



TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 3-11-23 KI TISSA

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.

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 3-11-23 KI TISSA

Message originally shared 2/28/97
KI TISA - WHEN YOU ELEVATE
Shemoth 30:11-34:35
I Kings 18:1-39
I Corinthians 8:4-13

Exodus 32:30-33: And it came to be on the next day that Mosheh said to the people, "You, you have sinned a great sin. And now I am going up to Adonai - if I might atone for your sin." And Mosheh returned to Adonai and said, "Oh, these people have sinned a great sin, and have made for themselves a mighty one of gold! And now, if You would forgive their sin, but if not, please blot me out of Your book which You have written. And Adonai said to Mosheh, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I blot him out of My book.

Verse 9-10: And Adonai said to Mosheh, "I have seen this people, and see, it is a stiff-necked people! And now, let Me alone, that My wrath might burn against them, and I consume them, and I make of you a great nation."

1 Kings 18:21: And Eliyahu came to all the people, and said, "How long would you keep hopping between two opinions? If Adonai is Elohim, follow Him; and if Ba'al, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.

We see the similarity here between Moses' Israel and Eliyahu's Israel. Turning to what they could see was the easy way. Trusting in Yahveh that had already performed miracles for them, but they could not see, was the hard way.

Verses 37-39: Answer me, O Adonai, answer me, and let this people know that You are Adonai Elohim, and You shall turn their hearts back to You again." Then the fire of Adonai fell and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. And all the people saw, and fell on their faces, and said, "Adonai, He is the Elohim! Adonai, He is the Elohim!"

At this point in the life of Eliyahu, he was the last prophet of Yahveh left alive. He was one man against 850 prophets of Ba'al and Asherah. One man of Yahveh against overwhelming odds.

1 Corinthians 8:4: We know that an idol is no matter at all in the world, and that there is no other Elohim but one.

Confirmation of YAHVEH's power as we see in Exodus and 1 Kings. No god of man is more powerful than Yahveh Himself.

Verse 5: For even if there are so-called mighty ones, whether in heaven or on earth-as there are many mighty ones and many masters-
Verse 6: For us there is one Elohim, the Father, from whom all came and for whom we live, and one Master Y'shua Messiah, through whom all came and through whom we live. Verse 7: However, not all have this knowledge. But some, being aware of the idol, until now eat it as having been offered to an idol, so their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Verse 10: For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's place, shall not his conscience, if he is weak, be built up to eat food offered to idols? Verse 11: So, this weak brother, for whom

Messiah died, shall perish through your knowledge! Verse 12: Now sinning in this way against the brothers, and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Messiah.

Genesis 4:9: And Adonai said to Qayin, "Where is Hebel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's guard?"

Yes, we are our brother's keeper. We have a responsibility, according to the knowledge of Messiah that we hold, to share that knowledge with our brothers. Because if we don't, we will be held accountable. Do we want to hear from Yahveh the following from Genesis 4:10?

And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.

Do you want to be the stumbling block that causes anyone to not learn of Messiah?

In 1 Corinthians 8:9: But look to it, lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling-block to those who are weak.

We all have a responsibility regarding the knowledge that we each have of the Messiah Y'shua. If we don't choose to share with others that knowledge, we will be held accountable.

Moses, Elijah, Paul and all those great men and women of Yahveh knew this responsibility. They knew that they had to be examples of Yahveh and Y'shua. Because if they stood up and cried to the world that they were servants of the Living Yahveh and then lived as the rest of mankind did, worshipping the idols of this world, and their actions caused another to perish because of them. Then they would be held accountable.

We are our brother's keeper. Yahveh meant it to be that way. We are called the family of Yahveh. We are called the children of Yahveh.

We have this promise if we do the work that we have been called to in Him.

Romans 8:17: And if children, also heirs - truly heirs of Elohim, and co-heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with Him, in order that we also be exalted together.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, David, Paul, Peter, all of these great servants of Yahveh knew the promise. They chose the way of Yahveh rather than the way of man.

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 Ki Tisa: Summary Exodus 30:11-34:35

God continues describing the Tabernacle to Moses; the people worship the Golden Calf, Moses pleads on their behalf, and God forgives them.

God was with Moses on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. God had already commanded Moses how to build a Tent of Appointed Meeting for God. This Dwelling Place was a moveable holy sanctuary where the people can bring offerings to God. Priests were to wear special garments and wash before officiating in this sanctuary. Each person, rich and poor, was to donate half shekel to finance the service in the sanctuary.

“As for you, Moses,” God continued, “take the finest spices and the finest olive oil and make a holy anointment. You shall anoint the Tent of Appointed Meeting, the Ark of the Testimony and all within the sanctuary. Sanctify them so that they become holy and that all who touch them become holy.”

“Tell the children of Israel to keep My Sabbaths so that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. For those who profane My Sabbath, their soul shall be cut off from among the people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. This shall be a perpetual covenant, a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day God ceased from work and rested.”

When God finished speaking, God gave Moses the two stone Tablets of Testimony written with the finger of God.

At this moment, the people were beginning to wonder if Moses would ever return. They gathered against Aaron saying, “Make us a god who shall go before us, for we do not know what happened to Moses.”

The Golden Calf

“Remove your gold earrings and bring them to me,” Aaron answered. And the people did. Aaron then melted the gold and molded it into a golden calf. The people exclaimed, “This is the god, O Israel, which brought us out of the land of Egypt.”

Aaron built an altar before the golden calf, proclaiming, “A festival to the Lord, tomorrow.” Early the next day, the people feasted and made offerings.

Back on Mount Sinai, the Lord said to Moses, “Go, descend, for the people brought from the land of Egypt have become corrupt. They strayed quickly. They made a molten calf and worshipped it as if it were Me. Now let Me alone so My anger may destroy them.”

But Moses pleaded with God, “Why destroy the people whom You saved? Why should the Egyptians say, God saved them with evil intent, to kill the people later? Reconsider. Remember your promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to multiply their offspring like stars of heaven and give them the promised land.”

And the Lord renounced the punishment planned for the people.

Moses left Mount Sinai with the two stone Tablets of Testimony in his hands. On these Tablets, written on both their sides, was the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God.

As soon as Moses saw the calf and the dancing, his anger flared. He cast the Tablets out of his hands and shattered them. Then Moses took the calf, burnt it with fire, ground it to powder, threw it upon the water and made the children of Israel drink it.

Moses confronted Aaron, "What did these people do to you that you permitted such a great sin?"

"Do not be angry," Aaron answered. "You know the people are predisposed toward evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god, which shall go before us, for we know not what has become of Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt.' So, I told them to bring me their gold jewelry and I cast it in the fire and out came this calf."

Moses saw the people were out of control since Aaron had let them get out of control. So, Moses stood outside the camp gate and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come here!" Inside the camp some three thousand people were then killed.

The next day, Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go to God and try to make atonement."

Moses went to God and said, "If you cannot give the people forgiveness, then blot me out from Your book which You have written."

God responded, "Whoever has sinned against Me, him I will blot out from My book! But when I remember their sin, on that day, there will be a reckoning." Then God sent a plague upon the people.

"Now go, Moses, and take the people to the land flowing with milk and honey, as I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will send an Angel before you and drive out the native peoples. But I will not go in your midst, since you are a stiff-necked people, lest I destroy you on the way."

When the people heard this harsh warning, they mourned, and no one put on their fine jewelry.

Moses erected the Tent of Meeting outside the camp. Whoever sought God would go out to the Tent of Meeting.

Moses in the Tent

Whenever Moses went to the Tent, all the people would watch as a pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the Tent while the Lord spoke with Moses. When the people saw this pillar of cloud, all the people stood and worshipped God.

"Oh, God," Moses said in the Tent of Meeting, "let me behold Your Presence."

God answered, "I have singled you out by Name. I will make all My goodness pass before you. I will be gracious to those to whom I will be gracious and show compassion to those to whom I will show compassion. But you cannot see My face, for no human may see Me and live. But stand on the rock and when My glory passes by, you shall see My back, but My face may not be seen."

God then said to Moses, "Now come back to the mountain and carve two tablets of stone like the first. I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets you broke."

Moses did as God said and brought two new tablets of stone up to Mount Sinai. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses. God proclaimed,

"The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, extending mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but Who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation."

Moses bowed his head, worshipping and asking God to pardon the sins of the people and take them as an inheritance.

God said, "Behold, I make a covenant, I make distinctions such as never have been created in all the earth, nor in any nation. All the people shall see the work of the Lord. Observe what I am commanding this day. I will drive peoples off their land, lest you follow their ways or sacrifice unto their gods.

"Instead, you shall break down their altars and smash their pillars. For you shall bow down to no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. You shall make no molten gods. Passover shall you keep. The Sabbath you shall keep. Shavuot you shall keep. You shall redeem your firstborn. You shall give the first of your produce to the Temple of God. Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk. Write these words of my covenant. According to these words have I sealed a covenant with you and Israel."

Moses remained with the Lord for 40 days and 40 nights and did not eat bread nor drink water. God wrote upon the Tablets, the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

When Moses came down from the Mount Sinai with the two Tablets of Testimony, Moses did not know that his face radiated because he had spoken with God. When Aaron and the people saw the way Moses' face radiated, they were afraid to come toward him. Moses beckoned them forward. First, he gave the Commandments to the priests and rulers and then to all the children of Israel. Moses gave them all that the Lord had spoken upon Mount Sinai.

When Moses was done speaking, he put a veil on his face. When Moses went to speak to God, he took the veil off. When the children of Israel saw Moses' face radiating, Moses put the veil back upon his face until he went to speak again with God.

Parashat Ki Tisa Discussion Questions

- 1) Moses' face radiated because he had spoken with God. What makes your face radiate?
- 2) When Moses is delayed in returning from Mount Sinai, the people ask Aaron to make another god for them to worship. Do you ever get impatient with God and consider worshipping a different god?
- 3) God is known here as a Jealous God. How do you feel when you are jealous? What does being a Jealous God mean?
- 4) Moses asks to see God's face, but God says no human can ever see God's face, lest s/he die. Do you ever wish you could see God? Why? How does it make you feel to know that God doesn't want you to physically see God?

Haftarah for Ki Tisa Ezekiel 36:16-38

Elijah takes on Ahab and worshippers of Baal.

In *Parashat Ki Tisa*, Moses confronts the consequences of the worship of the Golden Calf. The Haftarah for Parashat Ki Tisa focuses on Elijah, and his mission to disprove the power and existence of two other foreign gods, Baal and Asherah.

Elijah was a prophet who lived in the ninth century BCE, during the time that King Ahab and Queen Jezebel ruled Israel. When the Haftarah begins, Elijah has been hiding east of the Jordan River for three years after bringing a drought upon Israel at the beginning of his career (17:1). God commands Elijah to appear before the king, who has been searching the land for water with his servant Obadiah. Obadiah comes across Elijah and brings Ahab to meet the prophet.

Ahab taunts Elijah, calling him, "troubler of Israel," (18:17) for bringing the draught upon Israel, but Elijah reverses the insult, saying, "It is not I who have brought trouble on Israel, but you and your father's house, by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and going after the Baalim" (18:18). Elijah then asks Ahab to summon all of Israel to meet him on Mount Carmel, along with 400 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah.

Challenge on the Mountain

When everyone has gathered on the mountain, Elijah issues a challenge to the other prophets. They will take two bulls, one for the prophets of Baal and Asherah, and one for Elijah. Each bull will be slaughtered and put on top of a wooden base as a sacrifice, but no fire will be applied to the meat. Then the prophets of Baal and Asherah will call out to their gods, and Elijah will call out to his God. "The god who responds with fire, that one is God," (18:24) Elijah says.

The prophets of Baal go first, preparing the animal and calling out to Baal. They call all morning, perform a hopping dance, and even slice their own flesh with knives when Elijah taunts them. But there is no fire.

Then Elijah repairs damage that had been done to a pre-existing altar, setting up 12 stones to correspond with the 12 tribes for the new altar. He makes a trench around the altar, lays the meat on top, and fills the trench with water, getting the wood of the altar completely wet.

Finally, Elijah comes forward and says, "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God; for You have turned their hearts backward" (18:37)." Fire then comes down from the heavens and consumes the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth, even drying up the water that was in the trenches. When the people see this, they fling themselves to the ground and cry out, "The Lord alone is God, The Lord alone is God!" (18:39)



From the Desk of Rabbi Philip Hammond

WORDS OF WISDOM CHAPTER 26

As we continue on in our journey of life, we have a constant need to be reminded of the dangers associated with the "importance of self". The biggest stumbling block we have in our lives is actually ourselves. Our relationship with HaShem is according to our relationship with "self". There are many warnings given that should cause us to review our "self-importance".

"Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgements and His statutes which I command you today, lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver, and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you

forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which yours fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end – then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’” Deuteronomy 8:11-17 [NKJB]

Arriving at the point whereby we appreciate that all that we have or in fact don't have is according to the will of HaShem. When we have abundance, then we are in danger of forgetting HaShem and becoming consumed with our “self-importance”. For most, the more we have the more we want. Not only that but we do begin to believe that ***“my power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth”***. This sets us at odds with HaShem, where we put ourselves above the might of HaShem. Foolish, but true!

If we are in a position of abundance, then we begin to gather and strive for “things” that we desire taking our eyes completely off the “things” HaShem wants for His Children. In most cases the “things” we desire are not the “things” HaShem would be pleased for us to have.

What is intriguing in all this; is the fact that when we have abundance, we often see this as due to our own might. Yet when we have lost all or have little, we often blame HaShem. There is a remedy for those of us who find ourselves in such a position.

“O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand and is all Your own.” 1 Chronicles 29:16 [NKJV]

It is imperative that we understand that ALL comes via the “Hand” of HaShem. He created us, and therefore He has the right to mold us into the very vessels He chooses. This can be a hard fact to swallow, especially when we have a high dose of “self-importance”. Pride and arrogance are the building blocks of “self-importance”. It would be fair to say that Cain, Korah, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Nadab, Abihu, Judas Iscariot, Demas, and Alexander the coppersmith were consumed with a large dose of “self-

importance". HaSatan of course is the embodiment of "self-importance". A verse in Proverbs gives great instruction in this area.

"My child, pay attention to me, let your eyes take pleasure in my way:" Proverbs 23:26 [NJB]

By paying attention to the Torah, we quickly find ourselves being drawn to the beauty of HaShem and HaMoshiach Yeshua through Torah. This is the way of HaShem, the Holy One of Israel, blessed be His name. Sin lies at our door ever waiting for us to invite "him" in. Without the holy Torah we lack the necessary tools to employ in keeping the enemy of sin from entering our doors. Sin is a master at playing the "self-importance" card. We fall for the deceit and the bluff associated with such a move. Whilst we often believe [foolishly] that we hold all the cards, the fact of the matter is that we not only have a poor hand, but we underestimate the cards sin holds. This is a monumental mistake, and it can cost us dearly. Fortunately for the Children of Israel, we have the support of One who owns all the cards and deals them according to His purposes and make no mistake HaShem never loses a game. HaShem has a set of rules that He plays by, and all who want to be on the winning side must adopt these same rules. Of course, these rules are to be found in Torah. Every time we play a game and neglect the Torah or reject the Torah, we will surely lose the game.

Prayer keeps us in communication with our heavenly Father, our Moshiach Yeshua, and allows the Ruach HaKodesh to oversee our every move. It is impossible for a Child of HaShem to engage in sin when they are engaged in heavenly prayer. Heavenly prayer not only keeps us connected to HaShem, but it also keeps us connected to Torah.

I once read a quote that said, "The best way to break a habit is to drop it." This truth then brings us face to face with a choice! Which habit do you want to drop? Is it the habit of prayer or the habit of sin? HaSatan would have us drop the habit of prayer, and he has a toolbox full of gadgets to achieve this. If we are engaged in sin, then you can be sure we have dropped the habit of prayer and broken our "Royal Telephone" to HaShem.

Living a life on this earth, [as it is] devoid of sin, is impossible. Only One has achieved this, Yeshua HaMoshiach. None the less this should not deter us from trying and employing all the tools at our disposal to achieve such a goal. With the help of our Father, Yeshua HaMoshiach, Ruach

HaKodesh and Torah we can confidently pursue this wonderful goal. In doing this, I encourage you not to compare yourself with others, but look for personal improvements in the shedding of sin. Most of us will have “good” days and “bad” days, but we must continue the struggle. HaShem will make the final judgement, not other people, so we need to be on side with HaShem first and foremost. Yet in saying this it would be irresponsible for me not to encourage people to look for a friend and a mentor who can help in this difficult journey. This is not an easy task, and the enemy has plenty of people willing to pose as angels of light, when in fact they are messengers of darkness. A foolish person spends their days self-absorbed in their own importance opening the door for sin to enter. A Child of HaShem spends their days in constant prayer, talking to Him as a friend and mentor, closing the door to sin.

Let us finish this chapter with the following words the Master spoke to the assembly in Laodicea, an assembly many believe describe today’s assemblies.

“Write to the angel of the assembly in Laodicea and say, “Here is the message of the Amen, the trustworthy, the true witness, the Principle of God’s creation: I know about your activities; how you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other, but since you are neither hot nor cold, but only lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth. You say to yourself: I am rich, I have made a fortune and have everything I want, never realising that you are wretchedly and pitifully poor, and blind and naked too. I warn you, buy from me gold that has been tested in the fire to make you truly rich, and white robes to clothe you and hide your shameful nakedness, and ointment to put on your eyes to enable you to see. I reprove and train those whom I love: so repent in real earnest. Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person’s side. Anyone who proves victorious I will allow to share my throne, just as I have myself overcome and have taken my seat with my Father on His throne. Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies.” Revelation 3:14-22 [NJB]

It would be extremely foolish to ignore this word of the Master, as recorded by Yochanan. Let us be constantly in prayer, with the joy of embracing the

Torah in our hearts. This will please our Father, Yeshua HaMoshiach and Ruach HaKodesh.

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

This, that and the other ...



The Sephardic Experience During the Holocaust

The Nazis wiped out several major Sephardic population centers and caused the almost complete demise of Ladino culture.

The Nazi Holocaust that devastated European Jewry and virtually destroyed its centuries-old culture also wiped out the great European population centers of Sephardic (or Judeo-Spanish) Jewry and led to the almost complete demise of its unique language (Ladino) and traditions. Sephardic Jewish communities from France and the Netherlands in the northwest to Yugoslavia and Greece in the southeast almost disappeared.

On the eve of World War II, the European Sephardic community was concentrated in the Balkan countries of Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. Its leading centers were in Salonika, Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Sofia. The experience of the Balkan Jewish communities during the war varied greatly and depended on the type of regime under which they fell.

The Jewish communities of Serbia and northern Greece, including the 50,000 Jews of Salonika, fell under direct German occupation in April 1941 and bore the full weight and intensity of Nazi repressive measures from dispossession, humiliation, and forced labor to hostage taking, and finally deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau and extermination in March-August 1943.

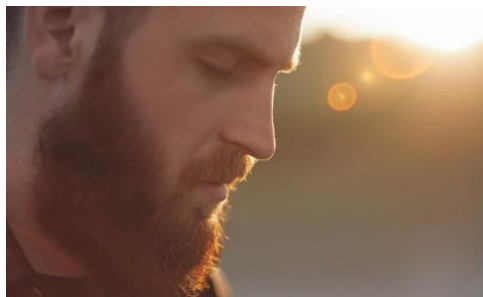
The Jewish population of southern Greece fell under the jurisdiction of the Italians, who eschewed the enactment of anti-Jewish legislation and resisted whenever possible German efforts to transfer them to Poland, until the surrender of Italy on September 8, 1943, brought the Jews under German control.

Sephardic Jews in Bosnia and Croatia were ruled by a German-created Fascist-Catholic satellite state from April 1941, which subjected them to pogrom-like actions before herding them into local camps where they were murdered side by side with Serbs and Roma (Gypsies).

The Jews of Macedonia and Thrace were controlled by Bulgarian occupation forces, which after rendering them stateless, rounded them up and turned them over to the Germans for deportation.

Finally, the Jews of Bulgaria proper were under the rule of a Nazi ally that subjected them to ruinous anti-Jewish legislation, but ultimately yielded to pressure from Bulgarian parliamentarians, clerics, and intellectuals not to deport them. More than 50,000 Bulgarian Jews were thus saved.

PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY



Prayer as Spiritual Practice

Ask most people about their long-term goals for prayer and they often lack even the vocabulary to venture an answer.

I am a beginner-level practitioner of the modern Japanese martial art of Aikido, established by Morihei Ueshiba. Aikido is somewhat unique as a martial art in that it upholds non-violence. It can be practiced only in pairs, but there are no tournaments or competitions, no orientation towards “beating” another person. What then is the practice for?

I have been taught that over the long-term, we are practicing for everyday life. That is to say, we learn certain techniques on the mat in order to learn particular modes of being that can be lived both in and out of the dojo. The techniques involve attacking and receiving attacks, throwing people and falling through the air, all while transforming the energy of conflict into

harmony. But our everyday modes of being do not involve throwing people or doing somersaults. The ultimate objective in Aikido is the acquisition of mental, spiritual, and psychological skills, learned through the body, that have the potential to change the way you live.

It can be helpful to think of prayer in a similar manner. Prayer involves certain forms to be learned — the prayer book, for example, is a form one can learn, practice, and get better at applying. But the true measure of its success is not how well you master the form, but how it affects your life outside the synagogue. After engaging in prayer, I ask myself: What have I learned? How have I grown? And how is this growth reflected in the way I live?

We tend to be more comfortable talking about the forms of prayer. Ask a Jew about their prayer life and they will often tell you how the chairs are arranged in the synagogue and whether the men and women are seated separately or together. They will tell you which prayer book they use and whether the service is participatory and musical. But when asked about long-term goals of prayer, they often lack even the vocabulary to venture an answer.

My understanding is that a spiritual practice must have a goal, an aspirational result that follows the ongoing practice of particular forms. At the core of any practice is the question: What is my goal and how are the methodologies that I apply serving that goal? Calling something a practice means it has an orientation, it's going toward something. And there has to be a connection between the particular methodology — the things we do — and the goal we're trying to achieve.

There can, of course, be many different goals for prayer. Goals for prayer can be communal, oriented towards creating or strengthening community, or achieving certain objectives in the world. There can also be purely individual goals, like having a mystical experience of God or fulfilling a religious obligation to pray. But for prayer to be a practice, it has to have a goal.

To help clarify the notion of having a goal and the relation between the daily methodologies and the long-term goal, I will describe some of my own prayer practice. For me, the long-term goal of prayer is to live with an awareness of the presence of God. As the psalmist wrote, "One thing I ask of God, only that do I seek: to live in the house of God all the days of my life." With a god that is all-that-is and beyond, the request to live in God's presence is really a request for a shift in consciousness.

I have come to understand that this longing for God's presence is the most fundamental religious experience — even more so than the experience of God itself. To put that notion in the language of the Torah, God tells Moses that no person can see God's face and live. Some things, like complete wholeness, are simply beyond the bounds of this world. And as long as we live in a world of boundaries, the deepest core of our being is one of longing. Living with the constant awareness of God's hiding in the world (the Hebrew word for world, *olam*, is related to the word for hiding) translates for me into the emotional medium of cultivating and clarifying the longing for God through prayer.

Longing for God's presence is realized by gradually learning to see more and deeper connection where I previously saw separation and fragmentation. The biggest obstacles to that kind of consciousness expansion are, of course, my habits of mind, the way I unconsciously set up boundaries for what is possible and what is impossible, what is connected and what is other. Set forms of practice give us a stable point against which to measure the shifts in our own experience. Just as a set sequence of physical movements give the practitioner a set point against which to judge, and eventually shift, her habits of movement, so too in the practice of prayer, a fixed liturgy offers us a form against which to judge, and eventually shift, our spiritual and mental habits.

This is how I understand the structure of the daily morning prayer service beginning with Pesukei d'Zimrah – literally, “verses of song.” The great Israeli poet Hayim Nachman Bialik wrote that words serve as a kind of armor, protecting us against the great existential abyss of death and of darkness. But music is born of this abyss, and as such enables us to undermine the structures of defense we set up in our regular lives. We start prayer with music to signal that we are stepping for a moment outside our habitual modes. To invest in song is to let some of our intellectual boundaries fall away, to undermine the structures that our words create, so that something new can grow.

But it's also important to acknowledge that there are often good reasons why these structures were set up in the first place. We make some of our worst mistakes and cause the most pain when we forget about boundaries. Within us are some dark places that we are justifiably afraid of, so knocking down our boundaries does not guarantee the discovery of a shining light on the other side. At their sweet root, as kabbalists call it, separation and otherness are not evil. They are what allow us to love.

So, after softening our boundaries in song, the liturgy turns to the blessings before Shema, which re-establish the sense that we are not alone. Our individual song is but one voice in the choir of all being. Reinforcing this experience, we arrive at the Shema, with its core statement of commitment to living towards a God that is one — not in the sense that there is one God as opposed to many gods, but that at the deepest level all of existence is one. In the biblical paragraphs that follow we commit to making that central to our lives, keeping it in our hearts at all times, on the road and at home, whether sleeping or awake, and teaching it to our children. We then voice our recognition that commitment to this unity is necessary for fulfilling our role in the functioning of the natural cycles. And finally, we commit to the ritual practices that will forever remind us that this is what we are doing.

It is only after deeply committing to these structures that we allow ourselves to enter the great silence of the Amidah. Note that I am speaking of the silence of the Amidah — not the words. It is in the silence that comes before the words that I practice a consciousness of no boundaries, no words creating intellectual structures, just the quiet of being. The words of the Amidah, when we get there, are a gradual journey out of that silence. It moves from the abstract — wonder at God's greatness and power, our connection to our ancestors — to blessings for knowledge, repentance, healing, social justice. Each blessing of the Amidah invites us to reflect

on what it would mean to bring the quiet experience of God, or a clarified moment of longing for God, into a particular aspect of our lives.

It should be clear: Some days this works and other days I'm just banging my head against the wall. But my hope is that I am slowly getting a little better at it, and I pray that is reflected in some ways in my life. That is what I go back to prayer for every day — to practice.

This is, of course, not the only way to practice prayer. I offer my own experience mainly to help clarify the questions I think are useful for any person who wants to engage in prayer as a spiritual practice: What do you hope to achieve by engaging regularly in Jewish prayer? How do you imagine your life will look different if you successfully practice prayer for a decade or two or three? What capacities of yourself will be developed? How do the forms of prayer serve your goals? Do they help you develop self-awareness of where you are on your journey?

I offer these questions in the hope that they will help make prayer meaningful in diverse ways, and that sharing a set of questions helps us all remember, in the words of the prayer book: "they are all beloved, all clearly on their way, all powerful, and all doing their Creator's will with love, fear and awe."

עִבְרִי - Hebrew

Word (s) of the Week

וְלֹהֵלֵל לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Ooh-leh-ha-lahl Lah-YHVH Eh-loh-hay Is-rah-el

And Praise YHVH the God of Israel



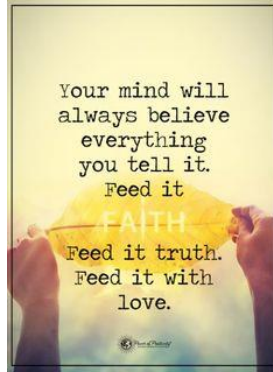
A Taste of Jewish Humor

A Jewish man is shipwrecked on a desert island. He's stuck for years! Using materials from around the island, he builds a house, a store, and a synagogue. Eventually, he's made a whole neighborhood.

One day, he's rescued by a passing ship. The sailors help him collect his few possessions and get ready to leave the island forever. Just before they leave, one of the sailors says, "Hey! Why'd you build two synagogues?"

The man rolls his eyes. "This," he says, pointing at one building, "Is my synagogue."

"And that," he says, pointing at the other, "Is the one I would never set foot in!"



This is not your Bubbie's Chicken Soup

The ultimate comfort soup—and your slow cooker does all the work! by: Gimme Some Oven

Ingredients

- 2lb bone-in chicken (thighs, legs or breasts), skin removed
- 2 large carrots, peeled and sliced
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 medium white onion, peeled and sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 8 cups water
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper (or more to taste)
- 2 teaspoons salt (or more to taste)
- 1/2 cup matzo ball mix
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 eggs

Steps

Add first 10 ingredients (chicken through salt) to a slow cooker and stir to combine. Cook covered on low heat for 8 hours.

Once cooked, remove the chicken with a slotted spoon and discard the bones. The chicken should just fall apart, but if there are large pieces, use a fork to shred. Then return chicken to the soup.

Meanwhile, in a separate bowl, stir together the matzo ball mix, vegetable oil and eggs until combined. Refrigerate for 15 minutes to chill. Then remove and shape the mix into 1-inch balls.



Carefully place the balls back in the soup, and cover and cook for an additional 20 minutes.⁵

Season the soup one final time with additional salt and pepper if needed. Then serve!

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