



**נא לא לדבר בשעת התפילה**  
PLEASE NO CONVERSATION DURING SERVICES



**WEEKDAY DAVENING INFORMATION**

	Sunday (3/15)	Monday (3/16)	Tuesday (3/17)	Wednesday (3/18)	Thursday (3/19)	Friday (3/20)
<b>Earliest Talit</b>	6:15 AM	6:13 AM	6:12 AM	6:10 AM	6:08 AM	6:07 AM
<b>Shacharit</b>	8:15 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM	6:25 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM
<b>Gedolah</b>	1:06 PM	1:06 PM	1:05 PM	1:05 PM	1:05 PM	1:05 PM
<b>Mincha (Sun/Fri) - Maariv</b>	6:45 PM	8:00 PM	8:00 PM	8:00 PM	8:00 PM	6:55 PM
<b>Shkia</b>	7:03 PM	7:04 PM	7:05 PM	7:06 PM	7:08 PM	
<b>Tzait</b>	7:48 PM	7:49 PM	7:50 PM	7:51 PM	7:53 PM	

**שבת פרשת ויקהל-פקודי/פרשת פרה**  
**SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYAKHEL-PEKUDEI**  
**PARSHAT PARAH**  
**23 ADAR - MARCH 14**  
Maftir reads from Chukat (Numbers 19:1-22). Haftorah is Ezekiel 36:16-38. We bless the month of Nisan. Don't say אל-מלא or אב הרחמים or אב הרחמים. Say צדקתך צדק.

**FRIDAY NIGHT**  
**CANDLE LIGHTING - 6:43 PM**  
**MINCHA - 6:50 PM**  
**TZAIT - 7:46 PM**

**SATURDAY**  
**CHUMASH SHIUR - 8:00 AM**  
**SHACHARIT YOUTH - 8:20 AM**  
**SHACHARIT MAIN - 8:45 AM**  
**LAST KRIAT SHEMA - 10:08 AM**  
**GEMARA SHIUR - 5:30 PM**  
**MINCHA - 6:30 PM**  
**SHKIA - 7:02 PM**  
**MAARIV/HAVDALAH - 7:47 PM**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**  
**TO REQUEST A BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT (BY 7:00 PM WEDNESDAY) OR DEDICATE A BULLETIN FOR \$36 (\$54 W/PHOTO), EMAIL SEPLOTNICK@GMAIL.COM.**

**CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM**  
**18-25 SADDLE RIVER ROAD**  
**FAIR LAWN, NJ 07410-5909**  
**201-797-0502**  
**WWW.AHAVATACHIM.ORG**



Welcome to all of our guests and members joining us this Friday night to celebrate Shabbat Across America. We hope that everyone enjoys the lively davening welcoming Shabbat, followed by Chinese food dinner with friends at the shul. Thank you to Eli Greenbaum for arranging.

On March 15, the Gita Cooperwasser<sup>ה"ע</sup> Youth Program presents Rolling Video Games, which is rescheduled from the Purim snow postponement. Contact Sara at [sarasilb@yahoo.com](mailto:sarasilb@yahoo.com) to RSVP. And please bring a bag of food for our Good Deeds Day Food Drive, run by the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey. To sort the food, from 1:00 PM to -2:30 PM go online at <http://www.jfnnj.org/>.



The Molad for Nisan is Friday, March 20, 12:43 PM & 3 Chalokim. During Nisan we say neither Tachanun nor the series of יהי רצון after Torah readings on Monday/Thursday. We don't say אל-מלא or אב הרחמים, except when Counting the Omer and אב הרחמים is said. Fasting and Eulogizing are prohibited in Nisan.

## Kiddush Information

- ☆ Kiddush cleanup for the month of March is Sokoloff, Solomon, Sonnenblick, Sperling, Spier, Stock, Vann, Weinraub, Wigod, Winchester
- ☆ Kiddush setup for this Shabbat is Agress, Baron, Bernstein
- ☆ Kiddush setup for next Shabbat is Brenenson, Riskin, Wolfson
- ☆ To sponsor a Kiddush (\$1000/\$613/\$318 plus scotch) send an email to [gplotnick@aol.com](mailto:gplotnick@aol.com).

## Adult Education



- ☆ GEMARAH SHIUR - Rabbi's Shabbat afternoon gemarah shiur takes place one hour before Mincha.
- ☆ CHUMASH CLASS - Gerry Halpern's Class - Shabbat morning before Shacharit.

## Numbers & Info

- ☆ ERUV UPDATE – 201-797-0502
- ☆ MIKVAH – 201-796-0350. At Shomrei Torah, weekdays 9:00 PM–10:30 PM, Motzei Shabbat from 11/4 hours after Shabbat ends for 1.5 hours. Kaylim Mikvah: Sunday 10 AM-3 PM
- ☆ TWITTER: @AhavatAchimFL
- ☆ FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/groups/ahavat.achim/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ahavat.achim/)

## Tzedakah

- ☆ For matanot levyonim donations totaled about \$1,600. The funds were given to support Purim seudahs for the poor in Israel. Od Yosef Chai received \$900, Keren Hatzadik \$500 and Ezras Yisroel \$180.

## Gita Cooperwasser נ"ע

### Youth Program



- ☆ This Shabbat the youth leaders are: Andy Freund (Floater), Sophie Oster (Beit Midrash - Group Aleph), Hannah Levine & Serena Freund (Purple Room - Group Bet).
- ☆ May 24 - Shavuot ice cream party (first day), 4:00 pm at the Bernstein home, 13-03 Tanis Pl.

### The Sisterhood

- ☆ Get your Mitzvah cards! Contact Eita Latkin at [parentsof3@aol.com](mailto:parentsof3@aol.com) to have an acknowledgement of a Simcha, a refuah shelayma or to extend condolences.
- ☆ Pre-Pesach Food Drive to support the Fair Lawn Food Pantry in



memory of Edith Wigod נ"ע will be Sunday, March 22, 8:00 AM to 5 PM, at the Bickel Garage (36-02 Hale Place, Fair Lawn). Funded entirely

by private donations, the food pantry is utilized on a regular basis by many Fair Lawn families who receive food and personal products. Due to low inventory it desperately needs cereal, sugar, pasta, rice, peanut butter, and paper goods. When you're cleaning your kitchen for Pesach, please donate your non-perishable food bringing them to the Bickel Garage. Email [bickelar@aol.com](mailto:bickelar@aol.com) for more info.

## Upcoming Events

- ☆ Mar. 17 - Board Meeting
- ☆ Mar. 21 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Garfunkels for the first Yahrzeit of David's mother Fayge Rivka Bat R' Chaim Halevi נ"ע.
- ☆ Mar. 28 - Kiddush sponsored by the Katters in honor of Rebekah
- ☆ Apr. 26 - OU Community Fair
- ☆ May 9 - Shimshon Goldstein Bar Mitzvah
- ☆ May 13 - Norpac Mission to Washington
- ☆ May 16 - Eli Schachter Bar Mitzvah
- ☆ May 23 - Suedah Shlishit sponsored by Eli Zefon in memory of שלמה בן אליהו נ"ע
- ☆ June 6 - Suedah Shlishit sponsored by Eli Zefon in memory of ברוך מפצור בן שמואל נ"ע
- ☆ June 20 - Kiddush sponsored by the Schwitzers in honor of Jason's Aufruf and upcoming wedding to Alicia Cohen
- ☆ July 18 - Kiddush sponsored by the Kor family in honor of the upcoming marriage of Rachel to Yoni Edelman
- ☆ July 25 - Ben Greenbaum Bar Mitzvah
- ☆ Aug. 1 - Kiddush in honor of Andrew Wigod's Aufruf, and upcoming wedding to Kira Batist
- ☆ Oct. 3 - Hadassah & Hadar Schachter B'Not Mitzvah
- ☆ Feb. 13 - Ben Wechsler Bar Mitzvah

### Pack 613

- ☆ Mar. 8 - Den Meeting
- ☆ Mar. 15 - Trip/Service Project
- ☆ Mar. 22 - Den Meeting
- ☆ Mar. 29 - Pinewood Derby
- ☆ Apr. 12 - Pack Meeting
- ☆ Apr. 19 - Den Meeting
- ☆ Apr. 26 - Den Meeting
- ☆ May 3 - Den Meeting
- ☆ May 10 - Den Meeting
- ☆ May 17 - NJ Kinus
- ☆ May 31 - Final Den Meeting



## IN NISAN WE REMEMBER ...



NAME	HEBREW DATE	CANDLE EVENING OF	DEDICATOR	RELATIONSHIP
Joseph Bickel	2	March 21	Jack Bickel	Father
Herbert Sturm	2	March 21	Robyn Safier	Father
Ben Chass	3	March 22	Murray Chass	Father
Limor Adler	4	March 23	Ayala & Gideon Adler	Daughter
Edith Garfunkel	4	March 23	David Garfunkel	Mother
Margot Flora Rothschild	5	March 24	Audrey Bickel	Mother
John Berber	5	March 24	Susie S. Berber	Husband
Rachel (Risha) Adler	6	March 25	Gideon Adler	Mother
Hania Kirschenbaum	8	March 27	Hyman Kirschenbaum	Mother
Estelle Smedresman	9	March 28	Steve Smedresman	Mother
Stan Solomon	13	April 1	Andy Solomon	Father
Daniel Mittelpunkt	13	April 1	Eita Latkin	Cousin
Yetta Mittelpunkt	14	April 2	Eita Latkin	Grandmother
William Horwitz	14	April 2	Hanna Lewinson	Father
Edith Lazarovici Fontain	17	April 5	Fred Fontaine	Mother
Aaron Moskovitz	25	April 13	Charlotte Moskovitz	Husband
Leah Schwartz	29	April 17	Kenny Levine	Grandmother
Leah Schwartz	29	April 17	Naomi Levine	Mother
Adolph Stanger	30	April 18	Sarah Stanger	Father-In-Law



## SUPPORT YOUR SHUL

### Donate a Sefer, etc.

The shul has Siddurim & Machzorim (\$36) and Chumashim (\$54) available to be donated. Please contact Jeff Safier at [rjsafier@optonline.net](mailto:rjsafier@optonline.net) for details.

### Yahrzeit Plaques

Memorialize a loved one and receive written notice of your upcoming yahrzeit every year. In addition, your loved one's name will be mentioned during the public Yizkor we recite on Yom Kippur and in the Bulletin. Plaques are \$300 for members and \$350 for non-members. For more information, contact Sophie Infield at 791-5518.

### Scrip

Scrip is available from Men's email by emailing David at [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com), at Paypal at [treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org) or by Discover, MasterCard or Visa - email [treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org) for details.

### Mishebayrach

If you've made a Mishebayrach you've pledged to give Tzedakah on behalf of those for whom you asked Hashem's blessing. Contributions to the shul are appropriate and can be made via Paypal to [treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org), or via MasterCard, Visa or Discover by sending the information to Elliot Greene (contact him at [treasurer@ahavatachim.org](mailto:treasurer@ahavatachim.org)). If paying by check please indicate on its face "Aliyah Donation." Thank you for your generosity.

### David Schwitzer<sup>ת"ע</sup> Social Hall

Please contact Steven Winchester at [swinchman1@gmail.com](mailto:swinchman1@gmail.com) to book the David Schwitzer<sup>ת"ע</sup> Social Hall for an event or special occasion. \$250 per simcha (members) / \$500 paid in advance for non-members, plus the cost of any additional clean up (plus a \$150 security deposit refunded when the social hall is returned in the condition it started in). Private caterers must be approved in advance by the Rabbi.

### Sisterhood & Men's Club

Please contact Elliot Greene at [egreene@acm.org](mailto:egreene@acm.org) to join the Men's Club. To join Sisterhood, please contact Lori Garfunkel at [garfmom@gmail.com](mailto:garfmom@gmail.com).

### Honoraria

Contributions to acquire honoraria in memory or honor of a loved one are welcome. The available Honoraria list will be provided upon request by contacting Steven Plotnick at [seplotnick@gmail.com](mailto:seplotnick@gmail.com).

### Mitzvah Cards

Want mitzvah cards, contact Eita Latkin at 791-8940 or [parentsof3@aol.com](mailto:parentsof3@aol.com). Cost is \$3 per card. Also can be ordered in bulk - ten cards for \$25, which you send out yourself privately.

## SUPPORT YOUR SHUL

## PARSHAT PARAH

"This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come." (BaMidbar 19:2)

This is an example of Law of the Torah which is considered completely above human comprehension. The paradox is that those who are involved in the preparation of the ashes of the cow become ritually impure, while the sprinkling of water with those ashes is used to remove contamination! It is an example of a Law which must be accepted on faith alone.

On the Shabbat after Purim, two Torah Scrolls are removed from the Ark. The Sidrah of the week is read from the first, and from the second, the chapter of Parah Adumah, the Red Cow (or Red Heifer), is read. It gives the procedure through which people can purify themselves from the contamination caused by a human corpse.

The reading of this chapter was instituted for this time of the year because Jews were required to purify themselves before coming to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festival of Passover. The Haftarah read on the Sabbath of Parashat Parah contains the verse, "And I shall sprinkle pure water upon you, that you be cleansed. From all your contamination and from all your filth I will cleanse you" (Ezekiel 36:25). There are other parallels in the Haftarah between the concepts of sin represented by contamination, and atonement represented by purity.

This idea is discussed in the commentary to the ArtScroll Ezekiel (pp.534-5), as follows: Freedom of will in moral matters is the first and irreplaceable condition for living one's life on the higher plane demanded by the Torah. Belief in man's freedom of action, however, is endangered by the fact that man cannot avoid death and that he is subject to the superficial limitations imposed by the forces of nature.

This belief is particularly shaken by the sight of a dead human being. If the whole human being has succumbed to death, been overpowered by physical forces - If man, like all other organic beings, cannot escape the spell of an overpowering force - then there is no room for the moral "you shall" next to the physical "you must." Moral freedom of will would then be an illusion, and the Divine law of morality with its demand for total free-willed devotion to the illuminating, purifying fire of its sanctuary would be incomprehensible. (R'Hirsch, Numbers 19:22).

Thus, sin is related not only to death, but also to contamination, which is closely associated with death. Because the sinner is shackled by his desires, he loses spiritual control of actions. He is swept along by the physical lusts that have overpowered his spiritual self. Thus, the most meaningful part of life, the spiritual, has been killed. For this reason, when G-d forgives man's sin and grants him a new heart and a new spirit, He is imbuing him with purity, the state of mind in which man is the sole master of his actions.

A living (and therefore a pure) person uses his body as he wills; it is his tool to use as he sees fit. The regenerate sinner, upon returning to the state of purity, joins once more the state of the living - and the free. (Chazon HaMikra) As with the other of the Four Parshiyot, a boy who is not yet of Bar-Mitzvah age should not be called to the Torah for Maftir on Shabbat Parshat Parah, nor should he read the Parshah for others. For since he is free of the obligation of Mitzvot, he cannot enable others to fulfill their obligation through him.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Rabbi Goldstein's Hours

Rabbi Goldstein is available to the membership by contacting him at [UriG77@aol.com](mailto:UriG77@aol.com) or by phone at 201-703-2458. For those who wish to contact him during office hours, he is available to be at the shul Wednesday evenings after Ma'ariv until approximately 10:00 pm. Please note that the Rabbi's e-mails are forwarded to his home PC and to his mobile phone.

### Become a Member of Ahavat Achim

If you are not yet a member; please contact Aryeh Brenenson [abrenenson@gmail.com](mailto:abrenenson@gmail.com) for details on membership.

### Bikkur Cholim/Chesed

If anyone could use a visit/assistance from the Bikkur Cholim/Chesed Committee, contact the Rabbi at [UriG77@aol.com](mailto:UriG77@aol.com) or Sara Levine at [saralevine06@gmail.com](mailto:saralevine06@gmail.com) or (201)797-9286. Contact Sara to join the committee and offer Biker Cholim assistance in the manner that's most conducive to your schedule. You may find yourself in a position to spend time visiting a homebound shul member, give them a call and see if they require any special assistance or might even decide to cook or purchase a special meal for them. No offer will be refused and all are most appreciated.

### Personal Announcements

Various life cycle events related to members are announced in the shul's weekly bulletin (e.g., births, bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings and deaths), and the bulletin acknowledges travel to/from Israel for study. We also welcome new members and those who've moved into the community and express interest in our shul. Other personal announcements generally are not appropriate for inclusion in the bulletin, except as part of the bulletin's dedication (a \$36 cost - \$54 with photo). Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

## The Spirit of Community (Vayakhel 5775)

What do you do when your people has just made a golden calf, run riot and lost its sense of ethical and spiritual direction? How do you restore moral order – not just then in the days of Moses, but even now? The answer lies in the first word of today's parsha: *Vayakhel*. But to understand it we have to retrace two journeys that were among the most fateful in the modern world.

The story begins in the year 1831 when two young men, both in their twenties, one from England, the other from France, set out on voyages of discovery that would change them, and eventually our understanding of the world. The Englishman was Charles Darwin. The Frenchman was Alexis de Tocqueville. Darwin's journey aboard the *Beagle* took him eventually to the Galapagos Islands where he began to think about the origin and evolution of species. Tocqueville's journey was to investigate a phenomenon that became the title of his book: *Democracy in America*.

Although the two men were studying completely different things, the one zoology and biology, the other politics and sociology, as we will see, they came to strikingly similar conclusions – the same conclusion God taught Moses after the episode of the golden calf.

Darwin, as we know, made a series of discoveries that led him to the theory known as natural selection. Species compete for scarce resources and only the best adapted survive. The same, he believed, was true of humans also. But this left him with serious problem.

If evolution is the struggle to survive, if the strong win and the weak go to the wall, then everywhere ruthlessness should prevail. But it doesn't. All societies value altruism. People esteem those who make sacrifices for the sake of others. This, in Darwinian terms, doesn't seem to make sense at all, and he knew it.

The bravest, most sacrificial people, he wrote in *The Descent of Man* "would on average perish in larger number than other men." A noble man "would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature." It seems scarcely possible, he wrote, that virtue "could be increased through natural selection, that is, by survival of the fittest."<sup>[1]</sup>

It was Darwin's greatness that he saw the answer, even though it contradicted his general thesis. Natural selection operates at the level of the individual. It is as individual men and women that we pass on our genes to the next generation. But civilization works at the level of the group.

As he put it, "a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection." How to get from the individual to the group was, he said, "at present much too difficult to be solved."<sup>[2]</sup>

The conclusion was clear even though biologists to this day still argue about the mechanisms involved.<sup>[3]</sup> We survive as groups. One man versus one lion: lion wins. Ten men against one lion: the lion may lose. *Homo sapiens*, in terms of strength and speed, is a poor player when ranked against the outliers in the animal kingdom. But human beings have unique skills when it comes to creating and sustaining groups. We have language. We can communicate. We

have culture. We can pass on our discoveries to future generations. Humans form larger and more flexible groups than any other species, while at the same time leaving room for individuality. We are not ants in a colony or bees in a hive. Humans are the community-creating animal.

Meanwhile in America Alexis de Tocqueville, like Darwin, faced a major intellectual problem he felt driven to solve. His problem, as a Frenchman, was to try to understand the role of religion in democratic America. He knew that the United States had voted to separate religion from power by way of the First Amendment, the separation of church and state. So religion in America had no power. He assumed that it had no influence either. What he discovered was precisely the opposite. "There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."<sup>[4]</sup>

This did not make sense to him at all, and he asked Americans to explain it to him. They all gave him essentially the same answer. Religion in America (we are speaking of the early 1830s, remember) does not get involved in politics. He asked clergymen why not. Again they were unanimous in their answer. Politics is divisive. Therefore if religion were to become involved in politics, it too would be divisive. That is why religion stayed away from party political issues.

Tocqueville paid close attention to what religion actually did in America, and he came to some fascinating conclusions. It strengthened marriage, and he believed that strong marriages were essential to free societies. He wrote: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone."

It also led people to form communities around places of worship. It encouraged people in those communities to act together for the sake of the common good. The great danger in a democracy, said Tocqueville, is individualism. People come to care about themselves, not about others. As for the others, the danger is that people will leave their welfare to the government, a process that ends in the loss of liberty as the State takes on more and more of the responsibility for society as a whole.

What protects Americans against these twin dangers, he said, is the fact that, encouraged by their religious convictions, they form associations, charities, voluntary associations, what in Judaism we call *chevrot*. At first bewildered, and then charmed, Tocqueville noted how quickly Americans formed local groups to deal with the problems in their lives. He called this the "art of association," and said about it that it was "the apprenticeship of liberty."

All of this was the opposite of what he knew of France, where religion in the form of the Catholic Church had much power but little influence. In France, he said, "I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country"<sup>[5]</sup>

So religion safeguarded the "habits of the heart" essential to maintaining democratic freedom. It sanctified marriage and the home. It guarded public morals. It led people to work together in localities to solve problems themselves rather than leave it to the government. If Darwin discovered that man is the community-creating animal, Tocqueville discovered that religion in America is the community-building institution.

It still is. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam became famous in the 1990s for his discovery that more Americans than ever are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer are joining bowling clubs and leagues. He took this as a metaphor for a society that has become individualistic rather than community-minded. He called it *Bowling Alone*.<sup>[6]</sup> It was a phrase that summed up the loss of "social capital," that is, the extent of social networks through which people help one another.

Years later, after extensive research, Putnam revised his thesis. A powerful store of social capital still exists and it is to be found in places of worship. Survey data showed that frequent church- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, offer a seat

to a stranger, or help someone find a job. On almost every measure, they are demonstrably more altruistic than non-worshippers.

Their altruism goes beyond this. Frequent worshippers are also significantly more active citizens. They are more likely to belong to community organisations, neighbourhood and civic groups and professional associations. They get involved, turn up and lead. The margin of difference between them and the more secular is large.

Tested on attitudes, religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender or race. Perhaps the most interesting of Putnam's findings was that these attributes were related not to people's religious *beliefs* but to the frequency with which they attend a place of worship.[7]

Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to synagogue (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer or give to charity than a religious believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a community that makes it the best tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

What Moses had to do after the golden calf was *Vayakhel*: turn the Israelites into a *kehillah*, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the calf, the Torah says the people were *peruah*, meaning "wild, disorderly, chaotic, unruly, tumultuous." He "saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies." They were not a community but a crowd.

He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them to build the *mishkan*, the sanctuary, as a symbolic home for God.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the *mishkan* are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together.[8] Hence the *mishkan*. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we focus not on the pursuit of individual self interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together: in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the *mishkan* were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert.

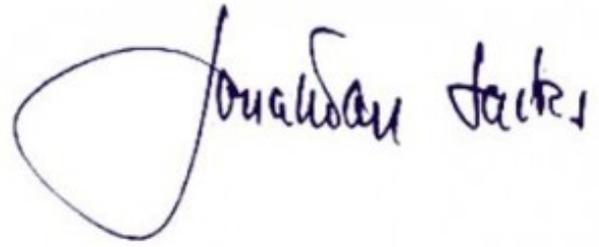
More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a *minyan*. When we celebrate or mourn we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules that "One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfil the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people — such a person has no share in the world to come." [9]

That is not how religion has always been seen. Plotinus called the religious quest the flight of the alone to the Alone. Dean Inge said religion is what an individual does with his solitude. Jean-Paul Sartre notoriously said: hell is other people. In Judaism, it is *as a community* that we come before God. For us the key relationship is not I-Thou, but We-Thou.

*Vayakhel* is thus no ordinary episode in the history of Israel. It marks the essential insight to emerge from the crisis of the golden calf. We find God in community. We develop virtue, strength of character, and a commitment to the common good in community. Community is local. It is society with a human face. It is not government. It is not the people we pay to look after the welfare of others. It is the work we do ourselves, together.

Community is the antidote to individualism on the one hand and over-reliance on the state on the other. Darwin understood its importance to human flourishing. Tocqueville saw its role in protecting democratic freedom. Robert

Putnam has documented its value in sustaining social capital and the common good. And it began in our parsha, when Moses turned an unruly mob into a *kehillah*, a community.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonathan Sacks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

[1] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Princeton University Press, 1981, 158-84.

[2] *Ibid.*, 166.

[3] This is the argument between E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins. See Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, New York: Liveright, 2012. And the review by Richard Dawkins in *Prospect Magazine*, June 2012.

[4] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, abridged with an introduction by Thomas Bender, New York, Modern Library, 1981, 182.

[5] *Ibid.*, 185.

[6] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[7] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

[8] See Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, Continuum, 2007.

[9] Maimonides, *Hilkhos Teshuvah* 3: 11.

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## Integrity in Public Life (Pekudei 5775)

There is a verse so familiar that we don't often stop to reflect on what it means. It is the line from the first paragraph of the Shema: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your *me'od*." That last word is usually translated as "strength" or "might." But Rashi, following the Midrash and Targum translates it as "with all your wealth."

If so, the verse seems unintelligible, at least in the order in which it is written. "With all your soul" was understood by the sages to mean, "with your life" if need be. There are times, thankfully very rare indeed, when we are commanded to give up life itself rather than commit a sin or a crime. If that is the case then it should go without saying that we should love God with all our wealth, meaning, even if it demands great financial sacrifice. Yet Rashi and the sages say that this phrase applies to those "to whom wealth means more than life itself."

Of course, life is more important than wealth. Yet the sages also knew that, in their words, *Adam bahul al mammono*,<sup>[1]</sup> meaning: people do strange, hasty, ill-considered and irrational things when money is at stake. Financial gain can be a huge temptation, leading us to acts that harm others and ultimately ourselves. So when it comes to financial matters, especially when public funds are involved, there must be no room for temptation, no space for doubt as to whether it has been used for the purpose for which it was donated. There must be scrupulous auditing and transparency. Without this there is moral hazard: the maximum of temptation combined with the maximum of opportunity.

Hence the parsha of *Pekudei*, with its detailed account of how the donations to the building of the *mishkan* were used "These are the amounts of the materials used for the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the Testimony, which were recorded at Moses' command by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest" (Exodus 38: 21). The passage goes on to list the exact amounts of gold, silver and bronze collected, and the purposes to which it was put.

Why did Moses do this? A midrash suggests an answer:

*"They gazed after Moses" (Ex. 33: 8) – People criticized Moses. They used to say to one another, "Look at that neck. Look at those legs. Moses is eating and drinking what belongs to us. All that he has belongs to us." The other would reply: "A man who is in charge of the work of the Sanctuary – what do you expect? That he should not get rich?" As soon as he heard this, Moses replied, "By your life, as soon as the Sanctuary is complete, I will make a full reckoning with you."*<sup>[2]</sup>

Moses issued a detailed reckoning to avoid coming under suspicion that he had personally appropriated some of the donated money. Note the emphasis that the accounting was undertaken not by Moses himself but "by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar," in other words, by independent auditors.

There is no hint of these accusations in the text itself, but the Midrash may be based on the remark Moses made

during the Korach rebellion, “I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them” (Num. 16: 15). Accusations of corruption and personal enrichment have often been levelled against leaders, with or without justification. We might think that since God sees all we do, this is enough to safeguard against wrongdoing. Yet Judaism does not say this. The Talmud records a scene at the deathbed of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, as the master lay surrounded by his disciples:

*They said to him, “Our master, bless us.” He said to them, “May it be God’s will that the fear of heaven shall be as much upon you as the fear of flesh and blood.” His disciples asked, “Is that all?” He replied, “Would that you obtained no less than such fear! You can see for yourselves the truth of what I say: when a man is about to commit a transgression, he says, I hope no man will see me.”[3]*

When humans commit a sin they worry that other people might see them. They forget that God certainly sees them. Temptation befuddles the brain, and no one should believe they are immune to it.

A later passage in Tanakh seems to indicate that Moses’ account was not strictly necessary. The Book of Kings relates an episode in which, during the reign of King Yehoash, money was raised for the restoration of the Temple. “They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty” (II Kings 12: 16). Moses, a man of complete honesty, may thus have acted “beyond the strict requirement of the law.”[4]

It is precisely the fact that Moses did not *need* to do what he did, that gives the passage its force. There must be transparency and accountability when it comes to public funds even if the people involved have impeccable reputations. People in positions of trust must be, and be *seen to be*, individuals of moral integrity. Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law had already said this when he told Moses to appoint subordinates to help him in the task of leading the people. They should be, he said, “Men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain” (Ex. 18: 21).

Without a reputation for honesty and incorruptibility, judges cannot ensure that justice is seen to be done. This general principle was derived by the sages from the episode in the book of Numbers when the Reubenites and Gadites expressed their wish to settle on the far side of the Jordan where the land provided good grazing ground for their cattle (Numbers 32: 1-33). Moses told them that if they did so, they would demoralise the rest of the nation. They would give the impression that they were unwilling to cross the Jordan and fight with their brothers in their battles to conquer the land.

The Reubenites and Gaddites made it clear that they were willing to be in the front line of the troops, and would not return to the far side of the Jordan until the land had been fully conquered. Moses accepted the proposal, saying that if they kept their word, they would be “clear [*veheyitem neki'im*] before the Lord and before Israel” (Num. 32: 22). This phrase entered Jewish law as the principle that “one must acquit oneself before one’s fellow human beings as well as before God.”[5] It is not enough to do right. We must be *seen to do right*, especially when there is room for rumour and suspicion.

There are several instances in the early rabbinic literature of applications of this rule. So, for example, when people came to take coins for sacrifices from the Shekel Chamber in the Temple, where the money was kept:

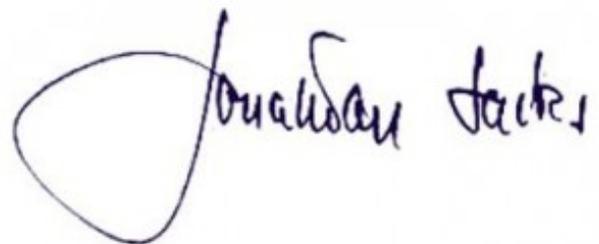
*They did not enter the chamber wearing either a bordered cloak or shoes or sandals or tefillin or an amulet, lest if he became poor people might say that he became poor because of an iniquity committed in the chamber, or if he became rich people might say that he became rich from the appropriation in the chamber. For it is a person’s duty to be free of blame before men as before God, as it is said: “and be clear before the Lord and before Israel,” (Num. 32: 22), and it also says: “So shall thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Prov. 3: 4).[6]*

Those who entered the chamber were forbidden to wear any item of clothing in which they could hide and steal coins. Similarly, when charity overseers had funds left over, they were not permitted to change copper for silver coins of their own money: they had to make the exchange with a third party. Overseers in charge of a soup kitchen were not allowed to purchase surplus food when there were no poor people to whom to distribute it. Surpluses had to be sold to others so as not to arouse suspicion that the charity overseers were profiting from public funds.[7]

The Shulkhan Aruch rules that charity collection must always be done by a minimum of two individuals so that each can see what the other is doing.[8] There is a difference of opinion between R. Joseph Karo and R. Moshe Isserles on the need to provide detailed accounts. R. Joseph Karo rules on the basis on the passage in II Kings – “They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty” – that no formal accounting is required from people of unimpeachable honesty. R. Moshe Isserles however says that it is right to do so because of the principle, “Be clear before the Lord and before Israel.”[9]

Trust is of the essence in public life. A nation that suspects its leaders of corruption cannot function effectively as a free, just and open society. It is the mark of a good society that public leadership is seen as a form of service rather than a means to power, which is all too easily abused. Tanakh is a sustained tutorial in the importance of high standards in public life. The prophets were the world’s first social critics, mandated by God to speak truth to power and to challenge corrupt leaders. Elijah’s challenge to King Ahab, and the protests of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah against the unethical practices of their day, are classic texts in this tradition, establishing for all time the ideals of equity, justice, honesty and integrity. A free society is built on moral foundations, and those must be unshakable.

Moses’ personal example, in giving an accounting of the funds that had been collected for the first collective project of the Jewish people, set a vital precedent for all time.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonathan Sacks". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.

[1] Shabbat 117b.

[2] Tanchuma, Buber, Pekudei, 4.

[3] Berakhot 28b.

[4] A key concept in Jewish law (see, e.g. Berakhot 7a, 45b, Baba Kamma 99b), meaning supererogation, doing more, in a positive sense, than the law requires.

[5] Mishnah, Shekalim 3: 2.

[6] Mishnah, Shekalim 3: 2.

[7] Pesachim 13a.

[8] Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah 257: 1.

[9] Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah 257: 2.