



קובץ תורת אולפנה

DIVREI TORAH BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE
JUDAIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAM (JEP) PROGRAM

ULPANAT OROT

התשפ"ג · 2022-2023

Now in its fourth year, the Judaic Enrichment Program (JEP) at Ulpanat Orot consists of a core group of Grades 9-12 students who are committed to fostering an atmosphere of religious growth and engagement in Torah at school. This collection of Divrei Torah is a culmination of the students' individual *Torah L'shma* projects undertaken over the course of the past year. These Divrei Torah show effort, critical thinking skills, and meaningful engagement with the topics that JEP participants have tackled. May these students continue to grow from strength to strength in their Torah learning and religious development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Opening Remarks

GRADE 9

7 **Shayna Mammon** · Sarah

9 **Abby Mayer** · Free Will: The Only Thing Inevitable in Life

12 **Nava Rabinovitch** · אָנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאֶמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּבִיאַת הַמָּשִׁיחַ

15 **Lily Smolack** · The Torah of our Forefathers

GRADE 10

19 **Reena Fixler** · Who Was The Greatest of the Twelve Shevatim?

22 **Gila Grauer** · Akeidat Yitzchak

24 **Yamaya Newman** · Judaism's View on CRISPR

GRADE 11

27 **Lir Yissar** · To Fall in Love: the Female Role of Talmud Torah

GRADE 12

33 **Malka Moshkovits** · The Boundaries of Relationship Judgement

35 **Tali Wer Berger** · The Importance of Challah

References



INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Parashat Beha'alotecha, we read: "And Aharon did so... he kindled the lamps, as Hashem had commanded Moshe." (Bamidbar 8:3). Rashi adds, "This is to teach the praise of Aharon that he did not deviate."

Aharon did as he was told. So what? Is it so hard to light a menorah?

Furthermore, would any of us swerve from duty in the face of a direct executive command from HaKadosh Baruch Hu? Why is this something we should praise?

The Sefat Emet says that Aharon's greatness was that he didn't change in his level of excitement and enthusiasm for the rest of his life, which is not an easy task. Naturally, a person's enthusiasm wanes with the passage of time. He or she needs to constantly seek out new ways to experience the act done daily for almost 40 years as if it was the first time.

This is not a new challenge. The first time we do something, it is always very exciting and uplifting, but the novelty often wanes and sometimes even becomes stale and boring.

Sports teams have that challenge in every game. Studying in school and getting ready for exams can be like that too. You can get really excited the first time a new teacher comes into class, or you start a new subject, and then somehow the excitement cools off and it all becomes routine.

We have to make the conscious decision and effort to go about our lives with the enthusiasm of Aharon HaKohen, whether in the realm of Torah and mitzvot, like lighting a menorah, or in our mundane acts, like exercising, but if we do so, we will surely raise everything to the level of joy, and reap the rewards.

The JEP (Judaic Enrichment Program) at Ulpanat Orot was established precisely for girls who are prepared to go the extra mile to enrich their lives with meaningful Torah study outside the regular curriculum. They want to keep their passion for learning Torah and living meaningful lives flickering every day, just like the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash.

When you study Torah – or do anything – because you want to rather than because you have to, it ignites you from within. And not only do you have that warm feeling of joy, fulfillment and light, you are then able to transmit that enthusiasm for life to others.

May the teachers and students in this wonderful program continue to go about their work with the same excitement and enthusiasm as if it's always the first time!

Warm Regards,

Rabbi Seth Grauer

Rosh Yeshiva & Head of School



OPENING REMARKS

”טוב לי תורת פיך מאלפי זָהָב וְכֶסֶף” (תהילים קיט:עב)

“I prefer the teaching You proclaimed to thousands of gold and silver pieces.” (Tehillim 119:72)

Dear Parents and Students,

The study of Torah is not merely an academic pursuit; it is an exploration of our Jewish identity and a pathway to a deeper connection with our heritage. Through Torah learning, we uncover the timeless wisdom that has guided our people for generations. It is through this exploration that we come to understand the richness of our tradition and the profound relevance it holds in our lives today.

We are thrilled to welcome you to the closing celebration of the Jewish Enrichment Program at Ulpanat Orot, 5783. By choosing to participate in this program, each student has embarked on a remarkable journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth. We cannot emphasize enough how great of an opportunity this is to enrich our Torah learning.

We want you to know how incredibly proud we are of your decision to explore your Jewish identity through learning. In a world that often values material success and fleeting pleasures, your commitment to delve into the depths of Torah demonstrates a profound understanding of what truly matters. By embracing this journey, you are nurturing your connection to our faith, culture, and values, and empowering yourself to be a source of light and inspiration to others.

Throughout history, women have played a pivotal role in the transmission and preservation of our traditions. Today, we stand at the forefront of a renewed era, where the voices of women are being amplified and celebrated in Torah study. Your participation in this program is a testament to the significance of this revival, as you join the ranks of women who are reclaiming their place in the world of Torah and halacha.

This is a closing celebration, but it's not the end of the journey. Each and every one of you should embrace the opportunity to further explore the depths of our tradition, to ask questions, and to challenge yourselves intellectually. Let the flame of curiosity burn brightly within you, igniting a passion for lifelong learning and a deepening connection to your Jewish roots.

I had the privilege to accompany you on this enriching journey, and I look forward to witnessing the profound impact it will have on your lives.

Mrs. Prielle Rakovsky

JEP Coordinator, Ulpanat Orot

GRADE 9





SARAH

Sarah, the first of the four imahot. What are the things that make Sarah so special? Why is she such a big face of Judaism? Sarah is the Jewish woman that symbolizes motherhood to the entire world, shaped our Jewish history, and we can learn so many different amazing things from her.

Sarah is first introduced in Bereishit 11:29 “וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנָחוּר לְהֵם נָשִׁים שָׁם אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָם שָׂרָי” Avraham took Sarai as his wife. The pasuk also writes “אֲבִי מִלְכָּה וְאֲבִי יִסְכָּה”. Masechet Megillah 14:13. The Gemara asks with regard to the prophetesses recorded in the *baraita*: Who were the seven prophetesses? The Gemara answers: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. The Gemara offers textual support: Sarah, as it is written: “Haran, the father of Milkah, and the father of Yiscah” (Bereishit 11:29). And Rabbi Yitzchak said: Yiscah is in fact Sarah. And why was she called Yiscah? For she saw [*sachta*] by means of divine inspiration, as it is stated: “In all that Sarah has said to you, hearken to her voice” (Bereishit 21:12). Alternatively, Sarah was also called Yiscah, for all gazed [*sochin*] upon her beauty.

As you all know Avraham was commanded to leave his homeland and go to the land Hashem shows him. In Bereishit 12:1 “וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְנוּלָתְךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ”. And in pasuk 5 it says “וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שָׂרָי” Avraham took his wife Sarai.

Sarah is a person that doesn't let something stop her. In Bereishit 11:30 it says “Sarai was barren, she had no child”. Sarah struggled for many years with having a child. Not being able to have a child is very sad and scary. Today many women try so hard for many years, but they can't. The same was for Sarah. But she had a maidservant named Hagar. In Bereishit 16:2 it says “וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרָי אֶל אַבְרָם הִנֵּה נָא עֲצֹרְנִי ה' מִלְדֹת בָּא נָא אֶל שִׁפְחֹתַי אוּלַי אֲבִנָּה מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרָי Sarai tells Avram to marry Hagar so she can have a child through her. Avram followed Sarai's request. It is taught that whoever doesn't have a child is like one who is dead. Sarah did not let this stop her. This is why Sarah says to Avraham “so I can build from her”. Sarah is building on what was destroyed. She is not stopping from making Bnei Yisrael flourish just because she can't have a child. She knows Bnei Yisrael is supposed to be as many as the stars and the sand so she is going to make that happen. We learn from this Sarah is persistent, she won't give up and will try a different approach to a problem. Hagar became pregnant and gave birth to a son, Yishmael.

Sarah is so special just because of her name. Originally Sarah's name is Sarai. What is the significance of changing Sarai's name to Sarah. The meaning of Sarai is “my princess”. Sarah is only the princess to Avraham, not the whole world. Sarai is supposed to become the mother of all humanity and teach everyone about Hashem. So, Hashem changed Sarai's name to Sarah “the princess” so she will now have the divine energy to be the mother of the entire world. Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 47:1 explains that now Sarah is the princess to the entire world, not just herself. Hashem then tells Avraham that

he and Sarah will have a son, Yitzchak. A midrash explains that Avraham looked up at the stars and he saw that Sarah could not have a child. Hashem then told Avraham that he could not have a child and saw cannot give birth, but Avraham and Sarah could have a child. From this we learn that when someone's name is changed it changes their G-dly life-energy, and they become virtually a different person, with a different destiny and a different potential. For these reasons, this is why Sarah's name is so powerful.

Sarah did Hachnasat Orchim throughout her whole life. This was because her tent was like no other. She (and Avraham) would welcome guests constantly. Rashi explains that because of her kind acts Hashem performed miraculous miracles. Her bread had a blessing, and it would rise miraculously. One Shabbat candle was lit after another, and a cloud was always stationed over the tents. Not only was her tent open to others but it was open to Hashem. This is how Sarah did Hachnasat Orchim on a daily basis.

After reading this report on Sarah it should be clear how powerful Sarah truly is. Sarah is a Navi, she is strong, loving, and most importantly the princess of the entire world.



FREE WILL: THE ONLY THING INEVITABLE IN LIFE

Every Pesach we read the story of the Exodus of Bnei Yisrael from Mitzrayim. After several of the ten plagues, Pharaoh was inclined to let the Jewish people leave. However, the Torah says that Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he refused to allow the Jews to leave. Many Rabbis raise the question: how can we blame Pharaoh for enslaving the Jewish people when Hashem didn't let Pharaoh act in the way that he wanted to. If free will is given to us by Hashem, how can Hashem make Pharaoh lose that free will? After all, Hashem essentially 'made' Pharaoh keep Bnei Yisrael captive in Mitzrayim. In fact, Hashem taking away someone's free will is not unprecedented in the Torah, as it has happened many times before.

Free will ultimately determines our life. Free will justifies the idea of punishments and rewards. If we choose the "right" choice, we should be rewarded, but if we choose the "wrong" choice, we should be punished. But what are the right and wrong choices? Free will refers to the moral choices we as humans make. Moral choices don't necessarily mean good and evil. Everyone will undeniably choose to be "good," even the most vicious and wicked people, because they may view something "evil" as "good" or "deserving" in their eyes. For example, even anti-Semites who engage in vicious acts may believe they are making the world better by eliminating Jews.

Except in unique circumstances, like when Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart, human beings possess free will to act as they please. We exercise our free will every day to make choices that can have a significant impact on our lives, the lives of those around us or on our environment. While free will affects everyone's lives, I feel that many people don't appreciate it and take it for granted. I chose the topic of free will because Hashem allowed me to pick it and also because I think it's an important concept in Judaism and our society.

Hashem allows us to make decisions for ourselves. It is even written in the Torah in Devarim 30:19 "הַעֲדִיתִי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת הַשְּׂמִימִים וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֹת נְתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבְחַרְתָּ בַחַיִּים לְמַעַן" "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live."

Many philosophers and rabbis raise the question: If Hashem knows the future of every act we do in our lives, do we truly have free will? It is already known to Hashem that I will do a certain act at a certain time and place and there is no possible way to avoid it! Consequently, isn't our life just a meaningless act, a pointless decision on a predetermined script that Hashem has on our whole life?! Furthermore, if I have no control over my actions, how can I be accountable for them? After all, I literally have *no choice*. If my life is already out of my hands, how can Hashem punish me for my deeds?

Rabbi Sacks z”l gives a fascinating explanation. He says, Hashem lives in the future, past and present! Humans only live in the present. Therefore, when we make our decisions, either for good or for bad, Hashem knows what choice you will make because He is in the future. Hashem is above time; therefore, He can know in advance all outcomes of events without affecting our choice in the present. Free will is the greatest gift Hashem gave to mankind, even Hashem’s immeasurable knowledge doesn’t interfere with free will. Free will can either be our greatest gift, or strongest weakness, it is how we use free will to determine that.

King David, the most well-known king of Israel, was a great king who fought many wars against Israel’s enemies. Although David had many successes, he also had much tragedy in his life, specifically with his children. David used his free will to make one bad choice by having relations with Batsheva. The outcome of this mistake caused him much suffering in his later life as Hashem punished him for his actions.

Even Moshe Rabbeinu, the most famous leader of Israel, made a bad decision. Hashem asked Moshe to speak to the rock and Moshe hit the rock instead. Moshe disobeyed what Hashem had specifically asked! He *chose* not to listen. Moshe ended up getting punished for this as he was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel.

Going back to the question: If my life is already out of my hands, how can Hashem punish me for my deeds? We are all familiar with the concept of Teshuva. Teshuva, the ability to regret our actions and be forgiven for them, is one of the fundamental building blocks of Judaism. We even have a day, Yom Kippur, which is dedicated to atoning for our sins. How does this make sense? If our life is predetermined by Hashem, we have no choice on the decisions we make, therefore how can we be punished? How can we have a day to repent for our sins, if our “sins” are something that is out of our control?!

The story of Cain and Abel can help us understand this better. As we are all familiar, Cain killed Abel out of jealousy. What is strange about this situation is that Hashem didn’t punish Cain right away, rather he said “אַי הַבֶּלְ אָחִיךָ”, “Where is your brother Abel?” This gave Cain a chance to admit to his sins and do Teshuva. Rather, he responded with one of the most famous lines in the Torah “וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדָעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי:”, “And he said, I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The Midrash dives deeper into Cain’s reply to Hashem. The Midrash states that Cain says “Hashem controls all life and You (Hashem) are asking me where he is?! I did kill him because you gave me the evil inclination to do so. You are supposed to watch over everyone but you let me kill him. You are the one that killed him, Hashem... if you had accepted my offering just as you did with Abel, I wouldn’t be jealous of him in the first place”. According to the Midrash, Cain’s response blames his mistake on Hashem.

In our world today, when people choose to do bad things, we are aware that we did something bad but often do not admit it. The concept of Teshuva is a recognition that “I could have done better”, that we can all fight our evil inclinations and not sin. We all have a choice to make. Without admitting you did something wrong, we cannot begin to do Teshuva properly. Hashem makes it very easy for us to do Teshuva, all we have to do is recognize our wrongdoings.

In fact, frequently in the Torah, Hashem doesn’t punish people who make bad decisions at first. He gives them a chance to admit to their mistakes and do Teshuva, just as he did with Cain. If Cain

and other characters in the Torah had taken responsibility from the beginning, it is clear that their punishment would have been less severe.

The concept of free will is also tied to the issue of why bad things happen to good people and vice versa. If Hashem gives us free will and we then decide to act properly, then shouldn't we be rewarded? How do we explain why someone chooses evil and has a better life than someone who chooses mitzvot? It is unclear to us how Hashem decides to reward or punish people, it does seem logical that the key to being rewarded is to have the ability, through our free will, to make the right decisions. Let's all try to use the greatest gift that Hashem granted us with, to make the correct choices in our life.



אָנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאֱמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּבִיאת הַמָּשִׁיחַ

Every morning we sing the song Ani Ma'amin about how we have perfect faith that Hashem is going to bring Mashiach, but have we ever stopped and asked ourselves when is Mashiach coming? Could he already be here? There is so much information and signs in the Tanach about when Mashiach is coming. I chose this for my topic because Mashiach is something that Jewish people starting from when they are very young are told to be ready for, but so many people are just waiting for it to come without actually diving deeper into all the signs and trying to find out exactly when Mashiach will come.

What if we are already in the Messianic era? Many sources say that Adam was the first human, David HaMelech is the midpoint and Mashiach will be the last. I read in an article by Mr. Efi Palvanov that the Arizal says that אָדָם is an acronym for אֲדָמָה דִּיד מְשִׁיחַ. Rabbi Yaakov Ginsburg says that David is supposed to be the exact midpoint in history, but what does this mean for Mashiach? If we calculate how much time was from Adam to David, then we should know when Mashiach is supposed to come. David's lifetime was 907–837 BCE; if we double that, it gives us the year 1947–1948 or 2087–2088 CE. This is so interesting because that's the year that the State of Israel was established in. The midpoint of the Messianic Era is 5778 or 2017–2018. If this is true, could we be living through it?

We all talk about Mashiach and how awesome he is, but is there anywhere that actually tells us the level of greatness that Mashiach will reach? In Yeshayahu 52:13 it says הִנֵּה יִשְׁכִּיל עַבְדִּי יְרוּם וְנִשְׂא וְנִבֵּה מְאֹד, My servant shall prosper be exalted and raised to great heights, exceedingly lofty. The Bereishit Aggadah tells us who Hashem is talking about. Hashem is talking about Mashiach, but we still don't know what level of greatness Mashiach will reach. The Midrash states that Mashiach will be greater than five spectacular people we know! Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe and Adam HaRishon. This is so hard to wrap our heads around, Mashiach is going to be greater than our forefathers? Then Moshe the greatest prophet of all time? Then Adam HaRishon the man created by Hashem to be the "perfect" human? Rashi comments on this saying that although the text is in singular it's actually talking about the Jewish nation as a collective. We are all going to be exceedingly lofty, raised to great heights and prosper. The role of Mashiach will be to instill all these amazing qualities that Mashiach will already be privy to.

In Yechezkel (38–39) we read about a battle against Israel and Hashem that will be started by Gog and Magog. When Israel defeats Gog and Magog that will bring on the Messianic revolution. The main character of the battle is Mashiach Ben Yosef. There are two Mashiachs involved in the final geulah. Although there are two Mashiachs, Mashaich Ben Yosef and Mashiach Ben David, Mashiach Ben David is the "ultimate Mashiach." Could this battle have already happened?

Some people say that Mashiach is already here or on his way already. According to many sources when the Mashiach comes all kinds of miracles are going to become the new normal. Nowadays there are many miraculous miracles happening every day in Israel. An example of this could be when a 62-year-old Israeli man was traveling from his home in Jerusalem to Meron when he was attacked by the bombings that happened on November 23, 2022. He was injured by the blast but when he took his Tehillim he was carrying out of his front pocket he saw something incredible. He discovered that a lethal piece of shrapnel had penetrated through the corner of his book. It tore through the whole book and stopped at the verse: "*Nafsheinu K'Tzipor Nimlata MiPach Yokshim: Hapach Nishbar, Va Anachnu Nimlatnu,*" Our soul has escaped like a bird evading the grasp of its captors. The grasp is broken, and we have escaped. They tried to kill him, but Hashem protected him, and he escaped. I find this absolutely remarkable. Could this be a modern-day example of the miracles in the era of Mashiach?

There is an old notion that there is a "Mashiach in every generation," there is someone in each generation that could very possibly be the Mashiach. What does this mean? I watched a video by Rabbi Manis Friedman that I think explained it perfectly. The one person in this generation that could be the ultimate Mashiach and Geulah would arrive at that time, but if the time was not right then that person would contribute massively to the world and bring us all one huge step closer to Mashiach coming but then there not the Mashiach. I always grew up thinking that Mashiach was set in stone but really it could be different people it all counts on when we are ready and deserving. There are many Tzadikim in our world that could potentially be Mashiach so it's not about them when they're ready to come and redeem us but actually it's all about us being ready and deserving and the very best people we can be.

How do we know that Mashiach is coming? Are there any signs that we know that the time is near? The Gemara in Sotah 49b gives us five signs before Mashiach comes. They are:

- (1) "*Chutzpah yizgeh*" – Chutzpah will increase. There is certainly no shortage of chutzpah.
- (2) "*Yoker yaamir*" – Prices will increase. Inflation is booming right now – just go to the grocery store and you will see for yourself.
- (3) "*HaEmet Teheh Ne'ederet*" – The truth will be absent. Nowadays people everywhere try and get attentions by posting articles that could be the farthest from the truth wherever anyone will look.
- (4) "*Pnei Hador Kpnei Hakelev*" – The face of the generation will be like that of a dog, we will not be embarrassed of each other.
- (5) "*Haben Eino Mesbayesh be'Aviv*" – Sons will have no shame of their fathers.

The mishnah ends by saying "*Ve'al Mi Yesh Lanu lehesha'ein,*" who can we rely on? "*Al Avinu Shebashamyim,*" on our Father in heaven. All the signs are here. Mashiach should be coming soon. Although we learn in Gemara Sanhedrin 98a Mashiach will come in a generation with all wicked people or all righteous people. Now all these signs would be true if our generation was all wicked but what about all the righteous people? Perhaps we are interpreting these signs in the wrong way, and we should be interpreting them as good things. When we have chutzpah to do the right thing, prices will increase in the right things and now people will be willing to spend money on the good things such as Torah and mitzvot. Instead of truth being absent talking about bad things people will be humble when talking about the torah the only truth. The Maharsha says that we will be like the face of a dog because *kelev* is *kulu lev* because dogs are all heart, loyal to our master just like we can

aspire to be when Mashiach comes. Sons will be such incredible Torah scholars there is no reason to have any shame.

I hope that our generation will be all righteous and all the signs will be there that Mashiach is coming but until then all we can do is continue working on ourselves to be the version that deserves Mashiach.



THE TORAH OF OUR FOREFATHERS

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, our forefathers who we look so highly upon, who are constantly mentioned in our tefillah and who are constantly spoken of by Hashem are surrounded by a fascinating mystery. Something I have always wondered was if our forefathers, who are the leaders and patriarchs in the Tanach, kept the mitzvot. If they did, one might wonder how it was possible for them to keep the mitzvot if Bnei Yisrael were given the Torah hundreds of years later, after our גאולה from Mitzrayim at Har Sinai. Thinking of this question made me curious, and this program is the perfect opportunity for me to answer mine and others' questions regarding our forefathers. Even more, this discussion and the topics that are going to be mentioned is able to widen our perspective and admiration of the forefathers. For this reason, I will be sharing the answers to the questions of whether the אבות kept mitzvot and how it was possible.

Did our forefathers keep the mitzvot of the Torah? Moving backwards in history, I will start with Yaakov. There is a פסוק mentioned in Parshat Vayishlach that Rashi comments on, supporting the prior inquiries. It is written, "וַיֵּצֵאוּ אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כִּי תֹאמְרוּן לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֵשָׂו כִּי אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם לָבָן גִּרְתִּי וְאָחַר עַד וְעַתָּה," and he instructed them as follows, "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now,'" (Bereishit 32:5). Yaakov was telling his messengers what to say when they reached Esav; one thing he mentioned was to tell Esav he lived with Lavan. Rashi comments on this request, specifically on the word "גִּרְתִּי" and says "גִּרְתִּי" is equivalent to the numerical value of 613. You can read it as "I lived with Lavan and kept the 613 מצוות mitzvot) and I did not learn from his evil ways." From Rashi's understanding, it is clear that Yaakov kept the מצוות. Therefore, he knew the laws of the Torah before it was given to Bnei Yisrael.

In the case of Yitzchak, he almost predicts the future. As Yitzchak commands his beloved son Yaakov after Esav is planning to kill him, Yitzchak says "לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן," meaning "you shall not take a wife from the Canaanite women" (Bereishit 28:1). Yitzchak knew the commands of Hashem 200 years before he spoke them; Moshe spoke these commands to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael quoting the words of Hashem to not make any covenants with the inhabitants such as "וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי..." (Shemot 34:11). Moshe then continues, "וְזָנוּ בְּנוֹתַי אֲחֵרִי," and "אַל־הִיָּהוּן וְהִזְנוּ אֶת בְּנוֹתַי אֲחֵרִי אֶל־הֵיָהוּן," and "you take from his daughters for your sons, and their daughters prostitute after their gods and cause your sons to prostitute after their gods," (Shemot 34:16). Here, Moshe is telling Bnei Yisrael the same thing Yitzchak told Yaakov; avoid marrying the foreign women! Yitzchak had this great intuition and perception of the Torah, and it is evident that Yitzchak knew the commandments before the physical Torah existed in our world.

Finally, with regard to the first of our forefathers, Avraham Avinu, it appears in Bereishit (26:5), that Avraham did follow all the mitzvot of the Torah! As Hashem spoke to Yitzchak, fulfilling the covenant he swore to Avraham, he says “עֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע אֲבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֹתַי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹּתַי וְתוֹרָתַי,” “because Avraham has listened to My voice and has kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My teachings.” As seen in this pasuk, Avraham did follow Hashem’s commands “מִצְוֹתַי” and His Torah “וְתוֹרָתַי”! However, the Gemara has something contradictory to say. Masechet Yoma discussed whether or not Avraham fulfilled the *entire* Torah. To start off, Rav said that Avraham indeed fulfilled the entire Torah, “קָיָים אֲבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כּוּלָּהּ,” as it says, “עֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע אֲבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי וְגו’.” Then comes רַב חֲסִידָא בַר חֲסִידָא, who contradicts Rav: “וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֹתַי שְׁבַע מִצְוֹת” “And say that he only fulfilled the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach?” The Gemara chimes in, “הֲאֵל אֵיכָּא נְגִי מִילָּה” “But isn’t there also circumcision!” This mitzvah is not a Noahide law, and Avraham observed this as it says “וַאֲבְרָהָם בֶּן תְּשַׁעִים” וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן תְּשַׁעִים,” “Avraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin” (Bereishit 17:24). The Gemara then continues, “And say (he fulfilled) the seven mitzvot and circumcision,” “וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֹתַי וְגַם מִלָּה” Rav answers this question “לָמָּה לִי” “If so, why does it say say “מִצְוֹתַי וְתוֹרָתַי”? This obviously indicates that Avraham followed the *entire* Torah and not just the seven mitzvot, otherwise, why would Hashem say “מִצְוֹתַי וְתוֹרָתַי”? Clearly, Avraham knew the mitzvot of the Torah, just as Yitzchak and Yaakov had.

Now, we can come to the question of how it was possible for Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov to have known the Torah before it existed! In my research, I did not find a rabbi who has found a solid, definitive answer, though one thing I found was that it traces back to Avraham. As I read an article written by Rabbi Yehuda Shurpin, he explains how Avraham was chosen by Hashem. He suggests the following. As it is mentioned in Masechet Nedarim, Avraham began recognizing G-d at the age of three “בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנַיִם הִכִּיר אֲבְרָהָם אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ” He never understood the logic behind worshiping stones and statues as his father, Terach, did. Avraham recognized that Hashem was one, and from then on, began devoting his life to spreading the truth about Hashem. He would go “even beyond the point of self-sacrifice.” Therefore, G-d of course gave Avraham His covenant, “וַיִּקְרָא אֶת בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין” “וְאֶתְּרָעָךְ אֶתְּרָעָךְ לְדוֹרֹתֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לְהִיּוֹת לָךְ לְאֵלֵקִים וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אֶתְּרָעָךְ” “I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be G-d to you and to your offspring to come.” G-d chose Avraham. He chose Avraham’s middot and the fact he was able to give up everything for him. That is what compelled Hashem to choose Avraham, and for Avraham to then teach his descendants (that is how Yitzchak and Yaakov recognized Hashem, because Avraham was chosen). At Har Sinai, G-d gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, not because of specific unique qualities like our forefathers had; he gave it to us because it was Hashem’s choice, a choice only he will understand (transcending the rational). Not only this, Rabbi Shurpin mentions this point earlier in his article that a main difference between the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai and to the forefathers is that up until Har Sinai, the mitzvot weren’t mandatory. Avraham was not obligated to follow Hashem and his Commandments, though he chose to anyway. Avraham was devoted to G-d, the G-d he recognized at the age of three and Avraham passed down his knowledge to Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Now that we know that Avraham was the core to Yitzchak and Yaakov’s knowledge because Hashem chose him, and that the forefathers volunteered to follow Hashem’s commands, how did they know the Torah before it existed; in other words, what *was* the Torah? Another article I read, written by

Rabbi Tzvi Freeman, answers this question. He explains that the Torah was more spiritual than it was literal. Before the Torah was given to us, it was Hashem's wisdom, "as He considers Himself, as He considers us and as He considers His world." Each of our forefathers obtained Hashem's wisdom. Then, at Har Sinai, the Torah became a command, rather than a wisdom, and starting there, every Jew was obligated to follow it. Rabbi Freeman brings in sources from *Shnei Luchot HaBrit* (written by Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz) based on the words of Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, who says that the Torah exists in the spiritual realms. Therefore, it is not only Hashem's wisdom, but his inner will and desire. With our free choice, we choose how that divine will enters our world. He then brings in an example, that if after receiving the Torah, we did not perform the sin of the Golden Calf, we would not have needed the מִשְׁכָּן; each Jew would have been a "perfect temple" for Hashem's שְׂכִינָה. This is an example of how we channeled and chose how Hashem's divine will entered our world. In the case of our forefathers, they chose to conduct their lives around the divine will, they decided to teach it, and to know it; they did everything they could, because in the end, they did not really know how that divine will would be actualized on Earth, after Har Sinai. Therefore, the Torah our forefathers knew is not the exact same Torah we know today. They knew the spiritual side of Torah, and they chose to apply it to their lives as they did. We know the actualized Torah here on Earth, and we chose to apply it to our lives differently with our free choice.

In the end, we will never truly know *how* the forefather knew the Torah, but one thing we do know is that they *did* know it, and Hashem *wanted* them to know it; it was Hashem's inner will and desire. When I think of it, Hashem's two inner desires are the Torah itself and for our forefathers to *know* Hashem's desires (the Torah). Therefore, Hashem provides evidence in the Torah that our forefathers knew the mitzvot, and not *how* they knew it. That is why we cannot find a definite answer as to how it was possible. It was Hashem's inner desire. In addition, Avraham and his descendants voluntarily chose to follow and learn the mitzvot without any obligation because they knew that doing so would raise them to a higher spiritual level and strengthen their connection to Hashem. Nowadays, some mitzvot may seem like a burden, but if we look at them as an opportunity, a desired action, mitzvot may seem more like a gift, a pleasure. I find this extraordinarily inspiring, and I think if we applied some of the middot our forefathers had to our lives, we could also get closer to that spiritual realm with Hashem as Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov did.

After all, we know that each of our forefathers performed the spiritual mitzvot, from Avraham being chosen, from passing it down, and from wanting to transcend to a high spiritual plane. One thing I might consider researching after this, is how Adam applied Hashem's divine will in his life. Did Adam recognize Hashem's will as Avraham did? Was Avraham the first patriarch to discover such a force? Avraham was a brilliant man for discovering Hashem, so let us all strive to be like him and his descendants, to get closer and closer to that spiritual plane and Hashem's will.

GRADE 10





WHO WAS THE GREATEST OF THE TWELVE SHEVATIM?

Who was the greatest of the twelve shevatim, and what did they accomplish to be given that title? Did they encounter many challenges and hardships along the way, or did they live an easy, trouble-free life? The shevatim are certainly among the most notable Jewish leaders in our history, and while I believe there are particular shevatim who are the greatest and most distinguished, we can learn meaningful lessons from all of them.

Fundamentally, Yosef HaTzadik was known as the most moral and righteous among all his brothers. It is evident that Yosef was the most favoured brother by many, including his own father, Yaakov, as it says in Sefer Bereishit (37:3) “וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהַב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו כִּי בֶן זָקְנִים הוּא לוֹ”, “now Yisrael loved Yosef best of all his sons – he was his ‘child of old age.’” However, Yosef underwent many struggles throughout his life as a result of being the favourite child of all his brothers. On account of their extreme jealousy, he was thrown into a pit, sold to merchants in Egypt, and thrown into jail. Because of this, when the tables were turned and the rest of the shevatim came down to Egypt and Yosef was second-in-command, he refused to listen to his brothers’ pleas right away, but rather harassed and tested his brothers until he was certain they regretted their actions. Nevertheless, even while experiencing so many hardships in his life, Yosef did not lose his faith in Hashem, and continued to believe that everything was for the best, and this ultimately worked to his advantage as he emerged from the depths of Egyptian jail to become the second-in-command to Pharaoh.

While Yosef was definitely a tzadik and the most honourable among his brothers, he also made some mistakes, as well. As it says in Parshat Vayeshev (37:2) “וַיִּבֶא יוֹסֵף אֶת דְּבָרָם רָעָה אֶל אָבִיָּהֶם”, which shows that Yosef did speak badly about his brothers as well. Rashi explains that Yosef gave his father a bad report of his brothers whenever they made any mistake, or did any wrongdoing. Therefore, Yosef was later punished middah k’neged middah, measure for measure. An example of this is that Yosef was punished and sold as a slave because of the fact that he had informed his father that his brothers had mocked handmaids by calling *them* slaves.

While Yosef was one of the more notable of the shevatim, there were some others as well, such as Reuven, Yaakov’s eldest son. While his fellow brothers plotted to murder Yosef and throw his body into a disgusting pit, Reuven tried to stop them, as it states “וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיִּצְלֵהוּ מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִקְחוּהוּ, וַיִּשְׂפֹּט” “But when Reuven heard it, he tried to save him from them. He said, “Let us not take his life”

(Bereishit 37:21). He then proposed a different idea to his brothers, which involved throwing Yosef into a pit alive, but leaving him there, with the plan in mind that Reuven would later retrieve Yosef and bring him back to their father, ultimately saving his life. Even so, Reuven was not able to carry out his plan, and returned later to find his brother gone from the pit. Out of grief and despair, and knowing his failure would devastate his father, he tore his clothes and mourned.

A few years prior to this incident, after Rachel had died, the pasuk states “וַיְהִי בְשָׁכְנוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ” (Bereishit 35:22). Rashi illustrates that once Yaakov could no longer sleep with Rachel, he moved his bed into Bilhah’s tent, to sleep with her. This infuriated Reuven, as he thought that out of respect and honor to Leah, his mother, his father should have been with *her*, and not Bilhah, who had merely been the maidservant of Rachel. Therefore, Reuven moved Yaakov’s bed to Leah’s tent, and decided to sleep with Bilhah, committing a sin. Yet, once Yaakov found out, Rashi indicates that the words “וַיְהִיו בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר”, “and the sons of Yaakov were twelve”, show that in fact, all of the shevatim were still considered of equal righteousness, and consequently, Reuven had committed no actual sin. Nevertheless, the Rambam disagrees with Rashi’s interpretation of these words, and teaches that in fact Reuven did get punished for not thinking before acting, and his first-born rights were taken away, middah k’neged middah once again.

Lastly, there was Yehuda, who is most notably described as the strongest of the shevatim. Yehuda was the leader, and the one that suggested: “לָכֵן וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ לַיִּשְׁמְעֵאֵלִים וַיְדַנּוּ אֶל תְּהִי בּוֹ כִּי אָחִינוּ בְּשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא” “Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh” (Bereishit 37:27). Yehuda recognized and thought about something that the other brothers did not give a single thought about: the fact that Yosef was still their brother, and therefore, they should not kill him themselves, but rather sell him to merchants. Once again, Yosef’s life was spared because of one of his brothers.

While Yosef began his journey in Egypt, Yehuda married and had three sons. His oldest son married a woman named Tamar, but he died as a result of his sins, as did his second son, which left Tamar a widow. The proper halachic course of action at that point was for Yehuda to give Tamar to his youngest son, Shelah, so they could have a child together and continue his brothers’ legacy, but Yehuda did not do this.

Later, once Yehuda’s wife had died as well, and he fell into a state of depression, Yehuda decided to sleep with a zonah, who was actually Tamar, who had hidden herself from him, ensuring that Yehuda would not know who she was. He agreed to give her his staff as a pledge to reimburse her for her actions. After a few months, it was discovered that Tamar was in fact pregnant from the incident, and Yehuda decreed that the one responsible for impregnating Tamar must be burned. Thus, when Tamar held up Yehuda’s staff and proclaimed that the owner of the staff had been the one who made her pregnant, Yehuda said: “וַיִּכַּר יְהוּדָה וַיֵּאמָר צְדָקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי עַל כֵּן לֹא נִתְּתִיהָ לְשִׁלָּה בְּנִי וְלֹא יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ” “Yehuda recognized them, and said, ‘She is righteous from me, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah.’ And he was not intimate with her again” (Bereishit 38:26). The Rambam explains that Yehuda acted extremely wisely here, and even admitted the fact that Tamar was more righteous than himself, and he had been the one who sinned. Sforno adds that even though Tamar had misguided Yehuda and misrepresented herself, she had *still* acted more righteous than he had, and she had simply done what Yehuda asked of her, clearly indicating that only he *himself* had sinned.

In conclusion, while Yosef, Reuven, and Yehuda all had their successes and struggles, I believe the greatest and most outstanding of the twelve shevatim was Yehuda. It is evident that although Yehuda may have accumulated the most sins in his life, he was also the most repentant and owned up to his mistakes, teaching a valuable lesson of accountability and humility. No matter how righteous a person may appear to be, or how many sins it seems he has committed during his lifetime, what matters is if the person learned and grew from his mistakes and became a greater and more righteous person each and every time.



AKEIDAT YITZCHAK

We all know that the story of Akeidat Yitzchak was a test of faith for Avraham, one of the ten tests Hashem gave him. Is this story a test for Yitzchak also? In order to answer this, you have to ask another question. Did Yitzchak know that his father was going to offer him as a sacrifice? If yes, then it would seem the test was just as much for Yitzchak as it was for Avraham. If not, then there is no test for Yitzchak because he did not know what was to happen. This topic is important, because although this story is a well-known story taught to us as children, perhaps there is more behind the scenes that we never really investigated. I believe there is a lot to be learned from the story of Akeidat Yitzchak and hope that through this research I can better understand the story and see the full picture.

The story of Akeidat Yitzchak goes as follows: Hashem tested Avraham by asking him to take the son he loves to the land of Moriah and offer him up to Hashem. Avraham gets up and takes his son Yitzchak and two servants up to the place that Hashem showed him. Along the way Avraham leaves the servants and tells them that he and Yitzchak were going up to worship Hashem and would return to them. Avraham takes the wood for the offering, gives it to Yitzchak, takes a knife and they go up. Along the way, Yitzchak asked his father where the sheep that they were going to offer is. Avraham replies that Hashem will give them the sheep. When they arrived, Avraham built a Mizbeach and bound his son on top of the wood. Avraham picks up the knife to offer his son, and at that moment, Hashem calls out to him and tells him to not kill his son, because now Hashem knows that Avraham believes in Hashem, and he passed the test. Avraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thorns, so he took the ram and offered it to Hashem on the Mizbeach in place of Yitzchak.

According to the simple pshat it seems Yitzchak did not know that he was to be offered, as Avraham never told him, and he even went as far as to ask “וְאַיִהּ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה” (where is the sheep for the burnt offering?). If he knew he was the offering, he would not have asked Avraham where the sheep is.

The mefarshim offer some other explanations. Rashi has two explanations that at first glance seem contradictory but when you look closer you see that it actually fits with the story. According to Rashi on pasuk 6 when it says “וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו” it means that Yitzchak walked with the same willingness and joy as his father even though he did not know what was to come, and his father did. However, in pasuk 8, when it says “וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו” again Rashi says that this time they walked with the same ready heart, but at that time Yitzchak did know that he was to be the offering to Hashem. In between these two Rashis, there is another Rashi on the words “וְיִרְאֶה לוֹ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי”. After Yitzchak asks where the sheep that they will offer is, Avraham replies “It is Hashem who will see to the sheep for this burnt offering, my son.” Rashi interprets this to say that Hashem will find them a sheep, and if not, Avraham will offer his son. Yitzchak understood this and at that moment realized the purpose of this trip and that he was to be offered as a Korban to Hashem.

According to Bereishit Rabbah, Yitzchak did know that his father was going to offer him as a sacrifice and allowed his father to do it. He said to Avraham “Father, I am a young man, and I am concerned lest my body shake from fear of the knife and I will trouble you, and lest the slaughtering will be invalid and it will not be considered a sacrifice for you. Rather, tie me very well.” Yitzchak trusted Hashem and allowed his father to sacrifice him.

Eben Ezra has a different opinion and says that Yitzchak did not know that he was to be offered. He gets this from the words “וַיִּשְׁוֹבָה אֶלְיָכֶם” in pasuk 5. When Avraham and Yitzchak leave their servants and go up the mountain, Avraham tells them to stay there, and they will worship and return to them. How could Avraham say they will return if he knows that his son will not return. He planned on returning with Yitzchak’s bones and said this to disguise what he was doing so that his servants would not know, and so that his son, Yitzchak, would not find out and flee. The Maharit seems to side with Eben Ezra and says that Yitzchak did not know until he was tied down and it was too late to protest.

In the end, there are different opinions about whether or not Yitzchak knew he was going to offered to Hashem. According to the pshat it seems he did not know, and Eben Ezra and Maharit agree. Rashi and Bereishit Rabbah disagree and take the stance that Yitzchak did know and chose to follow and trust Hashem. Although Rashi does say that he started off not knowing and gained that knowledge along the way. I do not think that there is one right answer rather different ways to view the story. In my opinion, I believe that Yitzchak was very intelligent, and it is hard to think that he did not suspect anything along the way, and therefore believe that Rashi and Bereishit Rabbah’s opinions are more logical.

A final piece to keep in mind is the discussion regarding Yitzchak’s age at the time of the Akeida. The pasuk says that Yitzchak was a na’ar, but we do not know what exactly that means. This could contribute to the level of awareness Yitzchak had of what was happening around him and could affect the arguments of whether or not Yitzchak knew what was going to happen.



JUDAISM'S VIEW ON CRISPR

The world is changing rapidly, and with that comes many new, sometimes unconventional inventions. One such controversial invention is genetic editing, which, according to the Oxford dictionary, is an alteration of the genetic material of a living organism, by inserting, replacing, or deleting a DNA sequence. Genetic editing usually is done with the purpose of improving some characteristic of a crop or farm animal, or for correcting a genetic disorder in a person.

Being able to manipulate genes is definitely exciting, a giant leap in science. CRISPR is a subset of gene editing. It stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats. It was initially discovered in 1987, but in recent years has advanced tremendously, making us able to manipulate the genes in an embryo to prevent a child from being born with a disease. In 2020, Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer A. Doudna won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for their advancements in this technology. CRISPR has proven to be quite controversial, as it has many possible uses, some considered unethical. But how does the Torah view this whole process? Are we playing God by manipulating genetics? What is the limit to how much we should change a person, and is there a line we shouldn't cross?

Let's first discuss gene editing in human beings. Rabbi Moshe Hershler is of the opinion that gene editing is generally not allowed in Judaism. He uses the pasuk from Vayikra 19:19: אֶת הַקְּדָשִׁי תִשְׁמְרוּ: וְגִבַּר כְּלָאִים שִׁעֲטוּנָה לֹא יַעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ בְּהִמְתָּךְ לֹא תִרְבִּיעַ כְּלָאִים שִׁדְךָ לֹא תִזְרַע כְּלָאִים וּגְבֹר כְּלָאִים שִׁעֲטוּנָה לֹא יַעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ. This means "he who changes the [Divine] arrangement of creation is lacking faith [in the Creator]."

His reasoning behind this is that all human beings are made b'tzelem Elokim, in God's image, like we learn in Bereshit 1:27: וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵי אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּמְקַיָּה בָרָא אֹתָם, "God created humankind in God's image, making males and females."

Rabbi Moshe Hershler says that since we are all already made in God's image, we are the way that God intended for us to be. Others believe this too and think that therefore we should not alter anything about us, including our genetics. According to some, there is a risk we would be playing God and it could escalate quickly to believing that we are as powerful as God, like a scientific Tower of Babel.

Other rabbis refute this statement, like Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. He reminds us about the concept of pikuach nefesh, which tells us you are permitted to break Jewish law in order to save a life. This concept is similar to the one of hishtadlut, which is that we have to make an effort to solve problems that we encounter without waiting for God to swoop in and save us. Rabbi Auerbach also reiterates that the point of genetic therapy is to cure disease, which will restore health and prolong life. This is torat chaim, we must remember that the Torah is in favour of life. That's how all of medicine is permissible in the first place, even though it too could be perceived as playing God. So, if a

person – or even an embryo – is found to have a *harmful* genetic deficiency, it is not only permissible, but encouraged, to intervene using gene therapy. Overall, the psak halacha follows that gene editing is permissible so long as it's used for the purpose of health, and not to enhance people's looks or intelligence to create 'designer babies.'

As with any emerging area of halachic discourse, there are a lot of grey areas as to what is or is not considered acceptable. There are questions I have struggled to answer in my research, that rabbis continue to weigh as they work to set forth the halachic view. When does gene editing transition from therapeutic use into the unethical world of designer babies? What separates the life-saving from the God-imitating? For example, Tay-Sachs disease, a genetic disease common among Ashkenazi Jews, can prevent young couples who both carry the Tay-Sachs gene from giving birth to babies, because of the risk that their babies will have the fatal disease of Tay-Sachs. Thus, this limits their ability to do *pru urevu*. In Bereshit we learn about the mitzvah of *pru urevu*, being fruitful and carrying on the Jewish nation. Recent work from the University of Massachusetts has proven fetal gene therapy as a potential way to prevent this terrible disease. Would we be allowed, or even encouraged, to do this in order to allow couples to fulfill the mitzvah of *pru urevu*, or is this interfering with the way that God is trying to run the world? Is this a designer baby? Are we playing doctor or playing God? This is still unclear.

If anything *is* clear, though, it's that halacha is dynamic. Since Sinai, we have constantly applied our time-honoured Torah traditions to new circumstances as the world evolves and new technologies emerge. The world is rapidly changing – and yes, some things are not clear. But Judaism's ancient verses and values can give us the tools to answer new questions as they come up.

GRADE 11



תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי תלמוד בבלי

נדה משניות סדר מדרות פכרות ערכין תמורה לריותות מעילה קטן תפיד מזהב חולין זבחים מנחות עבודת זרה תוריות עידות אבות זבוח דריג מופרים שמחות כלל דרך ארץ מנהרגין מכות שבועות כבא בתרא כבא מציעא כבא קמא קדושין



TO FALL IN LOVE: THE FEMALE ROLE OF TALMUD TORAH

Falling in love takes discovery. To love another individual, one must first get to know them. The same is true for Tanach. To fall in love with the beauty of Tanach one must first discover its greatness and intricacies. The experience of this kind of love should not be deprived from any individual be it male or female. Still, sometimes this form of love gets lost among women. This paper will outline the different Orthodox halachic approaches throughout history regarding women's study of Torah. The author's hope in writing this is to encourage more males and females to take a more serious approach to the topic of women's Talmud Torah.

To start, the term *Talmud Torah* must be understood. The word *Torah* can be defined in numerous ways, as it says in Bamidbar Rabbah 13:16, there are 70 faces to the Torah. Similarly, there are countless ways to understand *Talmud Torah*. The literal definition of *Talmud Torah* is Torah study, that itself can be expanded on in several different ways. The study of Torah can be done through learning with a teacher, admiring a pious individual, contemplating G-d and nature, and much more. The goal of Talmud Torah is also multifaceted, including studying for the sake of bringing the community together, performing *mitzvot*, and understanding the halacha. This is proven through the commandment of *Hakhel* in Devarim 31:12, which states that all Jewish people should gather every seven years, male and female alike, and listen to the King read certain portions from the Torah. This offers the idea that Torah study is to enhance and unite the community. On the other hand, in Devarim 5:1-2, the Jewish people are commanded to hear the *chukim* and *mishpatim* in the Torah. *Chukim* being the laws one cannot understand and *mishpatim* the laws one may be able to make sense of. This suggests that the study of Torah is to create a foundation of understanding to be able to fulfill the mitzvot. Furthermore, at the end of the aforementioned passage, Moshe states that G-d made a *brit* with the Jewish nation, implying another reason for Torah study: the Jewish people's obligation to keep their end of the covenant. Later, in Devarim 6:7, G-d commands the Jewish people to repeat the words of the Torah to their children with the word "veshinantam." Sages teach that the unique word is there to teach the Jewish people that they have an imperative to know the Torah with fluency, beyond standard learning. In Yehoshua 1:8, "לא ימוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ וְהָגִיתָ בוֹ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה," sages derive that Torah should frame a person's day and night (Makkot 99b). The Rambam specifies that the mitzvah of Talmud Torah includes mastering the Written Torah from childhood and then moving on to the

mastery of the Oral Torah. It is clear that there are various ways to understand Talmud Torah. It can vary from communal responsibility to personal obligation of observing mitzvot, and much more. Still, with these definitions, it is not clear where the women's exemption is derived. What makes women exempt from all forms of Talmud Torah?

The female exemption of Talmud Torah is derived from Devarim 11:19: “לְמַדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם, לְדַבֵּר” by Midrash Sifrei. Sifrei translates “בְּנֵיכֶם” as “your sons” and concludes that “וְלֹא בָנוֹתֵיכֶם” (Parshat Eikev 46). From here it is understood that a parent is not obligated to teach a daughter Torah. As well, in Kiddushin 29b, it is made clear that since a woman is an individual that others are not commanded to teach, she is not commanded to teach herself. Through these sources, it is established that women are exempt from the Torah-level mitzvah of Talmud Torah. However, an interesting case regarding a suspected *sota* in the Mishnah makes some rabbis question the idea of whether women should be completely exempt from Torah study.

The Mishnah discusses the implications of the female exemption of Talmud Torah in the context of a suspected *sota* (a woman suspected of adultery). The *sota* ritual is as follows: the husband of the *sota* has an injunction issued against her being alone with the other man. Afterward, the *sota* chooses to seduce herself with said man so the husband pursues a claim against his wife (the *sota*) in the temple. At the temple, G-d's name is written on a scroll and placed in water. The woman is forced to drink it to restore faith with her husband. If guilty of adultery, the woman and her illicit partner are killed by G-d. However, even a guilty *sota* might have other merits working in her favour that may hold off death. According to Ben Azzai in Mishnah Sota 3:4, one of these merits can include Torah study. From this, Ben Azzai derives that a man *must* teach his daughter Torah so that if there is a delay in a *sota's* punishment it will not seem like a mistake in Divine judgment. Clearly, Ben Azzai believes that Torah study *can* have a positive effect on women, it may even prevent her from becoming a *sota* to begin with. That is why he takes the position that a father is obligated to teach his daughter Torah. In the same Mishnah, Rabbi Eliezer disagrees with Ben Azzai and states that a father who teaches his daughter Torah teaches “תִּפְלִיזָה” (nonsense or lewdness). Rabbi Eliezer's opinion is explained by Rabbi Abbahu in Mishlei 8:12, that Torah study comes at the expense of innocence and might lead a woman astray. Although Rabbi Eliezer's ruling that women should not learn Torah finds wide halachic acceptance, it raises crucial questions: how does one reconcile the sources that women did study Torah with Rabbi Eliezer's opinion?

In Sanhedrin 94b, it states that in the time of King Chizkiya, every boy, girl, man and woman was an expert in the laws of purity and impurity. For a female to become an expert in any field of Halacha, she must have engaged in Talmud Torah. Moreover, as stated earlier, women are required to participate in *hakhel*. Why would this be the case if female Talmud Torah is considered *tiflut*?

Rabbi Elazer ben Azarya, in Chagiga 3a, breaks up the mitzvah of *hakhel* and explains that men come “in order that they will learn” and women come “in order that they will hear.” Tosafot explains that women must “hear” or “listen” to the Torah for the sake of being able to fulfill mitzvot, but they do not need to “learn” Torah for its own sake. Therefore, Rabbi Elazar holds that a woman only needs to learn the Torah that is practically necessary for her to fulfill mitzvot. Sefer Chasidim agrees that a father is obligated to teach his daughter Halacha to ensure that she is able to keep it. This offers a

new approach to understanding Rabbi Eliezer's opinion, maybe his objection is only regarding women studying Torah for the sake of learning. This is the first change in the role of women learning Torah: going from nothing at all to *some* allowance. Leading into the next question: What are the parameters for women seeking to learn *some* Torah?

The Maharil, Rabbi Yaakov ben Moshe Levi Moelin, takes the position that women studying Torah should only engage in the informal transmission of halacha. This opposition to serious study is rooted in Maharil's caution about making halacha available to unlearned individuals (Responsa Maharil Siman 199). On the other hand, Rav Yitzchak, a major Tosafist and author of Semak, believes that a woman's mitzvah performance has as much to gain from formal study that does a man's. Therefore, a woman should engage in Talmud Torah to gain the knowledge necessary for mitzvot, as much as a man does. While the Maharil disagrees, he does state that Rav Yitzchak offers a halachically valid approach (Responsa Maharil 45:2). In Yoreh De'ah 246, the Rama writes that women are obligated to study the laws applicable to them.

The Rambam takes an interesting approach to this issue, identifying a difference between studying and teaching Torah, moderating Rabbi Eliezer's statement, addressing the issue of *tiflut*, and separating the Written Torah and Oral Torah (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Torah Study 1:13). First off, the Rambam begins with, "אשה שלמדה תורה יש לה שכר/אשה שלמדה תורה יש לה שכר." This proves that there must be a halachic value in women's Talmud Torah. Then, the Rambam separates learning and teaching, while a women's *study* deserves praise; there is a problem with *teaching* her. The Rambam introduces Rabbi Eliezer's opinion with, "Tzivui Chachamim" which is most commonly used when mentioning a preferred practice, not a prohibition, suggesting that Rabbi Eliezer's statement is not a prohibition. When addressing the issue of *tiflut*, Rambam says that "most women's minds are not oriented to study." Most women are certainly not all women, implying that a minority of women *do* have minds oriented to study. Then, Rambam distinguishes between the Written Torah and Oral Torah, saying that Rabbi Eliezer's opinion refers to the Oral Torah. This new approach to Rabbi Eliezer completely redefines its scope. Still, the Rambam ends with a final ruling that a father should not set out to teach his daughter the Written Torah, seemingly following the opinion of Rabbi Ben Zarya. Taz explains that since Rabbi Ben Zarya holds that women should hear the Written Torah at *hakhel* but not study it deeply, the Rambam's objection is regarding in-depth study of the Written Torah. All in all, the Rambam's ruling regarding women's Talmud Torah offers a few new ideas: there is halachic value in women's Talmud Torah, Rabbi Eliezer's statement is not a prohibition, *some* women may have the capacity to learn Torah, women should be taught the Written Torah superficially. This new understanding raises another question: What about a woman who want to study Torah independently?

The Maharil explains the Rambam's approach: that women who engage in Talmud Torah independently are rewarded since they have good intentions. This explains Beruria, a woman quoted as a sage in the Talmud, as it is assumed she learned on her own. However, if it is assumed that a woman studying alone has good intentions can the same be applied to a woman studying with her father? Rav Yehoshua Falk, also known as Perisha, explains that a woman who studies Torah independently is considered an exception to the rule of *tiflut* which is not necessarily true for a daughter learning from her father. Therefore, the same cannot be applied.

According to these sources, it seems that women should not be engaging in Talmud Torah through a school curriculum, and yet most Modern Orthodox schools approach female Torah study in this way, so how did this change come to be? The change in women pursuing Talmud Torah first started in the nineteenth century when Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch began to pioneer Jewish girls' education in Germany and emphasized the importance for women to learn Torah for the knowledge of mitzvot and foster Jewish literature (Rav S.R. Hirsch Torah Commentary, Devarim 11:19). Later, after World War I, Sarah Schenirer began to worry about the amount of secular studies women were pursuing with no religious studies to balance and in response founded the Bais Yaakov movement. Schenirer's belief was that women's souls are the same as any others and are thirsty for Torah study. In her eyes, secular learning will not "quench the flame of a Jewish soul" and so women must pursue Talmud Torah. Schenirer received a blessing from the Belzer Rebbe and Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan (the Chafetz Chaim). Chafetz Chaim was an avid supporter of the Bais Yaakov movement, believing that in today's modern times, women must have access to a Jewish education that goes beyond mimesis (oral study). He argued that anyone concerned about the prohibition should know that it does not apply these days since the Jewish people are faced with the issue of losing women to transgressions because of withholding Torah knowledge. It is clear that after females began to engage in secular studies more commonly, Orthodox tradition had to adapt to this and find a way to allow females to engage in Talmud Torah. Otherwise, the risk of losing women to the secular world would be too great.

The new recommendation and approval of Torah study for women mean new parameters must be defined. Earlier, Rambam mentioned that the study of Written Torah and Oral Torah are separate, and women can engage in the former. Almost everyone (except Satmar Chassidim and other small groups) agrees that women should study the Written Torah. The question that remains to be asked is: what about commentaries? The Chafetz Chaim says that women should learn Tanach, Pirkei Avot, and Menorah Ha-maor but never specifies if the commentary is included. An even more prevalent issue is that most commentaries draw from the Oral Torah and until this point, no research proves that women are allowed to engage in the study of the Oral Torah. However, without commentaries the Written Torah cannot be deciphered, and because of this reasoning, Bais Yaakov taught girls Written Torah with commentaries. Today, across the Jewish world, girls learn Tanach with commentaries.

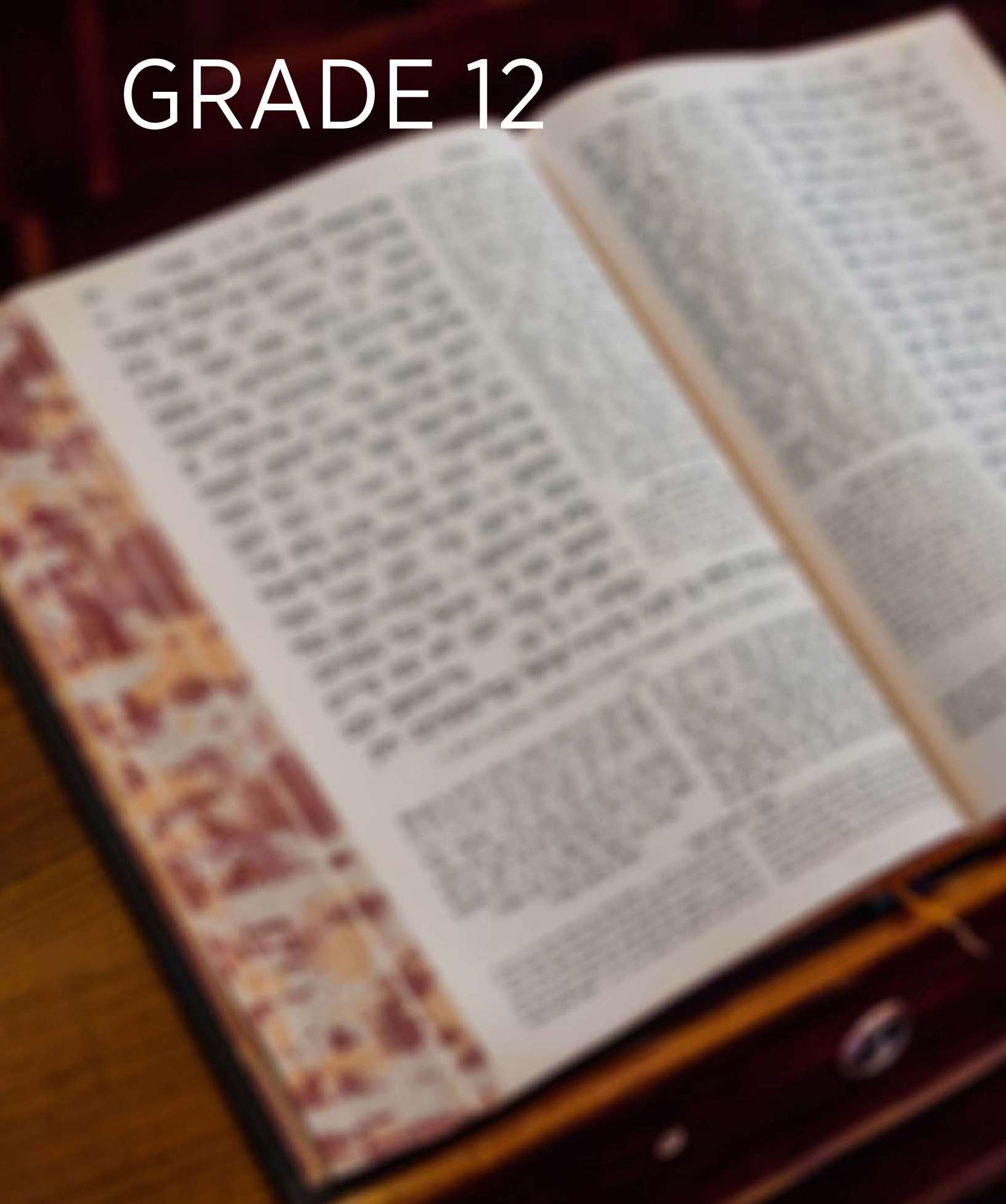
The discussion regarding women being permitted to study Oral Torah is much more controversial. The Rambam says that men teaching women Oral Torah is a problem, Maharil and Semak debate whether women should even learn practical halacha from the text, and Rav Moshe Feinstein holds that women should learn Pirkei Avot (like Chafetz Chaim said), and no other Mishnaic tractates. Privately, it is believed that Rav Moshe held women can learn other Mishnaic tractates so long as they are studying from another woman. The overarching concern regarding the study of Oral Torah is *tiflut*, that there is no other reason for women to learn Oral Torah other than the minimum necessary for keeping faith (similar to the approach of Rav Hirsch). Many female schools, including Bais Yaakov, follow this approach.

On the other hand, many respectable rabbis believe that there is no halachic barrier for women to study Oral Torah or for men to teach women Oral Torah. Rav Mordechai Eliyahu argues that halachic authorities have permitted women to learn Written and Oral Torah and it is actually preferable for a woman to study Torah rather than forbidden matters (Ma'amar Mordechai I, Y.D. 11). Here, Rav

Mordechai is challenging Rav Eliezer's opinion, saying that times have changed and while female Talmud Torah may have threatened *tiflut*, today the threat is *not* engaging in Talmud Torah. In 1953, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said that it is an "absolute imperative" to teach girls the Oral Torah (Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, 'Talmud Study for Girls in Yeshiva Elementary and High Schools' (b)). This is because women must understand halacha to be able to consent to keep it. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein argues that the Oral Torah should be available for study to women but not obligated in the intensive form ('Torah Study for Women'). He emphasizes the importance of respecting the women who are interested in studying any form of Torah and teaching them with seriousness. He believes that how well Torah is taught is based on how much the teacher respects the student ('Women, Talmud Study, and Avodat Hashem'). Certainly, women need to study the Written Torah and while opinions vary regarding the Oral Torah, it does seem permissible and, in some circles, encouraged.

In Pesachim 68b it states, "If not for this day [Shavuot] that caused it, how many Yosefs would there be in the marketplace?" If the Jewish people had not received the Torah, they would be like any other nation. Rav Yosef and the Jewish people are said to be different thanks to the fact that they study Torah. The opportunity to study Torah has not always been available to women, now that it is, do not pass it up. Talmud Torah is what makes the Jewish people unique and offers each individual the ability to discover Hashem and His work. While the topic of female Talmud Torah is heavily disputed, that should not cause any woman to shy away from her learning. It has been made clear that women are permitted to study the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, in some cases even obligated. It is time for each female to take Talmud Torah upon herself, in any form that suits her, and discover what it feels like to fall uniquely in love.

GRADE 12





THE BOUNDARIES OF RELATIONSHIP JUDGEMENT

Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz, an Orthodox rabbi, activist, and author, said, “In our society today, there is too much judgment and too little compassion. We spend too much time looking for the faults and shortcomings of others, rather than focusing on building strong and supportive communities that can lift each other up. As Jews, we have a responsibility to practice empathy, kindness, and understanding towards all members of society, regardless of their beliefs or practices. Only by doing so can we create a world that is truly reflective of our highest ideals and aspirations.” Judgement is a frequent happening in the Jewish community and this is contrary to many of our views, including **וְאֶתְהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ**. We regularly judge people based on their observance of different mitzvot: “Oh, her skirt is way too short”, “Oh I heard he doesn’t keep Shabbat”, “Oh I saw them buying a non-kosher drink from Starbucks” – these are things I regularly hear in the Jewish community and it seems that these comments have mixed responses.

Obviously, this could be a violation of lashon hara if we’re sharing this with others, but what about if this is just an internal thought or something we’re communicating directly with the person who we’re judging? What if our judgement and criticism come from a good place, and we want them to improve? Why don’t we get a little more specific? Many rabbis ask a question on the first paragraph of Shema: How can G-d command us to love? How can we be commanded to feel something? And in line with this is judging people’s relationships with G-d. How can we judge someone’s relationship with Hashem? And what are the boundaries of judging people’s relationships with G-d according to the Tanach, the Talmud and rabbis?

The Tanach has multiple sources on judging relationships with G-d. In Devarim, it says, **הַנִּסְתָּרֹת**, “לֵה’ אֵלֵינוּ וְהַגִּלְתָּ לָנוּ וְלִבְנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת הַנְּעֲשֶׂה בְּפָנֶיךָ וְלֹא בְּחֵטְא” this means that sins that are done privately, whether in the privacy of someone’s home or their thoughts, we cannot prosecute and those are Hashem’s business. We cannot judge those, because we cannot know the private dealings of others. However, if someone’s sins are public, that is our responsibility as a community to assist them in Teshuva. But if we leave someone to sin, are we not violating the commandment of **לִפְנֵי** “לִפְנֵי” **מִכְשַׁל** “עֲגֹר לֹא תִתֵּן מִכְשַׁל”? If we know someone is violating a mitzvah and we don’t tell them, are we guilty of violating this? What if they don’t know that they’re violating it and by ignoring it we’re allowing them to stumble?

A little later in Vayikra, it says, **הוֹכִיחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא**. From this, we learn that we are meant to rebuke people, in cases when we sincerely believe they will listen to the advice, and it will not make the situation worse. As well, you cannot embarrass them, and you must be sure of

the sin. In any cases that do not meet these criteria, we are supposed to *not* rebuke them and if we do, we have sinned. A pasuk in Mishlei backs this up: “בַּרְזֶל בְּבַרְזֶל יַחַד וְאִישׁ יַחַד פְּנֵי רֵעֵהוּ.” It means “as iron sharpens iron, a man sharpens the wit of his friend.” This means that we have a responsibility to assist our friends in learning the proper way to keep commandments. The Tanach says that we cannot judge other people’s relationships but if we sincerely think our advice would help them improve, we should do so. This only applies if we believe they would take our advice and the advice is given in a sincere, delicate way and not a criticizing way.

The Talmud has a similar approach to this question. In Shabbat 127b, we learn the mitzvah of giving people the benefit of the doubt. We are told to judge our fellow favourably. This means we cannot assume we know everything and must give people the benefit of the doubt. For example, if we are davening and we notice someone without a siddur open, we cannot assume they are not davening and tell them to daven. We must judge them favourably and think maybe they are davening in their own way, without a siddur. As well though, Shabbat 54b explains that if one is in the position to stop sin, they must do this, or they’re guilty of the sins. We learn from these sections that we must give people the benefit of the doubt but if we can stop sin, we must do our part. The Talmud, like the Tanach, says that we must give people the benefit of the doubt before judging their relationship with G-d, but if we see an actual halachic violation, we should try to stop it, as long as we do it respectfully.

The Rabbis say many things on this as well but mostly take the same positions as the Tanach and Talmud. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks explains in his book, *To Heal a Fractured World*, that we must address all other people with humility, and we cannot judge, because we are on different paths. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik says each situation is unique and complex (Halakhic Man) but delicate constructive criticism is good (The Lonely Man of Faith). Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains in the *Igrot Moshe* that we cannot judge unless there is a direct halachic violation. Rambam explains in the *Mishneh Torah* that we cannot judge others and hold a grudge but should rebuke them. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe says in his book, *Zeriya U’Binyan B’Chinuch*, that we must offer guidance and support with humility and sensitivity. Although the rabbis share different opinions, they have similar core points and come to the same consensus, judging is not good because we all have different paths, but rebuke is still important.

So, let’s go back to the question. What are the boundaries of judging people’s relationships with G-d? We cannot judge others because we have not experienced their lives and we do not know their circumstances. This is like it says in *Pirkei Avot*, “Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place.” We may not judge others because we don’t know everything about them. However, rebuke is important and should be given in cases of direct halachic violation or when it is given sincerely and delicately. Rebuke should only be given carefully and with consideration for others’ feelings. We should not be criticizing people’s davening or how they connect to Hashem because these are outside our understanding. But if we believe we can help them improve, we have a responsibility to do that, as long as we are being helpful and not criticizing them. We live in a community with tons of judgement, some that cross these boundaries. So, the next time we begin to judge someone, let’s take a moment to consider these things and make sure we stay within the boundaries.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CHALLAH

Challah is a food that many love, but it is also very interesting to dive into when it comes to halacha. There are many mitzvot that surround challah, and each is unique. The first mitzvah that comes with challah starts at the very beginning when the challah is first made, this is called *hafrashat challah*. This mitzvah is mentioned in Bamidbar as a way for Bnei Yisrael to atone for their sins from the Merglim. During the times of the Beit HaMikdash and the Mishkan, this mitzvah was to give a portion of the challah to the kohen. The second is Hamotzi, a bracha that we say on challah every week at our Shabbat tables and even more regularly on chagim. I want to explore more about being yotzei on the mitzvah of the Shabbat meal through challah. Additionally, I would like to explore how one can fulfill this mitzvah when they are unable to complete it, what if one happens to have an intolerance to gluten, celiac perhaps? Could they still fulfill the mitzvah of the Shabbat meal? If so, how?

It is a known practice in Jewish homes, as well as a mitzvah to say Hamotzi on Shabbat. The Shulchan Aruch rules that bread must be included during the meal at night and day of Shabbat. According to Chazal the reason for eating bread is to enhance the meal. This is completed by taking two full loaves of bread made up of wheat, spelt, barley, oat, or rye to represent the two portions of man that were given to the Jewish people on Shabbat with a covering below and above, representing the dew on top of the man in the desert. A cut is made on one of the challot to minimize the delay between the beracha and the consumption. The beracha is then recited on either the bottom or top challah depending on if it is night or day, respectively. Everyone responds amen. Following this, other customs may be added such as adding salt to compare the table to the altar in the temple to which salt was also added before a sacrifice. After this is completed, the challah is cut and shared among those at the table.

So, now we know the importance of bread and Hamotzi, but what happens when one, such as myself, is incapable of such a consumption? I would like to offer a few different opinions on what can be done. Firstly, it is important to distinguish between one who has a sensitivity to gluten versus one who has Celiac disease. One who occasionally does consume gluten must eat a kezayit size of challah on at least the first two meals of Shabbat. Someone with celiac disease who is on a strict gluten-free diet due to the implications of consuming wheat is prohibited from eating challah on Shabbat. If one looks further into Chazal's reasoning for eating challah, which is due to the enhancement of pleasure, then if it is more pleasurable for one who is Celiac to *not* eat challah, so it is deemed not only okay for a Celiac not to eat the bread but rather a requirement.

One answer for how to be yotzei is to have “קדיש בַּמִּקּוֹם דְּעוֹדֶה”, this could mean having a cup of wine or grape juice. It is important to note that one quart of wine must be drunk. According to the Shulchan Aruch, the cup from Kiddush is enough. If we take this idea one step further assuming one may not drink wine either, what shall they do? They can follow the opinion of הלְטֵי הַגְּבוּרִים and fulfil קדיש בַּמִּקּוֹם דְּעוֹדֶה by eating other types of fruits, preferably dates. If one chooses to fulfil the mitzvah with wine, then one must make a beracha on the foods eaten during the meal. However, the drinks at the meal do not require a beracha since the beracha of Kiddush covers those berachot. One would still say Birkat Hamazon in this case but would additionally need to say Bracha Acharona for wine and Borei Nefashot for the other foods.

Another option, if possible, is to make gluten-free challah using oat flour. One usually adds rice flour since the oat flour has a harsh taste when used on its own or in large quantities. The challenge with this is to keep it in proportion relative to rice flour to allow for Hamotzi to be said on it. So, what are these proportions to allow for Hamotzi to be said on a regular day? According to Rabbi Dovid Heber, 51% oat flour to 49% rice flour is considered hamotzi. If one adds the oat flour to enhance flavour, then it can also be considered hamotzi even if it is less than 51% oat flour. There is a complication that arises on Shabbat. A kezayit, which is the size of a golf ball, of oat flour must be consumed in four minutes to be considered yotzei. When one uses less oat flour, more challah needs to be eaten to obtain the consumption of a kezayit. For example, using 51% oat flour, one would need to eat the size of two kezayit in four minutes. If one’s recipe contained only 33% of oat flour, one would need to eat three kezayit in four minutes. This means that depending on the recipe one needs to adjust their consumption accordingly.

Ultimately, everyone has their own personal tolerances and abilities when it comes to food sensitivities and allergies. Some are more stringent while others are able to “cheat” every now and then. When it comes to mitzvot it is important to think about how one can complete it and be yotzei while taking into account dietary needs. As a Celiac, who has learned to adapt by having gluten-free oat Matzah on Pesach and my mom’s famous gluten-free challah every Friday and Shabbat day, it can be difficult. It takes time and research, but there is always a way to earn mitzvah points, even if it seems unfathomable.

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