



TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 8-19-23 SHOFTIM

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/)

RABBI MORDECAI HAS A NEW BOOK AVAILABLE. IT IS A SPANISH TRANSLATION OF THE TORAH IS VALID: THE COVENANT OF ISRAEL. IT’S AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.

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

CHECK OUT RABBI MORDECAI SILVER’S 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 8-19-23 Shoftim

*Shof'tim - Judges
Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9
Isaiah 51:12-52:12
Acts 5:34-39*

I call this message "This Is God."

Deuteronomy 20:3-4

He shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel, you are coming near to the battle against your enemies; let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, do not panic, and do not be broken before them. For Hashem, your God, is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you with your enemies, to save you."

Isaiah 51:12-13

I, only I, am He Who comforts you; who are you that you should be afraid of mortal humans and of men who will be made as grass? You have forgotten Hashem, your Maker, Who spread out the heavens and set the foundations of the earth, and you are terrified continually, all day long, because of the

oppressor's fury when he prepares to destroy – but where is the oppressor's fury?

Isaiah 51:16

And I have placed My words in your mouth – and with the shade of My hand have I covered you – to implant the heavens and to set a foundation for the earth and to say unto Zion, “You are My people!”

Isaiah 52:10

Hashem has bared His Holy Arm before the eyes of all the nations; all ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God!

The Hebrew for ‘salvation of our God’ is Yeshuat Ehlohaynu.

Isaiah 52:15 So, will the many nations exclaim about Him, and the kings will shut their mouths (in amazement), for they will see that which had never been told to them, and will perceive things they had never heard.

Isaiah 40:10-11 Behold, my Lord, Hashem / Elohim, will come with (a) strong (arm), and His arm will dominate for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His wage is before Him. (He is) like a shepherd who grazes his flock, who gathers the lambs in his arm, who carries them in his bosom, who guides the nursing ewes.

Isaiah 40:21

Do you not realize? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not contemplated the foundations of the earth?

Acts 5:34-39

But one of the members of the Sanhedrin rose to his feet, a Parush named Gamli'el, a teacher of the Torah highly respected by all the people. He ordered the men put outside for a little while. And then addressed the court: “Men of Israel, take care what you do to these people. Some time ago, there was a rebellion under Todah-Theudas, who claimed to be somebody special; and a number of men, maybe four hundred, rallied behind him. But upon his being put to death, his whole following was broken up and came to nothing. After this, Y'hudah HaG'lili-Judas the Galilean led another uprising, back at the time of the

enrollment for the Roman tax; and he got some people to defect to him. But he was killed, and all his followers were scattered. So, in the present case, my advice to you is not to interfere with these people, but to leave them alone. For if this idea or this movement has a human origin, it will collapse. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them; you might even find yourselves fighting God!

Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, who died in 1941), asks a key question regarding a law found in the compilation of laws by Maimonides. It states that there is an obligation to believe in God. This is best understood as there being an obligation to cultivate one's already intact belief in God through analysis of the creation, and various other methods. Consequently, everyone who is obligated to observe commandments, girls, age 12 and up, boys, age 13 and up, are obligated as well to believe in God. Rav Elchonon asks how it is reasonable to expect such a thing from a child? Even great philosophers had difficulty in issues of faith in God's existence! Rabbi Wasserman further asks how it can be that a person ignorant of the responsibilities placed upon him by God can be held responsible for not having performed them.

Rabbi Wasserman answers that really the question should be just the opposite. How is it possible that a wise philosopher could have questions of faith? He says that if you found a beautifully written paragraph, and you were told that it is the result of a monkey randomly spilling ink on a sheet of paper, you would not consider it remotely possible. Yet when we observe a world infinitely more complicated than a paragraph, and obviously belying design and purpose, we fail to recognize a Designer, and even make claims to the contrary!

Rabbi Wasserman's answer, then, is that since it really is simple for a reasonable person to believe in The Creator, even those with untrained minds such as the young, and even the most unsophisticated people can be held responsible for not recognizing Him and feeling indebted to Him.

Why then did great philosophers have questions of faith? Rabbi Wasserman explains that it is because of lack of objectivity. People understand that if they accept the concept of a God then it follows that He created the world for a purpose which involves them. That means that there is something they need to be doing that they aren't presently doing. In other words, they feel that belief in God will prevent them from continuing to attain their earthly desires which run contrary to God's dictates. Rabbi Wasserman points out that in Jewish law the minimum bribe prohibited (which can corrupt one's perspective) is the minimum

amount of money that people ascribe value to. Approximately the equivalent of one nickel is enough to sway a mind ever so subtly. This prohibition even applies to Moses! Applying this reasoning, Rabbi Wasserman says that even some of the greatest minds can lack objectivity in matters of faith because of something relatively small which they fear they will lose. However, an objective mind can easily recognize the hands of a designer in the creation.

Isaiah 41:13

For I am Hashem, your God, Who grasps your right hand, Who says to you: 'Fear not, (for) I help you!'

י אֲנִי יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִחֲזִיק יְמִינֶךָ הָאֹמֵר
לֵךְ אֶל-תִּירָא אֲנִי עֲזַרְתִּיךָ:

Ah-nee ah-zahr-tee-ach. I help you. Or another translation is I support you.

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 Shoftim: Summary

Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

Moses reviews for the Israelites their system of justice, the rules of kingship, their relationship to idolatrous nations, and the rules of doing battle.

Moses continues his last speech to the Israelites before he dies saying: “Judges shall be appointed to judge the people with justice. You shall not twist judgment by recognizing a face or accepting bribery, because both blind the eyes of the wise and cause the words of the righteous to falter. Justice, justice shall you pursue, so that you may live and take possession of the land which God, your God, is giving you.

“Do not make a memorial stone for God, nor offer to God a blemished animal for sacrifice.

“If you find an individual who does evil in the eyes of God and transgresses God’s covenant, then you shall make careful inquiry. If it turns out to be true according to the word of two or three witnesses, then that person shall die. No one shall be put to death on the basis of the word of only one witness.

“If the matter is too difficult for you to decide, between blood and blood, between right and right, between damage and damage, then you shall come to the priests for judgment.”

Moses then says: “When you come to the land that God is giving you, and dwell in it, you will want a king. You shall then set a king over yourself who God will choose. This king shall not be a foreigner but one of your brethren. This king must not have many horses, nor many wives, nor amass silver and gold for himself in excess, so that his heart may not go astray. Rather, when he sits upon the throne, he shall write for himself a duplicate of this Teaching in a book. He shall read from it as long as he shall live, so

that he may learn to fear God and not lift himself above his brethren nor turn aside from the commandments.

“The priests, the Levites, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance. They shall eat the fire offerings to God, the first of your grain and oil, and drink your new wine because God chose this tribe to serve in the Name of God forever.

“When you are in the land that God is giving you, do not learn their evil ways. You shall have no one among you pass your son or daughter through fire, nor listen to soothsayers, interpreters of omens, sorcerers, or charmers. These are abominations to God.”

Moses continues saying, “A prophet from among your brethren, like myself, will God raise up for you. To him you shall hearken. Then God will put words into this prophet’s mouth so that he may speak them to the people. But if the prophet speaks wantonly in God’s Name or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you ask, ‘How can we recognize the word that God has not spoken.’ If it is spoken in the name of God and does not come true, then God has not spoken that word and the prophet has spoken it wantonly. You shall not be afraid of him.

“When you dwell in the promised land, you shall separate out three cities and they shall serve as a refuge for murderers. These cities are only for the murderer who kills his neighbor unintentionally and without hate. For in the heat of the moment, this murderer could be killed even though the initial crime was an accident. This will prevent innocent blood from being shed in the promised land.

“Do not move your boundary marker of your neighbor from those set by inheritance.

“The testimony of one witness shall not stand against a person with regard to any crime or offense or sin that may have been committed. Only through a testimony of two or three witnesses may a case be established. If a pair of witnesses misuse their power and are false witnesses, then you shall cause to happen what was planned for the sinner. In this way you clear away the evil from your midst. Your eye must not have pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

“When you go forth in battle against a stronger enemy, do not be afraid, for God who brought you out of Egypt, is with you. The officers shall speak to the people, saying, ‘If there is a man that has a new home, a new wife or a new vineyard, let him return home.’ Let him who is afraid and fainthearted go home too, so as not to inspire cowardliness in other soldiers.

“When you approach a city to wage war, you must first offer peace. If the answer is peace, then the entire population shall serve you. If peace is rejected, then you shall battle against them, and God will deliver them to you. Then you shall kill all the males, but the women and children and animals and all the booty shall be your spoils. However, of the cities that God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not allow a soul to remain alive so that they will not teach you abominations practiced for their gods.

Do not destroy the food trees in the cities captured. Eat of them but do not cut them down. You may cut down non-food trees.

If a slain person is found fallen in the field, you must find the city closest to the slain man, and the elders of that city shall sacrifice a young calf and blessings by the priests shall be made over it. The elders shall then say prayers for atonement. You must put away the innocent blood from your midst by doing that which is right in the eyes of God.

Parashat Shoftim Discussion Questions

- 1) Why is it so important to have two or three witnesses on a crime rather than just one?
- 2) What is justice? Why is justice so important to God and to humanity? Is this a just world?
- 3) Have you have felt a victim to injustice? How did you react? Have you ever been the recipient of justice? How did that feel?
- 4) This passage speaks of kings and prophets appointed by God and those who are not appointed by God. Do you think God still appoints Kings and Prophets? Why or why not?

Haftarah for Parashat Shoftim: Summary

Through Isaiah, God extends a note of condolence.

Isaiah 51:12-52:12

Haftarat Shoftim is the fourth of the seven haftarot of consolation read in the weeks following Tisha B'Av. It is taken from the Book of Isaiah—a prophet who lived in the time of the Babylonian Exile and consoled Israel with comforting prophecies of the return to Zion. The haftarah for Shoftim begins, characteristically enough: “I, I am He who comforts you!” (51:12)

It continues using Isaiah’s colorfully metaphorical language to describe people in turmoil who are saved by God—“the crouching one who is freed” (51:14) and “an antelope caught in a net” (51:20). All these people will come to praise God, Isaiah promises.

He also describes Jerusalem as God’s chosen one, with the special status of “you who drink from My hand.” (51:17) There has been much destruction and turmoil that has plagued Jerusalem, but God says the tormentors of Jerusalem will get what they deserve.

The haftarah climaxes with a classic and oft-quoted proclamation of triumph: “Awake, awake, O Zion! Clothe yourself in splendor, put on your robes of majesty.” (52:1) The verses that follow recall the weight of the exile, and express hope for the greatness of the promised future redemption.

The haftarah concludes with a plea to God for the people’s departure out of exile—which, still, has not been assured at the time of Isaiah’s prophecy. “Turn, turn away, touch naught unclean as you depart from there...for the Lord is marching before you, the God of Israel is your rear guard” (52:11-12).

The theme of the week’s Torah reading is based around the fact that, though Israel has many judges, there is only one true Judge: God. Similarly, as the beginning of the haftarah rhetorically asks: “What ails you that you fear Man who must die?”—there is only one true savior, and only one comfort...and this is in God.



From the Desk of Rabbi Philip Hammond

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

LIFE IS WHAT IT IS??

LIVING IN THE MOMENT!

Life brings with it various emotions, challenges, and moments of both highs and lows. So many elements can have an influence on how we feel and how we respond to these emotions and challenges. Elements such as where we live, our age, marital status, children, work commitments, health, finances, dwelling, recreational activities, education, world view and the list continues, have huge bearings on our life. One of the challenges we face is trying to find lasting periods of happiness. This appears to be a challenge even for those of us fortunate enough to live in a relatively peaceful country and environment, let alone a war-torn country. One of the things that prevent us from having long periods of happiness is our habit of worrying about things that may not happen or that we have no control over. My wife and I have been discussing this topic of late and one of the suggestions she made in trying to have longer periods of happiness was “to live in the moment”. Perhaps this can only work when you are fortunate enough to live in a relatively peaceful environment, but it certainly can help. Worrying about tomorrow and things you have no control over will rob you of periods of happiness. It is understandable that we concern ourselves with issues that are important to us, but it is how we concern ourselves that makes the

difference. As a farmer I am constantly worrying about the weather, as the weather is a major factor in farming. However, I cannot control the weather so instead of worrying I have to train myself to enjoy and give thanks to the good weather that “supports” the process. This doesn’t mean I ignore the probability of a drought or flood etc, but I don’t let it rob me of enjoying the moment.

With so many pressures and changes that face us today, it is important that we take time to live in the enjoyable and precious moments. Unfortunately, our media focus on “bad news” stories because they sell and because of our current level of media access we are saturated with “bad news” stories, robbing our focus on the “good news” stories. This becomes a habit and we then find ourselves focusing on our own “bad news” woe is me stories. This does not mean we ignore or try to be unrealistic about challenges and problems, but we should train ourselves to take advantage of the enjoyable moments in our lives. No matter who we are we do have such moments, even those who live in terrible war torn environments will have moments of enjoyment.

Thankfully we can put ourselves into a position to receive more “good news” stories if we so desire. We can follow the leadership and guidance of HaShem, the God of Israel. He is the Master of “Good news” stories. Any who follow His instructions will certainly learn how to celebrate in the moment, but even better will learn to celebrate the past, present and future. HaShem can offer the presence of Shalom in our lives, He can turn darkness into Light and teach us to cope with situations that we can influence and those we cannot.

Want some lasting moments of happiness in your life; then seek HaShem whilst He can be found.

Rabbi Philip [Yochanan] Hammond. PhD.

Insights into Judaism



Where the Word ‘Anti-Semitism’ Comes From

Hatred of Jews has been around for centuries, but only in the 1800s did it begin to be referred to as 'anti-Semitism.'

Hatred of Jews has been a feature of world history for centuries. But only in the late 19th century did a new specific word emerge to describe it.

What prompted the coining of the neologism “anti-Semitism” was the perception of an altered relationship between Jews and the peoples among whom they lived that could not accurately be described as mere “Judeophobia” or “Jew-hatred.” The felt need for a new word affected not just self-identified anti-Semites. It was recognized by Jews and non-Jews throughout Europe and wherever Europeans settled in the world.

Anti-Semitism, as a concept and a movement, was a response to the so-called Jewish Question, which was itself precipitated by the remarkable economic, cultural and political ascent of the Jews during the 19th century and their entry into mainstream European life. For some of the peoples among whom they lived, this rapid accumulation of power was ominously threatening. Accustomed to seeing Jews as small-time chiselers, heretics, peddlers, and parasites, they were now confronted by Jewish political leaders, cultural luminaries, bankers, captains of industry, army officers, professors, and bosses. No longer powerless outsiders, Jews were seen as wielders of surreptitiously acquired power.

Seeing only the dramatic success stories, this view ignored the thousands of still impoverished Jews dwelling in Eastern Europe and in the slums of central and western European cities. Nevertheless, it was the fear of what Jews would do with their wildly exaggerated power that animated efforts to disempower them before it was too late — first in Germany, and then in many other countries. Conservative Christians, disaffected democrats, former liberals, nationalists, cultural critics, thwarted academics, and visionary social reformers took action against the Jewish enemy in a variety of ways. Some, though certainly not all, were convinced that a mass movement organized on the basis of Jew-hatred was the best way to proceed — assuming, probably correctly, that the great majority of their countrymen harbored some degree of resentment, suspicion, or disdain for Jews.

The term anti-Semitism emerged to describe these efforts. In Germany, Wilhelm Marr, if not the coiner of the word then certainly one of its major early popularizers, thought of himself as a modern man, a student of history and science. Anti-Semitism allowed him to distinguish the party he launched in late 1879 — the Antisemites' League — from the religious bigotry of medieval Jew-hatred. Like many (but not all) who shared his goals, Marr defined the Jewish Question as one of race, not religious deviance. In the past, persecution had been episodic; outbursts of terrible violence alternated with long periods of quiet relations between Jews and their neighbors. In Marr's view, such lackadaisical Jew-hatred had allowed Jews to grow stronger and, in fact, launch plans for conquest of the non-Jewish world. Mere religious prejudice had failed to halt their rise. The Jews had become too powerful, too entrenched in society, to be beaten back by the occasional pogrom.

Anti-Semitism rejected these errors of the past. What was needed was disciplined and systematic struggle, nothing less than the institutionalization of anti-Semitism in political parties, grassroots organizations, lobbying agencies, newspapers, learned journals, and a variety of voluntary associations action would be buttressed by modern mass media and new technologies, by unceasing agitation. Anti-Semites had to be prepared for the long struggle which was to continue for as long as it took to solve the Jewish Question. Whether Marr's contemporaries wished to admit it or not, the modern world was engaged in a race war, a war that could not have a peaceful end.

While many agreed with Marr's goals and methods, the term anti-Semitism itself was never wholly embraced. Some found it too evasive, others too pseudo-scientific. The German philosopher Eugen Dühring (1833-1921) objected to its avoidance of naming the enemy directly. It was also seen as too imprecise. Not all Semites were deemed inimical. For example, when Nazis sought Arab allies before and during World War II, they found it advisable to disavow use of the term in propaganda directed at the Middle East, reassuring potential allies that Arabs were a noble race. Even today, Arabs — Semites themselves — object to being associated with the Jewish Question. Others, quite hostile toward Jews, claim that because they are Semites, they cannot be accused of anti-Semitism.

Another source of controversy that adheres to the term, even today, is its correct orthography. Should it be anti-Semitism or antisemitism?

The issue is with the word Semitism. The word emerges from the study of languages and may have once been a reasonably neutral description of the peoples and cultures of the Middle East, essentially just a means of distinguishing language groups. But those who favor antisemitism over anti-Semitism note that the term Semitentum, usually attributed to the German Enlightenment thinker A. L. Schlozer (1735-1809), was polemical from birth, invented to establish a polarity between superior white Christian cultures and those of the inferior Orient. By the time the word was appropriated by critics of the Jews, however, it had lost even a semblance of neutrality. Semitism came to signify a bundle of uniformly negative traits.

Placing "anti" and a hyphen in front of a word typically results in its opposite. But anti-Semitism is essentially a synonym of Semitism. As a result, it's now commonplace in academic circles to

drop the hyphen. The noted Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt has championed the change, saying the use of the hyphen “completely distorts the meaning of the word.” The Anti-Defamation League and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance have dropped the hyphen. However, the change is far from universal. The Associated Press, the standard bearer of journalistic style, continues to use the hyphen, as do many major news outlets, including The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. The Merriam-Webster dictionary and the U.S. State Department also continue to use a hyphen.



Is God Listening?

Prayer remains vital to our religious experience, even if God doesn't swoop down to remove tumors.

Sixteen years ago, my mother suffered a debilitating stroke. All four of her sons prayed that she might live and recover. Although she lived, her recovery was partial, and she continues to suffer serious aftereffects, including aphasia. Did God answer our prayers?

The theological optimist would reply, "Of course. God answered, 'Yes, I will let your mother live.'" But what if my mother had not had four children? What if we had decided not to pray? Would God have let her die? If we assume that God answers prayers, we must assume that had the prayers not been offered, there would be no answer. What would have become of my mother if one morning I had decided not to pray, or been distracted, or simply apathetic? It is hard to believe that God would have made my mother suffer because her sons did not pray. Yet if not offering our prayers would have made no difference, then why pray in the first place?

Unanswered Prayers

More powerfully yet, what of the prayers, worthy prayers, desperate prayers, that go unanswered? The traditional, glib response is, "God answered. He said no!" That flip rejoinder is satisfactory if the prayer is for a new bicycle; but prayers are often the product of true anguish. "God said no" sounds not clever but callous if the plea is that God spare a child suffering from cancer. Then "no" begins to sound more like the absence of God than a response from God.

Yet what can we make of prayer if it does not work in the world? How do we still maintain the worthiness of religious traditions if God does not swoop down to remove our tumors and raise our bowed lives?

Some point to recent research demonstrating that prayer has a medical benefit. But this research is a dangerous, even destructive tool for religion to wield. First, the results are contradictory. Second, if we take our stand on empirical studies, we are confounded when tomorrow a more thorough study comes along disproving the previous research. Faith should not be placed on the statisticians' operating table.

Demeaning God

Indeed, I believe that expecting God to answer one's prayer in the fashion that most people expect is to demean God. Our relationship to Ultimacy ought not to be one of favors. Do we pray so that God might act as a Celestial Doctor, a Grand Dispenser of Goods? Or do we pray for relationship, for closeness; to elevate our spirits and raise our hearts?

A good deal of prayer is indistinguishable from barter. Dear God, we pray, heal my mother, and I will be good. Such a prudential arrangement is hardly in the highest spirit of faith.

A New Model

Judaism offers a different, more powerful model of prayer. Two thousand years ago, Antogonos of Socho taught: "Do not be like a slave who placates his master simply to receive a reward." What then might prayer be?

A medieval rabbi, Leon Modena, expressed the truth of prayer as follows: Imagine a man in a boat who is pulling himself to shore. If one did not know better, it could appear that he is pulling the shore to himself. But indeed, it is the one in the boat who is being moved, because the shore is fixed. So it is, he said, with prayer. We think that when we pray, we are moving God closer to our will. But true prayer does quite the opposite: It moves us closer to God's will.

If we rise from our prayer as better human beings than the ones who sat down, our prayers have been answered.

Does God answer prayer? Although I too have heard stories of miraculous recoveries and remarkable coincidences in people's lives, stories of salvation that credit God's power, I do not believe God supernaturally intervenes in the world in response to prayer. Although my heart yearns for such a God—and at times, I confess, my soul prays in such hopes—my experience in this often pain-wracked world belies the yearning of my heart.

But to say that God does not remove tumors is not to declare God irrelevant. For we can invoke the strength, guidance, and love of God in our prayers. Calling out to God, we elevate ourselves; seeking God through prayer, we can change our lives.

עֲבָרִי - Hebrew

Word (s) of the Week

שַׁדַּי

Shaddai

Meaning: 'the almighty,' a title for God

Usage: Almighty



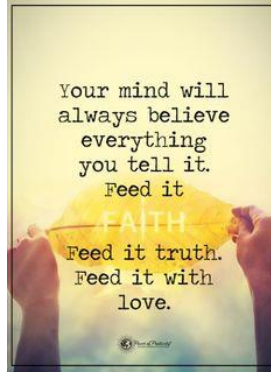
A Taste of Jewish Humor

A Brave Woman

Ethel and Herman Epstein interrupted their vacation to go to the dentist. "I want a tooth pulled, and I don't want any freezing because I'm in a big hurry," Ethel said. "Just extract the tooth as quickly as possible, and we'll be on our way."

The dentist was quite impressed. "You're certainly a courageous woman," he said. "Which tooth is it?"

Ethel turned to her husband Herman and said, "Show him your tooth, dear."



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



Red Velvet Cake Challah Recipe

Invented for a daughter's 10th birthday, this challah is both bread and cake.

Red Velvet Cake – my daughter's favorite. She has been obsessed with it ever since she learned there was something out there that is called red velvet cake. So it should not have shocked me that when I asked her what she wanted for her 10th birthday, she said: "I want you to invent a special challah flavor just for me – Red Velvet Cake Challah!"

Challahs these days are a changin': they are topped with sprinkles, stuffed with pastrami or flavored with gourmet seasonal ingredients like ramps. They are unique. And while they all hold firm to their traditional braided bread roots, they are definitely a new breed of bread, not braided cake. So to make bread that is cake but still challah, I had to do my research. I looked at

countless recipes...everything was red food coloring, cocoa powder, buttermilk, vanilla...all things that go great in a CAKE but, in challah dough? Not gonna work. So what do you do when you are a mommy on a mission but can't figure out how to get your project to the finish line? You cheat.

Turns out Amazon sells bakery emulsions, which are concentrated flavor for baking that add depth without requiring excess liquid. They come in every flavor under the sun, including Red Velvet Cake. One click and two days later I had the bottle in my hands. I carefully opened it, and holy mother of cake balls, it smelled fantastic. Like cake in a bottle. Aside from adding the emulsion, I made two changes to my basic challah recipe: I removed the eggs, figuring all those yolks might affect the good red color, then replaced them with an additional tablespoon of oil and water; I also added 2 tablespoons of vanilla sugar to keep the dough's consistency in check but add a hint of vanilla.

I didn't want to make the challah too cakey, though I did want to kick it up a notch in terms of its red velvet cake flavor.

It turns out Duncan Hines makes red velvet cake mix. A little margarine, a little vanilla, a little cake mix and voila! An actual red velvet cake crumb topping. Add a simple glaze to the top because glaze is awesome and, believe it or not, you have a red velvet cake that is a challah.

It looked and tasted amazing, but most amazing of all was my little girl's face when she saw her special birthday challah. All the work and planning was totally worth it...until my son requested a Jello Challah for his birthday.

Ingredients

For the red velvet challah:

1 1/3 cup + 1 tablespoon water

1/3 cup + 1 Tbsp canola oil

1 1/2 tsp salt

2 Tbsp Red Velvet Cake Emulsion

4 1/4 cup bread flour

1/2 cup sugar

2 Tbsp vanilla sugar

1 Tbsp bread machine yeast

For the crumb topping:

1 cup Red Velvet Cake Mix

2 Tbsp softened butter or margarine

2 Tbsp vanilla

For the glaze:

2 1/2 cups powdered sugar

3 Tbsp (regular, almond or soy)

1 tsp vanilla

pinch of salt

Directions

Add dry and wet ingredients to a bread machine in the order specified by the manufacturer. Set machine for “dough” cycle.

If not using a bread machine, combine all the ingredients in a large bowl, turn out on to a floured board and knead for 5 minutes. Allow to rise in a large bowl covered with plastic wrap or a towel for 1 1/2 hours.

While dough is rising in the bread machine, prepare the crumb topping by combining ingredients with a fork until well blended (mixture will be crumbly).

When dough cycle is complete, remove dough from bread machine and divide into 6 equal portions. Roll three portions into long ropes and braid together, then place into a greased loaf pan or greased cookie sheet. Repeat with remaining dough. Sprinkle half of crumb topping mixture on each challah, then cover with a towel and let rise for 30-60 minutes in a draft-free place.

Preheat oven to 350 degree.

Bake challahs for 35 minutes or until golden brown and bottom is hollow when tapped. Remove from pans and allow to cool on a wire rack.

Prepare glaze by mixing ingredients together until well blended.

Let cool completely. Drizzle with glaze. Add dry and wet ingredients to a bread machine in the order specified by the manufacturer. Set machine for “dough” cycle.

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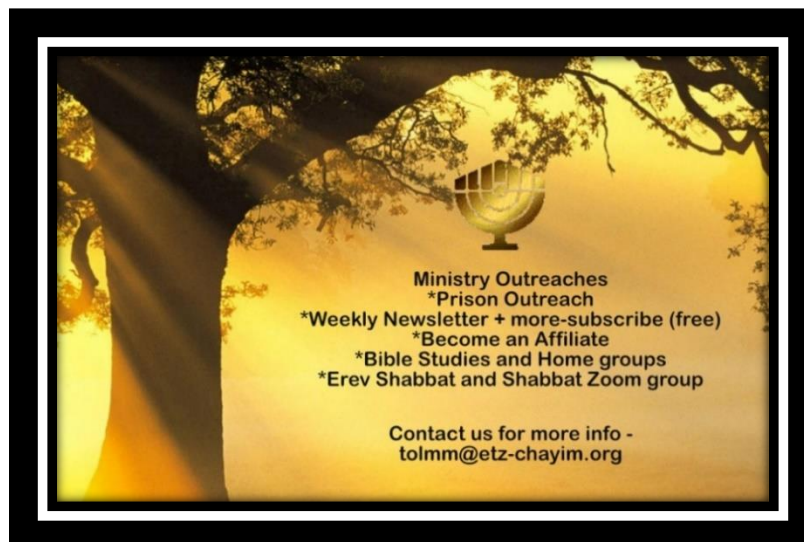
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*Philip Hammond
Phone: 0416087400 or
61 + 416087400
Philip@etz-chayim.org*

