



TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 8-12-23 REEH

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 a 501 C-3 non-profit. To donate go to etz-chayim.org and click on the PayPal or Venmo 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. 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.

Gabriel Martinez has a home group in El Paso. 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 Torah Assembly.

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

Michael and Gayle Michelucci are forming a new Home Group in Idaho.

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/>.

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. TO SEE MORDECAI’S BOOKS, GO TO: [HTTPS://WWW.ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG/SHOP-OUR-STORE/PRINT-AND-KINDLE-BOOKS/](https://www.etz-chayim.org/shop-our-store/print-and-kindle-books/)

FOR RABBI HAMMOND’S BOOK, **HIS PERFECT GRACE**, GO TO AMAZON.COM AS WELL.

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

WE HAVE 7 PRISON AFFILIATES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

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



Rabbi Mordecai Silver tolmm@etz-chayim.org

MESSAGE FOR 8-12-23 REEH

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17

Isaiah 54:11-55:5

John 7:37-52

Deuteronomy 11:26-28

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: The blessing, when you obey the commands of Adonai your Elohim which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commands of Adonai your Elohim but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other mighty ones which you have not known.

Deuteronomy 12:28

Guard, and obey all these words which I command you, that it might be well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the eyes of Adonai your Elohim.

The word "re'eh," meaning "see" or "behold," is given in the singular, whereas "lifneichem," "before you," is said in the plural.

Jewish commentary explains that this verse hints to a saying of our Rabbis (Talmud Kiddushin 40): a person should always view the world as if it is half good and half bad, or half meritorious and half lacking. If he does even one Mitzvah – good deed, then he tilts the scales and the entire world is found meritorious; but if he commits even one transgression, then he tilts them the other way, and the entire world is found lacking.

Therefore, the verse tells each individual: see (in your mind) that I am placing the entire world in front of you, blessing and curse, and you control the scales...

People tend to view themselves only as individuals, and often resent interference from others. But there is a famous parable about a group of people traveling in a boat. One takes out a drill, and he begins to make a hole in the boat beneath his seat. When the other passengers protest, he responds "why is this your business? I'm making a hole beneath my seat! Leave me alone!" But when the water comes in, everyone will sink.

This parable drives home the idea that we are all interconnected. Yes, we are all responsible as individuals for our own actions, but we must also realize that everything we do affects those around us.

Isaiah 55:1-5

Oh, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. And you who have no silver, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without silver and without price. Why do you weigh out silver for what is not bread, and your labor for what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to Me, and eat what is good, and let your being delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, so that your being lives. And let Me make an everlasting covenant with you, the trustworthy kindnesses of David. See, I have given Him as a witness to the people, a Leader and a Commander for the people. See, a nation you do not know you shall call, and a nation who does not know you run to you, because of Adonai your Elohim, and the Set-apart One of Yisrael, for He has adorned you.

John 7:37-38

And on the last day, the great day of the festival, Y'shua stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and let him who

believes in Me drink. As the Scripture said, out of His innermost shall flow rivers of living water.”

An interesting sidenote is that the Scriptures here talk about the living water and that there was a ceremony done in the time of Y’shua that involved a water ceremony. In our study of Sukkot, we will cover this ceremony and its meaning.

Deuteronomy 14:2

For you are a set-apart people to Adonai your Elohim, and Adonai has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a treasured possession above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 12:32

All the words I am commanding you, guard to do it – do not add to it nor take away from it.

Revelation 22:17-19

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And he who hears, let him say, Come! And he who thirsts, come! And he who desires it, take the water of life without paying! For I witness to everyone hearing the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, Elohim shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, Elohim shall take away his part from the Book of Life, and out of the set-apart city, which are written in this Book.

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 Re'eh: Summary

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17

Moses instructs the Israelites regarding idolatry, false prophets, clean and unclean foods, tithes, freeing slaves, and pilgrimage festivals.

In his last speech to the Israelites, Moses warns them, "If you follow God's laws, you will be blessed more than all the peoples of the earth. However, if you worship false idols and ignore the other commandments, then you shall be cursed and perish.

"These are the statutes which you are to carry out. You shall utterly destroy the places where the nations, whose property you are taking over, served other gods. You shall destroy their altars, break up their memorial stones, burn down their sacred trees, cut down the images of their gods, and you shall obliterate their gods from that place.

"Then, from among all your tribes, God will choose a place to give God's Name habitation. When you search for the manifestation of God's Presence, you will come to this place that God chooses. It is there that you will bring offerings and donations. There, before God, shall you eat

with family and servants and the Levites, who have no portion or inheritance. All will rejoice before God.

“Take care to make offerings only in the place where the Lord chooses. But whenever you desire, you may slaughter and eat meat in any of your settlements, according to the blessing that the Lord God has granted you, but you must not partake of the blood. You shall pour blood out on the ground like water.

“You must not eat your tithes of new grain or wine or oil or the firstlings of your flocks or any of your offerings. These you and your household must consume before the Lord your God in the place that the Lord your God will choose.

“Take heed that you do not follow the lead of the nations who once dwelled in your land. Do not inquire about their gods or how to serve them. For everything that is detested by God, everything God hates, have they done. For they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire for their gods.

“Do not add or subtract from these commandments. If there arises among you a prophet or receiver of dreams, and if he gives you a sign and that sign comes to pass, and if he then says, ‘Let us go after other gods and serve them,’ stop. Do not hearken to that person’s words, because God is testing you with this to know whether you truly love your God with all your heart and all your soul. You shall only follow and fear your God.

“Then the receiver of dreams shall be put to death, for he has uttered untruth concerning God, your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery. Do not listen to anyone, family or friend, who urges you to follow other gods. Rather you, yourself, must bring him to death for leading you away from God.

“You are the sons of God, your God, so do not cut yourselves nor shave your heads in mourning.

“You shall not eat anything abhorrent. You may eat any animal that has true hoofs that are cleft in two and brings up the cud, like sheep, goats and oxen. Those with a cleft hoof, you may not eat, like camel and rabbits. Also, the pig, for though it has true hoofs it does not bring up its cud, so it is unclear.

“Of all that live in the water, you may eat anything that has fins and scales. You may eat any clean bird. You may not eat the eagle, the vulture, raven hawks, owls, storks and bats among others. All winged swarming things are unclean for you. You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death—give it to the stranger in your community to eat or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God.

“You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk. You shall set aside every year a tenth part of all the yield from your produce. Every third year, you shall have a full tithe on your field and leave it within your settlements. During that time the Levite who has no hereditary portion, and the

stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your enterprises.

“Every seventh year, you shall practice a release. Every kinsman creditor shall release from his hand his debt. The debtor may no longer claim payment because of this release for the sake of God. In the promised land, you shall open up your hand to the needy and lend him what is sufficient for his need, for what he lacks.

“You shall free your Hebrew slave in the seventh year. Do not send him away to freedom empty handed but provide for him out of your flock and your wine press, that which your God has blessed for you. Remember that you were once a slave in Egypt when God redeemed you. If, however, the slave wants to stay, then he may do so as a bondsman or handmaid.

“Remember to make the offerings of the firstlings and make sacrifices to God with clean animals, those which are neither lame nor blind or blemished. Keep the Pesach offering to God, your God; for that is the eternal reminder of the time when God took you out of slavery to freedom. You shall only eat unleavened bread for seven days in this memory of our God-given exodus. There shall be a Sabbath on the seventh day of this Passover holiday.

“Then, count seven weeks, and you shall come to the Festival of Weeks. Then you shall give a gift of your hand to God, such that God will bless you and you shall rejoice before the Lord. You will rejoice with your family and servants, with the Levites, with strangers, orphans and widows in your midst. You will come in the place that God will choose to give God’s presence.

“Then in the Festival of huts, You shall make huts and celebrate before God for all the produce, all the harvests, in all the work of your hands.

“Three times each year shall all your males appear in the immediate Presence of your God, in the place that God will choose: on the Festival of Matzah, on the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Huts. He shall not appear in the immediate Presence of God empty-handed. Every person must give according to the gift of his hand, in accordance with the blessing of God, your God, that God has given you.

Parashat Re’eh Discussion Questions

- 1) In everyday life, how do you think God blesses and curses us?
- 2) Why is what we eat so important that Moses adds it to his last speech before the people?
- 3) What does it mean that in the promised land God will choose a place to give God’s Name habitation? Is there such a place in your community?

Haftarah for Reeh

God promises to rebuild and restore Zion.

The haftarah selection is from Isaiah 54:11-55:5.

In the seven weeks after Tisha B'Av we read a series of haftarot from the book of Isaiah that focus on themes of consolation. These haftarot are meant to comfort a nation that has just mourned for the destruction of its most sacred space and the exile from its homeland.

Isaiah's prophecy in the haftarah selection for Re'eh focuses on how the downtrodden Israelites will once again rise to glory. Their buildings will be made of precious stones, their children will be raised in peace, and their cities will be safe. God reminds the people that no harm can come to them without His consent. If He decides that they will be strengthened and restored, this will happen. Isaiah promises that with the God's help, the people of Israel will be invincible.

In the second half of the haftarah, God continues in the same vein, but adds a stipulation: the people must turn to Him in order to reap the rewards He promises. "Give heed to Me, and you shall eat choice food and enjoy the richest dishes" (55:2). God promises that just as He brought David up from his common roots, and made him royalty, so shall the people be lifted out of their destitute situation.



From the Desk of Rabbi Philip Hammond

Rabbi Hammond can be contacted at – Philip@etz-chayim.org

LIFE IS WHAT IT IS??

NOT MAKING A DECISION IS STILL MAKING A DECISION!

I read somewhere the following, “The future is coming whether you’re prepared or not”. This is a simple statement, but I wonder how many actually contemplate the depth of such a statement. If I recall correctly this statement was in some material advertising the importance of financial planning for the future. However, the statement holds true for all areas of our lives. We all face the future, the time frames will vary, but we all face a future.

Preparing for the future is important, but how people prepare and what they prepare for will differ amongst the populace. The world view someone holds will influence preparations taken or rejected. For instance, someone who is an atheist will not take into account any decisions with HaShem in mind. Whereas someone who practices Judaism will obviously make decisions with HaShem in mind.

The decisions my wife and I take are heavily influenced by what we believe HaShem would have us do and on the foundations of Torah. Unfortunately, we are well and truly in the minority. If I was to enter our public education institutions and ask what programs were put into place influenced by faith in

HaShem, I would be told none. If I were to ask students if they considered HaShem in future decision processes, I would be most likely asked, “Who is HaShem”? Very few students in our public education’s institutions would even know Who HaShem is let alone consider HaShem in their decision-making processes.

Students are easy pickings when we discuss this issue, but I find this unfair. Our children are influenced by their “elders”. If those of us who are a little older, who should be showing the way, and I am sad to report that it is us who have started this decline in removing HaShem from our decisions making processes. As our communities and societies move further away from any acknowledgment of HaShem, our future decisions will be based on a revolving door system. History is littered with societies that have become “cannibalistic” destroying themselves from within because of decisions taken. The Western World is fast tracking to “destruction” as we discard the Judaic and Christian foundations of our societies. I often hear the nonsensical statement, “Our world would be far better off without religion”. It may be far better off without so-called religions such as Islam, but I challenge anyone to come up with a better “system” for life than that of the Torah, especially the foundational pillars found in the Ten Words or Ten Commandments. The decisions our present leaders are making on “our behalf” are destroying our communities and societies.

The future will arrive regardless of our preparations or lack of. There is no escaping the future. Even death does not allow you to escape the future. What will our future be? Well, our future is in the Hand of HaShem. Most people deny or will deny this, but that does not change the facts. How that “Hand” guides our lives depends on the decisions we take. There are always consequences attached to our decisions. Rejecting the guiding Hand of HaShem will bring a different consequence than if you embrace the guiding Hand of HaShem. That goes for individuals, but especially communities and societies. Ignoring these issues might bring you a moment of peace and provide some solace for a time, it will not change the fact you have actually made a decision that will still have consequences.

I would like to witness a future that provides structures for healthy vibrant communities. I would like to see a change in our attitudes towards the very “medication” that can provide this. I would like to witness decisions taken and made whereby HaShem is at the very front of our thoughts and decisions making

processes. I admit I am very biased in my thoughts and opinions, but I am confident in saying there is no better “system” for providing a bright and healthy future.

The future continues to arrive, we must face it; there is no escaping it. So what decisions are you taking to make it better for your family, community, society, and country? Only you can answer this question, but it is one that should occupy your everyday decision making.

For my wife and I HaShem is the only One who can be fully trusted. He says what He means and means what He says. His promises can be relied upon. He doesn't “pander” to the politicians, or power brokers. He is not bribed by the rich and famous of the day. HaShem has provided the guidelines for a wonderful future, why we don't embrace it only He knows.

Freedom is a great privilege, but how you decide to use it will determine the outcome of your future. I encourage you to use it wisely whilst you still have the chance.

Rabbi Philip [Yochanan] Hammond. PhD.

Insights into Judaism



Hava Nagila's Long, Strange Trip

The unlikely history of a Hasidic melody.

If there is one Jewish song known by Jews and non-Jews alike, it is undoubtedly Hava Nagila (הבה נגילה), which is Hebrew for “let us rejoice.” From its obscure origins in early 20th-century Palestine, the song has gone on to become a perennial favorite at weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs and Jewish — and non-Jewish — cultural events around the world. With its short lyrics and simple yet distinctive melody, Hava Nagila has been recorded hundreds of times by musicians ranging from Neil Diamond, the Barry Sisters, and Harry Belafonte to the contemporary pop singer Ben Folds and the Serbian Gypsy brass band legend Boban Marcovic. Yet for all of its widespread popularity, few know the history of this global Jewish hit.

Eastern European Origins

Like many modern Israeli and popular Jewish songs, Hava Nagila began its life as a Hasidic melody in Eastern Europe. There the tune was sung as a *nigun* (wordless melody) among the Sadigorer Hasidim, who took their name from the small town of Sadigora in Bukovina (present-day Ukraine), where the Rizhiner Rebbe, Reb Yisroel Friedman (1798-1850) had settled from Russia and established his court in 1845.

At some point around the turn of the last century, a group of Sadigorer Hasidim emigrated to Jerusalem and brought the nigun with them. There the melody might have remained in the cloistered world of Jerusalem's Hasidic communities if not for one man, Avraham Zvi Idelsohn — the father of Jewish musicology.

Idelsohn was born in 1882 in Foelixburg (Filzburg), a small town in the Courland province of Tsarist Russia (present-day Latvia). He trained as a cantor in Russia and studied classical music in conservatories in Berlin and Leipzig before settling in Jerusalem sometime after 1905. He soon became active as a musician, music teacher and scholar in the Jewish community there.

As a passionate Zionist, Idelsohn sought to collect and preserve the folk music of Jewish communities from around the world, using a phonograph to record the traditional melodies of Yemenite, Russian, German, Moroccan and other communities he encountered in Jerusalem. At

the same time, he sought to pioneer a new style of modern national music that would unify the Jewish people as they returned to their historic homeland in Palestine. To that end, he arranged and composed many new Hebrew-language songs based on traditional melodies. These modern songs with ancient roots quickly became popular as new Hebrew folk songs, sung in kibbutzim, moshavs and printed in songbooks in the Jewish community of pre-state Israel and beyond. Among them was Hava Nagila.

The Lyrics

Idelsohn transcribed the Sadigorer melody in 1915, while serving as a bandmaster in the Ottoman Army during World War I. In 1918 he selected the tune for a celebration concert performance in Jerusalem after the British army had defeated the Turks. Arranging the melody in four parts, Idelsohn added a Hebrew text derived from Psalms:

<i>Hava nagila, hava nagila</i>	Let us rejoice, let us rejoice
<i>Hava nagila ve-nismeha</i>	Let us rejoice and be glad
<i>Hava neranena, hava neranena</i>	Let us sing, let us sing
<i>Hava neranena ve-nismeha</i>	Let us sing and be glad
<i>Uru, uru ahim</i>	Awake, awake brothers
<i>Uru ahim be-lev sameah</i>	Awake brothers with a joyful heart

The words echo the biblical verse: “This is the day that God has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it” – “*Ze ha-yom asah adonai, nagila ve-nismeha bo*” ([Psalms 118:24](#)). Years later, one of Idelsohn’s students, Cantor Moshe Nathanson, claimed that he had suggested the verse to his teacher. Whatever the original lyrical inspiration, the song was an immediate hit. Idelsohn himself later recalled how the song spread extremely quickly:

“The choir sang it and it apparently caught the imagination of the people, for the next day men and women were singing the song throughout Jerusalem. In no time it spread throughout the country, and thence throughout the Jewish world.” Idelsohn first published the song in a Hebrew song collection in 1922. Soon it was being sung all over the world, typically referred to simply as a “Palestinian” or “Hebrew” folk song, with no mention of its origins, Hasidic or otherwise.

In the decades after Hava Nagila first appeared, it became a world-wide fixture of Jewish life. Already in the 1920s and 1930s it was sung in Zionist circles in the United States and Europe. Soon the song was included in Jewish children’s songbooks in Palestine, Europe and North America. At the same time, cantors and Jewish folk singers began to issue commercial recordings of Hava Nagila. By the 1940s, the song had become a staple of Jewish weddings, bar mitzvahs, and youth groups, where it was sung and danced as an Israeli-style *hora* folk dance.

Harry Does Hava

In the 1950s, Hava Nagila began to attract the attention of well-known non-Jewish performers in the United States. This was the era in which American popular singers began to perform folk songs from around the world. Along with Italian, Calypso, and other ethnic pop song hits, performers turned to Hava Nagila.

Cuban-born mambo legend Machito and his Afro-Cuban Orchestra was one such example. His 1951 recording of Hava Nagila as “Holiday Mambo” made the tune into a dance hit (to listen, [click here](#)). Dick Dale, the Californian king of the surf guitar, scored a popular hit with his 1963 version of the song (as well as his equally famous 1962 cover of “Misirlou.”) But perhaps the non-Jewish musician who did the most to make Hava Nagila into a mainstream cultural favorite was international pop star Harry Belafonte. In the 1950s, Belafonte used Hava Nagila as his regular closing number because of its uplifting melody and hopeful, brotherly lyrics (to listen, [click here](#)). His 1959 Carnegie Hall live concert recording became a best-selling record. For musicians such as Machito, Dale, and Belafonte, Hava Nagila appealed because of its catchy, quirky, and distinctive Jewish melody and optimistic, joyous, and easy lyrics.

Still Singing

The popularity of Hava Nagila only continued to grow in the 1960s and 1970s, as it came to be featured in Israeli films and American Jewish celebrations of all sorts. Yet by the 1980s and 1990s, Hava Nagila had spread in popularity to the point of caricature. It could be heard at Romani weddings in Macedonia and Yugoslavia, in Las Vegas nightclubs, on Israeli television shows, and in European dance clubs as a techno hit. Entering into its post-modern phase of popularity, Hava Nagila began to be the subject of musical parodies by musicians, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

In recent years, the number of new interpretations have multiplied exponentially to include avant-garde jazz, punk rock (to listen to Me First and the Gimme Gimmes’ version, [click here](#)), and reggae recordings. Some klezmer musicians have even taken the melody back to its roots by performing the song in the style of a slow Hasidic nigun. Traditional or ultra-modern, all of these versions play on the song’s famous, easily recognizable melody. Though it continues to evolve in many different musical directions, Hava Nagila remains a universal symbol of Jewish song and celebration.



Loving and Fearing God

Should Jews feel one emotion over the other--or both equally?

In Jewish thought the love and fear of God are to be understood as complementing one another. Fear without love can easily result in a too rigorous and ultimately stultifying approach to the religious life. Love without fear can just as easily degenerate into sheer sentimentalism.

Biblical and Rabbinic Love

The great biblical text for the love of God is: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). “All your heart” in this context refers less to the emotions than to the mind: in the biblical idiom the intellect is located in the heart, the inner aspect of the human personality. “With all your soul” means “with all your being”; the Hebrew *nefesh*, translated as “soul,” really refers in the Bible to what we would call the person rather than the soul.

But in early rabbinic thought the love of God is understood less as an attitude of mind or as an emotional response than it’s advocating a course of action. The rabbinic Midrash known as the *Sifre*, for example, has the following comment on the verse: “Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day (Deuteronomy 6:6).” “Why is this said? Because it is said: ‘You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart’ and I do not know in what way God is to be loved, therefore it says: ‘Take to heart instructions with which I charge you this day.’ Take these to heart and in this way, you will come to recognize God and cleave to His ways.”

In this passage, typical of the rabbinic emphasis on doing the will of God, on the deed, love is understood to mean the practice of the precepts and the study of the Torah. This leads to, and in a sense is identified with, the “recognition” of God and attachment to His laws. There are passages in the rabbinic literature which do speak of the love of God as an intense longing for God’s nearness. But the main emphasis in rabbinic literature is on love expressed in the deed.

Love of God in the Middle Ages

The medieval thinkers, on the other hand, Saadiah, Bahya Ibn Pakudah, Maimonides, and the Kabbalists, do place emphasis on the mystical love of God. Maimonides devotes the opening chapters of his *Mishneh Torah* to an account of the marvels of the created universe, in the course of which he remarks (*Yesodey Ha-Torah*, 2.2): “How does man come to love and fear God? No sooner does man reflect on His deeds and on His great and marvelous creatures, seeing in them His incomparable and limitless wisdom, than he is moved to love and to praise and to glorify and he has an intense desire to know the great Name. As David said: ‘My soul thirsts for God, for the living God’ (Psalms 42:3).”

The Kabbalists not infrequently use erotic symbolism for the love of man for God, this being compared to human love between a man and a woman, but the pure love of God is often described without any erotic overtones. The Zohar (iii. 267a) understands the love of God to mean that the one who loves is ready to sacrifice everything he has and even life itself in his love for the Creator. “One who loves God is crowned with loving-kindness on all sides and does loving-kindness throughout, sparing neither his person nor his money.”

In Hasidism the love of God generally means completely disinterested service of God with joy in the heart. Tales are told of a number of Hasidic masters who believed that they had forfeited their right to heavenly bliss. Becoming aware of this they declared that now they would have the opportunity of serving and loving God without any thought of self, not even that of the self-enjoying the nearness of God for ever.

There is thus no single Jewish understanding of the concept of the love of God. On the whole, two distinct tendencies emerge. On the one hand, there are Jewish teachers, represented particularly in the rabbinic tradition, who prefer to speak of the love of God in terms of the practical details of the religious life. For them, to study the Torah and keep its precepts is the love of God. On the other hand, there are those who understand the love of God in its mystical sense of intense longing for the nearness of God and for communion with Him. But even this latter group of teachers emphasize the great difficulties in the way of attainment of their ideal and teach that in its highest reaches it is only for a few very rare souls.

Biblical and Rabbinic Fear

From the many references in the Bible to both the love and the fear of God, without any clear distinction being made between the two, it would seem, as many biblical scholars suggest, that the two are essentially identical with an intense relationship with God, especially as realized in ethical conduct.

The very expression “the fear of God” often refers to an extraordinary degree of piety and moral worth. Of the Hebrew midwives who defied Pharaoh’s order for them to kill the infants the verse says: “The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live (Exodus 1:17).” Job is described as “wholehearted and upright, and one that feared God, and shunned evil (Job 1:1).” In the rabbinic literature, the usual expression for the

fear of God is *yirat shamayim*, “the fear of Heaven,” by which is meant the determination to carry out God’s will and not commit sins.

Fear of God in the Middle Ages

Nahmanides understands the positive precepts of the Torah—commands to do this or that—as based on the love of God and the negative precepts—not to do this or that—as based on the fear of God. Love is the motivation for action where this is demanded. Fear is the motivation for inaction where this is demanded.

In medieval Jewish thought, a distinction is drawn between two kinds of fear: fear of punishment and fear in the presence of the exalted majesty of God. The latter comes close to the feelings of awe and dread described in Rudolf Otto’s phrase the “numinous.”

Medieval thinkers believed in reward and punishment. It is not that they rejected the fear of punishment but that they believed this to be inferior to the higher fear of which they spoke. The Zohar, (i. 11b) remarks:

“There are three types of fear; two of these have no proper foundation but the third is the main foundation of fear. A man may fear God in order that his sons may live and not die or because he is afraid of some punishment to be visited on his person or his wealth and because of it he is in constant fear. But it follows that such a man’s fear has no proper foundation. There is another man who fears God because he is terrified of punishment in the next world, in dread of Hell. Both these types of fear do not belong to the main foundation of fear and to its root meaning. But the fear which does have a proper foundation is when a man fears his Master because He is the great and mighty ruler, the Foundation and Root of all worlds and all before Him are accounted as nothing, as it is said: ‘And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing’ (Daniel 4:32).”

Hasidic thought is generally free of references to the fear of hellfire. In Hasidism the idea is often repeated that the fear of God has to be attained by human effort, but the love of God is given to man by divine grace once he has attained fear. Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev introduces into the concept of fear the Hasidic doctrine of annihilation of selfhood. In the lower fear a man is necessarily aware of himself since he dwells on his sinfulness. But in the higher fear a man is so overawed by God’s majesty that he has no self-awareness at all, not even a sense of his own unworthiness.

In the [ethical] Musar movement the emphasis is placed on the lower fear. Taking a somber view of human nature, the Musarists say that only simple reflection on the severe punishments in store for the transgressor can penetrate man’s stony heart. It is somewhat surprising that in modern Jewish theological thinking there is very little on the fear of God. This is no doubt partly because of the move from a God-centered to a man-centered universe and partly because of the unwholesome emotions the concept of fear is said to generate. But it is an odd religious outlook that can blithely ignore, for all its difficulties, such a deeply rooted concept as the fear of God.

עֵבְרִי - Hebrew

Word (s) of the Week

גָּדוֹל *gadol*

Meaning: great



A Taste of Jewish Humor

A Brainy Creation

David Epstein came home from work to see his wife and young daughter Rivkah, reviewing the girl's Hebrew homework.

"What are you learning honey?" asked David.

"Well, we're learning Bereishit (Genesis) and Mommy told me how Hashem made the first man and the first woman. He made the man first. But the man was very lonely with nobody to talk to him. So, Hashem put the man to sleep. And while the man was asleep, Hashem took out his brains, and made a woman from them."



This is not your Bubbie's Chicken Soup Recipes shared by Cooks and Bakers



My Mother's Ultimate Chocolate Babka

A beloved cake made famous by a "Seinfeld" episode.

My mom grew up in New York and went on the hunt for the perfect babka she remembered from the Jewish delis and bakeries that used to be all over the city. Now there are barely any great bakeries left, so, other than perfecting her golf game, she enjoys retirement by experimenting in the kitchen. If you don't know, babka is a beloved cake with Eastern European roots, made famous by a Seinfeld episode at Zabar's Market in New York. This babka is the one that consistently generates rave reviews from all of our family for its irresistible combination of rich

chocolate and other indulgent flavors, and I love that we can honor my mom this Mother's Day by sharing her original recipe with you.

A few notes: this recipe makes approximately 3 babkas in 9" loaf pans. Bake one or all three at once or store extra dough in the freezer, defrosted, and then baked off individually. This recipe has 3 components: the dough, the filling, and the topping. I recommend making the dough first and, while that rises, making the other components. I use a stand mixer, but you can also use a large bowl with a hand mixer plus some hand kneading.

Ingredients

For the dough

- 1 ½ cups warm whole milk, approx. 110 degrees
- 2 (¼ oz. each) packages active dry yeast
- ¾ cups, plus a pinch, white granulated sugar
- 3 whole large eggs, room temperature (save 1 egg for egg wash)
- 1 Tbsp heavy cream (for egg wash...you can substitute milk)
- 2 large egg yolks, room temperature
- 1 ½ tsp of vanilla extract
- 6 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for work surface
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces, room temperature, plus more to grease bowl and loaf pans

For the chocolate filling

- 24 oz. semisweet or dark chocolate chips (2 bags)
- 2 1/2 Tbsp ground cinnamon
- 1 cup walnuts
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup sugar in the raw or turbinado sugar

- ¾ cup unsalted butter (1 ½ sticks)

For the streusel topping

- 1 2/3 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 12 Tbsp (1 ½ sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature

Directions

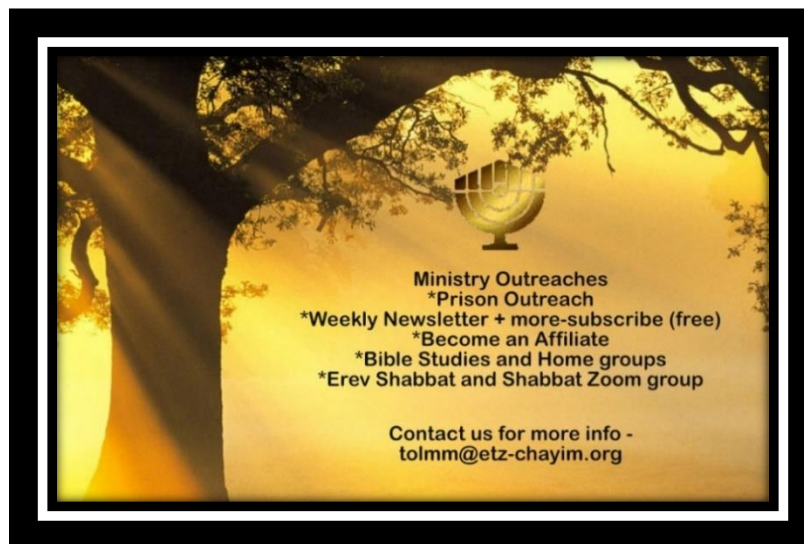
1. Pour warm milk into a small bowl. Sprinkle yeast and pinch of sugar over milk, stir lightly; let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes.
2. In a bowl of electric mixer with paddle attachment, mix together ¾ cup sugar, 2 eggs, vanilla, and egg yolks. Add yeast mixture and lightly mix to combine.
3. In a bowl combine flour and salt. Add to egg mixture and beat on low speed until almost all the flour is incorporated, about 30 seconds. Change to the dough hook. Add 2 sticks butter and beat until flour mixture and butter are completely incorporated, and a smooth, soft dough that's slightly sticky when squeezed is formed, about 10 minutes.
4. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead a few turns until smooth. Butter a large bowl.
5. Place dough in bowl and turn to coat. Cover tightly with plastic wrap. Set aside in a warm place to rise until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.
6. **To make the filling:** Place chocolate chips, ½ cup sugar, ½ cup raw sugar, walnuts and cinnamon in the bowl of a food processor, process into coarse crumbs.
7. Add the 1 ½ sticks butter and process until well combined; set filling aside.
8. **To make the streusel topping:** In a large bowl, combine sugar, flour, and butter. Using a fork, stir until fully combined with clumps ranging in size from crumbs to 1 inch.
9. **To assemble:** Pre-heat oven to 350F. Generously butter your 9-by-5-by-2 ¾-inch loaf pan.
10. In a small bowl beat the remaining egg with the tablespoon of cream, set bowl aside.

11. Punch back the dough, and transfer to a clean surface. Let rest 5 minutes. Cut into 3 equal pieces. Keep 2 pieces covered with plastic wrap while working with the remaining piece. On a generously floured surface, roll dough out into a 16-inch square; it should be about 1/8 inch thick.
12. Brush edges with egg wash. Crumble 1/3 of the chocolate filling evenly over dough, leaving a 1/4-inch border. Roll dough up tightly like a jelly roll. Pinch ends together to seal. Now, twist 5 or 6 turns.
13. Fold long roll in 1/2 and brush top of roll with egg wash. Carefully crumble 2 tablespoons more filling over the roll and twist folded roll a few more times.
14. Place twisted roll into prepared baking pan (it will be a little messy)
15. Brush the top of Babka with egg wash. Crumble 1/3 of streusel topping over each loaf. Loosely cover each pan with plastic wrap and let stand in a warm place for 20 to 30 minutes.
16. Bake babkas, rotating halfway through, until golden, about 35 minutes test for doneness. Toothpick should come out clean of dough when done. Remove from oven and transfer to wire racks until cool. Remove from pans; serve.

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*Philip Hammond
Phone: 0416087400 or
61 + 416087400
Philip@etz-chayim.org*

