



In loving memory of Harav Yitzhak Yoel ben Shlomo Halevi

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11 Av 5780

Shabbat Nachamu

Shabbat ends:

London 9.45pm
Sheffield 10.07pm
Glasgow 10.32pm
Edinburgh 10.28pm
Birmingham 9.57pm
Jerusalem 8.16pm

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You do not need to sign into Facebook to access the US Facebook page. The US Coronavirus Helpline is on 020 8343 5696.

May God bless us and the whole world.

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*"Honour your father and your mother"
(Devarim 5:16)*



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Sidra breakdown

ואתחנן

Vaetchanan

2nd Sidra in:

דברים

Devarim

By Numbers:

122 verses

1,878 words

7,343 letters

Headlines:

History; The Shema; The Ten Commandments



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The Point of Prayer

by Rabbi Jonathan Hughes,
Radlett United Synagogue & US in the City



During this pandemic, prayer has become more popular. Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962, United States),

asks rhetorically in his writings why we need a mitzvah of tefillah (prayer) – surely calling out to God is almost instinctive and is built into our nature? Rabbi Kotler's point is most pertinent if one adopts the view of the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) - that prayer, at least on the level of biblical obligation, is a response to suffering. "There are no atheists in a foxhole," goes the

saying. Granted, we are obligated to pray each and every day, yet this could well be because humanity is existentially in a perpetual state of need and pain.

However, there is another approach to tefillah, borne out by rabbinic teaching in the Midrash to Shemot 21:5, using the familiar technique of parable. The Midrash tells of a princess who is ambushed by thieves and cried out for help in her distress. She is rescued by her prince charming, who then decides to marry her. Much to the prince's chagrin, the incident is

In loving memory of Chaya Rachel bat Moshe Ben-tzion

Sidra Summary

1st Aliya (Kohen) – Devarim 3:23-4:4

Moshe recalls that after defeating Sichon and Og in battle (see Devarim 2:31-3:11), he prayed to be allowed to enter the Land of Canaan (see Rashi). God refused Moshe's request, allowing him only to see the Land from afar. Moshe tells the people to observe the mitzvot, which will allow them to inherit the Land and he reminds them of the punishments they witnessed when the nation strayed after the idol of Pe'or (see Bemidbar 25:3).

Point to Consider: *What is an example of the prohibition of "not adding to the words" of the Torah? (see Rashi to 4:2)*

2nd Aliya (Levi) – 4:5-40

Moshe tells the people that studying Torah and keeping the mitzvot will raise

“I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying... Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan.” (*Devarim 3:23-24*)

soon forgotten and the princess no longer communicates with her saviour. What did the prince do? He arranged for the thieves to



come back so that he would once again hear the voice of his beloved princess.

This may sound like a fairy tale, but there is an important point here. If we are ambushed by thieves and find ourselves in physical, spiritual or even existential crisis, we cry out, just as the princess did in the story. That is the tefillah of the Ramban, the prayer that Rabbi Kotler thought was innate to our nature. However, the Midrash directs us to another dimension of tefillah: the communication between the princess and her prince, even when it is not in times of crisis. Prayer during those moments shows that the bond between the lovers transcends the needs of the moment. It redefines the relationship between the prince and princess from saviour and saved, master and servant, to that of partners in marriage, a relationship of sharing between equals.

Seeing prayer as innate seems

less compelling if one understands prayer as part of a process of relationship building. Indeed, we see from the Midrash that once rescued, the princess forgets all about her rescuer; communication is not second-nature when there are no pressing needs that elicit it. One could argue that perhaps this is the model of prayer that the Ramban (Maimonides, 1135-1204) had in mind when he formulated the mitzvah of tefillah as one that must be undertaken daily. A relationship requires constant care and maintenance, continual renewal and nourishment.

What is the difference between prayer as a response to distress and prayer as a means of deepening a relationship? The former is marked by emotional outburst, a torrent of words and feelings that heighten in proportion to the degree of crisis. The latter comes at moments of calm and is the result of reflection and appreciation. The rabbinic commentaries have described prayer of the heart and prayer of the intellect. Perhaps we need to be commanded to work on developing our relationship with the Almighty, even in good times when we have long forgotten about recent troubles.

their stature in the eyes of the other nations. He warns them not to forget the historic revelation at Mount Sinai, in which God Himself spoke the Ten Commandments from the midst of the fire. Moshe adds that they must not make any idols, and warns them against worshipping the sun, the moon or the stars. He warns them that failure to heed this will result in exile from the Land. However, God will never abandon His nation; they will always be able to return to Him.

3rd Aliya (Shlishi) – 4:41-49

Moshe sets aside three cities to the east of the Jordan River. These cities are to provide refuge for a person who has killed accidentally and is fleeing from the relatives of the deceased.

4th Aliya (Revi'i) – 5:1-5:18

Moshe again stresses that the people stood “face to face” with God at the time of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Moshe recalls the Ten Commandments:

1. Faith in God's existence
2. Prohibition of idol worship
3. Prohibition of taking God's Name in vain
4. Remembering Shabbat to keep it holy and refraining from 'work'
5. Honouring one's parents
6. You shall not murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not bear false testimony
10. You shall not covet what others have

Honouring And Revering Parents

by Rabbi Daniel Roselaar, Alei Tzion United Synagogue



The requirement that a person should respect their parents is an important aspect of Jewish life and law. This requirement finds expression in two different mitzvot in the Torah. In the sidra Va'etchanan, the fifth of the Ten Commandments is "Honour your father and your mother" (Devarim 5:16). In sidra Kedoshim there is an obligation that "A person must revere his mother and father" (Vayikra 19:3). The Talmud (Kiddushin 31a), based on a parallel verse in Shemot (20:11) explains that each of these mitzvot entails different measures. The mitzvah of honouring parents has a physical focus to it and means that a child must cater to their parents' needs and help look after them (though the financial resources for this should be provided by the parents). The mitzvah of revering parents has a spiritual and emotional dimension to it and includes not occupying a parent's place (e.g. at the table or in shul) and not contradicting them.

Some specific applications of these mitzvot discussed in the classical halachic literature include:

- Children should not address or refer to their parents by their first names – though rabbinic authorities note that the Torah records instances of the patriarchs referring to their parents by their first names and there are similar examples in the Talmud.
- If a parent is under medical instructions not to eat certain things and asks his children to provide him with such food, they should disregard his instructions.
- Children are required to stand up when their parents enter a room. This halacha is more honoured in the breach than in the observance but the Talmud rules that a parent is allowed to forgo this honour due to him. Presumably this is an instance where the dominant practice is that parents forgo this form of respect.
- There is halachic discussion regarding how these mitzvot should be addressed in the sad instances of

abusive parent-child relationships.

- Children must honour any step-parents (as a function of honouring their parents) and they should also honour their parents-in-law.
- The Talmud (Ketubot 103) teaches that the use of the word "v'et" in the context of the mitzvah to honour parents indicates that there is also a mitzvah to honour one's older brother. Later authorities dispute whether this applies to all older siblings or only to the eldest of the siblings.

The mitzvot relating to parents demonstrate how we must show care for our parents both physically and in our general behavior towards them. Doing so not only complies with the Torah but also shows how proper observance of the mitzvot impacts on use by helping us to behave in more general terms as kind, thoughtful people.

The mitzvot relating to parents demonstrate how we must show care for our parents both physically and in our general behavior towards them.

In memory of Yisrael Shmuel ben Yirmaya Yehoshuah

5th Aliya (Chamishi) – 5:19-6:3

Moshe recalls that the heads of the tribes and the elders asked him to relay God's commandments to them; they feared they would die if they continued to hear the commandments directly from God. God agreed to their request.

6th Aliya (Shishi) – 6:4-25

The paragraph of Shema Yisrael is stated, in which the Jewish people are enjoined to believe in the Oneness of God, to love Him, to teach Torah, to wear tefilin and to affix mezuzot to their doorposts. Moshe warns the people not to allow the material attractions of the Land to cause them to neglect their service of God, nor to test Him like they did in the desert.

Shabbat Nachamu

by Rabbi Dovid Lewis, South Manchester Synagogue



I confess that as a young boy it took me a while to realise that this week's Haftarah from Yeshayahu (Isaiah) did not start off with an invitation to "come for tea", but was instead a cry of "comfort ye"! Yet with many shuls still gradually going through the process of reopening their physical doors after months of isolation and virtual abandonment, it really resonates. Verses two and three are particularly apt: "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call her, for she will become full from her returning exiles. Clear the way of God in the desert to Jerusalem. Straighten out a highway (so His people can return)."

Isaiah was a member of the royal household, a nephew of the reigning King Amatziah. According to the Midrash (early rabbinic teachings on the Bible), he was born circumcised, a fact alluded to when he prophesied: "God called me from my mother's womb". When God called out for a messenger, Isaiah replied with alacrity, proclaiming: "Behold, here I am. Send me."

He was a confident prophet whose opening chapter contains the painful verse "Israel is a sinful nation who does not even consider God".

The difference between optimism and positivity is part of the lockdown zeitgeist, but Judaism has long debated the matter with the two approaches to life of Emunah and Bitachon.

Yet within 20 verses he offers the consolation that God will 'debate' with the Jewish people to decide who is indeed responsible for those sins, us or Him, and that He promises to "whiten our scarlet sins like freshly driven snow."

So is Isaiah an optimist, pessimist or realist? And what do we need right now, optimism or realism? Is it about having a positive mindset or a belief that everything will turn out alright on the night? The difference between optimism and positivity is part of the lockdown zeitgeist, but Judaism has long debated the matter with the two approaches to life of Emunah and

Bitachon.

Emunah is faith: it is the belief that God runs the world according to His master plan. Nothing happens by chance, neither a global weather disaster, nor a dropped bottle of milk.

Bitachon is trust: it is the deep-seated confidence that a little baby has in its parent, the knowledge that, come what may, they will be there to protect their child and ensure it comes to no harm.

It is possible to have Emunah in God without Bitachon.

Emunah is the passive optimism that everything in the world will work out for the best and we cannot change the reality of the Masterplan.

Bitachon is the active positivity with which we respond to every situation the Almighty puts us into.

When Isaiah proclaims "every valley will be raised and every mountain lowered," he is recognising that the current path is a difficult one, but we need to have the Bitachon that God will give us the strength to navigate through. It is not blind faith that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, it is the trust that we will be gifted the power to overcome the difficulties. It could be said that Emunah is a trait whereas Bitachon is a choice.

In memory of Yehuda ben Yaakov HaCohen

7th Aliya (Shevi'i) – 7:1-11

When the Israelites come into the Land of Canaan, they will successfully overcome seven great and mighty nations. Moshe warns them not to enter into a covenant with these nations, nor to intermarry with them. Israel is God's chosen nation, whom He lovingly brought out of Egypt.

Haftarah

Taken from the book of Yeshaya, this is the first of the seven 'haftarot of consolation' read after Tisha B'Av. It starts with God's instruction to the prophets to "Comfort, comfort My people" (Nachamu, nachamu, ami) and goes on to prophesy that God will return to Jerusalem and bring an end to the exile.

Judaism and Art part 3

‘The Reality Within’

by Rabbi David Lister, Edgware United Synagogue



Biblical texts occasionally exaggerate or distort reality simply to create a mood.

For instance, Canaanite cities are described in Devarim 1:28 as being fortified “up to the heavens”, and Rashi comments there that this is an exaggeration to convey the fortifications’ awesome dimensions.

Equally, Yeshayahu (Isaiah, 55:12) states that “the mountains and hills will sing and all the trees will clap their hands.” The Metzudat David commentary, written by Rabbi David Altschuler of Prague (1687-1769), points out that this is also a figure of speech.

Tragedy is also depicted in a way that distorts reality. In Eicha (Lamentations, 2:18), the wall of Jerusalem is told to cry tears like a river.

This notion is expressed visually in Expressionist art, where the way things look is twisted to express a mood, sensation or idea.

One of the most famous examples of this is Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. It is hardly an accurate physical representation of a night scene. But this was not Van Gogh’s aim. He was prepared to subordinate visual reality to the conveying of sensations and ideas.

The magnificent swirls contorting the sky might well be Van Gogh’s attempt to express the sensation of the Mistral, the maddening wind which challenged his attempts to paint outdoors in the south of France. We can almost feel the buffeting of the wind through the rotating clouds and the rippling tree



Van Gogh, *The Starry Night* (1889)

on the left. Even the hills seem to shudder in the background.

Van Gogh might also have used this picture to express his musings on life and death. The moon and stars are painted in “close up” in an attempt to portray a proximity between this world and the next. He once said:

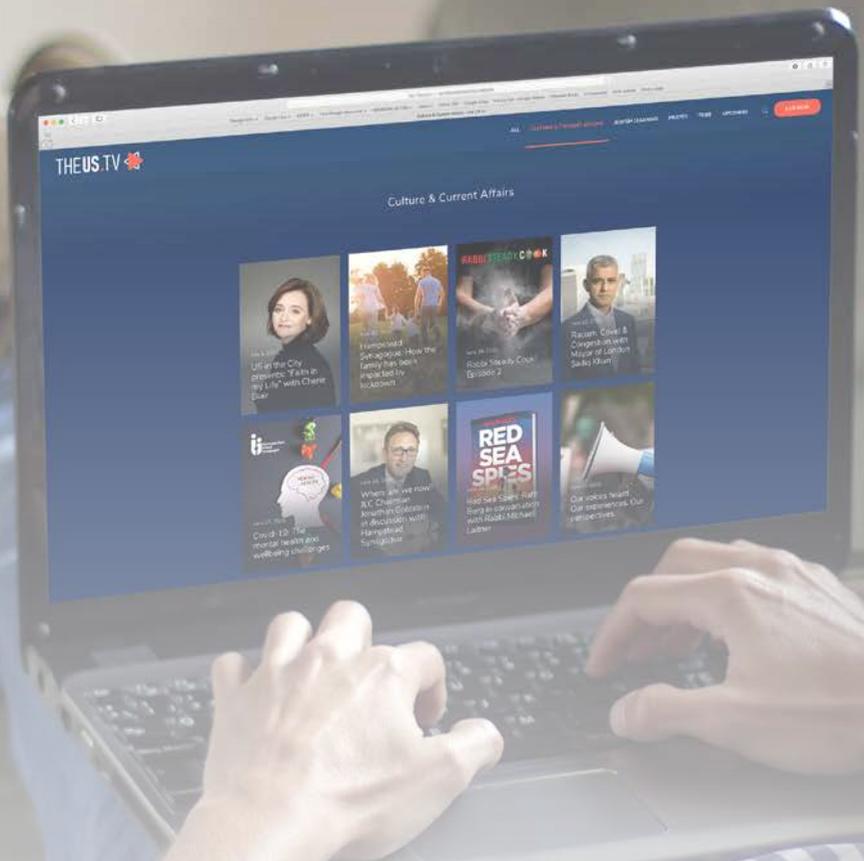
“Looking at the stars always makes me dream. Why, I ask myself, shouldn’t the shining dots of the sky

be as accessible as the black dots on the map of France? Just as we take the train to get to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to reach a star”.

The Expressionism of the Bible is there to empower us. The Biblical idiom shows physical reality warped by God’s word to show us how much energy is hidden within the Torah, and that it can be a powerful agent of change on us and on the world beyond all natural expectations. Through Torah study and observance, we can harness our lives to God’s invincible spiritual energy, transcending nature to the point where the very fabric of the world is warped and stretched up to heaven.

Expressionist painting, showing mood affecting reality, unwittingly gives us a visual representation of our own strength.

The Expressionism of the Bible is there to empower us. The Biblical idiom shows physical reality warped by God’s word...



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VAETCHANAN: SHEMA YISRAEL - HIDDEN MESSAGES!

THIS WEEK'S PARASHA CONTAINS THE FIRST PARAGRAPH OF THE SHEMA. THIS IS ONE OF OUR CENTRAL PRAYERS.



HEY, THERE'S A MISTAKE IN MY SIDDUR! THE **ו** IN THE WORD **שְׁמַע** HAS COME OUT EXTRA BIG!



OH NO! MY SIDDUR HAS IT TOO! AND LOOK, THERE'S A LARGE **ו** AT THE END OF THE LINE!

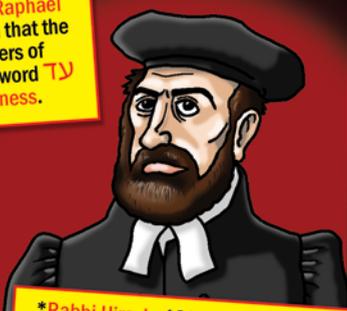
IN FACT, IT IS OFTEN THE FIRST PRAYER WE TEACH TO CHILDREN. JEWISH PARENTS HAVE BEEN PUTTING THEIR LITTLE ONES TO SLEEP TO THE SOUND OF THE BEDTIME SHEMA FOR GENERATIONS. LET'S CHECK IT OUT...

DAN, DO YOU THINK THOSE BIG LETTERS MIGHT BE THERE ON PURPOSE?



YES, MAYBE IT'S A CLUE! PUT THE **ו** AND THE **ו** TOGETHER. WE GET **טו** - THE HEBREW WORD FOR WITNESS.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained that the two large letters of Shema form the word **טו** meaning witness.



*Rabbi Hirsch, 1808-1888, lived in Germany and was the father of modern orthodoxy and Jewish Day Schools.

RABBI HIRSCH TAUGHT THAT WHEN WE SAY THE SHEMA, WE ARE LIVING PROOF OR WITNESS TO GOD'S PRESENCE AND KINGSHIP IN THE UNIVERSE. NOT ONLY FOR OURSELVES BUT FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD TOO.

*The Shema can be found on page 21 in the Tribe Shevet Asher siddur.



SAYING THE SHEMA CAN GIVE US A HINT OF OUR TASK AS JEWS. EVERY DAY WHEN WE SAY THESE WORDS, WE REMIND OURSELVES ABOUT GOD AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND BY THE WAY WE LEAD OUR LIVES WE CAN INSPIRE THE REST OF THE WORLD TO APPRECIATE THIS AS WELL.



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Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.

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