



## **TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 1-21-23 VAERA**

### ***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.

**Donate**



**Tree of Life Messianic Ministries is an approved Giving Charity by PayPal. To donate go to [etz-chayim.org](http://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](mailto: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](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/>.

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.

Michael and Gayle Michelucci are forming 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.

CHECK OUT RABBI MORDECAI SILVERS 3 YEARS OF VIDEO TEACHINGS ON THE TORAH PORTIONS AND FESTIVALS ON YOUTUBE.

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



## **MESSAGE FOR 1-21-23 VAERA**

*Message originally shared 1/24/98*

*Va'era – And I appeared*

*Exodus 6:2-9:35*

*Ezekiel 28:25-29:21*

*Romans 9:14-29*

**Exodus 6:2-3**

*God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but with My Name the Lord, I did not make Myself known to them.*

**El Shaddai – the Mighty God who sustains or provides**

**Ha Shem Adonai – the Name of the Lord – the Existing One**

**Exodus 6:6-8**

*Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: I am the Lord, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements. I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a God to you; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, Who takes you*

***out from under the burdens of Egypt. I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand to give it to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I shall give it to you as a heritage – I am the Lord.”***

From this passage is where we get the four cups spoken about in the Passover Seder. The Cup of Sanctification, the Cup of Affliction, the Cup of Redemption, and the Cup of Elijah.

#### **Ezekiel 28:25-26**

***Thus said the Lord God: When I gather in the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they were scattered, then I will be sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, and they will dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, to Jacob. They will dwell upon it in security and build houses and plant vineyards and dwell in security, when I execute judgements upon all those who despoil them from all their surroundings; then they will know that I am the Lord, their God.***

#### **Romans 9:22-26**

*Now what if God, even though He was quite willing to demonstrate His anger and make known His power, patiently put up with people who deserved punishment and were ripe for destruction? What if He did this in order to make known the riches of His glory to those who are the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory – That is, to us, whom He called not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles? As indeed He says in Hoshea, **“Those who were not my people I will call my people; her who was not loved I will call loved; And in the very place where they were told, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called sons of the living God!”** (Hosea 2:25 (23), 2;1 (1:10))*

The tree's primary components are the roots, which anchor it to the ground and supply it with water and other nutrients; the trunk, branches and leaves that comprise its body; and the fruit, which contain the seeds through which the tree reproduces itself.

The spiritual life of man also includes roots, a body, and fruit. The roots represent faith, our source of nurture and perseverance. The trunk, branches and leaves are the "body" of our spiritual lives – our intellectual, emotional, and practical achievements. The fruit is our power of spiritual

procreation—the power to influence others, to plant a seed in a fellow human being and see it sprout, grow, and bear fruit.

## **Roots**

The roots are the least "glamorous" of the tree's parts - and the most crucial. Buried underground, virtually invisible, they possess neither the majesty of the tree's body, the colorfulness of its leaves nor the tastiness of its fruit. But without roots, the tree cannot survive.

Furthermore, the roots must keep pace with the body: if the trunk and leaves grow and spread without a proportional increase in its roots, the tree will collapse under its own weight. On the other hand, a profusion of roots makes for a healthier, stronger tree, even if it has a meager trunk and few branches, leaves, and fruit. And if the roots are sound, the tree will rejuvenate itself if its body is damaged or its branched lopped off.

Faith is the least glamorous of our spiritual faculties. Characterized by a "simple" conviction and commitment to one's Source, it lacks the sophistication of the intellect, the vivid color of the emotions, or the sense of satisfaction that comes from deed. And faith is buried underground, its true extent concealed from others and even from ourselves.

Yet our faith, our commitment to God, is the foundation of our entire "tree." From it stems the trunk of our understanding, from which branch out our feelings, motivations, and deeds. And while the body of the tree also provides some spiritual nurture (via its "leaves"), the bulk of our spiritual sustenance derives from its roots, from our faith in and commitment to our Creator.

A soul might grow a majestic trunk, numerous and wide-spreading branches, beautiful leaves, and lush fruit. But these must be equaled, indeed surpassed, by its "roots." Above the surface, we might behold much wisdom, profundity of feeling, abundant experience, copious achievement, and many disciples; but if these are not grounded and vitalized by an even greater depth of faith and commitment, it is a tree without foundation, a tree doomed to collapse under its own weight.

On the other hand, a life might be blessed with only sparse knowledge, meager feeling and experience, scant achievement and little "fruit." But if its

"roots" are extensive and deep, it is a healthy tree: a tree fully in possession of what it does have; a tree with the capacity to recover from the setbacks of life; a tree with the potential to eventually grow and develop into a loftier, more beautiful, and fruitful tree.

## **Fruit**

The tree desires to reproduce, to spread its seeds far and wide so that they take root in diverse and distant places. But the tree's reach is limited to the extent of its own branches. It must therefore seek out other, more mobile "couriers" to transport its seeds.

So, the tree produces fruit, in which its seeds are enveloped by tasty, colorful, sweet-smelling fibers and juices. The seeds themselves would not rouse the interest of animals and men; but with their attractive packaging, they have no shortage of customers who, after consuming the external fruit, deposit the seeds in those diverse and distant places where the tree wants to plant its seeds.

When we communicate to others, we employ many devices to make our message attractive. We buttress it with intellectual sophistication, steep it in emotional sauce, and dress it in colorful words and images. But we should bear in mind that this is only the packaging, the "fruit" that contains the seed. The seed itself is essentially tasteless - the only way that we can truly impact others is by conveying our own simple faith in what we are telling them, our own simple commitment to what we are espousing.

If the seed is there, our message will take root in their minds and hearts, and our own vision will be grafted into theirs. But if there is no seed, there will be no progeny to our effort, however tasty our fruit might be.

## **Romans 11:16**

***...And if the root is holy, so are the branches. ...remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.***

Elohim wanted to show the world, through Israel, that He is Elohim. That Israel could not and cannot exist but through Him. It is the same with those of us who are Children of Elohim.

The Tree is made up of branches some of which are natural-Israelites/Jews and some of which are wild olive tree branches-the Nations. Together we join with the trunk of the tree-Y'shua. We are nourished by the roots-the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) and we are all joined to the ground-the foundation-the earth-the Father.

**I think that it makes a beautiful picture of the source of life.**

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**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 Vaera: Summary Exo: 6:2-9:35**

***Through Moses and Aaron, God brings plagues on the Egyptians, and Pharaoh repeatedly refuses to allow the Israelites to leave.***

God spoke to Moses, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God but I did not make Myself known to them by My other name (which is neither pronounced nor translated). I established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan. I have heard the moaning of the Israelite slaves. I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through miracles. I will take you to be My people and I will be your God. You shall know that I am God who freed you from your labors in Egypt and gave you the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'"

#### **Moses Struggles With God's Command**

The Lord told Moses to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. But Moses retorted, "The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh heed me, a man of impeded speech!"

The Lord replied to Moses, "I place you in the role of god to Pharaoh with your brother Aaron as your prophet. You shall repeat all that I command you and Aaron shall speak to the Pharaoh. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I deliver the Israelites from their midst."

Moses was 80 years old, and Aaron was 83 when they made their demand on Pharaoh. The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh says to 'produce your miracles,' then cast your rod before Pharaoh and it shall turn into a serpent."

#### **Moses and Aaron Perform Miracles**

Moses and Aaron did as God commanded. Pharaoh summoned his magicians, and they turned their rods into serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed their rods. Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord predicted.

God then commanded Moses, "Go to Pharaoh in the morning when he is coming out of the Nile river. Tell him to let the Israelites go to worship Me in the wilderness. Tell him that I will show I am God by striking the river's water with the rod, turning it into blood and killing all the fish. All the waters in Egypt, even in the vessels, shall turn to blood."

Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded and the waters turned into blood and the fish died. But when Pharaoh's magicians did the same with their spells, Pharaoh's heart stiffened, and he refused to let the Israelites go.

Seven days later, God told Moses to say to Pharaoh that "if he refuses to let the people go, I will plague the country and his palace and the people's homes with frogs." And frogs appeared everywhere. But the magicians also brought frogs upon the land.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron saying, "Plead with the Lord to remove the frogs and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."

### Pharaoh's Stubbornness

"I will do it so that you learn that there is none like the Lord our God," Moses answered. Then Moses pleaded to God and God killed the frogs. The people piled the dead frogs in heaps and the land stank. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he became stubborn and would not let the people go, just as God had predicted.

The Lord told Moses to say to Aaron, "Hold out your rod and strike the dust of the earth and it shall turn to lice throughout the land of Egypt." They did so and vermin came upon man and beasts throughout Egypt. The magicians tried to produce lice with their spells, but they could not. "This is the finger of God," the magicians said to the Pharaoh. But Pharaoh's heart stiffened, and he would not heed them, just as God had predicted.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go again to Pharaoh and tell him that if he does not let the people go, I will let loose a swarm of insects. These insects shall swarm all over Egypt, but in the land of Goshen, where My people dwell, there shall be none. Thus, shall Pharaoh know that I, the Lord, God, makes a distinction between My people and the Pharaoh's people." And God did so, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by swarms of insects.

### Let My People Go

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron saying, "Go and sacrifice to God within the land."

"It would not be right for us to do this," Moses replied, "because what God commands us to sacrifice is sacred to the Egyptians. If we do so before their very eyes, they will stone us. So, we must go a distance of three days in the wilderness to do these sacrifices."

"If you will remove these insects," agreed the Pharaoh, "I will let you go do your sacrifices in the wilderness, but do not go very far."

"And," Moses added, "do not let Pharaoh act deceitfully again and not let the people go."

Moses asked the Lord to remove all the swarms of insects from the land and God did so. But Pharaoh became stubborn and would not let the people go.

God said to Moses, “Tell the Pharaoh that if he refuses to let My people go, then I will strike Egyptian livestock with a severe pestilence, but the Israelite livestock shall not be struck.” And the Lord did just that. But the Pharaoh still would not let the people go.

Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Each of you take handfuls of soot from the kiln and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become a fine dust over all the land and cause boils on man and beast.” And it was done just like that. The magicians were unable to confront Moses because of their own boils. But God stiffened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not let the people go, just as God had foretold.

The Lord said to Moses, “Tell Pharaoh that this time I shall send all My plagues upon him and his people in order that Pharaoh may know that there is none like Me in all the world. Tell him that I could have killed him by now, but I have spared him to show My power so that My fame may resound throughout the world. Tell him that this time tomorrow I shall rain down a heavy hail such has never been seen before and to bring the livestock inside shelter.”

### Pharaoh’s Heart Hardens Once Again

The courtiers who feared God brought their livestock inside and those who did not fear God left them out in the open. Then thunder and hail and fire streamed down on the ground of Egypt. Anything in the open was struck down, as well as all the grasses and trees. Only in the region of Goshen where the Israelites stayed, there was no hail.

Pharaoh then sent for Aaron and Moses and said, “I am guilty this time. The Lord is in the right and my people are wrong. Plead with the Lord to end this thunder and hail and I will let you go.”

Moses replied, “As I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to the Lord. Then the thunder and hail will cease, and you will know that the earth is the Lord’s. But I know that you and your courtiers do not yet fear the Lord God.” And Moses did as he said but when Pharaoh saw the hail and thunder cease, he reverted to his guilty ways. Pharaoh’s heart stiffened and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had foretold through Moses.

### Parashat Vaera Discussion Questions

- 1. What does it mean that God will take the Israelites as God’s people? Are not all people God’s people? Why or why not?**
- 2. What does it mean the God placed Moses in the role of god to Pharaoh? What is the difference between God (upper case G) and a god (lower case g)? How can anyone be “a god” to someone? Is there anyone in your life who is “a god” to you?**
- 3. How is Aaron a prophet? What is a prophet? Is there a difference between Moses as a prophet and Aaron as a prophet? If so, what?**

4. The text says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. How does God do this? Is it possible to separate God hardening Pharaoh's heart from Pharaoh making this decision himself? If so, how?

5. Do you believe God could make such plagues? Can God still make such plagues? Do you think there are plagues today that God makes? If so, what are the plagues God is making today?

## Haftarah for Vaera Eze: 28:25-29:21

### *A prophecy of destruction for Egypt.*

The Nile River figures prominently in the story of the Israelites in Egypt. In Parashat Shemot, Pharaoh decrees that all Hebrew newborn boys be thrown into the river (Exodus 1:22), and Pharaoh's daughter finds baby Moses floating in a basket on the Nile (Exodus 2:6).

In this week's Torah portion, Vaera, Moses hits the Nile with his staff, and it turns to blood (Exodus 7:20). He later hits it again to bring about the plague of frogs (Exodus 8:2).

#### The Nile as God

Since the Nile was a major source of fertility in otherwise arid Egypt, these assaults on the Nile were particularly painful for the Egyptians. Moreover, some scholars believe that the ancient Egyptians actually worshipped the Nile; seeing it turned to blood or infested with pests would be a real cause for panic.

#### Pharaoh The Sea Monster

The Haftarah for Vaera is a prophecy about Egypt's downfall, and it too uses the Nile as a central motif. Ezekiel foretells that God will punish the current Egyptian Pharaoh, whom he describes as "Mighty monster, sprawling in the Nile channels" (Ezekiel 29:3).

Pharaoh is the sea-monster of the Nile, Ezekiel explains, and God will drag him out with sharp hooks. God will fling the sea-monster into the desert, with the fish of the Nile sticking to its scales. Abandoned, the monster will become food for the beasts of the earth and the birds of the sky (29:4-5).

#### The Sin of Arrogance

Egypt's sin, Ezekiel explained, is arrogance. By claiming that "The Nile is mine and I made it" (29:9), Pharaoh and the Egyptians deny God. This earns them complete destruction. Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel promises, will bring about the destruction of Babylon: "He shall carry her wealth and take her spoil and seize her booty; and she shall be the recompense of his army" (29:19). Egypt will remain desolate for 40 years.

In closing, Ezekiel states that Egypt's downfall will endow Israel with strength. This event will be recognized as a symbol that the God of Israel is true.



## **From the Desk of Rabbi Philip Hammond**

### **WORDS OF WISDOM CHAPTER 19**

Is not all we have and possess from HaShem, the Holy One of Israel? Is it not the grace of HaShem that allows us to have, including life itself? Should we not be ever grateful for the love, grace, and wisdom of HaShem? Has and does not HaShem provide us with all we need? Whatever we humans require is to be found on this earth! The reason we have not is due to our own sin of corruption. We are unprepared to do that which HaShem has commanded us to do. We refuse to listen to the wisdom of our Creator. This has been a historical problem with Israel, so many great and wonderful promises given to us if only we would listen to HaShem. We are a nation that could change the world from darkness into light.

*4 "Now, Isra'el, listen to the laws and rulings I am teaching you, in order to follow them, so that you will live; then you will go in and take possession of the land that ADONAI, the God of your fathers, is giving you. <sup>2</sup> In order to obey the mitzvot of ADONAI your God which I am giving you, do not add to what I am saying, and do not subtract from it. <sup>3</sup> You saw with your own eyes what ADONAI did at Ba'al-P'or, that ADONAI destroyed from among you all the men who followed Ba'al-P'or; <sup>4</sup> but you who stuck with ADONAI your God are still alive today, every one of you <sup>5</sup> Look, I have taught you laws and rulings, just as ADONAI my God ordered me, so that you can behave accordingly in the land where you are going in order to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup> Therefore, observe them; and follow them; for then all peoples will see you as having wisdom and understanding. When they hear of all these laws, they will say,*

*'This great nation is surely a wise and understanding people.'*

*<sup>7</sup> For what great nation is there that has God as close to them as ADONAI our God is, whenever we call on him? <sup>8</sup> What great nation is there that has laws and rulings as just as this entire Torah which I am setting before you today? Deuteronomy 4:1-8 [CJB]*

People often speak about opportunities and how they can be easily lost. Can we Children of Israel dream up any better opportunity than to represent HaShem, the Holy One of Israel, blessed, be He? Do we actually grasp the “opportunity” we have as the only nation chosen by HaShem to represent Him? Generation after generation have allowed this opportunity to slip through their grasp. This present generation appears to be following the previous generations. This should not be the case. There is no reason outside our pride and stubbornness that prevents us from changing and hence changing the world. Alas when reading the bible, I see very little hope of this taking place before great suffering and pain is afflicted from above, due to our sin. Perhaps I am wrong in thinking this is so; one can only pray and hope. None the less our behaviour as a chosen people is far from the “expectations” and commands of our Father in heaven. It is absolute foolishness to reject the wonderful opportunities we have been given by HaShem, yet we all seem to possess the ability to refuse Him. We require Divine help from above, enabling us to change direction, to walk the path of the righteous.

*<sup>33</sup> Teach me, ADONAI, the way of your laws; keeping them will be its own reward for me. <sup>34</sup> Give me understanding; then I will keep your Torah; I will observe it with all my heart. <sup>35</sup> Guide me on the path of your mitzvot, for I take pleasure in it. <sup>36</sup> Bend my heart toward your instructions and not toward selfish gain. <sup>37</sup> Turn my eyes away from worthless things; with your ways, give me life. <sup>38</sup> Fulfill your promise, which you made to your servant, which you made to those who fear you. <sup>39</sup> Avert the disgrace which I dread, for your rulings are good. <sup>40</sup> See how I long for your precepts; in your righteousness, give me life! Psalm 119:33-40 [CJB]*

*<sup>97</sup> How I love your Torah! I meditate on it all day. <sup>98</sup> I am wiser than my foes, because your mitzvot are mine forever. <sup>99</sup> I have more understanding than all my teachers, because I meditate on your instruction. <sup>100</sup> I understand more than my elders, because I keep your precepts. <sup>101</sup> I keep my feet from every evil way, in order to*

*observe your word. <sup>102</sup> I don't turn away from your rulings, because you have instructed me. <sup>103</sup> How sweet to my tongue is your promise, truly sweeter than honey in my mouth! <sup>104</sup> From your precepts I gain understanding; this is why I hate every false way. Psalm 119:97-104 [CJB]*

If only we as a nation would pray such prayers with genuine contrite hearts. Without Torah there is no light. Yeshua is the Living Torah and before the foundation of the world He was. Yeshua is the Light and we are to reflect that Light. We do this through the application of Torah. We cannot have Yeshua as our guiding Light without Torah. In trying to make a point, it could be said that the Father, Yeshua, the Ruach HaKodesh and Torah are echad. HaShem is the God of perfect order and perfect balance, and you must have all Four in your life to achieve order and balance.

It is so easy to squander opportunity, and once passed there is no guarantee for it to visit again.

*<sup>22</sup> Yeshua continued traveling through town after town and village after village, teaching and making his way toward Yerushalayim. <sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, "Are only a few people being saved?" <sup>24</sup> He answered, "Struggle to get in through the narrow door, because — I'm telling you! — many will be demanding to get in and won't be able to, <sup>25</sup> once the owner of the house has gotten up and shut the door. You will stand outside, knocking at the door and saying, 'Lord! Open up for us!' But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from!' <sup>26</sup> Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you! you taught in our streets!' <sup>27</sup> and he will tell you, 'I don't know where you're from. Get away from me, all you workers of wickedness!' <sup>28</sup> You will cry and grind your teeth when you see Avraham, Yitz'chak, Ya'akov and all the prophets inside the Kingdom of God, but yourselves thrown outside. Luke 13:22-28 [CJB]*

As a nation, as a people we can never claim that we weren't given great opportunity to forge a loving and faithful relationship with HaShem. It will happen, there will be a generation, a people who will claim and take that opportunity. Many individuals have already taken the Hand of life and we say Baruch HaShem, giving all the glory to God. However, as a nation, as a

people, we have yet to unite and grasp this opportunity. So, the question remains: Where to from here?

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

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## ***This, that and the other ...***



### **The World to Come**

***The rabbis of the Talmud had a lot to say on the World to Come, but little about what it actually is.***

The World to Come — or *olam ha-bah* in Hebrew — is a general Jewish term for the hereafter. References to it are sprinkled throughout ancient Jewish texts, though the particulars of what it means aren't entirely clear.

There are two general possibilities: One is that it refers to a heavenly abode where the souls of the righteous live on after death. The other is that it's the perfected world that will follow the coming of the messiah, when the dead are resurrected, and complete peace prevails.

There are no explicit references to the World to Come in the Torah, though some commentators saw hints to it in the text. Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, an 18th-century Moroccan kabbalist, suggested that the Torah begins with the Hebrew letter *bet* — which corresponds to the number two — to hint that God actually created two worlds in Genesis, the physical world and the World to Come. And several statements in the Bible imply that there is some continuance of life that follows death in this world, including this verse from Genesis 15:15 about Abraham: "As for you, You shall go to your fathers in peace; You shall be buried at a ripe old age." Since Abraham was not buried with his fathers, some understand this verse to be referring to the afterlife.



The first explicit mention of the World to Come appears in the Talmud, which records a number of teachings on the subject, the most famous probably being this one, from the Mishnah in Sanhedrin 10:1:

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא

### **All of Israel have a share in the World to Come**

The mishnah immediately proceeds to detail various exceptions to this seemingly categorical statement, including those who deny the truth of the doctrine of resurrection, one who reads “external literature” (books by heretics) and whispers invocations over a wound (per Rabbi Akiva), the residents of an idolatrous city, and various biblical characters, including the king Jeoroboam and the prophet Balaam. All these and more are excluded from the World to Come.

Yet the rabbis of the Talmud don’t have a lot to say about just what the World to Come is. For that we turn to two medieval scholars who held distinct views on this question.

Maimonides was adamant that the World to Come is the reward for the righteous after death. As he describes in the *Mishneh Torah*:

The hidden good in store for the righteous is, life in the World to Come, which is a life connected with no death and a kind of good connected with no evil; such as is described in the Torah: “That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest prolong thy days” (Deut. 22.7), which was traditionally deducted to mean, “That it may be well with thee” in a world which is entirely good; “and that thou mayest prolong thy days”—in a world existing forever; and this is the World to Come.

Maimonides’ conception of the World to Come is akin to how many traditions imagine heaven, an eternal joyful existence of pure spirit. He goes on:

The World to Come harbors neither body nor aught of a concrete form, save only the souls of the righteous divested of body as are the ministering angels. Inasmuch as it harbors no concrete forms there is no need there for eating, drinking, or other of the bodily necessities of the sons of man in this world; neither will any of the many things which happen to bodies in this world come to pass there, as, for instance, sitting down, standing up, sleep, death, sadness, mirth or the like.

An alternate view, and one that seems to have been held by the majority of early Jewish authorities, was articulated by Nahmanides, a medieval Catalan kabbalist and talmudist, who insisted that the World to Come is what will come into being in the present world after the messiah comes and the dead are returned to life. Nahmanides distinguishes between the World to Come, in which the physical body is present, and the ancient Temple rebuilt, and the World of Souls (*olam haneshamot*), where the soul goes after the death of the body. Unlike

Maimonides, who believed that the resurrection of the dead would be followed by a second death and the eternal rest of souls in the World to Come, Nachmanides believed the resurrected would enjoy eternal physical life in the messianic age.

Both these ideas draw support from the Talmud. In its discussion of the aforementioned mishnah about all Israel having a share in the World to Come, the Talmud explains that denial of a share in the World to Come to those who reject the resurrection is an appropriate punishment because it's "measure for measure" — that is, commensurate with the crime. Since the denied person doubted the resurrection, they will not be resurrected themselves. Ergo, the World to Come refers to resurrection.

But Maimonides' view that the World to Come is a place of pure spirit also draws support from the Talmud, in particular a statement from Rav recorded in the Talmud in Berakhot 17a:

The World to Come is not like this world. In the World to Come there is no eating, no drinking, no procreation, no business negotiations, no jealousy, no hatred, and no competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence.

Though the specifics are hardly clear, that didn't stop the ancient rabbis from saying a lot about the World to Come. Here are two of their better-known teachings on the matter, both of them from the fourth chapter of Ethics of the Fathers:

Rabbi Yaakov says: This world is like a hallway before the world to come. Fix yourself in the hallway so you may enter the drawing room.

He would say: One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the time in the World to Come. And one hour of pleasure in the World to Come is better than all the time in this world. Pirkei Avot 4:16-17

These statements encapsulate two distinct strands of Jewish thought with respect to the World to Come. The first suggests that the World to Come is where the action is and that this world is merely a prelude, the hallway before the drawing room. The distinction is even clearer in the second teaching, which suggests that this world has intrinsic value too, and in at least one sense is superior to the World to Come — it is the place where good deeds and repentance are possible, though this idea is at least partially tempered by the claim that comes next, that the pleasures available in the World to Come are simply unimaginable. The latter point is reflected in another famous dictum about the World to Come, from Tractate Berakhot 57b, which teaches that Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the World to Come — that is, the joy of Shabbat is but a hint of the vastly greater pleasures that await the righteous.

References to the World to Come show up with much greater frequency in Hasidic and mystical works. The medieval Spanish kabbalist Abraham Abulafia penned an entire volume entitled *Chayei Olam Habah* ("The Life of the World to Come"), though that work is primarily concerned with meditation techniques that enable a direct experience of God. Rabbi Moshe

Hayyim Luzzatto, an 18th century kabbalist and the author of one of the core texts of Mussar, or Jewish character development, echoed the first teaching from Ethics of the Father noted above in claiming that the work of this world is merely to prepare for the next. In his major work, *The Path of the Just*, he writes:

It is the foundation of saintliness and the perfect worship of God for a man to realize what constitutes his duty in his world and to which aim he is required to direct all his endeavors throughout his life. Now our sages, of blessed memory, have taught us that man was created only to find delight in the Lord and to bask in the radiance of His Shekhinah [divine presence] for this is the true happiness and the greatest of all possible delights. The real place in which such delight can be attained is the World to Come, for this has been prepared to this very purpose. But the way to attain this desired goal is this world.

In contemporary times, Jewish thinkers tend not to focus too much on the World to Come. Among liberal Jews, the concept veers into theological beliefs that many do not accept. According to the Pew Research Center, Jews have among the lowest rates of belief in heaven and hell among all American religious groups. Among more traditionally observant Jews, the concept gets somewhat greater air time. A 2019 volume of teachings on the World to Come by Rabbi Avigdor Miller, a prominent American haredi rabbi who died in 2001, made the case that the concept is not given sufficient attention in the Orthodox community.

## ***Prayer Points***



### **Prayer: Service Of The Heart**

***Abraham's servant teaches us the power of spontaneous prayer, a concept that challenges our contemporary focus on consistency and conformity.***

***Genesis 23:1 - 25:18***

One of the universals of human culture is the need to commune with something larger, something that extends beyond us. We all feel the desire to speak, to create, to perform. One aspect of the human urge to communicate is worship—the simple act of noticing the awe of

existence, the staggering marvel of the world and its order. Awe moves us to a silent expression of gratitude and wonder. Awe moves us to worship.

### What Is Worship?

For many Jews, worship means the formal ritual of reading from a printed *Siddur* (prayer book), listening to the chanted words of the Torah and the Haftarah (weekly reading from Prophets or Writings), and absorbing the insights of the rabbi's sermon. Worship is public, planned, and cyclical. What we did last week we will do again next week.

Today's Torah portion illumines another aspect of Jewish worship, one sadly neglected by too many Jews today. While most of us are familiar with reading the stirring words of prayer composed by other, earlier Jews, few of us are comfortable approaching God with the simple outpouring of our own hearts. The whole notion of just speaking with God sounds strikingly un-Jewish.

Yet consider Abraham's nameless servant, given the assignment of traveling to a distant land to find a bride for the Patriarch's son. Overwhelmed by the gravity and seriousness of his mission, the servant creates a new religious form. Without the possibility of sacrificing an animal, unable to summon a special revelation, the servant simply sits and speaks.

Without any elaborate introduction, stripped of the appropriate formula or poetry, the servant just shares what is on his mind:

**O, LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with master Abraham.**

The servant speaks to God with directness borne of necessity. Filled with a sense of the uncertainty of his task, aware of his own limitations, he turns to the Source of Life and shares his fear.

Note also that the servant establishes criteria for judging the successful accomplishment of his mission, and then prays that his standard should be God's as well. Those standards are themselves an insight into the human heart—he asks for a woman who is generous, compassionate, and willing to act on behalf of others. Such a person is indeed a fitting mate.

Modern people are no less in need of pouring out their hearts than were our ancestors. We, too, are daily sent on missions which test our limits, which force us into territory we have not previously explored, and for which the stakes are very high indeed. Sustaining a marriage, cultivating a friendship, raising children, or pursuing a career all test us every day.

With as great an emotional burden as Abraham's servant faced, with no less a need to cry out (and to absorb the comfort of having been heard), we have nonetheless cut ourselves off from God's listening ear.

## Are We Just Superstitious?

We worry that speaking to God is superstitious. We feel that God doesn't answer prayer. Or, that God doesn't hear prayer. Or that there is no God. Or that we simply dare not address God for fear of being hypocrites.

Part of the price we pay for living in our age is that we are plagued by the illness of consistency and weighted down by the power of conformity. Both would have us deny a need simply because we don't always feel it.

Our discomfort with spontaneous prayer does a disservice to our sacred tradition, to our deepest needs, and to our relationship with God.

Prayer is not philosophy—it need not justify itself at the bench of reason, consistency, or sophistication. Prayer, what the Talmud calls “the labor of the heart,” is answerable to the heart alone.

Our discomfort with spontaneous prayer can lead us to the very first prayer we need: “Help me, Lord, to pray.” Or, in the words preceding the Shabbat *Amidah* (the silent, standing prayer), “When I call upon the Lord, give glory to our God. Open my mouth, Lord, and my lips will proclaim Your praise.” If you are uncomfortable praying with words teach yourself to sit with silence. Let your awareness of your need become your prayer, let your awareness of God's love be your answer.

If you need to pray, if your sorrows or your joys move you to speak—from a simple “thank you” to an elaborate speech—then pray. If you rise from your prayers a more sensitive and aware person, then your prayer was worthwhile.

**עֲבָרִי - Hebrew**

**Word (s) of the Week**

אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵי רַחוּם

*Adonai El-Rah-Khoom*

*Oh Lord, a God Merciful*



## ***A Taste of Jewish Humor***

### The Converts

Three Jews who had recently converted to Christianity were having a drink together in a posh restaurant. They started talking about the reasons for their conversions.

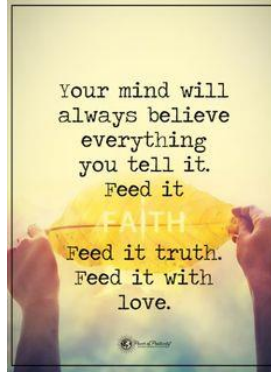
“I converted out of love,” said the first. “Not for Christianity, but for a Christian girl. As you both know, my wife insisted that I convert.”

“And I,” said the second, “I converted in order to rise in the legal system. You probably know that my recent appointment as a federal judge may have had something to do with my new religion.”

The third man spoke up: “I converted because I think that the teachings of Christianity are superior to those of Judaism.”

“Are you kidding?” said the first man, spitting out his drink.

“What do you take us for, a couple of goyim?”



## ***This is not your Bubbie's Chicken Soup*** **Chocolate Chip Mandel Bread Recipe**

BY DAWN LERMAN

I was the only person in Miss Duckler's kindergarten class without a sibling. I had wished so long for a sister. But I had also wished on a star for a Baby Alive doll, and that never came true. So when my Aunt Jeannie picked me up from school and shared the birth of my sister April, I couldn't really believe it. I started cheering and skipping in circles. "I have a sister; I have a sister!"

As we drove off in her silver El Dorado Cadillac, I was dying with anticipation. I wanted to see what April looked like, hold her, and be one of the first voices she heard. Breaking the news that we would have to wait till morning before we could go to the hospital, Jeannie pulled out a bag of her just baked chocolate chip mandel bread. "They're still warm," she said, trying to comfort me.

Biting into the heavenly biscuits, still warm, with puddles of melted chocolate, my mood lifted.

When we arrived at her house, she led me to her secret freezer—"The Just In Case." The just in case was hidden in the back of the basement and it was only to be opened on very, very special occasions. It was stocked with decorative cookies and cakes that we feasted on. When my belly was full, she taught me how to measure, whip, and separate eggs so we could re-stock for future festivities.

She also taught me the magic of transforming recipes using swaps from her bag of tricks, even though I never saw an actual bag. "If you are missing a couple of ingredients and can't get to the store, or if you wanted to lighten the sugar, butter or dairy content in a recipe to make it a little healthier and a little more waistline friendly, I have all the tricks!" my aunt boasted. When I left Aunt Jeannie's house, I not only had a new baby sister, but several baking secrets—many of which were top secret and could be used for baking desserts on nights that meat was served.

### **Ingredients**

3 cups of flour (plus more for kneading)  
1½ tsp aluminum-free baking powder  
¼ tsp of salt  
3 eggs, beaten  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup melted butter or oil  
2 tsp vanilla extract  
1 tsp almond extract or orange juice  
½ cup of chocolate chips, semi-sweet  
Butter, oil, or parchment paper for the baking sheet

## **Directions**

In a large bowl, mix together the flour, baking powder, and salt and set aside. In another bowl combine the beaten eggs and sugar until smooth. Whisk in the butter or oil, the vanilla extract, and the almond extract or orange juice and then pour into the dry ingredients until it turns into dough. Then stir in the chocolate chips. Make into a large ball and chill in a glass bowl covered with plastic wrap in the refrigerator for two hours.

Grease a baking sheet or cover with parchment paper and preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator and wait five minutes so the dough is more pliable. Coat your hands with flour and remove the dough from the bowl. Knead the dough and divide into two pieces. Form each piece into a roll about 3 inches wide. Place the rolls side by side onto the prepared baking sheet. They should stretch the length of the sheet. Bake 20 minutes at 350 degrees, until the rolls have started to turn brown. Then reduce the heat to 250 degrees and bake for another 15 minutes.

Remove the rolls from the oven onto a rack. Let cool about 10 minutes, until cool enough to handle. Then slice them diagonally about every ½ inch. Return the cookies to the baking sheet and lay them flat. Return to the oven and bake until lightly golden, about 30 minutes at 250 degrees. Allow to cool completely on a wire rack before serving. The cookies will get crunchier as they cool.



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