



TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 2-10-24 MISHPATIM

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 2-10-24 MISHPATIM

MISHPATIM - JUDGEMENTS

Shemoth 21:1-24:18

Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Shemoth 23:24: Do not bow down to their mighty ones, nor serve them, nor do according to their works, but without fail overthrow them and without fail break down their pillars. 25: And you shall serve Adonai your Elohim, and He shall bless your bread and your water.

Shemoth 23:30: Little by little I shall drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. 31: And I shall set your border from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River, for I shall give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. 32: Do not make a covenant with them nor with their mighty ones. 33: Let them not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me, when you serve their mighty ones, when it becomes a snare to you.

Yirmeyahu 33:25-26: Thus said Adonai, If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the laws of the heavens and earth, then I would also reject the descendants of Yaaqob and David My servant, so that I should not take of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Yitshaq, and Yaaqob. For I shall turn back their captivity and have compassion on them.

Yirmeyahu 34:13: Thus said Adonai the Elohim of Yisrael, I Myself made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Mitsrayim, out of the house of bondage, saying 14: At the end of seven years each one should set free his Hebrew brother 15: And you recently turned and did what was right in My eyes, each man proclaiming release to his neighbor. And you made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My Name. 16: But you turned back and profaned My Name, and each one of you took back his slaves.... 17: Therefore, thus said Adonai, You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release...See, I am proclaiming release to you, declares Adonai, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the scarcity of food! And I shall make you a horror to all reigns of the earth.

34:22: See, I am commanding, declares Adonai, and shall bring them back to this city, and they shall fight against it and take it and burn it with fire. And I shall make the cities of Yehudah a ruin without inhabitant.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18: Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness? And what agreement has Messiah with Beliya'al? Or what part does a believer have with an unbeliever? And what union has the Dwelling Place of Elohim with idols? For you are a Dwelling Place of the living Elohim, as Elohim has said, I shall dwell in them and walk among them, and I shall be their Elohim, and they shall be My people. Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate, says Adonai, and do not touch what is unclean, and I shall receive you.

We are called a separate, a set-apart people. The Hebrew word for set-apart is QoDesh, the word that most translations render as Holy. We are different than other peoples. We are called to walk a different road in the same way as the Israelites were called to walk a separate road as a people set-apart to Elohim.

We read some of these rules that Elohim laid down for the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. These rules or commandments are the basis for man's treatment of each other in ALL areas of life. And I mean ALL areas.

And these rules exist today in the form of rules of conduct among nations. All peoples of the world have laws in one form or another that guide man's treatment of one another. Do you think that these rules just popped into someone's head, and they wrote them down? No! These rules are based on Elohim's rules. But in much the same way that the Pharisee's of old added and made the rules of Elohim a burden so has man today done the same thing.

Yes, Elohim has provided a better way. He calls us to love Him and one another. This is not something new that Elohim came up with in the Brit Chadashah. This law of Elohim has its foundation in the Torah, way back there at Mount Sinai. His rules of conduct. They are formed around the Ten Mitzvot or commandments but extend out into a total of 613. Around these 613 Mitzvot flow man's relationship with each other and with Elohim.

We are called to be a separate people who follow the ways of our God. And by doing this we are given the following promise, one that is the promise given to all who believe in God and believe in His Son, the Messiah Y'shua.

Verse 18: And I shall be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says Adonai the Almighty.

Do you want to be set-apart or part of those who will be on the outside looking in?

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



Parashat Mishpatim: Summary

Exodus 21:1-24:18, 30:11-16

Moses informs the people of numerous ethical and ritual laws and seals the covenant between the Children of Israel and God.

God has just given The Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The people fell back and stood at a distance.

Moses then tells the people many detailed rules:

More Rules

When you have a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years and in the seventh be freed.

Anyone who murders intentionally shall be put to death. If this murder occurs without intention, there is a place for this murderer to flee.

Honor your parents and do not strike them.

When there is a quarrel and one strikes another, the one who strikes shall go unpunished except he must pay for the sufferer's cure.

When someone strikes a slave with a rod and he dies, the striker must be punished.

If two men fight and a pregnant woman is hit and miscarries, the husband shall fine the one responsible. But if the pregnant woman dies, then you must compensate a life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burns, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

When anyone strikes a slave's eye or tooth, the slave shall be set free.

When an ox gores someone, it shall be put to death and not eaten. If the ox is known to gore people and does so, then the ox and the owner shall be put to death.

When anyone opens a pit or leaves one uncovered and an animal falls into it, the person leaving the pit uncovered is responsible for the harm done to the animal. He must make fair payment for the loss but may keep the dead animal.

If a thief is caught with stolen goods, the thief shall pay double the value of what is stolen.

If a person permits his animal to graze on another person's field, then the restitution shall be based on the field when it is most plentiful.

The person who starts a fire must pay for the property lost by the fire.

When a man gives money or goods to another for safekeeping and they are stolen, then the thief shall pay double when caught.

When a man gives another livestock to guard and the livestock dies or is missing without an eyewitness, then an oath must be given before God in court. Guilt will then be decided, and fair payment given.

When a man borrows an animal and it dies of injuries without the owner present, then fair payment is due to the owner. If the owner is present, no payment is necessary.

If a man seduces an unmarried, sexually untouched woman, then he must make her his wife. If the father refuses to give her to him, he must still pay a fair rate for untouched brides.

You shall not tolerate a sorceress.

Whoever lies with a beast sexually shall be put to death.

Whoever sacrifices to a god other than the Lord alone shall be utterly destroyed.

You shall not oppress nor do any wrong to strangers, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

You shall bring no harm to any widow or orphan, lest in God's anger you become a widow and your children become orphans.

If you lend money to My people, especially the poor, do not act as a creditor nor take interest. Return to your neighbor what it is you borrow before the sun sets.

You shall not offend God, nor put a curse upon the leaders of your people.

You shall not delay in offering to God the first bounty of your harvest and the first born among your sons and your animals.

Do not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field. Instead cast it to the dogs.

You must not utter any falsehood, nor follow others to evil. Neither shall you favor a poor man.

When you see a wandering animal, return it to its owner. Help all animals, even if they are the animals of your enemy.

Keep far from any false matter and do not hurt the innocent and righteous, for I will not free one who is guilty.

You shall accept no bribes, for bribery blinds the clear-sighted and turns the words of the righteous to falsehood.

Six years shall you plant and reap the harvest, but the seventh year you shall let it be for the poor and the animals to graze.

Six days you shall do all your tasks, and on the seventh day you shall cease from work, so that you and your animals, your servers and stranger may recover.

Make no mention of any other god.

Three New Holidays

Three times a year, you shall have a feast for Me. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) to remember how God delivered you from Egypt out of the house of bondage. The Feast of Harvest (Sukkot), to honor Me with the first and choicest of fruits, and the Feast of Ingathering (Shavuot), at the end of the year, when you reap the results of your work.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have made ready. If that which is Mine is heeded, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

When My angel brings you in contact with other peoples, you shall not bow down to their gods in worship, nor follow their practices, but shall tear them down. You shall serve the Lord your God and God will bless your bread and water and there shall be health and healing in the land.

Early in the morning, Moses set up an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He made an animal offering to the Lord, saying aloud, "This blood seals the covenant which the Lord now makes with you."

Then God said to Moses "Come up to Me on the mountain and I will give you the tables of stone with My commandments so that you can teach them."

God told Moses to leave Aaron and Hur in charge of the Israelites. Then the glory of God rested upon Mount Sinai and the appearance of God was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain before the eyes of the sons of Israel. Moses entered into the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain, and Moses remained upon the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Parashat Mishpatim Discussion Questions

- 1) In the last portion, God gives us the Ten Commandments. How do the detailed rules in this portion compare to The Ten Commandments?**
- 2) What are some of the concerns of these rules within this portion? Are they relevant today? Which is your favorite rule?**
- 3) God commands Moses to come up Mount Sinai and write down The Ten Commandments on stone tablets so they can be taught. Why is it important to teach the Ten Commandments? Are the Ten Commandments strictly for Jews or for all people?**

Haftarah for Mishpatim

Haftarah Shekalim

Isaiah 66:1-24

A new king collects taxes for the upkeep of the Temple.

On Shabbat, during the month or so around Purim and Passover, we recite four special maftir readings, called the *Arba Parshiot* (four Torah portions). The four Saturdays are named after their readings: Shabbat *Shekalim*, Shabbat *Zakhor*, Shabbat *Parah*, and Shabbat *Hachodesh*.

Shabbat Shekalim takes place the Shabbat prior to Rosh Chodesh Adar or on Rosh Chodesh Adar itself if it happens to fall on a Saturday. On Shabbat Shekalim we read a *maftir* taken from Parashat Ki Tissa ([Shemot_30:11-16](#)).

The maftir describes a census of the Israelites during the time that they were wandering in the wilderness. Instead of counting the people directly, each man over the age of 20 was commanded to contribute half a shekel toward the construction and upkeep of the mishkan, the portable sanctuary, which was used until the Temple found its permanent residence in Jerusalem. When all of the money had been collected, one could calculate how many people were wandering together in the desert.

Later, the collection of the half shekel was done annually in time for the first day of the month of Nisan; we read this maftir a month before that as a reminder.

In the haftarah, we read about King Jehoash of Judah (9th century BCE), who assumed the throne when he was only seven years old after his grandmother, the evil Queen Athaliah, had his family killed. Athaliah herself was then murdered in the subsequent revolution, but Jehoash was hidden in the Temple by the wife of the High Priest Jehoiada.

The Sephardic custom is to begin reading at the end of chapter 11, in which Jehoiada and the people of Judah go to the temple of the foreign god Baal and smash the idols there. Then they rescue Jehoash from his hiding place, and he ascends to the throne.

Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike read from chapter 12, in which King Jehoash commands that all of the money being brought to the Temple should be set aside to make repairs to the structure, which had suffered severe damage.

After 23 years, King Jehoash notices that no repairs have been made to the Temple despite his earlier decree. He summoned Jehoiada, who took a box, made a hole in the top, and put it right next to the altar in the Temple.

From then on, the priests dropped any money that was brought to the Temple into the box. When the box began to fill up, Jehoiada and a royal scribe counted the money and delivered it to the men who were working on restoring the Temple. The money was used to pay for the carpenters, laborers, masons, and stonecutters, as well as for supplies such as wood and quarried stone.

Just as God commanded the people to contribute money for the upkeep of the Mishkan, Jehoash and Jehoiada institutionalized a system to make sure that there were sufficient funds to keep the Temple clean and beautiful.



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

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

To Love or not to Love

To love or not to love ...

- We would hope true biblical love would end up with a celebration like this...



To love or not to love...

- 22 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² Then He said, "Take now your son, **your only son Isaac, whom you love**, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you. Genesis 22:1-2
- This is the 1st time the word love/ahab אָהַב [Total dedication to another] is used in the bible. Remind you of anything?
- "And behold a voice from the heavens said, 'This is **My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.**'" Matthew 3:17 – You cannot help but see the link here.
- ¹⁶ For **God so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

To love or not to love ...

- We should be able to grasp how important LOVE is to our heavenly Father – it is not something to throw around lightly... in fact we are commanded to love YHVH with all our heart, mind and soul. We repeat it each week – do we not?
- With this in mind turn with me please to Hosea:
- "When Israel *was* a child, **I loved him**, And out of Egypt I called My son. ² As they called them, So they went from them; **They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images.** ³ "I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped *and* fed them. Hosea 11:1-4

To love or not to love...

- My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt Him. Hosea 11:7
- “Ephraim has encircled Me with lies, And the house of Israel with deceit; But Judah still walks with God Even with the Holy One who is faithful. 12 “Ephraim feeds on the wind, And pursues the east wind; He daily increases lies and desolation. Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, And oil is carried to Egypt. Hosea 11:12-12:1
- Would you say Ephraim is in love with YHVH? Probably not.. Judah walks with God – how by keeping His instructions.. now back to Ephraim!
- Feeds on the wind/ruach רוח Spirit @ in Judges 3:10, Isaiah 48:16 – pursues the east wind/ruach. I find this extremely intriguing ...
- Here we have Ephraim feeding on some form of spiritual food, and very keen to continue the pursuit.

To love or not to love ...

- If one claims to be in love – then one will likely pursue the one of intent.
- Let us look at the ruach Ephraim is pursuing – A ruach from the East. Guess where many enemies [Moab, Ammon, Edom] of Israel came from – of course the East.
- To this day, the majority of Ephraim, are still feeding on strange spiritual food they are not walking with YHVH, and receiving sustenance from the Ruach HaQodesh – they are unfaithful preferring wind/ruach from the East.
- Now for some Good News...
- Upon repentance we witness great blessings – Hosea 14:1[2]-10 – However what I find very encouraging is Hosea 6:1-3. Firstly we have the account of 3 days – After 2 days [a thousand years is a day to YHVH] He will revive us and on the 3rd day He will raise us up...
- Love will always mean repentance for the likes of you and – Sadly we commit forms of adultery in our relationship with YHVH.

To love or not to love...

- Yeshua is the ultimate example of One who loves: Let us remind ourselves of His love – along with our love and the challenges thereof.
- **Ephesians 5:1-33**
- Questions – What wind/ruach are you chasing? Do you want to beechad with The Messiah Yeshua? Are you totally dedicated to hearing from the Ruach HaQodesh? Are you willing to give your life for the love of our Saviour Yeshua The Messiah?
- **7 And war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels making war against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought⁸, but they were not strong enough, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven⁹. And the great dragon was thrown down—the ancient serpent, called the devil andatan, who deceives the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Anointed One, for the accuser of our brothers and sisters—the one who accuses them before our God day and night—has been thrown out. ¹¹They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives even in the face of death Revelation 12:7-11**

To love or not to love ...

- As we close, let us be further encouraged by some scriptures.
- **9 “Just as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you. Abide in My love¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love¹¹ These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and your joy may be full¹². “This is My commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you¹³. No one has greater love than this: that he lay down his life for his friends¹⁴. You are My friends if you do what I command you John 15:9-14**
- So the question is: To love or not to love – I suggest both: Love YHVH and not the World...
- There is no God like our God...

Jewish Practices



God 101

In Judaism, who or what is God?

There is no single Jewish conception of God. God has been described, defined, and depicted in a variety of ways in different works of Jewish literature and at different historical moments.

About God

God is beyond human comprehension, but that has not stopped Jewish thinkers from attempting to describe God. The Jewish God is referred to with many names and euphemisms, though God's scriptural names are traditionally only pronounced during religious activities. Belief in one God is one of Judaism's defining characteristics. Nonetheless, some parts of the Torah seem less monotheistic than others. In addition, there are minor currents of thought within Judaism that play down the importance of belief in God.

Biblical vs. Talmudical Depictions of God

The God of the Bible has a multitude of roles and attributes that often contrast sharply with each other. In this sense, God is like a person — experiencing a range of emotions, often torn between competing allegiances and values. The God of the Bible communicates with people through prophets and is even open to critique. Of the varied biblical representations of God, the two that became particularly prominent in Jewish thought are God's oneness and God's role as creator of the world.

Classical rabbinic literature portrays God in a similar way. However, in rabbinic writings, God no longer communicates with people through prophecy, and God is no longer considered a direct legal authority. One of the most radical Jewish descriptions of God can be found in the *heikhalot* literature, an early corpus of mystical texts, which actually describes the physical dimensions of God. Though most early Jewish thinkers did not shy away from depicting God in human terms, Philo, a first-century philosopher, was an exception. He integrated Greek philosophy with Judaism and conceived of God in a more abstract way.

God in Medieval Jewish Thought

The medieval philosophers departed from the non-systematic theology of biblical and rabbinic literature. Philosophers like Maimonides worked tirelessly to make their philosophical interests coincide with the truths of the Bible. They wrote proofs for the existence of God and struggled with passages in the Torah that seem to compromise God's unity. The medieval mystics—or kabbalists—also developed systematic theologies. They posited that God in Himself—known as the *Ein Sof*, or Infinite—cannot be discussed or described. However, God is revealed in the 10 *sefirot*, divine attributes or powers, and this manifest form of God is intelligible to humankind.

Modern Jewish Views of God

Secularization and the values of the modern world have created challenges for traditional conceptions of the Jewish God. Jewish thinkers adjusted to the rationalistic universalism of early modern philosophy by focusing on the ethical implications of Judaism's belief in one God. Later, existentialists like Martin Buber focused on the experiential relationship between humans and God. Mordecai Kaplan and Richard Rubenstein took the challenges of scientific naturalism and the Holocaust so seriously that they rejected the traditional Jewish God. Finally, feminism raised serious questions about the problems of a male God.



What is Jewish Meditation?

"Truly, you are where your mind is," taught the Baal Shem Tov.

What is Jewish meditation? How can it be practiced? And to what effect?

The Jewish meditation tradition goes back at least a few thousand years. The early literature points to a variety of techniques for permuting Hebrew letters in the mind's eye, visualizing otherworldly celestial realms, and communing with the Deity. Medieval Kabbalah continued to build on these practices, providing a symbolic map of the divine realm as the terrain for visualization.

Enough of these texts have been translated into English that it's possible to learn and practice many classical Jewish meditation techniques. Doing so might help cultivate a concentrated mind and lead to exotic, blissful states. But it won't lead to wisdom — neither about the nature of consciousness and the mind, nor about how to cultivate a happy, peaceful, loving, contented, harmonious, generous, and awakened life.

To support the work of cultivating wisdom, I practice mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness was originally taught by the Nepali prince Siddhartha Gautama, better known as the Buddha (or "awakened one") after his enlightenment, who used it as a tool for uncovering and extinguishing the roots of suffering in the mind. It was then adapted by Asian teachers over 2,500 years and eventually repackaged in a secular context over the last 30 years in America. In the past two decades, a number of teachers have been offering mindfulness meditation in a Jewish framework to forward decidedly Jewish goals — loving your neighbor, cultivating compassion, sensing God's loving presence, directly experiencing the light of the soul, and experiencing our own personal exodus by finding a greater degree of inner spaciousness and freedom from habit.

What does mindfulness meditation do? It enables us to directly observe our mental habits with curiosity and discernment instead of getting swept up in them. As a serious practitioner of a variety of Jewish spiritual practices for over 20 years — including prayer, character refinement, Torah study, observance of mitzvot, and a variety of meditation techniques — I have found no practice more transformative than direct investigation and cultivation of the mind through the practice of mindfulness meditation.

Prayer might open my heart to wonder, gratitude, reverence, and humility. Character refinement practices might make me more generous, patient, and non-reactive. Study of sacred text might enable me to drink from a multigenerational font of Jewish counsel for good living. And normative Jewish observance might incline me toward greater attunement with a mysterious transcendent consciousness that calls me to holy living.

Yet none of this is possible without attention to the habits of mind that undermine my capacity to pay close attention, open my heart, show up in relationships as the person I wish to be, truly receive and embody the wisdom of our tradition, right-size my ego, and connect with a Presence much larger than myself. No matter how much I wish to be present, open-hearted, connected, loving, wise, and selfless, if I am mindless of my habits of perception and thought, I will keep tripping over my own mind.

“Truly, you are where your mind is,” taught the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism. How many of us have had the experience of sitting with a loved one as they tell us about their day, only to realize that we didn’t take in what they said because we were thinking about an upcoming deadline or something that happened two days ago? Your body was present, but your mind was elsewhere. So where were you really?

Regular mindfulness meditation practice helps us to begin to see the hidden, subtle mental habits that inhibit our capacity to be present with ourselves and the people in our lives. One can then intentionally choose to relinquish those habits and strengthen others. Beyond that, it may be possible to discover an abiding refuge of contentment, peacefulness, love, and connection that flows from an inner wellspring of spacious, luminous awareness.

How does mindfulness meditation work? It’s simple, though not easy. Find a quiet space. Silence your phone. Let go of the to-do list and any worry about what happened or what may be. Sit still. Commit to remain present and bear witness to the contents of your own mind. Do this regularly, even daily, and you’ve got to practice.

Because our attention tends to be scattered and dull, I recommend commencing a session by paying attention to a single point of focus in the body — the current of the breath, say — and returning attention to it repeatedly when the mind wanders. This preliminary practice allows the mind to become more calm, focused, vivid, and serviceable. We can remain aware of our mental content, watching thoughts and perceptions arise and unfold as if from a watchtower without getting swept into them. In time, we begin to see which mental habits keep us small, contracted, fearful, anxious, and dull, and which support our capacity to be more expansive, calm, content, and awake to the grandeur of being.

Ultimately, though, mindfulness practice in a Jewish framework is an experiential venture that stands to open a gateway to the kinds of sacred experience that cannot adequately be conveyed in words. Check it out and see for yourself.

עֲבָרִי - Hebrew

Word (s) of the Week

Mitzvah / **מִצְוָה**

Pronounced: meetz-VAH

While a *mitzvah* is sometimes understood as a good deed, it translates as "commandment."



A Taste of Jewish Humor

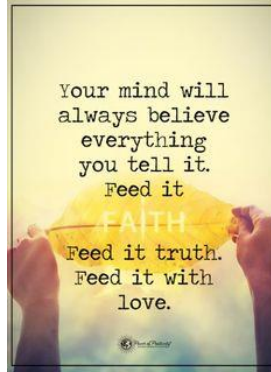
A Golf Goodbye

Shimon and Reuven are playing golf one day at their local golf course. Shimon is about to chip onto the green when he sees a long funeral procession on the road next to the course.

He stops in mid-swing, closes his eyes, and bows his head in prayer.

Reuven says, "Wow, that is the most thoughtful and touching thing I have ever seen. Shimon, you truly are a kind man."

To which Shimon replies, "Well we were married for 35 years."



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



What Are Gribenes?

The fried chicken skin crackling is making a comeback.

Why Pasta Salad Is Actually Really Jewish

This beloved American side dish is rooted in Italian Jewish cuisine.

Scoping a spoon of lukewarm macaroni salad — glooped in mayonnaise, studded with unidentifiable vegetables — onto a paper plate at a picnic or barbecue feels like a quintessentially North American experience. “I’ve always thought of pasta salad as a peculiarly American treatment of pasta, and not even necessarily Italian-American. Recipes have been printed in the U.S. at least since 1916,” summarized Chris Crowley for Taste. But the concept of eating cold, dressed noodles has a surprisingly rich Jewish history.

It's said that the Jews have an ancient connection to pasta; historian and archeologist Susan Weingarten claims that the first written mention of pasta appears in the Talmud, referencing a food called triqta. Prolific Jewish food writer Claudia Rodin takes this further, crediting Jews with being the first to champion eating cold pasta and inspire others to explore and invent variations.

"Centuries before Americans popularized pasta salads Jews were the only Italians to eat cold pasta," Rodin wrote in the Spring 2003 issue of Notes from Zamir.

Cookbook author Marcia Freidman agrees, explaining that pasta salad evolved as a clever Italian Jewish invention intended to make cold pasta more palatable on Shabbat, when it is prohibited to cook. This prohibition has particularly shaped Saturday lunch fare, which traditionally consists of slow-cooked dishes assembled before Shabbat begins on Friday night, or cold dishes. It's worth noting that pasta salads are very popular among Orthodox Jews in the U.S. for this reason, and often skew more American than Italian when it comes to flavor and ingredients (hello, mayo!).

"In Southern Italy, Jewish communities often used a sweet and sour dressing made of vinegar and sugar, or sometimes lemon and sugar, to dress their pasta salad," said Freidman. This not only added flavor but also served as a preservative.

In "Jewish Flavors of Italy: A Family Cookbook," for instance, Silvia Nacamulli includes a recipe for Tagliolini Freddi per Shabbat (cold tagliolini for Shabbat), where pasta is enrobed in a punchy tomato sauce laced with vinegar, sugar, lemon, and chili. "The dish tastes slightly different when warm rather than cold, but it is delicious either way," writes Nacamulli. The tomato sauce is "actually better used cold," she says.

Part of the reason Italian Jewish cuisine is so distinctive is due to Italian treatment of the Jews in the 15th and 16th centuries. Jews were often discriminated against through social and economic restrictions and were segregated in ghettos. In these ghettos, Jews crafted a cuisine that adhered to their dietary restrictions and incorporated local ingredients that were disliked by non-Jews (and thus cheap and plentiful), like eggplant, artichokes, fennel and onions. They transformed them into delectable dishes like caponata, fennel gratin and — yes — pasta salad.

Benedetta Jasmine Guetta, author of "Cooking all Guidia: A Celebration of the Jewish Food of Italy," hasn't found direct evidence of Jews inventing the concept of eating cold pasta in her research, though she sees why it would have been popular among Jews who observed Shabbat. Instead, Guetta suggests a cold rice salad, with recipes she's seen dating back to the 16th century, could be the origin of pasta salad. Many of the vegetables and ingredients typical of Italian pasta salad feature in this cold rice dish.

"As pasta gained more variety, it's possible that people started treating it like rice. It's possible that Jews, accustomed to serving their pasta cold, contributed to this evolution," she hypothesized.

In Italy and beyond, pasta salad has become an integral part of the Shabbat table, with families passing down their unique recipes from generation to generation. Whether it's a classic American macaroni salad or a sweet-and-sour Roman recipe, pasta salad symbolizes culinary creativity and tradition. And while the historical connection between Jews and pasta salad remains open to interpretation, its enduring presence reflects the richness of Jewish culinary heritage and its ability to adapt and evolve over time.

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