



## **TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 11-4-23 VAYERA**

### ***Ministry News***

***IF YOU HAVE A PRAYER REQUEST YOU WOULD LIKE PEOPLE ON THE LIST TO PRAY FOR YOU CAN SEND THEM TO US AT [TOLMM@ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG](mailto:TOLMM@ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG) OR BY TEXT MESSAGE TO 575 644-7706 AND I WILL SEND THEM BY EMAIL ONLY.***

Remember that you can support the work of Tree of Life Messianic Ministries with a donation made via PayPal or by check to PO Box 467, Organ, NM 88052. Your donation helps our continued outreach to inmates and the time it takes to put this Newsletter together.

**Donate**



**Tree of Life Messianic Ministries is a 501 C-3 non-profit. To donate go to [etz-chayim.org](http://etz-chayim.org) and click on the PayPal or Venmo Link.**

**Tree of Life Messianic Ministries primarily focuses on its Prison Ministry and helping form groups in the prisons. TOLMM also seeks to help Home Groups and offers a covering for Home Groups and the combined experience of leadership**

from Rabbi Philip Hammond and Rabbi Mordecai Silver. Group leaders can receive recognition as Elders under TOLMM, which will help in an advisory role. Your support is needed for the Prison Ministry due to continuing rising costs. We now have an Affiliate in Australia.

## ***HOME GROUPS, CONGREGATIONS AND PEOPLE SEEKING FELLOWSHIP..***

Shawn Warren lives in Arizona. If you know of someone who is looking for a group in that area, please let me know and I will send the information to Shawn. Elder Shawn Warren is an Elder affiliated with TOLMM and helps with one-on-one correspondence with inmates in our Prison Ministry Outreach. He also encourages people to contact us about affiliating with TOLMM through Home Groups and our help to group leaders.

Gabriel Martinez has a home group in El Paso. If interested let me know and I will send him the information. Gabriel is an Elder affiliated with TOLMM as is his Home Group, Ohr Ha'Brit Messianic Torah Assembly.

There is a new Home Group in Las Cruces. For more information email [tolmm@etz-chayim.org](mailto:tolmm@etz-chayim.org).

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

Rabbi Phillip Hammond has a Zoom Bible Study and a Erev Shabbat and Shabbat Service on Zoom Friday evening and Saturday morning at 11:00am. Rabbi Hammond is in Australia and the time difference would be 5:00pm Friday Mountain Time. Rabbi Hammond is looking into starting a men's group focused in the United States. You can contact Rabbi Hammond at [Philip@etz-chayim.org](mailto:Philip@etz-chayim.org). Rabbi Hammond is now affiliated with Rabbi Mordecai Silver and his ministry, Tree of Life Messianic Ministries. Check out Rabbi Hammond at <https://www.etz-chayim.org/australia-affiliate/>.

We thank you for your support. Blessings in Messiah Yeshua, Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph. D., and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D. and our team

## ***General News***

TO SEARCH FOR MY BOOKS ON AMAZON ENTER “**BOOKS BY RAV MORDECAI SILVER**”. MINE ARE AVAILABLE IN PRINT FORMAT ONLY. I HAVE TWO NEW BOOKS ON AMAZON: RAV SHA’UL AND REFLECTIONS ON TORAH. TO SEE MORDECAI’S BOOKS, GO TO: [HTTPS://WWW.ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG/SHOP-OUR-STORE/PRINT-AND-KINDLE-BOOKS/](https://www.etz-chayim.org/shop-our-store/print-and-kindle-books/)

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

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

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

WE HAVE 7 PRISON AFFILIATES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

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



Rabbi Mordecai Silver [tolmm@etz-chayim.org](mailto:tolmm@etz-chayim.org)

## **MESSAGE FOR 11-4-23 VAYERA**

*Vayera – And He Appeared*

*Genesis 18:1-22:24*

*2 Kings 4:1-37*

*Luke 1:26-38; 24:36-53*

### **Genesis 22:1-3**

*And it happened after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham,” and he replied, “Here I am.” And He said, “Please take your son, your only one, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah; bring him up there as an offering upon one of the mountains which I shall tell you.” So, Abraham woke up early in the morning and he saddled his donkey; he took his two young men with him and Isaac, his son; he split the wood for the offering and stood up and went to the place of which God had spoken to him.*

### **Genesis 22:7-8**

*Then Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “Father—” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?” **And Abraham said, “God will seek out for Himself the lamb for the offering, my son.”** And the two of them went together.*

**Acts 8:32**

*Now the portion of the Tanakh that he was reading was this: **He was like a sheep led to be slaughtered; like a lamb silent before the shearer, he does not open his mouth.***

**Genesis 22:9**

*They arrived at the place of which God had spoken to him; Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood; he bound Isaac, his son, and he placed him on the altar atop the wood.*

*\*note: Isaac was about 37 years old and Abraham well over 100*

**Genesis 22:12**

*And he said," Do not stretch out your hand against the lad nor do anything to him **for now I know that you are a God-fearing man, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me.**"*

**Luke 9:35**

*And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to him!"*

**Genesis 22:18**

*And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring, because you have listened to My voice."*

**John 1:29**

*The next day, Yochanan saw Y'shua coming toward him and said, "Look! God's lamb! The one who is taking away the sin of the world!"*

**Matthew 26:39**

*Going on a little farther, he fell on his face, praying, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet—not what I want, but what you want!"*

**Matthew 26:42**

*A second time he went off and prayed. "My Father, if this cup cannot pass away unless I drink it, let what you want be done."*

**Mark 14:35-36**

*Going on a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass from him: Abba! (that is Dear Father!) "All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me! Still, not what I want, but what you want."*

**Luke 22:42**

*"Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, let not my will but yours be done."*

**WHAT IS A JEW? WHO IS A JEW OR THE NATIONS / THE GOYIM?**

**by Jane Davis**

I was born "Jewish." I was raised "Jewish." I felt different because I was "Jewish." But I never stopped to sit quietly with me and "Jewish," to think about or to feel deeply what it meant. I was aware it came with a sense of pride. A sense of belonging to something special. I was aware that it taught me to be a giver. Even as youngsters we were always collecting for something. The blue and white can where coins were saved and sent to Israel, a distant land that somehow I was a part of. I was aware of my grandparent's always being honored for their support of various Jewish causes.

I went to religious school and Hebrew school. I was confirmed. My mother's family was Orthodox, my father's reformed. Very reformed. We lit the Shabbos candles every Friday night. We kept a kosher home. These things came from my mother's side. The Orthodox side.

I wondered why we went to a Reform Temple, and I felt "less than" Jewishly, around my more religious friends who went to the Conservative and Orthodox shuls. I wanted more. More of this "Jewish" that I sensed was very significant and very special. The others at the Reform Temple didn't keep kosher or Shabbos and so even among my own I was different.

A few years ago, after searching for a Rabbi, a teacher, I found one. Amazingly enough he wasn't in my backyard. He was in cyberspace. And, unlike most Rabbi's I know, he was available. I mean really available to discuss and explore and guide and teach. The opportunity to learn with him has been a Jewish gift.

When I learned that there are 613 characters in the Ten Commandments to mirror the 613 Mitzvoth, I was excited. When I heard there are 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments that match the same number of veins, arteries, and limbs in the human body, I was excited. In awe, actually.

And I wondered, was I done a disservice as a Reform Jew? As a Reform Jew I was not expected to maintain the rituals. I wondered what I had lost by not practicing the gifts of my religion. Is a Reform Jew and an Orthodox Jew practicing the same religion? I don't think so. Is one Jewish and one simply a different religion? Did God give the Ten Commandments to "Orthodox Jews" or just to Jews, expecting "Jews" to follow the ways of the Torah?

In a few weeks I will be speaking at a conference called "World Without Violence". It is a conference bringing together religious and spiritual leaders to discuss the issue of the death penalty. In the most recent poll done by the American Jewish Congress 80% of Jews support the death penalty. This figure is about individuals who call themselves "Jews". But are they "Jewish?" Are they learned in the teachings of the Torah? And I come back to the original question. Who is a Jew? What is a Jew? Maybe the answer is, there is no answer. If we are not following the basic demands that our religion asks of us like honoring the Shabbos and keeping kosher what makes us "Jewish?" What do we collectively lose when the majority of our people are not following the most basic of rituals through which we are challenged and humbled? I wonder if I am a Jew although I strive to be one. I'm not sure that I can rise to the demands of it.

We are alarmed at the Orthodox saying Conservative and Reform essentially "don't count." So, instead of being defensive perhaps it is time to define who we are. When I am asked "what is the Jewish perspective on the death penalty?" I will have to say, "First, you must understand what Jewish is."

***And so, I continue to ponder, and question and learn and grow and wonder..... who is a Jew; what is a Jew and what is the difference between being a Jew and Jewish or someone from the Nations-the Goyim?***

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**We include a Traditional Torah Commentary and my Messianic Commentary. The reason for this is so you can see a Messianic Perspective and a Traditional Jewish one. Remember to use discernment in approaching Traditional Jewish teachings as they do not recognize Yeshua as the Messiah. There are various ideas in traditional Jewish circles about the Messiah and even that there is no**

Messiah, the thinking in Reform Judaism. So, please be careful to balance the teachings.

We do not agree with the Jewish position on Yeshua, but Believers need to know the Jewish thinking on Yeshua and not buy into this thinking and forsake faith in our Messiah. For those who say they would never do this, we must beg to differ, because we have seen it over our lives as Jewish Believer's in Yeshua. We have been Believer's in Messiah Yeshua for decades. We have seen a lot and had many discussions with our fellow Jews and non-Jews who ultimately turned away from Yeshua because they steeped themselves in Jewish teachings. One does not come out of either traditional Judaism or Christianity and come into the Messianic walk, and then going back, or into, traditional Judaism. *There are many good things in Judaism but denying Yeshua as Messiah is not one of them.* Berachot (Blessings), Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph.D., and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D.

## **A TRADITIONAL JEWISH PARASHAH AND HAFTARAH COMMENTARY**



### **Summary of Parashat Vayera Genesis/Beresheet 18:1-22:24**

***Isaac's birth, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the exile of Hagar and the ultimate sacrifice.***

As Abraham was sitting before his tent, after having circumcised himself, God appeared. Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw three men standing there. Abraham invited them to come in and made a fine meal for them.

One of the men said that Sarah would have a son by the time he returns to their tent. Sarah heard this comment and laughed to herself, saying, "Oh, that I shall have the greatest fulfillment now that I am already worn out and my husband is an old man!"

God said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Is there anything too wondrous for God?”

The visiting men left, and Abraham escorted them on their way to Sodom. Now, God said, “Should I keep undisclosed from Abraham that which I am doing? The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah already weighs very heavily. I will go down and see if I need to destroy it. If not, I shall handle it case by case.”

Now, Abraham stood before God asking, “Will you ruin the righteous along with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous in the city. To kill the righteous along with the wicked such that the righteous should be like the wicked—to do such a thing, I know would be a profanation to You, God. Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?”

And God said, “If there be 50 righteous, I will forgive the city because of them.”

Abraham continued, “See, now, I have begun to speak with my Lord, and I am only dust and ashes. How about if there were only forty-five righteous? Or 40? Or 30? Or 20? Or 10?”

And God responded to each. “I shall not destroy the whole city if there are forty, or thirty, or twenty or even ten righteous people.”

After Abraham and God parted, the two angels went to Sodom in the evening. Lot greeted them with a reverent bow and urged them to stay at his house overnight. At first, they refused, but then they agreed, and Lot made them a feast.

But before they lay down to sleep, the men of Sodom surrounded the house. They wanted Lot to reveal his guests, but Lot refused, begging them to not act wickedly. But the men pushed harder until they almost pushed down Lot and his door. The visitors grabbed Lot and brought him inside, then struck down the men with blindness so that they could no longer find the entrance.

The visitors then told Lot to get his family and leave Sodom, for God had sent them to destroy the city. Lot lingered, but God took pity on him and had the men seize him and his wife and two daughters and lead them out of the city. They warned them, “Do not look back and do not stand still. Escape.” God caused sulfur and fire to rain upon Sodom and Gomorrah. When Lot’s wife looked back, she became a pillar of salt.

Lot ended up in a cave with his daughters. Because the daughters wanted to give descendants to their father, they made their father drunk with wine. Each slept with their drunken father, but he did not know when each daughter lay down or when each rose up. The elder daughter bore a son and named him Moab. He is the ancestor of Moab. The younger bore a son and she named him Ben-Ami. He is the ancestor of the sons of Ammon.

Abraham journeyed to the land of Abimelekh, king of Gerar. He said that Sarah was his sister, so Abimelekh took Sarah for his wife. Now, God came to Abimelekh in a dream and said, “You shall die, because the woman you have taken is already married.” But Abimelekh responded, “My

God, will you even slay a righteous nation? They both told me they were siblings. In my innocence I have done this.”

And God answered, “I know you did this out of innocence. That’s why I prevented you from sinning against Me and touching her, even indirectly. Now, restore the wife to her husband, for he is a prophet, so he will pray for you, and you will remain alive.”

Abimelekh returned Sarah and gave Abraham animals and servants, money and the right to settle on his land. He told Sarah she no longer had to disguise her marriage. So, Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his handmaids, and they gave birth.

Now, God remembered Sarah, and she conceived and bore Abraham a son, Isaac, at the appointed time, which God had spoken. Abraham circumcised his son Isaac on the eighth day. Isaac grew, and on the day, he was weaned, Abraham made a great feast.

But Sarah saw Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the Egyptian woman, making mockery. Sarah said to her husband, “Cast out this handmaid and her son, for the son shall not share the inheritance with our son, Isaac.”

But the matter was very displeasing in the eyes of Abraham because of his son. And God said to Abraham, “Let it not be evil in your eyes because of the lad and your handmaid. Harken to Sarah’s wishes, for in Isaac shall be your seed. And also, for the son of the handmaid, I will make a nation, for he is your seed.”

Abraham rose early in the morning, took bread and water and gave it to Hagar and Ishmael and sent them away. Hagar lost her way in the wilderness of Beer Sheva and the water came to an end, and she threw the child under a shrub. She sat away from him, saying “Let me not look upon the death of the child.” Then she cried.

But God heard the voice of the lad, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said, “What ails you, Hagar? Do not be afraid! For God has already heard the voice of the lad. Arise, pick him up and strengthen your hand upon him for I will make him a great nation.” And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. God was with the lad and he grew up and became a master archer.

And it came to pass that God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham.”

“Here I am,” Abraham responded.

God said, “Take, I beg of you, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and get yourself to the land of Moriah and offer him on one of the mountains.”

So, Abraham did as he was told, journeying with his wood for the offering and with his son and his servants to the place that God had told him. On the third day, Abraham and Isaac left the servants and took the wood for the offering, some fire and a knife. So they went, both of them, together.

Isaac spoke to his father, Abraham, "My father!"

Abraham said, "Here I am, my son."

"Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?" asked Isaac.

"God will see that we have a lamb for the offering, my son." They came to the place of which God had spoken, and Abraham built the altar and arranged the wood and bound Isaac, his son, and placed him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. And an angel of God called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am!" said Abraham. And God said, "Do not stretch your hand toward the lad, nor do the slightest thing to him, for now I know that you are God-fearing and did not withhold from Me."

Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and lo! There was a ram caught in the hedge. Abraham took the ram and offered it up as an offering in place of his son. Abraham named this place, "God sees."

An angel of God called to Abraham a second time out of heaven and said, "By Myself have I sworn, says God, because you have done this thing and not withheld from Me your son, your only son, that I will bless you without fail, and without fail multiply your descendants as the stars in heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore, and your seed shall inherit the gate of its enemies. And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves through your seed, as a consequence of your having hearkened to My voice."

Then Abraham and Isaac and the servants returned to Beer Sheva.

## **Parashat Vayera Discussion Questions**

- 1. Why does Abraham argue with God over the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah, but not over sending Hagar and Ishmael away or the notion of using his son Isaac as an offering? Do you ever argue with God? How?**
- 2. When Hagar and Ishmael are sent away by Abraham, why does he only give them bread and water? What would you have done in the same situation?**
- 3. God appears to Abimelekh in a dream. Has God ever appeared to you in a dream? In what way?**
- 4. There are many angels of God in this portion. What exactly is an angel of God? Have you ever met an angel of God? When?**

## **Haftarah for Vayera**

### **2 Kings 4:1-37**

## ***The prophet Elisha performs two miracles.***

This week's Haftarah contains two stories about the prophet Elisha, a protégé of Elijah. In the first story an unnamed woman, traditionally identified as the wife of Obadiah, one of the minor prophets, comes to Elisha with a complaint. Her husband has died, and she is so destitute without him that her children are about to be taken away from her to be sold as slaves.

Elisha asks her if she has anything of value in her house, and she replies that all she has is a single jug of oil. Elisha then instructs her to borrow as many vessels as she can from her neighbors. Then, he tells her to pour the oil from her vessel into the other ones. Miraculously, the oil does not run out, ultimately lasting long enough to fill all the borrowed jugs. She returns to Elisha, who tells her, "Go sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your children can live on the rest."

### **The Shunamite Woman**

Elisha frequently visited Shunem, a city in the tribal territory of Issachar. Whenever Elisha was there, he and his servant Gehazi were hosted by a married Shunamite woman, who fed them and gave them a special room in which to sleep. One day Elisha asks how he can reward the woman.

She responds by saying that she does not want any kind of public recognition. But because she was childless, Elisha says, "At this season next year, you will be embracing a son." The woman responds with doubt, telling Elisha not to delude or disappoint her. However, his prophecy comes true in the very next sentence when she is blessed with a son.

Years later, while out in the fields with his father, the boy cries out, "My head! My head!" He is taken back to his mother who holds him on her lap as he dies. She lays him on a bed and immediately goes out to bring Elisha to her child. When she reaches the prophet, she falls at his feet.

The woman does not tell Elisha what happened to her son. Instead, she asks, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn't I say, 'Don't mislead me?'" Elisha understands what has occurred and sends Gehazi ahead with his walking stick and instructions to lay the staff on top of the boy's face. The effort to save the boy is unsuccessful.

### **The Second Miracle**

When Elisha and the boy's mother arrive at the house, the boy is still dead, his body lying on a couch. Elisha closes himself in a room with the boy and prays to God. Then he lies on top of the boy, putting "his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands, as he bent over him."

The boy's body begins to warm. Elisha gets up, walks around, and lies on top of the boy again. The boy sneezes seven times and opens his eyes, revived. Elisha summons the boy's mother who falls at Elisha's feet again and then leaves with her son.

## **Connection to Vayera**

Many of the themes in Parashat Vayera also appear in the Haftarah. *Hakhnasat orhim*, welcoming guests, is a prominent feature in both Vayera and in the stories of Elisha's miracles. In both stories, a messenger of God comes to a childless woman (Sarah and the Shunamite woman) and tells her that she will soon give birth. Both messages are skeptically received, but both women ultimately have sons.

Finally, and perhaps most poignantly, both the Torah portion and the haftarah close with stories of sons who miraculously survive what would otherwise be a deadly experience. Isaac is almost sacrificed by his father on top of Mount Moriah but is saved at the last minute by an angel and a strategically placed ram. The Shunamite boy dies but is revived by a prophet and his prayer.



## ***From the Desk of Rabbi Philip Hammond. Ph.D.***

Rabbi Hammond can be contacted at – [Philip@etz-chayim.org](mailto:Philip@etz-chayim.org)

### **LIFE IS WHAT IT IS??**

### **WHAT NEXT?**

As I consider the direction our communities are heading, I wonder what the next life changing event or decisions made by our governments will be. There is little doubt if we compare our current behaviours and attitudes against biblical values and guidance we are poles apart. Our moral compass is broken, and it can no longer be relied upon to create loving lasting relationships. Turn on the TV, open a magazine, plug in your computer, go to the movies, sit in on a university lecture, view school curriculums and it soon becomes evident how far we have drifted from biblical values. Personally, I am very disturbed by the increasing animosity against biblical values within the general public. It is also disturbing what is replacing these biblical values. It is “fascinating” to witness the general increase in support of Islam by those who aggressively oppose Christianity and Judaism. It makes no sense for someone who hates the Judeo-Christian world view to embrace an Islamic world view. All the arguments these people bring against such a world view are to be found within Islam. Take for instance the “feminist” movement. They hate with a passion the values of the conservative Judeo-Christian world view but are often found embracing the tenets of Islam. When was the last time someone who followed the Judeo-Christian world view guilty of female genital mutilation.

How many women and girls are killed within families who hold to a Judeo-Christian world view in the name of “family honour”? Ask these same questions regards Islam and the answers are totally different. The list of atrocities committed through adherence to fundamental Islam is long and shameful. For any feminist to choose Islam as a bed fellow is mind boggling. Any casual reading of Islamic texts and commentary will quickly expose the held belief that women are “second class” citizens at best. The elite leftist is also sympathetic to the values of Islam. Why would this be the case? How many Islamists are concerned about the environment? How many Islamists are compassionate when it comes to individual choice?

It appears that HaShem is blinding the eyes of many. The only way one can make sense of this is to understand the spiritual side of these issues. Our Western governments are making decisions that are harming the culture and future of their citizens. Once again it is only when you understand the spiritual elements of these matters that you can make some sense of their decisions. Take Sweden for instance, a country thought to be one of freedom and harmony. It is now reported that ambulance workers in Sweden are asking for gas masks and bullet proof vests to protect them from attacks in certain districts. Sweden is not the only country where governments refuse to accept the fact that “no go zones” not only exist but are on the increase. Instead of addressing these issues and protecting the historical culture of the country, governments are submitting to the demands of those who wish to change and harm these historical cultures.

Each and every day we find a change in rule of law, brought about by our governments that take us further and further away from the stability of biblical values. I am no longer surprised at decisions made by those in power no matter how foolish and harmful they are. Those that hold to a biblical world view are decreasing and those who want to destroy the biblical world view are increasing. Even the very institutions that should be defending a biblical world view are caving into the demands of those who are bent on destroying it.

What next, we may well ask. Well, I cannot answer that question, but I am not optimistic in the short term. I am persuaded our world will continue to move further and further away from biblical values, with the expected results following.

I can only encourage people to explore the common sense and values found within the bible and seek the hand of HaShem to hold and protect you through these uncertain times. Rest assured HaShem will see His will done. It is only a matter of when, not if. Challenges lie ahead as they have always done, sides must be chosen. What choices you make is your responsibility. Choose wisely and understand the consequences of your choice.

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever. Psalm 111:10 [JPS]*

# ***Insights into Judaism***



## **George Washington and the Jews**

### ***His famous letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport.***

***This letter, written by George Washington in 1790, is a response to Moses Seixas, warden of the Touro Synagogue in Newport. In it, Washington addresses the tolerance and freedom of religion in the newly established nation:***

Gentlemen.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess a like liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree,

and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

**G. Washington**



## How to Pray for Happiness

***The prayer Eilu Devarim reflects the seeming paradox that focusing on others more than ourselves makes us happier.***

Should we pray for happiness? On the face it, of course we should. Who doesn't want to be happy?

But something about word "happiness" strikes Jews in the wrong way. There's the old joke about the Jewish telegram: "Start worrying...details to follow." Our default is often guilt rather than happiness. It is as if we have been programmed to see anxiety around every corner, to be more comfortable in the familiar "oy" over the risky "joy."

Happiness is also an odd English word. It comes from the Middle English *hap*, as in happenstance and haphazard. This origin suggests that a happy life is a result of randomness and luck. Prayer has nothing to do with it.

In our consumerist culture, happiness is also frequently confused with pleasure, and praying for pleasure can feel self-indulgent. But happiness and pleasure are different.

Pleasure is short-term, like getting a massage or eating a sumptuous meal. Happiness is long-lasting. It is flourishing, which is a word preferred by the founder of the scientific study of happiness, Professor Martin Seligman. According to Seligman, flourishing contains five key components: positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and accomplishment. An easy way to remember them is the acronym PERMA.

The Jewish happiness prayer, as we will see below, promotes flourishing. It is the happiness experienced through a life of meaning and purpose.

What is the happiness prayer? It is a series of verses from the Mishnah we recite as part of the morning worship service. It is found in many prayer books as part of the traditional series of morning blessings.

The prayer begins with the words Eilu Devarim (“These are the Words”). The Hebrew word *devarim* also means actions or deeds. So the happiness prayer is a series of words describing actions that promote happiness.

***Read the text of the prayer in Hebrew here.***

The prayer contains ten actions in total, which I have translated as follows:

**These are the deeds with infinite benefits. A person enjoys their fruit in this world, and in the world to come. Guide me in embracing these sacred practices:**

**Honor those who gave me life / Practice kindness / Learn Constantly / Invite others into my home / Be there when others need me / Celebrate life’s sacred moments / Support others during times of loss / Pray with intention / Forgive those who hurt me and seek forgiveness where I have others / Commit to constant growth.**

This translation is not literal. For a few of the practices, I chose to convey the value expressed in the specific practice itself. For example, the Hebrew phrase that literally means “provide for a bride” I have rendered as “celebrating life’s sacred moments.” Providing for a bride reflects the importance of marking sacred moments with ritual, and these moments are not limited to weddings. Today they include anniversaries, baby naming, even graduations. Finding ways to participate in and create communal celebrations around those life events makes us happier.

The academic discipline of positive psychology has reinforced the message of the happiness prayer. Indeed, even though the rabbis who wrote this prayer were not familiar with positive psychology, their teachings intuit it. The actions this prayer calls upon us to take fit squarely within the PERMA framework noted earlier.

For example, celebrating life’s sacred moments incorporates positive emotions, relationships, and meaning. Praying with intention is a act of engagement, and prayer itself encompasses a worldview that life has meaning. Knowing how to pray — the words, the rhythm, the melodies — gives us a feeling of accomplishment. When we look at the Eilu Devarim prayer as a guide to happiness, we can see each of its practices as an expression of some aspect of PERMA.

Saying the prayer also promotes happiness in other ways. First, it pushes us outside of ourselves. Almost all of the ten practices involve other people. Inviting others into our lives, practicing kindness, and comforting mourners, are just the most direct examples. The rabbis understood the seeming paradox that focusing on others more than us makes us happier. As Victor Frankl put, “the door to happiness opens outward.”

Frankl's observation helps us see a second source of happiness in this prayer. It roots us in a religious worldview. Its opening verses remind us that we are reading more than a list of good deeds. They are a series of practices that echo through eternity. We feel their effects in this world and in the world to come.

Put differently, embracing a religious worldview makes us happier. We can speculate on why this is true. But I suspect part of the reason is that faith is a mindset that pushes us — in some cases, even obliges us — to do things that may not feel great in the short term, but that enhance our lives in the long term. These are the things we do that we can look back on a year later and feel happy to have done.

Every year, I fast on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. To do so is a commandment found in the Torah and has been a Jewish tradition for more than 4,000 years. Since I am working all day — delivering sermons and leading my congregation in eight hours of prayer — fasting is the last thing I want to do. Yet it enhances my experience of the day and my connection to others. It does not feel pleasurable in the moment. But when I look back, I know I experienced the power of the day.

This is the kind of commitment faith has always nurtured, and ignoring the role of faith in the search for happiness is like going to search for a treasure and throwing away an old map leading directly to it. The Eilu Devarim prayer is such a map. May it guide us on our journey.

**עֲבָרִי - Hebrew**

**Word (s) of the Week**

**Outside / חוץ**

**Pronounced: CHOOTZ**

**Israelis traveling abroad say they are going to *chul*, an acronym for *chutz la'aretz*, meaning "outside of the land [of Israel]."**



## ***A Taste of Jewish Humor***

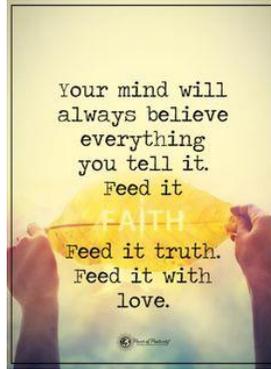
### **A Date to Remember**

Moshe and Sadie, both in their seventies, are driving to the beach when they decide to stop at a nice restaurant for a bite to eat. After finishing their meal, they get back into their car and continue their journey. But 15 minutes after leaving, Sadie suddenly says, "Moshe, you've got to turn around and go back to the restaurant. I left my glasses on the table."

"I don't believe it," Moshe shouts angrily at her, "you silly old woman! You'll forget your head one day."

Moshe turns the car around and starts driving. All the way there, he's grumpy and makes many snide comments like, "Your memory is getting really bad," and "Because of you, we won't make it to the mountain in time to see the sunset." The more he rebukes Sadie, the more agitated he becomes, and he doesn't let up for the entire drive back to the restaurant.

**To Sadie's relief, they finally arrive back at the restaurant. As she gets out of the car and hurries inside to retrieve her glasses, Moshe yells to her, "And while you're in there, Sadie, you might as well get my hat. I left it in the cloakroom."**



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

# **Hot Dogs Are the Greatest American Jewish Food. Here's Why.**

***American hot dogs are a true immigrant success story.***

American Jewish food is most typically defined as pastrami sandwiches, chocolate babka, or bagels and lox. But I am here to argue that the greatest American Jewish food may actually be the humble hot dog. No dish better embodies the totality of the American Jewish experience.

What's that you say? You didn't know that hot dogs were a Jewish food? Well, that's part of the story, too.

Sausages of many varieties have existed since antiquity. The closest relatives of the hot dog are the frankfurter and the wiener, both American terms based on their cities of origin (Frankfurt and Vienna respectively). So, what differentiates a hot dog from other sausages? The story begins in 19<sup>th</sup> century New York, with two German-Jewish immigrants.

In 1870, Charles Feltman sold Frankfurt-style pork-and-beef sausages out of a pushcart in Coney Island, Brooklyn. Sausages not being the neatest street food, Feltman inserted them into soft buns. This innovative sausage/bun combo grew to be known as a hot dog (though Feltman called them Coney Island Red Hots).

Two years later, Isaac Gellis opened a kosher butcher shop on Manhattan's Lower East Side. He soon began selling all-beef versions of German-style sausages. Beef hot dogs grew into an all-purpose replacement for pork products in kosher homes, leading to such classic dishes as Franks & Beans or split pea soup with hot dogs. Though unknown whether Gellis was the originator of this important shift, he certainly became one of the most successful purveyors.

Like American Jews, the hot dog was an immigrant itself that quickly changed and adapted to life in the U.S. As American Jewry further integrated into society, the hot dog followed.

In 1916, Polish-Jewish immigrant Nathan Handwerker opened a hotdog stand to compete with Charles Feltman, his former employer. Feltman's had grown into a large sit-down restaurant, and Handwerker charged half the price by making his eatery a "grab joint." (The term fast food hadn't yet been invented, but it was arguably Handwerker who created that ultra-American culinary institution.)

Nathan's Famous conquered the hot dog world. Like so many of his American Jewish contemporaries, Handwerker succeeded via entrepreneurship and hard work. His innovative marketing stunts included hiring people to eat his hot dogs while dressed as doctors, overcoming public fears about low-quality ingredients. While his all-beef dogs were not made with kosher meat, he called them "kosher-style," thus underscoring that they contained no horse meat. Gross.

The "kosher-style" moniker was another American invention. American Jewish history, in part, is the story of a secular populace that embraced Jewish culture while rejecting traditional religious practices. All-beef hotdogs with Ashkenazi-style spicing yet made from meat that was not traditionally slaughtered or "kosher", sum up the new Judaism of Handwerker and his contemporaries.

Furthermore, American Jewry came of age alongside the industrial food industry. The hot dog also highlights the explosive growth of the kosher supervision industry ("industrial kashrut").

Hebrew National began producing hot dogs in 1905. Their production methods met higher standards than were required by law, leading to their famous advertising slogan, "We Answer to a Higher Authority."

While the majority of Americans may be surprised to hear this, Hebrew National's self-supervised kosher-ness was not actually accepted by more stringent

Orthodox and even Conservative Jews at the time. But non-Jews, believing kosher dogs were inherently better, became the company's primary market. Eventually, Hebrew National received the more established Triangle-K kashrut supervision, convincing the Conservative Movement to accept their products. Most Orthodox Jews, however, still don't accept these hot dogs as kosher.

But over the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America, the Orthodox community has gained prominence and their opinions, and food preferences, hold more weight in the food industry.

The community's stricter kashrut demands, and sizable purchasing power created a viable market, and glatt kosher hot dogs hit the scene. Abeles & Heymann, in business since 1954, was purchased in 1997 by current owner Seth Leavitt. Meeting the demands of the Orthodox community's increasingly sophisticated palate, their hot dogs are gluten-free with no filler. Recently, they've begun producing a line of uncured sausages, and the first glatt hot dogs using collagen casing.

Glatt kosher dogs can now be purchased in nearly thirty different sports arenas and stadiums. American Jews have successfully integrated into their society more than any other in history. So too, the hot dog has transcended its humble New York Jewish immigrant roots to enter the pantheon of true American icons. So, when you bite into your hot dog this summer, you are really getting a bite of American Jewish history, and the great American Jewish food.

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