



TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 12-2-23 VAYISHLACH

Ministry News

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

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

Donate



Tree of Life Messianic Ministries is a 501 C-3 non-profit. To donate go to etz-chayim.org and click on the PayPal or Venmo Link.

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

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

HOME GROUPS, CONGREGATIONS AND PEOPLE SEEKING FELLOWSHIP...

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

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

There is a Home Group in Las Cruces. For more information email tolmm@etz-chayim.org.

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

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

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

General News

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

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

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

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

WE HAVE 8 PRISON AFFILIATES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

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



Rabbi Mordecai Silver tolmm@etz-chayim.org

MESSAGE FOR 12-2-23 VAYISHLACH

VaYishlach – And he sent

Genesis 32:3-36:43

Obadiah 1:1-21

Hebrews 11:11-20

Genesis 32:29

He said, “No longer will it be said that your name is Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome.”

The name Israel is a combination of Isra=to prevail and el=God.

The Hebrew word for Divine in this verse is Elohim or the plural form of God.

Jacob was struggling with God and himself and he finally overcame his human nature and entered a new phase of his life in that he accepted God and his plan for his life.

A parable: A king once granted all his subjects the opportunity to come before him with requests. Every day the king set aside one hour for the audience with his

subjects. Appointments were made for months in advance. Each person was given three minutes to beseech the king for his needs. Many requests were indeed granted. One man, whom we will call Mr. So and So, was given an appointment for three months in advance. That was ample time to prepare just the right words, which needed to be said in not one second more than three minutes.

As time went by, Mr. So and So compiled a large list of things he would read before the king. He was quite proud of himself, and he was making plans about what he would do with his newfound fortune. After all," Mr. So and So reasoned, "I have been a loyal and faithful subject for many years."

On the appointed day Mr. So and So made his way to the palace. He was ushered into the king's chambers. He bowed and greeted the king. He took out his list and began reading. "You expect all of those things?" asked the king. "Yes, your highness." "Why?" asked the king. "Because I have been a loyal and faithful subject, your highness." "And for that I owe you something. Is that what you are saying?" "Yes, your highness," replied Mr. So, and So. "Remove this man, and let it suffice for his reward that I let him go on being my loyal and faithful subject," exclaimed the king angrily. "And don't come back here wasting my time with your foolish expectations."

If we can have a connection with the Creator of the universe; if He is willing to listen to us, how should we best make use of the opportunity we have to beseech Him? What is the attitude we should have in prayer?

Hebrews 11:17-19

*By trusting, Avraham, when he was put to the test, offered up Yitzchak as a sacrifice. Yes, he offered up his only son, he who had received the promises, to whom it had been said, "What is called your seed will be in Yitzchak. **For he had concluded that God could even raise people from the dead! And, figuratively speaking, he did so receive him.***

The student of Scripture considers his time in prayer a very special time. Prayer is called "the fruit of the day". This means that standing face to face with God, praising Him, thanking Him, and recognizing His ability to grant us our requests is not just a means, but a noble end in itself. The sweetness of the fruit is the attitude we manifest in requesting humbly, and not demanding our needs.

And because we come before Him in faith, this is what He is going to do.

Obadiah 1:21

And saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge the Mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord's.

The Hebrew word for saviors is Mosheim, which is a plural form. It speaks of God's anointed which here speaks of the Messiah and His army who will fight the final battle spoken of in the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 19:11-16

Then I saw heaven opened, and there before me was a white horse. Sitting on it was the one called Faithful and True, and it is in righteousness that He passes judgement and goes to battle. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and on His head were many royal crowns. And He had a name written which no one knew but Himself. He was wearing a robe that had been soaked in blood, and the name by which He is called is, "The Word of God". The armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses. And out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down nations – "He will rule them with a staff of iron." It is He who treads the winepress from which flows the wine of the furious rage of Adonai, God of heaven's armies. And on His robe and on His thigh, he has a name written: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords".

logos {log'-os} a word, uttered by a living voice, embodies a conception or idea
3) In John, denotes the essential Word of God, Yeshua the Messiah, the personal wisdom and power in union with God, his minister in creation and government of the universe, the cause of all the world's life both physical and ethical, which for the procurement of man's salvation put on human nature in the person of Yeshua the Messiah, the second person in the Godhead, and shone forth from His words and deeds. ++++ A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus first used the term Logos around 600 B.C. to designate the divine reason or plan which coordinates a changing universe. This word was well suited to John's purpose in John 1.

The Word of God is His anointed One, the Moshiach Y'shua, God's chosen means of salvation. In faith we come to Him for salvation. In faith we come to Him in prayer. And by faith we put our lives in His hands and Scripture tells us that in

the end He will answer that faith and our prayers because He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

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 stepped themselves in Jewish teachings. One does not come out of either traditional Judaism or Christianity and come into the Messianic walk, and then going back, or into, traditional Judaism. *There are many good things in Judaism but denying Yeshua as Messiah is not one of them.* Berachot (Blessings), Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph.D., and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D.

A TRADITIONAL JEWISH PARASHAH AND HAFTARAH COMMENTARY



Parashat Vayishlach: Summary

Genesis/Bereisheet 32:4-36.43

Many years after his marriages to Rachel and Leah, Jacob received word from God that it was time to return home. Jacob sent messengers ahead to meet his brother Esau. "Tell him that his servant Jacob has been with Laban until now. Tell him that I have acquired herds and flocks and servants. Tell him I seek favor in his eyes."

The messengers soon returned. "Your brother is coming to meet you, but there are 400 men with him."

Gifts for Esau

Jacob was very much afraid of his brother (because Jacob had deceived their father into giving him the special first-born blessing that was meant for Esau). So Jacob divided his camp saying, "If Esau strikes down one camp, the other will escape."

Thereupon Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, God who says to me to return to my country and that the Almighty will do good to me. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, for I fear he shall kill me and my family, even though you promised to make my descendants like sand in the sea."

That night Jacob set aside gifts for Esau from his herds and property. He instructed his servants to go one by one, with space in between, to present Esau with these gifts.

Jacob Wrestles with God's Angel

While the servants were bringing Jacob's gifts to Esau, Jacob moved his wife and children to yet another camp. Jacob was left alone in camp and someone wrestled with him until the break of day. When the one that wrestled with Jacob saw that it was impossible to win, that one touched the upper joint of Jacob's thigh and it was dislocated.

Then the one that was fighting against Jacob said, "Let me go for day is breaking."

But Jacob responded, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

"What is your name?" asked the wrestler.

"Jacob."

"Then your name shall no longer be Jacob but Israel, for in prevailing in this fight you have become the commanding power before God and men."

The one that wrestled Jacob would not give a name, but did bless Jacob. Jacob then named the place Peniel: "For I have seen the Divine face to face and my character has remained intact." Then Jacob limped away.

Jacob Encounters Esau

Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked and lo! Esau was coming with 400 men. Jacob immediately lined up his families: the maidservants and their children, followed by Leah and their children, and then Rachel and Joseph at the end. Then Jacob went ahead of them and bowed to the ground seven times until he came close to his brother. Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, fell upon his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

After Jacob's families introduced themselves with bows, Esau turned to Jacob. "I received your gifts, but I have plenty. Keep them."

"But they were a tribute to you from my hand. I have looked up to your face as judge, and you have accepted me with kindness. Please take my blessing, which was brought to you because God has favored me with it and then, I have everything."

Esau took it, then offered to escort Jacob to his city where he lived.

Jacob chose instead to follow the natural pace of his travel. Jacob next journeyed to Sukkoth and built booths for his property. He then went to a nearby city and bought some land from the sons of Hamor so he could build an altar. Upon the memorial, Jacob proclaimed, "God is the God of Israel."

The Rape of Dinah

Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob, went to explore the area.

Shekhem, the son of Hamor the Hivvite, the prince in the land, saw Dinah, took her and raped her. But his soul clung to Dinah and he loved the girl and he asked his father to get her for him as a wife. Jacob and all the men heard that Dinah had been defiled and their hearts were filled with sorrow and anger.

Soon, the father of Shekhem approached Jacob and asked for permission for Dinah to marry his son. He offered a large dowry.

Shimon and Levi Lead a Massacre

The sons of Jacob spoke for their father, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who has foreskin, for that is a disgrace to us. However, if you want to circumcise your men, then we will become one people. But if you choose not to circumcise, we will take Dinah and go."

Now, the son and the father and the rest of the men became circumcised. On the third day when the males were in pain, the two brothers of Dinah, Shimon and Levi, came and killed all the males of that city, including the man who raped their sister. Then they took the property of the people and took all the women and children captive.

But Jacob said to Shimon and Levi, "You have brought me trouble. You discredit me among the people who live in Canaan. They will gather together and strike against us."

Later, God said to Jacob, "Go to Beth-el and live there and make an altar to God."

Therein, Jacob had all the captives purify themselves, change their clothes and bring him their foreign gods. Jacob buried these gods under the oak tree in the city of the rape.

Rachel Dies During Childbirth

Jacob's people then went to Beth-el, where he wrestled that night. God appeared to Jacob and God blessed him. "Your name shall no more be Jacob, but Israel. I am God, the All-sufficing. Be fruitful and multiply, and kings shall come from your loins. And the land I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give to you." Jacob then erected a memorial there.

Now Rachel was pregnant. On their journey, she had difficulty giving birth. The midwife said to her, "Do not be afraid, for this one, too, is a son for you." When her soul departed in death, she named him Ben-oni, but Jacob named him Benjamin. They buried Rachel with a tombstone.

Jacob journeyed to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. Isaac then died at one hundred and eighty years with his sons, Esau and Jacob, burying him.

Esau took his family and his properties to another land, away from his brother Jacob, for their wealth was too great for them to dwell together.

Parashat Vayishlach Discussion Questions

- 1. How did Jacob ask forgiveness from his brother? How do you ask forgiveness from someone?**
- 2. Why do you think Esau forgave Jacob? How do you forgive someone?**
- 3. With whom did Jacob wrestle?**
- 4. What is the significance of Jacob having his name changed to Israel? If you could change your name, what would you change it to and why?**

Haftarah for Vayishlach

The fate of the Edomites.

The Haftarah for Vayishlach is the entire book of Obadiah, the shortest book in the Bible, clocking in at only 21 verses in a single chapter.

Who Was Obadiah?

According to rabbinic tradition, Obadiah was a convert to Judaism from Edom and a servant in the court of Ahab and Jezebel, the king and queen of Israel. Though it's not clear exactly when he lived, his prophecy is mainly concerned with how the Edomites mistreated the Israelites, which was likely in the aftermath of the destruction of the first Temple.

The Edomites lived south of Jerusalem and probably took advantage of an already downtrodden nation. As a result, Obadiah predicts that the Edomites will suffer greatly in punishment for their cruelty.

The Edomites were a large and powerful nation, but Obadiah warns, "Should you nest as high as the eagle, Should your nest be lodged among the stars, Even from there I will pull you down—declares the Lord" (1:4). There will be no escape from the punishment that God will bring upon the nation of Edom, a nation which sprung from Esau, the twin brother of Jacob.

In several places Obadiah refers to the progenitors of both groups, emphasizing that Esau's descendants, the Edomites, will be thoroughly beaten by the Israelites who are descendants of Jacob. He says, "The House of Jacob shall be fire, And the House of Joseph flame, And the house of Esau shall be straw; They shall burn it and devour it, And no survivor shall be left of the house of Esau—for the Lord has spoken" (1:18).

Connection to Parashat Vayishlach

In Parshat Toldot, after Esau receives the lesser blessing from his father, he vows to kill his twin brother. In Vayishlach, Jacob worries that this vow is still in place, and is so concerned that his brother will attack him and his family that he splits them up into two groups, thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp might yet escape (32:9).

Though Esau does not, in the end, attack Jacob and his family, his descendants (the Edomites) torture and hurt the Israelites both in body and spirit. However, just as Jacob emerged victorious in his confrontations with Esau, Obadiah is confident that so will the Israelites.

The final verse of the haftarah, "For liberators shall march upon Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esau; and dominion shall be the Lord's," is recited daily in the morning service at the conclusion of the recitation of the Song of the Sea, just before Yishtabah.



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

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

Clever or Wise – this is the question

Clever or Wise – this is the question...

- Making assumptions can be dangerous- yet perhaps one could be forgiven for ASSUMING people would seek wisdom...
- It would appear such an assumption is wrong. People seek to be clever not wise!
- Make no mistake there is a big difference between wisdom and being clever. Wisdom comes from YHVH - cleverness comes from a variety of other sources.
- Some may reject the following statement, "all wisdom comes from YHVH". This in no way negates the fact that people can be very clever in and of themselves, but this human cleverness is far removed from the wisdom of The Almighty.
- We witness just how clever people have become. Never have there been more educational institutions in the world. Technology has never been more advanced than what it is at present. Communication is at a level never imagined 100 yrs ago. We have become so clever we have deceived ourselves in believing that not only do we no longer need YHVH, but He is just a figment of imagination at best.
- Our communities are bereft of the wisdom of YHVH, instead relying on the cleverness of humans. People have deceived themselves into believing that we no longer require the wisdom of YHVH, in fact most see this wisdom as foolishness and reject any association with it.

Clever or Wise...

- This has had and is having a devastating impact on our lives. Make no mistake, deception is toxic, and leads to deadly sicknesses. This belief that YHVH has nothing to offer us is destroying us and there is testimony of this truth on a daily basis.
- Sadly, this deadly sickness has infected the Houses of God or those who claim to be Houses of God. Many have a world view that mirrors the unbeliever instead of our Saviour Yeshua.
- Kind of reminds of something Paul wrote many years ago –Read: [Romans 1:16 -32](#)
- Written thousands of years ago, yet so appropriate to what we witness this very hour. The above is the result of people being **clever** not **wise**.
- Nothing has changed since the serpent came to Chava/Eve with his clever persuasions. The scene described in Genesis is the perfect picture of what happens when people become clever.
- [Genesis 3:1-6](#)
- Could we say, up until this point Adam and Eve had the wisdom of YHVH – None the less, it was when they decided to become “clever” that death entered their lives. This is such an important lesson for us to learn.
- Enter Free choice...

Clever or Wise...

- In making choices [which we all do] either turns out for the good or bad. Biblical choices end in blessings or curses! If we choose to follow the instructions of HaShem then that choice will be blessed. On the other hand if we choose to reject the instructions of HaShem then that choice will end in a curse.
- **28 “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Deuteronomy 28:1-2 [ESV]**
- **15 “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Deuteronomy 28:15 [ESV]...**

Clever or Wise...

- I encourage you to take the time to view the list of blessings and curses...
- Not sure about you, but I believe the wise would choose the blessings. Great News: You can choose! You can choose to employ the wisdom of YHVH and follow His instructions for your lives, thus receiving future blessings. On the other hand you can choose to be clever and employ your own "smarts" reject the Torah and receive the curses. The choice is really yours to make.
- Most peoples are choosing to be clever over wise. Certainly our so-called leaders are choosing to be clever over wise, thus causing havoc, confusion, and a multitude or curses for people everywhere.
- Tragically many so-called bible leaders, and teachers continue to stray away from the precious instructions of YHVH, choosing to be clever over wise. This too can only end in current, and future biblical curses.

Clever or Wise...

- Something that is often overlooked is the fact it is YHVH who is in total control of the curses as well as the blessings. People often blame the devil when things go astray, but it is usually due to the choices we make.
- Remember we occupy a fallen world, a world that is not our home, a world that must end in it's current state – Baruch HaSheM...
- This current world cannot be a paradise for God's people. It is in the hands of the clever people. Notice they seek, and search for ways to live forever... yet in their cleverness they show no wisdom in turning to the only One who can deliver eternal life...
- You may be the most clever person in the world, but unless you put away your cleverness and take up the wisdom of YHVH, it will all end in naught.
- "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight" Isaiah 5:21 [NASB]
- "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.'" 1Corinthians 1:19 [NASB]

Clever or Wise...

- We must be wise in our choices if we are to improve our lives. We cannot have any reliance on our cleverness as this is mostly shrouded in deceit, resulting in a toxic cocktail of misery.
- Would it not be wonderful for us to truthfully utter the following words?
- “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Yeshua HaMoshiach, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty”. 2Peter 1:16 [NASB]
- If we choose to be wise in the choices we make – we can look forward to:
 - ¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these dressed in white robes, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.”¹⁴ Then he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white^[bl] in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His Temple. The One seated on the throne will shelter them.¹⁶ They shall never again go hungry, nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them and guide them to springs of living water, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”
Revelation 7:13 -17

Clever or Wise...

- Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”
- Truly there is no God...

Insights into Judaism



Body and Soul

Indispensable partners for doing life's sacred work

Judaism teaches that the body and soul are separate yet indivisible partners in human life. Rather than imprisoning or corrupting the soul, the body is a God-given tool for doing sacred work in the world. It requires protection, care, and respect, because it is holy.

Ancient Israelite Concepts of Soul

The Bible gives few clues to the ancient Israelite idea of the soul or spirit. Three words which over time developed the meaning of “soul” are present in Tanach: *Neshamah*, *Nefesh*, and *Ruach*. Tracing the evolution of these terms gives us some idea of the ancient Israelites’ beliefs regarding the soul.

In the Creation story, we read of God blowing a “breath of life” into the man of earth and dust ([Genesis 2:7](#)). The word used here, *neshamah*, is a form of the Hebrew root indicating breath. Although this word later becomes associated with the soul, here it only describes the element that animates a body. This animating element is not, in early biblical tradition, separate from the body in life, nor does it possess any personality.

Similarly, *ruah* is the animating force from God. Most often used as “wind,” *ruah* may also be used to mean “breath.” “God said, ‘My breath [*ruhi*] will not govern man forever, since he is flesh...’” ([Genesis 6:3](#)). Here, we see the added element of transience: The *ruah* ends its association with the mortal body at death.

The word *nefesh* is often used to mean “person” or “living being”. In the Torah, however, animals may also possess this life force—a “*nefesh behemah*.” The term *nefesh* is particularly associated with blood, as in “the life [*nefesh*] of the flesh is in the blood” ([Leviticus 17:11](#)).

Nefesh does reflect a personal dimension. It may be used in the sense of “self” (including “himself”). *Nefesh* is also associated with personal desire or attraction. One’s *nefesh* may cleave to someone (as in the case of Shehem’s yearning for Dinah, Jacob’s daughter), or to evil

(see [Proverbs 21:10](#)). In a later example of this usage, a person of considerable appetite is called “*ba’al* [possessor of] *nefesh*” ([Proverbs 23:2](#)). In all of these usages, the *nefesh* is connected to the body and its material wants.

In later books of the Bible, the soul (using all three terms) is mentioned apart from the body and as more than just an animating spirit. This subtle evolution of meaning reflects the growth of the idea of what we call the soul—the unique, everlasting, intangible part of a person. In the stunning poem that serves as the centerpiece of the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, the death of a person is described as occurring when “... the dust returns to the ground where it had been and the *ruah* returns to the God who had given it” (12:7). While previously we saw the life-breath leaving the body at death, here we see it as a separate entity that returns to God, rather than simply disappearing.

Pure in Body & Soul

Ancient Jews displayed an awareness of how influential non-Jewish philosophers regarded the soul. For example, the Greek Jew Philo tried to use the three words associated with spirit—*neshamah*, *nefesh*, *ruah*—to support Plato’s claim that the soul has three parts. The Sages of the Talmud, however, were not as keen on many of these foreign ideas. Although the Rabbis also saw human beings as composed of body and soul, they generally rejected the Greeks’ and Gnostics’ belief that the earthly body imprisons the soul.

Instead, literature of the Talmudic period gives us images of body and soul in harmony. “Just as the Holy One of Blessing fills the world, so does the soul [*neshamah*] fill the body. Just as the Holy One of Blessing sees but cannot be seen, so does the soul see but cannot be seen... Just as the Holy One of Blessing is pure, so is the soul pure” ([Berakhot 10a](#)).

In Midrash Leviticus Rabbah, we read that the soul is a guest in the body and that care of the body is deemed a commandment by the great sage Hillel the Elder, who cited the idea in the Creation story that God made the human in the divine image. In the medieval period, Rabbeinu Bahya points out that even bodily fluids (menstrual blood, semen, and fluid from certain skin eruptions) considered impure (*tamei*) are only deemed such *after* they have left the human body.

In the mind of the Sages, sin is not the product of an unruly body asserting itself over a pure soul; on the contrary, the body and soul are seen in a partnership of equal responsibility for actions, in this life as well as the next.

This concept is illustrated in the following Talmudic anecdote, from tractate Sanhedrin: The Emperor Antoninus tries to convince Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi that the body and soul can each excuse themselves from sin by claiming that the transgression is the fault of the other, since without its counterpart, it is lifeless. Rabbi Yehudah counters with a parable: Two guards—one blind and one lame—are in a garden. Together, they are able to steal some fruit from a high tree. When caught, each claim that he is obviously unable to commit the crime due to his

disability. In the end, the orchard owner places the lame man on the back of the blind man, and they are judged as one (91b). Similarly, God judges the actions of the body and soul in partnership after returning the soul to the body at resurrection.

Where Souls Come From & Where They Go To

The Rabbis rejected another claim Plato made for the soul—that souls pre-date Creation. Many in the ancient world believed that all human souls were created before the material world, but the midrash Tanhumah tells us that all souls were made *during* the six days of Creation. Before the birth of each person, God calls forward the proper soul and has angels show that soul how earthly existence benefits spirit by allowing for spiritual development.

According to another midrash, sleep, like death, temporarily separates body and soul ([Genesis Rabbah 14:9](#)). Several rituals surrounding going to sleep and waking up evolved from this belief. Like birth and death, even temporary severings of the connection between body and soul require holy acts (for example, the washing of hands or recitation of particular prayers). Jews express gratitude to God every morning for renewal of both body and soul: “I offer thanks to You, living and everlasting King, for having returned to me my soul with compassion and great faithfulness” (the *Modeh Ani* prayer).

The path of the soul following death was not a particularly significant matter of speculation for the Sages, nor is there consensus on the matter in the Talmud and Midrash. In Tanhumah, we read a vaguely worded passage suggesting that the body cannot live without the soul nor the soul without the body. On the other hand, many Talmudic Rabbis taught that the soul not only exists separately from the body, but also exists in a fully conscious state in an ethereal realm (Ketubbot 77b, [Berakhot 18b-19a](#)), and elsewhere).

A Tool for the Soul’s Redemption

Saadia Gaon, a product of Greco-Arabic philosophy as well as Jewish tradition, presented his own view of the soul in the sixth chapter of his work *Emunot veDeot*. In it, he states that a soul is created at the same moment of the body, from a more subtle, but still material, element. Although he opposed many of Plato’s views, Saadia also disagreed with many of the more abstract opinions of the Talmudic Sages. Despite this, he preserved the belief that the soul benefits from its partnership with the body. Without the body, the soul would be unable to do the holy, redemptive work of following the commandments.

Maimonides developed a complicated Aristotelian model of the soul. He described a number of faculties of the soul, all of which are related to the relationship of a person to his or her material environment, perceptions, memories, creativity, and desires. Most of these faculties of soul exist only in a living human body; with the death of the body, they too die. For Maimonides, the only eternal aspects of soul are the logical and spiritual speculations and learning of a person produced over his or her lifetime.

Treatment of the Human Body

Halacha (Jewish law) teaches us that the paramount holiness of human life extends to the human body. *Mitzvot* (commandments) cover mundane bodily matters such as clothing, eating, and sexual habits precisely because care of the body is also care for the soul. Healthcare is the maintenance and upkeep of the soul's home. Torah law prohibits mutilations of the body, including tattooing ([Leviticus 19:27-28](#), [Deuteronomy 23:3](#)). Not only medical but even hygienic treatments are often elevated to the level of commandment. Maimonides deemed it obligatory to provide proper sustenance and respectful clothing for the body.

Judaism offers an optimistic view of life, the union of body and soul. The body is a gift from God to be protected and tended. Only with our pure, holy bodies can we bring the commitments and truths of our souls into every action.



Rainbows in Jewish Thought

God's promise never to again destroy the world with a flood is represented by a rainbow.

Rainbows are deeply symbolic in Judaism. The principal source of this is the 9th chapter of Genesis, where God blesses Noah after destroying the earth with a flood, crowning humankind as masters over all of nature and charging Noah to be fruitful and multiply — an echo of the blessing God gave to Adam in the Garden of Eden. God then promises never again to destroy the world by flood and establishes the rainbow as a sign of that promise. This idea is reflected in the Hebrew word for rainbow, *keshet*, which like its English counterpart connotes a weapon used to shoot arrows — one that is pointing at heaven, reminding God to keep this promise.

I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.

When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds,

I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth.

That,” God said to Noah, “shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth.” ([Genesis 9:13-17](#))

On the basis of this story, the rabbis of the Talmud ([Berakhot 59a](#)) established that one should recite a blessing on seeing a rainbow, as they did for various other natural phenomena, though in typical fashion they disagreed about what the blessing should be. One opinion holds that one should bless God “who remembers the covenant with Noah.” Another maintains that the

blessing is “who is faithful to his covenant and fulfills his word.” The accepted practice is to say a blessing that incorporates both of these elements. The blessing reads in full:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם זֹכֵר הַבְּרִית וְנֹאֲמָן בְּבְרִיתוֹ וְקִים בְּמֵאֲמָרוֹ

Baruch ata ado-nai elo-heinu melech ha'olam zocher ha'brit v'ne'eman bivrito v'kayam b'ma'amaro.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who remembers the covenant, and is faithful to His covenant, and keeps His promise.

Though the rainbow is considered a sign of blessing, because it emerged from God's destruction of the earth, there is a tradition that rainbows have a dark side — that is, but for God's mercy and promise to Noah, the earth would be destroyed. Elsewhere, the Talmud even goes so far as to suggest that in times when perfectly righteous people are living, there are no rainbows — since it is in their merit (rather than God's promise) that the world continues to exist. On this basis, the Mishnah Berurah asserts that one should not tell people when there's a rainbow in the sky, equating it with spreading rumors.

The Talmud also states ([Chagigah 16a](#)) that a rainbow is one of three things that should not be stared at lest a person's “eyes grow dim.” (The other two are the head of the Sanhedrin and the priests.) This thinking is based on a verse from [Ezekiel 1:28](#), which states: “As the appearance of the bow that is in the clouds in the day of rain so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” Rainbows, in other words, are the likeness of God, and staring at God's likeness is considered disrespectful.

The question then arises how one can say the blessing over a rainbow if one can't look at it and can't even hear about it from someone else who happened to see it. The Shulchan Arukh, the most significant medieval Jewish law code, rules that one may look at a rainbow solely to say the blessing — but no longer.

In contemporary times, Jewish thinkers have ascribed still more associations to the rainbow. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the great 19th-century German scholar, said the rainbow's colors represent different types of people and the rainbow as a whole symbolizes unity, an idea evoked by many contemporary invocations of the rainbow. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin has suggested that since the rainbow is a half-circle it represents the idea that God can promise not to destroy the earth, but humanity must become partners in that endeavor, in doing so making up the unseen other half of the rainbow.

In the 1950s, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the founder of the Jewish Renewal movement, designed a tallit prayer shawl in rainbow colors based on the mystical idea that the colors correspond to the seven lower *sefirot*, or divine emanations. The design caught on and rainbow shawls are now common in Jewish communities around the world.

Hebrew - עֵבְרִי

Word (s) of the Week

Garden / גַּן

Pronounced: GAHN

Gan Eden is the Hebrew term for "Garden of Eden," but *gan* can also mean "kindergarten."



A Taste of Jewish Humor

A Family Tradition?

One day little Rivki Adler was watching her mother make a roast for Shabbat. She cut off the ends, wrapped it in string, seasoned it, and set it in the roasting pan.

Rivki asked her mother why she cut off the ends of the roast. Mom replied, after some thought, that it was the way that her mother – Bubbie – had done it.

Bubbie came over for Shabbat dinner and Rivki asked her why she had cut the end off of the roast before cooking. After some thought, Bubbie replied that it was the way her mother had done it.

Now the great-grandmother – Alter Bubbie as they called her – was quite old and in a nursing home. But Rivki went with her mother and grandmother to see her and again asked the question.

Alter Bubbie looked at them a bit annoyed and said, "So it would fit in the pan, of course."



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

Guest Article



Why American Jews Love Stella D’Oro Cookies

Spoiler: the Swiss Fudge cookies resemble shtreimel hats.

As a child, visits to my maternal grandfather and grandmother (of Italian and Polish heritage, respectively) involved eating a lot pasta and pierogi. Dessert, in turn, was sometimes cannoli and poppyseed roll, but often a platter of Stella D’Oro cookies — assorted dainty corrugated rings and logs of buttery dough with almond undertones. My grandfather had developed a taste for them early in his youth as an immigrant from Genoa, and my grandparents’ pantry was never without at least one package. Truth be told, my juvenile palate found the cookies too bland (re: insufficiently sugary), but they held a special place in my heart because they were a favorite of my beloved sometimes salty, comparatively sweeter Pop-Pop.

Up until my second year in college, I associated Stella D’Oro (Italian for “Star of Gold”) exclusively with Italian American culture. While “grocery” shopping in the 7-Eleven near our dorm (hey, we didn’t have cars, OK?) with a friend who also happened to be Jewish, I came upon a package and remarked upon my personal nostalgic ties. “Stella D’Oro?” he replied with a puzzled grin. “That’s a Jewish thing.”

We preceded to dive into an appropriately sophomoric argument about whether Stella D’Oro was “more Jewish” or “more Italian,” each of us buttressing our claims with mostly anecdotal evidence and hearsay, and completely eschewing the more interesting question: What happened with these cookies that laid the foundation for such a debate in the first place?

Stella D’Oro, as its name might suggest, was started in 1930 by Joseph and Angela Kresevich, Italian immigrants in Brooklyn. Already successful restaurateurs, the Kresevichs further parlayed their food business savvy by creating a line of Italian-style cookies, crackers, and breadsticks that appealed to other Italian immigrants missing flavors from home. The cookies, originally made by hand and without (gasp) butter, were immediately popular.

The fact that Stella D’Oro cookies were devoid of butter as well as milk also led them to be an object of desire early on for devout Kosher Jews because they were pareve and could therefore be eaten for dessert after a meat supper. The Swiss fudge variety, whose crimped circumference and inner opaque dark chocolate circle bore a whimsical resemblance to shtreimels, round fur hats worn on the Sabbath, led them to become particularly popular in the ultra-Orthodox community. And when in 2019 *Tablet* published its venerable list of the 100 Most Jewish foods, Swiss fudge cookies earned the title of “most Jewish cookie ever made.”

Broad appeal, however, has not prevented Stella D’Oro from becoming a subject of controversy. As the business changed owners throughout the years, wages and benefits have been reduced and/or altered, unsurprisingly souring relations between management and its multicultural labor force, many of whom had worked for the company for decades. This contentious history, and specifically the 11-month strike that ensued following its acquisition by a hedge fund, is documented in the 2011 film, *No Contract, No Cookies*.

Perhaps the greatest scandal occurred in 2003, when then-owner of Stella D’Oro Kraft foods announced they were discontinuing the traditional (pareve) Swiss fudge recipe and replacing the chocolate filling with a dairy version. Following public outcry, Kraft clarified this substitution was being “reconsidered,” eventually reversing course. There was much rejoicing, especially by one superfan Yaakov Kornreich of Flatbush, who dubbed the cookies so “addictive” that “they should come with a surgeon general’s warning.”

Stella D’Oro aficionados (Italian, Jewish, both, and neither) continue to be highly vocal in their opinions, and the company in turn has been receptive to the taste vagaries of its consumer public. In 2014, the beloved Lady Stella collection was brought out of its five-year retirement in response to consumer demand. To commemorate the occasion, Stella D’Oro gifted loyalists with coupons for gratis goodies and donated 100,000 cookies to families in need.

So now that we have resolved *why* one can quibble as to whether Stella D’Oro are a “Jewish” or “Italian” thing, here is a better question: Does it matter? For me, an ardent lover of Jewish cuisine and proud Italian American, the cookies’ cultural and religious connotations are trumped by something more important: their role in so many cherished family suppers.

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