.

In the second half of the haftarah, Hosea pleads with the Israelites to repent (14:2). Again, Hosea uses metaphors from nature, but this time in a positive way: "He (Israel) shall blossom like the lily, shall strike root like the Lebanon tree" (14:6). This part of the haftarah, which stresses repentance and the potential for change, is also read on Shabbat Shuva—the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

In the end, Hosea promises that the people of Israel will abandon their idolatry and return to God. And they will come to understand: "Straight are the ways of the Eternal: while the righteous walk in them, transgressors stumble on them" (14:10).



From the Desk of Rabbi Philip Hammond

WORDS OF WISDOM CHAPTER 12

After having written chapter twelve I could not help but ponder the issue of “warnings”. Warnings are meant to do two main things. Give information and bring attention to a situation. Weather warnings are given on a regular basis through various media streams. Many people and occupations rely on these warnings. Farmers, fishermen, tourism, and the like are constantly assessing the ‘warnings pages’. There is an old saying, “Sunset at night, shepherds delight, sunset in the morning, shepherds warning”. Warnings are put out for people to heed. As we know not all people heed these warnings and some are determined to go against them. This is the case with every bush fire season here in Australia. Lives perish because people fail to adhere to warnings.

So what about warnings given in the bible! Should not we Children of Israel pay close attention to warnings given by HaShem via His Torah, Moshiach and prophets? Israel has a history of ignoring warnings given to them by HaShem. Any casual reading of the bible will quickly affirm this. Did not the Master Himself point this out with the following words?

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling! Behold, your house will be abandoned, desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Matthew 23:37-39 [NAB]

These words followed some rather strong warnings Yeshua gave concerning the “Religious elite” of the day. We are often quick to repeat the words, “woe to you,

scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites”, and point the finger at others. This no doubt has its place, especially against those that are leading the children astray with the doctrines of men over and above the doctrines of HaShem. The sticking point is sorting out the one from the other! What are the doctrines of men? What are the doctrines of HaShem? I am going to suggest the One who knows the answer to such questions is HaShem. I am also going to suggest that Yeshua who walked, talked, and taught Torah knows the answer. Hence for us to have any hope in knowing, what are the doctrines of HaShem as against the doctrines of men, we need to follow in the footsteps of HaMoshiach Yeshua. This is vital if we are to pick up on the warnings given to us.

Within “all this”, we do have challenges that have created immense problems and confusion. How many times have we witnessed so called leaders giving “prophecies” about numerous issues that have failed to come true? These same “leaders” claim they have heard from HaShem and usually use sections of scripture to support their claims and prophecies. So, when these “prophecies” fail to come true, does these make HaShem a liar? Absolutely not! They have failed to read the prophecies and warnings of HaShem correctly. They have put their own interpretation on the Word and come up with a false warning. Sadly, there is a large component of self-interest attached to these “prophecies” as it is big business in the world of faith. We are warned about the “prophecy industry”.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them.” Matthew 7:15-16 [NAB]

“He answered, ‘See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and ‘the time has come.’ Do not follow them.” Luke 21:8 [NAB]

“I came in the name of My Father, but you do not accept me; yet if another comes in his own name, you will accept him.” John 5:43 [NAB]

Over the years we have had the unsavory experience of witnessing the pollution of false prophets. I am persuaded that this will become even worse over the coming years and delusion of the saints will increase along with the many associated dangers.

Allow me to say that unless you have a good knowledge of Torah your chances of either staying deluded or becoming deluded are extremely high. Charlatans have literally made millions of dollars from deceiving the Children of Israel. Not only have they made countless money, but they have countless followers who refuse to see these prophets for whom they are – false deceivers. I understand this is a harsh statement, but none the less, we Children of Israel have a historical pattern for adhering to and following false prophets. This pattern must change if we are to hear

from The Almighty One of Israel. We must have a Torah education if we are to understand what has been, what is, and what is coming. We must have a Torah education if we are to understand and know our Father, our Moshiach Yeshua and the Ruach of HaShem. We must have a Torah education if we are to guard ourselves from being deceived by Satan, false prophets, and false doctrines.

The most important study you can undertake is the study of Torah. This will bring wisdom, understanding, hope, and prepare you and your family for what is on the horizon. If HaShem is in total control, and He is, then is it not wise to understand His outline for humanity and this world? He has been merciful enough to provide a “manual” for us to read and study. He has given us the perfect example of how to walk according to His instructions and guidelines in Yeshua HaMoshiach. We have all the “tools” at our disposal, the instruction manual on how to use them and the helping hand of the best teacher available. It is my hope that we once again witness HaShem raise up true prophets of wisdom to bring His Living Word to His people. These prophets will be known by the fruit they produce, and it will be a fruit filled with the goodness of Torah as well as the love and helping Hand of Moshiach Yeshua.

May the grace, love and wisdom of HaShem and Yeshua HaMoshiach be with you!

This, that and the other ...



Jewish Views on Cremation

Taboo in Jewish tradition, but increasingly popular nonetheless.

Jewish law mandates that human remains be buried after death, and this has been dominant Jewish practice for millennia.

Extensive sources from the Torah through the later rabbinic authorities attest to this requirement, and there is a powerful taboo against cremation reinforced by the millions of Jews burned in Nazi crematoria during the Holocaust. Nevertheless, as cremation becomes more common in mainstream society, the number of Jews opting for cremation appears to be increasing, forcing Jewish authorities to consider a number of related issues, including whether cremated remains may be interred in a Jewish cemetery and whether a rabbi may officiate at a funeral for someone who has been cremated.

Is cremation permitted by Jewish law?

Defenders of cremation point out that there is no explicit prohibition against cremation in Jewish legal sources. However, there are prohibitions on defiling dead bodies and detailed procedures for handling them prior to burial — all of which appear inconsistent with the act of cremation. Proponents of cremation also point to biblical sources suggesting that Jews may have practiced the burning of dead bodies in ancient times.

Against that is a large body of Jewish literature that deals extensively with burial of the dead. In Genesis (3:19), God declares of man: “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Deuteronomy (21:23) commands in the case of an executed criminal, “You shall surely bury him.” The requirement of burying the dead is explicitly codified in multiple later rabbinic sources as well, including Sanhedrin 46b, Maimonides’ Sefer Hamitzvot and the Shulchan Aruch.

Moreover, there are additional historical, cultural and spiritual arguments against cremation. According to the Jewish mystical tradition, the soul does not immediately depart the body after death, and the process of decay in the earth allows a gradual separation rather than the more immediate and painful one resulting from the burning of the body. Cremation was historically associated with pagan practices that Jews are repeatedly enjoined in the Torah to reject. And because the body is traditionally considered the property of God, it is forbidden to defile it, which some regard the willful burning of human remains to be.

For all these reasons, Orthodox and Conservative rabbinic authorities maintain that cremation is prohibited. The Reform movement has adopted conflicting positions on this question over the years, but the most recent rabbinic opinion on the subject states that while cremation ought to be discouraged, the practice is not considered sinful.

Can the remains of cremated Jews be buried in a Jewish cemetery?

Generally, yes. Even in traditional communities, the fact that someone may not have adhered to Jewish law in their lifetime does not constitute grounds for their exclusion from Jewish burial grounds. Individual burial societies or Jewish cemeteries might decline to inter the ashes of a cremated body, in part as a deterrent to others who might also choose cremation. But there is nothing in Jewish law that bars them from burying ashes. Many Jewish cemeteries are known to bury ashes upon request, and the Reform movement has said explicitly that cremated remains of a Jewish person should be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

Can a rabbi officiate at a funeral for someone who was cremated?

It depends on the circumstances. According to a ruling adopted by the Conservative movement's legal authorities in 1986, in a case where a family declines the advice of a rabbi not to cremate a family member's remains, the rabbi should not officiate at the interment, but may choose to officiate at a ceremony prior to the cremation. If the family did not consult a rabbi prior to cremation, the rabbi may choose to officiate at the interment. The Reform movement does not object to its rabbis presiding over a funeral at which a cremation is to take place.

Does a deceased's wish to be cremated have to be honored?

The Shulhan Arukh rules explicitly, citing Maimonides, that heirs must not respect the wishes of a deceased person not to be buried. While some rabbinic authorities differed on this point, contemporary Orthodox and Conservative authorities uphold the view that next of kin are not obliged to defer to the wishes of the deceased in such a case. The Reform movement has said that children are not forbidden from honoring a parent's request to be cremated, yet neither are they obliged to do so if it contravenes their own religious principles.

Is cremation cheaper than burial?

Yes. According to a study from the National Funeral Directors Association, the median cost of a funeral in the United States in 2014 was \$7,181, while cremation cost \$6,078 — and could easily be far lower if certain services were foregone. However, given the importance traditionally accorded to Jewish burial, many Jewish communities have resources, such as free burial societies, to subsidize a traditional burial in cases where the family lacks sufficient financial resources. In addition, it is traditional Jewish practice to bury someone in a simple pine casket, rather than the more expensive types of caskets that funeral homes often market.

Is embalming permissible in Jewish tradition?

Embalming is the process of preserving human remains, often to enhance presentability for public viewing. As with cremation, embalming is traditionally viewed as inconsistent with Jewish practices surrounding death and burial. Embalming a body is generally seen as a form of mutilation of the dead body, while the whole notion of preservation runs counter to the tradition that the dead be buried quickly and in as natural a state as possible. However, exceptions for certain embalming procedures are occasionally made in extenuating circumstances, as when it is required by law or if a body must travel overseas for burial.

Prayer Points



How to Pray for Happiness

The prayer Eilu Devarim reflects the seeming paradox that focusing on others more than ourselves makes us happier.

Should we pray for happiness? On the face it, of course we should. Who doesn't want to be happy?

But something about word "happiness" strikes Jews in the wrong way. There's the old joke about the Jewish telegram: "Start worrying...details to follow." Our default is often guilt rather than happiness. It is as if we have been programmed to see anxiety around every corner, to be more comfortable in the familiar "oy" over the risky "joy."

Happiness is also an odd English word. It comes from the Middle English *hap*, as in happenstance and haphazard. This origin suggests that a happy life is a result of randomness and luck. Prayer has nothing to do with it.

In our consumerist culture, happiness is also frequently confused with pleasure, and praying for pleasure can feel self-indulgent. But happiness and pleasure are different.

Pleasure is short-term, like getting a massage or eating a sumptuous meal. Happiness is long-lasting. It is flourishing, which is a word preferred by the founder of the scientific study of happiness, Professor Martin Seligman. According to Seligman, flourishing contains five key components: positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and accomplishment. An easy way to remember them is the acronym PERMA.

The Jewish happiness prayer, as we will see below, promotes flourishing. It is the happiness experienced through a life of meaning and purpose.

What is the happiness prayer? It is a series of verses from the Mishnah we recite as part of the morning worship service. It is found in many prayer books as part of the traditional series of morning blessings.

The prayer begins with the words Eilu Devarim (“These are the Words”). The Hebrew word *devarim* also means actions or deeds. So the happiness prayer is a series of words describing actions that promote happiness.

The prayer contains ten actions in total, which I have translated as follows:

These are the deeds with infinite benefits.

A person enjoys their fruit in this world,

and in the world to come. Guide me in embracing these sacred practices:

Honor those who gave me life

Practice kindness

Learn Constantly

Invite others into my home

Be there when others need me

Celebrate life’s sacred moments

Support others during times of loss

Pray with intention

Forgive those who hurt me and seek forgiveness where I have others

Commit to constant growth.

This translation is not literal. For a few of the practices, I chose to convey the value expressed in the specific practice itself. For example, the Hebrew phrase that literally means “provide for a bride” I have rendered as “celebrating life’s sacred moments.” Providing for a bride reflects the importance of marking sacred moments with ritual, and these moments are not limited to weddings. Today they include anniversaries, baby namings, even graduations. Finding ways to participate in and create communal celebrations around those life events makes us happier.

The academic discipline of positive psychology has reinforced the message of the happiness prayer. Indeed, even though the rabbis who wrote this prayer were not familiar with positive psychology, their teachings intuit it. The actions this prayer calls upon us to take fit squarely within the PERMA framework noted earlier.

For example, celebrating life’s sacred moments incorporates positive emotions, relationships, and meaning. Praying with intention is a act of engagement, and prayer itself encompasses a worldview that life has meaning. Knowing how to pray — the words, the rhythm, the melodies

— gives us a feeling of accomplishment. When we look at the Eilu Devarim prayer as a guide to happiness, we can see each of its practices as an expression of some aspect of PERMA.

Saying the prayer also promotes happiness in other ways. First, it pushes us outside of ourselves. Almost all of the ten practices involve other people. Inviting others into our lives, practicing kindness, and comforting mourners, are just the most direct examples. The rabbis understood the seeming paradox that focusing on others more than ourselves makes us happier. As Victor Frankl put, “the door to happiness opens outward.”

Frankl’s observation helps us see a second source of happiness in this prayer. It roots us in a religious worldview. Its opening verses remind us that we are reading more than a list of good deeds. They are a series of practices that echo through eternity. We feel their effects in this world and in the world to come.

Put differently, embracing a religious worldview makes us happier. We can speculate on why this is true. But I suspect part of the reason is that faith is a mindset that pushes us — in some cases, even obliges us — to do things that may not feel great in the short term, but that enhance our lives in the long term. These are the things we do that we can look back on a year later and feel happy to have done.

Every year, I fast on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. To do so is a commandment found in the Torah and has been a Jewish tradition for more than 4,000 years. Since I am working all day — delivering sermons and leading my congregation in eight hours of prayer — fasting is the last thing I want to do. Yet it enhances my experience of the day and my connection to others. It does not feel pleasurable in the moment. But when I look back, I know I experienced the power of the day.

This is the kind of commitment faith has always nurtured and ignoring the role of faith in the search for happiness is like going to search for a treasure and throwing away an old map leading directly to it. The Eilu Devarim prayer is such a map. May it guide us on our journey.

Hebrew - עִבְרִי

Word (s) of the Week

וְאֶנִּיְהוּ

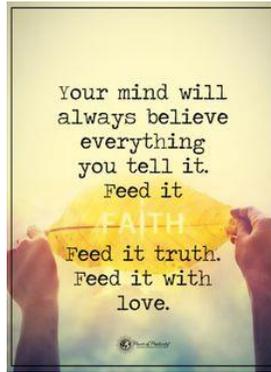
Vih-Ah-Nih-Vay-Hu

I Will Praise Him

A Laugh a Day-Keeps the....? 🤔

**Warning: dates in calendars are much closer than
they appear.** 😄

This is not your Bubbie's Chicken Soup



Chicken Fricassee: A Jewish Classic

Ashkenazi-style braised chicken and meatballs.

Ingredients

16-20 oz. chopped beef, veal, turkey or a combination

1/2 cup plain dry bread crumbs or matzah meal

1 large egg

2 Tbsp vegetable oil (or melted chicken fat)

12-15 chicken wings, cut into sections

1 lb chicken gizzards

3 medium onions, sliced

1 Tbsp paprika, approximately

salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

2 cups water, approximately

4 medium all purpose potatoes, peeled and cut into small chunks, optional

4 carrots, cut into chunks, optional

10 oz coarsely cut mushrooms, optional

Directions

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

In a large bowl, combine the chopped meat, bread crumbs and egg, and mix thoroughly. Shape the meat mixture into 1-1/2 inch balls and place them on a large baking sheet.

Bake the meatballs for 16-18 minutes, turning them occasionally, or until lightly browned on all sides. Remove the meatballs from the oven and set aside.

Reduce the oven heat to 300 degrees. Pour the vegetable oil into a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the wings a few at a time and cook them for 6-8 minutes, turning them occasionally, or until lightly browned. Remove the wings from the pan and set aside.

Add the gizzards to the pan and cook, stirring occasionally, for 4-5 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove the gizzards from the pan and set aside.

Add the onions to the pan and cook them, stirring occasionally, for 6-8 minutes or until lightly browned and softened.

Using the same pan (if large enough) or an ovenproof casserole, return the meatballs, wings and gizzards to the pan.

Spoon some of the onions on top of the meats. Sprinkle the ingredients with the paprika, salt and pepper. You might have to use layers, depending on the size of the pan; if so, season each layer before adding the next.

Pour in 2 cups water. Either cover the casserole and bake the fricassee for 45 minutes OR turn the cooktop heat to low, cover the pan and cook on the stovetop for 45 minutes. Add the optional ingredients if desired, cover the pan and cook an additional 50-60 minutes, or until the meats and vegetables are tender. Check the pan occasionally and turn the ingredients gently if the ones on top seem dry. Check fluid levels and add more water if needed.

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