Oorah

Torah Nuggets

Yesodos | Mitzvos | Hashkafa | Middos | Tefillah | Around the Year



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ChillZone 2026-27 Edition

Learning Schedule

11/7	Avos and Imahos (1)	1/16	Zachor (16)
11/14	Hachnasas Orchim (5)	1/23	Shatnez (6)
11/21	Emunas Chachamim (2)	1/30	Simchas Hachaim (11)
11/28	Chanukah (17)	2/6	Tzitzis & Yarmulke (7)
12/5	Middos (9)	2/13	Tehillim (14)
12/12	Minhagim (3)	2/20	Jewish Weddings (8)
12/19	Churban (18)	2/27	Asher Yatzar (15)
12/26	Minyan (13)	3/6	Taavah (12)
1/2	Kashrus (4)	3/13	Purim (19)
1/9	Emes (10)		

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TheZone Six Flags

1 Proud Jews!

The concept of national pride is not unique to the Jewish nation. But our pride runs much deeper. As Jews, we know we are the purpose of Creation, and part of something huge, another link in the golden chain that goes all the way back to Har Sinai – to the wonderful moment we became Hashem's Chosen Nation. We celebrate our heritage with joy, exploring our history, traditions and holidays with passion.

2 Mentchin!

In TheZone, we learn how to become people who care, treating others with kindness and respect, as well as helping those in need. We seek to become someone with good Middos – refined character traits. By treating each other with kindness and respect, we create a supportive and nurturing community where everyone feels valued and appreciated.

3 Mitzvah Doers!

The Mitzvos – commandments – were given to us by our loving Father, golden opportunities to connect to Hashem, and show how much we love Him. Every Mitzvah we do – big or small – makes us better people and lights up the world, bringing an abundance of blessing to the entire universe!

4 TorahMates!

A manual to life given to us by our Creator, the Torah is our guide, helping us navigate a turbulent world and become better people.

Through TorahMates, we make time for daily Torah study, creating relationships with our mentors and role models that carry us throughout the year.

5 Shabbos Keepers!

More than the Jew keeps Shabbos, Shabbos keeps the Jew.

Shabbos is a special day that elevates our entire week, as we prepare for it with excited anticipation. It's a time to disconnect from the everyday routine and connect to our souls. We celebrate with family and friends and keep the uplifting experience in our hearts the whole week.

6 Shteigers!

We have a growth mindset, always striving to reach greater heights – in our connection to Hashem, in our relationship with others, and as people! Even as we celebrate our accomplishments, we look toward our future goals. Always keep Shteiging!

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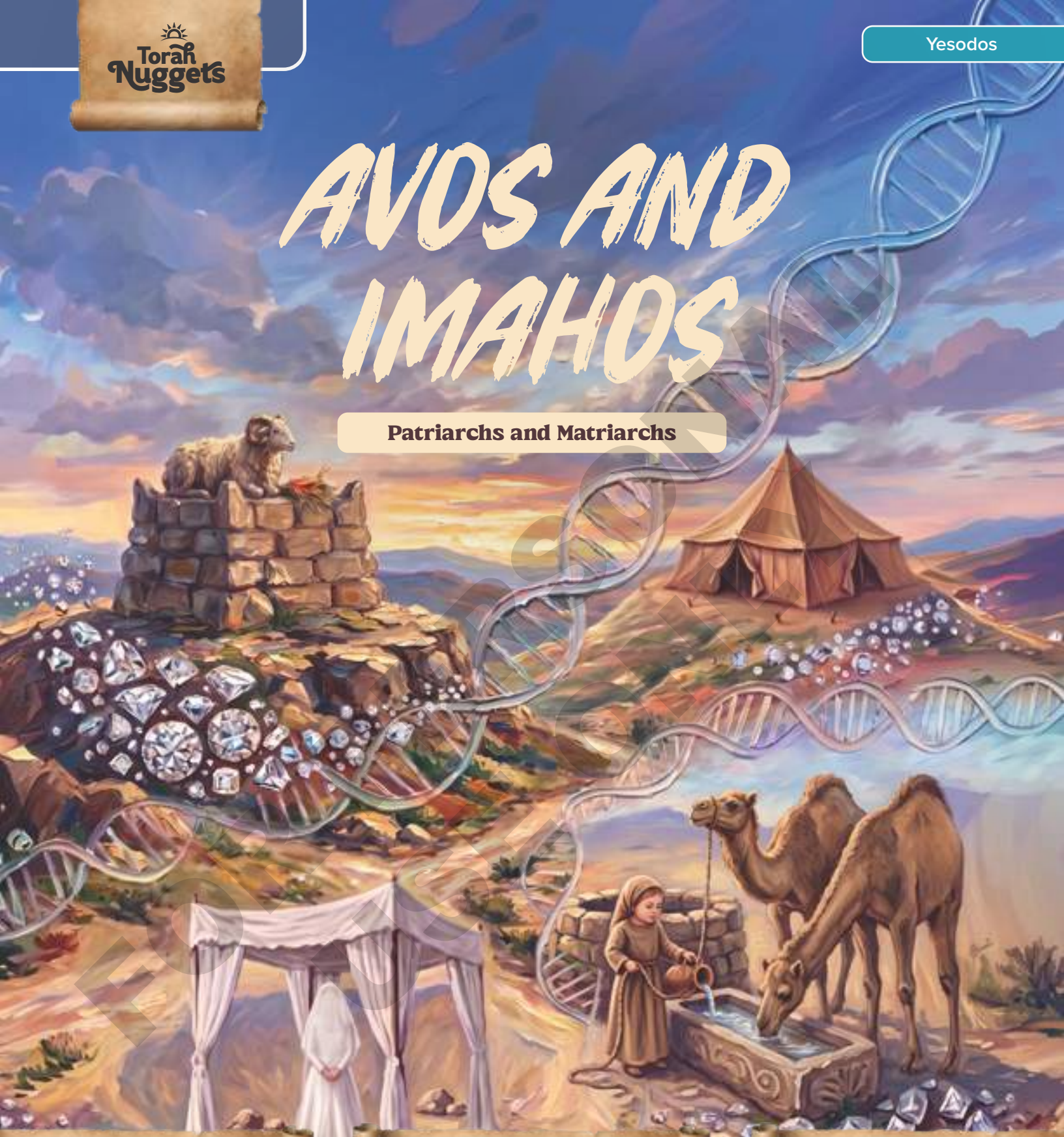


TheZone is Geshmak!



AVOS AND IMAHOS

Patriarchs and Matriarchs



1. Who are the Avos and Imahos?
2. Why Are the Avos and Imahos Important?
3. How can we learn from the Avos and Imahos?

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Who Are the Avos and Imahos?

Spotlight

The spiritual achievements of the Avos and Imahos formed the character of the Jewish people and gave us a living example for what every Yid (Jew) should strive for.

In a Nutshell

The earliest ancestors of the Jewish People are called the "Avos" and "Imahos" (lit. "Fathers" and "Mothers"). Because they constantly searched for Hashem and perfected their *middos** (character traits), Hashem chose them to begin His special nation.

Avraham Avinu

Avraham Avinu (our father) lived during a time when almost everyone worshipped idols and believed in many gods. But Avraham looked at the world around him and realized that there is only one Hashem (G-d) who created everything. He was so different from everyone else that people called him "*Ha'Ivri*," meaning "the one on the other side," because he stood alone for the truth.[1]

Avraham was also famous for his incredible *chesed* (kindness).[2] He loved welcoming guests into his home, even days after his *bris milah* (circumcision) at age 99![3] He'd feed his guests and teach them to thank Hashem for their food.[4] His wife, Sarah, joined him in this *chesed*, and they taught the world about Hashem.[5]

Hashem tested Avraham ten times to see if he truly trusted Him.[6] The hardest was the *akeidah*, when Hashem asked Avraham to bring his beloved son Yitzchak as a *korban* (offering), and Avraham was ready to obey.[7]

Yitzchak Avinu

Yitzchak Avinu was the son of Avraham and Sarah, and the second of the Avos. His birth was a miracle. Avraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90![15]

Yitzchak is known for his *middah* (character trait) of *gevurah*, meaning inner strength.[16] He also showed *avodah*, meaning he obeyed Hashem's will completely. We see this best at the *akeidah*, when Yitzchak was willing to be brought as an offering to Hashem.[17] He trusted Hashem, and ultimately, a ram was offered instead of him.

After the *akeidah*, Avraham's servant Eliezer found Yitzchak a wife named Rivka.[18] They had twin sons, Yaakov and Eisav.[19]

Yaakov Avinu

Yaakov Avinu was the third of the Avos, and he was known for his *middah* of *emes* (truth).[8] His twin brother Eisav didn't care about serving Hashem, so he sold his *bechorah* (special rights of the firstborn) to Yaakov.[9] Yaakov then received the *brachos* (blessings) from his father, continuing the special bris (agreement) Hashem made with Avraham and Yitzchak.

Yaakov spent fourteen years learning Torah in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever before living with his uncle Lavan.[10] Even though Lavan tried to trick him again and again, Yaakov stayed honest and good. There, he married Lavan's daughters, Rochel and Leah.[11]

And became the father of the 12 tribes. Years later, Yaakov wrestled with an angel all night long and won! The angel renamed him Yisroel, meaning someone who struggled with angels and came out on top.[12]

Torah Challenge

וַתָּרָץ עוֹד אֶל־הַבְּאֵר לִשְׁאֹב — *"And she [Rivka] ran again to the well to draw"*[13]

The shoresh רו"ץ (ratz, to run) also appears by Avraham: וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתָם — "and he ran to greet them [his guests]".[14]

Why do you think the Torah uses the same word for both of them?

*See the **Middos Nugget** to learn more.



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Sarah Imeinu



Sarah Imeinu was the first of the Imahos and the devoted wife of Avraham Avinu, traveling with him on his journeys and helping spread belief in Hashem.[20] She was extremely beautiful, yet extremely modest.[21] When famine struck Eretz Yisroel, they traveled to *Mitzrayim* (Egypt), where Pharaoh took Sarah to his palace.[22] Hashem protected her, until she was returned to Avraham.

Sarah could not have children naturally, yet Hashem promised her a child. At ninety, that promise was fulfilled with Yitzchak's birth, showing that the Jewish people began with a miracle.[23]

Sarah's tent was filled with holiness: the *Shechina* rested above it, her challah always stayed fresh and her candles burned Shabbos to Shabbos.[24] She lived 127 years, passed away in Chevron, and Avraham buried her in the *Me'aras HaMachpela*.[25]

Rivka Imeinu



Rivka Imeinu, the wife of Yitzchak Avinu, was outstanding in the *middah* of kindness. When Eliezer, Avraham's servant, was looking for the right wife for Yitzchak, he asked her for a little water. Rivka not only gave him a drink right away but also offered to draw water for all his camels.[26] This showed Eliezer that Rivka did not just do kind acts; she truly loved being kind.

Though Rivka came from a family of wicked people, she stayed pure and good-hearted.[27] Like Sarah before her, Rivka could not have children naturally, but after she and Yitzchak prayed to Hashem, she miraculously gave birth to twin sons, Yaakov and Eisav.[28]

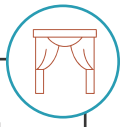
Rivka understood through prophesy that Yaakov was meant to carry on Hashem's covenant, so she helped him receive the *brachos* from Yitzchak.[29] When she passed away, Rivka was buried in *Me'aras HaMachpela* alongside Yitzchak.[30]



Did You Know?

Avraham's original name was Avram, and Sarah's was Sarai. Hashem changed both their names: He added the letter "*hei*" to Avram's name, making him Avraham, father of many nations. And Sarai, meaning "my princess," became Sarah, meaning "princess of everyone"!

Rochel Imeinu



Rochel Imeinu, the beloved wife of Yaakov Avinu, excelled in the *middah* of putting others first and being *mevatar* (letting go of one's own wishes). Yaakov waited seven years to marry her and gave her special signs so he would know it was her, since he suspected his father-in-law Lavan would try to trick him.[37]

Lavan tricked everyone anyway. On the wedding night, he secretly gave Rochel's older sister, Leah, to Yaakov instead.[38] Rochel thought about how embarrassed Leah would feel once Yaakov found out. So, she gave Leah the secret signs herself, giving up the husband she had waited seven years for, just to spare her sister's feelings.[39] This is the ultimate example of her *middah* of putting others first. Yaakov later married Rochel too.

Rochel is the only one of the Imahos not buried in *Me'aras HaMachpela*. Instead, she was buried in *Beit Lechem*, along the road her descendants would later travel into exile, so she could pray for them as they passed by.[40] Her burial place, where prayers are especially answered, receives hundreds of thousands of visitors every year.

Leah Imeinu



Leah Imeinu, the first wife of Yaakov Avinu, is remembered for the power of her tefillah. As the older sister, Leah was afraid she would have to marry Eisav, Yaakov's wicked brother, so she cried and prayed to Hashem until her eyes grew soft and weak.[31] Hashem heard her prayers, and she ended up marrying Yaakov instead.[32]

Leah continued turning to Hashem with heartfelt tefillah throughout her life, and Hashem blessed her with six sons, who became six of the tribes of the Jewish people.[33] Her tears teach us that sincere prayer, straight from the heart, reaches all the way up to *Shamayim* (Heavens). When she named her fourth son Yehudah, saying "this time I will thank G-d,"[34] she became the first person to ever thank Hashem.[35]

Leah was buried in *Me'aras HaMachpela*.[36]

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Why Are the Avos and Imahos Important?

Their Middos, Our Inheritance

When the Avos and Imahos worked hard to build their amazing middos, they weren't just changing themselves; they were changing every Jew who would ever be born after them. When Avraham Avinu believed in Hashem, he planted that belief deep inside every Jewish soul, making it easier for all of us to believe in Hashem too. The same is true for every middah the Avos and Imahos worked on, like Rivka's kindness, Rochel's selflessness, and Leah's powerful tefillah. These incredible middos are now part of us. We don't have to build them from scratch; we just have to tap into the treasures already inside us. That's why, with just a little bit of effort, we can improve these middos more easily than we might think. They're not something new we're creating, but something precious we're uncovering. All we need to do is work a bit to activate them.[43]

Merits of our Fathers

Our sages teach us something amazing: even when the Jewish people haven't fully earned Hashem's kindness, Hashem still gives them merit because of the Avos and Imahos. Their close relationship with Hashem, and everything they achieved spiritually during their lives, didn't just end when their lives ended. It created a permanent treasure, one that keeps giving to every generation that comes after them. This is called "*Zechus Avos*," the merit of our forefathers and foremothers. Just like a gift from a grandparent can bring blessing to a whole family, the spiritual greatness of the Avos and Imahos continues to bring Hashem's kindness to their descendants. Every single one of us is still living off that treasure today.[42]

Why Three Different Avos

Rav Shimon Schwab teaches[44] that each of our three Avos showed us a different way to see Hashem as King: King of the whole universe, King of each person, and King of the Jewish people. Avraham taught people all over the world about Hashem, and thousands of people came to believe in Him. Yitzchak showed that Hashem was *his own* personal King at the *akeidah* (binding of Isaac), when he was ready to give up his life for Hashem at any moment. Yaakov, whose twelve sons all stayed loyal to Hashem, was the first to show Hashem as King of the Jewish people as a whole nation.



Each of the Avos showed us something different about how we can connect to Hashem. Together, all three ways make our own connection to Hashem complete!

Standing on their Shoulders

Every *Shemoneh Esrei* starts with the words "Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, v'Elokei Yaakov" — the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov. Why is this necessary?

Rav Shimon Schwab explains[41] that, as we begin to talk to Hashem, we proclaim that are our relationship with Hashem is firmly established, dating back to the Avos. They were spiritual giants, people with a clear awareness of Hashem and a strong connection to Him, who recognized Hashem and accepted Him as their G-d. This was reinforced when our entire nation witnessed Hashem's revelation at Har Sinai. Our belief is strongly founded, transmitted to us by our parents, who received it from their parents, all the way back to the Avos. Every time we say *Shemoneh Esrei*, we remind ourselves of this strong foundation of our *emunah*.



Korny Korner

What is the patriarch of all drinks?

Soda Pop

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Spiritual Gene Therapy

Have you ever wondered why we call Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov our "Avos," which means "fathers"? Of course, we are their descendants, so that makes sense. But a great sage named Rav Chaim Volozhiner, teaches us something much deeper. He explains that the Avos and Imahos are not just our physical ancestors. They are the reason we are who we are on the inside, too.[45]

Everything they accomplished during their lifetimes did not just affect them. It established the character of the entire Jewish people, forever. It's almost like they performed spiritual gene therapy on all of us! When a doctor does gene therapy, they change something deep inside a person's body so it works better. The Avos and Imahos did something similar, except what they changed was our *neshamos*, our souls. Every good *middah* they worked so hard to build is now planted inside every single Jew, just waiting to be developed. These *middos* aren't loud or obvious all the time. They're dormant, like a seed underground. But with a little bit of effort, we can water that seed and help it grow.

Let's look at Avraham Avinu. Avraham searched for Hashem on his own, already at a young age, until he found the truth: there is one G-d who created and runs the entire world. His belief was so powerful and so real that when he was thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to idols, he did not give in. He trusted Hashem completely, even facing death and was saved miraculously.[46]

Because Avraham planted that unshakable belief inside every Jewish *neshama*, something remarkable happened throughout history. Jews who lived hundreds and even thousands of years later, some of whom weren't even so careful with mitzvos during their regular lives, suddenly found unbelievable strength when it really counted. When enemies gave them a choice to give up their Judaism or lose their lives, countless Jews chose to remain loyal to Hashem, even until their very last breath. Where did that incredible courage come from? It came from the spiritual DNA implanted in ever Jewish soul by Avraham Avinu. His fiery furnace became their fiery furnace too, buried deep inside their souls, ready to be tapped into exactly when they needed it most.

The same is true for kindness. Avraham, Sarah, Rivka, Rochel, and Leah were famous for their extraordinary *chesed*, always looking for ways to help others before themselves. Each of the Imahos had her own unique greatness too. Sarah's modesty, Rivka's kindness, Rochel's selflessness, and Leah's gratitude all shaped who we are, but their shared devotion to kindness became something every Jew carries. Because they worked so hard on kindness specifically, it became woven into the Jewish character. That's part of why Jewish people around the world are known for giving tzedakah, helping strangers, and caring for people in need. It doesn't take enormous effort for a Jew to be kind, because that kindness is already inside of us, waiting to be used.

Even big life decisions trace back to the Avos. For example, moving to Eretz Yisroel connects back to Avraham Avinu. Hashem told Avraham to leave his home, his family, and everything familiar, and travel to a new land that Hashem would show him.[47] Avraham didn't hesitate. He packed up and went, leaving his entire life behind because Hashem asked him to. Because of that first incredible step Avraham took, something similar lives inside of us too. That's part of why, even today, a Jew can suddenly feel a pull to leave behind a comfortable life and move to Eretz Yisroel. It might seem like a sudden decision, but really it's Avraham's courage stirring inside their soul.

This is what makes the Avos and Imahos so much more than just relatives from a long time ago. We couldn't have these remarkable *middos* on our own. We needed them to build these traits first, so completely, that they became part of who every Jew is, forever.

So the next time you do something kind, feel a burst of *emunah*, or hear about Jews standing strong no matter what, remember: that strength isn't coming from nowhere. It's the gift of the Avos and Imahos, planted deep inside of you, just waiting for you to tap in and nurture it.

What character traits did you get from your mother or father?

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How Can We Learn from the Avos and Imahos?

Learn It Straight from the Source

Did you know the Torah can teach us many halachos from one small letter? That shows how precious and packed with meaning every word of Torah is. Yet when it comes to the Avos, the Torah does something surprising: it repeats an entire story, Eliezer finding a wife for Yitzchak.[54] This teaches us something powerful. The Avos get so much "airtime" in the Torah because their lives contain endless fundamental lessons for us to learn. That means simply studying the *parshiyos* in *Chumash* that talk about the Avos is one of the best ways to learn from them.

Blueprint for the Future

Chazal teach us something amazing called "*Maaseh Avos Siman L'banim*." That means everything that happened to our Avos isn't just history; it's a blueprint for what will happen later to their children, the Jewish people.[48]

Here's a great example. One night, an angel representing Eisav fought with Yaakov Avinu. They wrestled all night, right up until the sun began to rise. The angel tried and tried, but could not beat Yaakov. At the very last moment, right before dawn, he managed to hurt Yaakov's hip a little.[49]

This teaches us something very special about our own lives. Just like that fight happened at night, right before the sun came up, it shows us that our people will face our hardest tests right before Mashiach comes, bringing light to the world. Things might feel scary or hard for a little while. But just like Yaakov, we will not be defeated! We will stay strong and make it through, right into the wonderful light of the *Geulah* (Final Redemption).[50]

By learning about the Avos, we're not just hearing cool stories; we're finding a map for our own lives, showing us exactly what challenges we'll face, and how we'll get through them.



A Living Roadmap

Our sages teach that we should ask ourselves, "When will my actions reach the level of the Avos?"[52] This doesn't mean every person is expected to become as great as Avraham, Yitzchak, or Yaakov. Instead, the Avos give us a living example of what a Yid can strive for.[53]

Imagine someone described a baseball game to you, but you never had a chance to actually watch a game. Even with a great description, you still wouldn't understand the game as well as someone who watched it being played. The same is true with *middos*. If the Torah simply told us to have good character traits, we wouldn't have a clear picture of what that really looks like. The Avos are that real-life example, a living roadmap. Through their lives, they show us exactly what Hashem wants from us, giving clear direction on how to unlock the incredible potential every person has when working hard to follow Hashem's will.

Finding Our Strongest Middah

Each of our Avos had one *middah* that was most dominant in them. Avraham Avinu's most dominant *middah* was kindness, and from there, he grew in fear of Hashem and truth too. Yitzchak Avinu's most dominant *middah* was fear of Hashem, and from there, he grew in kindness and truth also. Yaakov Avinu's most dominant *middah* was truth, and from there, he grew in fear of Hashem and kindness as well.

Rav Dessler teaches us that we each have one *middah* that is most dominant in us too, just like the Avos.[51] When we find our strongest *middah*, we can start improving our *middos* with that one, and it becomes easier to climb the ladder of self-improvement and grow in all our other *middos* too!

Tefillah Time

The first bracha in Shemoneh Esrei opens with all three avos: אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק וֵאלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב, "the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov." Yet the bracha closes with only מָגֵן אַבְרָהָם, "Shield of Avraham." This is because Hashem specifically promised Avraham that his name would be used for a bracha.[55]

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Avraham the Chosen One

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book3 pg.312

Why was Avraham chosen to be the father of the Jewish nation and not Noach, who preceded him and is described by the Torah as a tzaddik?

Avraham was not the first to recognize Hashem, or even the first tzaddik. Noach was a great tzaddik, as were Chanoch, Mesushelach, Shem, and Eiver. However, while these individuals were themselves righteous and shared their wisdom with those who sought them out, they were not proactive in spreading the truth of Hashem's existence to the world. What made Avraham special was his relentless drive to spread the knowledge of Hashem to the world. He actively fought for this truth, even endangering his life to teach others. Rambam explains that this is what made Avraham fit to be the father of the chosen people.

Hashem had Noach spend 120 years building the teivah (ark), giving the world a chance to see his work and inquire why he was doing it. When they did, Noach warned them of the impending flood, rebuking them in the hope they might repent. But his efforts were passive — he spoke only when questioned, and despite the long period, he failed to convince a single person to repent. This cautious approach stemmed from the dangers of engaging these people. The violent, hostile people of his generation even threatened to kill him if he tried to board the teivah, and Noach reasoned that he was not obligated to put his life on the line for the sake of Hashem. Additionally, Noach was afraid of being influenced by their wickedness, and so he focused on preserving his own righteousness rather than trying to engage with and change the world around him.

Avraham, by contrast, was fearless in his mission to spread the truth of Hashem. Rambam (Avodah Zarah 1:3) details how Avraham engaged his community, challenging their idol worship, smashing their idols, and preaching that Hashem is the only One, and only He is worthy of devotion. His compelling arguments won him many followers, and as his influence grew, King Nimrod attempted to kill him by throwing him into a fiery furnace, but he was miraculously saved by Hashem. Avraham then fled to Charan, where he continued to proclaim the existence of one G-d, traveling from city to city

and gathering tens of thousands who embraced the path of truth and service to Hashem.

The reason behind these two approaches lies in their differing levels of emunah (faith) and service to Hashem. Of Noach, it says, (Bereishis 6:9) "Noach walked with Hashem," while Avraham said about himself (Bereishis 24:40), "Hashem, before Whom I have walked."

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 30:11) compares Noach to a young child who needs his father's support to walk. He wasn't strong enough to stand on his own and needed Hashem's assistance to keep safe, so he avoided spiritual danger by remaining in a protective environment.

Avraham, by contrast, was steadfast in his emunah, like a mature son who is able to walk ahead independently, spreading truth fearlessly, unaffected by the evils around him.

There are important lessons to be learned from both of these tzaddikim. If a person recognizes that he is vulnerable to the spiritual dangers of the world, he must follow the lead of Noach, withdrawing and protecting himself from those dangers, by enclosing himself in a safer, holier environment. At the same time, it is incumbent upon us to follow Avraham's example and strengthen our emunah, learn mussar, and clarify the principles of Judaism. This will enable us to go out and spread the truth of Hashem and Torah to our fellow Jews.

IN SHORT: *Avraham was chosen because he alone put his life on the line to take up the mission of spreading Hashem's truth and bringing the world closer to Him.*

Got questions about Judaism? Curious about something?

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Go to **oorah.org/asktherabbi** to join as well as watch previous questions.

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

The Avos and Imahos weren't just our ancestors, they're the reason we are who we are today. Each one built a specific middah so completely that it became woven into the neshama of every Jew who came after them: Avraham's *emunah*, Sarah's *chesed*, Yitzchak's *gevurah*, Rivka's kindness, Yaakov's *emes*, Rochel's *vitur*, and Leah's tefillah. Their lives also serve as a "*Maaseh Avos Siman L'banim*," a roadmap showing us the challenges we'll face and the strength we already carry to overcome them. We don't have to build these traits from scratch; we just have to uncover the treasure already planted inside us. The next time we act with kindness or hold onto emunah in a hard moment, that's the Avos and Imahos, still guiding us from within.

Avraham Avinu's Hospitality

Avraham Avinu made his tent near the desert. There were no tents, and very little water, available nearby. So, Avraham commanded his servants to dig a well, and they found good, fresh water. He called this well Be'er Sheva, the well of seven.

The water wasn't only for Avraham. He also welcomed guests, people who arrived hungry, thirsty, and tired. He planted fruit trees and shady trees just for them[56], and he made sure there was always food and water ready. He even built his tent with four entrances, one facing north, one south, one east, and one west[57], so that a traveler from any direction could easily find their way in.

Word spread through the desert. Everyone knew there was a man named Avraham who took in guests and gave them the very best. Travelers hurried to reach his tent. As soon as guests appeared, Avraham would run out to greet them, invite them to rest under a tree, and wash their tired feet. While they rested, Sarah Imeinu prepared a wonderful meal, and Avraham himself set the table. He served them cold water from the well, fresh bread, meat, wine, dates, figs, and pomegranates from his orchards. The guests ate until they were full and drank until they were satisfied.

When the meal was finished, the guests wanted to bless Avraham and thank him. But Avraham would say, "Me, you want to bless? All this came from the Creator of the world, and it is Him you should thank! Who sends rain, sun, and wind and makes food grow? Everything comes from Hashem, so it is only Hashem you need to thank." Then he would teach them a simple blessing: "Blessed is the G-d of the world, that we ate from His."[58]

But not every guest understood right away. Some would answer, "We don't know Hashem, and you gave us this food. We'll just thank you!"

Avraham would answer calmly, "If everything truly came from me, then you must pay me for your meal." He would add up the cost: the wine, the meat, the bread, the fruit, until the total sounded like far too much money. The guests would be amazed. "Who else would give you all this in the middle of the desert?" Avraham would ask.

Then the guests would realize, "But you told us this was all from Hashem, not from you!"

"Exactly," Avraham would say with a smile. "So it's Hashem you should thank."

Understanding at last, the guests would ask Avraham to teach them the blessing, and they would gladly thank Hashem before continuing on their way. This is how Avraham Avinu taught everyone who passed through the desert to thank Hashem for all the good He gives.

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Did You Know?

According to the Rambam, Avraham Avinu began questioning idol worship when he was a young child. Some say as young as three! Even then, he thought day and night, asking: "How is it possible that this world runs continuously without a being who runs it?" Eventually, he came to a clear, certain awareness that this world is run by one G-d, who created everything, and there is no other god, and everyone else was wrong.[59]



Zoniac Challenge

Guess Who?

A clue ladder for three figures. Each round gives 3 clues, one at a time, getting more specific, ending in "Who am I?" The reader can guess after any clue.

A

Clue 1: I ran to greet three strangers, even though I was recovering from a painful mitzvah.

Clue 2: I promised a little bread, then served a whole feast.

Clue 3: I was willing to risk my life just to spread the truth about Hashem.

Who am I? _____

B

Clue 1: A stranger came to my well looking for a wife for his master's son.

Clue 2: I didn't wait to be asked; I ran back and forth to water all ten of his camels myself.

Clue 3: My eagerness to do *chesed* without being asked is why I was chosen.

Who am I? _____

C

Clue 1: My father planned to trick my husband-to-be by giving him my sister instead of me.

Clue 2: I could have exposed the plan, but I taught my sister our secret signs instead.

Clue 3: I gave up my own moment so she wouldn't be embarrassed.

Who am I? _____

A: Avraham B: Rivka C: Rochel



Zoniac Dilemma

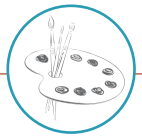
For three days, Josh had watched Danny, the new kid, sit alone at the end of the lunch table. Danny hadn't found his group yet. Josh had his usual spot beside Sam and Ben, who saved seats and cracked the same jokes every day. Nobody had told Josh to sit elsewhere, or told him not to.

The lunch line moved, trays clattering. A few steps ahead, Danny carried his lunch box toward that same lonely spot.

Josh considered moving one seat, just for today. But what would that fix? They'd learned how Avraham Avinu ran outside looking for guests, strangers, anyone who needed a place. Josh was just a regular kid with a lunch tray. What difference could he make?

Sam waved him over to his saved seat. Josh hesitated.

Should he sit with Sam and Ben, or take the empty seat beside Danny?





COVER UNCOVERED:

This cover depicts how the Avos and Imahos shaped the Jewish people. Like diamonds, their spiritual achievements are precious treasures passed down to us, woven into our spiritual DNA. Avraham and Sarah opened their tent for chesed, Yitzchok showed complete devotion at the Akeidah, Rivka eagerly watered the camels, and Rochel selflessly gave Leah her place under the chuppah.



Daily Challenge

Pick one middah of any of the Avos or Imahos and try one small act that uses it today.

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Sources

1) Bereishis Rabbah 42:8, on Bereishis 14:13
2) Zohar, Bereishis 132a–b
3) Bereishis 18:1 (Rashi, citing Bava Metzia 86b)
4) Sotah 10a-b
5) Bereshis Rabbah 39:14
6) Pirkei Avos 5:3
7) Bereishis 22:1–19
8) Zohar, Bereishis 132a–b
9) Bereishis 27:1–29
10) Megillah 17a
11) Bereishis 29
12) Ibid 32:25–29
13) Ibid 24:20
14) Ibid 18:2
15) Ibid 17:17, 21:5
16) Zohar, Bereishis 132a–b
17) Bereishis 22:1–19
18) Ibid 24
19) Ibid 25:24–26
20) Ibid 12:5
21) Bereishis Rabbah 40:4
22) Bereishis 12:10–20
23) Ibid 17:19, 18:10–14, 21:1–5
24) Bereishis Rabbah 60:16
25) Bereishis 23:1–2, 23:19
26) Ibid 24:15–20
27) Rashi, Bereishis 24:16
28) Bereishis 25:21–26
29) Ibid 27:5–17
30) Ibid 49:31
31) Rashi, Bereishis 29:17
32) Bereishis 29:23, 29:30
33) Ibid 29:31–35, 30:19–20, 35:23
34) Ibid 29:35
35) Brachos 7b
36) Bereishis 49:31
37) Bereishis 29:18 and Rashi, Bereishis 29:25
38) Bereishis 29:21–25
39) Rashi, Bereishis 29:25
40) Bereishis 35:19, 48:7
41) Rav Schwab on Prayer pgs. 420-422
42) Rashi, Bereishis 12:2; Shemos 32:13; Vayikra 26:42; Shabbos 55a; Yoma 87a
43) Rav Chaim Volozhiner, Ruach Chaim on Pirkei Avos 5:3
44) Rav Schwab on Prayer pg. 414-415
45) Rav Chaim Volozhiner, Ruach Chaim on Pirkei Avos, Perek 5, Mishnah 3
46) Bereishis Rabbah 38:13; Rambam, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:3
47) Bereishis 12:1
48) Ramban, Bereishis, 12:6
49) Bereishis 32:25–32 and Rashi there
50) Sefer HaChinnuch, Mitzvah 3
51) Michtav Me'Eliyahu Vol. 2, Parshas Lech Lecha, pg. 162-165
52) Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah 25
53) As per Rav Dan Segal in Yesod Hateshuva quoting R. Yisroel Salanter
54) Bereishis 24:1–9 and 24:34–49; Rashi, Bereishis, 24:42
55) Rashi on Bereishis 12:2, V'haya bracha
56) Bereishis 21:33 with Rashi there
57) Tehillim 110:1
58) Bereishis Rabbah 54:6
59) Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:3

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



The (Little) Midrash Says Bereishis

The Test of Rebecca

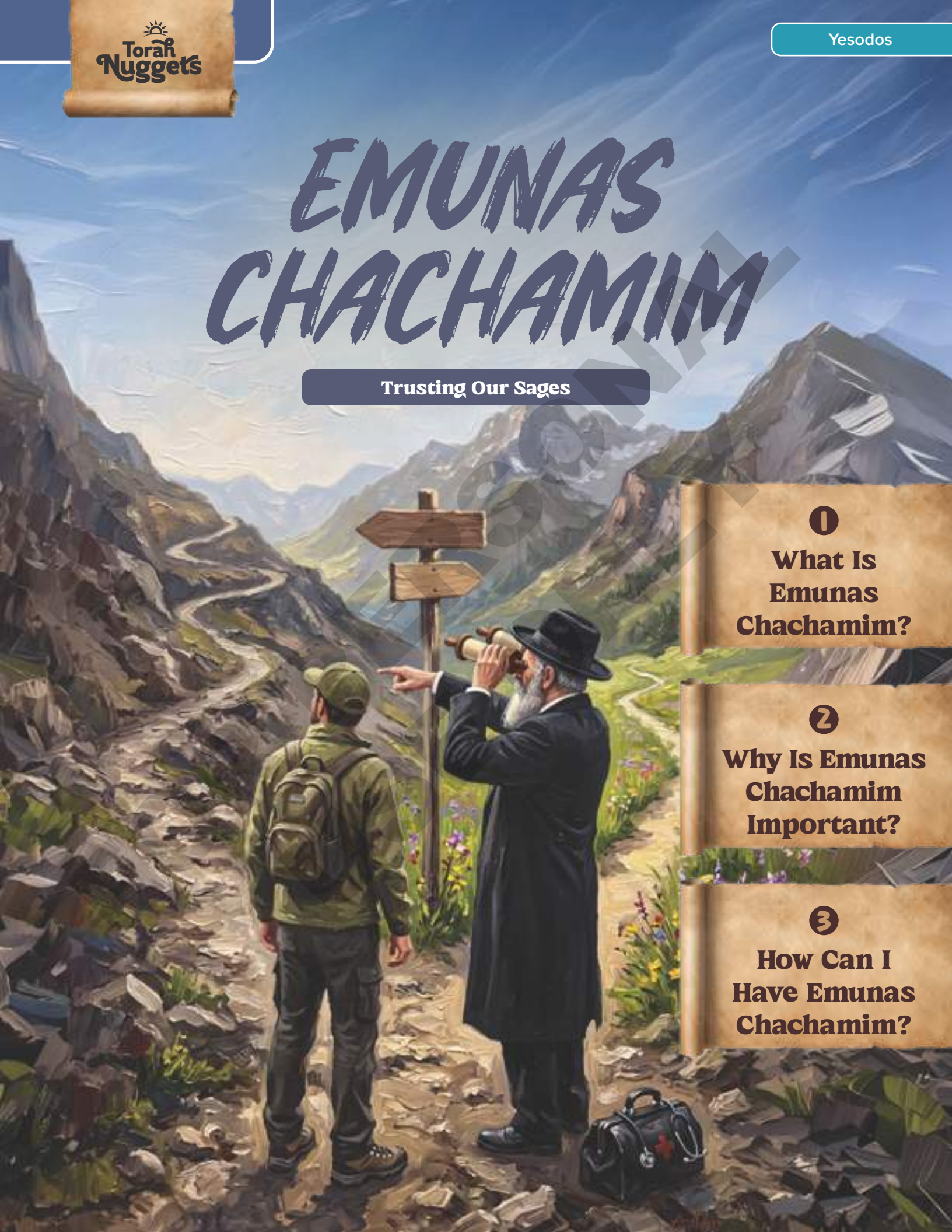
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/the-test-of-rebecca/

The Power of Prayer

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/the-power-of-prayer/

EMUNAS CHACHAMIM

Trusting Our Sages



1. What Is Emunas Chachamim?
2. Why Is Emunas Chachamim Important?
3. How Can I Have Emunas Chachamim?

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What Is Emunas Chachamim?

In a Nutshell

Hashem entrusted His Torah to the *Chachamim* of each generation to explain and teach it. Emunas Chachamim is believing and trusting in the words of Chazal (our Sages) and Rabbis. It is one of the most important parts of living as a Torah Jew!

I Need a Rebbi

Emunas Chachamim is one of the 48 qualities through which Torah is acquired.[1] It includes believing and trusting what the Sages say - even when their understanding reaches beyond our own. Even though so much of the Torah is written down in book form, we cannot be Torah Jews simply from reading the books. We have a Torah transmission from teacher to student in an unbroken chain stretching back to Moshe Rabbeinu who learned it all from Hashem on Har Sinai. Torah must be explained by a rebbe. The entire transmission of Torah depends upon our trust in its teachers.

They're Always Right (or Left)

The Torah commands us to do all that the *Chachamim* teach us, and not to stray from what they tell us "to the right or to the left."[2] Rashi explains that this means "even if they tell you that right is left or left is right."[3] How can the Torah expect us to accept a *psak* (rabbinic ruling) that seems clearly wrong? A hint can be found in the *posuk's* words "right or left." When two people face each other, one person's right is the other's left. Similarly, a ruling may seem clearly wrong only because we are viewing it from the wrong perspective. A Torah sage sees it from the correct angle.[4]



Spotlight

The only way to keep the Torah properly is to have Emunas Chachamim.

Who Commanded Us?

Before lighting Chanukah candles, we make a *bracha*: "Blessed are You, Hashem... Who commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light." But nowhere in the Torah is this *mitzvah* written! How can we say Hashem commanded us to light Chanukah candles when this *mitzvah* was established by the Sages? The Gemara[7] explains that Hashem actually *did* command us to light Chanukah candles when He commanded us "not to deviate from what the *Chachamim* tell us."[8] Included in that command is the obligation to observe the *mitzvos* the *Chachamim* establish. Therefore, when the *Chachamim* established a *mitzvah*, it is as though Hashem Himself commanded it.[9]

A Living Sefer Torah

Emunas Chachamim applies not only to *psak halacha*—halachic rulings—but also to *hadracha*, guidance for life. The reason for this is because a true Torah scholar possesses something invaluable called "*Daas Torah*." This term means that after immersing himself completely in Hashem's Torah wisdom, Torah shapes his character, lifestyle, and thought process, giving him the ability to see matters from a G-dly perspective. He becomes like a living *Sefer Torah* who sees the world through Torah eyes. In fact, the Gemara calls people foolish for only standing to honor a *Sefer Torah* but not for a great *Torah scholar*![5] Because of this, Jews seek the guidance of *Torah scholars not only in matters of halacha, but even for general life challenges as well.*

Torah Challenge

The *pasuk* says:

עַל־פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יוֹרוּךָ וְעַל־הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמְרוּ לְךָ תַּעֲשֶׂה

"*You shall act according to the Torah they teach you and the judgment they tell you*".[6]

Two words in this *passuk*, "*haTorah*" [the Torah] *and "yorucha"* [Your teaching] share the same Hebrew root—but look different. Can you identify their *shoresh* (root) and think of why these two words are related?

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What Is Emunas Chachamim?



Being a good Torah Jew does not only entail believing in Hashem and His Torah. It also means believing in the people whom Hashem entrusted with teaching us the Torah. Before Matan Torah, Hashem tells Moshe, "And also in you, they will believe forever".[10] Hashem arranged the revelation at Har Sinai so that the Jewish people would believe in Moshe forever as the repository and transmitter of Torah. When the Torah describes Moshe performing miracles, it merely calls Moshe a servant of Hashem - a term which implies that Moshe has no independent power. But when the Torah describes Moshe as the teacher of Hashem's Torah, it says: "They will believe in you." Moshe becomes the person authorized to give over and explain the Torah. From that point onward, Torah was no longer in Heaven.[11] If a person has a doubt about whether something is permitted, or how to understand a Halacha, he does not go to a prophet and ask him to obtain an answer from G-d. Instead, he goes to a *Talmid Chacham* who has a *mesorah** (tradition), has learned the Torah thoroughly, including the rules through which the Torah is interpreted. Whatever he understands through those means is what Hashem wants. A *talmid chacham* is therefore Hashem's messenger with the authority to determine what Torah is through his mesorah, his learning and the rules Hashem gave. His decisions are G-d's will, because the same G-d Who gave us the Torah also told us that this is how *halacha* must be decided throughout the generations.

The *Gemara* illustrates this through the famous disagreement concerning an oven. Rabbi Eliezer brought one proof after another that his opinion was correct. He even brought miracles, followed by a voice from Heaven confirming his position. However, all the other rabbis there disagreed with his opinion. They declared, ***"Lo bashamayim hi!"*** The Torah is not in Heaven. Hashem gave us rules to follow and told us to go after the majority opinion. We must follow those instructions - even if a voice from Heaven says the *halacha* is otherwise! At that moment, Hashem happily said, **"***Nitzchuni banai***!"**—"My children have defeated Me!"[12] Hashem gave the Torah to His children, and they were doing exactly what He said they should.

But beyond the above explanation, there is also another way to understand the words "*Nitzchuni banai.*" It can also mean "My children have made Me eternal."[13] By applying the Torah's eternal rules to every new situation, the *Chachamim* make Hashem's word last forever. Without the *Chachamim*, there is no Torah. For example, the Torah tells us not to work on Shabbos. Without the *Chachamim*, we would not know exactly which type of work is forbidden and what we can and cannot do on Shabbos. The same is true throughout the Torah, including matters of *hashkafah* (Jewish outlook). It is all contained in the Oral Torah and handed down to the *Chachamim* of every generation. When new situations arise, the application of Torah depends upon the *Chachamim*. Emunas Chachamim is therefore vital to the continuation and truth of Torah. When we know how to view our *gedolim* and *chachamim* properly, we can relate to Torah properly. That gives the Torah *nitzchiyus*—eternal existence.[14]

How does Hashem giving the *Chachamim* the authority to *pasken* (decide) *halacha* make the Torah eternal?

Tefillah Time

In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we ask Hashem: עַל הַצַּדִּיקִים וְעַל הַחֲסִידִים וְעַל זִקְנֵי שְׁאֵרִית עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל... יֶהֱמוּ נָא רַחֲמֶיךָ "*May Your compassion be aroused for the righteous, the devout, and the elders of Your nation, the Jewish people.*" We beg Hashem to have mercy on our Torah leaders, recognizing how precious they are to the Jewish people. We then add: וְשִׂים חֶלְקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם "*Place our lot with them.*" We do not merely want Torah leaders to guide us from a distance. We want to connect ourselves to them, learn from them, follow their guidance, and share in their Torah way of life. This is so integral to us that we pray for it three times a day, in *Shemonah Esrei*!

*See the **Mesorah Nugget** to learn more.



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Why Is It Important?

One Torah

New questions constantly arise, and people do not understand things in the same way. The Ramban explains that if every person were free to interpret the Torah according to his own understanding, disagreements would multiply until "the Torah would become many Torahs," and there would not be one unified Torah for all of *Klal Yisrael*.[15] Therefore, Hashem gave the *Chachamim* the authority to interpret the Torah and commanded us to follow their rulings. This preserves the Torah as one unified system instead of allowing each person to create his own version of it.

Our Torah Leaders Define Us

When Rav Ovadia Yosef, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, met King Juan Carlos of Spain, the king asked how many *Sephardim* lived in Israel. Rav Ovadia answered that they made up approximately half of Israel's Jewish population and included Jews from Yemen, Syria, Babylonia, Egypt, Morocco, India, and other countries. The king was puzzled. "But *Sephardi* means Spanish. These Jews were never in Spain. Why are they called *Sephardim*?" Rav Ovadia explained that the Jewish people are not defined only by geography, ethnicity, or ancestry. Their deepest identity comes from the Torah. The Rambam, born in Spain in the year 4895, became a leading Torah authority whose rulings were accepted by Jewish communities throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Although those communities did not live in Spain, they became known as *Sephardim* because they followed the Torah path of this great sage of *Sepharad*, and later of Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulchan Aruch. Our *Chachamim* preserve and transmit the Torah to us, which shapes our lives and the lives of entire communities across countries and generations. By attaching ourselves to qualified *Chachamim*, we remain connected to the Torah, our life-source.

The Proper Path Guarantee

Following Torah guidance does not guarantee that every problem will disappear or that everything will turn out the way we hoped. It *does* mean, no matter the outcome, that we followed the proper Torah path. Even if the reason for the guidance remains unclear, or the final outcome is painful or disappointing, and even in the unusual case that an authorized ruling turns out to be a mistake, the person who followed it still did what Hashem asked by following the Torah's system instead of relying only on his own judgment.



Aleph Beis or Beis Aleph?

All Torah knowledge, even written and simple things, ultimately depends on accepting our mesorah – the unbroken chain of oral information passed down from rebbe (teacher) to talmid (student), stretching all the way back to Mt. Sinai.

A Gentile (non-Jew) considering conversion approached the great sage Shammai and asked him: "How many Torahs are there?" Shammai answered, "Two. One written and one oral." The man replied, "I will accept the written one, but not the oral one." Shammai would not convert him on that basis. He then approached Hillel with this same request. The first day Hillel taught him the first few letters of the Aleph-Beis: "alef, beis, gimmel." The next day Hillel used different names for those same letters. The Gentile objected, "But that is not what you taught me yesterday!" Hillel responded, "Just like you are relying on what I told you yesterday, you also need to accept both the Oral and the Written Torah."[16] Without a rebbe, we wouldn't know what letter is called "alef" and which is called "beis," let alone more complicated things like what is permitted and what is forbidden and all the complex details of Jewish Law. We need to trust our *rebbeim* (rabbis) that they are teaching us the right things.

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Qualities of Torah Giants

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book3 pg.364

Rabbi Mintz, I know you have interacted with many great *Torah leaders* (gedolei Yisrael) over the years. Are there qualities you've observed that they have in common?

Thank G-d, I have had the privilege of meeting and speaking with many Torah giants over the years. Speaking about such great people calls for careful thought, as I would not want to say anything that fails to do them justice. That said, here are a few of the qualities I have observed.

The first thing that naturally stands out is their towering mastery of Torah. Each one had a vast breadth of knowledge and deep, penetrating understanding of both the written Torah and the Oral Law.

Another quality that comes to mind is what truly drove them in life — what they cared about most. Their concern was never for themselves, but for the Jewish people. They were deeply focused on spreading Torah, developing students, and helping others understand Judaism and the ways of the Torah. That's what interested them, and that's what occupied their minds and hearts. They recognized that Hashem had given them abilities, and with that came a sense of responsibility: to use those gifts to serve Hashem and His people and to bring Him nachas ruach.

Furthermore, their full dedication to this mission was extraordinary. Their time, energy, and entire lives were given over to Torah and the Jewish people. They lived with mesirus nefesh — willingness to sacrifice themselves completely — for this mission. They didn't hold anything back. They pushed themselves beyond what seemed possible, often skipping meals or sleep, because their focus was fully on teaching Torah, helping people, and serving Hashem's will. Even when their wives and families worried about their health or urged them to slow down, they remained entirely focused and driven. Their lives were fully consumed with the responsibility Hashem had placed upon their shoulders.

Something else that stood out to me was how they treated the people who came to them for guidance, whether it was about halachah or personal advice. They were always warm, friendly, and careful to make sure you never felt like you were bothering them. Despite their immense responsibilities and busy schedules, they greeted everyone with genuine kindness and patience, as if they had all the time in the world. When you spoke with them, they gave you their full attention and made sure you left feeling heard and satisfied with the answer. Their patience and willingness to help were remarkable, and left a lasting impression on everyone who came to them.

These giants possessed many great qualities, but these are a few that stood out consistently among those with whom I had the privilege to interact.

IN SHORT: ***Beyond their greatness in Torah scholarship, a few qualities I consistently observed among our Torah giants was a deep concern for the Jewish people, complete dedication to their mission, and patience and care toward those seeking their guidance.***

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Special Siyata Dishmaya

There once was a woman whose husband had disappeared, and no one knew whether he was alive or dead. Without reliable proof that he had died, she could not remarry. She brought her case to Rav Akiva Eiger, who studied the evidence and concluded that, according to *halacha*, there was sufficient proof that her husband had died and she was permitted to remarry. Nevertheless, Rav Akiva Eiger said, "I cannot issue the final *psak* until my son-in-law, the *Chasam Sofer*, who is the *posek hador*, agrees and gives his approval." The case was brought to the *Chasam Sofer*. His first question was, "What did my father-in-law say?" When he heard Rav Akiva Eiger's ruling, he answered, "According to the *din*, I agree with my father-in-law. But something does not feel right. Come back to me in three days."On the third day, the missing husband walked in! People hurried to Rav Akiva Eiger and exclaimed, "Your son-in-law is a *baal mofeis*! He performs miracles!" Rav Akiva Eiger answered, "No. He is the *posek hador*, and therefore Hashem gives him special *siyata diShmaya*. It is impossible for the *posek hador* to make such a terrible error and permit a married woman to remarry."[17]

How Can I Have Emunas Chachamim?

Finding A Rav

Chazal instruct us, "*Asei lecha rav*—Accept (lit. "make") a Rabbi for yourself."[21] How do you find someone to be your Rabbi? Look for someone recognized by respected *Rabbanim* as a *yerei Shamayim* and qualified halachic authority. He should have learned from established Torah teachers so that he is connected to the *mesorah*, the chain of Torah transmission that began with Moshe Rabbeinu. Your *rav* does not have to be the *rosh yeshiva* or the biggest *rav* in town. There may be many good choices. It is important to choose someone you can easily reach, who will have time for you, and with whom you can build a relationship. Once you have found a qualified *rav* who knows you and understands your circumstances, turn to him consistently for guidance

Super-Vision

Ever been 100% sure you had a situation figured out, only to discover that you missed half the story? A *Talmid Chacham* has accumulated years of Torah knowledge and developed a Torah-shaped outlook. He notices details, dangers, and possibilities that the rest of us may completely miss. And there is another layer: *Siyata d'Shmaya* - Divine Assistance. The Chachamim of each generation receive special assistance from Heaven that protects them from making mistakes.[18] Emunas Chachamim means realizing that we may not see the whole picture or have the right perspective and understanding. Even when the Chachamim's guidance does not make sense to us, we trust that their Torah perspective together with their *Siyata d'Shmaya* gives them a much clearer view.

Na'aseh V'nishma

Are questions allowed? Absolutely! Emunas Chachamim does not mean switching off your brain or being afraid to investigate. The key is why you are asking. Are you trying to understand the words of the *Chachamim*, or are you searching for a reason to reject them? Our investigation should begin with the belief that Chazal and our Rabbi's words are true. If we do not find a satisfying explanation, it should end with that same belief. Questions asked from that foundation can deepen our understanding. That is what we all answered by *Har Sinai*: *Naaseh v'Nishma!* First we accept, and then we work to understand.[20]

Saved By the Psak

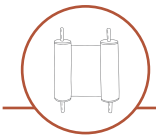
Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zt"l*, the *Gadol Hador* of the previous generation, once served as the *rav* of Luban, Russia. Among the town's residents was a wicked Jewish informer who had caused great suffering for the Jewish community. As the informer lay dying, he claimed that he deeply regretted his terrible deeds. As an atonement, he asked to be buried "like a donkey," with his coffin standing upright instead of lying flat. He even had the people sign a document promising to fulfill his request. However, nothing was done in the town without the approval of the city's *rav*, Rav Moshe, so they asked his permission. Rav Moshe firmly refused. Halachically, a human being may not be buried like a donkey, he explained, and this applied even to a *rasha*. Two days after the burial, officers from the NKVD, the feared Soviet secret police, arrived and ordered the grave to be opened. The officers inspected the body, looking surprised, and instructed them to rebury it. Only then did the community understand the informer's plot. He had told the NKVD that the Jews planned to take revenge by burying him upright like a donkey. The informer had hoped to bring calamity upon the Jewish community, even after his death. Because the townspeople consulted their *rav* and followed his ruling, they were saved from his scheme.[19]

Korny Korner

What do you call a rabbi who supervises the kashrus of Italian food?

Rav-ioli!

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Finding a Rav

How can you find a *rav*? How can you know who is truly a *talmid chacham*?

Imagine that someone needs a complicated heart operation. He wants the best surgeon for his particular condition, but how can he know who that is? He would not ask his neighbor or his dog walker. He would ask respected doctors. Because they know the medical world, they can recognize which surgeons have exceptional knowledge and skill. Experts in a field are able to recognize the true experts in that field.

The same is true when looking for a *rav*. A person should look for someone recognized and respected by established *talmidei chachamim*. They understand what Torah greatness is and can recognize who has the Torah knowledge, *yiras Shamayim*, and connection to the *mesorah* necessary to guide others.

This recognition is more important than an impressive title or official position. Torah leaders are not elected, and they do not necessarily hold formal positions. The Chazon Ish, one of the greatest Torah leaders of his generation, never held an official position. Yet the *talmidei chachamim* of his generation recognized his extraordinary greatness. Therefore, the first step in finding a *rav* is to look for someone whom respected, well-known *Rabbanim* recognize as a qualified Torah authority.

Does this mean that all qualified *Rabbanim* will follow the same path and always give the same answers? No. There are different legitimate paths within Torah. Some place special emphasis on Torah learning, others on *tefillah*, and others on *chesed*. Every authentic Torah path includes Torah, *avodah*, and *chesed*, but each may place its strongest emphasis somewhere else.

The Chofetz Chaim says that in the days of Mashiach, Hashem will place all the Torah leaders in a circle, with Hashem in the center. They will all point toward Him and say, "*Zeh Elokeinu kivinu lo*—This is our G-d; we waited for Him." Each one may stand at a different point on the circle, but they are all equidistant from its center. In the same way, different Torah paths can approach Hashem from different directions while remaining equally close to Him.

Of course, that does not make every path legitimate. An authentic Torah path must be rooted in a reliable *mesorah*, supported by qualified *Gedolei Yisrael*, and faithful to the Written Torah, the Oral Torah, and the Rambam's thirteen essential principles of faith. When a path meets those requirements, it can be legitimate even if it differs from the path that we personally follow.

Different qualified *Rabbanim* may also reach different conclusions in *halacha*. In the time of the Sanhedrin, there was one central authority to resolve these disagreements. Seventy-one great Sages sat together, discussed each question from every angle, and used the rules Hashem gave the *Chachamim* to determine the *halacha*. They then voted, and the majority ruling became the ruling for all of Klal Yisrael.

Today, we no longer have a Sanhedrin to issue one ruling for everyone. Different qualified *Rabbanim* may therefore rule differently on the same question. Without one central ruling, how can a person know what to do? He must choose one qualified *rav* and follow him consistently.

Other *Rabbanim* and their rulings may be completely legitimate, but a person may not move from one *rav* to another whenever he prefers a different answer. Otherwise, he may end up choosing whichever opinion is most convenient instead of truly following Torah guidance. He should accept both the lenient and stringent rulings of his own *rav*, while respecting other qualified *Rabbanim* and those who follow them.

Why is it so important to have a specific Rav as opposed to asking different Rabbanim each time a question comes up?



Ask the Rabbi

Every thinking person can (and should) have questions and concerns about Hashem, Torah and mitzvos, as well as life in general. However, many people mistakenly assume that faith and questions can't coexist, and everyone should just follow the Torah without asking why, brushing questions under the rug.

But HaRav Chaim Mintz *shlita*, mashgiach (spiritual mentor) of Yeshiva of Staten Island, as well as the founder and spiritual leader of Oorah, has taught us that this is not the Torah-true way of life, and that the Torah actually encourages questions.

It was with this perspective that "Ask the Rabbi" was introduced, every Tuesday night at 9pm on Zoom at oorah.org/asktherabbi/, and at every Oorah Yom Tov event, ShabbaZone, and "TheZone" summer program. "Ask the Rabbi" provides a forum for people to raise any issues they may be struggling with, explore concepts they have taken for granted, or discuss any aspect of Judaism or Jewish practice they find confusing or that they are simply curious about. More than that, it places an emphasis on questions and encourages people to think a little deeper into Judaism, and indeed has become an highlight of every Oorah event.

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Emunas Chachamim means trusting the Torah sages whom Hashem entrusted with transmitting, interpreting, and applying His Torah. This trust preserves the *mesorah* and allows us to know what Hashem really wants of us. Once a person has a qualified *rav* who is recognized by respected *Rabbanim*, he or she must follow his halachic decisions. However, it doesn't end there! A true *talmid chacham's* wisdom goes beyond *halacha*. He also possesses *Daas Torah*: his years of Torah learning have shaped the way he thinks, lives, and views the world. Therefore, we also turn to Torah sages for advice in all areas of life, and value their guidance. Different *Rabbanim* may reach different conclusions, but each person must follow their own *rav* while respecting others. By following Torah guidance with Emunas Chachamim, we can know with confidence that we are following the proper Torah path.

Ask the Rabbi

When you got a Q, and you need an A
Who you gonna ask? The Rabbi
If you got a game, but it's Saturday
Who you gonna ask? The Rabbi

I'm gonna ask the Rav
I'm gonna ask my shaila
I ain't scared to ask the Rav

When your health look poor, but it don't feel good
Who you gonna ask? The Rabbi
Can I make it big? Live in Hollywood
Who you gonna ask? The Rabbi

I ain't afraid to ask
Oh no, not me, I ain't gonna be an am haaretz
The Rabbi won't bite me after all
Worst that happens? He could tell me
He doesn't know

Ask the Rabbi, ask the Rabbi
Don't be scared, don't be scared
Ask the Rabbi, ask the Rabbis

Don't be scared, don't be scared
If the sun so big, why the moon so small
Who you gonna ask? The Rabbi
Do I must repent, if I don't sin at all
Who can I ask? The Rabbi

These questions really bother me
I need someone to ask
I think I'll ask the Rav
Yeah, I'm gonna do that

Everybody
You're shteiging hard, but you don't chap p'shat
Who you gonna freg? The Rabbi
The cheesecake falls in the cholent pot
Who can I ask? The Rabbi

Ask the Rabbi, ask the Rabbi
Come on Rabbi, tell me
Teach me the Torah
Like you got it from Moshe, the Mesorah
Ask the Rabbi, ask the Rabbi

Can I eat a fish, if it lost its fins
Who can I ask? The Rabbi
Can I gamble cash, if I always win
Who am I gonna ask that to? The Rabbi

Now that's a good shaila
I need to know
I want to live my life according to the Torah
Come on Rabbi, teach me

Ask the Rabbi, ask the Rabbi
Don't be scared, don't be scared

Do I gotta sway
Shuckle when I pray
Who can I ask? The Rabbi
Am I just a pin in a stack of hay
Who can I ask? The Rabbi

I'm gonna ask the Rav all my questions
Making a list
Don't be scared, don't be scared
I ain't afraid of the Rabbi

Demons and devils
Ghosts and golems
Secrets of creation and reincarnation
Kabbalah, Torah, the deepest mysteries
Yeah, I'm gonna ask the Rav all that

I'm gonna ask the Rav
I'm gonna ask my shaila
Oh yeah

Don't you wanna know, know, know
Ask the Rabbi, ask the Rabbi
Don't be scared, don't be scared

Who can I call? The Rabbi
Whom I gonna ask? The Rabbi
Who can I call? The Rabbi
Ask the Rabbi, ask the Rabbi

Who can pasken? The Rabbi
Who can illuminate
Who can extrapolate? The Rabbi
Who can I call
Ask the Rabbi
Who you gonna ask? The Rabbi
The Rabbi

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The Door Finally Opened

The Oppenheim family had finally found a house and signed a contract to purchase it. They expected the next stage to be filled with excitement as they prepared to move into their new home.

Instead, the closing became a source of anguish. Serious difficulties arose with the contractor, and the family did not know whether they would be able to complete the purchase. They had already contracted for the house, yet their future there remained uncertain. What should have been a joyful time became filled with pressure and worry.

During this difficult period, Rabbi Mintz joined the family at a *kiddush*. To the Oppenheims, his presence was a special honor. Yet what touched them most was not simply that he had come. Although Rabbi Mintz had many responsibilities, he spent time with their family and listened with heartfelt concern as they described what they were going through.

Rabbi Mintz told them that he would *daven* for them and gave them a *bracha*.

The family left the conversation feeling that their struggle truly mattered to him. Their problem was now in the *tefillos* of a Torah leader who cared deeply about them.

Then the situation changed. The contractor, who had been causing them so much distress, had a change of heart and became more reasonable. The obstacles were resolved, and the Oppenheim family was finally able to close on the house. Instead of losing the home they had contracted for, they could now prepare to move into it the following month.

Mrs. Oppenheim was certain that this sudden turnaround was connected to Rabbi Mintz's *tefillos* and *bracha*. "I am so sure that the heavens opened up to his prayers for us," she wrote afterward.

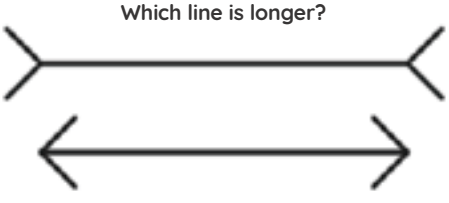
Emunas Chachamim includes recognizing the special power of a Torah leader's *tefillos* and valuing his *bracha*. Rabbi Mintz listened to their pain, and *davened* for their success. For the Oppenheims, his concern, *tefillos*, and *bracha* helped open the door to their new home.



Zoniac Challenge

Can You Trust Your Eyes?

Which line is longer?



Now use a ruler. Surprise—they are exactly the same length! Sometimes something seems completely obvious because of the way we are viewing it, yet our perspective can fool us.



Zoniac Dilemma

The Second Opinion

Ever since last year, Ari and eight of his friends had been planning an exciting cross-country trip together. They had chosen the places they would visit, planned the activities, and talked about the trip almost every day. The only problem was the price. Ari's parents felt that the trip was far too expensive, and for months they refused to let him go. Ari kept asking, and eventually they finally agreed. Before paying, however, they decided to ask their family *rav* for guidance. After hearing all the details, the *rav* said that he did not think the trip was a good idea. Ari was crushed. His friends were already preparing to book their tickets, and he had waited an entire year for his parents to agree! Then one friend said, "Why don't you ask a different *rav*? Maybe he will say yes. Just don't mention that your *rav* already said no, so he can give you his own opinion." Ari reached for the phone but paused. Was he just searching for the answer he wanted?

What would you do?





COVER UNCOVERED

This cover depicts how Emunas Chachamim guides us along the proper Torah path. A person should turn to a Rav for advice and guidance, not only for halacha. The Rav looks through the lens of Torah and sees what we may miss, directing the traveler toward the harder-looking path. Like choosing a doctor, we rely on recognized experts to guide us.



Daily Challenge

Make sure you have your Rabbi's number or contact info today.

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Sources

1) Pirkei Avos 6:6
2) Devarim 17:11
3) Rashi, Devarim 17:11
4) Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, as quoted by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss
5) Makkos 22b
6) Devarim 17:11
7) Shabbos 23a
8) Devarim 17:11
9) Rambam, Hakdamah to Yad Hachazakah
10) Shemos 19:9
11) Devarim 30:12
12) Bava Metzia 59b
13) Rabbi Zev Leff based on Toldos Adam, end of chapter 14
14) Based on class by R' Zev Leff
15) Ramban, Devarim 17:11
16) Shabbos 31a
17) Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, B'Kar'i Shemo, p. 112, Parshas Vayakhel
18) Ramban, Devarim 17:11; Tehillim 37:28
19) Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss
20) Shemos 24:7
21) Avos 1:6

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Pirkei Avos Treasury



R' David Chai Abuchatzeira on Emunah and Bitachon

What Gives Rabbis the Right to Tell Me What to Do?

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/gives-rabbis-right-tell/

MINHAGIM

Jewish Customs



1. What is a Minhag?
2. Why are Minhagim important?
3. How can people have different Minhagim?
4. How can I follow Minhagim?

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What is a Minhag?

Spotlight

Following Minhagim means following Torah!

In a Nutshell

A Minhag is a custom that a family, community or group has accepted upon themselves as binding. Minhagim are a means of safeguarding or enhancing the fulfillment of Torah mitzvos.

Root Meaning

The word Minhag is often translated as "custom," but it comes from the Hebrew root *noheg*, which means "to lead." A Minhag is a way of life, a practice that guides how we live as Jews.

Types of Minhagim

Minhagim include a wide range of customs that have different purposes. Some protect us from breaking *halachah*, like not working on Erev Pesach before midday so that we are sure not to work after midday when it is truly forbidden. Others help us remember mitzvos, like not eating before doing mitzvos such as burning your *chometz*, lighting the menorah, or shaking the *lulav*. There are even Minhagim that beautify mitzvos, such as decorating a sukkah or having a *Ner Tamid* (eternal flame) in front of the *Aron* in a shul[1]. Sometimes a Minhag reminds us of a mitzvah we can no longer do. We eat the afikomen to remember the *korban Pesach*, and we take *hoshanos* on Sukkos in memory of what was done in the Beis Hamikdash.



Rhyme and Reason

Minhagim have always developed from a strong need within the Jewish community or nation as a whole, never a random idea or request from one person. For example, when a group of Jews called the *Tzedukim* spread their idea that the *Torah She'beal peh* was unnecessary, the rabbis established the Minhag to eat a hot food on Shabbos, as one can only have hot food on Shabbos day through the explanations of the *Torah She'beal peh*. In another example, rice was almost always kept in storage with grain and would invariably have grain indistinguishably mixed in with the rice, which is why Ashkenazim do not eat rice on Pesach. Minhagim are serious business!

Family Gems

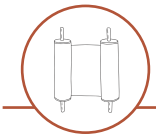
Some customs are universal, accepted by all of *Klal Yisroel*. Some examples would be eating a hot dish on Shabbos (cholent or *chamin*), saying *Kol Nidrei* on Yom Kippur, or covering the challah during *kiddush*. Others are specific to *Ashkenazim*, *Sefardim*, or Jews from certain cities or countries. Some examples would be different foods eaten or forbidden on Pesach, whether or not *Birchas Kohanim* is said daily, or whether or not a groom and bride can see each other before the ceremony on their wedding day! Even individual families have their own traditions that are passed down through generations.

I Identify

Whether it's the way someone ties tefillin, the type of siddur they use, or how they make Kiddush, Minhagim give shape to Jewish life. They help us feel connected to our *mesorah*, not just to *halachah*, to our parents, grandparents, and the Jewish people.



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What Is a Minhag?

To understand what a Minhag is, we have to go deeper than simply calling it a "custom." In Jewish thought, a Minhag is not just a cultural tradition or personal preference, but an expression of Divine wisdom revealed through the lived experience of the Jewish people. A Minhag may begin as a response to historical conditions or spiritual sensitivities, but over time, it becomes something more: it becomes part of the Torah.

Take, for example, the practice of keeping two days of Yom Tov outside of Eretz Yisrael. This began during a time when messages from the Sanhedrin about the new month could not reach distant communities in time. Today, we have precise calendars and instant communication. So why doesn't *halachah* revert to the original, one-day observance? The answer lies in the essence of Minhag. Once a practice has been embraced by the collective Jewish people over generations—especially when done to preserve or enhance mitzvah observance—it becomes not just a solution, but a sacred way of living.

This is because Torah is not only a book, but is a living wisdom. If we treated the Torah as merely a written document, we would constantly try to peel away layers and return to a pure "book version" of *halachah*. Customs would be seen as decorative, something to be changed or discarded as needed. But Torah is not static. It is Divine wisdom that grows and blossoms through time, nourished by the hands and hearts of the Jewish people.

The Torah given at Sinai was like a seed. Within it was packed infinite potential—codes, nuances, and meanings waiting to emerge. The Jewish people are the fertile ground in which that seed was planted. Through our learning, our struggles, and our daily lives, the Torah unfolds. Hashem, the perfect Gardener, planted this seed knowing exactly how it would grow—knowing that it would sprout leaves called Minhagim, that reflect His will as deeply as the original laws themselves.

This is why the Sages often treat *Minhagim* with halachic authority. The Talmud tells us that if a community takes on a certain practice in service of Torah, it may become binding even if it began voluntarily. A well-known example comes from *Pesachim 50b*, where the people of Bayshan had a communal custom not to travel between two towns on Erev Shabbos. Their descendants were told to continue the practice, based on the verse: *"Listen, my son, to the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the teachings of your mother"*[2]. Here, Torah is not just in the written law—it is in the lived behavior of generations.

Other sources also support this approach. The verse *"Do not move the ancient boundary set by your ancestors"*[3] has been understood not only as a property law, but as a warning against erasing spiritual boundaries such as *Minhagim* passed down through time. The Shulchan Aruch adds that when someone accepts a personal stringency, even if it isn't technically required, it becomes a *neder*, a halachic vow[4]. To ignore such a commitment is to break one's word before G-d.

Perhaps most striking is the example of eating hot food—*chamin* or *cholent*—on Shabbos day. This custom developed as a way to counter the influence of the *Tzedukim* and then the *Kora'im*, who denied the Oral Torah and refused to benefit from fire on Shabbos. The Jews insisted on preparing hot food before Shabbos so they could enjoy it on Shabbos day, affirming their faith in the *Torah Sheba'al Peh*. Over time, the practice became so meaningful that abandoning it was seen as aligning with heresy. What started as a custom grew into a halachic expression of belief[5].

Minhag, then, is not extra. It is the flowering of Torah in the world. It is Torah as lived and experienced by the Jewish people- not just rabbis, but grandmothers, merchants, children, and sages working together over centuries to bring Hashem's will into daily life. When we ask, "What is a Minhag?" we are not asking about a minor ritual. We are asking about the way Divine wisdom is revealed through time. A Minhag is the sign that Klal Yisrael understood the message, internalized it, and responded with *emunah* and wisdom.

Can you change your Minhag if you know the "right" answer?

(Like eating corn on Pesach because you know 1,000% there's no grain in it?)



Torah Challenge

The Navi tells us about Yehu, a military commander who was known for his crazy "driving" skills.[6]

וַיֹּאמֶר הַצֹּפֶה לֵאמֹר, בָּא הַמַּנְהִג וְלֹא שָׁב, וְהַמִּנְהָג כְּמִנְהַג יֵהוּא בֶּן נִמְשִׁי--כִּי בְּשִׁגָּעוֹן יִנְהָג.

"The watchman reported, saying: 'He came up to them, but he is not returning. And the driving is like the driving of Yehu son of Nimshi, for he drives like a madman.'"

Which word in this passuk has the same root as "Minhag?" What does that teach us about Minhagim?

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Why are Minhagim important?

Torah in Motion

Minhagim matter because they show how Torah is lived, not just studied. The Torah was given at Har Sinai, but it didn't stop there. Every generation applies its teachings to new situations, and Minhagim are one of the main ways that happens. When Jews take on a practice to protect a mitzvah, to honor a special moment, or to express love for Hashem, that practice becomes part of how we serve Him. Minhagim help us connect Torah to daily life. They are not just habits—they are part of the way Torah continues through us.

Don't Change

The Torah spends considerable time telling us about how Yitzchak re-digs the wells his father Avraham had originally dug[7]. The Pelishtim had filled them in, erasing his father's efforts. When Yitzchak reopens the wells, he gives them the same names that Avraham had used. He doesn't rename, rebrand, or reinvent. He honors what came before. This act teaches us how deeply the Torah values continuity. Just like Yitzchak didn't discard his father's wells, we don't discard our inherited *Minhagim*. Even when we don't fully understand them, we preserve them because they carry the identity, wisdom, and holiness of the generations that came before us[8].



Where You're From

When a child is born, their *neshama* contains spiritual roots from both parents. That means a child is spiritually as well as physically connected to their parents. Their soul is a continuation of their family's inner world. So when a person follows their family's *Minhagim*, they're not just honoring the past, but themselves as well. You are a piece of your parents' essence. Their customs are part of your spiritual DNA. To walk in their ways is not imitation, but identity.[10]

Hold on to the Chain!

The Torah doesn't just teach us what to do, but also how to stay connected. *"Listen, my son, to the discipline of your father and do not abandon your mother's teaching"* (Mishlei 1:8). Minhagim are the quiet threads that connect us to those who came before. A unique family name, hours waiting between milk and meat, or a community's special tefillah, are more than habits. They're living memories. To drop a Minhag lightly is to let go of a piece of that chain. But to keep it is to say: I am still connected.

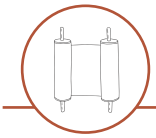
Stronger than Law

Not everything sacred comes from a formal command. Take the Minhag of saying *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh. The Torah never requires it, and even the sages did not officially obligate it (the *mitzvah derabanan* is specifically for Yamim Tovim). The Gemara even explicitly says[9] that we have no mitzvah to daven *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh, but then concludes that we recite Hallel on Rosh Chodesh as a Minhag. And yet, this custom spread across generations and became a regular part of davening in almost every community. Interestingly, Ashkenazim will say a *brachah* before Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, while many Sephardim will not.

They Keep Us

We often think we're keeping our customs, but sometimes, it's really the customs that keep us. Minhagim shape our identity. They give us familiar actions, words, and melodies that stay with us no matter where we go. A boy putting on his grandfather's tefillin, a girl lighting the same number of candles that her mother lit—they're part of something bigger than themselves. Minhagim turn abstract ideas into experiences. Even someone who doesn't know all the laws still connect to his Judaism through these customs. They remind us: you come from somewhere. You are part of a people and a path.

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Minhag Yisrael Torah

In Jewish life, *Minhagim* are often misunderstood. People may view them as sentimental or optional additions to halacha, interesting traditions that add color but not substance. Yet throughout Jewish history and halachic literature, we find a deeper and more serious approach. The phrase *Minhag Yisrael Torah*, which means "the custom of Israel is like Torah," reflects the idea that accepted customs are binding as well as meaningful. A Minhag that is rooted in Torah values, widely practiced, and accepted over time can become part of our halachic framework. Understanding why this is true reveals much about the nature of Torah, community, and the Jewish soul.

At the heart of this idea is the belief that Torah is not only transmitted through formal laws, but also through the lived behavior of generations of Jews. When a community acts with consistency and intention over time, especially in the service of mitzvos or protecting spiritual boundaries, their actions shape halacha itself. Minhagim are not outside of halacha; they are one of its most powerful expressions. They reveal how Jewish values are lived, not just studied.

This view is supported by many halachic discussions that treat Minhagim as serious obligations. When people accept a stringency or a spiritual practice upon themselves—even voluntarily—it can sometimes attain the status of a *neder*, a personal vow. According to halacha, a person who breaks such a commitment may be violating the Torah prohibition against going back on one's word[11]. The importance lies not only in the specific action, but in the personal and communal commitment behind it. When Jews consistently choose to live a certain way because of Torah values, that behavior becomes part of their religious identity, and that identity is protected by halacha.

We also find that customs can shape halacha on a communal scale. In some areas of Jewish law, such as business practices, the local Minhag actually determines the legal outcome, even when it differs from what would otherwise be expected[12]. This is because halacha recognizes that the lived reality of a Torah-committed community reflects Torah itself. In this sense, Minhag carries weight because it is a reflection of Torah wisdom applied through generations of practice. Talmud Yerushalmi says[13] that if you are ever not sure what the halacha is when there are two opinions, see what the accepted Minhag is and follow that.

This principle appears even in highly technical areas of halacha. The Talmud teaches that if Eliyahu HaNavi were to come and say that we must perform *chalitzah* with a shoe instead of a sandal, we would not accept his opinion—because the Jewish people already have the Minhag to use a sandal[14]. Once the Minhag was established, it became more than a preferred method; it became part of halacha itself. This example reveals the extraordinary strength of Minhag when grounded in accepted practice.

This continuity is not a sentimental attachment to the past. It reflects the Torah's own concern for preserving spiritual boundaries. The Torah commands us not to move the ancient boundary markers set by our ancestors[15], and this command has been understood by Chazal as applying to spiritual traditions as well. When a Minhag is accepted over generations, it becomes part of those sacred boundaries. To change it without cause is not innovation but a serious breach of Torah.

When we say *Minhag Yisrael Torah*, we are not simply describing the power of habit. We are affirming that the Jewish people, when grounded in Torah, have the ability to sanctify daily life through consistent, faithful action. Minhag is one of the ways Klal Yisrael brings Torah into time, into communities, and into the small moments of living. It is Torah in motion, passed from hand to hand, voice to voice, and home to home.

Understanding this helps us treat Minhagim with the respect they deserve. They are not side details. They are the walking, breathing form of halacha itself.

Is it ideal for a community rabbi to have different Minhagim than his community? What difference does it make?



Fake News!

While it's very important to follow Minhagim, not every custom qualifies as a legitimate Minhag. In fact, customs rooted in superstition are sometimes forbidden. The Torah prohibits following *darkei Emori* (the ways of non-Jews) based on two *pesukim*- לֹא תְנַחֲשׁוּ וְלֹא תְעוֹנֵנוּ "You shall not practice divination or believe in lucky times"[16] and בְּחֻקֹּתֵיהֶם לֹא תֵלֵכוּ "You shall not follow their customs"[17]. For example, knocking on wood to prevent bad luck or avoiding a black cat are rooted in pagan or superstitious beliefs, and practicing them may be a Torah violation rather than a harmless habit.

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How can people have different Minhagim?

Different Strokes

It can be confusing to see different Jews doing things differently. One family names a baby after a living grandparent, while another would only name after someone who passed away. Some wait six hours between meat and milk, others wait three, and some only wait one! If we all follow the same Torah, how can our Minhagim be so different? The answer is that Minhagim developed over time in response to where Jews lived, who led them, what they went through, and which spiritual teachings they followed. These differences don't divide us, they reflect the many ways Jewish life connects to Torah. In Judaism, there's room for more than one right way.

Leadership

Different communities followed different rabbinic leaders, and over time, their guidance shaped distinct Minhagim. One rav might have emphasized mikvah immersion before Yom Tov, while another discouraged it to avoid extra burden. A clear example is the practice of standing during Aseres Hadibros when they are read in shul. Some communities stand, based on the rulings of the Chida, while others sit, following the Vilna Gaon, who worried it might imply one part of Torah is more important. Both approaches come from deep Torah reasoning. Different leadership led to different customs—all valid, all rooted in Torah.

Historical Circumstances

Sometimes a Minhag began because of danger, exile, or loss—and was kept long after the moment passed. For example, although a menorah should ideally be lit outside the home, many Jewish communities in past centuries were persecuted terribly. Lighting the menorah outside their home was dangerous and would invite anti-semitism and vandalism. Today, even though we do not face the same dangers, we light the menorah inside our homes to reflect this accepted Minhag. The menorah glittering in a window tells us about what a community went through and how it adapted with strength and faith.

Kabbalistic Influence

Some Minhagim come from the world of Kabbalah, where physical actions reflect deep spiritual ideas. A beautiful example is the custom of staying up all night on Shavuos, known as *Tikkun Leil Shavuos*. The Arizal taught that this practice repairs the mistake of the generation that overslept before receiving the Torah. Though not halachically required, this Minhag spread far and wide—even to communities that don't normally follow Kabbalistic customs. It adds meaning, intensity, and a sense of spiritual readiness. Minhagim like these remind us that Torah is not just what we do, but how we elevate what we do.

Geography

Where Jews lived had a huge impact on how their Minhagim developed. Local foods, languages, and climates influenced how Jews practiced halacha. One classic case is the Minhag of sleeping in the sukkah and eating Shemini Atzeres in the Sukkah. In Europe, where the climate was very cold, people didn't do it. Geography shaped the concerns, which shaped the Minhag. In areas where the climate was warmer, sleeping and eating outside was more comfortable and was therefore done. Different places meant different realities—but all were aiming to keep the Torah properly.

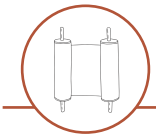
Corny Corner

Why did the chicken bring a map to kaparos?



Because it didn't want to wing it!

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A 70-sided Diamond

It's easy to wonder: if the Torah is one, why do Jews follow so many different customs? Why does one person wear Rabbenu Tam tefillin, while another does not? Why do some communities bang during Haman's name in Megillah reading, and others remain silent? How can everyone be right?

Chazal teach a profound truth: *"Shivim Panim LaTorah"*—the Torah has seventy faces[18]. This means that Torah is not a single, flat code. It is a Divine wisdom so vast and rich that it can express itself in multiple, equally valid ways. When customs are rooted in truth and tradition, each one reflects a unique aspect of Hashem's will.

This diversity is not a mistake, nor is it the result of confusion. It was part of the Torah from the very beginning. The Midrash[19] teaches that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Shamayim to receive the Torah, he did not eat or drink for forty days, because in the upper worlds, such actions are unnecessary. In contrast, when the *malachim* visited Avraham Avinu, they appeared to eat and drink, because that is what humans do. The Torah adapts to the world in which it is lived.

Furthermore, Chazal teach that when Moshe received the Torah, he was shown not only the written and oral laws, but also all future interpretations and every Minhag that would later emerge through the learning and lives of the Jewish people.

In this way, Torah Shebe'al Peh, the Oral Torah, is not limited to what was taught at Har Sinai. It also includes everything that would be revealed later through generations of faithful Jews. *Minhagim*, when they are grounded in Torah and accepted by Klal Yisrael, are part of this unfolding revelation. They are not detours from Torah; they are Torah itself, as it takes root and flourishes in real Jewish life.

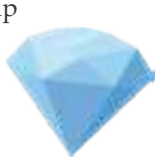
The Gemara[20] recounts a striking story. Yehuda and Hillel, the sons of Rabban Gamliel, visited new towns where they encountered unusual customs. In one place, two brothers would not go to the bathhouse together. In another, the locals prohibited certain shoes on Shabbos. Although these practices were not required by halacha, Yehuda and Hillel respectfully adopted the local customs. They did not argue or challenge the community. Their decision shows how *Minhagim* carry emotional and spiritual weight, are not based on "right" and "wrong" and how preserving them fosters peace and unity within the Jewish people.

Throughout the generations, we find diverse Minhagim that emerged from sincere and faithful practice. Some Jews wrap their tefillin in different styles, based on variations in halachic opinion or local tradition. In one community, men begin wearing a tallis before marriage, while in another, it is reserved for after the chuppah. Some include particular *piyutim* (liturgical poems) in davening, while others omit them. The Maharil, a major halachic authority in medieval Ashkenaz, once refused to introduce a new *piyut*, even for a meaningful cause, because he did not want to deviate from the Minhag of the place. These examples show that Minhag is not about convenience. It is about preserving integrity and honoring the spiritual path of a community.

Minhagim are not less important than halacha. In fact, the Rambam[21] rules that rabbinic enactments and accepted customs, once embraced by a community, carry a binding status. The Talmud adds[22] that even Eliyahu Hanavi, the prophet who will announce the coming of Moshiach, cannot overturn an established Minhag. Once a practice is accepted by Klal Yisrael, it carries halachic weight and becomes part of the living Torah. The Talmud Yerushalmi[23] even states that in some cases, Minhag can override formal halacha.

So who is right? The answer is simple. The person who follows their Minhag with sincerity and respect is right. The person who preserves the path of their family or community with joy and humility is also right. Whether someone wraps their tefillin in one direction or another, includes one *piyut* or chooses another, each person is expressing one of the seventy beautiful faces of the Torah.

We are not a divided people with mixed-up customs. We are a united people with a rich, multicolored heritage. Every Minhag is a thread in the great tapestry of Torah. And Moshe Rabbeinu saw it all.



What would Moshe Rabbeinu say about our Minhagim?

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How Can I Follow Minhagim?

Identify Family Minhagim

Minhagim begin at home. Think about how your family lights Shabbos candles, wraps tefillin, or pronounces certain Hebrew words. Do you eat *gebrokts* (beans and legumes) on Pesach? Give tzedakah at specific times? These details matter. They are part of your spiritual inheritance. Ask your parents or grandparents what Minhagim your family keeps. If there are gaps or uncertainties, that's okay—start documenting what you do know.



Community Minhagim

Your local shul, yeshiva, or neighborhood often has customs that go back generations. Some shuls sit for Kiddush, others stand. Some say *"leDavid Hashem ori"* during Elul; others do not. These practices shape how a community connects to Hashem. Take notice. Pay attention to what people do, ask questions, and listen to the answers. Even if your family has different traditions, understanding your community's Minhagim builds connection and awareness. It also helps you daven and celebrate in a way that's respectful and rooted.

Discover the Roots

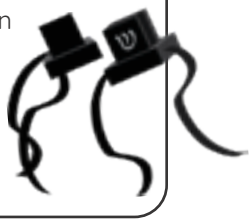
Minhagim aren't just random habits. Most have deep roots in halacha, Kabbalah, or historical circumstances. Learning about the reasons behind a custom gives it meaning and helps you connect to it on a personal level. Why do some people wait six hours after meat, while others wait three or one? Why do some use their whole hand to cover their eyes during Shema, and others three fingers? These are not just quirks—they're windows into generations of Torah thought. Ask your rabbi, look in a sefer, or even research with a friend. The more you understand, the more you'll appreciate what Minhag is really about.

Be Consistent

Once you learn what your Minhag is—keep it. Consistency builds identity and gives your *avodas Hashem* strength. Jumping between customs can cause confusion, and it may even go against halacha in some cases. If you're unsure about something, ask a rav or posek for guidance. There's no need to rush or panic, but once you've embraced a Minhag with awareness and sincerity, try to keep it with care. It's better to keep one path well than to keep switching. Minhag is not about doing everything. It's about doing your part with loyalty and love.

Respect Others' Minhagim

Just because someone does something differently doesn't mean they're wrong. There are many valid Minhagim in Klal Yisrael, and what's right for one person might not be right for another. One Jew may wear tefillin on Chol HaMoed; another may not. One person says *Baruch Hashem l'olam* in Maariv; another skips it. Some wash *mayim acharonim*, while others do not. These aren't mistakes—they're different Torah paths. Don't roll your eyes, and don't be ashamed of your own customs either. Respect creates unity. Minhagim aren't about competition. They're about how each Jew draws close to Hashem in their unique way.



Tefillah Time

Just picking up a siddur and davening is rooted in Minhag! The *nusach* you follow, the order and precise wording, connnect you deeply to your mesorah and are a living aspect of tefillah.



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So Many Different Customs and Ways to Observe the Torah

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book1 pg.120

All Jews received the same Torah. Why are there so many different customs and observances in our different communities? And if there are different ways of observing the Torah, what is so bad about following the Conservative or Reform movements?

The Jewish nation has only one Torah, given to us at Mount Sinai, when the entire Jewish nation stood together and received the Torah. Anyone who deviates even one letter from the Torah given to us by G-d, as the Reform and Conservative have, is not following authentic Judaism, and is not considered Torah observant. They claim that the laws of the Torah change with the times, which is based on their misconception that the Torah is man-made. In truth, the Torah is G-d-given, and just as G-d doesn't change, neither do His laws.

The fact that there are differing opinions among qualified Orthodox rabbis is a different story, and even that was not always the case. For many centuries, the Jewish people lived together in one land and were ruled by one High Court, the Sanhedrin. Whenever a question came up as to what the correct halachic practice should be, it was brought to the higher authorities, and a ruling was rendered, which was binding to all. This ensured that there were no significant variations in the way the Torah was observed.

However, when the Jewish people were scattered to the four corners of the earth, this was no longer feasible. Over the years, we encountered new conditions and inventions, and the Torah scholars in each generation and location applied their knowledge of Torah to the new questions that arose. They've had differing opinions on how to adapt to new circumstances, but all of their conclusions are based on the same Torah and Talmud. Each city or congregation must then follow the halachic rulings of their Orthodox rabbi.

In a similar fashion, Minhagim — customs and traditions — also developed as dozens of communities sprouted around the world. The most famous example is the difference between Sephardic and Ashkenazic customs. The many differences between these communities — including the text of the prayers (nusach) — developed over the centuries of living in different parts of the world. Such customs are not as strict as halachah, but it is also of utmost importance that they be maintained.

Some customs developed based on specific circumstances. For example, the fur hat called a shtreimel — a trademark of many Chassidim — became identified with Chassidim only after the Czar decreed that all citizens had to wear the clothing common in their region. Some claim that the Jews in those countries didn't want to blend into the populations of the cities in which they lived, and so they borrowed a style from another group within their region — the fur trappers. The large fur hats they wore satisfied the Czar's requirement of blending in with the locals, but still kept the Jews distinct from their city-dwelling neighbors.

Despite the many different halachic rulings that are followed, and the broad variety of customs that are observed throughout the world, Jews all follow one Torah. We are all bound together by the mitzvos of the Torah and the laws that we derive from the Oral Law. Shabbos is Shabbos wherever we go. In many communities people even have the same text for the songs (zemiros) they sing, albeit with different tunes.

One of the most fascinating things about traveling as an observant Jew is the chance to meet other Jews from varying cultures wherever you go. You can spend Shabbos with total strangers, following different halachic rulings and observing diverse customs, and still feel that you're sitting at a table with long-lost relatives. Just like a family, Jews may be different from one another, but we're all bound together by one Father and one Torah.

IN SHORT: *Anyone who deviates even one letter from the Torah given to us by G-d is not Torah-observant. It is only customs and traditions that may vary from one community to another.*

Got questions about Judaism? Curious about something?

Join **Ask the Rabbi Live** with Rabbi Chaim Mintz **Tuesday Nights** at **9PM**!

Go to **oorah.org/asktherabbi** to join as well as watch previous questions.

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Far from being lovely traditions or cultural habits, Minhagim are critical aspects of Torah, shaped by generations of Jews who lived with *emunah*, *chachmah*, and deep connection to their *gedolei hador* (the leaders of each generation). Some Minhagim were created to safeguard mitzvos, others to express spiritual ideas, remember important moments in history, or reflect the teachings of specific *gedolim* or the realities of different lands. Minhagim remind us that Torah is not just a system of halachos, but a living *mesorah* passed from parent to child and community to community.

Although Minhagim often vary from one family or community to another, they are all rooted in the same Torah. Chazal teach that the Torah has *shivim panim*, seventy faces, and each sincere Minhag reflects one of those truths. Our responsibility is to learn our family's customs, understand our community's practices, and follow them with consistency, care, and *kavod* (honor). Even when Minhagim seem unfamiliar or unclear, exploring their meaning turns them into powerful tools of connection. Minhagim allow us to live the Torah not just through study, but in the rhythm of daily life.

The Birds and the Bagel Guy

So, my name's Abie. I'm twelve, and until recently, I thought my family was pretty much normal. I mean, we're not religious or anything, but my mom does this mix of Jewish stuff that I never really understood. Like, every Friday night, she lights these little candles and says some Hebrew words… and then we all hop in the car and drive to that burger place with the giant moose on the sign. Not exactly kosher, but hey—the fries are amazing, and we never eat pork and bacon.

But the real mystery tradition? *The beach birds.*

Every year, on this random day in September, my mom packs up a bag of old bread and drags us to Coney Island. We don't go swimming or anything—she just insists that we walk along the boardwalk and feed birds. *Specifically* birds. Not fish. Not squirrels. Birds. She never explained why. She'd just say, "It's what we do." And she always had this serious look, like we were doing something super meaningful, even though I felt like a soggy bread delivery guy for pigeons.

Anyway, last year when I was eleven, something weird happened.

We're doing our usual bird-feeding walk, and I notice there are tons of other people on the beach. Like, way more than usual. And they're not in swimsuits—they're in regular clothes, some even in suits and dresses. Some are standing near the water talking quietly, and some are tossing bread or even—get this—*emptying their pockets* into the ocean. Like they lost change and were just giving up.

So, my dad finally gets curious. He spots this older guy in a funny-looking camel sweater and asks him, "Hey, what's going on here? Some kind of Jewish seagull festival?"

The guy laughs and goes, "Not exactly. It's called *Tashlich*. We're symbolically tossing away our sins into the water—it's a Rosh Hashanah tradition."

Now that was a plot twist. I'd been doing a real mitzvah this whole time without knowing it?

The guy's name was Mr. Lasker, and he was super friendly. He even invited us over for Shabbat dinner the next week. My mom was a little nervous, but she said yes. And wow. Real challah, songs at the table, grape juice in fancy glasses—it was like a Jewish Thanksgiving, but every Friday!

After that, we started going to the Laskers pretty often. My parents signed up for something called TorahMates (basically grown-up homework buddies, but with Torah), and I got invited to TheZone over the summer. That place is the BEST. Zip lines, color war, and I learned a ton about being a Jew.

Now my parents are even looking into a Jewish school for me. Pretty wild, huh? All because of some hungry seagulls and an old tradition we didn't even understand.

Turns out, Mom was onto something all along.

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Zoniac Dilemma



The camp was buzzing before Shabbos.

Girls were rushing through showers, laying out their skirts, and trying to squeeze in last-minute hair fixes. Meirav had just finished changing when she looked at the clock. Candle lighting was in less than ten minutes.

At home, her family had a Minhag that all the girls lit candles, not just the mother. It wasn't something Meirav had thought much about. She lit because that's what her mom liked her to do. It made her happy.

But here at camp, it was different. Candle lighting was in the Royal Ballroom, which was an 8 minute walk from her Sweet (bunkhouse). Most girls didn't light candles, because Mrs. Kleinman lit for everyone in the Shul. Her friends were already putting on their makeup and fixing their headbands in the mirror.

Meirav paused. Her hair was still wet, and she really wanted to find Ashira, who promised to let her try out the new Summer Friday lip-gloss color. No one would say anything if she skipped, because it wasn't such a common Minhag. And it's not like she was doing an *aveirah!* She'd just meet everyone at the Shul.

She looked toward the door. There were still a few minutes left.

What should she do?

Zoniac Challenge

Do you have a family Minhag about:

1. Saying Kiddush on Friday night?
2. What foods you eat on Pesach?
3. Hamotzi on Shabbos? (cutting or tearing the challah? Passing or throwing the challah?)
4. Washing Netilas Yadayim in the morning or before bread?
5. Wearing tefillin?
6. Naming a new baby?
7. How you light Chanukah candles?
8. Simanim on Rosh Hashanah?





Did You Know?

In some Yemenite Jewish communities, it was customary on Motzaei Shabbos during Chanukah to light a massive Havdalah candle with 48 wicks—yes, forty-eight! This unusual number symbolized the 48 nevi'im (prophets) who prophesied to the Jewish people, tying together the themes of light, nevuah, and rededication.[24]



COVER UNCOVERED: *The cover depicts minhagim as a precious mesorah passed down, like a father handing his son a treasured jewel. The tree's deep roots show minhagim rooted in Torah. The Har Sinai tapestry hangs from a chain, linking minhagim to Sinai's Torah and the unbroken chain of mesorah. The boys' different paths represent Klal Yisrael's customs, all valid expressions from the same Torah and luchos.*

Daily Challenge

Is your family Sefardi or Ashkenazi? If you don't know, find out!

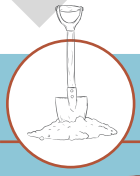
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Sources

1) Encyclopedia Talmudis, Minhag; Pesachim, Perek Makom Shenagu
2) Mishlei 1:8
3) Devarim 19:14
4) Yoreh De'ah 214
5) Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 257
6) Melachim Beis 9:20
7) Bereishis 26:18
8) Ibid with Rashi and Rabbeinu Bachya
9) Taanis 28b
10) Kedushas HaLevi, Lech Lecha 15:8
11) Bamidbar 30:3; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 214
12) Yerushalmi Bava Metziah 7:1
13) Yerushalmi Pe'ah 7:5
14) Menachos 32a
15) Vayikra 19:26
16) Devarim 18:10
17) Vayikra 18:3
18) Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15
19) Bereishis Rabbah 48:14
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24) Rav Yosef Kapach, based on Yemenite manuscripts of halachah and Minhagim.

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Pele Yoeitz volume 3 - *Haas Family Edition, Customs*

Traditional Chanukah Foods

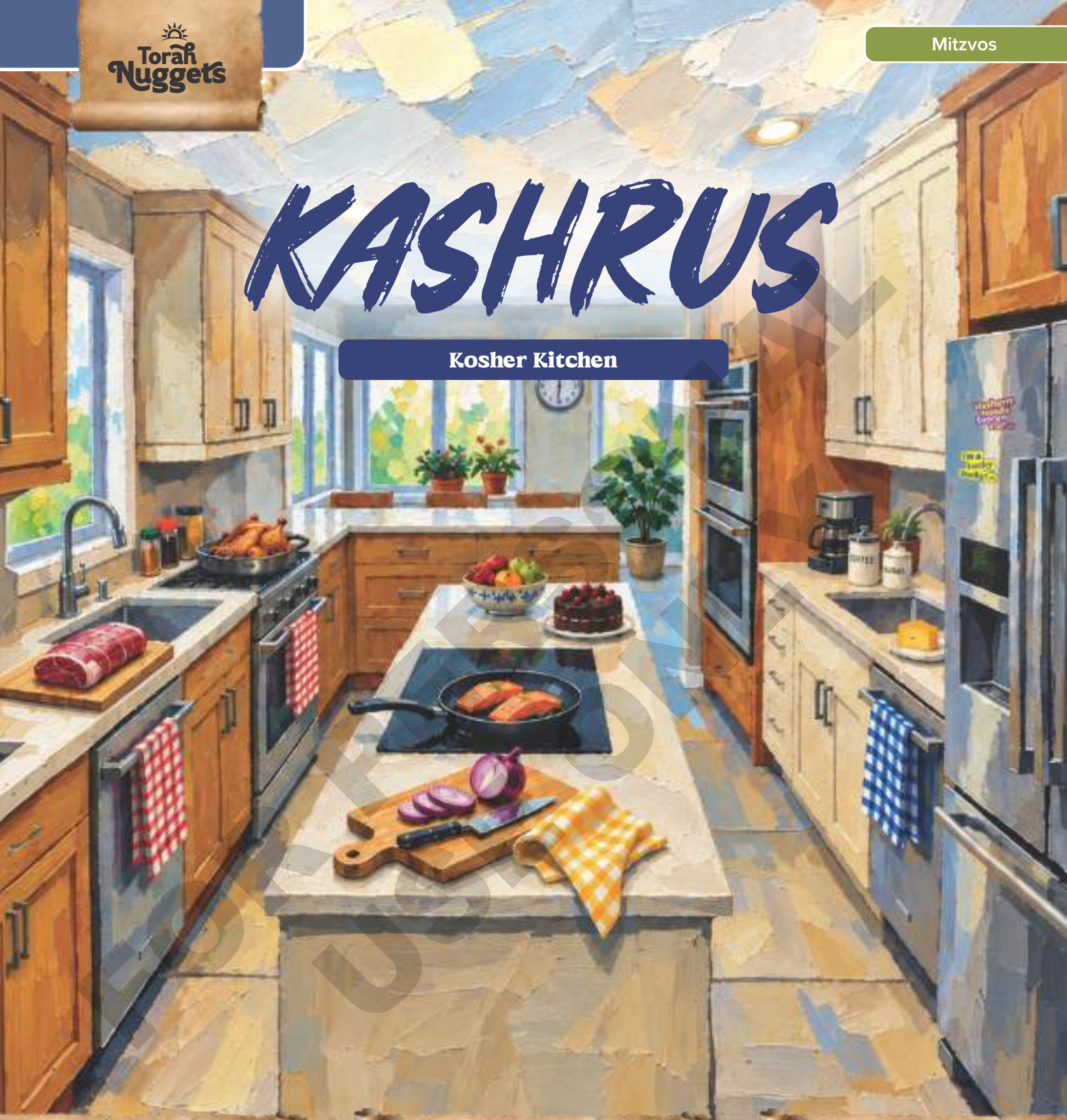
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/traditional-chanukah-foods/

Various Upsherin Customs

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/upsherin-part-8-various-upsherin-customs/

KASHRUS

Kosher Kitchen



1. What is a Kosher Kitchen?
2. How do I keep a Kosher Kitchen?
3. Basar B'Chalav

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What is a Kosher Kitchen?

In a Nutshell

Beyond bringing in only kosher products, the biggest factor in maintaining a kosher kitchen is keeping meat and dairy separate.

But First...

At a high level, kashrus entails a few things: only kosher food types and kosher animal species properly slaughtered may be consumed, milk and meat may not be mixed, and there must be proper handling and oversight throughout the process of food production, from preparation until consumption, to ensure the food's kosher status is not compromised.

Mindful in the Kitchen



Hashgacha means oversight and supervision. While professional *hashgacha* ensures that food manufacturers follow all the rules of kashrus, maintaining *hashgacha* in your own kitchen is equally important. This means being constantly aware of what's happening with your food and dishes. You need to make sure meat and dairy items don't get mixed up and that the right pots and utensils are being used for each type of food. You must maintain good border control, ensuring only foods with proper kosher certification enter your kitchen. It also means staying alert when cooking and making sure nothing splashes from one pan to another when cooking meat and dairy, or falls into the wrong pot. Even small mistakes, like using a meat spoon in a dairy pot, can create kashrus problems. Good *hashgacha* in the kitchen requires focus, organization, and the commitment to fix any mistakes properly when they happen.

Spotlight

Preparing kosher food properly requires knowledge and care – take time to learn to do it right!

Which Foods are Kosher?

For fruits and vegetables, there are no restrictions, as long as there are no hidden bugs [1](aside from produce that came from Israel, where the laws of tithing need to be taken into consideration). Fish, in order to be kosher, must possess both fins and scales.[2] Shellfish, like crab and lobster, are not allowed. When it comes to poultry, the Torah only tells us which birds are NOT kosher, meaning that any bird not on the list IS kosher. In practice, however, there are only a few types of birds we can confidently identify are permissible. Of these, chicken is by far the most available and popular. In the beef department, only a few types that are kosher are generally available: cows, sheep, goats, and deer. These must undergo shechita, ritual slaughter, to be kosher to eat.

Milk, Meat, and Pareve

In kashrus, "meat" (also known as *fleishigs* or *besari*) refers to the flesh of any kosher animal or bird that was properly slaughtered. It also includes anything that comes directly from the animal's body, like bones, sinews, and gravy made from meat. "Milk" (also called *milchigs* or *chalavi*) means dairy products from kosher animals, primarily milk from cows and goats, as well as all products made from them, like cheese, butter, yogurt, and ice cream. Then there's a third category called "*pareve*," which means foods that are neither meat nor dairy. Pareve foods include fish, eggs, fruits, vegetables, grains, and anything made purely from these ingredients. Pareve foods can generally be eaten with either meat or dairy meals.

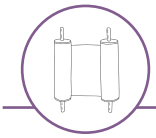
Torah Challenge

לֹא תְבַשֵּׁל גְּדִי בַּחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ

You shall not cook a kid (young goat) in its mother's milk.

What do we learn from these words being repeated three times in the Torah?

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Unclogging Spiritual Arteries

The laws of kashrus govern everything that goes into your mouth, whether at home or out. Keeping a kosher kitchen is just one important facet of what it means to keep kosher.

The commandment to eat kosher is a *chok*,[3] a mitzvah which we were given without an explanation or reason for it. Even more so the prohibition of *basar b'chalav*, not cooking or eating meat and milk together, transforming two perfectly permissible foods into something forbidden.

Yet, those who keep kosher can attest that its laws have two important effects: it makes our lives holy and preserves our Jewish identities. How so?

Eating is among the most basic and frequent human activities. By placing clear boundaries on what may be consumed, the Torah elevates this physical need into an intentional spiritual act. Each time a Jew refrains from non-kosher food and chooses instead to eat in accordance with Torah law, he turns an instinctive act into a conscious expression of obedience to the will of Hashem. In this way, kashrus elevates the mundane and trains a person to live with spiritual awareness.

Keeping kosher also helps preserve the unique identity of the Jewish people. Sharing meals is one of the strongest ways people connect with each other. Because Jews eat differently, kashrus naturally creates some separation between Jews and non-Jews, especially in social situations involving food, serving as a deterrent to assimilation.

Chazal teach that eating non-kosher food affects a person in a deeper way than just breaking a rule. This effect is called *timtum halev*, which means a dulling or blocking of the heart. In Jewish thought, the heart is not only the place of emotions, but also where spiritual awareness lives. When someone eats non-kosher food, it can make them less sensitive to holiness and make it harder to feel closeness to Hashem.[4]

Timtum halev is not a punishment, but a spiritual reality, a negative side effect of forbidden food. This is why there's a strong emphasis on ensuring that even young children do not eat treif.[5] It's not only about training them to keep kosher in the future but about protecting their spiritual purity in the present.

How might being careful about what we eat shape the kind of people we become over time?



Because I am a Jew

In the brutal environment of a Russian WWII labor camp, keeping kosher was nearly impossible. Prisoners were given pitiful rations, and an occasional scrap of meat felt like salvation to starving men. Even deeply observant Jews often felt forced to eat whatever they could just to survive the backbreaking labor.

One young Jewish prisoner, however, refused to eat nonkosher meat, despite the terrible cost. When a Hungarian officer heard of this defiance, he decided to make an example of him. Marching over with a piece of forbidden meat, the officer ordered the Jew to eat it. But he pointed to the wrong man.

The prisoner he confronted was a fully assimilated Jew who had never kept kosher. The others smirked, expecting him to comply. Instead, he calmly refused. The officer threatened him, then beat him viciously, but the man would not give in.



When it was over, the prisoners asked him why. He answered simply but with conviction. "He told me to eat it because I am a Jew. I am a Jew. I won't eat it."

AskTheRabbi New to Kashrus

I started keeping kosher, but my in-laws do not. When we visit for the holidays, they expect me to eat their food. How can I handle this without offending anyone?

See this situation, which is fairly common, as an opportunity to encourage others to join you in your growing observance. Offer to bring the food. Your relatives may appreciate being treated to kosher food; your mother-in-law might be happy not to have to cook!

You have to be proud of what you're doing. Explain in the nicest way you can that you have these standards you can't compromise on. Most people will understand and respect you for it, and maybe even be positively influenced by your strong beliefs. You absolutely cannot lower your level of kashrus so as not to make others feel bad. No need to argue or judge, just be clear and respectful.

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How do I keep a Kosher Kitchen?

Heaps of Dishes

The Sages teach that cooking vessels absorb the flavors of whatever food is prepared in them. When a pot absorbs non-kosher flavors, it can transfer those forbidden tastes to future meals cooked in the same vessel[6]. Most importantly, pots used to cook meat absorb meaty flavors, while those used for dairy absorb milky flavors. Since we cannot mix meat and dairy, we must maintain completely separate sets of dishes, pots, and utensils.[7] This means you need two sets of plates, bowls, cups, silverware, pots, pans, cutting boards, and even dish towels and sponges. To avoid mix-ups, many families mark their dishes or use different colors or patterns for meat and dairy.

Your kosher kitchen will also have another set of pots, pans and dishes that only come out once a year to be exclusively used for Pesach and don't come in contact with chametz. Add in a set of nicer dishes for Shabbos and you've got quite the collection!

Don't forget when buying new metal or glass dishes or meal prep utensils to do the mitzvah of tevilas keilim – immersing them in a mikvah.

Whoops! What Now?

Kashrus mistakes happen, but we can usually fix them. If you made a pot or utensil *treif* (not kosher) – let's say you accidentally stirred your mac n' cheese with the spoon you had just used for meatballs – kashering can often correct the mistake. Kashering typically involves applying heat to a cleaned utensil. The exact method used depends on the material of the pot, utensil or product in question and how the problematic taste was absorbed into it.

Kosher Layout

Having fully separate areas for meat and dairy is helpful and convenient but not critically necessary to maintain a kosher kitchen. You should have separate cabinets and countertops/work areas for preparing meat and dairy food – though not at all required, some even have dedicated space for pareve cooking. Some families have two or three sinks, while others make do with one by using separate dish racks and washing one type at a time. One fridge and freezer is quite sufficient since cold meat and dairy products can share the space. It's ideal to have separate ovens for meat and dairy (though a countertop toaster oven may be all you need for whichever gets lighter use). You may cook both meat and dairy on the same stovetop, but the stovetop surface should generally be considered *treif* (not kosher) and food that falls directly on it discarded. A dishwasher should only be used for one type.

Who Cooks Your Food?

Bishul akum is a rabbinic prohibition against eating certain foods cooked fully by a non-Jew. This includes even food cooked with all kosher ingredients, with your kosher cookware, in your own kitchen.[8] If you have non-Jewish hired help or relatives cooking in your kitchen, speak to a rabbi for practical guidance.

Ask your LOR

Since the laws of kashrus are complicated, it's crucial to ask a rabbi when you're unsure about something. Never assume that you made an irreparable blunder (or, conversely, that it must be okay). Keep your local Orthodox rabbi's number handy for the inevitable *shaila* (question of practical halacha). Have all the facts about the case ready – for example, how hot was the food? Was the pot clean and not used in more than 24 hours? Often, the situation is more salvageable than you might think. Don't feel dumb or shy to ask anything. Despite being as careful as possible, mistakes and questions inevitably arise even in the most scrupulous kosher kitchens. Rabbis appreciate getting these kinds of questions!

Korny Korner

Why did the cow become a mashgiach?



It wanted to make sure no one was milking the system.

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Keeping Kosher Essentials

Beginning to keep kosher is an exciting and meaningful step, but it can also feel overwhelming, especially when the kitchen you live in was not designed for kashrus. You may be sharing a kitchen with others who don't keep kosher or figuring out how to keep kosher with only one sink,[9] one oven, [10]and limited space. It's important to know that halacha addresses real-life circumstances and with the right knowledge, structure, and mindset, keeping kosher is always possible. Make sure you have a reliable rabbi you can call with the questions that will inevitably come up.

First, it is important to understand what *does not* create a problem. Non-kosher food doesn't contaminate the things around it through cold, dry contact. Cleanliness is essential. If surfaces and utensils are thoroughly cleaned of any food remnants or visible residue, many concerns are avoided at the outset.

Still, someone keeping kosher in a non-kosher setting should have their own dedicated cutlery, knives, and pots. Hot food may not be prepared in non-kosher utensils, so having a small set of personal cookware is non-negotiable. Kosher food and cookware should be clearly labeled and kept in designated drawers, cabinets or shelves to prevent mix-ups. Disposable utensils and aluminum pans can be extremely helpful and bypass many complications entirely. It may also be convenient and inexpensive to get a separate microwave.

Let's talk about the oven. You can cook kosher food in a *treif* (non-kosher) oven double wrapped. If the oven is clean, food that was cooked uncovered may also be permissible, depending on the nature of the food and how recently the oven was used for treif food. Check with a rabbi.

Similarly, meat and dairy can be cooked in the same oven, even at the same time, if they are both thoroughly covered and not touching each other or resting on a rack that has any residue of the other type.[11] If either or both foods were uncovered, speak to a rabbi. If you need to use the same oven for both meat and dairy, it's ideal to designate it as one or the other and then cook the other type covered after making sure the oven is completely clean.

You can kasher your oven by running the self-clean function, if it has one.[12] If not, you would have to wait 24 hours after the last use, clean it thoroughly and run it at the highest temperature for about an hour. Consult with your rabbi for your specific situation, as ovens with different features may require different approaches.

Food can be wrapped in two layers of plastic wrap (a well-fitted container cover can serve as the first wrapping) to be heated in a nonkosher microwave. To kasher a non-kosher microwave, you'll remove the glass tray (not to be used thereafter with kosher), clean the microwave well, and boil a cup of water in the microwave until it fills with vapor (about 5 minutes).[13]

You can cook on a nonkosher stovetop, or cook both meat and dairy on the same stovetop, as long as the burners are clean. Again, as appliances and their heating methods differ, always consult with a rabbi about your specific situation.

Treif dishwashers present a real problem and may not be used for kosher utensils. However, dishes may be washed in a non-kosher sink if care is taken not to touch non-kosher surfaces. Some people choose to use a sink that is not used for food at all, such as a laundry sink, or place a basin inside the sink to create separation. Similarly, when using one sink for both meat and dairy, separate basins and dishracks are in order.

When eating at the same table as others you know are eating non-kosher food, you must make sure that you are not sharing the same surface; a placemat is sufficient to solve this issue.[14]

Making the commitment to keep kosher is a big step that can feel like an overwhelming lifestyle change at first. Yet its laws are designed to be attainable regardless of your circumstances. With the right support and guidance, it will become a natural and meaningful part of daily life.



Is it possible to maintain strong relationships with nonobservant family members without compromising on kashrus standards?

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Basar B'Chalav

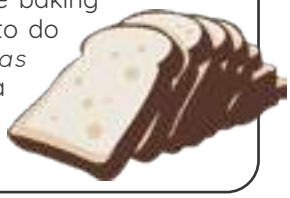
Mixing Milk and Meat

One cannot eat milk and meat together in the same meal or one right after the other. After eating meat, we must wait a period of time before eating dairy. This is to ensure complete separation between the two types of food. Eating dairy too soon after meat could cause meat particles stuck in your teeth or the fatty residue to mix with the dairy, violating the prohibition, at least on a Rabbinic level. The generally accepted custom is to wait six hours,[17] though some specific communities have longstanding traditions for different lengths of time.[18] However, when eating meat after dairy, one only needs to clean their hands and rinse their mouth by eating something dry, like a cracker, and drinking something.[19] The exception to this is hard cheese (strongly flavored cheeses aged for at least six months), which would require one to wait before eating meat for the same amount of time as between meat and milk.[20] Food that was cooked in a milk or meat pot but has only pareve ingredients can be eaten one after the other without waiting.[21]

Meat and dairy shouldn't be served in close proximity at the table unless there's a divider separating those eating.[22]

Dairy or Meat Bread

Because bread is a staple eaten with both dairy and meat meals, bread should be baked pareve.[26] You may only bake dairy or meat bread following one of two safeguards: either make it in a small enough amount that would generally be finished in a single meal with no leftovers or make it with a visible sign, such as a unique shape, that is a clear reminder the bread is not pareve. The same holds true for other baked goods like pastries, muffins and pies.[27] On the topic of bread, remember if you're baking a large enough quantity to do the mitzvah of *hafrashas challah* – taking off a small piece of dough to be burned completely.



Never the Twain Shall Meet

Besides for the prohibition to eat meat and milk products together, the Torah specifically prohibits cooking meat and milk together. The prohibition applies if the mixture sits together in liquid for a certain amount of time even without heat.[15]

The Torah further forbids benefiting in any way from a meat and milk mixture that has been cooked together. This means you can't sell it, give it away, or even feed it to your pet.[16]

Hold the Lox!

One should not eat fish and meat together.[23] When eaten in the same meal, our practice is to eat and drink something small between the fish and the meat (cue a *"l'chaim"* after gefilta fish!) and to use separate plates for each.[24] Most Sefardim follow the custom not to eat fish together with dairy, though some refrain only from eating fish with milk and cheese, but not butter.[25]

A Food Sensitivity

The Torah tells us not to mix meat and milk with these words, repeated in three different places[28]: "do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." Some commentaries[29] see in this a possible explanation for the prohibition. Using the sustenance a mother animal nourishes its baby with to flavor and cook the baby animal's flesh is an act of cruelty. Cooking or eating these foods together desensitizes a person to compassion and mercy.

Did You Know?



The Torah repeats the prohibition to eat blood at least 6 times! Properly certified kosher meat was already washed and salted to remove blood. Although most authorities consider the rare bloodspot found in commercial eggs in the US to be a non-forbidden form of blood, we still follow the practice to check raw eggs before using them, discarding any with a bloodspot.[30]

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A Matter of Taste

In order to better explore the halachos of basar b'chalav we have to understand the concept of *ta'am*, a food's taste, which can be transferred to other foods or surfaces, even without any accompanying food substance, most often through heat. The absorbed tastes are called *bliyos*. Think of *bliyos* kind of like germs – they have real significance to a food's kosher status even though you can't see them.

Like germs, *bliyos* are transmissible – but they don't spread in the same way germs do. Bliyos are generally transferred through heat together with moisture. Cold foods touching each other won't rub *bliyos* off on each other, nor will two touching hot but dry pots. Bliyos can also be absorbed through soaking for 24 hours, even without heat.[31]

To illustrate, when you cook meatballs in a pot, *bliyos* of meat become absorbed into the walls of the pot. If you cook a cheese sauce in that same pot later that day, even if it was washed clean of any meatball residue, the meat *bliyos* are mixed into the cheese, rendering it *treif*, and the cheese imparts its *bliyos* into the pot, rendering the pot *treif* as well.[32]

Like germs, *bliyos* have a shelf life – after 24 hours, they become 'stale' and while still halachically present, have a much weaker ability to impact other foods. So if our cheese sauce was cooked in a pot that had last been used for meat a few days before (called *eino ben yomo*, not of that day), the meat *bliyos* do not make the cheese sauce unkosher, though this should not be done intentionally and the pot would still need to be kashered.[33]

Furthermore, *bliyos* can only travel so far. If a food absorbs *bliyos* from a pot or dish containing *bliyos*, those second-hand *bliyos* are too weak to pass their taste on to a third dish or food. We call this rule *'nat bar nat'* - the taste of a taste.[34]



A sharp food, such as an onion, pickle or lemon, defies these rules. When the pressure of a knife (or fork prongs, blender blades, etc) is applied to a sharp food, even in the absence of heat, the sharpness draws out even stale or second-hand *bliyos*. Thus, for example, a pickle speared by a dairy fork (even clean and unused for 24 hours) can't be added to your burger sandwich. And if you cut that dairy pickle, it will transfer dairy *bliyos* into the knife and cutting board. (Note that a utensil doesn't become dairy simply by being designated as such. It would have to have been used with hot or sharp dairy to gain that status.)

Another way to transfer *ta'am* is through *zeiah*, steam. The steam emitted from liquidy or moist food cooking in the oven transfers its taste to the walls of the oven, and that taste can transfer from the oven walls to foods later cooked in the oven through their steam. This can make it problematic to use one oven for meat and dairy, even without cooking both types at the same time. Dry foods do not create steam as they bake and don't have this issue (as long as the oven is clean).[35] Similarly, thoroughly covering the pan will prevent steam from escaping or entering and protect the food's meat/dairy/kosher status.

Kashering a utensil essentially removes all the *bliyos*, whether meat, dairy or treif, and returns it to a neutral status. The general principle with kashering is that *ta'am* is removed in the same way it was absorbed, i.e., with boiling water, intense dry heat, etc. Not all materials can be kashered.[36]

A WORD OF CAUTION

All the halachic principles described here are true but their real-world application is often not so simple. Many other halachic factors are taken into account in determining a food or utensil's kosher status. Being aware of these principles allows you to recognize when questions arise and present them properly to your LOR.

Can you think of three specific ways someone could prevent kitchen kashrus mistakes from happening?

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Keeping kosher involves following Torah laws about what foods may be eaten and how they must be prepared. Only certain animals and fish are permitted, and meat must come from animals slaughtered through *shechitah*, a precise and humane ritual. The Torah forbids mixing meat and milk, so kosher kitchens require separate utensils and dishes for each. Fish are simpler, needing only fins and scales to be kosher. Reliable supervision, or hashgacha, ensures all these laws are properly observed. Maintaining kashrus demands care, organization, and the willingness to seek rabbinic guidance when questions arise.

The Lady Who Changed a World

Angela Homapour finished preparing dinner and reflected on her family's journey. She and Morris had decided to keep kosher when expecting their first child, Ariel, wanting to preserve their Jewish identity and prevent their children from disappearing into the melting pot. The laws of kashrus would keep their kids connected to who they were.

But maintaining tradition wasn't easy. Angela worked hard to prepare kosher lunches that matched the school menu, knowing her children didn't want to stand out. Still, challenges arose.

"Mommy, how come I couldn't eat the spare ribs they had in school today?" seven-year-old Ariel asked during dinner.

"They're not kosher," Angela replied gently.

"But I think they were kosher. If a rabbi lets his kid eat it, then it must be kosher, right?"

Ariel's classmate was the daughter of the local Reform rabbi, who apparently had no dietary restrictions. Angela explained carefully that they couldn't determine what was kosher by watching other Jewish children eat.

The conversation troubled Angela and Morris. The public school experience was becoming increasingly confusing for their children, but what could they do? Moving deeper into religious observance seemed impossible, especially since Saturday was their store's biggest sales day.

The next day, Angela visited Morris's downtown Brooklyn store. Among the usual customers—lawyers and office workers—stood an obviously religious woman in a modest wool skirt and sheitel. Putting aside embarrassment, Angela approached her.

"Excuse me, could I ask you a question?" Angela began, explaining her dilemma about raising Jewish children while they attended public school.

"That is difficult," the woman sympathized. "But there are Jewish schools. Did you ever consider that?"

"We've talked about it, but it's very expensive," Angela replied, glancing at Morris on the phone with a supplier.

"I know someone who could help," the woman said, scribbling a phone number. "There's an organization called Oorah that helps families like yours. Ask for Rabbi Yoffe."

That brief exchange changed everything. Soon, Ariel and his brother enrolled in yeshiva with Oorah's help. Their lives filled with TorahMates mentors, events, new friends, and summers at BoyZone camp.

Angela and Morris began learning through TorahMates, discovering Judaism's depths. Through Oorah's family events—Shabbatons, retreats, and celebrations—they saw that Judaism wasn't just rules but tools for building meaningful lives. They felt their connection to each other, to the Jewish people, and to G-d.

Angela encouraged fourteen other families to contact Oorah and enroll their children in yeshiva.

Today, Ariel learns in a yeshiva in Israel. Morris hosts a daily Mincha minyan at his store and now closes on Shabbos, trusting that G-d is a reliable business partner.

The woman in the store might never know what she set in motion, but the Homapours know very well and remain forever grateful for that pivotal moment that transformed their lives.

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Zoniac Dilemma

Imperfect Timing

Danny checked his watch, walking out of the cafeteria. 2:47 PM. He'd just finished the leftover brisket his mom packed – the amazing Shabbos leftovers.

His phone buzzed: "My mom just picked up ice cream cake for your birthday surprise in study hall at 3:15! Cookies and cream like you wanted!"

Danny's smile faded. 3:15 was only twenty-eight minutes away. His family had recently started being more careful about waiting between meat and dairy. His parents said they should wait longer than they used to.

But Alex's mom had bought the cake specifically for Danny. She'd even texted his mom about allergies. And honestly, Danny wasn't sure exactly how long his family waited now – three hours? Six? His parents mentioned it, but he hadn't paid attention.

It wasn't like he'd eat a huge piece. Just a small slice to be polite. After all, Alex had been talking about this party all week!

What should Danny do?





Zoniac Challenge

GUESS THE GAPS!

1. Don't mix your meat with cheesy pie,
   That combo's treif, and we know ___!
2. We wait between — six hours, three,
   Depends on what your customs ___.
3. A burger's fine, with fries, no doubt,
   But skip the milkshake — that's ruled ___!
4. Hot and sharp — those flavors spread,
   A spicy sauce might go to your ___!
5. Wrap up your food when ovens share,
   With milk and meat — you must take ___.
6. These halachos guide our daily ways,
   Keeping kitchens kosher all our ___.



Kosher in TheZone

Do we eat clam chowder or gefilte fish?
It's not too difficult a call.
Why eat crab cakes or octopus instead of soup with matzo balls?
You know that catfish, rabbit stew, or escargot,
Still, don't make a Shabbos meal.
Rather have cholent, potato kugel, and letcho than tiger, piranha, or eel.

Make sure it's only kosher food you eat,
No matter if it's dairy, fish, or meat.
Gotta have split hooves and chew its cud,
Let the pig stay in the mud.
Make sure it's only kosher food you eat.

Make sure that it has fins and scales,
Don't eat dolphins, save the whales!
Make sure it's only kosher food you eat.

Falafel, couscous, sambusak, babaganush, lachmagine,
Liver, herring, steak on the bone,
The delicious food here in TheZone.
No matter your preference, style, taste, or appetite,
There's something that's sure to appeal.

En tres, hours d'ouvres, fine cuisine and a quick bite,
There's kosher for all kinds of meals.
So before you swallow any type of food,
check that it's Rabinically approved.
O-U, O-K, C-R-C, J-S-O-R, for Sefardis,
Make sure it's only kosher food you eat.

Badatz, Hisachdus, K-A-J, Nitra, Kehilla, and Star - K,
Make sure it's only kosher food you eat.
Make sure it's only kosher food you eat.
Make sure it's only kosher food you eat.



Daily Challenge

When you finish eating meat, check your watch so you'll know exactly when you can eat milk!



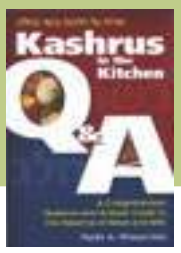
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Sources

1) See Yoreh De'ah 84 for details
2) See Yoreh De'ah 83 for details
3) Rabbeinu Bichayei Shemos 23:19 and Maharal Tiferes Yisroel ch.8
4) Abarbanel Vayikra Perek 11
5) See Remah Yoreh De'ah 81:7, see also Maharal Tiferes Yisroel ch. 8
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7) Yoreh De'ah 93
8) See Yoreh De'ah 112-113 for details
9) Yoreh De'ah 1:42
10) Igros Moshe Yoreh De'ah 1:40
11) S.A. Y. D. 108:1; See Kesav Sofer 54 and Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:10
12) aish.com/non-kosher-oven-kashering/
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15) See Yoreh De'ah 87:1 & 105:10
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17) Yoreh De'ah 89:10
18) Mizmor L'Dovid on Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 89:1 and Rema there
19) Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 89:2
20) Shach Yoreh De'ah 89:16
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22) Yoreh De'ah 88:1
23) Tur Orach Chaim 173
24) Yoreh De'ah 116:3
25) Yechave Daas 6:48 and see Shach Yoreh De'ah 87:5 and Pischei Teshuva 87:9
26) Shulchan Aruch and Rema Yoreh De'ah 97:1
27) Piskei Teshuva 97:3
28) Shemos 23:19, and 34:26, Devarim 14:21
29) Chinuch Mishpatim Mitzvah 92 & Ki Tisa Mitzvah 113
30) See Yoreh De'ah 66:8
31) Yoreh De'ah 105:1
32) Yoreh De'ah 93:1
33) Ibid
34) See Yoreh De'ah 95
35) See Yoreh De'ah 92:8 and Igros Moshe Yoreh De'ah 1:40
36) See Yoreh De'ah 121 and Orach Chaim 421-422 for details

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Kashrus in the Kitchen Q & A



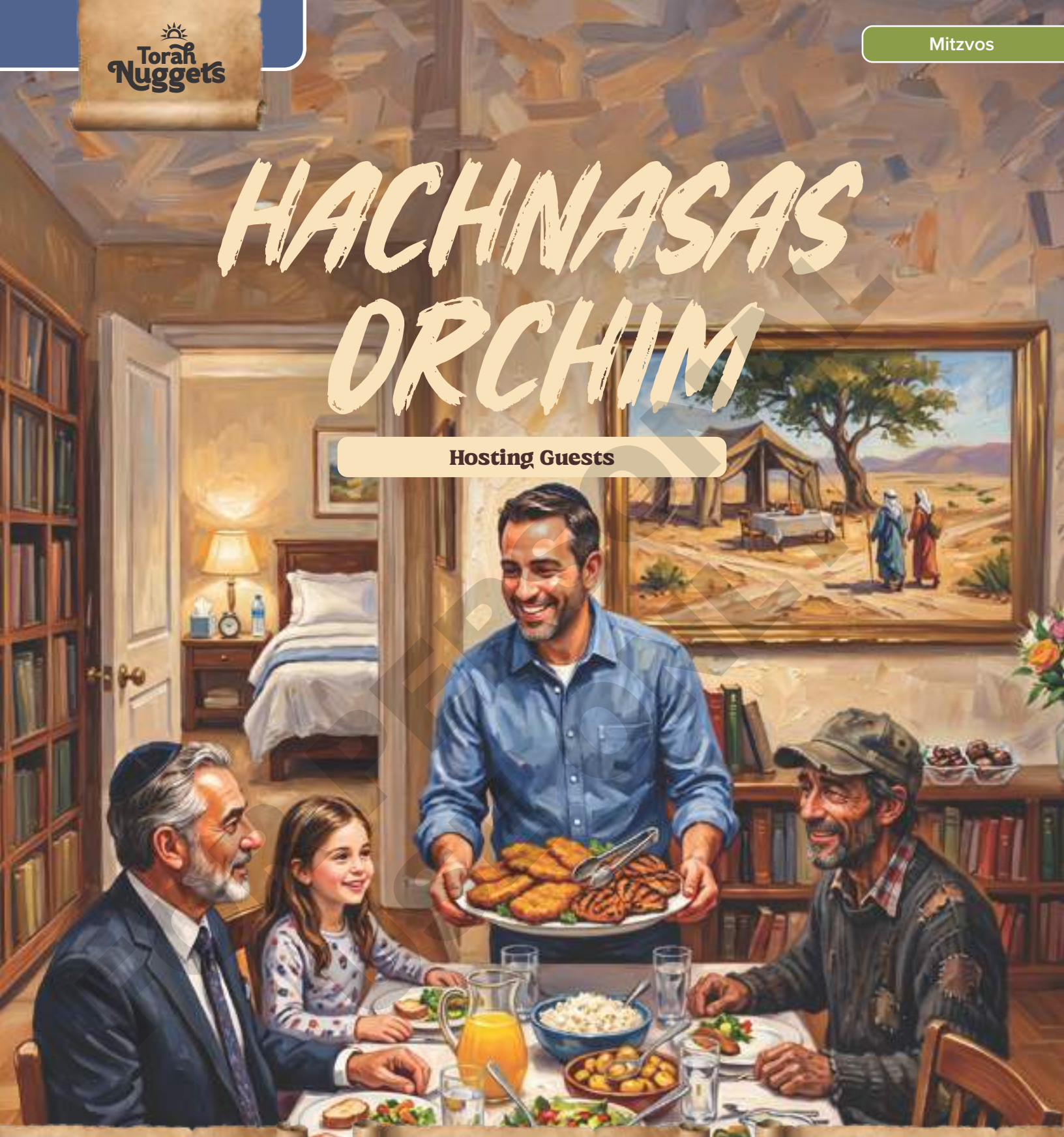
Illustrated Guide to the Kosher Kitchen

The World of Keeping Kosher

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/keeping-kosher/

HACHNASAS ORCHIM

Hosting Guests



1. What is Hachnasas Orchim?
2. Why Do We Do Hachnasas Orchim?
3. How Do We Do Hachnasas Orchim?

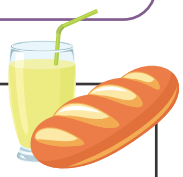
PROOF

What is Hachnasas Orchim?

In a Nutshell

Hachnasas Orchim is hosting guests who need a place to eat or stay.

Aishel – Avraham's Guest House



Hachnasas Orchim means welcoming guests. We learn the ideal way to host guests from Avraham Avinu. Avraham had a guest house, which the Torah calls an Aishel.[1] In Hebrew it is spelled אֵשֶׁל. Some say that the Hebrew letters אֵשֶׁל stand for אֲכִילָה (food), שְׁתִיָה (drink), and לִינָה (rest/sleep). Others say it stands for אֲכִילָה (food), שְׁתִיָה (drink), and לְוָיָה (escorting the person on their way)[2]. It's obvious why providing food, drink, and a bed are fundamental to Hachnasas Orchim, but even walking them out is also important as it is a show of respect and makes the guest feel cherished[3].

Cream of the Crop



Hachnasas Orchim falls under the banner of three mitzvos: tzedaka[4] (charity), *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*[5] (loving your fellow as you love yourself), and *v'halachta b'drachav*[6] (emulating Hashem). Chessed (kindness) is even greater than tzedaka, since giving tzedaka involves only money, whereas chessed can also be done with physical effort. Additionally, tzedaka only involves helping the poor and the living, whereas chessed can be done even for the rich or the deceased.[7] Hachnasas Orchim is a prime example of chessed, as it is an opportunity to use both our money and body to help others,[8] and it comes with immense rewards.[9]

Spotlight

By taking care of guests, we emulate Hashem, who takes care of every living thing.

Not All Guests Are Equal

The value of Hachnasas Orchim rises in proportion to the needs of the guest.[12] Inviting a friend for a meal has less value than inviting someone who genuinely needs it.[13] But hosting a wealthy person who needs a place to stay, is also a mitzvah.[14] Hosting poor people is Hachnasas Orchim in its highest form, as it is also tzedakah, making it a two-in-one mitzvah[15].

At the same time, not everyone should be invited into our homes.[16] For example, if someone may be a bad influence, they should not be invited. Also, if having guests will put a strain on the family, it may be best to forego the mitzvah.[17]

Even the Poor Can Share

Hachnasas Orchim is not only for the rich, as it says, "You should split your piece of bread for the hungry"[10], meaning that even if someone only has a little bit, they should still share it with guests.

Hachnasas Orchim hinges largely on the lady of the house, as it is the women who generally cook food and prepare the house, though men should also help. Indeed, many gedolim, like the Chafetz Chaim and the Chazon Ish, made sure to do something for their guests themselves, like serving or making the beds.

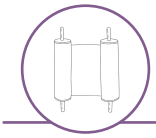
Torah Challenge

When the 3 angels were passing by Avrahahm Avinu's home, it says, "וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתָם" — "He ran toward them"[11]

Why did Avraham run to greet the angels?

What does this teach about the attitude a person should have toward Hachnasas Orchim?

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A Stamp of Greatness

Pirkei Avos teaches that the entire world stands on three pillars: Torah study, Avodah (meaning Tefillah), and Chessed.[18] It is not enough to simply do an act of kindness here and there when the opportunity arises. Throughout Tanach and Chazal, we learn that a person's whole pursuit and joy in life should be doing chessed for others.[19] This shows just how central chessed is meant to be in a Jew's life. And among all forms of chessed, the *Menoras Hameor* teaches that Hachnasas Orchim, welcoming guests, stands at the very top.[20]

Avraham Avinu performed countless righteous deeds throughout his life, yet the Torah is selective about which ones are recorded in detail. Of all his accomplishments, the Torah chooses to tell the story of Avraham inviting guests into his tent. The Torah even concludes this episode by praising Avraham, explaining that Hashem loves him because he will pass this same trait down to his descendants.[21] If the Torah chose to record this particular story, it must be that inviting guests is essential to living a life of true chessed.

The Gemara in Shabbos makes a remarkable claim: Hachnasas Orchim is equal to, or perhaps even greater than, arriving early to the *Beis Medrash* to learn Torah.[22] Based on this, the Chofetz Chaim rules that if a person rises early to learn, but has guests who have no one else to care for them properly, he should delay his learning to attend to the guests first. But if someone else is available and willing to host properly, the original person should continue with his learning.[23]

Even more striking, the Gemara teaches that Hachnasas Orchim outweighs greeting the Divine Presence itself! We learn this from Avraham. As he recovered from his *bris* (circumcision), Hashem came to visit him. At that very moment, ordinary-looking guests appeared. Avraham respectfully asked Hashem to wait while he ran to care for them. We see that caring for guests is even greater and being in Hashem's presence.[24] Why is this so? Some explain that the ultimate goal of this world is not just to reach lofty spiritual heights for their own sake. Hashem wants us to fulfill the mitzvos and to become as similar to Him as possible, and since Hashem is a giver who sustains the entire world, we draw closest to Him by becoming givers ourselves.[25] Avraham understood that by rushing to serve his guests, he brought Hashem more pleasure than by remaining in His presence, because that is precisely what Hashem wanted from him.[26]

As was mentioned, this trait did not end with Avraham, but was also passed down to his descendants. When Eliezer searched for a wife for Yitzchak, Rivkah not only passed the test of offering water to the camels, but took her chessed a step further, inviting Eliezer to stay not just one night but many, with ample food for him and his animals as well.[27] This generosity proved Rivkah was a true *ba'alas chessed* (a kind and giving person), worthy of becoming a matriarch of the Jewish people .[28]

The Gemara identifies kindness as one of three defining traits of the Jewish nation. Generations of our greatest leaders carried this torch. The Maharsha, famous for his commentary printed in every Gemara, was so devoted to hosting guests that he inscribed a *pasuk* from Iyov above his doorway: "No stranger shall sleep outside; my door to guests I will open".[29] Similarly, the Midrash says that Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, and David all excelled in tzedakah, and that this became their greatest source of merit in this world and the next.[30]

In fact, Ezra Hasofer instituted that women bake fresh bread every morning, so that any poor or hungry guest who came asking for food would always be served fresh bread.[31] While this specific practice is no longer necessary today, since we have many ways of keeping our food fresh, and our houses are stocked with all kinds of foods, its message endures: when it comes to caring for others, we should always strive to give the very best we have to offer.

Why do think that Hachnasas Orchim is considered like following in the footsteps of Hashem?



Korny Korner

What did the guest say after his seventh helping of desert?

"I came here as an ore'ach (guest) and I'm leaving as an oreo."

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Why Do We Do Hachnasas Orchim?

Honoring People = Honoring Hashem

We are all basically "guests" in Hashem's world. By doing Hachnasas Orchim, we are emulating Hashem, and doing the mitzvah of *vehalachta bidrochov* (following in His footsteps). Moreover, since people are created *b'tzelem Elokim* (in the image of G-d), by honoring people and inviting them into our homes and graciously providing for their needs, we are honoring Hashem.

Worth Millions

Hachnasas Orchim often brings extraordinary rewards, including children (as seen with Sarah Imeinu),[38] long life,[39] and material wealth.[40] Chazal teach that having guests at one's table today achieves the atonement once granted by korbanos during Temple times.[41] In fact, chessed is valued above a thousand *korbanos* and gains the same level of forgiveness.[42] In addition, Hashem listens to the tefillos of one who does Hachnasas Orchim, and protects them from *Gehenom*.[43] It is also one of the mitzvos mentioned in *Elu Devarim* (recited right after Birkas Hatorah) whose fruits are enjoyed in this world, while the main reward awaits in *Olam Haba*.[44]

Who's Helping Who?

Every Rosh Hashana, Hashem decrees not only how much a person will earn, but how much they'll lose. Money spent on tzedaka and helping others counts toward that loss, so instead of losing it to expensive repairs, costly medical treatment, or other inconveniences, you get to use it to make others happy and earn endless dividends while you're at it.[35] In earlier generations, philanthropists who always invited guests had a custom to be buried in a casket built from the wood of their own dining room table, sending a powerful message: that the good deeds done with one's money accompany a person to the next world.[36]

Sometimes punishment is meant to befall an individual, but Hashem kindly sends a chessed opportunity their way so that if they take it up, that merit will protect them.[37]



Hospitality That Shaped History

Hachnasas Orchim is extremely powerful and important, with tremendous impacts. There are many examples in Tanach of the far-reaching consequences of Hachnasas Orchim, or lack thereof. Yisro invited Moshe into his house when he heard there was a fugitive by the well, resulting in his daughter, Tziporah, marrying the greatest man who ever lived, and meriting to have great descendants.[32] On the flip side, since the nations Amon and Moav didn't provide food and drink to the Jews and treat them as guests when they passed by them in the *midbar* (desert), they were banned from ever marrying into the Jewish nation, even if they convert.[33] In another example, the whole city of Sodom was destroyed and has no *Olam Habah* (reward in the next world) because they were stingy and didn't want to share with others. They enacted all sorts of repulsive laws to ensure no guest would ever make the mistake of setting foot in Sodom.[34] Lot, who learned how to do Hachnasas Orchim from Avraham Avinu, was saved from Sodom, but his wife, who objected to having guests, was not.



Tefillah Time

In *Birkas Hamazon*, there is a blessing for a guest to say for his host, as follows:

יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁלֹּא יֵבוֹשׁ וְלֹא יִכָּלֵם בַּעַל הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה לֹא בָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְלֹא בָעוֹלָם הַבָּא וְיַצְלִיחַ בְּכָל־נְכָסָיו וְיִהְיוּ נְכָסָיו מוּצְלָחִים וּקְרוֹבִים לָעִיר וְאַל־יִשְׁלוֹט שָׂטָן בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו וְאַל יְזַדְּקֵק לְפָנָיו שׁוּם דְּבַר חֵטְא וְהַרְהוֹר עָוֹן מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם:

May it be G-d's will that the host not be put to shame in this world nor disgraced in the World to Come. May he prosper greatly in all his possessions. May his property and our property be successful and near the city (i.e., secure and readily accessible). May no adversary have power over his handiwork or over ours. May neither he nor we encounter any thought leading to sin, transgression, or iniquity, from now and forever.

Besides the great rewards for Hachnasas Orchim, every time your guests sit down to a meal, you receive this amazing brachah!

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Inviting Difficult Guests

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book3, pg.186

I have some relatives and acquaintances whom I try to have over for Shabbos meals but can be very difficult. Some are bossy, and others don't stop talking, making it extremely annoying for everyone, and my kids often leave the Shabbos table. Should I invite them anyway? And does it make a difference if these guests are their grandparents?

When it comes to grandparents, you must certainly give them the proper respect and invite them even if they are unpleasant or even annoying. Honoring parents and grandparents and showing them proper respect is a mitzvah we are required to do, and as with every mitzvah, is even greater when done with difficulty. You can use this as an opportunity to teach your children the concept of לְפוּם צַעֲרָא אַגְרָא, that G-d rewards according to the difficulty that is involved.

One of the basic reasons for the mitzvah of honoring parents and grandparents is hakaras hatov, showing appreciation. Help your children realize that they owe everything to their grandparents. They should think about all the time, money, effort, and sleepless nights their grandparents spent raising their own parents. As hard as it may seem to have them over, it is surely nothing in comparison to what their grandparents had to endure while raising and nurturing their children. This will help them view this as a privilege, not a burden.

As far as other annoying guests, although it is a great mitzvah to invite them as well, especially less desirable guests, it must be done with a proper balance. Your children should look forward to the Shabbos meal, so don't invite them on a regular basis.

When you do invite them, utilize the opportunity to train your family to show respect, patience, and understanding to others, and

to strengthen their love for every Jew. Tell your family members that even if it is challenging to have these guests around, they too have a Jewish soul, and Hashem deemed them equally valuable to create and keep alive. If Hashem wants them and cares for them, we should follow in His ways and seek to do the same.

In addition, they must know that mitzvah performance is not only when it's convenient. Every mitzvah that comes our way is a treasure and should be done happily, keeping in mind the great reward we receive for inviting guests and being warm and welcoming to them. The fact is, that if it is difficult, it makes the mitzvah all the more great. Our rabbis teach us that a mitzvah performed with difficulty is 100 times greater than a mitzvah that is done without much difficulty. So if having 100 guests at your Shabbos table is great, having difficult ones is even greater.

Reb Zisha Heschel, son of the Kapischnitzer Rebbe, once told me a powerful story about the way his father treated difficult guests. Although the rebbe would have many challenging guests at his table, one particular guest was simply unbearable, until it reached the point where he was asked by family members not to come back. The following Shabbos, the rebbe noticed that their "special" guest was missing, and found out that he had been "disinvited." The rebbe then told his family that he would not make Kiddush until they found him and brought him back. It took some time, as the man had been insulted by being disinvited, but they eventually found him and convinced him to come. The rebbe later told his family, "You think it's a big deal to invite enjoyable guests like R' Moshe Feinstein? Inviting someone like this is the real mitzvah!"

So although we may not be on the level of the Kapischnitzer Rebbe to host such guests all the time, it is a great mitzvah, and we should try to do it every so often, and do our best to make it a wonderful experience.

IN SHORT: *You must certainly invite grandparents, even if they are annoying. Inviting other such guests is a great mitzvah as well, but not for every week.*

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How Do We Do Hachnasas Orchim?

Seek Them, Serve Them

Taking care of guests can be physically and emotionally demanding, but appreciating the value of Hachnasas Orchim makes it feel more like an exciting challenge rather than a burden.[58] It also helps to keep in mind that every act of Hachnasas Orchim brings Hashem great *nachas*, making it a privileged opportunity.[59] Your attitude will be felt by your guests and determine whether or not they feel wanted. You should actively look for guests, rather than waiting to be asked. When you're the one making the offer, guests feel wanted, not like they're begging a favor. When they arrive, treat them with utmost respect, regardless of who they are. If Avraham Avinu could personally serve simple Bedouins, it shouldn't be beneath anyone's dignity to honor our guests. Furthermore, if Hashem takes care of every creature in the world and does not consider it beneath His dignity, we should gladly take care to do the same.[60]

Guests First

Treat guests how you would like to be treated. This is a fulfillment of "love your friend like yourself."[45] Try to anticipate their needs. The Chafetz Chaim was known to recite Kiddush right away on Friday night when he had hungry guests (singing "*Shalom Aleichem*" later instead).[46] Be sensitive to their feelings. Small things like giving out challah or cake, and eating with your guest even if you're not hungry, go a long way in making guests feel comfortable. Engage them in conversation that they find enjoyable and find ways to make them feel good. If they are sleeping over, try to give them your best bed and pillows. Sometimes a good rest is more important than good food.[47] In general, though, for a mitzvah, we always strive for the best[48].



Quality over quantity

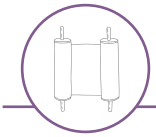
It's not only what you give, but how you give it. Dry bread/simple food offered with a smile may be more appreciated (and a bigger mitzvah) than fancy food given with a frown.[52] As Shlomo Hamelech said, "A simple meal filled with love beats a lavish feast filled with resentment."[53] Just as one who gives charity cheerfully earns double the blessing of one who gives without a smile, the same applies to Hachnasas Orchim.[54]

One of the *yetzer hara's* tricks is to convince people that hosting is too expensive, but you can spend what you would have anyway and just share it.[55] Ironically, overspending can make guests feel guilty and uncomfortable, while a simple, genuine welcome puts them at ease .[56] Similarly, don't shy from hosting for fear of imperfection — an imperfect place to stay surely beats none at all.[57]

How To Be A Good Guest

Besides for being a good host, it's important to know how to be a good guest. A good guest tries not to be an unnecessary burden and avoids being demanding. Don't pressure someone into hosting you. If they can't or don't want to host, forcing the issue is almost like stealing, since you'd be taking something they don't truly wish to give.[49] Also, don't overstay your welcome, as lingering too long can become an invasion of your host's privacy. Act pleasantly towards your host's family and express genuine appreciation; a good guest recognizes how much effort went into their visit, while an ingrate tells himself the host would've cooked anyway.[50] View even small favors done for you as significant[51]. Though not always necessary, a small gift is a nice way of showing a host appreciation and may even encourage them to keep up the good work and continue hosting.

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The Host Par Excellence

The Torah dedicates a very unusual amount of space to describing, in vivid detail, how Avraham Avinu took care of his guests. It did this so that we can learn how to do Hachnasas Orchim in the most ideal way. Let's examine some of the details and learn from Avraham Avinu's approach.[61]

Look for opportunities and make the most of them: Avraham was recovering from his *bris milah*, and it was extremely hot outside. Nevertheless, he went out into the heat and waited hopefully for guests. When he saw the three travelers, he greeted them excitedly and pleaded with them to come inside.

Although we might not be able to achieve such a high level, we can look for opportunities to host guests, and at the very least, greet guests enthusiastically once we're already hosting them.

What do they need? Avraham offered the guests water to wash their feet. This teaches us that there is more to being a good host than just offering food. Supply guests with whatever they might need: a towel, soap, shampoo, water bottles, etc.

Make them comfortable: While preparing the meal, Avraham told the guests to rest in the shade of the tree. When guests arrive, they're often tired after travelling and may want to rest before eating (though you should offer food in case they want to eat first). Show them where the restroom is and offer them a place to sit and rest. This also avoids guests having to stand around awkwardly while you prepare food. Offering a book or a sefer may prevent guests from feeling uncomfortable while they wait.

Less talking, more doing: We learn from Avraham to say a little and do a lot. He sensed that his guests did not want to be a burden, so he said, "just take a small snack before you continue on your way", and then proceeded to prepare a whole fancy spread. Try to put yourself in your guest's shoes. People generally feel uncomfortable taking from others, so ease their discomfort by offering a little at first, and once they feel at home, give as much as you can.

Be generous: Avraham gave his guests a sumptuous, generous meal, consisting of a whole cow's tongue per guest (which means he slaughtered three entire cows), amongst other delicacies. It's always better to give in abundance if you can, so that guests feel comfortable taking, and not feel that they are eating your last bit of food.

DIY: Although Avraham had plenty of servants, he personally served the guests and brought out the food. We learn from here to honor our guests by serving them ourselves rather than getting someone else to do it.

Escort them out: When they were finished, Avraham personally escorted them out. Escorting guests out is a way to show them honor and make them feel cared for.

These are just some of the many lessons we can learn from Avraham Avinu. Even if we can't emulate him entirely and do all the above things, each one is important, and we should do our best to imitate him as far as possible.

What are some things that you can do to make your guests feel more comfortable?



Did You Know?

The Midrash teaches that because Avraham gave his guests water to drink, washing water, shade, bread, meat, and personal service, Hashem rewarded his descendants in kind, with water, purification, protection, food (*mahn*), and meat, leading them personally in the desert, in Eretz Yisrael, and even in the time of Mashiach. One man's hospitality yielded all these rewards.[62]

Furthermore, while chasing a calf to feed his guests, Avraham discovered *Me'aras HaMachpeilah* (Adam and Chava's burial site). He was rewarded that this became a family burial plot, where the Avos and Imahos are buried to this day (with the exception of Rachel Imeinu).[63]



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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Hachnasas Orchim is modeled after Avraham Avinu's guest house: providing food, drink, rest, and escort. It combines tzedakah, loving others, and emulating Hashem, making it the greatest form of chessed. Its value increases with a guest's need, and even those with very little should share what they have. The rewards for Hachnasas Orchim are immense, including children, long life, wealth, and the atonement once granted by *korbanos*. Remembering the value of the mitzvah helps one treat it as a privilege rather than a burden. Hosts should: honor guests, anticipate their needs, and prioritize warmth over lavishness. Guests should: be grateful, pleasant, and considerate.

Last Minute Guest



It was less than an hour before Shabbos when Rabbi Mozes received a phone call. He was rushing around Lakewood, picking up a few last-minute items for his family.

"Rabbi Mozes, it's Rabbi Teitelbaum. I just met a woman in my local grocery store who is traveling from Los Angeles to Brooklyn to visit her mother. She's unexpectedly stuck in Lakewood for Shabbos and doesn't have anywhere to go. Would you be able to host her?"

Rabbi Mozes hesitated. His home was already full of guests, and he wasn't sure he could accommodate another person. Then he thought of someone who might be able to help.

"I don't think I can host her this week, but try Rabbi Louis Friedman," he suggested. "He has a wonderfully welcoming home, and even if he can't host her himself, he'll know whom to call."

Across town, Rabbi Louis Friedman hurried to do his last-minute errands. It "just so happened" that he chose to use the same grocery store that Rabbi Teitelbaum had just been in a few minutes earlier. His phone was already turned off for Shabbos, and he was eager to get home.

As he stood in line, a woman approached him.

"Excuse me," she said. "I'm not from the area, and I unexpectedly need somewhere to have a Friday night meal. Would you happen to know someone who might have room for me?"

Rabbi Friedman smiled.

"You're welcome to join us," he said. "In fact, please join us for the entire Shabbos!"

With Shabbos only minutes away, the Friedmans made room for one more. They welcomed their unexpected guest warmly and gave her a beautiful, uplifting Shabbos.

On Sunday evening, Rabbi Friedman turned on his phone and listened to his messages.

"You have one new message," the automated voice announced. "Sent Friday at 5:18 p.m."

"Hi, Rabbi Friedman, this is Rabbi Teitelbaum. I'm sorry to call so close to Shabbos, but Rabbi Mozes suggested I reach out to you. I met a woman who needs a place for Shabbos, and I was wondering if you might be able to host her. Please call me back."

Rabbi Friedman had never even heard the request! But when the guest appeared before him, he had already opened his heart and his home.

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Give with a Smile

Right before I daven Shacharis, standing in Sheel
I see a mentch who looks tzebruchen and he's for real
I say Shulem Aleichem with a smile and g'feel
Can I bring you something? Perhaps a good meal?

Chorus I

Whether you're in Shul or home
Show a Yid he's not alone
Wear a smile- it sets the tone
And give him something of your own

Sit with him and have a bite
Chap a shmuz and hear his plight
You'll help him feel alright
And you'll be doing right

Chorus II

When you give, give with a smile
Yes bringing cheer is worth your while
It's not only the things you share
But also show you care

A Baal Tzedaka cannot lose
So put yourself in someone's shoes
Open up your heart and say
How can I make his day

Chorus II

Sometimes at my desk, I'm checking orders that went
I hear a knock, a man from Eretz Yisrael was sent
A Chasuna he's making and can barely pay rent
I give a check, we have a tantz, and say bi Gezint

Chorus I

Chorus II (2x)

Zoniac Challenge

Unscramble the Hachnasas Orchim lingo!

1. AKZTAED __ __ __ __ __ __ __
2. MARAHVA __ __ __ __ __ __ __
3. TSGEU __ __ __ __ __
4. DEHSESC __ __ __ __ __ __ __
5. HLESIA __ __ __ __ __ __
6. TGNSECIRO __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

Zoniac Dilemma

Aviva's camp friend, Sara, was coming to Aviva's neighborhood to check out the local seminary. When Aviva's Mom found out that Sarah would be there over Shabbos, she suggested that they invite her for a Shabbos meal. It was a great idea in theory, but Aviva could just picture the scene...

Last week, Aviva's great-aunt had come for Shabbos, and at all three meals, her younger brothers, Yosef and Daniel, had been at each other's necks, fighting over everything down to who got to take gefilte fish first and who would bring dessert to the table. There had been yelling, hitting, name-calling, and Daniel had even spilled the big tureen of cholent on the floor while trying to carry it to the table and kick Yosef at the same time. Aviva had practically died at the look on her great aunt's face. But having a friend witness the same scene would take her embarrassment to new levels. How could she possibly invite Sara?

But how could she not? They were the only people Sara really knew in the neighborhood, and if Aviva didn't invite her, she'd probably end up eating all three meals with the older couple she was staying with.

What should Aviva do?



COVER UNCOVERED

The cover depicts the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim in action. A host warmly serves a meal to a wealthy guest, a poor guest, and a relative. A painting of Avraham Avinu's tent hangs in the background as the model for hospitality, while a carefully prepared guest room shows that hosting includes providing food, comfort, and a welcoming place to stay.

Daily Challenge

The next time you are asked to help with something, try to see the opportunity as a gift from Hashem, rather than as a burden.

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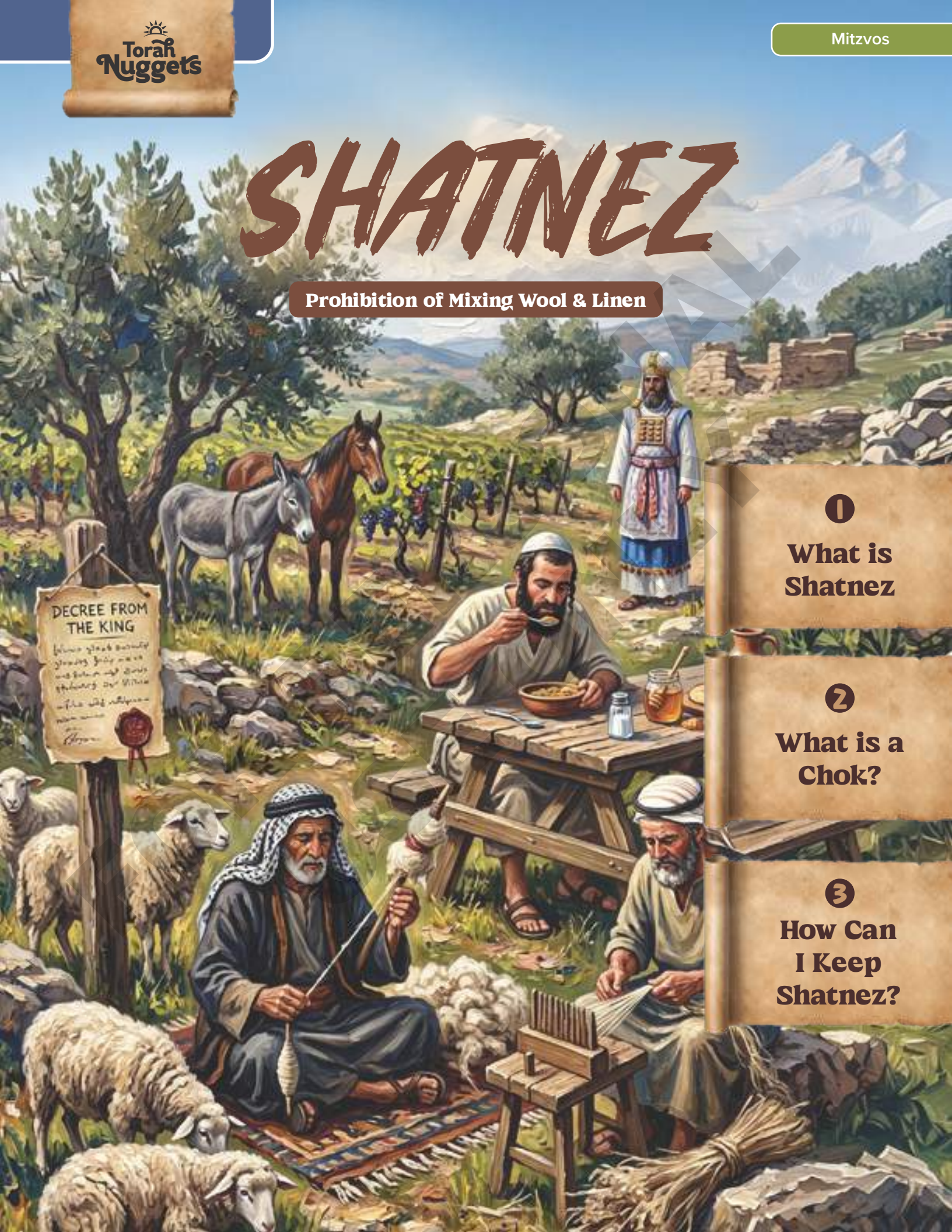
Kindness
By R. Zelig Pliskin

Hachnasat Orchim
They Are Watching You

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/hachnasat-orchim-they-are-watching-you/

SHATNEZ

Prohibition of Mixing Wool & Linen



1 What is Shatnez

2 What is a Chok?

3 How Can I Keep Shatnez?

What is Shatnez?

In a Nutshell

Shatnez is the Torah prohibition against wearing a garment that contains both wool and linen joined together in the same garment. This prohibition is a *"chok"* - a mitzvah whose reason we do not fully understand. While the commentators do offer explanations for this mitzvah, we still cannot fully understand the true reason.

Three Types of Mitzvos

The Torah names three categories of mitzvos: *eidos*, *chukim*, and *mishpatim*.[1] *Eidos* are testimonial mitzvos that remind us of important truths and events. For example, Shabbos testifies that Hashem created the world, while the *Yamim Tovim* recall key events in Jewish history.[2] *Mishpatim* are laws governing how we treat others, including prohibitions against stealing or causing harm. They guide our ethical and financial relationships.[3] *Chukim* (which is the plural word for *"Chok"*) are Divine commandments whose true reasons lie beyond human understanding. While every *mitzvah* contains depths beyond our grasp, *chukim* are based primarily on mystical realities beyond human intellect. Shatnez is an example of a chok.[4]

Five Types of Kilayim

The Torah prohibits five different types of mixtures - called *"kilayim"* - of which Shatnez is one. Forbidden mixtures can show up in your barn, field, orchard, vineyard, or even in your closet!



Animals: It is forbidden to crossbreed two species of animals or birds.[5]

Seeds: One may not plant multiple types of edible seeds together .[6]

Trees: It is forbidden to graft two types of fruit trees together.[7]

Vineyards: One may not plant other edible seeds near a vine or vineyard.[8]

Clothing: It is prohibited to wear a garment whose fibers are a mixture of wool and linen.

Spotlight

Some mitzvos, such as shatnez, are beyond our understanding—but we keep them because Hashem said so!

Animal Mixtures

It is forbidden to actively crossbreed two animal species.[16] A Jew may not even ask a non-Jew to crossbreed animals on his behalf.[17] These prohibitions apply in Israel, and also outside of Israel. If two species of animals were crossbred, it is permitted for a Jew to benefit from the offspring.[18]

Plant Mixtures

It is forbidden (in Israel) to plant different types of vegetable seeds together.[9] The resulting produce is permitted.

It is forbidden (inside and outside Israel) to graft different fruit trees species together.[10] The fruit produced from it is permitted.[11]

It is forbidden to plant vegetable seeds or grain near a grape vine (inside Israel – Biblically, and outside Israel – Rabbinically).[12] The growths must be burned.[13]

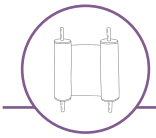
What Is Shatnez?

The fifth and final forbidden mixture is called Shatnez. This means that it is forbidden to wear a garment which has in it both wool and linen. "Wool" refers specifically to the hair of sheep, and "linen" refers to the flax plant.[19] This prohibition applies both in Israel and outside of Israel. It is permitted to ask a non-Jew to create a garment with Shatnez, and even a Jew is permitted to create and own such a garment! It is only forbidden for a Jew to actually wear it.[20]

Torah Challenge

"לֹא תִלְבַּשׁ שַׁעַטְנֵז"—"Do not wear *Shatnez*."[14] Raw wool and linen are processed in three ways which can then lead to *Shatnez*: **שׁוּעַ** *(shua)*—combed or smoothed, **טָווּי** *(tavui)*—spun into thread, **נוּז** *(nuz)*—woven or attached.[15] How does the word **שַׁעַטְנֵז** (shatnez) hint to these three processes?

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When Middos Collide

Shatnez is the prohibition against wearing a garment that contains both sheep's wool and linen from flax. This mitzvah is beyond human logic. We trust Hashem and keep every mitzvah, even when we do not fully understand. Any explanation offered is merely a glimpse of insight, not the complete reason.[21] With this in mind, the following explanation can be offered.

The first children born were Kayin and Hevel – the sons of Adam. Kayin worked the fields, while Hevel raised sheep. They wanted to serve Hashem, and Adam told his sons to bring a *korban.* They both listened but did it in very different ways. Kayin brought some of his flax, while Hevel brought sheep. Hashem accepted Hevel's *korban* but rejected Kayin's.[22] Kayin became jealous, and he killed Hevel— the first murder in the history of the world.

A connection to *shatnez* now becomes clear. Kayin brought flax while Hevel brought a sheep. Their offerings led to the first tragic fight and murder in history, so Hashem told us to distance ourselves from this blend, and keep wool and linen separate.[23]

But the explanation of this story goes even deeper. Why did Kayin offer specifically linen, and why did Hevel offer sheep? The *Michtav M'Eliyahu*[24] explains that Kayin and Hevel were not simply brothers with different jobs; they were archetypes of different personalities. Kayin's personality was dominated by the **middah*** (trait) of *"gevurah"* - strict discipline. Hevel's personality was dominated by the trait of *chesed*— kindness. The kabbalistic writings explain that linen represents the trait of *gevurah*, while wool represents the trait of *chesed*. Kayin chose an offering which related to his dominant trait, while Hevel chose an offering relating to his.

What were Kayin and Hevel trying to do when they brought their respective offerings? Well, an offering is a way to show love or gratitude to Hashem. But in a much deeper sense, an offering is a way to strengthen the holy forces which Hashem created to make the world run. In the upper worlds, Hashem created something called "the Force of *Gevurah*". He also created "the Force of *Chesed*". Each person is supposed to tap into these traits and use them properly. When Kayin brought an offering from linen, he was trying to empower the force of *gevurah* in the world. When Hevel brought an offering from wool, he was trying to empower the force of *chesed*.

Who was right? Is it better for the world to have just *gevurah* or just *chesed*? The answer is, they were both wrong, because you need both! The middah of *chesed* is a wonderful trait – to do kindness for others. But if a person is too kind on himself, he will never become disciplined. The middah of *gevurah* is a wonderful trait – to be self-disciplined. But if a person is harsh on others – he will be cruel to them. Kayin wanted only *gevurah*, while Hevel wanted only *chesed*. They were both wrong, because these traits must be combined.

However, even when these traits are combined, they need to be combined properly. A recipe may call for salt and also honey, but if you put in the wrong amounts – it will taste terrible. Some foods need a little bit of salt but a lot of honey. Other foods need a little bit of honey, but a lot of salt. Combining these essential ingredients without following precise instructions can cause tremendous harm.

With all the above understanding, we can circle back to Shatnez. Wool and linen represent two types of traits. While both traits are important, combining them can be catastrophic if we don't follow clear instructions. The Torah therefore tells us to steer clear of playing around with these elements based on our own knowledge. But if we receive instructions from Hashem when it will be a good combination (e.g. with the clothing of the Kohein Gadol in the Beis Hamikdash), then we will indeed combine them – with fantastic results.[25]

This is one of many deep explanations for the intriguing mitzvah of shatnez. However, the most accurate reason why we keep the mitzvah of shatnez is because Hashem commanded us to. Our task is to trust His wisdom, respect the boundaries He placed in creation, and follow His commands.



Can you think of a good way to mix gevurah (self-discipline) with chesed (kindness)?

*See the **Middos Nugget** to learn more.



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What Is a Chok?

> **"Whatever command or prohibition of Gd it may be that prompts one to ask why one should do this and not do that, there is but one answer: Because it is the will of Gd!"[34]**
>
> *- Rabbi Shimshon Raphoel Hirsch*

Because He Said So

Shatnez is a classic example of a chok. While we can understand why murder is wrong and honoring parents is important, our minds cannot comprehend what is wrong with combining wool and linen. We may explore the explanations offered by the commentaries, but ultimately, we keep *chukim*—and really all mitzvos— just because Hashem commanded us to.[27]

King's Order

Even though Shatnez is a chok, that does not mean it is a random or meaningless law. Think of a wise king who issues a law but does not reveal its purpose. His citizens' inability to understand the law does not make it pointless; it simply means that the king knows more than they do. Either way, they remain obligated to obey it. Hashem's wisdom is infinitely greater than ours. He has a reason for every mitzvah, even when He has not revealed it to us. We may not understand a *chok*, but we trust that it comes from His perfect wisdom.[26]

Questions Welcome

Keeping a mitzvah because Hashem commanded it does not mean that we should stop asking questions. We are encouraged to think deeply about the Torah's laws and understand as much as we can. Exploring a mitzvah can help us appreciate it and grow from it. The difference is that our observance does not depend on finding an explanation that satisfies us. We obey first—and then explore.[29] Interestingly, the Medrash says that in the future, Hashem will reveal the reasons behind the Torah's commands, including shatnez, and reward those who faithfully observed them.[30]

Only a Taste

The reasons given for the mitzvos are called *ta'amei hamitzvos*. The word *ta'am* means both "reason" and "taste." The reasons attached to the mitzvos can be compared to eating food. Food is primarily eaten for its nutrition, yet we also enjoy its many tastes. That enjoyment is a pleasant "side effect" of eating. Similarly, Hashem made the mitzvos with varied "tastes." With some mitzvos, we can clearly experience the pleasant benefits that accompany them. However, just as a person does not eat food merely for its taste, we do not perform a mitzvah simply because of its reason. The *ta'am* provides added zest and meaning to its fulfillment, but the reason we perform it is because Hashem commanded us to.[28]



Keeping Order

When the Torah describes Hashem creating every plant and animal, it specifies that He designed each one to continue to reproduce exactly how Hashem created it.[31] By crossbreeding animals or grafting different plants together, a person interferes with that order, almost making it seem as though Hashem needs help producing new species! Such new mixtures also cause physical and spiritual harm that we cannot recognize.[32] While shatnez does not actually crossbreed two species, it is still forbidden. One understanding is that since wool and linen **are** among the materials **very** commonly used for clothing, the prohibition against joining them serves as a constant reminder not to mix species or tamper with the order Hashem established in Creation.[33]

Korny Korner

Why didn't the shatnez checker believe the materials written on the jacket's label?

He knew they were certainly fabricated.

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Why Did the Kohanim Wear Prohibited Garments?

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book 3 pg.156

I know that it is prohibited to wear clothing containing a mixture of wool and linen, known as Shatnez. Yet we find that some of the garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) during the service in the Holy Temple were made of wool and linen. Why was this permitted? Why could the garments not just be made of wool?

In olden times, linen was considered a precious fabric, and was usually reserved for the nobility and priests. Indeed, the Torah tells us[35] that when Yosef was appointed viceroy of Egypt, he was dressed in garments of linen in honor of his coronation. *Rashi* comments that this was because linen was a precious fabric in Egypt. On a simple level, this is why linen was so prominent among the materials used in the priestly garments. In fact, the *Mishnah*[36] tells us that the special linen garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol* on *Yom Kippur* were especially exclusive, made of the finest, most expensive imported linens.

In order for us to understand why it was permitted for the High Priest's garments to be made of a forbidden mixture, let us explore the mitzvah of Shatnez. Wearing a mixture of wool and linen is considered a *chok*, a mitzvah whose reason is beyond human understanding. Nevertheless, the commentators provide the following small glimpse into the reason behind this prohibition: In addition to the prohibition of Shatnez, it is also forbidden to crossbreed animals or plant mixtures of seeds in order to produce a new species. This is because when Hashem created the world, He created each species "l'mino," with a specific theme, flavor, and purpose — both physical and spiritual. And in His great wisdom, He decreed that in order for each species to be utilized properly and to its fullest, it must be kept intact and unadulterated.

Mixing two species that don't belong together is tampering with Hashem's plan, thereby causing a spiritual "explosion" that is harmful to the world. This can be compared to certain chemicals, which when separate can be very useful and safe, but when combined can be combustible and dangerous. This is a small understanding of the Torah's prohibition against all of these mixtures.

However, this is only true in the physical world. But the *Bais HaMikdash* was not part of this physical world. When one crossed the threshold of the *Beis HaMikdash*, he was transported to an entirely different world, one of complete spirituality that transcended this physical world entirely. And the *avodah* performed by the *Kohanim* in the *Beis HaMikdash* had a profound impact on the entire universe, as it affected the spiritual spheres and brought an abundance of blessing — spiritual and physical — to the world.

Because the spiritual world has its own way of operating, the "game" changed completely in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Mixtures that are hazardous and forbidden in our physical world are not only safe and permitted there, they are even advantageous. Even in our physical world, we find that chemicals react differently at different altitudes, causing water to boil at different temperatures and dough to rise at different rates. And those same chemicals mentioned earlier, that can be so dangerous when combined in our atmosphere, perhaps won't cause in any danger in a different atmosphere.

So the mixture of wool and linen, which is so harmful to our world, was actually able to enhance the spirituality of the avodah in the *Beis HaMikdash*. And instead of causing harm, it played an important role in bringing great blessing to the world.

IN SHORT:

Mixing wool and linen is only dangerous and prohibited in our physical world. In the spiritual world of the Holy Temple, not only was it safe, it enhanced the blessing being showered from Heaven.

Did You Know?

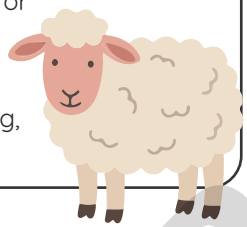
The kesones (tunic) of the bigdei kehunah (priestly garments) atoned for the sin of wearing shatnez.[37]

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How Can I Keep Shatnez?

The Right Fibers

Not every fluffy fiber is wool—and not every plant fiber is linen. The prohibition of *shatnez* applies specifically to wool from sheep or lambs combined with linen made from flax.[42] Cashmere, mohair, alpaca wool, hemp, and other fibers do not create *shatnez*. Still, a garment's main fabric may not be the only concern. Some rabbinic authorities forbid garments with unidentified or re-processed materials, and even a synthetic suit can have natural fibers hidden in its collar, padding, stitching, or trim.



From Tag to Lab

Today, *shatnez* is less common than it once was because many garments are made from cotton or cheaper manufactured fibers such as polyester and rayon. Still, many garments contain *shatnez*—sometimes in places the label does not mention. Checking the label is important, but it is only the first step. Labels generally describe the garment's main fabric and may not identify its sewing thread, lining, interfacing, padding, or decorative pieces. That is where a *shatnez* laboratory comes in. A trained checker knows which garments and areas are most likely to present a concern and removes tiny samples without noticeably damaging the garment. Under a microscope, wool has a scaly appearance, while linen resembles a bamboo stalk. These distinctive patterns reveal what the eye—and the label—may miss. Most large Jewish communities have a *shatnez* laboratory or trained checker. To find one, ask your L.O.R. or check *testshatnez.com/shatnez-lab-directory*. The laboratory can also tell you which types of garments need checking and which generally do not.



Hidden Connections

Wool and linen do not have to be blended into the same fabric to create *shatnez*. Weaving, sewing, or tying them together can create a forbidden connection.[41] A wool garment can therefore contain *shatnez* because of something as small as linen thread used to attach a button, shoulder pad, appliqué, or reinforcement. That is why wool suits, coats, dresses, skirts, sweaters, ties, and garments with sewn-on designs may require checking—even when the visible fabric seems fine.

Shatnez FAQs

May I try on an unchecked suit?

Generally, yes—as long as there is no particular reason to believe that it contains *shatnez*. However, a garment known to usually contain *shatnez* may not be tried on. In the rare case that someone wants to try on such a garment before having the *shatnez* removed, a rabbi should be consulted.

Does the prohibition apply only to clothing?

No. Draping *shatnez* over the body for warmth or protection is also forbidden. Certain blankets, cushions, and even oven mitts and couches can therefore raise questions.[38]

What's the halacha if I see somebody else outdoors wearing a garment which I know is shatnez? Should I tell him now (i.e. when he's outside) or wait until he's inside?

If you are a Sephardic Jew, then you should follow the *Mechaber* (Rabbi Yosef Karo) and tell him right away. If you are an Ashkenazic Yid, then follow the Rama and wait the short time it takes to get him indoors or to a more private area.[39]

May I wear a linen garment over a wool garment or vice versa?

It depends. Wearing a linen garment over a wool garment is permitted as long as the two are not attached. If the inner garment cannot be removed without first removing the outer one, the *poskim* disagree, but the prevalent custom is to be lenient. A common example is wearing a linen *kittel* over a wool suit on Yom Kippur or at the Seder.[40]

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The Man Who Saved a Mitzvah

R' Yosef Rosenberger grew up in Austria and worked in the family clothing business. When WWII broke out, he escaped to America, a place where many viewed religion with impatience or scorn. He was encouraged to rebuild his shattered life. But then an innocent request changed his life's path.

Someone purchased a suit and, knowing that R' Yosef had worked in clothing, he asked him whether it contained *shatnez*, expecting him to recognize the materials. R' Yosef pulled out several threads and examined them. Although he had been familiar with the materials used in suits in Europe, these American materials looked different.

The owner of the store didn't know, so he approached three suppliers and received three different answers. R' Yosef was stunned. Clothing passed through so many manufacturers and suppliers that no one knew what they contained. If the experts didn't know, how could we avoid *shatnez*?

R' Yosef decided that he would research to find the answers, whatever it took. He went to textile school and researched in libraries. The books suggested staining, burning, or dissolving fibers, but these tests were unreliable. R' Yosef refused to give up and began experimenting. He soon developed a test, based on the properties of fibers. A thread would be unraveled, treated with certain fluids, and examined beneath a magnified light, and he was finally able to identify the different fabrics. Then Agudas Yisrael gave him a room in their headquarters, and America's first *shatnez* lab was opened.

But instead of gratitude for devoting himself to this mitzvah, R' Yosef was met with ridicule. "Oh, here comes another unemployed European Jew!" one complained. "He is just trying to swindle us with some get-rich scheme!" said another. Some just laughed at his entire mission, and "experts" informed him that American suits were "100% wool," so there was no need to check them.

R' Yosef would get up to speak in *shuls*. Sometimes he was met with hoots, but R' Yosef wasn't scared off. "Who will give me his suit to check? If I do not find *shatnez*, I will give him $100 (a lot of money, in those days)!" Someone would hand over his jacket. R' Yosef opened the collar, tested a fiber, and announced, "Linen!"

But public interest was still painfully slow. Then, R' Yosef convinced Crawford Clothes to offer *shatnez* testing together with alterations. He borrowed $75 to place a full-page advertisement in a leading Yiddish newspaper. Charging only 25-cents per garment, he would need to check 300 garments to repay the loan.

But no one responded. R' Yosef was crushed and nearly considered closing the laboratory. Then he got a call — not from a customer, but from Crawford's competitors! They feared losing Jewish business and wanted to offer testing too. Soon, stores throughout New York were advertising R' Yosef's service.

In 1945, R' Yosef married Miriam, who joined the mission, with their apartment's front room becoming the laboratory. Miriam performed the painstaking work of opening collars and labels, replacing backing, and sewing garments closed again. For decades, their tiny home overflowed with racks of clothing, microscopes, chemicals, needles, tweezers, ringing telephones, and waiting customers. In the first twenty years, they estimated that they checked approximately 150,000 garments!

But examining clothing was not enough; the world had to be educated. So R' Yosef wrote pamphlets and brochures about the mitzvah of *shatnez*, and visited classrooms. Children learned and taught their parents. Even in his eighties, he continued teaching about *shatnez*.

R' Yosef devoted his life to spreading the *mitzvah*, rejecting honor and titles. He did not allow people to call him "Rabbi," but "Mr. Rosenberger," and many affectionately called him "Mr. *Shatnez*."

R' Yosef did not revive *shatnez* through one dramatic victory. He did it through decades of rejection, exhausting work, and quiet persistence. He saw a *mitzvah* that needed a boost and gave everything he had to bring it back to life. This unknown refugee would become the man who revived and spread the nearly forgotten *mitzvah* of *shatnez*.[43]



What would you do if you came up with a good idea and a lot of people were teasing you about it?

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Shatnez is one of the Torah prohibitions against forbidden mixtures called *kilayim*, and involves wearing wool and linen joined together in one garment. Shatnez is a *chok*—a Divine command whose complete reason is beyond human understanding. That means we observe it just because Hashem commanded us to. Still, asking questions and exploring the *ta'amei hamitzvos* can deepen our appreciation of the mitzvah. Practically, even one wool or linen thread can create shatnez when attached to the other material. Although shatnez is less common today than it once was, it can still be hidden where we least expect it, and certain garments need professional checking.

A Microscope for a Mitzvah

In the 1940s, *shatnez* observance was not widespread in America. Jewish families were struggling to remain faithful to even familiar *mitzvos* such as Shabbos and *kashrus*, while *shatnez* required knowledge and equipment that few people possessed.

In 1940, Reb Yosef Rosenberger, *z"l*, opened a *shatnez* laboratory in New York City. Using specialized skills and equipment, he checked garments and worked to restore awareness of this nearly forgotten *mitzvah*.

Boston, however, had no laboratory. After arriving there in 1942, the Bostoner Rebbe arranged for garments to be sent to Reb Yosef's lab in Brooklyn. The process was slow and inconvenient, and the Rebbe desperately wanted to establish a local lab. Yet every attempt to find someone who could train a Boston checker fell through.

One day, a friend entered the Rebbe's office and found him deeply troubled.

"How can a *frum* community thrive without a local *shatnez* laboratory?" the Rebbe asked. "This is a *mitzvah min haTorah*. How can we allow it to be neglected?"

"Why not ask MIT?" his visitor suggested. "It is one of America's leading centers of science and technology, and it has a textile division. Perhaps its experts can help."

The Rebbe was intrigued. He contacted the division's director, Professor Schwartz, and arranged a meeting. Soon, the Rebbe and several local *Rabbanim* were sitting in the professor's office, explaining that they needed a reliable way to distinguish wool from linen.

The professor smiled. "Rebbe, you have come to the right person."

MIT had recently investigated a lawsuit involving workers who claimed that textile fibers had damaged their lungs. During the research, its scientists had developed a polarized microscope that could identify fibers by the colors they displayed beneath its lens. Linen, cotton, wool, and other materials each appeared differently.

It was exactly what the Rebbe needed! MIT owned only two of these microscopes, but Professor Schwartz agreed to sell one. The price was enormous, yet the Rebbe did not hesitate. Helping an entire community observe a Torah command was worth the cost.



Through the Rebbe's determination—and help from a most unexpected source—Boston finally gained the equipment it needed to establish its own *shatnez* laboratory.[44]

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Zoniac Dilemma

Getting Cold Feet

On a cool October morning, Devorah was walking home in her warm UGG boots, crunchy leaves crackling beneath her feet, while she chatted on her phone with her friend Miri.

"You know these UGGs we both bought?" Miri mentioned casually. "I brought mine to a shatnez lab—and they actually found shatnez in them!"

Devorah froze and looked down at her feet. "Uh… I've gotta go," he said, quickly ending the call.

She was only two blocks from home, but what should she do now? Her boots had never been checked, so she didn't know for sure that they contained shatnez. Maybe her pair was different. Be real, a voice inside her head said. They are the exact same boots as Miri's! Nervously, Devorah sat on a bench and pulled them off. Underneath, she was wearing thick, fluffy Mickey Mouse socks her little sister had bought her last Chanukah. What should I do?? She looked around nervously.

Just then, he spotted a group of girls she knew turning onto the block. This was going from bad to worse. Walking home through the cold, crunchy leaves in socks would be not just uncomfortable now—it would be seriously embarrassing. Devorah tried to hide her feel in the pile of leaves in front of her. Should she just put the boots back on and run home? But they probably contained shatnez!

What should Devorah do?



Zoniac Challenge

FROM WOOL TO FLAX

Keep wool and flax apart—but can you travel from one to the other?

Begin with **WOOL** and change just **one letter** at each step until you reach **FLAX**. Do not rearrange the letters, and every step must form a real English word. Use the clues for help!

WOOL

1 ☐☐☐☐ Something used to complete a job

2 ☐☐☐☐ A fee paid to use certain roads

3 ☐☐☐☐ The opposite of short

4 ☐☐☐☐ To lean toward one side

5 ☐☐☐☐ Fine soil carried by water

6 ☐☐☐☐ A long, narrow cut

7 ☐☐☐☐ To move lightly and quickly

8 ☐☐☐☐ Smooth and level

FLAX

Answers: **wool**, 1.tool, 2.toll, 3.tall, 4.tilt, 5.silt, 6.slit, 7.flit, 8.flat, **flax**



COVER UNCOVERED

The cover depicts shatnez and other forbidden mixtures. Sheep's wool and flax linen remain separate by the King's decree. The reason for a mitzvah is like the taste of food—meaningful, but not the main reason we eat. Honey and salt show that mixtures require proper balance. The Kohen Gadol shows when shatnez is permitted, while animals, trees, and vineyards illustrate other forms of kilayim.

Daily Challenge

Do a mitzvah today just 'cuz Hashem said so'!

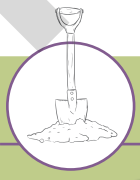
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37) Vayikra Raba 10:6; Shir Hashirim Raba 4:7
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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Sefer Hachinuch Eng/Heb

Vol 9, Mitzvah 551

Parshat Vayeira:

Shatnez And Our Nation's Purity

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/parshat-vayeira-a-nation-of-purity/

TZITZIS & YARMULKE

Special Jewish Garments

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1 What are Tzitzis?

2 Why are Tzitzis Good for Me?

3 How do I Wear Tzitzis?

4 Yarmulke

What are Tzitzis?

In a Nutshell

Tzitzis are special strings attached to the corners of a four-cornered garment. It is meant to remind us of all of the mitzvos throughout the day.[6]

Made for the Mitzvah

The mitzvah of *tzitzis* appears twice in the Torah.[1] In fact, we recite Hashem's commandment to us every day in the third paragraph of *Krias Shema*.[2] The Torah requires *tzitzis* only on a four-cornered garment. Since today most shirts and jackets do not have four corners, we go out of our way to wear special garments designed for this mitzvah. One is the *tallis katan* (often just called "*tzitzis*"), which is worn throughout the day. The other is the *tallis gadol* (or *tallis*), a prayer shawl worn by many during *Shacharis*.[3] In this way, we can constantly fulfill this beloved mitzvah.

STRING AROUND YOUR FINGER



Did you ever tie a string around your finger to remember something? Probably not. But the expression exists for a reason – it actually works! When you notice the string, it snaps you out of autopilot and reminds you of whatever you were trying to remember. *Tzitzis* work the same way.[4] The Torah tells us that when a person sees his tzitzis, *"You will remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them, and... not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you go astray..."*[5] Every time we notice our *tzitzis*, they remind us what our mission is, and how Hashem wants us to live.

Spotlight

Tzitzis are a constant and tangible reminder that we are Jews and servants of Hashem.

Once Upon a Time

As the Torah tells us, the mitzvah includes having some strings dyed with *techeiles*,[12] a special blue dye produced from a rare sea creature called the *chilazon*.[13] However, during the long years of exile, the identity of the *chilazon* was lost, and Jews were no longer able to produce *techeiles*. In recent times, some claim to have found it, but most Jews today don't wear blue strings. But even without the blue string, we can still fulfill the mitzvah of *tzitzis*.[14]

Do I Have To?

Are we required to wear *tzitzis*? Interestingly, the Torah does not command a person to wear a four-cornered garment with *tzitzis* on its corners. Rather, it says that if someone wears such a garment, then it must have *tzitzis*.[7] But that is not the end of the story. The Gemara[8] tells us that if someone doesn't wear *tzitzis*, he may be punished, since the mitzvah of *tzitzis* has so many wonderful benefits, and has been cherished by *Klal Yisroel* throughout history.[9] Furthermore, wearing *tzitzis has become* the accepted custom of the Jewish people, making it something we are now obligated to do.[10] Women, however, are exempt since it is a time-bound mitzvah, and they should not wear *tzitzis*.

Torah Challenge

Rashi tells us that the word *tzitzis* contains a hint to its purpose. Can you figure it out?

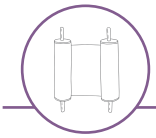
Step 1: Find the *gematria* of the word **ציצית**.

(**צ** = 90, **י** = 10, **ת** = 400)

Step 2: Add **8** for the strings, and **5** for the knots

What number did you get? What does that number hint to?[11]

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Dress for Success

Tzitzis are specially made strings that we attach to a four-cornered garment, either a smaller one to wear all day as a "*tallis katan,*" or a larger one that is special for davening, called a *tallis gadol* or "*tallis*" for short. By wearing these, we fulfill the mitzvah described twice in the Torah:

...וְעָשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל־כַּנְפֵי בִגְדֵיהֶם

...and you should make tzitzis for the corners of your garments.[15]

The Torah tells us that when we look at tzitzis, it reminds us to perform Hashem's mitzvos.[16] Rav Shamshon Rafael Hirsch explains a deep idea that shows how every detail of *tzitzis* carries a message that reveals what it means to be a Jew and keep the mitzvos.

In order to understand tzitzis, we first need to think about the clothing it is attached to. Let's remember that the first articles of clothing were given to Adam and Chava after they sinned by eating from the forbidden fruit in *Gan Eden*.[17] Clothing therefore reminds us of man's "fallen state," and of the imperfections that we have as human beings. *Tzitzis*, a special mitzvah object that reminds us to do all the mitzvos, are attached to our clothing[18] to help us overcome those imperfections and keep us on the right path. This is, of course, accomplished by our performance of mitzvos.

The *tzitzis* strings have two parts: the tied knots and the loose, flowing strings. The tied knots represent boundaries/restraint, and the free-flowing strings represent freedom. This teaches us that a person can only experience true freedom if he is able to exercise self-control over his desires. True freedom, represented by the strings, can only exist once one has self-restraint, as shown by the knots. Without this, he is simply a slave to his desires.

The mitzvah in the Torah of *tzitzis* includes 1 or more strands of *techeiles*—blue strings, with the remaining strings being white. *Techeiles* represents the Jewish concept of holiness and closeness to G-d. As the Gemara explains, blue resembles the sea, the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the Divine Throne of Glory.[19]

Techeiles also played a central role in the *Mishkan*, was prominent in the garments of the *Kohen Gadol*, and was used to cover the *Aron* while it traveled. These are all articles of holiness.

So the blue string(s) serves to further remind us to act in a holy manner. Our thoughts turn upwards from the sea to the sky to Hashem's Throne of Glory, and we are reminded of the service of the *kohanim* in the Beis Hamikdash. This all helps us become more aware of ourselves as "spiritual beings" who are capable of acting on a "higher plane."

The numbers of the strings teach the same lesson. Six represents the physical world, which was created in six days. Seven represents the purpose of this world: to recognize that it was G-d's who created it, as shown by Shabbos, when Hashem rested from creating the world. The blue eighth string goes even further. Eight in Judaism represents *l'maalah min hatevah*—that which is above nature. In other words, it represents our uniquely Jewish mission to rise above our nature and serve G-d in a special Jewish way.[20]

Rabbi Shimon Schwab, one of the great Jewish leaders of the last generation, summarizes the same idea beautifully: "As far as the Jewish people are concerned, a person's ability to subdue his animal nature (represented by clothing) grows and flowers (for which the Hebrew word is "*tzitz*") into an even higher moral calling—that of accepting the mitzvos of G-d. Where moral decency—with which all humanity is charged—ends (i.e. at the corners of their garments), the specifically Jewish mandate begins. The Torah presupposes the highest form of decency and dignity. We, as the Jewish people, are to make 'extensions' of our clothing to symbolize our special mandate. So, when we look at our *tzitzis*, we are reminded that our membership in the Jewish nation, through accepting the mitzvos, extends our humanity to a higher moral calling."[21]

How can we not jump at the opportunity to fulfill such a mitzvah?



What are some examples of where Yiddishkeit goes beyond basic moral obligations?

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Why are Tzitzis Good for Me?

Not-So-Fringe Benefits

The Gemara says incredible things about the mitzvah of *tzitzis*. It is considered equal to all the mitzvos combined, and one who is careful to wear *tzitzis* merits greeting the *Shechinah*.[24] The Torah itself tells us what makes this mitzvah so special. When a person looks at his *tzitzis*, he is reminded of all the mitzvos – which helps him fulfill them. But it goes even further - *tzitzis* even help prevent a person from sinning.[25] The Gemara tells of a man who was always careful to wear *tzitzis*. He traveled across the sea and paid an enormous sum of money just to commit a terrible *aveirah* (sin). But just as he was about to sin, his *tzitzis* "slapped him in the face," and he stopped himself. In the merit of his tzitzis, he was saved from sin![26]

Not a String nor a Strap

When Avraham Avinu won the war and rescued his nephew *Lot* from the 4 Kings, he refused to take any of the spoils —not even "a string or a strap."[22] He understood and wanted everyone else to know that his success came from Hashem alone. As a reward, his descendants merited two *mitzvos* that serve as visible signs of their connection to Hashem: the strings of *tzitzis* and the straps of *tefillin*.[23]

The King's Uniform

Kings often have servants wear a special uniform or insignia so everyone knows whom they serve. Hashem gave us *tzitzis* for the same reason.[30] By wearing them, we are recognizable as Hashem's servants and messengers, reminding both ourselves and others that we represent Him. Tzitzis are also compared to the identifying seal worn by slaves, testifying that the Jewish people belong to Hashem.[31]

A Whole Lotta Hints

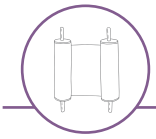
Sometimes a person needs a hint to remind him of something, and tzitzis are full of hints. The numerical value of *tzitzis* is 600. Add the 8 strings and 5 knots, and you get 613 — the exact number of mitzvos in the Torah.[28] The five knots on each corner correspond to the five *Chumashim*. And strings on the four corners remind us to remember the Torah in each of the four direction we go.[29] Each of these hints remind us to keep all of the mitzvos.

A Penny for Eternity

Wearing tzitzis is an easy way to rack up your mitzvos. It's not expensive to buy, and not hard to do (you just gotta wear them!), but will earn a person unimaginable reward. A famous story is told about the Vilna Gaon. As he lay on his deathbed, he began to cry. While he was crying, he picked up his *tzitzis*, held them close, and said, "In this world, for just a few *kopecks* (small change in Vilna) I was able to buy a tzitzis and fulfill Hashem's will every moment that I wore it. Soon I will be entering a world where no amount of money can buy even one more *mitzvah*." This was the Vilna Gaon speaking—a giant in Torah who learned day and night. In his last moments on earth, he was thinking about the precious mitzvah of *tzitzis* that he would no longer be able to perform. There is an interesting halachah that reflects this idea. A person should not wear his *tzitzis* out when he is in a cemetery because it considered mocking the dead by reminding them of an opportunity they can no longer take advantage of, no matter how much they might wish to.[27]



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Servants of the King

When we wear tzitzis, we constantly see them and are always reminded that Hashem is our master and that we must do His mitzvos. This is what the *passuk* (verse) means when it says: "*...and you should see them and remember to do all the mitzvos of Hashem.*"[32] One explanation of the word "tzitzis" is that it is from the *shoresh* (root) "tzitz," meaning "to see" or "to look at carefully."[33] We find this word in a verse in *Shir Hashirim* that we say when we do the mitzvah of "*Kiddush Levana*" (Sanctifying the New Moon) every month:

...הִנֵּה־זֶה עוֹמֵד אַחַר כָּתְלֵנוּ מַשְׁגִּיחַ מִן־הַחַלֹּנוֹת מֵצִיץ מִן־הַחֲרַכִּים:

"Behold this one is standing behind our wall, watching from the window, "*meitzitz min hacharakim,*" peering out through the lattice."[34] But how does looking closely at our tzitzis remind us of all the mitzvos?

Firstly, let us "look carefully" at what the Gemara[35] says about this mitzvah. Rabbi Meir says that the punishment for not having white threads is much greater than not wearing the special blue thread. He compares this to a king that commanded two of his servants to bring him a type of seal. From one servant he asked for a seal made of clay, a relatively easy task, and from the other one he asked for a seal made of gold, a much harder task. Neither servant fulfilled the king's request. Who was the king more upset with? Of course, the king was more displeased with the slave that didn't bring him the clay seal, because this was a much easier request to fulfill. *Tosfos*[36] points out that the *Gemara* specifically uses the example of a "seal," which is a way of marking who owns something. This is because tzitzis on our clothing are like the special stamp that people used to put on their slaves' clothing to indicate to whom they belonged. One reason Hashem gave us the mitzvah of tzitzis is to show that we are His servants. So when we see our tzitzis, we remember that Hashem is the Boss and we work for Him. We can't just say what we want, do what we want or even wear what we want.[37] We work for the Boss and need to remember that.

Additionally, if we look carefully at our tzitzis, we can see Hashem's name right in them. The four sets of windings hint to Hashem's 4-letter name. This is especially obvious in the Sephardic custom to follow this pattern in the number of windings: 10-5-6-5, which are the exact *gematria* (numerical representation) of Hashem's *yud-hay-vav-hay* name. (See "Strings Attached" essay for how the other custom – followed by Ashkenaznim and some Sefardim – hints to this differently.)

Furthermore, the mitzvah of tzitzis also reminds us not to do *aveiros* (sins). We see this from where the mitzvah was written in the Torah. The mitzvah of tzitzis is written right after the story about the *mikosheish eitzim*, the person who transgressed Shabbos by collecting sticks. What is the connection between that story and the mitzvah of tzitzis? Moshe Rebbeinu defended him by saying that, since it was Shabbos, the transgressor wasn't wearing his tefillin, which would have reminded him not to do *aveiros*. Hashem responded by giving us the mitzvah of tzitzis that are worn even on Shabbos to make sure we'd have enough reminders.[38] The Torah then goes on to say: "And they shall be tzitzis for you and you will see them and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and do them and not go after your own heart and after your eyes which may lead you astray."[39]

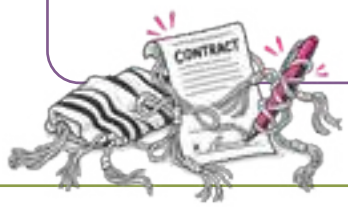
What we learn from this is that when we wear tzitzis, we remind ourselves that we are Hashem's special nation and need to act in special ways: not to run after our own desires, but to focus on doing mitzvos and Hashem's will instead.

What do we wear besides tzitzis that reminds us of our role in serving Hashem?



Korny Korner

Why did the tallis not want to sign the contract?



It had too many strings attached.

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How Do I Wear Tzitzis?

Uncommonly Good

Four-cornered garments are uncommon, but Jewish men don't let that stop them from fulfilling this precious mitzvah! Instead, they wear two specially made four-cornered garments: the *tallis katan* and the *tallis gadol*. A "shirt-like" *tallis katan* is worn throughout the day. The *tallis gadol* is a large prayer shawl and is worn by some men and boys during *Shacharis* and *Mussaf*.

Count Those Corners

The Torah requires *tzitzis* only on four-cornered garments. Most modern shirts and jackets do not have this, so they do not require *tzitzis*. However, certain uncommon garments such as Mexican ponchos, or coats with very deep side slits are considered to have four corners and therefore may require *tzitzis*.[40] Speak to your LOR if you think your garment may need tzitzis. One way to avoid this obligation is to round off one of the corners so that the garment no longer has four corners.

Tassel Hassles

If the strings of your tzitzis become damaged, ask a rabbi whether they are still kosher. A four-cornered garment may not be worn unless it has kosher *tzitzis* attached.

Show 'Em?

Should your *tzitzis* strings be visible? There are different customs. Some keep the strings tucked inside, and some keep the strings hanging out to serve as a reminder and a badge of honor that we are proud Torah-true Jews.[51] Speak to your LOR to find out your community's custom.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

Not everyone wears a *tallis gadol* at the same age, and not all *talleisim* look alike. Most Ashkenazim begin wearing a *tallis gadol* only after marriage, while many Sephardim and German Jews start at a young age. Sephardic *talleisim* are also traditionally all white, without the black stripes.

Strings, Knots, and Coils

Every kosher pair of *tzitzis* follows a precise set of halachos. The strings must be made from wool or from the same material as the garment.[47] They must also be spun specifically for the sake of the mitzvah of *tzitzis*.[48] On each corner of the garment, four strings are threaded through a hole, creating eight hanging strings.[49] Ashkenazim and Sephardim follow different customs for how the strings are wrapped and knotted.[50] Since there are many detailed halachos involved, it is important to buy *tzitzis* with reliable rabbinic supervision.

Bless Before You Dress

When putting on your *tzitzis*, look at them[41] and have in mind their purpose[42]—to remind you of Hashem's mitzvos and keep you from straying after your heart and eyes[43] and doing improper things.

Tallis Katan (tzitzis): If you will not be wearing a *tallis gadol* later, recite this *bracha* when putting on your *tallis katan*[44]:

"Boruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Haolam asher kidishanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu al mitzvas tzitzis."

("Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding the mitzvah of *tzitzis*.")

Tallis Gadol: When putting on a *tallis gadol*, some poskim[45] rule to only recite the following bracha and have your tallis katan in mind as well:

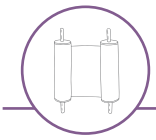
"Boruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Haolam asher kidishanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu l'hisateif batzitzis."

("Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in *tzitzis*.")

After saying the *bracha*, the *tallis* is draped over the shoulders and briefly wrapped over the head, and swung around one's neck, before being arranged so that two corners hang in the front and two in the back.[46] Afterwards, the *tallis gadol* rests on the shoulders in a cape-like fashion, although it is better to keep it over your head during parts of *davening*.



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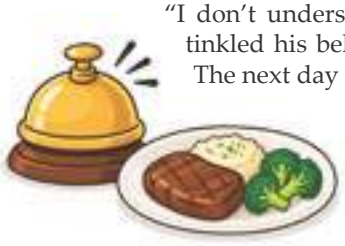
Strings Attached

The purpose of tzitzis is to remind us of the mitzvos. There are so many hints built into *tzitzis* that help us remember. The five knots on each corner correspond to the Five Books of the Torah.[52] The four corners remind us to remember the Torah in every direction we may turn.[53] Ashkenazim traditionally wind the strings in groups of seven, eight, eleven, and thirteen. These numbers hint to Hashem's Name: seven plus eight equals fifteen, the *gematria* of the letters *yud* and *heih*, the first part of the Divine Name. Adding the next eleven brings the total to twenty-six, the *gematria* of Hashem's complete Name. Finally, thirteen is the *gematria* of the word *echad*, reminding us that Hashem is One.[54] But these hints don't just magically make a person keep the mitzvos. A person needs to do some work on his end in order for the tzitzis to be a good reminder.

The following parable from the *Dubno Maggid* (Rabbi Yaakov Krantz, 1740–1804), illustrates this idea. A certain poor fellow, R' Yonah, was invited to a meal at a wealthy man's house. When everyone finished eating, the rich man, who sat at the head of the table, tinkled a bell. Almost at once, waiters came in to remove the dishes and bring in the next course. R' Yonah was amazed. He had never seen anything like that before. After the second course was completed, the host again tinkled the bell, and again the waiters removed the plates and brought in yet more food. R' Yonah was immensely impressed. When the meal was finally over, he went out to get such a bell for his home as well. He ran home excitedly to his wife.

"We're going to have unlimited food and waiters. Wait until you see what I brought home!" He immediately placed the bell on the table and told his family to take their regular seats. He then tinkled the bell with conviction. He waited for the waiter to walk in – but nothing happened!

"I don't understand it! When the rich man tinkled his bell, all that food was served!" The next day he returned the bell.



"The bell you sold me is useless. I got no response when I rang it."

"The obvious reason nothing happened," said the Dubno Maggid, "is because there is neither a waiter nor food prepared in the next room. The bell summons something that is there to be summoned. Much preparation is necessary before the bell can accomplish anything.

In some ways many of us are like this man, the Dubno Maggid explains. The Torah tells us to look at our tzitzis so that we will be reminded to perform all of G-d's mitzvos. There are many people, though, who can look at a pair of tzitzis and not be reminded of anything. All they see are strings. Only if one studies and understands what the 613 mitzvos are and how *tzitzis* represent them, will he be able to get the full benefits that looking at his *tzitzis* offers him. Merely looking at them without any preparation is like tinkling a bell without having arranged for anyone to respond.

The *tzitzis* protect us by reminding us of the mitzvos, but there's another important element. Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that the Torah specifically chose the *voluntary* mitzvah of *tzitzis* to represent all the others because that is the best way to strengthen our connection to Hashem and His Torah. Doing a voluntary mitzvah builds our relationship with Hashem. When a person willingly places himself in a situation where he becomes obligated in a mitzvah that he was not otherwise required to perform, he demonstrates an extra measure of love and commitment to his Creator.[55] According to Rav Moshe, that deeper attachment itself becomes a shield, helping a person perform mitzvos and avoid *aveiros*.

In order to get the most out of the mitzvah of *tzitzis*, we need to do some background work. We need to learn about *tzitzis* and the mitzvos and develop a relationship with Hashem. Once we do that, *tzitzis* can fulfill their lofty purpose and keep us on the right track.

Did you ever volunteer for someone or omething? Did it change your relationship with that person or thing?

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Yarmulke

But First...

Yarmulke is the *Yiddish* word for the head covering that Jewish boys and men wear. Some say it originally came from the Aramaic, *yarei malka*, which means "awe of the King," which is what the Yarmulke is all about. In Hebrew, the head covering is called a *kippah*. In English it is called a "skullcap."

Show Some Respect

In the Western world, it is customary to remove one's head covering when meeting an important person. In Judaism, putting *on* a head covering is a sign of respect. Wearing a *yarmulke* reminds us that we are standing before Hashem at all times. The Gemara tells us that the great Sage Rav Huna never walked even four *amos* with his head uncovered because, as he would say, "The *Shechinah* is always above my head."[61] Since Hashem is everywhere,[62] we show Him respect wherever we go by keeping our heads covered.[63]

Proud (and Polite)

Wearing a yarmulke is perhaps the most instantly recognizable sign of a Jew. It proclaims, "I am proud to be Jewish." But it is also a big responsibility. Wearing a yarmulke encourages a person to live up to a higher standard of behavior. A person must think twice before cutting in line, speaking rudely to a waiter, or acting dishonestly. In a sense, it makes a person a Jewish ambassador, reminding him that his actions reflect not only on himself, but on the Jewish people as well.

Did You Know?

Until around the mid 1950s, most men wore hats even in America. It was considered improper to walk out of one's house without a hat. Top silk hats, bowlers, and fedoras were more formal styles, while caps were worn more leisurely. As styles changed and non-Jewish men began to wear hats less and less, the Orthodox Jewish world kept them on to maintain their customs, combat assimilation, and as a sign of respect before G-d.



The Hat Really Helps

The *Gemara* tells the story of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak, whose mother was careful to keep his head covered from the time he was a child. She would tell him, "Keep your head covered so that the fear of Hashem will be upon you." One day, his head covering blew off—and at that very moment, he was suddenly tempted to sin.[59] Our Chachamim explain that covering one's head provides spiritual protection. An uncovered head can allow negative spiritual influences to weaken a person's *yiras Shamayim* (Fear of Heaven).[60]

Heads Covered

Today, a yarmulke is an accepted sign of Jewish identity, and therefore Jewish men may not ordinarily walk around bareheaded.[56] It is also forbidden to say Hashem's Name with an uncovered head.[57] While covering one's head is required for any matter of holiness, *tefillah* deserves even greater respect. We should dress as if we are standing before an important person—because we are standing before Hashem.[58] Many people also wear a hat for davening, as this shows even greater respect.

Yarmulkes of the World

Black Velvet Yarmulke



Common Orthodox yarmulke. Made of black velvet fabric with a silk or polyester lining, this yarmulke is typically worn by both Chasidish and Litvish men.

Bukharian Kippah



Worn by Jews who lived along the Silk Road in Central Asia (modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) for over a millennium. Features distinctively vibrant silk embroidery.

Knitted Or Suede



These yarmulkes are most often worn by Modern Orthodox men.

Yerushalmi White Kippah

Worn by Chassidic groups based in *Yerushayim*, as well as by some others.

Yemenite Kippah



A stiff black velvet dome worn by Yemenite Jews, one of the world's oldest Jewish communities, who remained in near-total isolation from other Jewish communities for centuries, yet kept their *mesorah* (tradition)!

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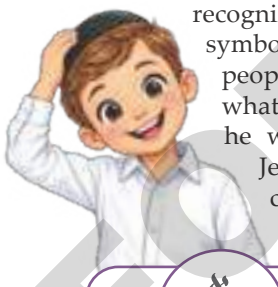
Tzitzis or Yarmulke

by Rabbi Chaim Mintz
(Ask The Rabbi Book 2 pg.216)

My TorahMate has been growing slowly in his Torah observance, and he recently expressed interest in taking on something new, specifically regarding his attire. What would be better for him to start with, wearing tzitzis or a yarmulke? Then his question got me thinking about a similar question that applies to me as well: When I get dressed after a shower, should I first put on my tzitzis or my yarmulke?

Let us first discuss the question of sequence when getting dressed. Wearing tzitzis is a fulfillment of a biblical mitzvah, whereas wearing a yarmulke is not, so — when practical — you should put on your tzitzis before your yarmulke.

However, when it comes to a baal teshuvah, it would be better for him to start with wearing a yarmulke. Although wearing tzitzis is a mitzvah and a yarmulke is not, in the greater picture, wearing a yarmulke has the potential to influence his whole way of life. Everyone recognizes a yarmulke as an identifiable symbol of being Jewish, whereas many people don't notice tzitzis or even know what they are. By wearing a yarmulke, he will feel recognized as a religious Jew, which will make him be more conscious of his Jewish identity.



A yarmulke also makes the Orthodox Jews around him recognize him as Jewish and "one of theirs," which will make them warm up to him and help him break in. Seeing someone with tzitzis and no yarmulke, on the other hand, looks unusual and does not give the same impression.

In addition, our rabbis (Shabbos 156b) teach us that covering the head infuses a person with fear of Hashem, and even young children should be trained to do so. Wearing a yarmulke reminds us that Hashem is above us at all times, and that our mission in this world is to serve Him always. Some even say that the origin of the word yarmulke is the Aramaic expression "yarei malka," fear of the King.

Every mitzvah should be done with feelings of love and fear of Hashem, as well as profound joy over the golden opportunity we have been given to serve the King of all kings. These feelings elevate a mitzvah, bringing it to a much higher level. Since wearing a yarmulke increases one's fear of Heaven, it would be appropriate for him to start with a yarmulke, because this will make all his subsequent mitzvos much greater.

IN SHORT: ***When practical, tzitzis should be donned first, as wearing them is a biblical mitzvah. A baal teshuvah should start with a yarmulke, because it is a stronger identification of Jewishness, and it will have a greater influence on him.***

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Tefillah Time

Every day, we mention the mitzvah of *tzitzis* in the third paragraph of *Krias Shema*.

...Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to attach a thread of blue on the fringe of each corner. They shall be to you as tzizis, and you shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem and fulfill them, and you will not follow after your heart and after your eyes by which you go astray - so that you may remember and fulfill all My commandments and be holy to your G-d...

....דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וְעָשׂוּ לָהֶם
צִיצִת עַל־כַּנְפֵי בִגְדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם וְנָתְנוּ עַל־צִיצִת
הַכָּנָף פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת: וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִת וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ
וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹת ה וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא־
תָתֻרוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם זֹנִים
אַחֲרֵיהֶם: לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתָי
וִהְיִיתֶם קְדֹשִׁים לֵאלֹקֵיכֶם:....

The *Zohar* says that if a person recites this paragraph without wearing *tzitzis*, it is like giving false testimony about himself.[64] During *Shema*, many people hold their *tzitzis*, look at them when the Torah says, *"And you shall see them,"* and kiss them at the end of the paragraph.[65] Some also pass the *tzitzis* over their eyes, and Chazal teach that doing so is a protection against blindness.[66]

Zoniac Zone



Key Takeaways

Tzitzis and yarmulke are two constant, wearable reminders of who a Jew is and what his job is. Tzitzis, worn on a four-cornered garment, are packed with hints — their *gematria*, their strings and knots — all pointing back to the 613 mitzvos, protecting a person from sin the moment he notices and thinks about them. The yarmulke serves a similar purpose: it reminds its wearer that Hashem is above him at all times, wherever he goes. Together, these two mitzvos aren't just symbols — they're daily tools that shape how a Jew acts, in public and private alike.



You Don't Belong Here

The first time Alec wore his *tzitzis* to school, he was proud. The strings hanging from beneath his shirt were a sign that he was a Jew.

As he walked through the hallway of his public school, a few boys noticed them.

"What's that?" one asked.

"My *tzitzis*," Alec answered.

The boys looked at each other.

"You don't belong here."

Alec didn't know what to say.

When he told his parents what had happened, they couldn't stop thinking about those words. They believed Hashem was sending them a message. Alec did belong somewhere—a place where wearing *tzitzis* wasn't strange, but a source of pride, something that everyone did.

With help from Oorah's tuition program, Alec was able to transfer to yeshivah.

Now, when Alec walks through the hallways, he still wears his *tzitzis*. The difference is that no one asks why. He's surrounded by boys wearing the same "uniform," each one proudly showing that he belongs to Hashem.



Kippah, kippah, kippah

I'm at school, play on my computer
My kippah never leaves my head
Even on the playground or on the roller coaster
And even when I'm jumping on my bed

chorus:
Kippah, kippah, kippah,
oh how I love my kippah
It's something to remind me of Hashem
Kippah, kippah, kippah,
oh how I love my kippah
And now I'm gonna sing this song again

Kippah, kippah, kippah,
oh how I love my kippah
I wear it no matter what I do
Kippah, kippah, kippah,
oh how I love my kippah
I wear it 'cause I'm proud to be a Jew

All around the world, in the places I show up
My kippah never leaves my head
Hey, look at me, I am so cool
My kippah makes me proud to be a Jew

chorus

Grand kippah, suede kippah
I put kippahs on my head
Knitted kippah, Velvet kippah
All the kippahs on my head

chorus

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Zoniac Challenge

Does It Need Tzitzis?

Think you know your corners? Take a close look at each garment and decide:

TZITZIS — It needs *tzitzis*
NO TZITZIS — It doesn't need *tzitzis*
ASK A RABBI — It's not so simple!

Pay attention to the garment's **corners, openings, and side slits**. They may affect the answer!

1



Regular T-Shirt

2



Athletic Jersey/ Pinnies

3



Prince Albert-Style Frock/Bekishe/ Kapote

4



Suit Jacket with Two Side Vents

5



Poncho-Style Rain Jacket

6



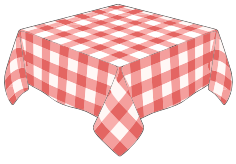
Sweatshirt

7



Mexican Poncho

8



Square Tablecloth

Zoniac Dilemma

Flying Kippah

Moshe loves basketball and never misses a game at recess. There's just one problem—every few minutes, his yarmulke flies off. He has to stop playing, run across the court to pick it up, and put it back on. Some of the other kids have started teasing him, calling him "Flying Kippah."

One day, a friend says, "Why don't you just take it off while you play? It's only for a few minutes."

Moshe knows wearing a yarmulke is important, but he also wants to enjoy the game without feeling embarrassed.

What should Moshe do? What advice would you give him?





COVER UNCOVERED

The cover depicts how tzitzis serve as a constant reminder of our mission as Jews. Like a soldier's uniform identifies whom he serves, tzitzis show that we serve Hashem. Like a string around a finger, they remind us of our mission. The techeiles string resembles the water, which resembles the sky, directing our thoughts upward to Hashem. Similarly, the yarmulke reminds us that Hashem is always above us. The bell shows that reminders need understanding to work.

Daily Challenge

Take a moment today to look at your tzitzis and think of the mitzvos.

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Sources

1) Bamidbar 15:38; Devarim 22:12
2) Bamidbar 15:38
3) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 24:1
4) Mishnah Berurah 24:1
5) Bamidbar 15:39-40
6) Bamidbar 15:38-40
7) Rambam, Hilchos Tzitzis 3:11
8) Menachos 41a
9) Shaar Teshuvah 3:22
10) Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:4
11) Rashi, Bamidbar 15:39
12) Bamidbar 15:38
13) Menachos 44a
14) Menachos 38a
15) Bamidbar 15:38. Also see Devarim 22:12
16) Bamidbar 15:40
17) Bereishis 3:6-7
18) Bamidbar 15:39
19) Shemos 24:10; Menachos 43b
20) Based on "The collected writings of R` Shamshon Refoel Hirsch" Eng. Edition vol. 3 pg. 329
21) Rabbi Shimon Schwab On Prayer, p. 108
22) Bereshis 14:23
23) Sotah 17a
24) Menachos 43b
25) Bamidbar 15:39-40
26) Menachos 44a
27) Mishnah Berurah 23:3-8
28) Rashi, Bamidbar 15:39
29) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 24:1
30) Sforno and Ohr Hachaim, Bamidbar 15:39
31) Tosafos, Menachos 43b
32) Bamidbar 15:39
33) Rashi Bamidbar 15:38
34) Shir Hashirim 2:9
35) Menachos 43b
36) Tosfos Menachos 43b
37) Ohr Hachaim and Seforno Bamidbar 15:39
38) Tanna D'vei Eliyahu in as brought by Daas Zekeinim 15:32 and Ohr Hachaim Bamidbar 15:37
39) Bamidbar 15:39
40) Shulchan Aruch 10:7 and Mishnah Berurah there
41) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 8:9 and Mishna Berurah there S.K. 20-21
42) Orach Chaim 8:9 and Mishna Berurah there 20-21
43) Bamidbar 15:37–41
44) Rama 8:5
45) Mishneh Berurah 8:24
46) Mishnah Berurah 8:4
47) Orach Chaim 9:2-3
48) Orach Chaim 11:1
49) Menachos 39b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 11:12
50) Orach Chaim 11:14; Mishnah Berurah 11:70
51) Mishnah Berurah 8:25-26, based on Tosafos, Berachos 18a
52) Orach Chaim 24:1
53) Orach Chaim 24:1
54) Mishnah Berurah 11:70
55) Darash Moshe Parshas Shelach pg. 122
56) Mishnah Berurah 2:1
57) Maseches Sofrim 14:15; Orach Chaim 91:3
58) Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 91:5–6
59) Shabbos 156b
60) Ben Yehoyada, Shabbos 118b
61) Kiddushin 31a
62) Yeshayahu 6:3; Kiddushin 31a
63) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 2:6
64) Mishnah Berurah 24:3
65) Mishnah Berurah 24:4
66) Mishnah Berurah 24:7

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*

Meaning of Tzitzit:
Why This Mitzvah is Like No Other – Parashat Shelach
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/meaning-of-tzitzit-why-this-mitzvah-is-like-no-other-parashat-shelach/



Yalkut Yosef – Tzitzit
More info

Upsherin Part 1:
A Jewish Boy's First Haircut
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/upsherin-part-1-a-jewish-boys-first-haircut/

JEWISH WEDDINGS

The Celebration of Jewish Marriage



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1. What is a Jewish Wedding?
2. Why do we Celebrate Jewish Weddings?
3. How does a Jewish Wedding work?

What is a Jewish Wedding?

In a Nutshell

A Jewish wedding is when a Jewish man and Jewish woman get married according to Jewish Law and the celebration of that event. It is celebrated because the start of another Jewish home represents the expansion and continuation of the Jewish Nation.

What Is Jewish Marriage?

A marriage is the holy union of a Jewish man and a Jewish woman. Their commitment to one another becomes not only legally binding but also makes them into a new entity. Furthermore, a marriage is the only context in which the Torah allows the fulfillment of the mitzvah to have children.[1] But beyond having children, getting married allows each partner to become a "complete" person.[2] The Torah tells us that "It is not good for man to be alone ...".[3] The Torah considers being married to be the ideal state.

Community Celebration



A Jewish wedding is the joyous celebration of a marriage not only by the family but by the entire community. More than simply bringing two people together, it marks the beginning of a new Jewish home built on Torah and *mitzvos*. Every Jewish marriage becomes another precious link in the unbroken chain stretching back to Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu, ensuring that our people and our traditions continue from generation to generation.

Spotlight

When we celebrate a Jewish Wedding, we are celebrating the building of the Jewish People.

Some Key Terms

The following key terms are good to know when reading this Nugget.

L'Chaim: Party for family and friends usually on the day the couple gets engaged. It is called a L'chaim because people will often choose to make a toast of "*L'chaim*" (to life!) to celebrate the new life beginning for the man and woman.

Vort: The *vort* is a more formal celebration of the engagement. "Vort" means "word" in Yiddish, and at this time, bride and groom give their word that they agree to marry.

Chuppah: The *chuppah* is the wedding canopy under which the marriage ceremony takes place.

Kiddushin: The first stage of the marriage ceremony, when the couple become married according to Jewish law. The *chassan* (groom) gives the *kallah* (bride) a ring in the presence of two witnesses and declares, "*Harei at mekudeshes li...*" ("Behold, you are betrothed to me...").

Nisuin: This second stage of marriage completes the couple's official status as husband and wife. It takes place immediately after *kiddushin* under the chuppah, with the recitation of the *Shevah Brachos* (Seven Blessings).

Sheva Brachos: Seven special blessings that are recited under the chuppah, after the wedding feast, and again at festive meals during the week after marriage.

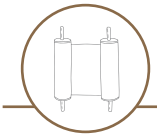
Torah Challenge

אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה, – זָכוּ, שְׁכִינָה בֵּינֵיהֶם; לֹא זָכוּ, אֵשׁ אוֹכַלְתָּן

"If a man and a woman are worthy, the Divine Presence dwells between them; if they are not worthy, fire consumes them."

What is the difference in the letters in the word אִישׁ (man) and אִשָּׁה (woman)? What word do those letters make up together, and what might this represent?

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The 3 Main Reasons For Marriage

Getting married is a *mitzvah* and considered to be one of the most important things that Hashem wants us to do.

Why?

There are 3 reasons why Hashem wants us to get married.

1 Not To Be Alone

The Tur at the beginning of *Even Ha'Ezer* explains that in Hashem's desire to do good for His creations, He recognized that it is not good for a person to be alone, so he fashioned a helpmate for him. This need for companionship is so great that the Tur writes in the name of Rav Nachman that even a man who already has several children should not remain without a wife, based on the words "it is not good for man to be alone". Rabbi Yehoshua adds that one who married in his youth should marry again in his old age. We learn from here that having children is far from the sole purpose of marriage. In fact, the Tur goes further, explaining that far from being a nice addition to an otherwise complete life, a person without a wife is without *tovah* (good), without *brachah* (blessing), without a proper *dirah* (home), without *Torah*, without a *chomah* (protective wall), and without *shalom* (peace). Spouses complete each other's material and spiritual gaps.

2 Building Future Generations

The second reason the Tur gives for marriage is to have children. Every Jewish marriage is another link in the chain that stretches back to Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu. Having children assures the continuity of our people, our Torah and our *mesorah*.

The Tur describes the weight of this mitzvah in the strongest terms, stating that one who chooses to not occupy himself with bringing children into the world is compared to someone who sheds blood, and is described as diminishing the *tzelem Elokim*, the Divine image in which mankind was created.

3 Bringing the Shechinah Closer

Continuing on with the Tur, there is a consequence for choosing to neglect the mitzvah of marriage – it causes the *Shechinah* to depart from *Klal Yisrael*. On the positive side, a proper Jewish marriage draws the *Shechinah* closer.

Rabbi Mintz develops this idea beautifully. Every relationship in this world, he explains, helps us understand a different facet of our relationship with Hashem. Just as a parent-child relationship helps us grasp Hashem's fatherly love, marriage helps us grasp the bond between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael* - a Groom and His bride. A husband's love for his wife and his responsibility to provide for her mirror Hashem's love for us and His constant providing for our needs.

Rabbi Mintz brings the Nefesh HaChaim's teaching, in the name of the Midrash, that Hashem relates to us the way a shadow mirrors a person's movements — as we act, so does He. When a couple builds their marriage the way the Torah intends, that harmony strengthens Hashem's own closeness and blessing to the entire world. He also draws a parallel to the physical act of building a family: just as a husband and wife bring a new life into being together, Hashem gave us the Torah, planting eternal life within us, and our task is to study it and bring it to life through the *mitzvos* we perform.

These three goals for marriage cannot be achieved through just any relationship. It is specifically the union of a Jewish man and a Jewish woman, formed according to *halachah*, that fulfils a person's *shleimus* (completeness), continues the chain of Torah and Yiddishkeit from Avraham and Sarah to our own generation, and draws the *Shechinah* to rest between husband and wife. A marriage built on any other foundation may accomplish other things, but it cannot accomplish these three. This is precisely why the Torah invests a Jewish wedding with such joy, such holiness, and such celebration.

What would happen to the Jewish world if people stopped getting married?

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Why Do We Celebrate Jewish Weddings?

Marriage Is Holy

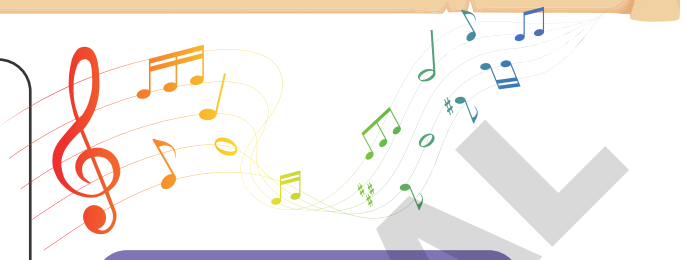
In Judaism, marriage is looked upon as an extremely important and holy union, and this is why we make such a big deal over celebrating *chasunas* (weddings). The family and guests dress in their finest clothes, and there is a special wedding meal (usually in the evening), accompanied by music and extensive dancing. We show the couple how important and wonderful we think their marriage is in the hope that they will treat their marriage with the respect and investment it deserves.

A New Jewish Family!

Another reason for the great celebration surrounding Jewish marriage is the fact that another Jewish family is being created. As part of the *shevah brachos*, we say וְהִתְקִין לוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ בִּנְיַן עֲדֵי עַד — Literally this means that "He prepared for him, from him, a building for ever." Some say this refers to how Hashem fashioned the very first wife (Chava) for the very first man (Adam).[7] If Hashem Himself arranged a marriage, it must be that it is a very important matter. If we too get married in the way of the Torah, it is a joyous continuity of the Jewish People.

An Opportunity For Closeness To Hashem

The holy union of husband and wife brings the *Shechinah* down to rest between them (although when husband and wife are not on peaceful terms, the opposite occurs). If the entire goal of the Jewish people is to be close to Hashem, then marriage, which is a means to come close to Hashem, is a great celebration.



Make Them Happy

It is a big mitzvah to make a *chassan* and *kallah* happy, which includes dancing in front of them and praising the *kallah*.[4] This joy is essentially a reflection of Hashem's joy that His creation of man and woman is now complete.[5] Even though the *chassan* and *kallah* are usually already very happy on their wedding day, we try as best as we can to add to that happiness, because we want the joy of their wedding day to carry them through their married life.[6] Besides for wanting to make the new couple happy, we are happy *for* them. As Jews, we feel each other's joys, and we are delighted that this couple have found each other and will be building a Jewish home together, giving us cause for celebration.



Tefillah Time

In the last of the Sheva Brachos we say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא שָ�asוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה, חָתָן וְכַלָּה, גִּילָה רִנָּה דִּיצָה וְחֶדְוָה, אַהֲבָה וְאַחֲוָה שָׁלוֹם וְרֵעוּת, מְהֵרָה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ יִשָּׁמַע בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְחוּצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָיִם, קוֹל שָׂשׂוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה, קוֹל חָתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה, קוֹל מִצְהֲלוֹת חֲתָנִים מֵחֻפָּתָם, וּנְעָרִים מִמִּשְׁתֵּה נְגִינָתָם: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מְשַׂמֵּחַ חָתָן עִם הַכַּלָּה.

You are blessed, Hashem our G-d, the King of the world, who created joy and celebration, bridegroom and bride, rejoicing, jubilation, pleasure and delight, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. May there soon be heard, Hashem our G-d, in the cities of Judea and in the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of celebration, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride, the happy shouting of bridegrooms from their weddings and of young men from their feasts of song. You are blessed, Hashem, who makes the bridegroom and the bride rejoice together.

This blessing contains ten different expressions of happiness, showing that we wish the newly married couple complete and total happiness.



Korny Korner

Why is marriage like a workshop?

One person works... and the other shops.

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Bringing Joy to the Bride and Groom

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book2 pg.160

Why is it such a great mitzvah to bring joy to a bride and groom? After all, no one is happier than a newlywed couple, so why the need to add more joy? And what about during the week of Sheva Berachos, is there an obligation to have a nightly party, or can we skip some of them?

The purpose of a Jewish marriage is to build a home for the sake of serving Hashem. Indeed, we bless every bride and groom that they build a bayis ne'eman, a loyal home — loyal to Hashem and His Torah. Furthermore, our rabbis teach us that when a couple follows the proper path, they merit to have the Divine Presence in their home. Thus, when a man and woman marry, they are building a miniature Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple). This is why bringing joy to a bride and groom is akin to rebuilding one of the ruins of Jerusalem (Berachos 6b), and why, in the Sheva Berachos blessings, we pray for the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash.

The wedding is the foundation of this wonderful holy edifice, and we want to make the foundation as solid as possible. A couple starting their married life amid great joy and celebration can help carry them over the many hurdles and challenges that will inevitably arise during their long life together. So although it's true that a new couple are already in high spirits, the happier we make them the stronger the marriage will be. Indeed, the Talmud (Kesubos 17a) tells us how even the greatest Tannaim and Amoraim would perform all kinds of antics to add to the merriment of the bride and groom, thereby empowering them to establish a life filled with joy.

This is similar to the impact the various holidays have on the Jewish calendar. Each Yom Tov has its own unique flavor that is mean uplift us and bring us close to Hashem and the Torah, recharging our "spiritual batteries" to help us remain connected to Hashem throughout the rest of the year.

For a bride and groom, the wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to infuse them with joy and elation that will hopefully keep them going for the rest of their lives.

But it is not only the wedding itself that sets the tone for the marriage; the seven days of festivities that follow are also part of the foundation. These seven days correspond to the seven days of inauguration celebrated at the time the Mishkan in the desert was erected. Those days were also meant to infuse a level of spiritual elation to last for the entire "lifetime" of the Mishkan.

In the same vein, the young couple's miniature sanctuary is inaugurated with great fanfare and doses of spiritual energy provided by the Sheva Berachos recited throughout these days, infusing it with sanctity and blessing.

Thus, although having a nightly party is not a requirement, it is certainly worthwhile, as the Sheva Berachos help launch their marriage with great joy and spiritual energy.

IN SHORT

The happier we make the bride and groom, the stronger the marriage will be for their future life together, helping them rise above challenges that may come their way. The Sheva Berachos recited throughout these seven days infuse their new home with great spiritual energy.

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**Got questions about Judaism?
Curious about something?**

Join **Ask the Rabbi Live** with Rabbi Chaim Mintz **Tuesday Nights** at **9PM**!
Go to **oorah.org/asktherabbi** to join as well as watch previous questions.

How Does A Jewish Wedding Work?

Below is a step-by-step guide to what happens at Jewish weddings and why.

Learning

During the engagement period, the *chassan* and *kallah* study the laws and Jewish outlook on marriage with mentors.

Shabbos Aufruf

There is an *Ashkenazi minhag* for the *chassan* to get an *aliyah* in shul on the Shabbos prior to the wedding. It's called an *aufruf which in Yiddish means "call up [for an aliyah]"*. The reason for this minhag (as well as the *minhag* of *shalom zachor*) is that all the blessings of the work week stem from the Shabbos before it. The amount of *brachah* that will be given during the week is determined on Shabbos, so it is an auspicious time to daven for those blessings and to offer blessings to the *chassan* for his success.[8]

Fasting on the Wedding Day

The *Ashkenazi Minhag* is that the *chassan* and *kallah* fast on the day of the wedding. This is because the day of a wedding is like Yom Kippur, since just like on Yom Kippur, all of a person's sins are forgiven, a person's sins are forgiven on their wedding day.[9] Some Sephardim have the *minhag* to fast, but this applies only to the *chassan* and not the *kallah*.[10] Just like on Yom Kippur, the *chassan* and k*allah* recite *vidduy* in *Minchah*. Even if the wedding is scheduled for a day when fasting is forbidden, such as Rosh Chodesh, *vidduy* is still said.[11]

Kabbalas Panim



Before the *chuppah*, *kabbalas panim* takes place, where the *chassan* and *kallah*, seated separately, are surrounded by family and friends. The *kallah* greets the guests and often gives *brachos*. Simultaneously, the *chassan tisch* takes place, where the *chassan* sits with other men. The *taananim* (marriage agreement) document is signed, read out loud, and the mothers of the bride and groom come in and break a plate. The *kesubah* is signed at this time as well.

Badeken

There is an *Ashkenazi minhag* to hold a ceremony called a *badeken* just before the *chuppah*, where the *chassan* places a veil over the *kallah's* face. This *minhag* originates either both from when Rivka *Imeinu* put on a veil when she met Yitzchak.[12] Sephardim do not have this custom, but the chasson covers the kallah later under his tallis.[13]

Chuppah

Structure: The chuppah is a four-sided canopy, symbolic of the house the *chassan* and *kallah* hope to build together. It is best if the canopy can be under the sky - just like their future home will be under the guidance of Hashem.

Groom Enters: The *chassan* is walked down to the *chuppah*, usually by his father and father-in-law or by both of his parents, depending on custom. The *kallah* then follows with her face still covered, escorted by her mother and mother-in-law, or both of her parents.

Bride Enters: The *kallah* walks around the *chassan* 7 times, usually escorted by the women that walked her down.

Wine: *Brachah* of '*Borei peri hagofen'* over a cup of wine, followed by the *brachah* of '*al ha'arayos*' is recited by a Rabbi, which praises Hashem for the laws that make marriage holy. The *Chassan* and *Kallah* both drink from the cup, which is considered a '*kois shel brachah* – cup of blessing'.

Kiddushin: The chassan places a plain ring on the kallah's finger and says, *"Harei at mekudeshes li b'taba'as zu k'das Moshe v'Yisroel"* ("You are sanctified to me with this ring, according to the law of Moshe and Israel"). *Kiddushin* comes from the word *kadosh*, meaning holy or set apart. This is the moment they become halachically married and it is observed by two witnesses.

Kesubah: After *kiddushin*, the chassan gives the *kallah* the signed *kesubah*. Ashkenazim have a *minhag* that someone first reads the *kesubah* out loud to all the attendees. Sefardim do not have the minhag of reading it publicly.

Sheva Brachos: Seven blessings are recited by honored guests over a second cup of wine:

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- **Borei Pri Hagafen:** the blessing on the wine, expressing joy.
- **Shehakol bara lichvodo:** everything was created for Hashem's glory, and this marriage adds to it.
- **Yotzer haadam:** Hashem as Creator of humankind.
- **Asher yotzar es haadam b'tzalmo:** humans are made in Hashem's image, and He gave them the ability to build a lasting future together.
- **Sos tasis:** a prayer for the joy of Yerushalayim. Even at our happiest moments, we remember the bigger Jewish story.
- **Sameach tisamach:** a prayer that the couple be as happy as Adam and Chava in Gan Eden.
- **Asher bara sason v'simchah:** praises Hashem for creating joy, love, friendship and peace, and asks that the sounds of celebration be heard throughout the Jewish people.

Breaking the glass: The *chassan* breaks a glass under his foot. This recalls the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, so even our greatest happiness includes remembering what's missing. Then everyone shouts "Mazel Tov!"

Yichud

The *chassan* and *kallah* spend a few private minutes alone in a room. It's their first moment together as a married couple, and it formally completes the marriage. This is also usually when they break their fast.

Festive Meal

The wedding meal is a *seudas mitzvah*, a meal that is itself a *mitzvah*, shared with family and friends to celebrate the new home being built.

Dancing

Making the *chassan* and *kallah* happy is an actual *mitzvah*. The dancing is the community's way of fulfilling it, with everyone joining in.

Bentching and Sheva Brachos

After the meal, everyone says *Birkas Hamazon* (grace after meals), followed by the *Sheva Brachos* again over a cup of wine. This gives more guests the honor of participating and ends the celebration by thanking Hashem. The *Sheva Brachos* are also repeated at festive meals during the week after the wedding.



Breaking Up is Hard To Do

The marriage bond is so strong that it can only be ended if either one spouse passes away or the couple receives a proper Jewish divorce[14] in front of a *Beis Din* (Jewish Court). The Jewish divorce document is called a "*get*," and this is needed to allow someone to remarry according to Jewish Law.

Rebbetzins

Originally created to support Oorah alumni entering the world of *shidduchim* (dating for marriage), the Rebbetzins program gives young Jewish singles personal mentorship, resources, and hands-on guidance. Free membership in the Rebbetzins network connects eligible young men and women with experienced mentors and *shadchanim* (matchmakers), while Rebbetzins events create warm, purposeful opportunities to meet and connect. With thoughtful introductions and wisdom from people who have helped others find their match, participants gain the confidence and clarity to build strong, lasting Jewish homes.



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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

A Jewish wedding is a celebration of Jewish marriage. A Jewish marriage is worthy of a grand celebration because it's the beginning of a new Jewish family that will continue the Jewish legacy and perpetuate Torah. The celebration and festivities are not only for the immediate family; the joy is shared by the entire community.

Mazal Tov!

Let's move
Cause I used to be a wallflower
I would clap along but wish I could disappear
Then my Zone counselor asked me what I'm doing
He got me rockin' his place
What you say
When he said to me
Let's move

CHORUS

Nobody wanna see you on the sideline
It's a Simcha, there ain't no guideline
Why you look like there's been a crisis
Loosen up, you be looking lifeless

Celebrate, you don't need a license
Go ahead, move your feet just like this
We're gonna teach you the latest
Make the Simcha contagious

Now watch me dance
Mazal tov, mazal tov, mazal tov
And break it down
Mazal tov, mazal tov, mazal tov
Let's rock this down
Mazal tov, mazal tov, mazal tov
Together now
Mazal tov, mazal tov
You know it's contagious

If you gotta sing
Gilah, Rinah, Ditza
Rinah, Ditza, Chedva
Ditza, Chedva, Achva
Chedva, Achva, Shalom
Ya, Achva, Shalom, Reyus
Ya, Gilah, Rinah, Ditza, Chedva
Achva, Shalom, V'Reyus

It's kinda contagious
Kinda catchy

They all wanna learn how to do this
So I'm gonna take you right through this
Mazal tov is a declaration
You gotta dance, it's a celebration

First step is a step, step
You can move to the right, to the left, left
You can do it freestyle when you step, step
Put your hands in the air, then you rap, rap

So go, go, go
Dance mazal tov
You can let your problems go, go, go

Jump in tune and you can make the whole world glow, glow, glow
No worries, now sing it mazal tov, tov, tov
Let me see you go, go, go

He taught me this

CHORUS I

When you say mazal tov
We take it to the dance floor
We celebrate and you know
We won't be going slow-mo

Move to the rhythm, here we go
We jumping, moving, dancing so
So we'll bring the mood way up high
Let's celebrate tonight

Hurray, ah, she's got herself a ring
Mazal tov
He breaks the glass, everybody scream
Mazal tov
It's party time, l'chaim, you the man
Mazal tov

For seven nights, we do it all again

Now watch me dance mazal tov, mazal tov, mazal tov
And break it down
Mazal tov, mazal tov, mazal tov
Let's rock this camp

Mazal tov, mazal tov, mazal tov
Together now
Mazal tov, mazal tov
You know it's contagious

Siman Tov U'Mazel Tov
Freeze
L'chaim, it's a mazal tov
Freeze

Yehei lanu for all of us
Freeze
And hey, okay, we're gonna go mazal tov

Siman Tov U'Mazel Tov
Freeze
L'chaim, it's a mazal tov
Freeze
Yehei lanu for all of us
Freeze

And hey, okay, we're gonna go mazal tov
Oy dishma v'arei Yehuda
U'bechutzot Yerushalayim

Kol sason v'kol simcha
Kol chatan v'kol kala

Mazal tov, mazal tov
Mazal tov, mazal tov
Mazal tov, mazal tov
Mazal tov, mazal tov

Mazal tov
Mazal tov

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A Shavuos Wedding

The day was crisp and clear, the sun just beginning its descent. Shavuos, the Yom Tov of kabbalas haTorah, of Klal Yisrael's marriage to their Creator, was moments away. It was picturesque: the lake sparkled in the setting sun, a breeze rippled through grassy fields, and on the gazebo, all was set for TheZone's first wedding.

It had only been a few weeks earlier that Steve had made the monumental decision to stop working on Shabbos (as chronicled in last week's column). With his connection to Torah and *mitzvos* growing stronger under his Torah Mate's guidance, he knew it was the right choice. His wife, who had earlier done a Conservative conversion, encouraged Steve's growth in *mitzvah* observance, and it wasn't long before her total and sincere acceptance of Jewish law was formalized with *geirus* by an Orthodox *beis din*.

Steve and Ruth wanted to celebrate their Jewish marriage together with their entire Oorah family. And where better to have the wedding than at TheZone?

And so it was that amid the preparations for a Yom Tov for which we were hosting 500 people, we were celebrating a new *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael!* The joy radiating from the *chassan* and *kallah*'s faces was matched only by the joy of Steve's Torah Mate, who had been instrumental in bringing the couple to this point.

Steve and Ruth were the king and queen of the ensuing three days. As another guest noted, "They both seemed to be radiating with tranquility because of what they had achieved in their life at that moment. I thought of how Klal Yisrael said *na'aseh v'nishma* and went forward without hesitation or uncertainty, with the same feeling of comfort Steve and Ruth showed. They felt like they were at home, they showed that they were part of the Oorah family and the extended family of Klal Yisrael."



Zoniac Dilemma

Dina's friend, Zara, is in a relationship with a non-Jew called Jason. Dina's been to TheZone and learned about the importance of marrying a Jew and the terrible, far-reaching consequences of marrying out. Zara, however, has been brought up completely secular and knows nothing about Judaism besides for the fact that she is a Jew.

Dina feels she may be in a position to influence Zara and tries to bring up the topic.

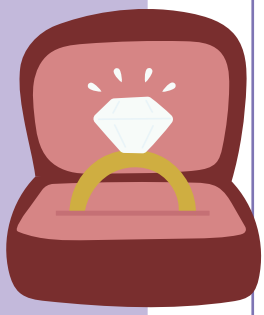
"You know Zara, in Judaism, it's extremely important that Jews marry Jews."

Zara responds,

"I've never heard that, but either way, the main thing in life is to be kind, and Jason is the kindest person I've ever met."

Dina knows that she's probably got one more shot at this before Zara dismisses her entirely.

What can she say to convince Zara that she absolutely must end this relationship?





Zoniac Challenge

Circle the words in this paragraph that are *opposites* of the truth and correct them.

We make a big deal over weddings to stress how unimportant marriage is and show the couple how mundane their union is. The wedding day itself is like Tisha B'Av for the chassan and kallah and all their mitzvos are wiped away on this day. Under the chuppah, the chassan encircles the kallah seven times, and then the kallah presents the chassan with a ring. It is a big mitzva to make the chassan and kallah sad, which is why we stand solemnly in front of them on the dance floor. At each meal during the week that follows the funeral, that are called "sheva brachos," seven curses are given to the chassan and kallah.



Daily Challenge

The next time you are at a wedding, have in mind you are doing a mitzvah when you dance with the choson or kallah.

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Sources

1) Bereishis 1:28
2) Tur, intro to Even Ha'ezer
3) Bereishis 2:18
4) Shulchan Aruch Even Ha'ezer 65:1
5) Invei HaGefen
6) ATR : Book2, Pg. 160 – Bringing Joy to Bride and Groom
7) Avudraham – Birkas Eirusin V'Nesuin
8) Teshuvos uHanhagos Chelek 2 202
9) Inve Hagefen 6:1; See Rashi Parasha Vayishlach 36:3
10) Ben Ish Chai Shana Aleph Shoftim 13
11) Pischei Teshuva Even Haezer 61:9
12) Maharil Hilchos Nisuin
13) Yalkut Yosef, Chuppah V'Kiddushin p. 123
14) Mishnah Kiddushin 1:1

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Marriage
by Pliskin



I Only Want To Get Married Once
by Chana Levitan

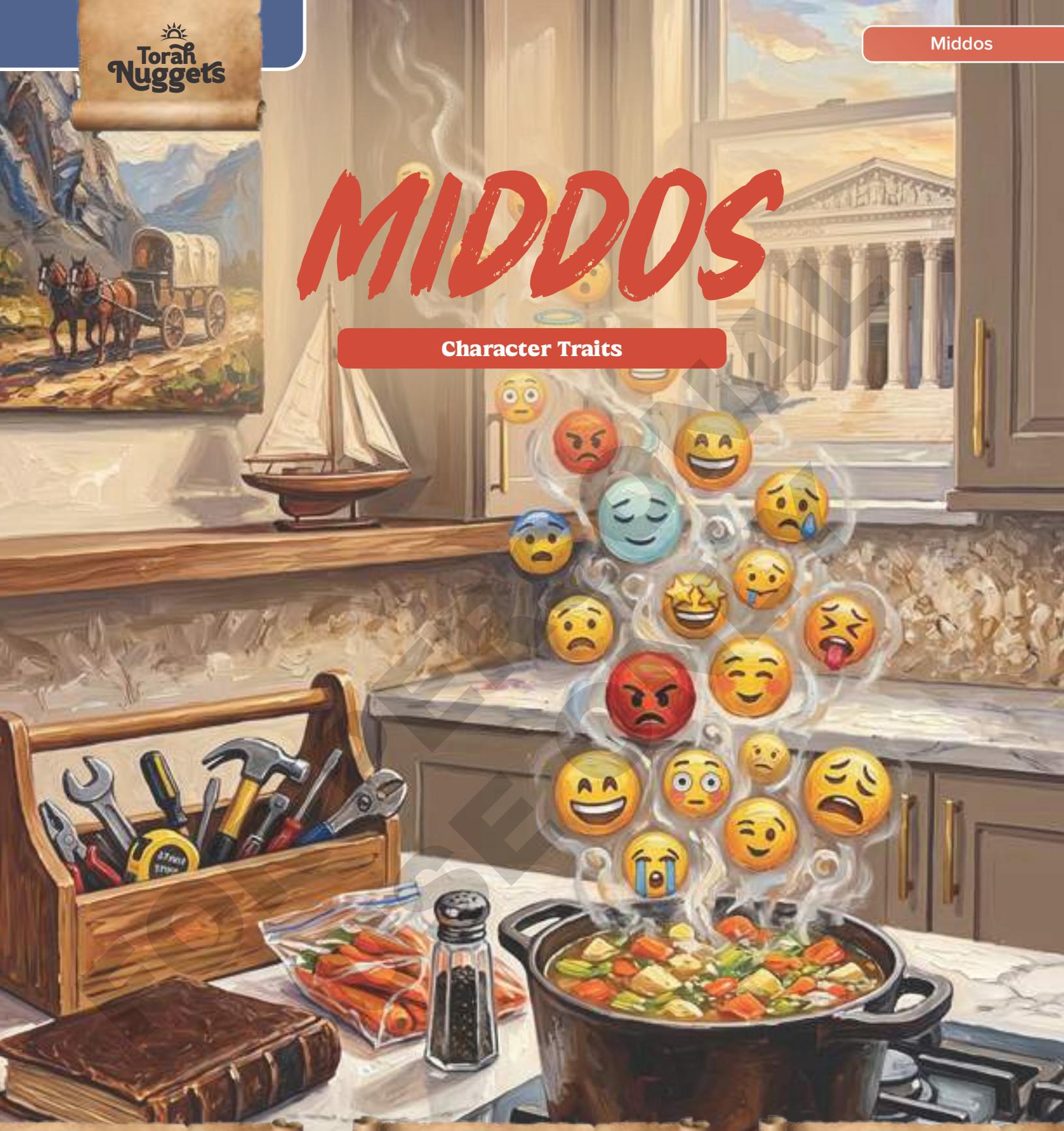
Blast from the Past
Ancient Advice for Jewish Wives

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/blast-from-the-past-ancient-advice-for-jewish-wives/

Torah Nuggets

MIDDOS

Character Traits



1. What are Middos?
2. Why Are Good Middos Important?
3. How do I Work on My Middos?

FREE SAMPLE

What are Middos?

In a Nutshell

Middos are the character traits inside you that drive every thought, feeling, and action. Everyone has a different mix; the goal is learning to use the right amount at the right time.

Your Middos Matter

What exactly are middos? They are the traits inside us that shape how we think, feel, and act. Patience, anger, humility, arrogance, generosity, stinginess, joy, worry, courage, jealousy, gratitude, honesty, and laziness are just some examples.[1] Each person has a unique combination of middos. It's important to know yourself, but don't just focus on the traits that need fixing. Recognizing your good qualities may be even more important! Hashem gave you special strengths to help you fulfill your unique mission. Discover what needs work—but make sure you also identify the wonderful tools you already have.

Measure Your Middos

No trait is inherently good or bad. It is the amount and situation that determine whether it is being used correctly. The Hebrew word *middos* literally means "measures," because each trait must be measured and used within its proper limits. The Rambam describes the ideal "Golden Path" as the correct balance between two extremes. Think of middos like ingredients in chicken soup. Carrots and black pepper both belong in the soup, but only in the right amounts. Every middah has its proper measure. Some middos should be used generously, while others belong only in small, rare doses.



Spotlight

Our purpose in this world is to work on our middos (character traits).[2]

Nature and Nurture

There are two categories of middos: natural middos that we are born with and acquired middos that we develop. Each person begins life with a unique mix of abilities, inclinations, and traits—but that is only a starting point. Unlike animals, which are bound by their natural instincts, people have free will. Our natural traits influence us, but they do not determine who we become. We can develop new traits and choose when, where, and how to use the ones we already have. Through our choices and actions, we have a real part in shaping our character!

Good Middos – A Mitzvah?

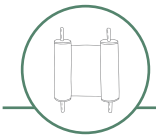
Some people think that having good middos is a nice thing, but not a requirement. This is a big mistake! The Torah commands us to follow in Hashem's ways. As our Sages explain, this means following His middos. Just as Hashem is merciful, gracious, righteous, pious, etc., we should be the same. The goal of this mitzvah is to become more like Hashem by developing and refining our own middos. The more we refine our middos, the more we become like Hashem. We are not expected to transform overnight, but we have to keep working throughout our lives. That steady effort is the mitzvah!

Torah Challenge

The Torah says **זה א-לי ואנוהו**. The Gemara teaches that the word **וְאַנְוֵהוּ** hints to the words "I and He," teaching us to become like Hashem: Just as He is merciful and compassionate, so should we be. "I" in Hebrew is **אני** and "he" is **הוא**.

Can you see how the word **וְאַנְוֵהוּ** hints to "I and He"?

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Master Your Middos

True greatness is not simply possessing good traits. It is knowing how to control each middah and use it correctly. A baal middos means someone who is in total control of his middos. A person may be naturally kind, honest, calm, or courageous, but if that trait controls him, appearing automatically in every situation, he has not yet mastered it. Mastery means choosing when, where, and how each middah should be expressed, according to the Torah's guidelines. It takes a lifetime of work, but it's the ultimate accomplishment.

A middah is not automatically good or bad. Its value depends on when, why, and how it is used. Take *ga'avah* (pride or haughtiness), for example. Arrogance distances a person from Hashem and from other people. Yet the Torah also describes a person whose "heart was uplifted (using the root word *ga'avah*) in the ways of Hashem." Confidence and pride used to serve Hashem can be holy. The same feeling, when used to place oneself above others, becomes destructive.

This is hinted at by the word middah itself. Middah means both "a character trait" and "a measure." Every trait has a proper time, place, purpose, and amount. When used within its proper measure, it can accomplish good. When used too strongly, too weakly, or in the wrong situation, it can cause harm.

It is also important to balance each trait with its opposite middah. For example, kindness must be balanced by justice, and humility must be balanced by confidence. Chazal teach, "Serve Hashem with awe, and rejoice with trembling."[3] Even joy and love of Hashem must exist together with reverence.

A person who brings all his middos into their proper balance is called an *adam shalem*, a complete person. This does not mean that every trait is used equally. Some middos, such as kindness and humility, should guide us constantly. Others, such as brazenness or cruelty, may be needed only in rare and carefully defined circumstances. Completeness means that no trait is missing and no trait is used at all times. Each one is available to be used when the Torah requires it.



Take for example Avraham Avinu, who is the great paradigm of *chesed*. He welcomed guests, cared for others, and overflowed with kindness. Yet Avraham was not controlled by his middah of *chesed*. He was the master over it, and used it only when appropriate. This is why, when Hashem commanded him to send away his son Yishmael, he did so immediately. Later, he was prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchak. Someone with boundless love would have trouble with such actions, but Avraham followed Hashem's will, not his middos. His greatness was not only that he possessed *chesed*. It was that he mastered it and used it according to Hashem's will.

Yaakov Avinu demonstrated the same control with the middah of *emes*. The Torah calls him an *ish tam*, a straightforward and honest person. Yet when dealing with Lavan, a dishonest trickster, Yaakov told his wife Rachel that he knew how to protect himself and could match Lavan's schemes. He was honest, but he was also not gullible. When dealing with honest people, he acted with complete honesty. When forced to protect himself from deception, he knew how to respond appropriately. As Dovid Hamelech says, "With the pure, You act purely, and with the crooked, You act cunningly."[4]

The commentators[5] explain that this is why he is called "*ish tam*," because "*ish*" means a *master*, a master over his honesty. He ruled over it and followed the Torah's requirements.

If people just follow their instincts, a naturally generous person will give, a naturally quiet person will avoid arguments, and a naturally honest person will tell the truth. But that is not enough. The Torah teaches us how and when to use each middah. We cannot be generous in helping bad causes. We must speak up and fight the wicked. And sometimes we must not say the full truth, such as to keep the peace.

But knowing what to do is not enough. We must train ourselves to be in control—to use our traits when they are needed and hold them back when they are not. True greatness is not merely having good middos. It is becoming the master of them.[6]

Can you think of a way to use the middah of *gevurah* (strength) in a good way and in a not good way?

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Why is it Good For me to Have Good Middos?

The Foundation

Middos are the foundation for keeping the mitzvos. They are what everything else rests on.[8] A person has to always be refining his or her middos, since their *avodas Hashem* depends on it![9] Imagine a builder who finishes a house and then asks for extra payment for the foundation. The buyer would certainly refuse, saying, "When I hired you to build a house, the foundation was obviously included. How can a house stand without one?" In the same way, good character is the foundation of Torah. It is so essential that it doesn't need to be explicitly stated.[10]

What Judgment Really Weighs

We are held accountable not only for what we do, but also for the kind of person we become. A court in this world can only judge an action. One thief who stole out of cruelty and another who stole out of hunger must repay the same amount, because a human court cannot see the whole picture. Hashem's judgment, however, weighs everything: the action, the motive, and the middos behind it. In fact, a person must even do *teshuvah* for negative middos such as anger, hatred, jealousy, mockery, and the pursuit of money, honor, or pleasure. In some ways, these are even more serious than individual sins.[7] Bad middos can lead to many different sins, while good middos make it much easier to fulfill the mitzvos properly. Our character is not just one part of us; it is what shapes everything we do.



Be Like Hashem, Be Close to Hashem

How does a person become close to Hashem? Our Sages teach that the way to achieve *deveikus* (a close connection to Hashem) is to become like Him by shaping our own middos to resemble His. The more our character reflects Hashem's ways, the closer we can become to Him. The Torah commands us to "go in His ways,"[11] which means following Hashem's middos. By training ourselves to act like Hashem, we gradually become more like Him. That inner resemblance is what allows us to become attached to Him and build a closer relationship with Him.[12]

Everyone Loves Good Middos

Good middos don't only benefit a person in the next world—they make life better here too. People naturally enjoy being around someone who is kind, honest, patient, and pleasant. They trust him, respect him, and want to help him. Good character leads to stronger friendships, happier families, and greater success in dealing with others.

Middos in Your DNA?

When Avraham Avinu sent Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak, he insisted that she be from his own family, because they had good middos, even though they still served idols. Although his loyal servant Eliezer had an eligible daughter, and Avraham also had many students who had given up idol worship, he only wanted a relative. This is because middos are passed down to one's children, and a Matriarch with good middos was an essential ingredient to help shape the future Jewish nation.[13] Although we can work on and change our character, we inherit a starting point from those who came before us. So you should know that when you work on your middos, you are not only helping yourself—you're giving your children a better head start too!

Korny Korner

Why did the pencil have such good middos?

It always knew when to draw the line.

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Which Comes First — Derech Eretz or Torah Study

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book2 pg.86

We learn in *Pirkei Avos* (3:17), אִם אֵין תּוֹרָה אֵין דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ, אִם אֵין דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ אֵין תּוֹרָה — *Without Torah one cannot have proper conduct, and without proper conduct one cannot have Torah.* That sounds like a catch-22! If I can't have one without the other, where do I start?

Character refinement has many levels, and one must have basic good character traits in order to study Torah, but can only achieve character perfection through Torah study.

Although a depraved person can become a great mathematician or scientist, a decent character is a prerequisite to Torah study because Torah is the wisdom of Hashem—the epitome of refinement—so someone completely lacking good *middos* is unable to connect to Hashem and His Torah. A person can reach a basic level of character refinement even before he studies Torah, because every Jew was created with inborn good character traits that he can tap into.

Additionally, a person who submits to his animalistic nature, the source of bad character, will inhibit his ability to grasp the profound concepts of the Torah. For example, a lazy person will be unwilling to put in the mental exertion needed to grasp an intricate Talmudic discussion. Similarly, an arrogant person will fail to achieve the proper understanding of topics because he will not pay attention to others' insights, or will refuse to admit that their explanations may be better than his own. And someone seeking relaxation and physical pleasure will be unwilling to forgo his comforts in order to study Torah diligently.

But although man was created with innate good character traits, they are raw and need to be developed. In fact, the Vilna Gaon writes that perfecting our character is the very reason we come to this world, and it takes a lifetime to perfect ourselves. This is where Torah study comes in, because the way to perfect one's character is through the study of Torah, for many reasons.

Firstly, when a person studies Torah he learns what true character refinement is all about. Our illustrious ancestors and Sages serve as examples for us, and the ethical topics discussed in Torah works teach us real-life lessons on how to conduct ourselves properly. In fact, the entire tractate *Avos* is devoted to ethical teachings. And as the Vilna Gaon writes, even when studying other areas of Torah, one who focuses on his studies properly will discover that every word of Torah is replete with lessons and insights to become better people.

Furthermore, as mentioned, proper Torah study requires a person to transcend his animalistic nature and become more and more refined, so the more a person studies, the more refined he will become.

On a deeper level, Torah is the word of Hashem, and when we study it, we connect to His greatness and sanctity. That connection transforms us and makes us more refined and spiritual people.

Thus, although a person must have basic good character in order to study Torah, it is only through studying Torah that a person can fully develop and refine his character properly.

IN SHORT: *A person must use his inborn basic good character in order to begin studying Torah. But true perfection of character can only be achieved through studying Torah.*



Until The Very Last Day

Rav Chaim Friedlander was the mashgiach of Ponevezh, and author of Sifsei Chaim. He had just returned from medical treatment in the United States. His face was pale, and he looked weak and exhausted, and he came to discuss his situation with the great rosh yeshiva and Torah leader, Rav Shach.

The doctors had told Rav Friedlander that he had only a few weeks left to live. He had come to Rav Shach with one question: What should he focus on during the little time he had left?

Rav Shach replied, "Work on your middos. A person must continue working on himself until the very last day of his life."

This great Torah leader taught us that even such a great man, who had worked on his middos his entire life, still had more growing to do.[14]



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Pathway to Good Middos

The Perfect Cure

Hashem created the *yetzer hara*—but He also created the way to overcome it: the Torah.[16] How does Torah help us overcome our negative traits? Rav Yisrael Salanter explained that it works in two ways. Learning Torah *lishmah* (with the right intentions) has a powerful spiritual effect that refines a person, even when the topic being studied is unrelated to the trait he is working on. The second is learning *mussar* (ethics). By studying words that speak directly to a particular struggle, a person begins to understand the problem and the practical ways to fight it.[17] Since different *sefarim* resonate with different people, you should find the specific *mussar sefer* that speaks to you.[18] Learning Torah heals the soul from within, while *mussar* targets the place that hurts!

Choose Your Influences

Middos are contagious! Since we are influenced by our environment, we naturally pick up the attitudes and habits of the people—and even the activities—we spend time doing. That is why it is so important to choose friends who inspire us to grow, and role models with beautiful middos. And just as good friends and role models can strengthen good middos, movies, social media, and reading material can slowly make bad behavior seem normal. If everyone around you speaks harshly, bends the truth, or treats others carelessly, it can begin to feel acceptable—but "everyone does it" does not make it right. Pay attention to what is shaping you. Choose people and influences that help bring out your best self.



Tefillah Time

תֵּן בְּלִבֵּנוּ שֶׁנִּרְאֶה כָּל אֶחָד מַעֲלַת חֲבֵרֵינוּ...וְלֹא וְלֹא חֶסְרוֹנָם

Grant in our hearts that each of us recognizes the positive aspects of our friends... and not their deficiencies.

These lyrics from the song Aderaba originate from a meditative prayer written by Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk.

You're Not Fighting Alone

The battle against the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) is bigger than any of us. Chazal teach that without Hashem's help, we could never overcome it.[15] That's why working on our middos begins with *tefillah*. Ask Hashem to help you see what you need to improve, give you the strength to change, and help you become more like Him. We aren't expected to perfect ourselves alone. Hashem is our partner in the journey, and with every step we take to be better, we receive His help in becoming the people He created us to be.

Play to Your Strengths

Rather than fighting an inborn nature head-on—which usually does not work—the Gemara recommends channeling one's natural traits and using them for good. When Shmuel Hanavi was asked to choose a king, he assumed Dovid was not the one, because he saw that he had a violent nature similar to Eisav's. Hashem told him not to worry. Eisav used his nature for evil and killed on impulse, while Dovid would control his nature and consult the Sanhedrin before using it. He used his strength to protect the Jewish people. Dovid did not erase his nature. He mastered it. As a result, instead of becoming a wicked murderer, he became one of the greatest and most righteous people who ever lived.

Be Like a Sailor

When a boat tilts too far to one side, a sailor restores its balance by shifting weight to the opposite side. Fixing an unbalanced middah works the same way. A stingy person should not merely try to stop feeling stingy—he should actively look for opportunities to give. As the "giving muscle" grows stronger, the stinginess gradually weakens. The ultimate goal is the Rambam's "Golden Path"—the proper balance between two extremes.[19] But when a trait already pulls strongly in one direction, the Rambam advises temporarily pushing toward the opposite extreme. This is not because that extreme is ideal, but because it counteracts the original pull. Once the middah is under control, the person can return to the healthy, balanced middle.[20]



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It's The Climb



Two people can behave in exactly the same way, yet their accomplishments may be completely different. One person may be naturally calm, generous, or humble. Another may have fought a powerful inner battle to reach that same point. We see only where each person stands. Hashem also sees how far each one had to climb.

Someone born with good middos should be grateful, but not proud.[21] Real greatness is measured by the effort a person invests in overcoming his nature. The pasuk says, "The laboring soul labors for itself."[22] The reward belongs especially to the person who had to struggle and work to reach his level.[23]

A dramatic example of this took place during a severe famine. The Great Rav Eliezer stood before the people and prayed for rain, but no rain fell. Then Rav Akiva prayed, and rain began to pour.

People thought that Rav Akiva was greater than Rav Eliezer. But then a voice from Heaven announced that this was not the reason his prayer was answered. Rav Akiva was answered because he had worked harder to overcome his natural tendencies and had developed a yielding, forgiving character through tremendous effort.[24]

The lesson is that natural goodness has limited value. A person who is naturally kind or patient has been given a precious gift and must use it well. But he cannot take credit for the starting point Hashem gave him. The person who struggles with anger and manages to remain calm may have achieved more than someone who was never tempted to become angry at all.

This also means that we should be very careful about comparing ourselves to other people. Someone else may seem far ahead of us, but we do not know their starting point, challenges and effort level. Our task is not to become someone else. It is to become the best that we can we.

It is also important to realize that good middos do not run on autopilot. Imagine the following: a merchant once hired a wagon driver for a long journey. The merchant settled down and fell asleep. Soon, the driver also began to doze. He trusted the horse, which had traveled the road many times before, to continue along the correct path. But the horse spotted some tempting grass at the side of the road. It wandered off course; the wagon overturned, and the sleeping passenger was thrown to the ground.

The furious merchant complained to the driver. The driver protested, "But this is a smart horse! I thought it knew the road!"

"A smart animal is still an animal," the merchant replied. "That is why I hired you to watch it."

Our instincts are animalistic like that horse. Even when we have trained ourselves to behave properly, our old pulls and habits do not disappear forever. If we stop paying attention, they may quietly lead us off the road. Good middos need continued reinforcement, and negative tendencies must be watched and controlled.[25]

That may sound discouraging. Does it mean we will have to struggle forever?

In a sense, yes—but that is not bad news. Working on our middos is not a punishment or a sign that something is wrong with us. It is one of the main reasons Hashem placed us in this world! Every person has strengths to develop, weaknesses to repair, and a unique path of growth.

When you discover a flaw in yourself, do not become discouraged. Be grateful that you can now see what needs attention. A person who never recognizes his faults can never improve them. And when you slip, do not assume all your progress has disappeared. Old habits are hard to change. Growth is rarely a straight line.

"A righteous person falls seven times and rises."[26] A tzaddik is not someone who never falls. He is someone who refuses to remain down.

Every time you stop yourself, apologize, try again, or make one slightly better choice, you are shaping your character. Hashem does not ask you to become perfect overnight. He asks you to keep growing. The goal is not to reach the top. The climb itself—the struggle, the effort, the falls, and the decision to rise again—is part of what makes you great.

How can someone feel humble about something he/she is really great at?

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> **Woe to someone who does not recognize his faults—but double woe to someone who does not recognize his good qualities, because then he does not even have the tools of his trade.**
>
> *Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the great mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva*

Zoniac Zone



Key Takeaways

Middos are the inner traits that shape how we think, feel, and act. We are born with certain tendencies, but our choices and repeated actions help shape who we become. Every middah has a proper time, place, and amount; true greatness means controlling our traits instead of letting them control us. Good middos bring us closer to Hashem and are the foundation of a Torah-true life. Through learning Torah and *mussar*, plenty of practice, and heartfelt *tefillah*, we can refine our character and become a person with beautiful middos.



Zoniac Challenge

WHAT'S YOUR MIDDAH SUPERPOWER?

1 A new student walks into the room. You…

A. Go over right away and make sure they feel welcome.
B. Give them clear, honest information about what to expect.
C. Speak up if anyone treats them unfairly.
D. Make them laugh and help them relax.
E. Stay nearby and patiently help them settle in.

2 Your group has a difficult job to complete. You…

A. Notice who needs help and support them.
B. Make sure everyone understands the plan correctly.
C. Take responsibility and push the group forward.
D. Keep everyone upbeat and excited.
E. Work calmly and steadily until it is finished.

3 A friend calls you with a problem. You…

A. Ask, "What can I do to help?"
B. Say what you honestly think they need to hear.
C. Encourage them to be brave and face the problem.
D. Help them see the hopeful or funny side.
E. Listen without rushing or interrupting.

4 You notice someone being left out. You…

A. Invite them to join you.
B. Point out that excluding them is not right.
C. Stand beside them, even if others disagree.
D. Draw them into the fun so it feels natural.
E. Keep including them patiently, even if they are shy.

5 You make a mistake that affects other people. You…

A. Focus first on repairing the hurt you caused.
B. Admit exactly what happened.
C. Take responsibility without making excuses.
D. Stay positive and look for a way to fix it.
E. Keep working at the repair, even if it takes time.

6 Which compliment would make you happiest?

A. "You always notice when someone needs something."
B. "People can trust what you say."
C. "You stand strong when something is difficult."
D. "You bring happiness wherever you go."
E. "You never give up on people."

7 You're with a group when something you planned suddenly goes wrong. Your first instinct is to…

A. Check whether anyone else needs help.
B. Figure out what really happened.
C. Take control and make a new plan.
D. Keep everyone from becoming discouraged.
E. Stay calm and adjust one step at a time.

8 Which role sounds most like you?

A. The Helper
B. The Truth-Teller
C. The Brave One
D. The Joy-Bringer
E. The Steady One

Count which letter you chose most often.

Mostly A — *Chesed*: The Helper
You naturally notice people and want to make life better for them. You may be generous, caring, and quick to offer help.
Your challenge is to make sure your kindness is truly helpful and does not prevent others from doing what they need to do.

Mostly B — *Emes*: The Truth-Teller
You value honesty, clarity, and doing what is right. People may rely on you to be genuine and straightforward.
Your challenge is to combine truth with wisdom and sensitivity. Not every true thought needs to be said in every situation.

Mostly C — *Gevurah*: The Brave One
You are willing to take responsibility, face challenges, and stand up for what matters. You may have strong self-control and determination.
Your challenge is to use strength gently, without becoming harsh, controlling, or impatient.

Mostly D — *Simchah*: The Joy-Bringer
You naturally bring energy, hope, and enjoyment into a room. You can help people appreciate the good and keep going through difficult moments.
Your challenge is to make sure happiness does not become silliness or distract you from moments that require seriousness.

Mostly E — *Savlanus*: The Steady One
You know how to wait, listen, and remain calm. People may feel safe around you because you give them time and do not give up quickly.
Your challenge is to make sure patience does not turn into passivity. Sometimes the patient thing is to wait—and sometimes it is time to act.

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Nikayon– Keep Clean!

See this trash bin, it's not full
Yet, papers on the floor- not cool
The boys they try throw papers in
But they miss, no basketball wins

Chorus I:
Do your part to keep things clean
Nikayon- that's what it means
Put all your papers in the trash
Nikayon- keep clean

Each day when I walk through the door
I never leave my things on the floor
My coat my hat and my briefcase
Everything has it's place

Chorus I

Chorus II:
Put your things where they belong
Nikayon- keep clean
And put all your paper in the trash
Nikayon- keep clean

On shabbos sitting at the Seudos
Eating and singing Zemiros
We all help out to clear the table
Each and all of us are able

Chorus I

We all can lend a helping hand
Nikayon- keep clean

Chorus II

When I go to Motzei Shabbos learning
Before I win a prize from the tickets I was earning
My Sefer goes back to it's spot
And I'm proud of the Mitzva that I got

Chorus I

Put back Seforim to their proper place
Nikayon- keep clean
We all can lend a helping hand
Nikayon- keep clean

Chorus II



COVER UNCOVERED:

This cover depicts how middos are tools Hashem gives us, but we must learn how to use them properly. Like carrots and pepper in soup, each needs the right measure. Hashem judges the middos behind our actions, unlike a human court. Torah and tefillah help us improve. Like balancing a boat, steering horses, or climbing a mountain, working on our middos takes constant effort.

Zoniac Dilemma

Going the Extra Mile

Rina ran a weekly gymnastics class for girls across town. By the time she finished teaching, packed away the equipment, and locked up, she was usually exhausted and ready to go home.

Kayla was one of the girls in the class. For the first few weeks, she arranged her own transportation. Then one evening, she approached Rina as everyone was leaving.

"Could you drive me home?"

Kayla lived fifteen minutes in the opposite direction. Rina was tired, but she had no urgent plans, so she agreed.

The following week, Kayla asked again.

And the week after that.

Soon, it seemed as though Kayla expected Rina to drive her home after every class.

Technically, Rina could do it. The extra trip took time, but it was manageable. She also knew how important *chesed* was. Maybe Kayla's family was having difficulty arranging rides. Perhaps the bus was complicated or unpleasant at night. Kayla might have a reason she had not shared.

Still, Rina could not help wondering why Kayla had not tried to arrange a carpool, take a bus, or find another solution. What had begun as a favor now felt like part of Rina's weekly responsibility—and Kayla had never even asked whether the arrangement was becoming difficult.

What should Rina do?

Daily Challenge

Pick one middah that you are good at and do one special act today that exercises that middah.

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Sources

1) These are some of the basic midos listed based on Rambam Deios 1:1 and Meseches Avos 5:11, the Orchos Tzadikim, and Peleh Yoetz
2) Gra in Even Shileima 1:2 and on Mishlei 4:13
3) Tehillim 2:11
4) Ibid 18:27
5) Chozeh of Lublin; Shineve Rav
6) Much of this essay is based on R. Chaim Shmulevitz's Sichos Mussar
7) Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 7:3
8) R' Chaim Vital, Sefer Hakavanos Sha`ar Kedusha 1:2
9) Biur HaGra on Shir HaShirim 1:5
10) Rav Elya Lopian vol. 1 Shevivei Lev pg. 319-320
11) Devarim 28:9
12) Sotah 14a
13) Drashos Haran Drush 5, Kli Yakar 24:3
14) Ish LeRe'eihu, p. 194
15) Kiddushin 30b
16) Bava Basra 16a
17) Lev Eliyahu, Chayei Sarah, pp. 76–83, citing Rav Yisrael Salanter
18) Lev Eliyahu, end of Parshas Terumah and Parshas Pekudei pg. 281-282
19) Avos 2:1; Rambam, Hilchos Dei'os 1:3–4
20) Rambam, Hilchos Dei'os 2:2
21) Peleh Yoetz, Middos
22) Mishlei 16:26
23) Lev Eliyahu, Shevivei Lev, p. 266
24) Taanis 25b
25) Shem Olam, vol. 1, ch. 18
26) Mishlei 24:16

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Olam Hamiddos



Pirkei Avos - Illustrated Youth Edition

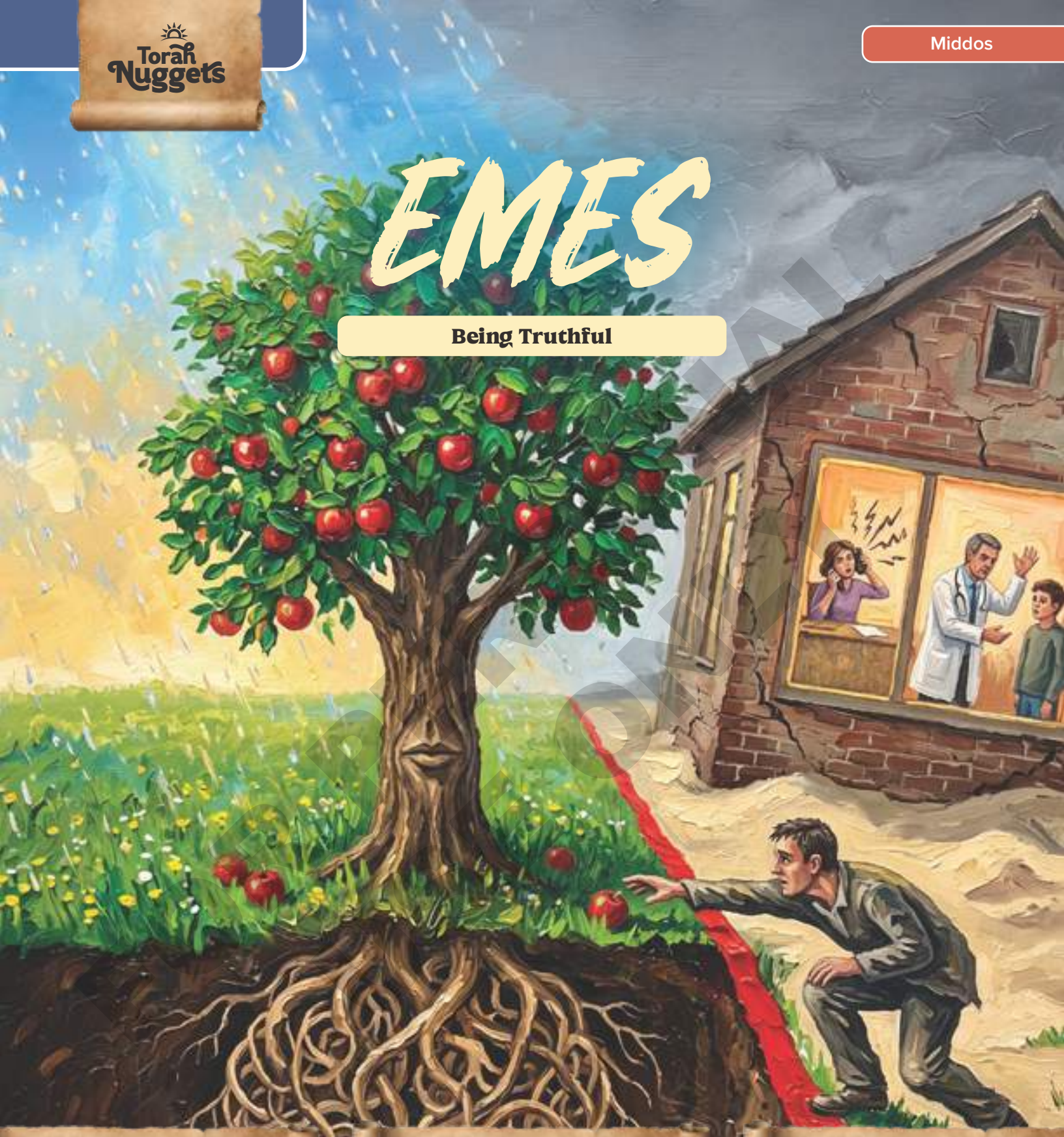
The Test of Rebecca

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/the-test-of-rebecca/

Torah Nuggets

EMES

Being Truthful



1. What is Emes?
2. Why is Emes Important?
3. How to be Honest

PERSONAL

What is Emes?

In a Nutshell

Emes means being truthful. This includes not exaggerating, being honest with others and yourself, and following through on your word.

Truth or Dead: There's No In-Between

Emes is not a little bit true or mostly true. It is either true, or it is not true at all. Here is a cool hint. The Hebrew word for truth is emes (אֱמֶת). Take away just the first letter, the aleph, and you are left with the word mes (מֵת), which means "dead." The Maharal says this is not an accident.[1] Even one small letter missing turns "truth" into "dead." That is the lesson. A story missing even one small part is not "almost true." It is not true at all. Emes means the whole truth.

אמת ← מת

Emes is Hashem's Signature



Of all the qualities, Hashem picked emes as His signature. The Gemara says, "*chosamo shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu emes*," the seal of Hashem is truth.[3] Think about your own signature; it shows who you are. Emes is so closely connected to Hashem that it shows who He is: truth. When a person works on being honest and truthful, they are acting like Hashem. And the more a person searches for the truth, the more a person is searching for Hashem. Just as a signature proves something is genuine, a person who lives with emes proves that who they are is genuine too.

Spotlight

Emes is called Hashem's signature,[2] so the more a person is connected to truth, the more they are connected to Hashem Himself.

Talk is not cheap!

Although many people think that words don't have significance, the Torah teaches otherwise. If you don't plan on doing something, emes means you may not say you will do it. Saying one thing but thinking another thing is a violation of an emes rule – don't be "*echad b'peh v'echad b'lev*" - "*one in your mouth, and one in your heart*."[7] For example, if a fundraiser calls you and asks for a donation on the phone, you might be tempted to brush him off by saying "I'll donate online." But if you don't plan to donate online, your words are not emes.



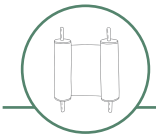
Your Word Is Your Bond

Emes is not only about telling the truth about the past. It also means keeping your word. If you say you will do something, you've got to do it! The Gemara[4] says that someone who doesn't follow through on their commitments is called "unreliable". But it's not only unreliable; it's also lying! Even though your non-action doesn't involve speech, it is called a lie, because you made your original speech into a falsehood. This is why Rabbeinu Yonah[5] and the Chofetz Chaim[6] both teach that one who wishes to be honest must always keep their word.

Did You Know?

Each of the Avos is connected with a special middah, and Yaakov's middah is emes (truth). The navi Micha says, "Titein emes l'Yaakov," "You will give truth to Yaakov.[8]" Even when Lavan tricked him, Yaakov stayed truthful.

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Emes is a Pillar the World Stands On

Imagine one person telling a small lie. Nothing bad seems to happen. Maybe nobody even seems to notice. So why does Pirkei Avos say that the world stands on emes, truth, as one of the 3 things holding it up?[9]

Think about how much of your life depends on trust. When your friend tells you what time to meet up, you rely on that. When a store says a product does something, you believe them. Every single interaction rests on one quiet assumption: what you are telling me is true. Take that assumption away, and things start to shake. You would have to question every text message, every promise, every "I'll be there."

That is the simple level. Without emes, you cannot trust anyone, and trust is one of the basic things a functioning world needs.

There is a deeper level too. When a person speaks and acts with emes, they are emulating Hashem.[10] Hashem is the ultimate source of truth, so honesty connects a person to Hashem and to the reason the world was created in the first place. This means telling the truth is not only about being a good, reliable person. It is about lining yourself up with something much bigger. Every time you choose emes over an untruth, you are practicing being like Hashem, in your own small corner of the world.

Here is the actual line from the Mishnah:

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד... עַל הָאֱמֶת

"The world stands on three things... on truth."[11]

The other two things on that list are *din* (justice) and *shalom* (peace). All three hold up the world together. Let's focus on the pillar of emes.

Notice the word "stands." A building stands on its foundation. Take away part of the foundation, and the whole structure collapses. The Maharal explains that without truth in the world, there would be what he calls a *bitul ha'olam*, the undoing of the world itself. Truth is not just a nice value. It is one of the structural supports holding up existence.[12] In other words, a world without truth is not just a worse version of this world. It stops being able to function as a world at all, the same way a building without part of its foundation is not a weaker building. It collapses.

So, Chazal are teaching something bigger than "honesty is a good policy." The Chofetz Chaim explains that emes actually affects the world itself. When a person tells the truth, they strengthen the world's foundation.[13] Conversely, when someone lies, even about something small, they weaken it.

That is why the Mishnah is worded the way it is. It does not say, "People should tell the truth." It says:

הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד... עַל הָאֱמֶת

"The world stands... on truth."

The world itself is standing on this, one of three pillars, not just one person's reputation. That is a much bigger claim than most people realize when they first read this Mishnah.

Think of it like a brick in the foundation of a building. One brick alone doesn't look like much. But the foundation is made of thousands of them, each one doing its share of holding up everything above it. You cannot see most of these bricks from the street. But if enough of them crumble, the whole building above starts to lean. One honest answer, one truthful moment when it would have been easier to bend the facts, is a single brick. It looks small. It is still load-bearing.

That is what Chazal are teaching us. Not that truth is a nice trait to have. It is one of the things holding everything up. It is a pillar the world stands on.

How can one person's lie affect the whole world?



Torah Challenge

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ דַּבְּרוּ אֱמֶת אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ...

"These are the things you should do: speak truth, each person to their friend..."[14]

Look closely at the word אֱמֶת. Its three letters are א, מ, ת.

Can you find where each letter falls in the Aleph Beis? Why do you think emes is spelled using letters from these specific positions? What might that teach us about what "the whole truth" really means?

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Why is Emes Important?

Emes Brings Us Close to Hashem

The Gemara[16] teaches that people who lie often "cannot receive the Divine Presence". While this statement is obscure, we clearly see that lying is bad, but telling the truth actually brings us closer to Hashem. Think of it like a phone call with a bad connection. Lies create static, making it hard to hear each other. The Chida adds that when there is a lot of dishonesty in the world, Hashem's presence feels even further away, and that delays good things, like Mashiach coming.[14] Every time you choose truth, you clear up the static. You help bring Hashem closer to you and to the whole world.

Emes Lasts Forever

The Rambam wrote to his son to love truth because you can build your whole life on it. Building a life on *sheker*, falseness, is like building a house on sand. It might look strong for a while, and it might even seem to help you in the moment, but sand cannot hold up a house forever. It always caves in. Truth is not just the right thing to do; it is the only thing that lasts. You can even see this in the letters themselves. The Gemara points out that every letter in the word *sheker* (שֶׁקֶר) stands on just one tiny point, like it is balancing on one leg.[20] One little push and it falls over. But every letter in the word emes (אֱמֶת) stands on a wide, flat base. Even the letters are telling us something. Falseness is shaky. Truth is built to last.



Emes is Part of Who We Are as Hashem's Children

The navi Yeshayahu calls the Jewish people "children who do not lie".[15] That's not just a nice compliment. It means being honest is part of what makes us Hashem's children. Think about it this way. If your good friend suddenly did something totally unlike them, you would say "that is not you!" When a Jewish person is dishonest, it isn't only wrong; it doesn't fit who they really are. It that it does not fit who they really are. Hashem is all about truth, and we are His children. So being honest is not just a rule. It is simply part of who we are.

Honesty Brings Blessing to the World

The Gemara teaches that rain and blessing come to the world in the merit of honest people.[17] On the other side, money that is gained dishonestly does not last. Yirmiyahu says it disappears halfway through a person's life, meaning it slips away before it ever really helps them.[18] Why would honesty specifically bring blessing? Hashem is the source of all blessing, and one way we get close to Him is by acting the way He acts.[19] Emes is Hashem's own signature, so when a person practices emes, they get closer to Hashem. And being closer to Hashem is exactly what brings blessing into a person's life.

Tefillah Time

אֱמֶת וְיַצִּיב וְנָכוֹן וְקַיָּם וְיָשָׁר וְנֶאֱמָן — *"True and firm, correct and enduring, upright and trustworthy."*

Right after Shema in Shacharis, we say a paragraph called *Emes V'yatziv*, and it's no accident that it opens with the word emes, then adds 15 more words that mean almost the same thing. Before we ask Hashem for anything else in Shemoneh Esrei, we first stop and declare that everything we just said in Shema is true, solid, and unshakeable.

On a deeper level, the 15 "*vav*"s (e.g. *V'yatziv*, *V'nachon*, etc.) allude in various ways to our confirming that Hashem is true.[21] Emes isn't something you believe once. It's something you keep declaring out loud, every single day, so it stays real to you.

Korny Korner

Why is the flashlight the most honest tool in the house?

It never leaves anything in the dark!



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Emes Depends on Good Middos

Have you ever done something wrong and immediately started explaining to yourself why it was actually fine? Maybe you snapped at your sibling because you were tired. Maybe you didn't study because you thought the test wasn't that important anyway. Maybe you skipped your chores because you were busy with something more urgent. Everyone does this. Rationalization is one of the most natural things a brain does. The question is what emes has to do with it.

Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that honesty is not just one good trait sitting next to all the others. It is a root that other good middos* grow out of.[22] That is a big claim. Kindness, patience, humility, all of these are supposed to trace back to emes somehow. To understand why, it helps to look at how people usually get stuck.

The Orchos Tzadikim[23] explains that people's character flaws sometimes lead them to accept falsehood over truth. Middos like laziness, anger, or arrogance affect the way a person thinks, sometimes without the person even noticing it is happening. Instead of admitting the truth, people make excuses: the tired excuse, the small justification, the story you tell yourself so you can feel fine about something you already know was wrong. It happens slowly and quietly, which is exactly why it works so well.[20] It's sometimes hard to recognize or admit the truth, even to ourselves.

A smart person will bring proofs against these excuses and admit the real truth to himself. "Actually this or that action is the correct thing to do, but you are feeling lazy and don't want to." Being honest with yourself means you cannot hide behind excuses anymore. If you snapped at your sibling, emes means admitting you snapped, not explaining why it was understandable. If you skipped your chores, emes means admitting you skipped them, not deciding they were not that important. Once you stop letting yourself off the hook with a story, you are forced to see what actually needs fixing. And once you see it clearly, you can finally work on it.

This is the real reason working on your middos is essential to becoming more "*emesdik*" (honest). After you clear away the "fog" caused by laziness, haughtiness or any other bad middah, it becomes easier to see the truth and act on it.

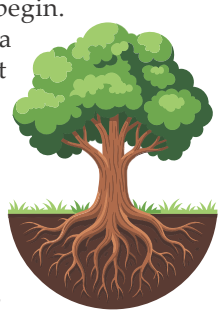
The *pasuk* below from Mishlei says that a person who pursues justice and truth is more beloved to Hashem than one who brings *korbanos*, the animal and grain offerings that were one of the main ways a Jew served Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash.

עֲשֹׂה צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט נִבְחָר לַה' מִזָּבַח

"Doing what is right and just is more desired by Hashem than sacrifice."[24]

That is a striking comparison. *Korbanos* are one of the most significant ways to serve Hashem, yet the pursuit of truth and justice is described as even more beloved. Chazal also teach that Hashem actively helps a person like this discover the ways he can grow and improve.[25] It makes sense once you think about what that pursuit requires. Someone chasing emes is not looking for the comfortable version of themselves. They are willing to see what is actually true, even when it is unflattering, even when a small lie to themselves would feel much easier.

Think about a doctor trying to treat a patient who will not admit what actually hurts. The doctor cannot fix a problem hidden behind a false description. The moment the patient tells the truth, real treatment can begin. Emes works the same way inside a person. The middah of emes is not just about what you tell other people. It is what allows you to actually treat yourself, instead of just managing a symptom you have convinced yourself does not exist.



That is why Rabbeinu Bechaye calls emes a root. The whole tree depends on the health of the root. Emes works the same way inside a person. Someone who is honest with themselves and with others and seeks the truth will be quicker to find it, as well as quicker to acknowledge their shortcomings and do something about it.

Can you think of a time when you made up an excuse for why you didn't have to do something when, really, you just didn't want to do it?

*See the **Middos Nugget** to learn more.



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How to be Honest

Fix your middos, not just your mouth

The Orchos Tzadikim teaches that people do not usually lie for no reason.[31] They lie because something else is going on inside, like laziness, anger, or wanting something so badly that it changes how they see things. For example, if you are too lazy to clean your room, you might tell your mom, "I already did it," even though you did not. The lie isn't the real problem; it is just what shows on the outside. If you only try to stop lying without fixing what is pushing you to lie, it will not last. Real honesty means working on what is going on inside you, your middos, and being honest with yourself first, not just with others.



Stop the Lie Before It Starts

The Chida[26] looks at a pasuk that describes the Jewish people in the future. It says they "will not do wrong, and will not tell lies."[27] The Chida says these are not two separate ideas; they are connected. If you don't do something wrong, you won't need to lie about it later. Here's how it usually happens: First, someone breaks a rule. Then, they tell a lie so they don't get in trouble. That is the pattern the Chida is pointing to. So the best way to stay honest is not just trying hard not to lie in the moment. It is staying away from situations that make you want to lie in the first place.

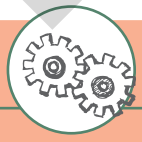
Don't say the truth if they think you're lying!

The Gemara[30] tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu, when announcing the plague of the firstborn, said it would happen "around midnight," not "at midnight". Now, Moshe was 100% sure when midnight was. After all, he was a prophet! Why then, did he say "around"? The answer is that Moshe knew that the Egyptians might make a mistake about when midnight was. They might think that he made a mistake, and then they would think he was a liar! Moshe did not want them to think he was a liar, so he made sure to say "around". The Gemara says that this teaches us to also always be careful how we speak, and choose to often say "I'm not really sure". Even if we are sure, we should still be careful, because we don't want other people to make a mistake and then assume we are liars. If that happens, we would lose all credibility!

Choose Your Friends, and Make One Rule You Never Break

Here are two ways to build honesty into your life. First, the Orchos Tzadikim says to stay away from people who lie a lot.[28] Even if you do not mean to, you pick up habits from the people you spend time with. Second, commit to always saying the truth. There is a story about Rebbi Shimon ben Shetach.[29] Someone wanted to fix their ways and asked him for advice. He told him just one thing: always tell the truth, no matter what. That one simple rule ended up protecting the person from all sorts of other mistakes too. Having one "red line" you never cross is often stronger than trying to use willpower every single time.

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Mitzvos That Keep Us Honest

There are many Mitzvos in the Torah having to do with honesty. Here are some of them:

1. Stay far away from falsehood.
2. Use accurate weights in business.
3. Don't cheat when buying or selling.
4. Don't encroach on another person's property or business.
5. If you find a lost object, return it, don't ignore it.
6. Return stolen items.
7. Don't steal in public.
8. Don't steal when no one is looking.
9. Don't deny you owe money.
10. Don't swear falsely.
11. Don't be a false witness.
12. Judges shouldn't alter justice.
13. Don't break your promises.

Insurance Claims

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book3 pg.350

My wife was in an accident and broke her leg, requiring major surgery and months of therapy. A lawyer told us we could sue and possibly win a million dollars. I see this as G-d answering our prayers, because we can use that windfall to pay for our children's Torah education. But my wife says that suing for so much may be exaggerated and unethical. Who's right?

Is this a gift from G-d, or is it the Satan luring you into stealing? Thankfully, we have the Torah to guide us, helping us determine the right thing to do. The Torah tells us that we must be honest in our business dealings, and exaggerating is also considered lying. You must, therefore, be fully honest with your claim and pursue it with integrity. If there is a legitimate claim, pursuing the lawsuit is appropriate. However, if it requires any dishonesty, it is absolutely forbidden, and using such money is unethical, and certainly not what Hashem wants.

A woman once approached R' Yaakov Kamenetsky with a question. As a child, she was hit by a car, and her family's lawyer convinced her to lie and say that the defendant ran a red light. This false testimony enabled them to win a large sum of money from the driver's insurance company, which had been placed in a savings account under her name.

Later, as an adult, she was filled with remorse and wanted to know what was the proper thing to do with the money.

R' Yaakov told her that she should certainly not keep the money she received. Returning the money to the insurance company was also not an option, as they are not set up for returns. She should not even give the money to a yeshivah or the Jewish needy, as that would give her the false sense of satisfaction of doing a mitzvah with ill-gotten funds. Instead, she should give it to a non-Jewish charity like the Red Cross or Cancer Society. This way, she would not derive any benefit from her lie, but view it as returning to society money that wasn't rightfully hers.

It is unfortunate that in today's system people often lie or exaggerate the damage incurred. Not only is this type of behavior forbidden, it is also harmful to everyone else. Insurance fraud and fraudulent lawsuits are probably among the most damaging types of fraud today, because they drive up premiums for everyone else. There are people who spend their whole lives trying to make a living off these lawsuits, harming the rest of us in the process.

IN SHORT

If there is a legitimate claim, pursuing an insurance claim is appropriate. However, any dishonesty or exaggeration is forbidden, and it is wrong to benefit from such claims.

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**Got questions about Judaism?
Curious about something?**

Join **Ask the Rabbi Live** with Rabbi Chaim Mintz **Tuesday Nights** at **9PM**!
Go to **oorah.org/asktherabbi** to join as well as watch previous questions.

Zoniac Zone



Key Takeaways

Emes means more than just not lying; it means acting honestly and making sure your words match your heart. Truth isn't a nice extra; it's one of the pillars the whole world stands on, and it's the root every other good middah grows out of. And emes isn't built in one big dramatic moment. It's built through small, easy-to-skip choices: the friends you keep, the promise you keep even when no one's watching, the guess you admit you're not sure about. Every time we choose emes, even in a small moment nobody notices, we're adding another brick to something much bigger than ourselves.



He's Watching!

In the village of Radin, lived the revered sage, known as the Chofetz Chaim. One morning, the Chofetz Chaim embarked on a journey to a distant town, in a horse-drawn buggy. As they traveled through the countryside, the driver spotted a grove of trees laden with ripe, luscious fruit. The sight of the apples gleaming in the morning sun was too tempting to resist. The driver halted the buggy and turned to the Chofetz Chaim. "Rebbe," he whispered, "I'm going to help myself to some of that fruit. Keep watch and shout if you see anyone coming." The Chofetz Chaim nodded, his eyes reflecting a deep understanding of human nature. The driver darted toward the orchard, his hands reaching out to pluck the forbidden bounty. Moments passed, and the driver had just begun to fill his pockets with fruit when a sudden cry pierced the air. "He's watching!" Startled, the driver dropped the fruit and spun around, his eyes darting in every direction. To his bewilderment, there was no one in sight. He looked back at the Chofetz Chaim, who was sitting calmly in the buggy. "Rebbe," the driver stammered, "I don't see anyone. Who's watching?" The Chofetz Chaim's face softened with a compassionate smile. "My dear friend," he said, "Hashem is watching. The Creator of the universe sees all our actions, whether we are in a crowded market or a deserted field. We are never truly alone, and we cannot hide our deeds from the One who sees all." The driver's face flushed with a mix of shame and realization. He walked back to the buggy, empty-handed and humbled. As they resumed their journey, the Chofetz Chaim's words echoed in his heart, instilling a profound awareness of the Divine Presence in every moment of his life. From that day on, the driver carried the lesson of the Chofetz Chaim with him, a reminder of the eternal eyes that watch over all, guiding him to live a life of honesty and integrity.



Did You Know?

When a person dies, one of the first questions they will be asked in heaven is, "Were you honest in business?"

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Zoniac Challenge

Say What You Mean

Take turns being the "reader." The reader reads a scenario out loud. The partner has to come up with something honest to say that matches how they'd really feel, without being unkind. Talk about each answer together before moving to the next one.

Someone gives you a gift you don't love. What do you honestly say (without being mean)?

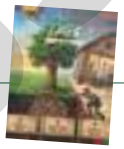
Your friend asks if you liked their joke, but you didn't get it. What do you say?

Your friend asks if you want to hang out, but you're actually tired and want to stay home. What do you say?

Someone asks if you're excited for a family simcha you're actually nervous about. What do you say?

A friend shows you a drawing they worked hard on, but it's not really your style. What do you say?

Someone asks how your test went, but you actually think you did badly. What do you say?



COVER UNCOVERED

This cover depicts how emes is the root from which good middos grow. The mouth symbolizes truthful speech, while rain signifies the blessing emes brings. The red line marks a boundary never to be crossed, and the apple thief reminds us that honesty matters even when no one else is watching. The sinking house illustrates that something built on dishonesty cannot last, while the static-filled phone reflects how dishonesty distances us from Hashem. The frustrated doctor cannot help the boy who isn't honestly describing his symptoms, illustrating that help (including self-help) requires honesty.

Zoniac Dilemma

Yehuda's class was doing a "Reading Marathon" all month. Every book you finished, you'd get a raffle ticket, and whoever read the most books by Friday would get to pick the prize for the whole grade, a pizza party, a trip, or other prizes.

Yehuda loves reading, but this month had been packed. Between his cousin's bar mitzvah, a cold that knocked him out for four days, and a math test he actually had to study for, he'd only finished two books. Meanwhile, his friend Shalom had read nine.

On Thursday night, Yehuda sat down to fill out his reading log and noticed the sheet just asks for a book title and "a few sentences" about it. No one actually checks whether you read the whole thing or just some of it. He thought about a novel he'd started over the summer and never finished; he read maybe fifteen pages in. If he wrote a few sentences about what he remembered, it would easily pass as a finished book. Nobody would ever know. It's not like he'd be making up a fake title. The book is real; he really did read part of it.

He picked up his pencil and looked at the empty line for book three.

Would writing down that book be lying, since he did not finish reading it yet? Or is it fine, since he's not making anything up, just... rounding up a little?

What should Yehuda do?

Daily Challenge

Today, say "I'm not sure" or "I don't know" instead of guessing when you don't actually know.

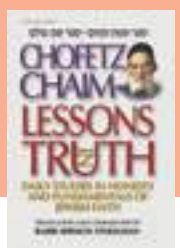
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Sources

1) Maharal, Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaEmes ch. 1, on Shabbos 104a
2) Shabbos 55a
3) Ibid
4) Brachos 4a
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6) Sefas Tamim, Ch. 6, 8
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8) Micha 7:20
9) Pirkei Avos 1:18
10) Rabeinu Bechaye in Kad Hakemach, Topic of Emunah; Sefas Tamim Ch. 7
11) Pirkei Avos 1:18
12) Maharal, Derech Chaim to Avos 1:18
13) Chofetz Chaim, Sefas Tamim, Ch. 6 to 7
14) Zecharyah 8:16
15) Yeshayahu 63:8
16) Sotah 42a
17) Ta'anis 8a
18) Yirmiyahu 17:11
19) Sefer HaChinuch #74
20) Shabbos 104a
21) Shulchan Aruch O.C. 61:3 with Rema and Mishna Berurah there
22) Rabeinu Bechaye, Kad Hakemach, topic of Emunah
23) Orchos Tzadikim, Sha'ar 22
24) Mishlei 21:3
25) Rabeinu Yonah on Mishlei 21:2-3
26) Chidah in Devarim Achadim Drasha #10
27) Tzefaniah 3:13
28) Orchos Tzadikim, Sha'ar 22
29) Sefer Chassidim 647; Orchos Yosher on the topic of Emes
30) Brachos 4a
31) Orchos Tzadikim, Sha'ar 22

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



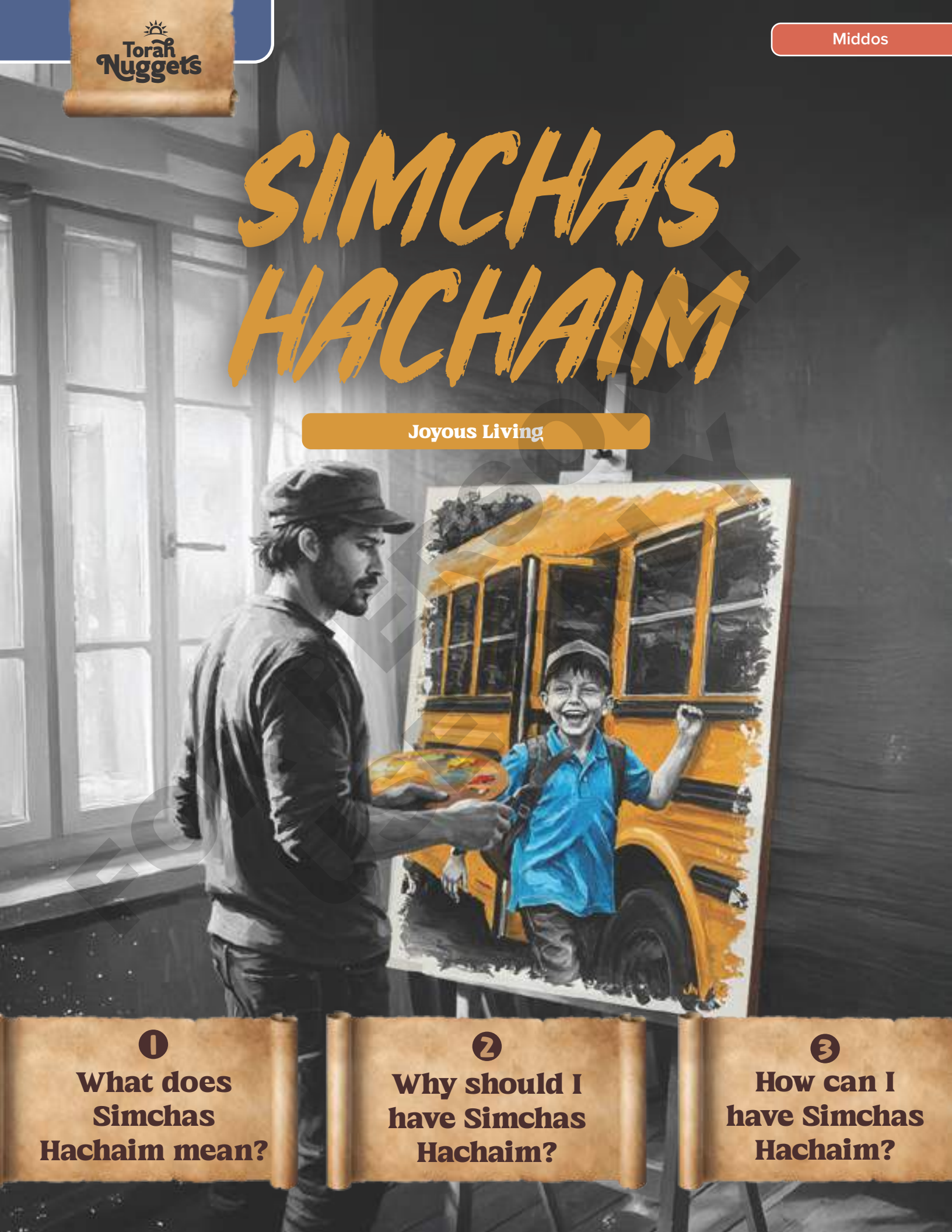
Chofetz Chaim
Lessons in Truth

Talmudic Debate
Both Are the Words of G-d

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/talmudic-debate-both-are-the-words-of-hashem/

SIMCHAS HACHAIM

Joyous Living



1. What does Simchas Hachaim mean?
2. Why should I have Simchas Hachaim?
3. How can I have Simchas Hachaim?

TORAH SOUL

What does Simchas Hachaim mean?

In a Nutshell

Simchas Hachaim is the inner joy of living with purpose and focusing on the good in daily life. It's finding joy in everyday experiences and noticing the positive in our lives.

Spotlight

Simchas Hachaim is a life-changing trait that anyone can develop, no matter their situation.

Black-and-White or Color?

Simchas Hachaim is an inner joy that is acquired by focusing on the good in daily life and appreciating our ability to do mitzvos and connect to Hashem. The difference between living a life with Simchas Hachaim and a life without it is like living in a world of black-and-white subtitles or a life of vivid color and sound. It is the difference between being vibrantly alive and just existing. Living with Simchas Hachaim means you are excited about life and everything in it. You look forward to waking up in the morning, to davening, to eating a healthy breakfast, and to swimming and sports!

It's Not What You Think

Don't mix up Simchas Hachaim with exuberance! Simchas Hachaim doesn't mean having tons of energy and talking with exclamation points, or being an extrovert and having tons of friends. It means approaching your life with positivity and enjoyment, which allows you to experience each aspect of your life with internal enthusiasm and appreciation.

Not in the Genes

You might think that if you aren't born with a naturally happy disposition, you'll never be able to learn it, like a talent for art or a high IQ. People often think, "It's not my nature to be happy, it's just the way I am." This is totally incorrect! Simchas Hachaim is not limited to your DNA; it is a trait that can be learned, developed, nurtured, and strengthened. In the beginning, it may take awareness and effort, but after a while, habit will become nature, and having Simchas Hachaim will become part of who you are.

Contagious



Simchas Hachaim is contagious! We are influenced by the emotional states of the people we interact with. A person who is cheerful, sincere, and upbeat will naturally pass their good feelings on to others. A happy person is like a light bulb in a dark room and a person like that is likely to have lots of friends because people want to be close to them to soak in their warmth.

Torah Challenge

In Pirkei Avos, the ethics of our fathers, it says:

- הֱוֵי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסֵבֶר פָּנִים יָפוֹת[1]

"One should greet every person with a pleasant countenance."

The great sage and mussar personality, Rav Yisroel Salanter famously said that though we may think our faces belong to us, they are, in fact, public property.

What do you think he meant by this?

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The Geshmak Life Guide

Having Simchas Hachaim means living with passion, warmth, and positivity. It means waking up excited, going through the day with energy, and giving others a reason to smile just by being around you. While some people seem naturally upbeat, the truth is, anyone can increase their Simchas Hachaim. It just takes intention and a little practice. One powerful way to begin is by learning to take pleasure in the little things. So many moments in life are filled with opportunity for joy, yet we rush right past them. When you walk outside, take a deep breath. Really feel the air as it enters your lungs. Look at the sky. Feel the breeze. These small pleasures are gifts from Hashem, and they are available every single day. When you have Simchas Hachaim, you're actually enjoying life, not just going through the motions of living. The more you practice this type of focused enjoyment, the more natural it becomes.

Another key to living with more joy is recognizing that you are already far richer than you realize. There is a famous story about a man who lived on the street with nothing but a cardboard sign and a plastic cup for collecting coins. What he didn't know was that he had a bank account with a million dollars in it. The money was his, but since he didn't know about it, he never accessed it. We are often like that man. We have priceless gifts that we forget to enjoy. If someone lost their ability to see or hear, they would do anything to get it back. That means the ability to see and hear is worth millions. So why are we not walking around like millionaires, delighted by everything we see and hear?

But even recognizing your blessings is not enough unless you have direction. A life with Simchas Hachaim is a life that is going somewhere. Too many people spend their days waiting for the next thing. They watch the clock at work, wait for lunch, then wait for bedtime, only to start the cycle again. This kind of life is empty and unfulfilling. To live with joy, you need to live with purpose. Ask yourself: What am I trying to accomplish in this world? What kind of person do I want to become? Write down long-term goals. Then break them into short-term goals. Where do you want to be in one year? In five years? Ten? Do you want to know more Torah? Be more patient? Be more generous? Set times to work on these goals, and review your list every so often. When you live with vision, even small steps forward feel deeply satisfying.

Of course, none of that is possible unless you take care of yourself. You are the tool through which you live your life. If your body and mind are not in good shape, everything else becomes harder. Getting enough sleep, eating nutritious food, and exercising regularly are not luxuries. They are the foundation for a vibrant life. Sleep restores your energy and clears your mind. Eating well gives you the stamina to face each day. Physical activity keeps your body strong and your thoughts focused. Even simple things like brushing your teeth, dressing neatly, and taking a refreshing shower can lift your mood and prepare you to live with confidence. When you feel good, you do good. And when you do good, life becomes more *geshmak*.

You do not need a perfect life to be a happy person. You just need to choose joy, live with gratitude, take care of your blessings, and share yourself with others. A happy life is not something that happens to you. It is something you build—one beautiful moment at a time.

How is Simchas Hachaim like cake icing?

Discuss how you could do the following with Simchas Hachaim:

1. A dentist appointment
2. Cleaning for Pesach
3. Sitting in traffic
4. Waiting at the DMV
5. Studying for your least-favorite subject
6. Taking out the garbage
7. Waking up early in the morning
8. Doing dishes after a big meal
9. Walking home in the rain
10. Helping someone who is being difficult



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Why should I have Simchas Hachaim?

A Mitzvah in its Own Right

The *simcha* that accompanies doing a mitzvah is a mitzvah in its own right![2] This is in addition to the fact that a mitzvah *itself*, if done with *simcha*, is worth **1000 times more** in *Olam Haba* than a mitzvah done as if it were a burden![3] While the reward for *mitzvos* is generally reserved for the next world, the joy that *accompanies* the mitzvah gets rewarded right now in this world![4] When a person does mitzvos joyfully, he will merit great understanding of Torah and spiritual growth.[5] The Arizal - one of the greatest Torah scholars ever - said his incredible achievements came from the fact that he did *mitzvos* with pure joy.[6] Besides doing *mitzvos* with joy, there are specific *mitzvos* connected to being happy: being grateful for what you have, cheering up sad people, making a bride and groom happy at their wedding, and celebrating on Shabbos and Yom Tov.[7]

Shechina Magnet

The Shechina (Divine Presence) only rests on someone who is happy when performing a mitzvah, not on someone who is sad[9]. Additionally, to properly absorb Torah learning, one requires a happy state of mind[10]. The sage, Rabbah, understood this so well that he would make his students laugh before teaching to lift their spirits, knowing they needed to be in the right emotional state to truly absorb Torah.[11] Happiness is essential to our service of Hashem because when someone is unhappy, it becomes difficult to concentrate on *davening* or learning. Plus, being happy makes you more eager and willing to do *chesed* and other *mitzvos*.[12]

Infinity

If we spent even just one minute contemplating the opportunities Hashem gave us just by giving us life, we would be bursting with joy. One second of *Olam Haba* is more pleasurable than all the pleasures that the collective human race has ever experienced in this world, from the beginning of all time until the end. Read that again - it's life-changing![8] Our sages tell us that one hour of doing good in this world is worth more than the entire Olam Haba, because the amount that can be gained in Olam Habah from every moment of doing a mitzvah is beyond all calculation!

Hand-Picked

Imagine a lowly person was picked to serve the king, wouldn't he be absolutely thrilled? Well, guess what, Hashem, the master and king of the entire universe, who has endless angels at his disposal, wanted and picked **you** and chose **you** to serve him, and He derives nachas and pleasure every time you do a mitzvah. How can one not be excited?!

Corny Corner

Why was the balloon so cheerful?

Because it knew how to rise above it all!



Tefillah Time

In the Pesukei D'Zimra of Shacharis, we say in Mizmor Lesodah,

"עִבְדוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה בֹּאוּ לְפָנָיו בִּרְנָנָה".
"Serve Hashem with joy, come before Him with song"

The juxtaposition of עִבְדוּ (service) and שִׂמְחָה (joy) teaches us that Simchas Hachaim isn't separate from our responsibilities—it's the very essence of how we should approach them. The verse continues with בֹּאוּ לְפָנָיו בִּרְנָנָה (come before Him with song), teaching that when we come before Hashem, whether in tefillah or in doing mitzvos, we should try to reach the level that we are so filled with joy that we are ready to sing!

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Pursuit of Happiness?

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book 3 pg.288

The Declaration of Independence guarantees a person the "Pursuit of Happiness." Is that the same as the Torah's concept of "Simchas Hachaim – joy of life"?

There is no connection at all between these two concepts. The Declaration of Independence is referring to what has become known as the American Dream, a beautiful home with a nice lawn, a fancy car, and extravagant clothing. These all stress the values of physical and mundane enjoyments, because they are based on the mistaken notion that happiness is attained through physical comfort and pleasure. But while a person may feel some fleeting pleasure when he indulges in physical gratification, these sensations come and go, and don't provide true satisfaction.

Material pleasures are shallow and fleeting, and can never provide a person with genuine inner happiness. And once a person's time in this world is up, it's all over, as none of a person's possessions follow him to the next world. On the other hand, the Torah's concept of happiness is the feeling of joy and contentment that comes from spiritual pleasure.

As the Mesillas Yeshorim writes, only connecting to Hashem brings true and lasting happiness, which is achieved through serving Him and studying His Torah. This is the greatest pleasure attainable, because Hashem is the Source and the highest degree of goodness and pleasure, and so connecting to Him is connecting to the source of happiness. Such joy has purpose and is deep and everlasting.

At the same time, the Torah also understands the need for a person to be physically comfortable and not lacking basic needs. However, there is a fundamental difference between this and the "pursuit of happiness." Pursuing happiness means viewing materialistic pleasures as an end unto themselves, which is not the Torah way.

The Torah looks at physical happiness as a means of helping us serve Hashem in the best way possible. For this reason, it is important to have our physical needs taken care of, so we can focus and concentrate on serving Hashem properly. We make sure to eat healthy, so we will have the strength to serve Hashem. We have cars that help us travel to our destinations, homes that provide shelter and a place to host guests, and clothing that provide warmth. All of these give us the ability to serve Hashem without distractions, enabling us to attain true Simchas Hachaim.

Imagine this: One man lives in luxury with a cook, maid, and pool, yet he's miserable. Another, a poor cashier in a tiny apartment, is full of joy.

How can that be?

IN SHORT: ***The Pursuit of Happiness stresses physical pleasure, which is fleeting and doesn't provide real happiness. The Torah's concept of happiness comes from spiritual pleasure, achieved by serving Hashem and keeping the Torah, which is deep and everlasting.***

The Richest Day of All

A poor man saved the prince's life and was rewarded with 24 hours in the royal treasury to take whatever he wanted. For the entire day, he neither ate nor slept, focusing solely on gathering treasures. This made him wealthy for life. Each year, he celebrated this day with a grand party. One year, surrounded by luxury, he told his friends: "Do you know what the happiest day of my life was?" They assumed it was that very day, at the height of his wealth and power. "No," he replied. "The happiest day was when I was in simple clothing, exhausted from not eating or sleeping, in the king's treasure house. Every second was precious as I became wealthier with each item I acquired. Despite my exhaustion, tremendous joy overcame any hunger or pain. Now I'm accustomed to my wealth and no longer feel that same exhilaration."



If we truly understood the value of Torah and mitzvos as the treasure house of this world, our immense joy would overpower any other emotion and give us the strength to overcome any hardship.

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How can I have Simchas Hachaim?

Like a Baby

The first key is firm trust in Hashem. When we truly believe Hashem runs this world, loves and cares about us, and does what is best for us, we feel happy and content, like a baby who is happily cradled in his mother's arms. Knowing Hashem is always caring for us frees us from jealousy, worry, and stress. We gain deep inner peace. Reaching this level of trust takes effort, but the happiness and serenity it brings are well worth it.

Stop and Smell the Roses

Life is filled with small moments that can bring a lot of joy if you take a moment to stop and enjoy them. Instead of rushing through a snack or zoning out while walking outside, try to focus on what you're doing. Savor your food. Breathe in fresh air slowly. Feel the warmth of the sun or the coolness of a breeze. These things might seem small, but they're free gifts from Hashem that will fill your day with Simchas Hachaim if you pay attention to them.



Patience!

Having Simchas Hachaim is not like flicking on a switch, it's a habit which is slowly developed with work and patience. Simply telling yourself, "I'm going to have Simchas Hachaim now" is not going to cut it – you need a game plan. Start with focusing on having Simchas Hachaim while doing things that you enjoy anyway, like eating your favorite supper. Once you get used to that, you'll find that this simcha will spill over into other areas of your life and you'll be able to turn moments that used to be 'blah' into moments filled with 'hah!' Once you've done that, you can start working on having Simchas Hachaim even in challenging situations.

Spread the Joy

Having Simchas Hachaim isn't just about you; it's about the atmosphere you create. You can directly influence the atmosphere in your home, and the same goes for your group of friends. You have the power to make the people around you enjoy life more. That means keeping calm in stressful times (like the hectic morning rush) and staying positive even in difficult situations. Making the most of enjoyable situations and diffusing tension with humor and a positive outlook will quickly spread simcha to those around you.

Score Goals

People who just drift through life doing the same thing every day often feel bored or stuck. But when you set goals—big ones for the future and small ones for now—you suddenly have something to aim for. That gives your life energy and meaning. Whether it's learning more Torah, improving your *middos*, strengthening your mitzvah observance, or building stronger relationships, having a goal makes every part of life more exciting. Write down your goals and check in on them every few months. You'll see the difference!

Take Care of Yourself

It's hard to feel Simchas Hachaim if your body and mind aren't feeling good. Getting enough sleep, eating healthfully, dressing neatly, and exercising all make a huge difference in how you feel. When you take care of yourself, you have more energy, better focus, and a stronger ability to enjoy life. You'll also feel more confident and ready to take on whatever comes your way. Your body is your tool for living. Keep it sharp and you'll live with more Simchas Hachaim!

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Flat Tire in a Thunderstorm

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, world-renowned author and speaker, authored a book, Gateways to Happiness. Many people were excited by his ideas, and he was asked to give a seminar on the topic of happiness, where he spoke to a standing-room-only crowd. In his masterful speech, he pointed out how every situation, when looked at from the right perspective, can actually be a cause for joy and happiness. We may not always be able to see it at first, but we can be sure that our loving Father has our best interests in mind, and we should rejoice with whatever comes our way.

At the end of the speech, Rabbi Pliskin opened the floor for questions, and a hand immediately shot up from a middle-aged man sitting in the middle of the room. "Rabbi," he began, "my name is Alan, and your speech was wonderful. But do you really think every situation is good? You have to admit that some things are just real bummers. For example," he continued, "imagine you get a flat tire on the highway in the middle of a thunderstorm, and you need to fix it in the pouring rain! How can that possibly be good?" The man sat down with a sense of triumph, and the crowd waited with bated breath to see how the rabbi would respond.

While Rabbi Pliskin was contemplating his response, another hand shot up right near Alan, from a man named Steve. Rabbi Pliskin called on him, and he asked if he could respond to Alan's question. Permission was granted, and Steve began his response.

"For many years, I was a workaholic, neglecting my health, not eating or sleeping properly. One day, I entered the doctor's office, the doctor took one look at me, and told me we needed to take some tests. When the results came back, he gave me a stern warning that if I wanted to live to see my next birthday, I must change my lifestyle. I need to stop working so many hours, eat healthily, and not exert myself in any way.

"I knew this doctor was not one to exaggerate, so I walked out of his office scared for my life. I turned my life around. I slept as I should, I ate normal meals, and, in general, I made sure to take care of myself. After one year, the doctor was amazed to see how much better I was, and told me that I was now as healthy as can be. I was free to run the marathon, and I can even change a tire if I want to!

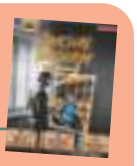
"I went out with my wife to celebrate, and while driving home in the rain, I heard a hissing sound coming from the back of the car. I pulled over and, lo and behold, we had a flat tire. It took a minute until it dawned on me that this was the big moment: I was now able to change this tire all by myself! As I changed the tire, my tears–tears of joy–started to flow, joining the puddles of water on the floor. There was never a happier moment in my life than when I had the opportunity to see that I was back to full health.

"So," Steve ended with a flair, "it is quite possible that changing a flat tire in the pouring rain can be something to be grateful for! And if you were always healthy enough to change a flat tire, you should certainly be thankful!"



How does emunah bring us real happiness?

Cover Uncovered



Like the painter bringing the scene of the child stepping off the school bus to life, Simchas Hachaim adds vibrant color to our everyday experiences. On a deeper level, the cover reflects the powerful idea that we shape how we see the world; we can choose to "paint" or view life through a lens of joy and positivity. It's like applying a happy filter to the world around us - with no app required!

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Simchas Hachaim is an inner joy that comes from focusing on the good in daily life and appreciating our ability to do mitzvos and connect to Hashem. Unlike fleeting material pleasures, Simchas Hachaim is a spiritual joy that is deep, lasting, and contagious. Simchas Hachaim is a trait that is developed through practice. The keys to Simchas Hachaim include: trusting in Hashem's care, appreciating small daily gifts, taking care of your physical and mental health, setting meaningful goals, and spreading joy to others. When we serve Hashem with simcha, ordinary moments are transformed into sources of spiritual satisfaction and purpose.

B'Simcha!

Ivdu- Ivdu,
Es-es
Hashem - Hashem
B'simcha - b'simcha,
Bo'u lefanav birnana - Bo'u lefanav birnana,
Bo'u lefanav birnana - Bo'u lefanav birnana.

Everything you say b'simcha,
every single day b'simcha,
Every bill you pay b'simcha, b'simcha tamid.
When you lose your game b'simcha,
When you miss your train b'simcha,
When you crash your plane b'simcha,
b'simcha tamid.

Ay di di dai di di dai dai yadidam Ay di di dai dai di di dai yadidam
Ay di di dai di di dai dai dai
ay di di dai dai
Ay di di dai di di dai dai dai ay di di dai dai ay dai di di dai
Ay di di dai di di dai dai dai ay di di dai dai dam

When you don't chap pshat b'simcha,
when you get a shot b'simcha,
burned the cholent pot b'simcha,
b'simcha tamid.

When your ketchup squirts, b'simcha
When you're feeling hurt, b'simcha
When you stain your shirt, b'simcha
b'simcha tamtid
Ay di di dai di...

Someone tells you no, b'simcha
When you stub your toe, b'simcha
When you're out of dough, b'simcha
b'simcha tamid
When your car gets stuck, b'simcha
Behind a garbage truck, b'simcha
When you have bad luck, b'simcha
b'simcha tamid

Ay di di dai di...
When you split your pants, b'simcha
When you forget your snack, b'simcha
All the jelly beans are black, b'simcha
b'simcho tamid
When it starts to rain, b'simcha
When you feel some pain, b'simcha
When you go insane, b'simcha
b'simcha tamid
Oh, everything is going wrong, b'simcha
I love this song, b'simcha
Oh, I feel so b'simcha tamid

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Zoniac Dilemma

Josh never expected to dread Fridays.

Back at camp, Shabbos was magic. The singing, the energy, the feeling of belonging—it lit him up inside. He'd come home inspired, determined to hold on to that spark.

But now? Life got busy. School, friends, his after-school job stocking shelves... By the time he got home Friday, he was drained. He'd throw on a shirt, help a bit, then crash on the couch, barely awake when Shabbos started.

His family did their thing—candles, kiddush, a little singing—but it didn't feel the same. The songs felt flat. The words blurred together. He wasn't upset...just kind of numb.

Then one week, his little cousin came for Shabbos. At the table, the kid was glowing—clapping, singing, talking about a story he heard in school about a tzaddik dancing on Shabbos even without fancy food or clothes. Yossi couldn't help it—he rolled his eyes.



But later, he wondered: what happened to the way he used to feel on Shabbos? The excitement, the warmth, that feeling of being lifted out of regular life? Was it just part of getting older? Or had he replaced real joy with just... being busy?

Could Josh get that feeling back by doing something different, or was it just part of life that the spark fades?

What do you think?

Zoniac Challenge

In life, we often find happiness in unexpected places. Sometimes we think that achieving happiness comes from receiving something big, but what if the real joy comes from giving? Think about a time when you made someone smile or helped someone in need—how did it make you feel?

How does giving fit into your understanding of Simchas HaChaim?



Did You Know?

It takes 34 muscles to frown and only 13 to smile!

Daily Challenge

Smile at five people today, just because.



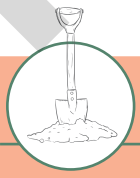
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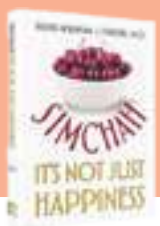
Sources

1) Pirkei Avos 1:15
2) Rabeinu Bechaye Devarim 28:47
3) Orchos Tzadikkim Shaar Hasimcha
4) Chida Devash L'fi Maareceches Mem, Ois Yud Daled
5) Peleh Yoetz, Simcha
6) Peleh Yoetz Simcha; Mishnah Berurah 669:11
7) Orchos Tzadikim, Sha'ar Hasimcha, Sha'ar #9
8) Pirkei Avos 4:17
9) Shabbos 30b
10) Ibid
11) Ibid
12) Orchos Tzadikim Sha'ar Hasimcha, Sha'ar 9

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Simchah - It's Not Just Happiness

R. Abraham Twersky

Parshat Bo: Happiness for Life

https://www.torahmates.org/jewish-resources/happiness-for-life/



Gateway to Happinesss

by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

TA'AVAH

Controlling Physical Desires



1. What is Ta'avah?
2. Why is Ta'avah such a challenge?
3. How can I balance my Ta'avah?

FOR PREVIEW

What is Ta'avah?

In a Nutshell

Ta'avah means 'desire' in Hebrew and is used by Chazal in the context of desiring physical pleasures, like food, money, and honor.

Spotlight

You strengthen your neshamah when you are stronger than your desires for food, money, and honor!

Needs vs. Indulgence

Ta'avah occurs naturally in every human being and is necessary for our survival, e.g. we need to get hungry for meals so that we'll remember to eat. The problems start when a person's Ta'avah becomes out of proportion to their physical needs. Fascinatingly, unlike humans, animals do not have the desire to exceed satisfaction. When a cow is hungry, it will eat grass until it is full, and no more. Human beings, on the other hand, have been given the challenge of controlling Ta'avah as an opportunity to elevate our *neshamos* and become closer to Hashem.

More Than Animals

Hashem says in *Parshas Bereishis*: נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ - *"Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth."* The basic meaning here is that man will rule over all living creatures. On a deeper level, however, Hashem is telling mankind that our *neshamos* are made in the image of G-d so that we can rule over our animal instincts.[1]

Kedoshim

There is a mitzvah in the Torah to follow in Hashem's ways, which includes being holy, as the *pasuk* says קְדֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי "You shall be holy because I am holy."[3] This includes not following one's desires, with the aim to eventually only use the physical world for what is needed to live.[4]

Impact!

When you work on suppressing your Ta'avah, not only do you elevate your *neshamah*, but you elevate the entire world. Since Hashem created the world for *avodas Hashem*, a person who elevates his *neshamah* through suppressing physical desire, elevates the world along with him. Conversely, when you chase after physical pleasure, you damage the world as you are doing the opposite of what the world was created for.[5] This is why chasing after food is considered a sin and we must do teshuvah for it.[6]

Who Rules?

Our *neshamos* are stronger than our Ta'avah and the more we work to control Ta'avah, the stronger our neshama becomes. On the flip side, if someone consistently gives in to their Ta'avah, their *neshamah* becomes dulled and it becomes harder and harder to say no.[2] Ta'avah is a difficult *middah* to conquer, and every small effort will be greatly rewarded.



Torah Challenge

In the desert, the Jews begged Hashem for meat, even though they had the miraculous monna. The Torah tells us (Bamidbar 11:4), וְהָאסַפְסֻף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הִתְאַוּוּ תַּאֲוָה וַיָּשֻׁבוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ גַּם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יַאֲכִלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר:

"And the mix of people that was among them desired a desire; and the Jews also wept again, and said: 'Who will give us meat to eat?'"

Based on the use of the word "Ta'avah," was this desire for meat reasonable or excessive?

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The Purpose of Pleasure



Separating oneself from physical pleasures is a high spiritual level. Surprisingly, though, it's not the highest or most ideal. A person who removes themselves from indulgence is called a *porush* (one who separates). But once someone reaches that stage, they are meant to strive for something greater: becoming a *kadosh*—a holy person.[7]

What does it mean to be a *kadosh*? The highest level in relation to *Ta'avah* (desire) is not separation, but transformation. Holiness means channeling desire toward serving Hashem. For example, savoring delicious food on Shabbos because it's *l'kavod Shabbos* (in honor of Shabbos), or enjoying a weekday meal while feeling grateful to Hashem for the pleasures He placed in the world.[8]

However, there is a crucial caveat. One cannot truly claim to be indulging for the sake of Hashem, whether in gourmet meals, luxury purchases, or public honors, without first learning how to say no. The person who eats on Shabbos *l'kavod Shabbos* must first pass through the stage of being a *porush*, where they practiced self-control.[9] If you can't say no to the second bowl of cholent, then your yes might not yet be coming from the right place. You have to earn the ability to tell yourself "yes, go for it!"

Consider the *Nazir*, who vows to separate from wine, grapes, and haircuts for thirty days to come closer to Hashem. When his term is complete, he brings a sin offering. Why? What did he do wrong? The Gemara explains that he caused himself unnecessary suffering by refraining from wine. And it continues: if the *Nazir*, who abstained from just wine, is called a sinner, how much more so someone who denies themselves all pleasures. Hashem created a world filled with goodness not to be avoided, but to be uplifted[10].

Rebbe Yehuda Hanasi, shortly before his passing, lifted his ten fingers and declared, "Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You that I toiled with my ten fingers in Torah and did not derive benefit from this world, even with my small finger[11]."

This seems puzzling. Rebbe Yehuda was famously wealthy. Rashi tells us he never lacked any food, even out of season. So how could he say he never benefited from this world?

The answer lies in this very distinction. Rebbe Yehuda wasn't a *porush*; he was a *kadosh*.[12] Yes, his table was full of delicacies, but he consumed them entirely *l'shem Shamayim*. He didn't indulge for personal gratification. Rather, he used physical pleasure as a vehicle for spiritual elevation.

This is why it's a mitzvah to enjoy tasty food on Shabbos, drink wine, eat meat, and buy special clothing and jewelry for Yom Tov. The key, however, is how we enjoy them. If it's just for personal pleasure, we've missed the point. The Torah's instruction to curb desire isn't about rejecting enjoyment; it's about refining it, elevating it, and using it in service of Hashem.

This concept applies to any permitted pleasure. As the pasuk says, *"In all your ways, know Him[13]."* If you eat to gain energy for *avodas Hashem*, your food becomes spiritual. If you buy clothing to appear dignified and make a *kiddush Hashem*, your wardrobe becomes elevated. If you sleep so you'll be rested to serve Hashem better the next day, your sleep becomes a mitzvah.

Hashem created this world to give us pleasure. He filled it with beauty, flavor, comfort, and joy. The real question is: for whom are we enjoying it? If it's for Hashem, then we're using the world exactly as intended. If it's just for ourselves, then we've got work to do. And that, of course, is the work of a lifetime.

Do you eat to live, or live to eat?

Tefillah Time

At the end of Birchos Hashachar, we say: **וְאַל תְּבִיאֵנוּ לֹא לִידֵי נִסָּיוֹן וְלֹא לִידֵי בִזָּיוֹן**, *"Do not bring us into a test, and not into disgrace."*

In this tefillah, we ask Hashem to keep us away from challenges that might lead us to fail, especially in areas where we are weak. When struggling with any aspect of Ta'avah, we often act impulsively, even against our values. With this tefillah, we ask Hashem to keep us away from situations where our self-control might break down.

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Why is Ta'avah Such a Challenge?

The Road to Aveiros

The body and soul exist in a profound spiritual tension, where materialism and spirituality are locked in constant opposition. When an individual strengthens their physical desires, they simultaneously weaken their spiritual essence[14]. This is why great people carefully consumed only enough food to sustain their souls. The Torah warns that unchecked materialism leads to dangerous spiritual consequences: it breeds haughtiness and causes one to forget Hashem[15]. Indulging every want can lead[16] one to throw off the yoke of Torah and drift towards aveiros. Luxurious possessions like fancy clothes, expensive cars, and grand houses fuel ga'avah (arrogance). It therefore does not pay to take more from this world than necessary. **Too much physical pleasure leads to aveiros!**

Use Your Brain!

Intellect distinguishes humans from animals. But a person who constantly indulges in physical desires, strengthens his physical senses and diminishes his intellect, and eventually can become like an animal, consumed by these desires.[19] Particularly, continuing to eat after you're full not only harms the body but also strengthens the *Yetzer Hara* and makes it harder to resist temptation.[20] **Chasing Taavah lowers your intellect!**



Corny Corner

What did the neshamah say after resisting a third slice of pizza?

I'm soul proud of myself!

Premium Fuel

Following one's desires strengthens the *Yetzer Hara* and allows it to dominate over the *yetzer tov*.[17] All actions stem from one's desires, and if a person can control these desires, they can align their actions with their intellect rather than their impulses.[18] Conversely, those who chase after pleasures are enslaved by their desires, and lose their self-control. Therefore, when it comes to committing aveiros, they will lack the self-control to resist temptation.

The Bottomless Pit

One may think that after indulging a desire, they will be satisfied and be able to move on. But in truth, Ta'avah can never be satisfied. In fact, giving in to one's desires makes those desires stronger until they take on a life of their own, distracting one from life's true purpose. Once accustomed to a lavish lifestyle, one finds oneself trapped in a cycle of work and worry, constantly striving to maintain that standard.[21] This pursuit can even drive a person to dishonest means to secure the money needed to sustain their desires. The *Aseres Ha'Shvatim*, who became consumed by physical pleasures[22], neglected Torah learning and, as a result, sinned and were exiled[23]. Similarly, Rabbi Elazar ben Aruch, one of the greatest sages, went to live in a place with enjoyable rivers and fine wine, hoping to focus on his learning. However, the distractions of pleasure caused him to forget his studies[24]. As the world modernizes and becomes more and more distracting, the intellect is increasingly clouded by the pursuit of desires[25]. It takes effort to transform from someone who lives to eat to someone who eats to live. The wise man understands that eating is for survival, not pleasure, while the fool lives only to satisfy his cravings, which distracts him from spiritual growth and meaning.[26] our mission in this world is to transform from someone who lives to eat to someone who eats to live. this takes effort. **The more you give in to your Ta'avah, the stronger it gets!**



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Endless Money and Honor

The Torah warns repeatedly of the dangers of wanting too much money and honor. These desires lead a person away from what truly matters in life and can cause them to become corrupt. There are some who say that the *yetzer hara* that once led people to worship idols was replaced by the desire for money.[27] The *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship was extremely intense, which tells us that its replacement - desire for money - is also extremely intense.[28]

The Mesilas Yesharim explains how the love of money can trap a person, since when someone desires money, it ties them up in a never-ending cycle of work, worry, and stress. The more money they make, the more they feel like they need, and the more they have to work for it. As a result, they can forget about davening and doing mitzvos, because they're too focused on making money. Even if someone has a lot of money, they can still worry about losing it, which also makes their life stressful and full of anxiety.

The desire for money doesn't just bring stress; it can also lead someone to do bad things. For example, someone might do *aveiros* just to make more money[29]. They might cheat, lie, or take advantage of others. The Mishnah teaches that the more things a person owns, the more worries they have[30].

But, as bad as the desire for money is, the desire for honor is even worse. When someone wants honor, they care more about what people think of them than what Hashem thinks. They want to be seen as important or better than others, which can make them feel like they are not enough if they aren't treated in a special way. The desire for honor is dangerous because it can make people do things they normally wouldn't do, just to look good in front of others.

There are many examples in the Torah of people who lost everything because of their desire for honor. For instance, Korach and his followers, who rebelled against Moshe and caused great damage to the Jewish people. Why did they do this? Because they wanted the honor of being leaders. They didn't want to accept that others had been given higher positions, which led to their tragic downfall when the earth swallowed them up.

The desire for honor is also what caused King Shaul to chase after Dovid and try to kill him. Shaul was positive that he was the best king for the Jewish people and would be able to lead them wisely, and he didn't like that the people were praising Dovid more than him. He wanted to preserve his rulership and ensure the survival of his kingdom, so he tried to get rid of Dovid, even though Dovid was not yet a threat to him.

What can we learn from all of these stories? The desire for honor can cloud a person's judgment and lead them to make terrible decisions. It can cause jealousy, anger, and even violence. If a person didn't care about honor, they wouldn't be as focused on comparing themselves to others. They would live a simpler life, worrying less about how they're seen and more about doing what's right.

Chazal teach us that jealousy, the desire for money, and the desire for honor take a person out of this world.[31] They create a life full of stress and unnecessary competition. Instead of focusing on trying to be better than others, Chazal encourage us to love hard work and avoid leadership positions that might make us proud.[32] They teach us that it's better to find any job we can and work hard for a living rather than rely on charity or waste time worrying that certain jobs are beneath us.[33]

The only true honor is the honor of Torah[34], the wisdom that comes from learning and applying Hashem's teachings. This kind of honor brings a person closer to Hashem and to the true purpose of life.

So, while it's okay to earn money and work hard, we should always be careful not to let the desire for money or honor take over our lives. These things are fleeting and can lead us away from what truly matters, which is being good people, learning Torah, and serving Hashem with all our hearts.

How much money do you think is too much for you?

Who's First?

King Yerovam ben Nevot forbade the Jews in his territory from going up to the Beis Hamikdash on Yom Tov, because he would have to stand while the king of Yehudah would get to sit. Instead he made two golden calves and convinced the Jews to serve them. He lost his *Olam Haba* because of his desire for honor. Chazal say that Hashem grabbed him by his shirt and said, "Do *teshuvah*, and then I, you, and Dovid Hamelech will stroll together in *Gan Eden*. Yerovom asked Hashem, "Who will go first?" Hashem answered "Dovid," to which Yerovom replied "If so, I don't want to." He forfeited Gan Eden because of his lust for honor.[35]

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How Can I Balance My Ta'avah?

Fill Your Mind



Our minds have limited space—what we fill it with matters. Just like a computer slows down when too many tabs are open, our brains can become overwhelmed when cluttered with unnecessary thoughts. If we constantly think about celebrities, fashion, or food, those distractions will occupy our mental "white space." But if we focus on Torah, chesed, school, and meaningful friendships, our minds will naturally drift toward those positive things.

Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, understood this. He wore the same black turtleneck and jeans every day to avoid wasting mental energy on trivial choices. As he explained, "I don't want to waste energy making decisions about what to wear." This practice helped him focus on what truly mattered.

We can apply this idea by making quick decisions when it comes to unimportant choices like which ice cream flavor to get, and instead focus on meaningful pursuits. Doing so will direct our desires toward what truly matters.

Drinking Salt Water

Indulging in physical pleasures is like drinking salt water; it might feel good for a moment, but it only makes you more thirsty and never truly satisfies.[36] Remember that physical pleasures are fleeting and will never satisfy you!

True Strength



The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos[40] asks, "Who is strong? One who conquers his *yetzer* (inclination). True strength isn't about physical power, but about self-control. Every person has natural desires, but greatness comes from using our mind and soul to guide our actions instead of just following our instincts. This kind of inner strength requires constant awareness and effort, like a warrior battling to stay in control[41]. The Maharal points out[42] that conquering your *Yetzer Hara* shows you are truly free—because if you can say "no" to your impulses, you will be a true *gibor*.

The Eye Sees



Have you ever felt perfectly fine—maybe not even hungry—but then, the moment you walk past a lavish buffet, you suddenly feel starving and end up eating way more than you planned? That's exactly what Chazal meant when they said, *"The eye sees, and the heart desires."*[38] Just seeing something can awaken a powerful craving. The Torah warns us in Shema, *"Do not stray after your heart and your eyes."*[39] Rashi explains: the eyes see first, then the heart wants, and that can lead to trouble. Taavah can actually blind us, making it hard to make smart choices. If we want to stay in control, it starts with what we look at. Avoiding looking at ads or scrolling through designers' social media feed stops your Ta'avah cravings at the root, helping you stay focused on your decisions and goals.

Daven!

Every human being is fallible. We were created with physical desires, not as a flaw, but as part of our mission in this world. Hashem gave us a *Yetzer Hara* so that we could grow by choosing the higher path. Struggling with Ta'avah doesn't make you bad; it makes you human. But when the pull feels strong, turn to Hashem and ask Him for help. Ask for help.[37] You don't need to wait for formal tefillah. You can daven in your own words, anytime, anywhere. Whether it's a quiet whisper before opening the fridge, a short plea before clicking a link, or a thought as you walk down the street, Hashem is always listening, every moment of the day. He is waiting, even craving that connection, and the moment you reach out, He is right there, ready to strengthen you, guide you, and help you rise.

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Let's Get Practical!

The best way to work on any *middah* is to make a very practical action plan. Thankfully, the *Chachomim* (Sages) have given us plenty to work with so that we can take practical steps to build up self-control muscles. Let's begin with some helpful thought processes, and then we'll move on to some actionable tips.

Chovos Halevavos teaches that indulging in *gashmiyus* (physical pleasures) damages a person's capacity to experience spiritual pleasure. Therefore, if a person is sunk in *gashmiyus*, their capacity to have spiritual enjoyment in both this world and the next will be limited. This knowledge encourages us to think twice before getting heavily involved in *gashmiyus* - is it really worth crippling our capacity to experience true spiritual pleasure in exchange for fleeting physical pleasure?[43] It's important to note that R' Wolbe is referring here to a person who is steeped in *gashmiyus*, not to enjoying the normal pleasures of life. (You don't need to worry that by enjoying your dinner, you're ruining your closeness to Hashem, particularly if you have in mind that your dinner will give you strength for *avodas Hashem*.)

The Gemara tells us that when Mashiach comes, Hashem will slaughter the *Yetzer Hara*, and there will be a *hesped* (eulogy). Why a *hesped*?! Shouldn't we have a party now that the *Yetzer Hara* is gone? The Gemara explains that the *tzadikim* and *reshaim* will both cry. The *tzadikim* will look at the felled *Yetzer Hara* and say "how did we manage to overcome this giant mountain?", while the *reshaim* will say "how did we not manage to overcome this thin hair?"

What is going on here? How can the same *Yetzer Hara* look like a mountain to the *tzadikim* and like a thin hair to the *reshaim*? The Maharsha explains that the wise *tzadikim* think about the future and are fearful of the *Yetzer Hara*. They understand that even if the temptation looked insignificant in the moment, the *Yetzer Hara* stealthily builds itself upon small victories until it becomes extremely difficult to overcome, like a mountain. *Reshaim*, on the other hand, see giving in to temptation as insignificant. They think, "What will happen already if I just do this or that?" Therefore, to them, the *Yetzer Hara* will appear like just a thin hair.

Remembering that *Ta'avah* builds upon itself can help us fight the *Yetzer Hara's* persuasion that it's 'just one more', or 'just this once. '

The Vilna Gaon compares the *Yetzer Hara* of *Ta'avah* to a sweet-talking lady because it convinces you that giving in to *Ta'avah* will be sweet. Rav Yisrael Salanter comments that *Ta'avah* is rooted in imagination, and imagination has no limits. Therefore, in our imagination, a chocolate bar can seem so delicious, it looks like *Olam Haba* itself! The way to combat our imagination, which blows *Ta'avos* out of proportion, is to think about how we will feel after we have given in to the Ta'avah. For example, if a person is dying for a bar of chocolate that they know they shouldn't eat, they should imagine how they'll feel once they've eaten it. Will it really be the amazing, must-have experience the *Yetzer Hara* is persuading them it will be? Or will it just be a fleeting enjoyment (that will coat their teeth in sugar and may make them feel slightly sick) that was totally not worth giving in to?

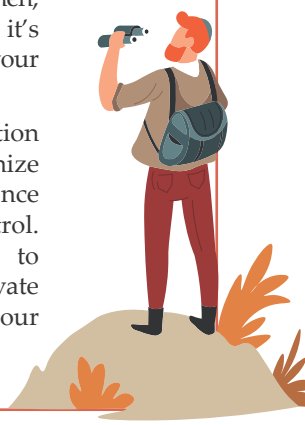
The Manchester Rosh Yeshiva once called a boy from America into his office. He asked him if he took sugar with his coffee and the boy said yes. The Rosh Yeshiva told him not to put sugar in his coffee for a week and then come back to him. The boy came back after a week and said that for the first few days, it was hard to miss out the sugar, but by now, he doesn't miss it. The Rosh Yeshiva explained that the point he was trying to teach him was that *Ta'avos* are not all they're cracked up to be by the *Yetzer Hara*.

R' Shlomo Wolbe gives a further practical tip for curbing *Ta'avah*: At the beginning of a meal, put the amount of food on your plate that you think you will need to be full. Then, he says, ENJOY your meal! Hashem wants you to enjoy it. Then, if you feel like having seconds, you'll know it's the *Yetzer Hara* because you put enough on your plate that would make you full.

To overcome the *Yetzer Hara* and the temptation of Ta'avah, we must consciously recognize the long-term consequences of indulgence and take practical steps to build self-control. By gradually strengthening our ability to resist fleeting pleasures, we can cultivate lasting spiritual fulfillment and deepen our connection with Hashem.

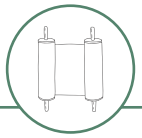
You have enough money for that second matching designer accessory, and it's free overnight shipping.

What can you tell youself to strengthen your self-control over your Ta'avah?



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Zoniac Zone



Steps to Greatness

Shlomo HaMelech teaches in Mishlei[44], *"Like a city broken through, without a wall, is a person who has no restraint over his spirit."* Just as a city without walls is left vulnerable to any intruder, a person who lacks self-control becomes exposed to the constant pull of desires and impulses. Without *gevurah*—inner strength to resist—we're spiritually unguarded, easily swayed by the temptations of food, money, honor, or comfort. The *Yetzer Harah* doesn't need to break down the gates when we've left them wide open. This vivid metaphor illustrates how self-discipline serves as a protective barrier for our neshama, shielding it from being overrun by momentary pleasures.

The Mesilas Yesharim teaches that developing self-control begins with mindfulness. We must first become aware of our actions, catching ourselves in the moment begins with mindfulness, which he calls "zehirus." We must first become aware of our actions, catching ourselves before giving in to impulse. This leads to zerizus, promptly and swiftly choosing to act in the right way. From there, we cultivate *nekiyus*, the cleansing of subtle desires, and eventually *perishus*, the ability to forgo even permissible pleasures when they interfere with spiritual growth. Change begins with small steps: consciously resisting just one unnecessary indulgence or delaying gratification builds the inner strength to withstand larger challenges later. By consistently exercising this "muscle" of restraint, we train ourselves to act from the soul, not the stomach. With practice, self-control becomes not only possible, but natural.[45]

AskTheRabbi

Why So Much Food on Shabbos and Yom Tov?

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book1 pg.272

All the Jewish holidays are so food oriented, with lavish, extravagant meals. Shouldn't they be days that focus on more spiritual stuff, like on Yom Kippur?

We were put here in this physical world, and given a commandment in the Torah to be holy. The simple way to accomplish this is by abstaining from worldly pleasures. However, that is not the ultimate achievement. The greatness of a Jew lies in his ability to partake of materialism for the reasons G-d has outlined for us, and connect it to Hashem, transforming it into something spiritual.

Enjoying food for the sake of performing a mitzvah is obviously easier said than done, but this is our mission as Jews. As Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the great sage and founder of the Mussar movement, put it: "It is easier to fast on Yom Kippur for the sake of Heaven than to eat on Erev Yom Kippur for the sake of Heaven."

It is important to understand that spiritual perfection can be reached only through a happy medium, a combination of both approaches. In general, one should be only moderately involved in the pleasures of this world. However, at certain times, such as on Shabbos or Yom Tov, one should partake of delicacies and other pleasures for the purpose of a mitzvah, thereby infusing spirituality into the material world.

Thus, a person enjoying his meal on Shabbos or Yom Tov with the intention of fulfilling Hashem's will is doing a great mitzvah. Similarly, one who feels the need for some relaxation or enjoyment, and has in mind that this will help him serve Hashem better, is turning the physical world into a more spiritual place.

Additionally, since a person is physical and associates with physical enjoyment, delicacies can actually enhance our service of Hashem. Eating good food puts a person in a good mood, and when in a cheerful frame of mind, one can feel more vividly the pleasure of celebrating the festival Hashem has given us. Thus, the food isn't an end unto itself. Rather, it's a tried-and-true way for a person to feel Hashem's goodness, and use this feeling to come close to Him.

IN SHORT: *An integral part of our greatness is our ability to partake of the material world, and transform the physical into a vehicle of spirituality.*

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Just Eat

The Oorah office was a whirlwind of activity, home to nearly 200 hardworking employees. But if you happened to wander through around 11:00 a.m., you'd quickly notice that the real work wasn't in marketing or programming — it was lunch strategizing.

A low buzz would spread across the office:

"What are you ordering today?"
"Can I join your order?"
"Wait, what's their number again?"
"Is the sushi good there or should I stick to salad?"
"Ugh, you're so lucky you can just eat a bagel. I'm on a diet — I brought carrots and chummus from home..."

It was a daily ritual. Delivery guys came and went like clockwork, arms full of brown paper bags. Employees wandered the halls, distracted by the hunt for napkins or desperately waiting for their orders to arrive. It got to a point where the lunch chaos became its own unofficial department.

Enter Rabbi Eliyohu Mintz. One day, after navigating a maze of pizza boxes and overhearing one too many debates about falafel vs. shawarma, Rabbi Mintz had enough.

Enough! The mission of Oorah wasn't supposed to be "Lunch Hunters Anonymous." It was about TorahMates, TheZone, kiruv, creativity, passion — not calorie counts and restaurant reviews!

And so, Rabbi Mintz took matters into his own hands.

No more food-induced distractions. No more Ta'avah-fueled office slowdowns. It was time for a revolution.

He hired a professional chef.

Thus, the Great Lunch Crisis was solved. From that day on, gourmet lunches were cooked fresh, right there in the office — healthy, delicious, and (most importantly) already decided. No more brain space wasted on sandwich decisions. Employees could now fully focus on building Torah projects...without simultaneously wondering whether they should get fries on the side. (And yes, the lunches are still amazing.)



Daily Challenge

At one meal today, fill your plate with a normal amount that you're sure will fill you up. Then, even if it's delicious, don't take seconds!



Zoniac Dilemma

Penina's mom just gave her exciting news: she can redo her bedroom. New furniture, new bedding, decorations—the works. And here's the kicker: she doesn't need to worry about price. Her mom told her she can go all out and choose whatever she wants to make the space feel beautiful and personal.

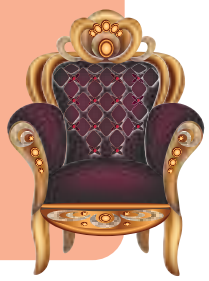
At first, Penina is overjoyed. She starts scrolling through design ideas and adding things to her wishlist. But then she notices something: she's being pulled toward the flashiest, trendiest items. The designer mirror. The name-brand LED headboard. The velvet chair with gold trim that's all over Instagram. The more she looks, the more she wants.

There's no question—these things are gorgeous. And she could get them. But deep down, Penina starts to feel a little unsettled. Is she choosing these items because they really reflect who she is and how she wants her space to feel? Or is it about the status, the aesthetic, the feeling of having something luxurious just because she can?

She thinks about other options—simpler, more modest furniture that still looks nice and would let her create a calm, authentic space. But then a voice in her head says, "Why not go all out? You have the chance! Isn't it normal to want something beautiful?"

Now she was torn.

What should Penina do?





Zoniac Challenge

For each of the options below, think of the extremes of Ta'avah and the opposite, and come to a "middle ground."

1. **Clothing**
2. **Home decor**
3. **Dinner out**
4. **Technology**
5. **Shoes**
6. **Job/position**

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Sources

1) Shaarei Teshuva 1:10
2) Ibid 1:30
3) Parshas Kedoshim 19:2
4) Ramban, Parshas Kedoshim 19:2
5) Mesilas Yesharim, Ch. 1
6) Hilchos Teshuva 7:3
7) Mesilas Yesharim, Ch. 13 and 26
8) Ibid 26
9) Ibid 13
10) Nedarim 10a
11) Kesubos 104a
12) Biur Hagra Shulchan Aruch OC 231
13) Mishlei 3:6
14) Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 248
15) Devarim 8:12 – 24
16) Mesilas Yesharim, Ch. 13
17) Shaarei Teshuva 1:30
18) Ibid
19) Rambam in preface to his Peirush Hamishnayos
20) Pele Yoetz Achila U'Shisiya
21) Mesilas Yesharim, Ch. 13
22) Shabbos 147b
23) Rashi on Shabbos 147b
24) Shabbos 147b
25) Chovos Halevavos Shaar Haprishus 2
26) Orchos Tzadikim Shaar Ha'ahavah
27) Baal Hatanya; Sefer Hachaim, Chaim Tovim 5
28) Chazon Ish, as per Bais Av 2:455.
29) Mesilas Yesharim perek 13
30) Avos 2:7
31) Ibid 4:21
32) Avos 1:10
33) Pesachim 113a
34) Ibid 6:3
35) Based on Sanhedrin 102a and Mesilas Yesharim 11
36) Mivchar Hapninim (brought in Igeres HaGr"a)
37) Tosfos Kesubos 104a, "Lo Nehenna"; Olas Tamid 31: Ya'aros Devash 1:7
38) Midrash Tanchuma, Bamidbar 15
39) Bamidbar 15:39
40) Avos 4:1
41) Meiri on Avos 4:1
42) Maharal, Derech Chaim on Avos 4:1
43) Alei Shur 175
44) Mishlei 25:28
45) Mesilas Yesharim, Ch. 2–13

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Duties of the Heart, Vol. 2, Chapt. 9

Parashat Shelach
What Are You Pursuing in Life?
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/parashat-shelach-what-are-you-pursuing-in-life/

Parshat Shmini
Say "No" to Yourself
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/shmini-say-no-to-yourself/

MINYAN

Davening with a Congregation

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1. What is a Minyan?
2. Why is Minyan Special?
3. How is the Mitzvah of Minyan done?

What is a Minyan?

In a Nutshell

There is special mitzvah to daven with a group of ten men (called a "*minyan*").[1] Such prayers are far superior to prayers said by an individual, and have special add-ons as well!

Words Which Warm You!

Tefillah is the mitzvah to connect to Hashem by speaking to Him in prayer. Since Hashem is holy (i.e. purely spiritual), we can also become holy when we connect to Hashem through prayer. This can be compared to a person who gets warmed up when he sits near a cozy fire. In the same way, when a person prays, he is thereby allowing Hashem to enter into his heart. When a person does this, he will become "warmed up" by being near Hashem, the Holy Creator of the World. This idea is the essence of what the mitzvah of *Tefillah** is all about.

When, in What Way, & How Many?

A person is certainly allowed (and even encouraged!) to speak to Hashem any time of day he wants, in any language he wants, and as many times as he wants. However, there is also a structured mitzvah to pray at three specific times in the day, using specific Hebrew prayers from a prayerbook (i.e. a *siddur*). These three daily prayers** are called *Shacharis* (Morning Prayer), *Mincha* (Afternoon Prayer), and *Maariv* (Evening Prayer). Furthermore, on special days (e.g. Shabbos, *Rosh Chodesh*, Yom Tov), there are also additional structured prayers (e.g. Mussaf).



*See the **Tefillah Nugget** to learn more.



See the **Daily Tefillos Nugget to learn more.



Spotlight

Every Jew is part of a holy nation, and a person will become much holier if he davens together with that nation, rather than all by himself.

But what does B'tzibbur mean?

Technically, a person can say any of the daily structured *tefillos* even without anybody else there. However, this *tefillah* would lack the full beauty of the mitzvah. Even though every individual Jew is special, a person is supposed to feel like he's part of a nation. A Jew should not be a lone soldier; he should join Hashem's army! In this vein, the Torah teaches that we must daven each of the three *tefillos* "*b'tzibbur*". This means "together with a congregation made of a minimum of 10 males over bar mitzvah (i.e. over 13 years old)". This is called "davening *b'tzibbur*", or "davening with a *minyan*".

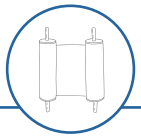
Tefillah vs. Tefillah B'tzibbur

If a person davens on his own, Hashem certainly listens. But whether or not Hashem grants this individual's requests depends on this individual's spiritual bank account. Did this individual do enough mitzvos to make him deserve what he's praying for? Maybe not! But if a person davens with a minyan, even if you as an individual do not have enough mitzvos to deserve it, Hashem looks at the collective mitzvos of the entire minyan! As long as there are enough mitzvos added up from all the members of the minyan put together, Hashem is willing to accept your *tefillah*, even if you personally don't deserve it![2]

Torah Challenge

The Gemara[3] says that the obligation to daven with a *minyan* is sourced in the *pasuk*[4] וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - "And I [Hashem] will be sanctified within the Children of Israel". The root of the Hebrew word "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי" is ק ד ש - which means "holiness". Can you explain why this word is being used in the context of the requirement to daven with a *minyan*?

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The Power of Ten

The Gemara[5] teaches a halacha: a *minyan* is a minimum of ten men. While certainly we can daven with a large group of people, a *minyan* must have a minimum of ten men. Less than this would be considered a bunch of individuals, not a "group". Why? Where in the Torah do we see that there is a power of specifically at least ten men?

The Gemara answers that we see this from the Jewish spies who went from the desert to spy on Israel before Bnei Yisrael went to conquer it. There were twelve spies, one from each of the twelve tribes. They unfortunately came back with a negative report about Israel. They did the terrible sin of *lashon horah*. They convinced Bnei Yisrael that it was too dangerous to conquer it, and Hashem angrily said "How long will this evil group [endure]?"[6] Hashem punished them right away that they would die rather than enter Israel.

That's what happened to what Hashem called "this evil group." But let's think about it. How many of the twelve spies were actually evil? The answer is: only ten. This is because two of them (Yehoshua and Calev) did not speak badly. The "evil group" only had 10 members.

The Gemara explains that we learn something very important from here. If you want to know when a bunch of individuals go from beings simply individuals and they actually become something called a "group", the answer is seen clearly from the spies. A "group" is ten men! Now we know how many people are needed for the davening group called a "minyan"! We need a minimum of ten men – just like the group of the ten spies.

However, even though the *halacha* and its source are now clear, there is still another Torah message, as follows. One will note that the only way we know that a *minyan* for davening must be made up of a minimum of ten men is because of the story about people who are not so good, i.e. the spies. The matter seems astonishing. Davening with a *minyan* is something which causes holiness to come to the world. But wicked people like the spies cause evil, not holiness! Why is there a linkage in the Gemara between holy groups and wicked groups?

The answer is that the Gemara is teaching us the power of a group. When ten Jews get together, they have nuclear ability to do tremendous things. But since human beings have free will, they can choose what to do with that ability. They can do things which are tremendously good – like davening with a *minyan*, or they can do things which are tremendously evil – like turn a whole nation to listen to *lashon harah* (evil speech). Whatever a person does when he is on his own will be multiplied when he does it with a group. A single person can speak *lashon harah*, but it is much worse when he does it with a group. Similarly, a single person can daven on his own, but we are not supposed to just be on our own. A Jew is supposed to be part of a greater whole, and that's why we are commanded to daven with a *minyan*! May Hashem bless us to know how to join with a group to do tremendously good and holy things.

Can you think of times you failed in individual work, as opposed to when the power of the many made you succeed?



Last Chance!



Reb Leib Sara was once in a town for Yom Kippur. They told him that there were only eight Jewish men in that town, and he was the ninth! Reb Leib asked "Are there any Jewish men nearby?" They answered: "Only the elderly *poritz (land-owner)* who is anti-religious. Reb Leib walked into the *poritz's* house and declared, "A Jew can acquire the World to Come in one hour. This is your hour! Come be the tenth man!" Once in shul, the *poritz* started crying in repentance. He stayed the entire Yom Kippur as the tenth man. Then, as the final words were said, the *poritz* fell down and passed away. Reb Leib declared, "Hashem gave him one last chance! He was the tenth in our minyan, and he did teshuva! The *poritz* will go to Olam Haba!"

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Why is Minyan Special?

Who is #11?

We know that a *minyan* has ten people. But really, every *minyan* actually has 11 members! This is because whenever ten men get together to daven, Hashem also joins the group![8] Why does Hashem want to join the minyan instead of just listening from up in Heaven? The answer is: it's like a king and his subjects. There are many individuals throughout a king's kingdom who want to meet personally with the king. Each individual can try to get a meeting, but it's likely that the king will only allow the individual to send him a message instead of meeting in person. However, if a significantly-sized group gets together, we can understand that this would be a case when the king will meet them in person.

Give & Take

Why does davening with a *minyan* make you holier? It's because the *pasuk* says[7] about when we gather in *shul* to daven with a minyan, "And I [Hashem] will be sanctified within the Children of Israel". The idea of "sanctifying Hashem" means to declare that He is special and holy. When we give that gift to Hashem, Hashem gives us a gift back – by declaring that we should become special and holy as well.

First 10 are the Best

Every member of the congregation gets the mitzvah of Tefilla B'Tzibbur - even if 100 people are there! However, the first ten men to come are the ones who cause Hashem to join! Therefore, they get the same amount of collective reward like all the people who come after them![9]



Korny Korner

What is the best way to describe a guy who is really particular about always davening with a minyan?

Ten-acious!

Why Wake up?

Each of the three daily *tefillos* can provide a different type of challenge. Regarding *Shacharis*, a person can find it very difficult to get himself out of bed in the morning to go to shul and daven with a minyan. This is often particularly difficult because Shacharis must be recited before a specific time of day! For *Mincha*, a person can find it challenging to stop in middle of a busy day to take time to step out from work to join a minyan. When it comes to *Maariv*, a person might find it difficult to stay awake long enough to go to shul after sunset in the long summer months when sunset is very late.

All of these challenges are worth it because davening with a minyan is like having a direct meeting with the King – Hashem. If you had an opportunity to meet a president or prime minister, you would jump out of bed as early as needed, or stay up late for it, or travel as far as needed. For the King of kings, it's certainly worthwhile.



The Holiest Number

It is clear that 10 is a holy number. This is the reason why a *minyan* for davening must also have at least 10 people. We see how special the number ten is from the fact that some of the most famous stories in the Torah center around this number. One example is that *Parshas Bereishis* describes how Hashem created the world by declaring for each category "Let there be _____". How many times did Hashem say this phrase? Ten! Another example is that when Hashem saved the Jewish People from Egypt by striking the evil Egyptians, how many plagues did Hashem send? Ten! Yet a 3rd example is that when Hashem gave us the *Luchos* (tablets), how many commandments were written on them? I'm sure you can guess – ten! And I'm sure you can find more stories with this number!

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Minyan gives the World Meaning

A person might think that davening with a *minyan* is just simply one of the many mitzvos we do, but is not necessarily more special than any other mitzvah. But in reality, davening with a *minyan* is possibly one of the most important mitzvos that a person can ever do. More so, it can be said that Hashem created the world for one reason - in order so that people would daven with a *minyan*!! Now, this is a very radical statement. How can this possibly be explained? The answer is as follows.

The great *Ramban*[10] explains that there is nothing more valuable in Hashem's eyes than when people admit and recognize that He is the King who created the world so long ago, and is still running the world today. In the earlier days of the history of the world, people used to recognize this fact automatically as an obvious truth. But over time, people stopped seeing this clearly. One way for Hashem to show that He is really running the show is by making open miracles. However, Hashem doesn't want to make open miracles every day – because that's not how the world is supposed to work. So Hashem decided that He would choose one time to go all-out with amazing miracles to show that He exists and has the power to do everything and anything. That one time was when He performed the ten plagues to take us out of Egypt. Those incredible miracles decisively showed everyone that He is in full control, and that is why it's so important to always remember what happened at that time.

There are so many things we do to show that we remember Hashem's kingship and control. For example, we put a *mezuzah* on every door to remember that Hashem is in that room, we eat *matzah* on Pesach, and we eat in a *sukkah* on Sukkos! But the Ramban adds that every single day, three times a day, we have the opportunity to collectively declare as a nation that we recognize Hashem – and that is when we daven *Shacharis*, *Mincha*, and *Maariv* in *shul* with a *minyan*.

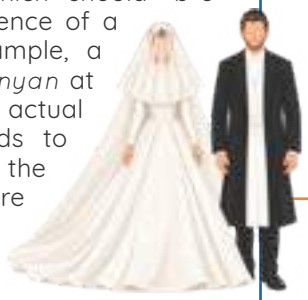
The *Ramban* never exaggerated when he spoke, and yet, he describes this idea with the following astounding words: "All mitzvos are intended to cause faith in Hashem, meaning – that we admit and recognize that He created us. This is the purpose Hashem had in mind for creating the world. Hashem has no greater desire for the creations of our world than for them to all admit and recognize that He created them. This is why we raise our voices in *shul*, and this is why it's so special to daven with a *minyan* in *shul*. It's so special because it is a way for us to gather together and declare to Hashem "We are Your creations!"

The above quote from the *Ramban* is all we need to realize why it is so incredibly special and important to not just daven, but to daven in *shul* with a *minyan*. It is a mitzvah, but it's also so much more. It's one of the most special mitzvos in the Torah, and it's a way to fulfill Hashem's plan which He had in mind when He created the entire world. May Hashem bless us to succeed in this mitzvah, and to make Him very proud!

How is the mitzvah of davening with a minyan related to the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem?

Did You Know?

Did you know that besides for davening, there are other times when a *minyan* of ten men is needed to do a mitzvah? One example is when it comes to reciting the seven special *brachos* for a bride and groom in the post-wedding week of celebrations. This can only be done if a *minyan* is present.[11] The same goes for reciting *Kaddish*[12] - like at a funeral. However, there are even certain events which are not prayer-related which should be done in the presence of a *minyan*. For example, a *bris*[13]. While a *minyan* at a bris is not an actual obligation, it adds to the beauty of the mitzvah. There are many examples like this.[14]



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How is the Mitzvah of Minyan done?

Where oh Where?

Technically, the mitzvah of davening with a *minyan* can be done in any place where 10 men gather. You can find a *minyan* in the airport, or even on the plane (in that small room in back)! You can make a *minyan* at work by lunch break, or you can make a *minyan* in the parking lot of Six Flags! Any place ten adult Jewish men gather becomes a place of holiness. However, the mitzvah of davening with a *minyan* should ideally be done in a *shul*. This is for two reasons. Firstly, a *shul* doesn't have other distractions. Secondly, a *shul** is intrinsically a holy place, so it's more proper to pray there.

What's Done Differently?

The content which is prayed in the daily *tefillos* is not identical to the content which is said when there is a *minyan*. This is because there are certain parts to the prayers which are called *devarim she'b'kedusha* - "extra holy parts". Since these parts are extra special and holy, an individual who is praying by himself does not get the privilege of saying them. These extra special parts can only be said when there is a *minyan* davening together.

Here are some examples of the extra-special parts:

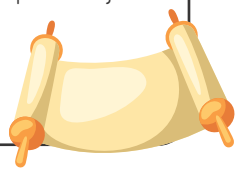
- *Kaddish* – the special, Aramaic prayer which is said a number of times throughout each *tefillah*
- *Barchu* – the one-liner which follows *Pesukei D'zimra* and precedes the blessings of Shema
- *Chazaras Hashatz* – the *chazzan's* repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*
- *Kedusha* – the four lines of congregational responses during the *chazzan's* repetition of *Shemoneh Esrei*

Guys or Gals?

It is obvious that the most important players in a *minyan* are its attendees. It is true that the mitzvah of *minyan* can only be done when there are at least ten men present. But a woman or girl also gets a mitzvah if she davens with a *minyan*. The Torah does not allow men and women to daven in the same space, so every shul has a *mechitza* - a partition – which separates the Men's Section from the Women's section. This way, both men and women can daven with the minyan. The Men' Section might often be bigger because men always come to shul – since they are actually obligated to daven with a minyan. But even though a girl is not strictly obligated to daven with a minyan, Hashem will certainly reward her if she chooses to honor Him in this beautiful way.

Who are the Players?

In a *minyan*, an appointed person (the "*gabbai*") will hand out jobs. The most important job is the "*chazzan*" – the leader. The leader is also sometimes referred to as the "*shliach tzibbur*" - the messenger of the congregation. He stands in front and sets the pace by reciting the end of every paragraph out loud to tell everyone where the prayers are up to. The *gabbai* also gives out the honors of carrying and blessing the Torah on special days when davening includes Torah reading. Another important job is the "Baal Korei" – the one who reads the Torah out loud on the days when davening includes Torah Reading.



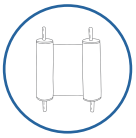
Did You Know?

The most special congregational response in Kaddish is "May G-d's great Name be blessed forever and ever in all the worlds." What are "all the worlds" referring to? Isn't there only one world? Our Rabbis teach us that there is much more to Hashem's universe than the physical world we see. Just like there are millions of stars we cannot see, so too are there many spiritual "worlds" that Hashem made that help keep our world running. These are the "worlds" that Kaddish refers to.[15]

*See the **Shul Nugget** to learn more.



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The 8 Most Powerful Words in the World

There are certain parts to the prayers which are called *devarim she'b'kedusha*, which means "extra holy parts". Since these parts are extra special and holy, an individual who is praying without a *minyan* does not get the privilege of saying them. These extra special parts can only be said when there is a *minyan* davening together.

One of these extra-holy parts is *Kaddish*. This short prayer is usually recited by the *chazzan* (prayer leader) a few times at different points in the prayer. (There are also points in the prayer when *Kaddish* is not recited by the *chazzan* but rather by someone who is observing a year of mourning for a parent who passed away.) The *chazzan* (or mourner) recites each line of *Kaddish*, and then pauses in between each line to allow the other members of the congregation to answer "*Amen*". It is a great mitzvah to answer "*Amen*" after each line in *Kaddish*.

However, while it is a great mitzvah to answer "*Amen*", there is one congregational response in *Kaddish* which is even greater than "*Amen*". This is the congregation's response to the second or third line of *Kaddish*. This response is "*Amen, yehei shemei rabbah mevorach l'olam u'l'olmei olmeiyah*". These words mean "I agree with what the *chazzan* is declaring about the greatness of G-d. May G-d's great Name be blessed forever and ever in all the worlds." This is one of the greatest declarations a Jew can ever make, similar to reciting Shema and other similarly very important prayers.

The Gemara[16] says that one is supposed to recite this line "with all his might." Some people therefore have the custom to shout these holy words as loud as they can. However, most commentators explain that "with all your might" means "with as much concentration as you can." It's a good idea for a person to memorize these eight words and their meaning, so he can fulfill the mitzvah of reciting them with his full concentration.

The Gemara even takes this discussion a step further and explains that the angelic court up in heaven sometimes decrees a harsh decree on a person. For example, sometimes a person will sin, and the heavenly court will therefore decide that he should suffer as a punishment, like getting sick. Sometimes a person will sin so greatly that the court will decree that he should get sick for a long time, even for many years. However, the Gemara adds that if a person fulfills this mitzvah of reciting *"Amen, yehei shemei rabbah mevorach l'olam u'l'olmei olmeiyah"* with all his might, the heavenly court will rip up any harsh decrees which they made against him. Even if the decree was so severe that he was judged to have problems for seventy years, they will still rip up the decree as a reward for the person reciting this line with all his might.

This Gemara very clearly lays out how important and powerful it is to daven with a *minyan*. When one davens with a *minyan*, he earns the right to include the very special add-ons which are so incredibly powerful and rewarding. May Hashem bless us to always daven with a *minyan* and be able to answer *"Amen, yehei shemei rabbah mevorach l'olam u'l'olmei olmeiyah"* with all our might. If we do, we will surely lead much more blessed lives.

What's a good technique which would help a person recite "Amen, yihei Shemei rabbah" with full concentration?



Long Live the King!

Imagine a king's coronation. If only a few people show up, it's an insult to the king. But if people come together as a group, it shows how great the king is. This is called "b'rov am hadras melech" - a bigger group brings more glory to the king." This is yet another reason why we must daven with a minyan. Furthermore, it's also a reason to consider that even if a shul already has 10 men, it's better to daven in a shul with many more! The more people bring glory to the king, the more the king will be so pleased and shower all of them with great gifts.



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Zoniac Zone

> "Nine great Torah scholars do not make a minyan. But one, ordinary Jew who joins them does."

Key Takeaways

Davening is a way of bringing Hashem into your heart, and then being warmed by His greatness. Davening with a minyan is a way to join with the rest of the Jewish People, and it multiplies the beauty and power of the *Tefillah* to be so much greater! Furthermore, davening with a *minyan* is like having a personal meeting with the King of kings – Hashem. Lastly, an individual does not have the privilege of saying the most special and powerful parts of davening, so davening with a *minyan* is so very worthwhile!

Minyan makes Miracles

Michael is a young man who has been learning and growing for a few years under the guidance of his Torah Mate – Menachem. Menachem has taught Michael so much about Torah and mitzvos, certainly including the mitzvah of davening with a minyan. Michael has absorbed these lessons eagerly, and has also shared them with his wife Yael as well.

The Thursday before Pesach, Michael was speaking to his neighbor Jonathan, and Jonathan started crying. He said that his mother was diagnosed with cancer, and he was terrified for her. Michael empathized with Jonathan, and told him that he should really go to shul to pray with a minyan for his mother's recovery. Jonathan got annoyed, and mocked the idea that this technique could help. The next day, Yael also was speaking to Jonathan, and she too pushed him to go daven with a minyan to pray for his mother's recovery. Finally, Jonathan relented. He called Michael and asked if he could join him in shul for the next prayer. The next week, Jonathan also joined Michael in shul for Pesach prayers, instead of going to work.

A few days later, it was Monday, on Chol Hamoed. Jonathan's mother went to the doctor for another scan to start planning treatment. But to their great surprise, the scan came back that there was no cancer there! It was all clear! Jonathan realized that with the power of minyan, miracles still happen. He quickly changed his working shifts to enable him to continue davening with a minyan, and his mother is still healthy to this day. All this came about through Michael's learning and sharing what he gained from his Torah Mate about the power of davening with a minyan.



Zoniac Challenge

The letters of the word "*minyan*" can be used to spell 10 words. Can you find them all?

Hint! There are **5** 2-letter words, **3** 3-letter words, and **1** 4-letter word.

1. minyan
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

ANSWER: 1.minyan 2.my 3.in 4.i'm 5.an 6.am 7.yam 8.may 9.man 10.main

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Zoniac Dilemma

Twelve-year-old Danny went to sleep-away camp this past summer. When he was in camp, he started going to minyan every day to practice for when he would be bar mitzvah. In camp, there was always a minyan for Shacharis, and since he was there anyway, he never missed even once! He definitely did not want to miss out on joining with the group and praying to Hashem as part of a nation! It was not such a challenge as long as he was in camp.

But then, camp ended. The last night of camp was a very late night, and he didn't get much sleep. He got on the bus the next morning and traveled all the way back to the city – very happy, but also totally exhausted. He got home and collapsed into his bed. He fell into a deep sleep.

A few hours later, he woke up and realized that the sun was going down! There was less than an hour left to daven Mincha. Of course, he could just daven Mincha at home, but he knew that a man is obligated to daven every tefillah with a minyan. Danny was so tired, and wanted to daven quickly in his room and go back to sleep.

Danny started an internal debate with himself. Should he go to shul? He really needed sleep, and he knew that it's a big mitzvah to take care of your health! Wouldn't he be more healthy if he slept more? And besides, he wasn't even bar mitzvah yet, so he wouldn't even count as one of the minyan! Furthermore, he already davened with a minyan 99% of the summer. Does it really matter if he missed just this once?

Danny yawned again. Oy, what should he do?



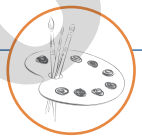
Hashem Needs Every Yid

At times I feel, why am I needed?
There's so many others besides for me.
At times I feel, why am I needed?
There's so many others besides for me.

Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid, every Yid.
Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid, every Yid.
Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid.
Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid.

At times I feel, why am I needed?
There's so many others besides for me.
At times I feel, why am I needed?
There's so many others besides for me.

Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid, every Yid.
Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid, every Yid.
Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid.
Hashem needs every Yid, every Yid.



COVER UNCOVERED



This cover depicts the power of davening with a minyan. Ten Jewish "soldiers" join Hashem's army by davening together, warmed by a fire just as tefillah brings Hashem's warmth into our hearts. Together, they approach the White House, showing how a group may gain a personal meeting with a president—and how a minyan brings us closer to the King of kings. The lone man at the ATM represents someone relying only on his own spiritual "bank account," rather than the collective merits of a minyan.



Daily Challenge

Find a minyan to join for the next tefillah you daven.

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Sources

1) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 90:9
2) This is based on the Gemara Brachos 6a, following the edition cited in Avodah Zara 4b in Tosfos כיון דאיבא ציבורא
3) Megilla 23b
4) Vayikra 22:32
5) Megilla 23b
6) Bamidbar 14:27
7) Vayikra 22:32
8) Brachos 6a
9) Brachos 47b
10) Ramban al HaTorah, Shemos 13:16
11) Megillah 23b and Kesubos 7b
12) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 55:1
13) Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, 265:6
14) See further in Pirkei D'rebbe Eliezer 19:6
15) Based in part on R' Chaim Volozhin in Nefesh Hachaim 1:20:5
16) Shabbos 119b

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*

Kedushah Prayer: *Toeing the Line*

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/kedushah-prayer-toeing-the-line/



Just One Word: Amen
More info



The World of Prayer
More info

TEHILLIM

The Book of Psalms



1. What is Tehillim?
2. Why is Tehillim Important?
3. How do we say Tehillim?

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What is Tehillim?

In a Nutshell

Tehillim (Psalms) is one of the books of Tanach. Its words are both *tefillos* to be prayed and Torah to be learned.

What is Tehillim?

Tehillim (Psalms) is one of the 24 books of Tanach (Torah, *Neviim, Kesuvim*) and is the first book of *Kesuvim*. Tehillim is made up of five books, corresponding to the five books of the Torah.[1] Altogether there are 150 *perakim* (chapters), each with its own message. To encourage people to finish Tehillim once a week or once a month, divisions were added to split Tehillim into seven days of the week and 30 days of the month.[2]

Who's The Author?

The Gemara[3] says that Dovid HaMelech compiled the *perakim* of Tehillim, which were written by him and 10 other people: Adam HaRishon, Malki Tzedek (a King of Yerushalayim in Avraham's time), Avraham, Moshe, Korach's three sons, and Heman, Yedusun, Asaf (these last three being Leviim who led the singing in the Beis HaMikdash).[4]



Most of Tehillim was written by Dovid HaMelech, but those written by others can usually be recognized by the introduction to the *perek*. For example, *Perek* 90 starts with "Tefillah l'Moshe," and Perek 78 starts "Maskil l'Asaf," as Moshe and Asaf wrote those respective chapters. Although there is no explicit mention of Avraham Avinu, Eisan HaEzrachi who wrote Perek 89, refers to him. Adam's name is also not mentioned, but he wrote Perek 92.[5]

Spotlight

Tehillim is an invaluable tefillah tool that helps us connect to Hashem in any situation.

What's It All About?

Tehillim is about the relationship between a person and Hashem through every circumstance of life. There are several recurring themes: praise and gratitude, like the sweeping "Hallelukah" of Perek 150, urgent pleas for help in moments of danger or distress, like Perek 20, and guidance on how to live, like the first *perek's* contrast between the righteous and the wicked. Tehillim also captures the unique bond between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*, as in *perakim* like 63 and 103, and it also teaches us lessons from history, with *perakim* like 78 and 106 that revisit our ancestors' mistakes in the *midbar* (desert).

What's It For?

Tehillim gives expression to the full gamut of human emotion, allowing us to put our feelings into words and channel them to Hashem. Saying Tehillim gives us comfort, connection, and merit for deliverance from any situation. However, Tehillim wasn't only written for times of distress. It's also appropriate to say Tehillim in times of joy, to give thanks to Hashem, and even as a general merit for *Klal Yisrael*. It's also important to note that Tehillim said in easy times can act as a merit during difficult times. It's always valuable to say Tehillim for one's future success, the future success of our children, and all of *Klal Yisrael*.

Torah Challenge

ה' אוֹרִי וְיִשְׁעִי

"Hashem is my light and my salvation." (Tehillim 27.1)

Hebrew Detective: Can you find the Hebrew words that mean...

My salvation: _____

My light: _____

Hashem: _____

Bonus: Why do you think Dovid Hamelech compares Hashem to "light"?

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Written for You

Picture a woman pacing outside an operating room, waiting for a loved one to come out of surgery, heart racing, unable to sit still. She pulls out a small Tehillim from her bag, starts reading, and somehow, uncannily, the words on the page seem to be talking directly to her, accurately capturing her fear. Or picture a father holding his newborn baby reaching for his Tehillim and finding that the very first *perek* he opens to seems to speak straight to that swirl of gratitude and awe. This happens to people constantly, in every kind of situation: fear, relief, grief, joy, and it raises a question: how can a book written thousands of years ago consistently seem to know exactly what a person is going through right now?

Part of the answer lies in the life of Dovid HaMelech himself. In his lifetime, he went through so many struggles and triumphs and experienced the full range of human emotions. There's Perek 34, composed when Dovid feigned madness before Avimelech after being driven out in fear for his life, Perek 51 which records a raw confession after Noson HaNavi confronted him following his sin with Bas Sheva, Perek 56, written when the Plishtim seized him in Gat, Perek 122 expresses Dovid's pure joy and anticipation of going up to Yerushalayim for Yom Tov, and Perek 131, which refers to feelings of inner peace, as just a few examples. This means that Dovid HaMelech wasn't writing from theory. He wrote as someone who had personally lived through the experiences described in Tehillim. Because of this, Tehillim functions as more than just Dovid's personal diary. The Malbim describes how Dovid gathered a lifetime of prayers, for himself, for the community, and for specific moments, and then compiled them into a dedicated book meant for the guidance of the individual soul, so that every person could see themselves reflected in it.[6] In fact, Dovid Hamelech davened that Tehillim be written for and available to later generations.[7]

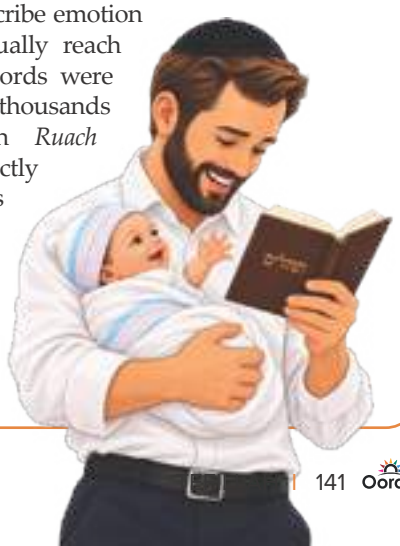
Another reason why Dovid's words are so applicable to us is that Tehillim was composed not through ordinary human authorship but through *Ruach Hakodesh* (Divine inspiration).[8] This is also why Tehillim is placed among Kesuvim rather than Nevi'im: it isn't prophecy, but it is Divinely inspired.[9] This detail matters enormously for the person standing outside that operating room. A purely human author, however gifted, can only write from his own experience and imagination. Since Tehillim was shaped through *ruach haKodesh*, Dovid's words reach beyond anything he personally lived through, anticipating the exact fears, joys, hopes, and language that a Jew would need in any given situation generations later.

This is why Tehillim is one of the most precious books in all of Tanach. Its Divine thoughts and true parables reach anyone who reads them, whether one who is doing well or in times of trouble, in such a way that makes it feel as though Dovid wrote his words specifically for them.[10] He adds that this is precisely why no other book of Tanach is used as widely as Tehillim, and why the sages of every generation have encouraged its recitation with real intention, as a good and worthy practice.

A person who has never opened Tehillim before may not immediately recognize which *perek* matches their moment, but the more familiar someone becomes with its words, the more they will relate to Tehillim. Familiarity turns Tehillim from a beautiful, distant text into a living tool that doesn't just describe emotion but helps a person actually reach Hashem with it. The words were always there, written thousands of years ago through *Ruach HaKodesh*, waiting for exactly this moment. All it takes is to open the page.

Why do you think familiarity with Tehillim can change the way a person experiences it?

> **"We must never think we truly understand a Psalm as long as we can view it only as a series of loosely-jointed verses and not recreate it in our own mind as a unified, harmonious whole."**
>
> *— Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch*



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Why is Tehillim Important?

Powerful Stuff

Dovid Hamelech wrote Tehillim with *Ruach Hakodesh* (Divine inspiration), making it a very potent form of Tefillah. Although the prayers we formulate ourselves are also important and valuable, there is a significant difference between these and prayers that were written with *ruach hakodesh* by someone on the caliber of Dovid Hamelech. The difference can be compared to a sharp sword versus a bow and arrow. A sharp sword penetrates immediately and powerfully, whereas the strength of a bow and arrow depends on the force with which it is launched. The tefillos that were formed with Divine inspiration are like a sword, whereas our own tefillos are like a bow and arrow – they have the potential to be very powerful, but depend on the intent and fervor with which they are said.[16]



Halachah Trove

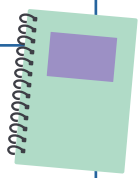
Tehillim is the source for countless *halachos* on *tefillah*. For example, there are seven brachos on the *shema*, three in the morning and four at night. This corresponds to the *passuk*[11] - שֶׁבַע בַּיּוֹם הִלַּלְתִּיךָ עַל מִשְׁפְּטֵי צִדְקֶךָ Seven times a day I praise You for Your just laws.[12] The reason why the brachah after shema in the morning is אֱמֶת וְיַצִּיב - *True and certain*, and at night is אֱמֶת וֶאֱמוּנָה - True and faithful, is to correspond to the passuk[13], לְהַגִּיד בַּבֹּקֶר חַסְדֶּךָ וֶאֱמוּנָתְךָ בַּלֵּילוֹת - *To tell of Your kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness at night*.[14] *In addition, the amidah (Shemoneh Esrei)* of Shabbos has seven brachos corresponding to the seven times the phrase קול ה׳ appears in Tehillim Chapter 29.[15]

Korny Korner



Why did David HaMelech always carry a notebook?

Because he was constantly making psalm notes!



Chock Full of Mussar

Tehillim is not only a sefer of *tefillah*, it is also a *sefer* of *mussar* (ethical teachings). Throughout its chapters, Dovid HaMelech teaches us how to think, how to respond to challenges, and how to develop the right *middos* (character traits). The following are just a handful of examples. We are taught to combine *emunah* with action: *"Bitach b'Hashem v'asay tov" — "Trust in Hashem and do good."*[23] We are reminded that doing good requires actively turning away from what is wrong: *"Sur meira v'asay tov, bakeish shalom v'radfahu" — "Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it"*.[24] Tehillim also teaches us the value of honest speech: *"Mi ha'ish ha'chafetz chaim... netzor l'shoncha m'ra u'sifasecha midaber mirma" — "Who is the person who desires life... Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit"*.[25] And when we face people or situations that anger us, Dovid teaches: *"Heref mei'af v'azov cheima" — "Let go of anger and abandon wrath"*.[26] By learning what the words of Tehillim mean, we discover practical lessons in *emunah*, patience, self-control, kindness, and integrity.

Great Dividends

Saying Tehillim carries tremendous *schar*. Dovid HaMelech prayed that the reward for reciting Tehillim should be equivalent to that of studying Negaim and Ohalos, which are the most difficult areas of Torah to understand.[17] This is because Tehillim is far more than simply asking Hashem for what we need. Through its *perakim*, we learn Torah while turning to Hashem in *tefillah*.[18]

Chazal teach that whoever recites Perek 145, Ashrei, three times daily is guaranteed *Olam Habah*.[19] Its alphabetical structure hints to the 22 letters through which Hashem gave the Torah, while *"Pose'ach es yadecha",- You open Your hand*,[20] highlights Hashem's constant care for every creature.[21] On top of this, Rav Yosi (a Sage from the Gemarah) declared, "May my portion be among those who complete *Hallel* every day",[22] he was likely referring to *pesukei d'zimra* in Shacharis, which originate from Tehillim.

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Rootless and Hopeless or Rooted and Fruited?

Perek Aleph, the first chapter of Tehillim depicts the ideal person. It opens, "Fortunate is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the company of scoffers."

Before telling us what the ideal person *does* do, Perek Aleph tells us what they do *not* do, namely, get involved in bad company. Note the progression in the passuk: walk, stand, and sit. This reflects human nature. No one starts off planning to be a bad guy. The slippery slope to evil starts with marginal exposure to bad influences, like just 'walking' by something. From there, it progresses to a more deliberate involvement, like 'standing' and observing. And from there, it's just a hop, skip, jump away from 'sitting' in the thick of evil itself.[27]

But the perek immediately makes an important point. Is the ideal person simply someone who avoids doing bad? Could he just make sure that he does not join the wrong people and otherwise do nothing?

The next passuk answers with the words "כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה. חֶפְצוֹ" — "Rather, his desire is in the Torah of Hashem." The Midrash explains that just 'not doing bad' isn't enough, we have to fill our lives with Torah.[28]

And then what will happen? וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל פַּלְגֵי מָיִם "He will be like a tree planted beside streams of water."

A tree is rooted. When the wind blows it may sway but it doesn't get blown away. It gets its strength from the roots that connect it to its source of nourishment. That is the picture Tehillim gives us of the person whose חֵפֶץ (desire) is in Torah. He is "*shashul*," planted beside a constant source of water. His Torah is not something sitting on the outside of his life; it is what nourishes him from within. The Midrash takes this word even further: unlike a tree that can be uprooted by the wind, this person remains firmly planted. "Even if all the winds in the world blow upon it, they cannot move it from its place.[29]

How does this contrast with the wicked?

לֹא כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם כַּמֹּץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְּפֶנּוּ רוּחַ

"Not so the wicked; they are like chaff that the wind blows away."

The *rashah* is compared to chaff: light, rootless, and carried wherever the wind takes it. The chaff does not survive long, whereas the tree not only survives, but *"asher piryo yitein b'ito"* — it produces fruit in its proper season. What is happening beneath the surface eventually becomes visible. Torah that has genuinely taken root produces something: actions, *mitzvos* and influence on others.[30]

This may be why Perek Aleph is the opening of Tehillim. Before the rest of the *sefer* takes us through fear, joy, suffering, gratitude, confusion and hope, it presents the foundation: Where are your roots?

Everyone experiences winds. Friends have opinions. Society changes. Trends come and go. A person who has no deep source of nourishment can be carried along by whatever happens to be blowing around him.

But the person whose *cheifetz* - desire is in Torah is different. He has roots.

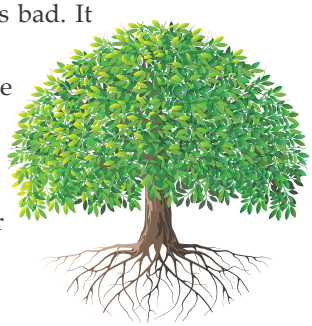
The final *passuk* therefore speaks of two ways:

כִּי יוֹדֵעַ ה. דֶּרֶךְ צַדִּיקִים, וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֹּאבֵד - Hashem knows the way of the righteous, while the way of the wicked is ultimately lost.

The choice presented by the *perek* is therefore deeper than simply good versus bad. It is rooted versus rootless.

Will we be carried wherever the wind blows?

Or will we become like the tree - planted deeply enough in Torah that whatever winds come, our *neshamah* remains standing?



Why might a perek describe a person's spiritual growth as something that happens "beneath the surface" before producing visible fruit?

Did You Know?

Perek 119 is longer than any other perek in Tehillim, with 176 pesukim. It is arranged in eight pesukim for each of the 22 Hebrew letters, creating an enormous alphabetic structure devoted entirely to the greatness of Torah.

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How do we say Tehillim?

Any Time. Any Day.

One of the beautiful things about Tehillim, is that it can be said at any time, in any situation. Sefer Tehillim is a treasure trove of spirituality that we can use as a growth medium and to deepen our relationship with Hashem. Saying Tehillim regularly is an excellent and highly beneficial practice. In fact, the sages of every generation have always urged its recitation with proper intention.[35] Dovid Hamelech himself used the challenges he faced as an opportunity to turn to Hashem and sing to Him. Just as a string instrument produces more music when its strings are pushed and stretched, Dovid Hamelech produced more songs of praise as he was pushed by the challenges of life [Ya'aros Dvash 1:15]. Throughout life's challenges, we too can use Tehillim to come closer to Hashem.

Individually

Tehillim has always been said as a merit for *refuah* (healing). However, Tehillim can be said as a merit for deliverance from all types of difficulties: troubles with livelihood, *shidduchim*, danger, and anything else. Tehillim is one of the first things we turn to for Hashem's help, with the *tefillah* and Torah learned through Tehillim acting as a merit. Having said that, it's important to understand that even if we don't see results in the area we were praying for, Tehillim (or any tefillah) is never wasted – Hashem knows how to channel it in the best way possible. In fact, *Klal Yisrael* have been saved from countless evil kingdoms and rulers over the *galus* thanks to the cumulative merit of Tehillim[33].

All Together

There are many instances where Tehillim is said in public gatherings. The Tehillim of Pesukei D'zimra are recited during the morning prayers, and Ashrei before Mincha, since one should praise Hashem before *davening*, and because Tehillim's role is to dispel accusing angels and open a pathway for *tefillah*.[34] Many congregations say some Tehillim afterward, as an addition, for Torah study, and to daven against harsh decrees. Tehillim is usually said at a *levayah* (funeral service) and sometimes at mass gatherings like a *Siyum Hashas* or *shiur* attended by many people. During difficult times for *Klal Yisrael*, e.g. when Eretz Yisroel is under attack, Jews all over the world gather specifically to say Tehillim.



Tehillim in Tefillah

Tehillim is woven throughout *tefillah*. Individual *pessukim* appear in *brachos*. For example, Tehillim 146 forms part of *Birchas Hashachar*, describing Hashem as the One who opens the eyes of the blind and clothes those who need them. Whole *perakim* are used in *pesukei d'zimra* (Tehillim 145-150), and *Hallel* (said on Rosh Chodesh, Yom Tov, and Chanukah) consists of *Perakim* 113-118. *Tachanun* (said after *Shacharis* and *Minchah*) features Perek 6 for Ashkenazim or 25 for Sefardim. The daily *Shir Shel Yom*, once sung by the *Leviim* over the *korban tamid*, is now said after *Shacharis*, since reciting the proper verse in its time is like offering that *korban*.[31] Rav Moshe Cordovero instituted *Perakim* 95-99, 29, 92, and 93 for *Kabbalas Shabbos*.[32]

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Carrying the Load



"הַשְׁלֵךְ עַל ה' יְהָבְךָ וְהוּא יְכַלְכְּלֶךָּ" - *Cast your burden upon Hashem and He will sustain you. (Tehillim 55:23)*

A poor, weary man was walking along carrying a very heavy sack. A wagon came past, and the driver kindly offered him a ride.

The man gratefully climbed onto the wagon but he continued holding the heavy sack on his shoulders.

After a while, the wagon driver noticed and asked him:

"Why don't you put the sack down? Put it on the floor of the wagon!"

The man replied:

"You've already been so kind as to give me a ride. I don't want to burden your horses by making them carry my sack as well."

The driver was astonished.

"What difference does it make? Whether you're holding the sack on your shoulders or it is lying on the wagon, the horses are carrying both you and the sack! Why make things harder for yourself?"

The *nimshal* is clear. Hashem is already carrying us, so we may as well put our bundle of problems on His shoulders too. In practice, this means not overly worrying about the problems in our lives and placing our trust in Hashem instead, because at the end of the day, Hashem is the only One with the solutions.

Reciting Tehillim at Night

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book1 pg.314

I enjoy reciting Tehillim, but an acquaintance told me that I should do so only during the day! Is that really true? What can possibly be wrong with saying Tehillim at night?

This is a general preference, not a prohibition. If you have a daily quota of Tehillim that can be recited during the day, then you should do so. This preference is not specifically in regard to reciting Tehillim, but is true for any study of the Written Torah. The simple reason for this is based on the Midrash, which tells us that when Moshe was in Heaven to receive the Torah, G-d taught him the Written Torah during the day. In addition, based on Kabbalah, there are other explanations for this preference. However, if nighttime is your only opportunity, you may definitely say Tehillim at night. Certainly, if a misfortune occurs during the night, one should respond by reciting Tehillim, beseeching the Almighty for salvation.

IN SHORT: *It is preferable to recite Tehillim during the day, but one may do so at night when that is the only time available.*

Siyum on Tehillim

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book3 pg.110

As a mother of children in shidduchim, I have been reciting a lot of Tehillim (Psalms) recently. It's taken me a few months, but I have finally completed the entire Tehillim. When we complete a significant section of Torah, we celebrate with a siyum. Is Tehillim significant enough? And is a woman able to make one?

When we think of a siyum, we typically associate it with the Oral Law, specifically completing a tractate of the Talmud — a demanding and lengthy endeavor undertaken by men who are obligated to dedicate time and energy to intensive Torah study. However, R' Moshe Feinstein ruled that a siyum can be made on Tanach as well, even though it is generally less demanding than Talmud study. Moreover, one does not need to complete all of Tanach — even finishing a single book, or even just one of the five sections of Tehillim, deserves a siyum. So, although the study of Talmud is reserved for men, women also study Tanach, and can therefore make a siyum as well.

But this applies to learning a book of Tehillim, not just reciting it. To make a siyum, a person must understand what he or she read. This requires studying with at least a basic commentary, such as the Metzudas David, which clarifies the basic meaning of the pesukim, along with the Metzudas Tzion, which explains difficult words. Most people who recite Tehillim don't fully understand the meaning of what they are saying. However, anyone who seriously studies a book of Tehillim, whether man or woman, should celebrate. Gather your family and perhaps some friends, serve some refreshments, and rejoice in the achievement of completing an entire book of Tehillim. This might even inspire others to do the same!

IN SHORT: *Anyone — man or woman — who learns and understands even one book of Tehillim can make a siyum, but not one who merely recites it.*

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Tehillim is the first book of *Kesuvim*, containing 150 *perakim* of *tefillah* written by Dovid HaMelech and other great figures. It expresses the full range of human emotions and teaches us how to connect with Hashem in every situation, through praise, gratitude, requests and guidance. Written with *Ruach HaKodesh*, Tehillim is a particularly powerful form of *tefillah* and carries great spiritual reward. It also teaches *halachos* of *tefillah* and practical lessons in *emunah* and *middos*. Tehillim is woven into daily davening, *Hallel* and *pesukei d'zimra*, and is regularly recited individually or communally for merit, deliverance and connection to Hashem.

The Holy Words of Tehillim

The following story happened to Morah Murik, the elementary school principal of several Oorah employees.

Whenever Morah Murik traveled to Eretz Yisroel, she had a special practice. Before leaving America, she would collect the full Hebrew names of all her students and their families. Then, while in Eretz Yisroel, she would make sure to go to the Kosel (Western Wall) and say Tehillim for each one of them. Each name represented a student she cared about, and she wanted to use the precious opportunity of standing at the Kosel to daven for every one of them.

On one particular trip, Morah Murik went to the Kosel with her list of names. Standing at the Kosel, she opened her Tehillim and davened for her students and their families, completing the entire Sefer Tehillim.

When she finished, she walked to the bus stop to take the #2 bus. The bus arrived, and Morah Murik stepped up to board. But as she started to board the bus, she opened her purse to take out her bus pass—and discovered another list of names that she had missed.



Morah Murik could have gotten onto the bus and said Tehillim for those names on the way. But she had come to the Kosel specifically to daven for each of her students and their families, and she did not want these names to receive anything less.

Without ever fully boarding the bus, she stepped back down and returned to the Kosel. Once again, she opened her Tehillim and davened, this time for the names on the additional list. Afterward, she returned to the bus stop and continued on her way.

Later, Morah Murik learned what had happened to the first bus. A bomb had been planted on it by terrorists, and shortly after she had returned to the Kosel, the bus exploded.

What had seemed like a small decision—to step away from the bus and walk back to the Kosel—had changed everything. Morah Murik had returned to the Kosel to say Tehillim and daven for others. She could never have known that those additional moments spent saying Tehillim would save her own life.

We do not always know what our Tehillim accomplishes. We may finish a perek or close our Tehillim without seeing any immediate result. But our tefillos are never meaningless. This remarkable story gives us a glimpse of the tremendous power of saying Tehillim and turning to Hashem through the holy words of Dovid Hamelech. Sometimes, the effect of those words may be far greater than we could ever imagine.

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Mizmor L'Dovid

Mizmor L'David, I praise you and thank you Hashem
For all that you give me, every day
This special psalm I will say

Shabbos will soon end, the darkness will soon descend
I'll keep the light burning all through the week
Until it's Shabbos once again

And when times are dark, I'll hold on to that spark
There is no need to fear, 'cause I know Hashem is right here
His guiding, caring hand, lifts me so that I can stand
I feel his embrace in each challenge I face
And I have the strength to withstand

So as Shabbos parts, another week starts
I'll keep the flame burning inside my heart
I know what to do, with The Zone I'll stay true
I'll be strong because of You

Zoniac Challenge

Tehillim Match-Up

Tehillim contains words for all kinds of feelings and situations. Read the *pessukim* below and match each one to the situation it describes.

The Pesukim

- טוֹב לְהֹדוֹת לַה׳

It is good to thank Hashem.

- ה׳ רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר

Hashem is my shepherd; I will not lack.

- מִמַּעֲמַקִּים קְרָאתִיךָ ה׳

From the depths I call out to You, Hashem.

- גַּם כִּי אֵלֵךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמָוֶת לֹא אִירָא רָע כִּי אַתָּה עִמָּדִי

Even when I go through a very difficult time, I will not be afraid, because You are with me.

The Situations

1. I need Hashem's help.
2. I want to thank Hashem.
3. I am going through a frightening or difficult time.
4. I want to remind myself that Hashem is looking after me.

Can you match each *passuk* to the right situation?

Bonus: Which *passuk* speaks to you most? Why?

Zoniac Dilemma

Tanya had set out to finish the whole of Tehillim. Her 37-year-old brother was still single after years of trying to get married, and she wanted the Tehillim to be a zechus for him to find his match. She'd been at it for 3 days, saying one perek a day. The problem was, that having mastered Hebrew reading only the year before, she had to concentrate to formulate each word, which made reading Tehillim a laborious and time-consuming process. On top of that, Tanya knew that Tehillim was full of deep, inspirational lessons, but she barely understood any of the words, let alone the meanings behind them. This made the task tedious and uninspiring. She didn't know what to do. She so badly wanted to reach her goal of finishing the whole Tehillim, but it seemed like a mountain too hard to climb and she knew she'd soon give up if she didn't find a way to make it easier and more enjoyable.

What could Tanya do to turn around the currently difficult and unenjoyable task of completing Tehillim to something she actually enjoys doing every day?



COVER UNCOVERED

This cover depicts Tehillim as Dovid HaMelech's songs connecting us to Hashem through every circumstance. The more Dovid was challenged, the more he sang to Hashem, like the strings of an instrument producing music when stretched. Dovid's sword represents Tehillim's power. A new father and hospital patient turn to its words in joy and difficulty. The burdened traveler teaches us to place our worries on Hashem. The flourishing tree beside water represents a person rooted and nourished by Torah.

Daily Challenge

Try to say one perek or even just a few pesukim of Tehillim today.

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Sources

1) Midrash Tehillem 1:2
2) Tzedah L'Derech 4:5 pg 220
3) Bava Basra 14b
4) Divrei Hayamim Alef 6:18,Beis 6:24, Alef 25:1
5) Bereshis Rabba 22:13, Midrash Tehillim 92:1
6) Malbim, Introduction to Tehillim
7) Midrash Tehillim 1:5
8) Shmuel II 23:2
9) R' Yosef Chiyun Intro to Tehillim
10) Ho'el Moshe Intro to Tehillim
11) Tehillim 119:164
12) Talmud Yerushalmi Berachos 1:5
13) Tehillim 92:3
14) Brachos 12a
15) Ibid 29a
16) Meshech Chachma on Bereishis 48:22
17) Midrash Tehillim 1:85
18) Ibid 1:5
19) Brachos 4b
20) Tehillim 145:16
21) Maharsha, Brachos 4b
22) Shabbos 118b
23) Tehillim 37:3
24) Ibid 34:15
25) Ibid 34:13-14
26) Ibid 37:8
27) Avodah Zarah 18b
28) Midrash Tehillim 1
29) Ibid, on Verse 3
30) Tehillim 1:3 with Eben Ezra and Radak
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33) Chiddushei Aggados on Sanhedrin 98a
34) Levush 1:9; Brachos 32a
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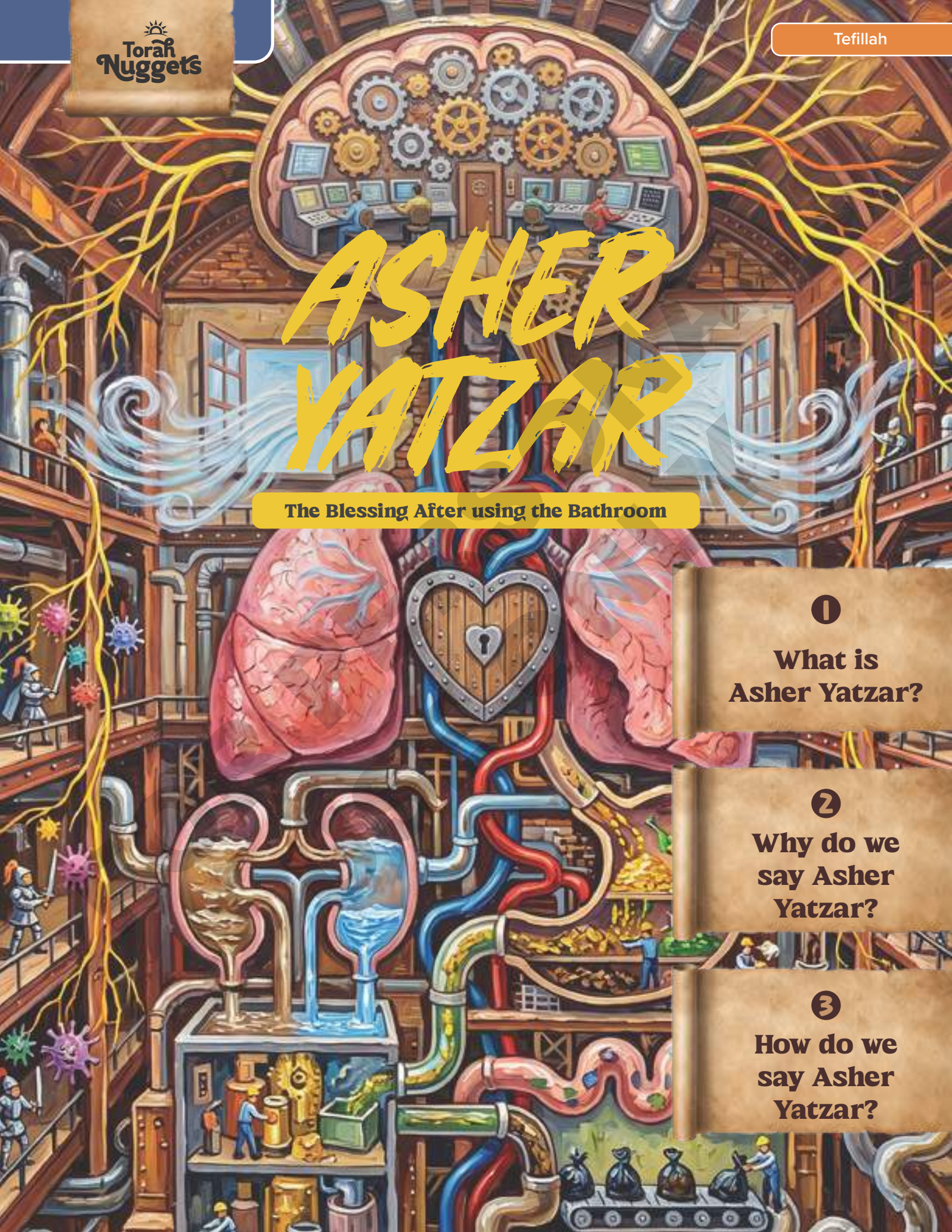
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ASHER YATZAR

The Blessing After using the Bathroom

1. What is Asher Yatzar?
2. Why do we say Asher Yatzar?
3. How do we say Asher Yatzar?

What is Asher Yatzar?

In a Nutshell

Asher Yatzar is a *bracha* (blessing) we say after using the bathroom. It thanks Hashem for making our bodies work perfectly and reminds us to notice the miracle happening inside us every single moment.

Appreciating Our Health

The bracha of Asher Yatzar, though said after using the bathroom, is not only about the bathroom. Chazal[1] composed it in a way to recognize the marvelous structure and functioning of the human body, and praise Hashem for it. Unlike other praises, Chazal did not want this said just once per day with morning blessings, but every time after using the bathroom.[2] It is important to utilize this bracha to focus and appreciate the ongoing miracle of the normal, healthy functioning of our bodies. Our bodies are a miracle, and Hashem is behind every moment of it.[3]

Made With Wisdom

Asher Yatzar thanks Hashem for creating our complex bodies *b'chochma*, with wisdom. Rashi explains that the body itself is the proof: it's so intricate that it shows just how wise Hashem is.[4] The bracha names two systems working in opposite directions at once: *nekavim*, openings like airways that must stay open, and *challulim*, hollow spaces like the heart and lungs that must stay sealed.[5] If even one stopped working correctly, you couldn't survive. When you say Asher Yatzar, you're acknowledging that the properly functioning, normal, healthy human body is a marvelous gift that Hashem has given to man.



Spotlight

Thinking about the amazing way our bodies work is one of the most powerful ways to see Hashem's wisdom and appreciate His kindness to us.

Best Doctor

Asher Yatzar ends with the praise, *Rofeh Kol Basar*, meaning Hashem heals all flesh. Rav Schwab teaches that a doctor can try to help prevent disease and sickness, but only Hashem decides whether the body keeps working. If our bodies could not remove waste, we could become sick and even die. Every time we use the bathroom, we are reminded of the incredible ways Hashem keeps us healthy.

Doer of Wonders

The second praise, *Mafli La'asos*, means "Hashem does wondrous deeds". There are three explanations for this.

The first is the miracle of breathing. Think about a balloon: one tiny puncture, and it deflates.[6] Yet your lungs, full of holes, keep working perfectly, breath after breath.[7]

The second is the miracle of digestion. Every time you eat, your body automatically absorbs what it needs and discards the rest.

The third, and perhaps deepest, explanation is that Hashem keeps our soul inside us, holding together two complete opposites, the physical body and the spiritual soul.[8]

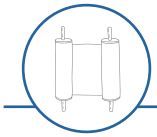
Tefillah Time

This is the main content of the 'Asher Yatzar' blessing:

...אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה וּבָרָא בוֹ נְקָבִים נְקָבִים חֲלוּלִים חֲלוּלִים גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדֶךָ שֶׁאִם יִפָּתֵחַ אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ יִסָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמוֹד לְפָנֶיךָ [אֲפִילוּ שָׁעָה אֶחָת] ... רוֹפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת.

...**Who formed** man with wisdom and created within him openings and many hollows. It is known before the throne of Your glory that if one of them were to be opened or sealed, it would be impossible to survive and to stand before You [even for a moment]...who heals all flesh and acts wondrously.

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Look Inward

Right now, without you doing anything at all, your heart is pumping blood through tens of thousands of miles of tiny blood vessels! Your lungs are pulling in oxygen across a surface so large it would fill an entire room,[9] all folded neatly inside your chest. Your kidneys are quietly filtering around 47 gallons of fluid today, keeping what your body needs and getting rid of the rest.[10] Your immune system is constantly finding and fighting off threats too small to see. Your brain is running all of this while also handling language, memory, and feelings, using less power than a dim light bulb.[11]

We live with this every single day and barely think about it. But Chazal said that noticing is exactly the point.

The classic *mussar* work *Chovos HaLevavos*, writes that the best way to recognize Hashem's wisdom and feel real gratitude is to look carefully at the human body.[12] Not big, complicated ideas. Not long arguments. Just the body itself. It is, he said, the clearest sign of Hashem's presence we have. It is simply there, without you ever asking it to.

What makes this even more powerful is how much we still do not understand. Rav Shimon Schwab pointed out that medical science continues to discover more knowledge of the human body and its miraculous workings.[13] Despite the enormous strides that medicine has made, a large part of the complex structure and functions of the human body remains unknown. Rav Schwab's point is simple: the body never runs out of new layers to discover, because it was made by Hashem, whose wisdom has no end.

That wisdom shows up even in the bracha we say after using the bathroom. *Asher Yatzar* talks about two opposite systems in the body. The *nekavim*, openings like the mouth and airways, are sealed while a baby grows inside its mother and open the moment the baby is born. If even one stayed closed, the baby could not survive. The *challulim*, hollow spaces like the heart, lungs, and intestines, work the exact opposite way: they must stay sealed for a person's entire life. If even one of them ruptured or became blocked, the person would be in mortal danger.[14] Even a small problem with any of them can make a person seriously ill.[15] We should be amazed at the marvelous wonder which Hashem has granted us when these organs are healthy and functioning properly.





Two opposite systems. Both essential. Both working at the same time, every moment of every day. Rav Schwab says this delicate balance does not take care of itself. Every moment that we are healthy, Hashem is actively keeping it going.

That same idea runs through the bracha's wording. Rav Schwab also explains why the bracha repeats its words, *nekavim nekavim, challulim challulim*.[16] It is not just a style choice. It is pointing out that a human being lives on two levels at once, body and soul. In Jewish thought, the *neshama* (soul) has its own shape that mirrors the body's. No other creation was made this way, not angels and not animals. Only a person. The bracha that starts with something as ordinary as a bathroom break ends up being about something as big as what it means to be human.

If something this astonishing happens inside you every single day, why does it take an effort to actually notice it?



And then the bracha ends the way it does. Manoach, the father of Shimshon, was told by an angel that he would have a son. In response, he brought an offering, and fire shot out of a rock to consume it[17]. The Torah calls this "*Mafli La'asos*," from the word "*peleh*," a wonder so astonishing it stops you in your tracks. Chazal took that exact phrase and made it the climax of Asher Yatzar. They wanted us to understand: the same *peleh* Manoach saw, fire out of a rock, is happening inside us right now, every time our bodies work. It is no less astonishing. It only feels ordinary because it happens every day.

That is the whole idea behind Asher Yatzar. It is there to help you remember what is happening. Your body is working right now because Hashem is keeping it going. The bracha is an opportunity to stop, look inward, and see Hashem in your own body.

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Why do we say Asher Yatzar?

A Thank-You Blessing



Your eyes have been blinking on their own thousands of times today, keeping themselves clean without you ever thinking about it. Your skin has been quietly closing every little scratch you've gotten. Your bones and muscles work together every single time you sit up, walk, or reach for something, all without one instruction from you. The Gemara teaches that Asher Yatzar was created to thank Hashem for a body so complex and so perfectly made that it just keeps going, hour after hour, without you lifting a finger.[18] The Orchas Tzadikim says that people eagerly thank a doctor who cures them once, yet Hashem heals and sustains every organ, without ever taking a break.[19] When we say "*Rofei chol basar*", we acknowledge the greatest Physician, whose care never pauses. This perspective can transform Asher Yatzar from a routine blessing into a heartfelt expression of gratitude.

Even Here, Hashem

As kids, it's easy to giggle at the idea of a blessing for the bathroom, it can seem like the strangest possible place for holy words. There's a bracha for seeing a rainbow and a bracha for smelling sweet spices. But a bracha for using the bathroom? Many *seforim* point out that Asher Yatzar is one of the only brachos about something so plain and private. No moment in your day is too small for Hashem. You don't need to be in shul to connect to Him.

Chazal teach that a healthy body isn't just something to thank Hashem for, it's what lets us learn, daven, and do mitzvos at all! Every time your body works right, Hashem is giving you the strength to serve Him.

Seeing Hashem in Your Own Body

Iyov tells us: "*Mibsari Echeze Eloka*", from our own bodies, we can come to know Hashem.[21] He means that when he contemplates the workings of the body and all its marvelous systems, he becomes aware of the fact that Hashem has created it.

You don't need to look far to find Hashem. He is right here, hinted to in the way your body works. Every breath, every heartbeat, every system functioning exactly as it should, all of it points directly to a Creator who designed it with intention and care.

That is what Asher Yatzar is. It is a genuine moment of seeing, stopping to look at your own body, and recognizing Hashem's hand in it. Imagine having that opportunity multiple times a day, every single day. The body becomes a window through which we can see Hashem.

A Walking Miracle

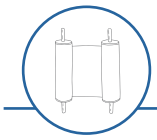
Most of us only think about our bodies when something hurts. The rest of the time, we barely notice the thousands of things going right. Your immune system has been fighting off germs all day before you ever felt sick. Your stomach has been breaking down everything you ate without any help from you. Your nerves have been firing off signals every second, letting you walk, talk, and think, all at the same time. That's part of why we say Asher Yatzar. It interrupts the autopilot and asks us to stop and notice: right now, your heart is beating, your lungs are breathing, and your kidneys are filtering, and none of it is running on its own. Every system running nonstop, not by accident, but by design.[20] Some people's bodies can't do these jobs on their own and need machines to help. It's a reminder of just how much we take for granted. You are not just a person going about your day. You are a walking display of Hashem's wisdom, and Asher Yatzar is a moment you get to stop and say: I see it.

Corny Corner

Why did the stomach apply for a job?

Because it was always hungry for work!

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Turning the Cup Right-Side Up

Asher Yatzar may seem small, connected to something mundane, and easily overlooked. But what if this little blessing had the power to help keep us healthy and even heal us from sickness? It does.[22] And understanding why can completely change the way we say it.

The *Sefer Hachinuch*, a famous *sefer* that explains the reasons behind the mitzvos, teaches a fundamental Torah concept: Hashem wants to give us good. Hashem is the Source of all blessing, all health, all sustenance, and everything good in the world. He is constantly wanting to pour His goodness into our lives. But the catch is: we have to make ourselves ready to receive it.[23]

Think of it like a cup. If the cup is upside down, nothing can be poured into it, no matter how much someone wants to fill it. When we say a *bracha* with real feeling and thought, we are turning the cup right-side up. We are reminding ourselves that Hashem is the One who gives us everything. And that awareness, that gratitude, is exactly what makes us ready to receive His blessings.

That is what Asher Yatzar invites us to do. The *Sefer Hachinuch* adds another powerful idea: when we perform a mitzvah involving a specific thing, we invite Hashem to bring more blessing to that very thing. So, the more sincerely we thank Hashem for our bodies, for the trillions of tiny parts working together perfectly right now, the more we invite Him to keep blessing our bodies with health and strength.[24]

Asher Yatzar describes how Hashem created us with openings and chambers, and that if even one of them stopped working properly, we could not survive. Think about that for a moment. Right now, your body is making brand-new blood cells. It's healing the tiny damage you didn't even notice. It's standing guard against germs you never saw coming. It's nothing short of a miracle happening inside you, right now. When we stop and truly think about these words, we are not just saying a blessing. We are waking up to the miracle of being alive.

The sefer Seder HaYom, written by Rav Moshe ben Machir over 400 years ago, strongly encourages us to say Asher Yatzar word for word with focus and intention, and that doing so will help a person to stay healthy.[25]

The following is adapted from an essay written by Dr. Kenneth M. Prager, M.D., about the blessing "Asher Yatzar" as seen from the eyes of a doctor. "There was one unforgettable patient whose story reinforced the truth and beauty of Asher Yatzar for me forever. Josh was a 20-year-old student who sustained an unstable fracture of his third and fourth cervical vertebrae in a motor vehicle crash… He was initially totally quadriplegic... A long and difficult period of stabilization and rehabilitation followed.... With incredible courage, hard work, and an excellent physical therapist, Josh improved day by day. In time, and after what seemed like a miracle, he was able to walk slowly with a leg brace and a cane..." But it was close to a medical impossibility that Josh could ever use the bathroom normally again. Yet one day "the impossible" happened. I was there the day Josh was able to say the Asher Yatzar prayer again... As he recited the ancient bracha, tears welled in my eyes. Josh is my son.[26]

The next time you finish in the bathroom and are ready to say Asher Yatzar, try something different. Slow down. Read each word and think about what it means. Thank Hashem for your beating heart, your breathing lungs, your healthy body. Really mean it. When you do that, you turn yourself into a vessel ready to receive Hashem's blessing. You connect yourself to the Source of all good. And you give Hashem, so to speak, the perfect opportunity to keep giving you the greatest gift He has already given you: the miracle of life itself.

Is it harder to feel grateful for something you never had to ask for? Why might "automatic" gifts get less thanks than earned ones?



Torah Challenge

These three words come from very different contexts. Can you spot what connects them?

הֲיִפָּלֵא (Bereishis 18:14): "Is anything beyond G-d?"

יַפְלִא (Bamidbar 6:2): "Clearly speaks a vow"

מַפְלִיא (Asher Yatzar): "Who does wonders"

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How do we say Asher Yatzar?

Before You Begin

Before saying Asher Yatzar, pause for a second: you're about to thank Hashem for a body that just did its job. There are two quick steps to get ready. First, wash your hands with water. (Some do this three times on each hand, alternating, but not required.) Then step outside the bathroom and find a clean place to stand. Once you've done both, you're ready.[34] No water nearby? You can wipe your hands on wood, stone, or cloth, say Asher Yatzar, and wash properly when water becomes available.[35] Clean hands, clean spot, then twenty seconds of gratitude to Hashem for a body that is working well.

In Hebrew or English?

Hebrew is the traditional language of prayer, and there is deep meaning in the words of *lashon hakodesh*, the holy tongue itself. But if you're still learning, don't let that hold you back. Saying the words in English, slowly and with genuine intention, is a meaningful and valid place to start. What matters most right now is that you're saying it, that you mean it, and that you're making the effort. The Hebrew will come.

You can say it in any language you understand, although it's better to say it in *Lashon Kodesh*.



Did You Know?

Asher Yatzar contains exactly 45 words, the same as the gematria (numerical value) of the word Adam, meaning "person"? And the double word *challulim challulim* ("hollow tubes") has a gematria of 248, exactly the number of limbs in the human body according to the Sages!

When To Say It

Asher Yatzar is said every single time you use the bathroom, as soon as reasonably possible after leaving the bathroom.[27] Each trip is a brand-new thank-you to Hashem for His wondrous creation of the human body. If you forget or wait too long, it can be recited until you feel the urge to go to the bathroom again.[28] Every bathroom trip is a new chance to start, though you only need to say it once. If you know you will need to use the bathroom a few times in a row, wait until you are finished and then say it once.[29]

The words of Asher Yatzar say "to exist and stand before You." If your body is not working properly, you can still exist, but you cannot stand before Hashem to daven, learn Torah, or do certain mitzvos. So, when saying this bracha, it is best to stand up tall, thanking Hashem that your body works and you can stand![30]

Say It With Kavanah.

Twenty seconds of real *kavanah* can fill you with *yiras Shamayim*, *emunah*, and *bitachon*.[31] Here's how to say Asher Yatzar properly:



Finish drying your hands first. That way, you can concentrate on the bracha.

Find one spot and stay there. No walking, no putting on your coat, no gesturing, just stand still for the twenty seconds it takes.[32]

Use a written text. Reading from a card or siddur, instead of saying it by heart, naturally helps you slow down and stay on each word.



Say each word slowly and think about what it means. Every man, woman, boy and girl should understand what the words mean and not just say them.[33]

That's it: it only takes about twenty seconds. That's not a lot of time to spend thanking Hashem for a body that's been working perfectly the whole time.

***Pro Tip**: Hang an Asher Yatzar card near the bathroom, so the words are always right there when you need them.*

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Feeling Connected to Hashem at All Times

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book1 pg.35

I find myself so busy sometimes that I seem to lose track of thinking about Hashem being part of my life. How can I feel more connected to Hashem?

This question is as large as life itself. A Jew in this world can and should feel connected to Hashem. Great people feel His presence 24/7, as King David proclaimed (*Tehillim* 18:6): "I place G-d before me at all times." Rambam writes that the *Avos* — Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov — did not forget Hashem, even for a moment. This feeling of constant awareness and connection to Him is something that we must all work to develop.

One of the main ways to cultivate this connection to Hashem is through *tefillah*, praying properly three times a day. If we realize that Hashem wants to hear from us, and is here next to us listening as we talk to Him, we will begin to feel this connection. If we realize the magnitude of every prayer and stay focused, we can tap into its great potential. The stronger the feeling becomes and resonates inside of us, the more it will spill over to the rest of the day, and we can feel His involvement in our daily lives.

The problem is that many people don't feel that way when they pray. Unfortunately, our prayers sometimes become just another thing on the "to-do list," as opposed to being the life-changing experience that they should actually be. We have too many distracting thoughts running through our minds preventing us from achieving the connection that prayer could be giving us.

In addition, talking to Hashem is not limited to three times a day. We recite many blessings throughout our day, and it is crucial to think about what we are saying. The great majority of these blessings serve as a constant reminder that Hashem takes care of our every need. In our morning blessings, we acknowledge that the only reason we can see, we can stand up straight, and we have clothes and shoes to wear, is because Hashem hands all this to us each and every day on a "silver platter." Before and after eating — a seemingly mundane and physical activity — we recite a blessing, reinforcing the fact that He is the only source of our sustenance.

We even recite a blessing — "*Asher Yatzar*" — for our ability to relieve ourselves of our wastes, perhaps the most mundane aspect of our lives. In this *berachah* we thank Hashem for the efficient functioning of our highly complex bodies. In fact, in the text of the blessing we use a fascinating expression:

גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדֶךָ שֶׁאִם יִפָּתֵחַ אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ יִסָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם, אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמוֹד לְפָנֶיךָ

It is clearly known before Your Throne of Glory, that if any [of the closed areas] would open, or if any [of the openings] would close, it would be impossible for us to live and stand before You.

The great Vilna Gaon points out that generally we do not find this expression used in our prayers. It is specifically when it comes to this function of "waste removal" that we describe it as something "known before the Throne of Glory." This is done to underscore how even the most mundane functions of our lives are taken care of by Hashem Himself.

How wonderful it would be if we utilized the recital of these *berachos* as an opportunity to think about the meaning of each blessing as we say it. That will no doubt enable us to reach a greater appreciation for the endless and abundant benevolence we receive from Above.

As the classic *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar HaBechinah*) teaches, by simply looking around at the wondrous world we live in, we can see Hashem everywhere. If we look around at the world — the trees, the grass, the sky, and even at our own marvelous bodies — we encounter wonders, all created by Hashem. If we appreciate these wonders, we will have a constant reminder of Hashem, everywhere we go and at all times.

IN SHORT: *By recognizing that we are talking to Hashem when we daven and recite our blessings, and listen to Hashem talk to us when we learn His Torah, we will feel more connected to Hashem. In addition, the wonders of the world serve as a constant reminder of Hashem.*

Got questions about Judaism? Curious about something?

Join **Ask the Rabbi Live** with Rabbi Chaim Mintz **Tuesday Nights** at **9PM**!

Go to **oorah.org/asktherabbi** to join as well as watch previous questions.

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Zoniac Zone

Key Takeaways

Asher Yatzar reminds us that our bodies are a constant, quiet miracle, openings that must stay open, chambers that must stay sealed, all working together every second without our help. This isn't only about the bathroom; it's also about pausing to notice what we usually take for granted. The blessing thanks Hashem for creating us with wisdom, for healing and sustaining our health every single moment, and for fusing our physical body with our spiritual soul. Next time you say it, slow down for twenty seconds. Really thank Hashem for a body that's been working perfectly and let that gratitude change how you see the rest of your day.

A Scientist Discovers Something New

Leib Goldblatt spent many years working in scientific and technical fields. In his world, things had to be tested, measured, and proven before he'd believe them. That's just how his mind worked.

A few years ago, Leib joined TorahMates, a program that pairs people up to learn Torah together each week. His partner, Rabbi Frank, became someone Leib looked forward to talking to. Over time, their weekly learning began to change the way Leib thought, not just about Torah, but about the whole world around him.

One day, Leib had to go to the hospital. It was a scary, uncertain moment. Later, he wrote a letter describing what happened. He explained that he turned to Hashem, but not to ask for a cure or a guarantee that everything would be fine. Instead, he asked Hashem "not [to] cure or heal me but just to let me make the best of the situation."

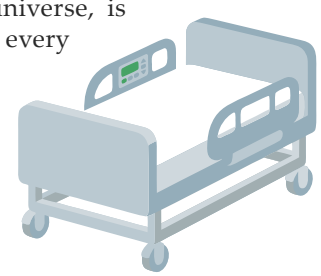
Things worked out okay that day. But something bigger had shifted inside Leib. He realized that whenever a hard moment comes up now, he believes "Hashem can help me make many situations a learning experience."

Then Leib described a thought that had been building in his mind for a while. Hashem created the entire universe, every star, every living thing. Hashem is *Kol Yachol*, meaning Hashem can do anything at all. So, Leib reasoned, if Hashem is that powerful, "then surely he can hear us." He added, almost like he was checking his own math, "Am I right? It makes sense to me."

He was right.

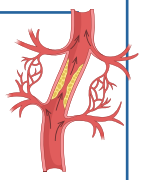
For a man who spent his whole career needing proof before he'd believe something, this was a remarkable moment. He hadn't read this idea in a science journal or proven it in a lab. He had arrived at it simply by thinking carefully about Who really runs the world, down to the smallest detail, and realizing that a Hashem powerful enough to create everything is also close enough to listen when we speak to Him.

That is exactly the idea behind Asher Yatzar. Every time we make this bracha, we are saying the same thing Leib figured out on his own, through a hospital visit and months of learning: Hashem, the *Kol Yachol* who set the stars in place and formed the entire universe, is also the One quietly keeping every system inside our own bodies working, moment after moment, keeping us healthy. And He hears us when we turn to Him.



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Did You Know?



The most common cause of death today is a blocked coronary artery, a blood vessel in the heart. Abayei was describing this exact danger in the words of Asher Yatzar about 1,700 years ago!

Zoniac Challenge

THANK YOU, HASHEM

1. One person picks a body part from the list below, but doesn't say which one!
2. Give your partner one clue about what that body part does for you (without naming it).
3. A second person guesses the body part.
4. Once they guess correctly, say together: "Thank You Hashem for my _____, which helps me _____!"
5. Switch roles. Now the guesser picks a body part and gives the clue!

Body parts to use:

Eyes, Lungs, Stomach, Heart, Brain, Ears, Hands

Bonus Round: Try giving a clue using only actions (no words at all). Can your TorahMate guess with just a mime?



COVER UNCOVERED

This cover depicts your body as a perfectly run factory. Your brain sends instructions, your heart pumps, your lungs breathe, your kidneys filter, and your stomach digests food. Airways remain open while hollow spaces remain sealed. Meanwhile, your immune system fights germs. Thousands of jobs happen automatically. Asher Yatzar reminds us to notice these wonders and thank Hashem.

Zoniac Dilemma

The Fastest Kid on the Team

Ari was the fastest sprinter in sixth grade, and everyone knew it. Coaches noticed. Kids picked him first for relays. He never had to think about running fast. His legs just did it, like they'd been built for exactly this.

At practice, his friend Eli kept falling behind, stopping every few minutes to use his inhaler before jogging again. "You're so lucky," Eli said between breaths, watching Ari barely break a sweat. "Running is just easy for you."

Ari shrugged. "I guess I'm just good at it."

That night, Ari's mom asked him to help his little cousin with a leg brace get up the stairs, one slow step at a time. Ari stood there holding the railing, waiting, watching his cousin's leg shake with the effort of something Ari's own legs did without a single thought: climbing, running, jumping, all day, every day, and he'd never once had to plan it or push for it.

He thought about Eli gripping his inhaler between breaths, hoping his lungs would cooperate. He thought about his cousin, concentrating hard just to reach the next step.

And he thought about himself, gliding across the field that afternoon, barely noticing his legs at all. It had taken watching someone else struggle for Ari to even think about his own legs at all.

What should Ari realize about his "natural talent," and why did it take someone else's hard moment for him to notice his own easy one?

Daily Challenge

The next time you go to the bathroom, take a moment afterward to recite Asher Yatzar slowly and think about what each word means.

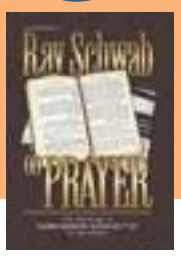
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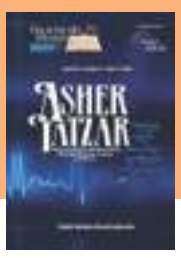
1) Brachos 60b
2) Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 6:1
3) Rav Schwab on Prayer, pg. 20
4) Rashi, Brachos 60b
5) Tur, Orach Chaim 6
6) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 6
7) Ibid
8) Beis Yosef; Rema, Orach Chaim 6
9) en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lung
10) www.kidney.org/kidney-topics/kidney-function
11) www.humanbrainproject.eu/en/follow-hbp/news/2023/09/04/learning-brain-make-ai-more-energy-efficient/
12) Chovos HaLevavos, Shaar HaBechina, Ch. 4
13) Rav Schwab on Prayer, Asher Yatzar, p. 19
14) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 6:1
15) Tur, Orach Chaim 6
16) Rav Schwab on Prayer, p. 21
17) Shoftim 13:19
18) Brachos 60b
19) Orchos Tzadikim p. 148
20) Chovos HaLevavos, Shaar HaBechinah
21) Iyov 19:26
22) Seder HaYom by Rav Moshe ben Machir
23) Sefer HaChinnuch, Mitzvah 430
24) Ibid, Mitzvah 97
25) Seder Olam, Kavanas Habrachos
26) Adapted from Kenneth M. Prager, M.D., "The Physician's Prayer," Assia, Da'at Educational Resources, www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/assia_english/prager.htm
27) Shulchan Aruch O.C. 7:1; Mishnah Berurah 165:2
28) Mishnah Berurah 7:1
29) Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 4:6
30) Rav Schwab on Prayer, pg. 23
31) Ibid, pg. 24
32) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 191:3
33) Ben Ish Chai Shana Alef, Parshas Vayeitzei os tes vov
34) Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 4:6; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 7:2; Mishnah Berurah 7:1–5
35) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 7; Mishnah Berurah 7:1–5

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Rav Schwab on Prayer
by Rabbi Shimon Schwab, pgs. 18-24



Asher Yatzar
by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits



Life's Blessings
by R. Abraham J. Twerski

ZACHOR

Remembering Shabbat



1 What is Zachor?

2 Shabbos Candles

3 Kiddush

4 Havdalah

PREVIEW ONLY

What is Zachor?

In a Nutshell

The Torah commands us, "*Zachor es yom haShabbos l'kadsho,*" "Remember the Shabbos day to make it holy".[3] The mitzvah of Zachor refers to all the mitzvos of Shabbos that we actively do, as opposed to what we refrain from doing on Shabbos.[4]

What it Includes

Zachor includes three main mitzvos of Shabbos: lighting candles, making *kiddush*, and saying *havdalah*. These are all part of the Torah obligation of *Zachor*. But the mitzvah of *zachor* really includes much more. Anything you do to honor Shabbos *(kavod Shabbos)* and enjoy Shabbos *(oneg Shabbos)* counts!

Lighting Shabbos Candles

The mitzvah to light candles before Shabbos is mandatory.[1] Imagine trying to eat in the dark—it wouldn't be very enjoyable! The Shabbos candles elevate our *seudah* (meal) and bring a warm, peaceful glow to the entire atmosphere of our home.

A Separate Peace



Shabbos is much more than just another day. It's totally separate and different from the rest of the week. In order to make this distinction very clear, we start Shabbos with *Kiddush* and end it with *Havdalah*. Both words mean to separate and are like the bookends of Shabbos, separating Shabbos's holiness from the regular week.[2]

Spotlight

On Shabbos, we remember that Hashem created the world!

Zachor All Week Long

Shabbos represents our belief that Hashem not only created the world but continues to sustain it. This is so important that it was given to the Jews right after *Yetziyas Mitzrayim* even before they were given the Torah.[5] Since Shabbos is the source of our emunah, it is considered equal to all the other mitzvos![6] Instead of saving this fundamental mitzvah for only one day a week, we can keep it all week long. How? Every day, when we say in davening, "Today is the first (or second...) day toward Shabbos," we fulfill the mitzvah of *Zachor* by remembering what we're headed toward[7]. Another way to fulfill the mitzvah of *Zachor* during the week is through honoring Shabbos by saving the best things we come across for the holy day of Shabbos.[8]

Bring it In!

We don't need to sit and wait for Shabbos to *happen*. We can *bring it in*! There is a mitzvah to add on to Shabbos, by accepting Shabbos before *shkiah* (sundown).[9]

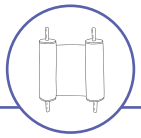
When we add on to Shabbos, we deliberately take time from the work week and transform it into the holy Shabbos. This reflects the whole purpose of the world's creation—making the mundane spiritual and holy. In fact, there is a special blessing of a longer life for those that add from the weekday onto Shabbos.[10]

Torah Challenge

We start Kiddush with the words from Bereishis: יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם. What do you see hinted to in these words?

Hint: look at the beginning of every word.

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Two Parts of Keeping Shabbos

Every Jewish soul was there at Mount Sinai when Hashem gave us the Torah. So YOU were there too! Do you remember?

When Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the command to keep Shabbos, He did something no human being can do. Our rabbis tell us that Hashem said two words simultaneously!

The *aseres hadibros* are written in the Torah twice. The first time it says "*Zachor es Yom Hashabbos* – remember the day of Shabbos," and the second time it says, "*Shamor es Yom Hashabbos* – safeguard the day of Shabbos." But which one did Hashem utter at Mount Sinai? The answer is that He said both words: "*Shamor*" and "*Zachor*" *bedibbur echad*, in one utterance! And an even greater miracle took place: us humans –flesh and blood – were able to hear both!

Why was this done? This is because both aspects of Shabbos are crucial for getting the whole package, and one aspect of Shabbos without the other is incomplete.

Zachor is a reference to the positive commandments of Shabbos, and *Shamor* is a reference to refraining from forbidden actions. Hashem expressed these simultaneously, teaching us that it is only with the full observance of Shabbos —both the positive commandments and the prohibitions —that we can connect to Hashem on Shabbos. Someone who says he wants to have a nice Shabbos meal but is not ready to commit to abstaining from *melachah*—doing creative work, will not get the full benefit of this wonderful day. Conversely, someone who just sleeps in bed and simply doesn't do any work, but doesn't recite Kiddush, will also be missing out.

For this reason it is customary to light at least two candles before Shabbos, corresponding to these two dimensions of Shabbos. This is also why we bake challah in braids, demonstrating that these two dimensions of Shabbos are intertwined, and each one complements the other.

But wait! Why was *Zachor* written in the Torah first and Shamor only later? The *Meshech Chochmah* explains that these two aspects of Shabbos were emphasized at different periods of the Jewish Nation.

If we take a closer look at how the Jews lived during their forty years in the *midbar* (desert), we can understand why the focus at *Har Sinai* was on *Zachor*. In the *midbar*, they didn't have to work or run businesses. Hashem gave them *mohn* to eat, water from a well, and clouds to protect them. They didn't have to worry about making a living, so they had more time to focus on learning Torah. As our rabbis teach,"*The Torah was only given to those who ate the mohn*." They were in an elevated state, and there was little concern that they would become pre-occupied with business. Their main challenge on Shabbos during the *midbar* was to uplift Shabbos and make it special. They didn't need to be warned about staying away from weekday pursuits, since those things didn't exist in the desert.

However, in *Sefer Devarim*, as Moshe Rabbeinu is reviewing the entire Torah with the Jewish nation, in preparation for their grand entry to Eretz Yisrael, there was a different focus. Life was about to change for Bnei Yisrael. They had to plant fields, build homes, and earn a living. There was a real risk that their connection with Hashem could weaken. Now that they were about to live in a physical world with jobs and responsibilities, they needed to be warned to guard the holiness of the day by not slipping into weekday thinking or mundane pursuits.

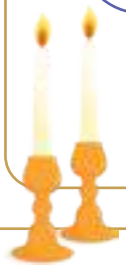
That's when the second part of Shabbos—*Shamor*, became more important to stress. They would have to ensure they would keep the day clear of weekday activities so they can learn Torah and connect to Hashem. This *Shamor* aspect of Shabbos would help them stay connected to their true purpose as a holy nation.

Understanding both aspects of Shabbos is integral to our making the most of the holy day.

Do we live in a time of "shamor" or "zachor?"



Did You Know?



You can receive Candle Lighting Time reminders for your location each week.
Sign up at oorah.org/candlelighting

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Shabbos Candles

Start with a Glow

The mitzvah to light candles before the start of Shabbos is an important one. It fulfills the mitzvos of both *kavod* and *oneg* Shabbos.[11] The added glow also fills the home with a peaceful atmosphere and increases our joy and pleasure.[12] It is so important to have candles at the Shabbos table that the Sages state that one who does not have enough money to buy a candle should go door to door collecting charity in order to buy it![13]



Corny Corner

Why don't candles ever get into arguments?

Because they always try to keep things light.



The Ridvaz's Dream

The Ridvaz zt"l, a great rabbi who lived in the city of Slotzk, once became very sick. While he was unconscious, he had a dream. In it, he saw the *Beis Din shel Maalah* — the heavenly court — deciding if he would live or die.

The Ridvaz begged, "Please don't take me! I'm still young and haven't finished my life's work. I started writing a commentary on the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, and I need to finish it!"

The court said, "Someone else can finish it for you."

He tried again. "But I give money every month to help widows and orphans — people with no one else to care for them!"

The court answered, "Other kind people can take over."

Then the Ridvaz said something different. "Every Thursday night, my wife and I already have the Shabbos table set — with a white tablecloth and everything — to honor Shabbos. And we bring in Shabbos early each week!"

This time, the court paused. "In that *zechus*, that special merit, you will live many more years."

The Ridvaz woke up feeling much better. He got well, finished his commentary on the *gemara*, and later moved to the holy city of Tzfas, where he became the rabbi of the city.

Time to Shine

The usual time to light is 18 minutes before sunset, but some communities, like Yerushalayim, light even earlier.[14] The earliest you can light is at *plag*, which is usually about an hour and a few minutes before sunset.[15] The latest time is just before the sun sets. Once the sun sets, Shabbos has begun, and lighting a fire is *assur* (forbidden), even if you haven't yet lit your candles.

Whose Mitzvah Is It?

Although anyone can light the Shabbos candles, it is primarily considered the woman's mitzvah, since she is usually in charge of running the home.[16] Another reason is that lighting candles is a *tikkun* (spiritual repair) for the sin of Chava, who darkened the world when she caused Adam to eat from the *Eitz Hadaas*. Now, every week the Jewish woman has the opportunity to bring light and peace into her home as she lovingly lights her Shabbos candles.[17]

How to Light

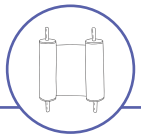
The *brachah* for lighting Shabbos candles is, "*Lehadlik ner shel Shabbos*." Ashkenazic women first light the candles and then cover their eyes and say the *brachah*. Once the *brachah* is said, Shabbos has started for them, and lighting a flame would be forbidden.[18] Most Sefardic women first say the *brachah*, and then light, because they don't consider the *brachah* to cause them to automatically accept Shabbos.[19]

Light up the World

One who is careful with this mitzvah is promised a special reward: children who will be Torah scholars.[20] That's why women have the beautiful custom to pray and ask Hashem to help them raise children who will be righteous Talmidei Chachamim right after lighting candles.[21]

Additionally, there is a promise that one who is careful about the *neiros* of Shabbos, will merit to see the *neiros* of Tzion and Yerushalayim in the *Geulah Sheleimah* (Final Redemption)![22]

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Lighting the Way to Torah

The sun dips low on Friday afternoon, casting golden rays across the world. In homes nestled on quiet suburban streets, in bustling city apartments, on kibbutzim and in far-flung corners of the globe, Jewish women pause to welcome a sacred moment.

Some have toddlers tugging at their skirts. Others stand alone, their hearts full of silent longing. Some wear beautiful wigs, others colorful scarves or a glittering headpiece. Some light surrounded by chatter and warmth; others in the stillness of a home waiting to be filled. But all are united in this luminous moment, when fingers strike a match and light dances on the walls. In that instant, something timeless happens. The *Shabbos* Queen is invited into their homes, filling it with blessing and peace.

The Gemara specifies a specific blessing to those that are careful with the mitzvah of *neiros*. It promises that they will merit children who are *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars).[23] Why does this mitzvah carry such a powerful reward?

The *Chachamim* explain that this is based on the *pasuk* in *Mishlei*, "*Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr*"—"A mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is light".[24] When we light the *ner*, the Shabbos candle, we will merit the light of Torah.

After a woman does her special mitzvah of lighting candles, it is an especially auspicious time for her to daven that Hashem grant her children who will light up the world with Torah.[25] Rabbeinu Bechaya explains that a Jewish mother is the very reason that Torah has a future as it is she whom develops her children's love of Torah from a young age and encourages them to learn. Therefore, after she does her unique mitzvah which provides physical light, it is a powerful moment to daven that her children merit to spread the spiritual light of Hashem's Torah throughout the world.[26]

This deep connection between candles and Torah also appears in the Beis Hamikdash. The Menorah was placed on the northern side of the Beis Hamikdash because someone who wishes to get wisdom should "turn to the north."[27] This is because the Menorah was a lot more than physical light. It represented the illuminating wisdom of Torah. Similarly, lighting Shabbos candles brings the glow of the menorah and all it represents into our homes. In fact, some have a minhag to specifically place the candles to the right of the table, just as the menorah in the Beis Hamikdash stood on the right side. For this reason, when a woman lights Shabbos candles, she is following the lead of Aharon, the Kohen Gadol, who lit the menorah in the Mishkan, bringing the light of Torah to her home and to the world!

The tremendous importance of lighting Shabbos candles plays out in practical *halacha*, too. If a person can only afford one candle, either for Shabbos or Chanukah, the *halacha* is that the Shabbos candle takes priority![28] This is because when we light those flames, we are doing more than marking the start of Shabbos. We are creating a peaceful atmosphere and planting the seeds of Torah for the next generation.

What do candles have to do with peace?

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The Soul is a Flame



Shlomo Hamelech tells us in *Mishlei*, *"Ner Hashem nishmas adam,"* "The soul of a person is the lamp of Hashem".[29] This deep truth about the candle and flame helps us understand how our body and soul work together.

Grounded, Yet Striving for More

Look at a flame. It dances upward, as if trying to break free and rise to the sky, but it stays attached to the wick. That's like our soul. It wants to connect deeply with Hashem, to rise higher and higher. But at the same time, it's attached to this earthly world for a reason: to live here and do *mitzvos*, bringing Hashem's light into this world.

The Wick, Oil, and Flame

A lamp, or candle, needs three things: a wick, oil (or wax) and a flame. The wick is like our body, physical and grounded. The oil is the Torah and *mitzvos* that fuel us, and the flame is our soul, lit up when we connect our body with Hashem's *mitzvos*.

Without Torah and *mitzvos*, the wick (our life) can't stay lit. And without a physical body to perform those *mitzvos*, the divine oil can't become light in this world. Every *mitzvah* adds oil to our flame. Every time we do Hashem's will, we burn brighter, drawing close to Hashem and making the world a more beautiful place.[30]

Kiddush

Make it Official!

Ever heard someone say, "Make it official!"? That's what *Kiddush* does for Shabbos. Although Shabbos already began with *shkiah*, we are obligated to say Kiddush and may not eat anything before doing so.[33]

Just like a witness verbally testifies in front of a court what he witnessed, when we say kiddush, we are testifying that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. On Friday night, *Kiddush* starts with the words, *"Yom Hashishi."* It includes the *pesukim* (verses) of *Vayechulu*, about Creation. We then make a bracha on the wine and on the day of Shabbos.

On Shabbos morning, *Kiddush* is shorter. We start with other *pesukim* about Shabbos, say *"Zachor es Yom Hashabbos Lekadsho," remember Shabbos to make it holy,"* and then make a *brachah* on the wine.

Why Wine?

Wine holds a unique place in Judaism. It is considered an elevated drink, unlike any other. Even grape juice, which is not fermented and alcoholic, is considered special. That's why we use wine or grape juice for *Kiddush*. It serves as a symbol of celebration and sets the tone for the special day.[31] The Gemara tells us about a great *Tanna* who became wealthy and lived a long life, all because he made Kiddush properly, even when wine was expensive and hard to find![32]

Message of Mitzrayim

Imagine a servant locked in prison, desperate to get out. One day, the king himself appears. He asks the desperate man, "If I rescue you from here, will you serve me loyally?" Of course, the servant ecstatically agrees! Later, whenever the king would give a command to this servant, he would remind him how he rescued him, and the servant would respond by eagerly doing as the king requested, filled with joy and appreciation. That's what Hashem does. He saved us from Egypt, and we get a reminder of our salvation every Shabbos as we make Kiddush, which helps us serve Him with joy and gratitude.[35]

Why Kiddush Twice?

We make *kiddush* twice on Shabbos: one on Friday night and one on Shabbos day. But they're not repeats! Friday night *kiddush* is a mitzvah from the Torah that welcomes Shabbos in with holiness and joy. Shabbos day *Kiddush* is a *d'rabbanan*, (added by the Rabbis) to show that this is more than an ordinary meal and remind us to honor Shabbos day. In fact, the *seudah* (meal) of the day is the more important meal of Shabbos![34]

Elevating the Physical

The word *Kiddush* comes from *kodesh*, which is translated as holy, and means something that is separated and different from the mundane. This is the magic of Shabbos. We don't escape the physical world, we elevate it from the mundane and use it for a higher purpose. On Shabbos, food, family and pleasure become ways to connect with Hashem. That's real holiness!

Menucha V'Simcha

Menucha V'simcha,
A joyful Friday night
Kiddush, zemiros,
At the candlelight
When we greet the Shabbos Queen,
We firmly do attest
In just six days, the world was made,
The seventh day was rest.

Chorus:
Take a look around you
The sceneries about you
Know that all these wonders
Are creations of Hashem
Camels, goats and parrots
Gefilte fish and carrots
In just six days He made it all,
A world for me and you.

Hu asher diber,
Hashem commanded us
To guard His precious Shabbos gem,
He's placed it in our trust
So we put down our hammers
And our cellphones take a break
We spend time with our families,
We sanctify this day.

Through Shabbos, we will grow strong,
Elevating us with song,
We feel the Shabbos spirit
As the sun begins to set
It's our charging station
Our dose of inspiration
The more you give to Shabbos
The more it gives to you.

With Lechem Mishneh
And a kiddush, oh so grand
The money's tight, forget your plight
You gotta understand
The more you spend the more you earn,
So make everything just right
Menucha V'simcha,
A joyful Friday night

Chorus

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A Divine Partnership

The Gemara[36] tells us *"Even the individual who prays alone on Erev Shabbos must say Vayechulu… and the Torah considers him as if he has become a partner with G-d in the act of creation."*

When Hashem created the world, He sanctified the seventh day as Shabbos, a day of rest and holiness. But when we make Kiddush, we're not just remembering history. We are actively joining Hashem in declaring the holiness of Shabbos, becoming partners in the world's creation!

What does that mean? How could man, who was only created after the rest of the world, ever be considered a *partner* in creation? And how could something as simple as saying a few words accomplish something so enormous? Maybe saying *Vayechulu* is a holy act, but a *partner in creation*?

The answer lies in a deep secret hidden in the words of the *Aseres Hadibros*. When the Torah mentions *Shabbos*, it says, *"Six days Hashem created the heavens and the earth."*[37] The *Ohr HaChaim* explains that this means Hashem literally created the world with the ability to exist for only six days. But He also created a seventh day on which He would renew the world's ability to continue. Shabbos is what allows the world to go on. And Shabbos itself depends on us, because without someone keeping *Shabbos*, it cannot exist.[38]

This is what *Chazal* meant when they said one who is *mekadesh* the Shabbos and recites *Vayechulu* becomes a partner in creation. One who keeps Shabbos helps "create" the day through which Hashem sustains the coming week. The world cannot exist without someone upholding Shabbos.

From the very beginning, there was always at least one *tzaddik* holding up the world by keeping Shabbos. Adam was a *shomer Shabbos*, and so was his son Sheis, and so on. Even in Mitzrayim, there were hidden *shomrei Shabbos* holding up the world and continuing that holy partnership.[39]

Every single week, Shabbos recharges the universe. Without it, the world would stop after six days. When we recite *Vayechulu* and observe Shabbos, we are partners in keeping the world going.[40]

The power of this partnership is illustrated by a story from World War II. As the Nazis approached Eretz Yisrael, Jews were terrified. Rav Shlomo of Zhvill was unaware of the threat until after he had recited Kiddush. When someone informed him, he became distressed. "Why didn't you tell me before Kiddush?" he asked. "That was the moment I could have partnered with Hashem and davened with more strength!" He explained that when we declare *Vayechulu*, we stand as Hashem's partner, and partners can influence one another! That moment of partnership is an especially powerful time to plead with Hashem for help.

Vayechulu is more than some *pesukim* about Shabbos. It is a testimony. When we recite it, we stand up and testify that Hashem created the world and sanctified Shabbos. Like all testimonies, it is meant to be given by two people standing together, which is why, when it is recited in Shul, it is said standing, together with someone else. [41]

Next time you make Kiddush Friday night and say or hear *Vayechulu*, take the moment to tap into the incredibly powerful moment of being a partner with Hashem!

How did you create the world?



Tefillah Time

The paragraphs right after Shema, *Veyatziv V'Nachon,* talk about the same two ideas as Kiddush on Shabbos:

Briyas Ha'olam—that Hashem created the world, and

Yetzias Mitzrayim—that He took us out of Egypt. These parts of davening remind us that Hashem is in charge of everything, both in nature and in history.

"אֱמֶת אַתָּה הוּא רִאשׁוֹן וְאַתָּה הוּא אַחֲרוֹן" True — You are the First and You are the Last," showing us the existence of Hashem eternally even before Creation, and surely then, the Creator.

Another passuk says, "'מִמִּצְרַיִם גְּאַלְתָּנוּ ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ" – "He took us out of Egypt and redeemed us from the house of slavery," reminding us of the miracles Hashem did to save us.

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Havdalah

Farewell to Shabbos

Havdalah is the name of the short ceremony we do after nightfall at the conclusion of *Shabbos*. The word *havdalah* literally means to differentiate or distinguish. This important mitzvah comes from the Torah's command to *"remember Shabbos to make it holy"* both at its beginning and end.[42] Shabbos ends at *tzeis hakochavim* when three medium-sized stars are visible at once in the evening sky.[43] This time varies according to location and season. There are different opinions as to what exact time this is, ranging from around 50 minutes after sunset to 72 minutes after sunset. You can check this time on myzmanim.com with your precise location.

The purpose of Havdalah is to distinguish between the Shabbos that we just experienced and the week that we are about to enter.

Basic Division

If the time for the end of Shabbos has passed, you can say *"Baruch ha-mavdil bein kodesh le-chol,"* (Blessed is the One Who divides between the sacred and the mundane.) Then, you are permitted to do all the "weekday" activities that are forbidden on Shabbos. But don't forget to make *havdalah!* You will still need to make Havdalah before eating.

Overflowing Blessing

The Gemara says making Havdalah on wine is so important that one who is careful to do so properly merits Olam Haba.[50] Some explain that this means he saves a little bit of wine from *Kiddush* to use for *Havdalah*.[51] There's a deeper meaning here. *Kiddush* is when we bring holiness into Shabbos and leave behind our regular, weekday work and worries. It's a time to be closer to Hashem and focus on spiritual things. *Havdalah* is when we return to our everyday activities. In this way, *Kiddush* is like a symbol for special, spiritual times, and *Havdalah* is for our normal, day-to-day lives. The sages are teaching us that if we take some of that Shabbos holiness and bring it into our regular, everyday life, we're living in a way that helps us earn a place in *Olam Haba*.[52]

What You'll Need

Double-wicked candle (or two candles held with flames together). The candle reminds us of the first (man-made) fire, which Adam created on the first *Motzei Shabbos* (Saturday night) after he was expelled from Gan Eden and needed warmth.[44]

Cup of wine or grape juice, which should be filled until it is overflowing slightly (this is a sign of blessing).

Besamim, which are good-smelling spices like cloves, cinnamon, or anise. On *Shabbos* we each receive a *neshama yeseira*, an extra soul which provides us with extra spiritual sensitivity. As *Shabbos* departs, so does the extra soul. When we smell the *besamim*, the scent comforts our souls.[45] Although any pleasant-smelling spice may be used, the standard custom is to use cloves, while some use *haddasim*, myrtle branches.[46]

How to make Havdalah

1. Light the candle.
2. Hold the cup of wine or grape juice in your right hand.[47]
3. Begin reciting the first *pessukim* of *Havdalah* and make a *brachah* on the wine *(Borei pri hagafen)*.
4. Switch the cup to your left hand and hold the besamim in your right hand.
5. Make a brachah on the *besamim (borei mini besamim)* and smell it.
6. Make a blessing on the fire *(borei meorei ha'aish)*. Then, hold your hands up to the flame and gaze at the reflection of the flame on your fingernails in order to benefit from its glow.[48] As we prepare to embark on another week, we gaze at our fingernails which are a sign of abundant blessing, as they never stop growing.[49]
7. Return the cup to your right hand.
8. Finally, recite the *bracha* of *hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol* (He Who separates between holy and mundane) and drink the wine or grape juice.
9. It is customary to extinguish the flame with leftover wine from the cup.
10. If you drank over 3 ounces of wine or grape juice, make a bracha acharona.

(It is preferable for a woman to hear havdalah from a man, but when needed, she can make it herself.)

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Reviving Our Spirit

During *havdalah*, we sniff at *besamim*, aromatic herbs, spices, or fruit. This is because the Gemara teaches that Hashem gives a *neshama yesairah*, an "additional soul" to a person as Shabbos begins, and it is taken from him when Shabbos departs. This is derived from the *pasuk*, "*Between Me and the children of Israel, it is forever a sign that [in] six days Hashem created the Heaven and the Earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested.*"[53]

The last two words of the *passuk*, "*shavas vayinafash*," can be understood in a different way: Once Shabbos stops (*shavas*), woe (*vay*) to him over the loss of his (additional) soul (*nafash*).[54]

As each Shabbos enters, the soul of every Jew is uplifted by their *neshama yeseirah*. With the departure of Shabbos and the arrival of another mundane work week, this *neshama yeseirah* departs, and the soul, or a spiritually in-tune person will feel the lack. Of all the five senses, smell is the one which impacts the soul the most. The Sages therefore instituted that we smell (*besamim*) every *motzei Shabbos* (unless Sunday is a *Yom Tov*), in order to comfort the soul.[55]

What exactly is this "extra soul"?

On a basic level, this refers to the fact that on Shabbos a person is more disposed toward relaxation, joy, and celebrating the holy day with extra food and drink.[56]

According to mystical sources, this "extra soul" is not simply a state of mind or greater disposition toward relaxation, but a literal additional soul that every Jew receives on Shabbos. With the conclusion of Shabbos, this extra soul departs, and the remaining soul mourns the loss of the extra soul.

The simple explanation of a *neshama yeseira* initially seems quite difficult to understand. However, it actually holds the key to an elevated concept. Rashi defines the *neshama yeseira* as a "widened" heart for resting and happiness, so that one can eat and drink without the soul being repulsed by it.[57] This seems astounding! Could the purpose of the *neshama yesairah* truly be so that we can rest, be happy, and eat vast amounts of food? Is this the exclusive "eternal sign" shared just between Hashem and Bnei Yisroel? Furthermore, don't we see that even during the week, without this *neshama yesairah*, we seem to enjoy eating and drinking quite well?

Rav Isaac Sher explains that Hashem sanctified the day of Shabbos by establishing this system of a *neshama yesairah*, which envelops each and every Jew on this sacred day. This additional soul brings purity and a deeper connection to Hashem, *specifically* through physical rest and enjoyment.

Normally, increased involvement in the physical world creates distance and a barrier between us and Hashem, causing the soul to be repulsed by physical indulgence. During the week, this is true. But on Shabbos, the *neshama yesairah* brings a fundamental shift: our involvement in *oneg Shabbos (rest and enjoyment), when done for the sake of honoring Hashem and Shabbos, actually increases our spiritual connection. As Rashi says, "He'll eat and drink without his soul being repulsed by it."*

By setting aside the worries and responsibilities of the workweek to enjoy Shabbos, even physically, we enjoy a taste of the World to Come, a time of constant connection to Hashem, a time of *kulo Shabbos* (eternal Shabbos).

This was the eternal sign uniquely shared between Hashem and Bnei Yisroel. The nations of the world understand holiness as something achieved through abstinence and deprivation of pleasure. But Hashem revealed to us a different truth: that we were placed in this physical world to use it as a ladder to ascend closer to Him. The physical pleasures of this world become transformed into spiritual pleasure.

How is this done on Shabbos? If one was invited to a meal at the White House, he wouldn't view the eating simply as satisfying his base physical needs. He would see the meal as a way of forging a relationship, a connection to important people. On Shabbos, we are invited to dine at the table of the King of kings. The meal becomes a means through which we connect to Hashem. The physical pleasure is transformed into spiritual pleasure.

"*Shavas va'yinafash*"—once Shabbos stops (*shavas*), woe (*vay*) to him over the loss of his (additional) soul (*nafash*).

As we comfort our soul with the *besamim* during *havdalah*, we say goodbye to our lofty *neshama yeseirah* until the next Shabbos. Let's carry the message of Shabbos into the week, elevating the physical into spiritual connection.

Why can't you use air freshener for *besamim*?



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Zoniac Zone

When Does Shabbos Actually Begin?

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book1 pg.276

Why does the calendar list candle lighting at 18 minutes before Shabbos? If Shabbos really begins at sunset, why can't I light a minute before?

Although, according to halachah, Shabbos begins at sunset on Friday, the candles are lit earlier. Most women follow the custom of lighting at the time given on the calendar — 18 minutes before sunset. There are a number of reasons for these added 18 minutes.

One reason is the mitzvah of tosafos Shabbos, adding additional minutes to the Shabbos. Although a few minutes is sufficient to fulfill this requirement, we try to add more than the minimum. By bringing in Shabbos early we show our enthusiasm and excitement for spending time with Hashem on this wonderful day.

It is indeed appropriate that we use the number 18, the numerical value of the word "chai — life." Shabbos is spent connecting to Hashem and is mei'ein Olam Haba — a microcosm of our true life, the eternal life in the World to Come.

The 18 minutes also serve as a buffer zone, to make sure that a person doesn't unintentionally desecrate Shabbos. For instance, if a woman would wait until the last minute to light her candles, she may discover that she doesn't have candles, or she can't find her matches! In addition, her clock may be off by a few minutes, or maybe she doesn't know exactly when sunset is. By the time she has everything ready, she might have already crossed the "red line" into Shabbos.

There is also another explanation given for the custom of 18 minutes. According to most halachic authorities, shekiah — the halachic term for sunset — occurs when the sun sets completely below the horizon. However, there is a prominent opinion that shekiah is actually when the sun begins to set, which is 18 minutes before it sets completely. Although the general consensus is not that way, since keeping Shabbos is such a great mitzvah, the women try to be extra vigilant and bring in Shabbos even according to that opinion.

We should also keep in mind that the mitzvah of candle-lighting brings great blessing. Sometimes, when people are suffering or facing some sort of difficulty in their lives, they bring in Shabbos even earlier than required, as a source of merit. Because Shabbos is the mekor haberachah, source of all blessings and holiness, adding on to it means adding blessing and holiness into our lives.

Although this is the ideal time, if for whatever reason a woman was unable to light, she may still do so until a few minutes before sunset, or in some extenuating situations, even up until sunset.

IN SHORT: *One must light candles before sunset. The accepted practice is to light 18 minutes before, to show our excitement for Shabbos, by adding on to this holy day, which brings blessing into our lives. In addition it serves as a buffer zone, and allows us to keep Shabbos properly according to all opinions.*

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Zoniac Dilemma

Havdalah or Hangout?

Gav kept Shabbos. Not just in theory—he really kept it. No phone, no texting. From candle lighting to Havdalah, Shabbos was a full disconnect.

On Friday afternoon, his friends were finalizing plans. "Burgers and games Motzei Shabbos?" one wrote.

"Pick up at 7:58. Shabbos ends 7:52. Don't be late."

Gav saw the messages before candle lighting. He had a feeling this might be a problem.

In his house, Havdalah wasn't a rushed formality. It was something they did together, after his father got home from Maariv, which would be at about 8:10 this week. No one ever said *baruch hamavdil* and left early. That just wasn't the vibe.

Now Shabbos was over. Gav glanced at the clock: 7:56. His friends would be there in two minutes, so they were expecting him.

He stood in the entryway, shoes on, keys in hand. If he waited for Havdalah, he'd miss the ride. If he left now, he'd be breaking the family's usual practice—and skipping Havdalah. Could he make it on his own later? Probably, but he wasn't supposed to eat until he heard Havdalah. Would he? Maybe. Should he just say *baruch hamavdil* and go?

No one was telling him what to do. No one was stopping him.

What would you tell Gav?



Key Takeaways

Shabbos is the holiest day of the week—it's blessed, elevated, and the source of blessing for the entire week ahead.[58] That's why we don't just keep Shabbos—we *honor* it and *enjoy* it.[59] This is what Chazal call *kavod* and *oneg*.

We wear special clothes and set our table more beautifully to honor Shabbos. Special *Shabbos* food is another big way to honor the day. The two fragrant braided *challos* we eat at every Shabbos meal commemorate the *mohn* that fell double on Fridays, in honor of Shabbos.[60] Many people eat fish at all three meals.[61]

But it's not just about what you eat. *Oneg* means chilling out without stressing about homework, tests, or chores. The Torah says to feel like "all your work is done" on Shabbos.[62] So yes—relaxing is part of the mitzvah!

Want to really rack up points on Shabbos? Avoid arguments. Shabbos is a time of peace and *brachah*, and anger certainly messes up the Shabbos feeling.[63]



Welcoming the Angels

The night was bitterly cold as Rabbi Mintz stepped out of his car. He pulled his coat tighter and looked up at the modest home before him. A glowing electric menorah in the window caught his eye. It wasn't much, but it was a spark—and Rabbi Mintz was drawn to sparks.

A kind man answered the door, warmly inviting the rabbi inside. His wife soon joined, and a curious little boy peeked from the hallway. The home was welcoming and Jewish, but far from Torah. Rabbi Mintz wondered: did they realize how fragile their son's Jewish future was?

He began building trust and gently suggested enrolling their son in yeshiva. The parents agreed—"just for him," they insisted. Their own lifestyle would remain unchanged.

That was fine. Change often begins with one person.

The boy thrived. He came home excited each week, sharing stories of kindness, mitzvos, and Shabbos. Moved by his enthusiasm, the family eventually relocated to Willowbrook, a Jewish neighborhood, to help him feel more connected. They still weren't fully observant—but it was a start.

One Friday night, the boy stood at the window watching families return from shul. His father stood beside him, ready to make Kiddush. The candles were glowing. It was peaceful—but something was missing.

"They're lucky," the boy said. "They have angels walking home with them… but we don't."

"Angels?" his father asked.

"My teacher said when you come home from shul, angels come too. That's why we sing *Sholom Aleichem*. But we didn't go—so they didn't come."

The words hit hard. The father looked out the window again, this time seeing what his son saw. He placed a hand on his son's shoulder.

"Next week," he said, "we'll come home with angels too."

And they did.



Daily Challenge

Find out what time candle-lighting is this week.

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Sources

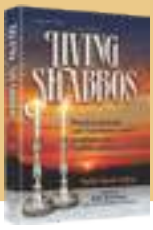
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3) Ibid
4) Ramban, Shemos 20:8
5) Aruch HaShulchan OC 242:3
6) Ramban Yisro 20:8
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8) Rashi Shemos 20:8, quoting Beitza 16a
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14) See Mishneh Berurah 261:23; Igros Moshe OC 2:6
15) Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, Orach Chaim 261:4
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24) Mishlei 6:23
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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



The Radiance Of Shabbos
By Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen



Living Shabbos
By Rabbi David Sutton

Remember The Day Of Shabbat

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/remember-the-day-of-shabbat-zachor-and-shamor/

CHANUKAH

The Holiday of Chanukah



1. What is Chanukah?
2. Story of Chanukah
3. Why are We Celebrating?
4. What are the Laws of the Menorah?
5. Minhagim of Chanukah

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What is Chanukah?

In a Nutshell

Chanukah is a joyful eight-day holiday beginning on 25th of Kislev, which is usually in December. It commemorates events that took place nearly 2,200 years ago! Back then, the Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple) stood in Jerusalem, and most Jews lived in Israel, which was under the control of the Assyrian Greek Empire. The Greeks tried to force the Jews to abandon the Torah and their Jewish way of life. The Jews resisted with great courage, relying on Hashem and their tefillos (prayers). With Hashem's miraculous help, they went to war, defeated the mighty Greeks, cleansed and restored the purity of the Beis Hamikdash, and relit the Menorah, bringing the light of Torah and Hashem back into the center of Jewish life.

Be a Chanukah Hero



Some people think that they need to be like all of the non-Jewish people around them, that they need to blend in with their neighbors. On Chanukah, we mimic the Maccabi heroes from our past and use the Chanukah flames to shout loud and clear that we are proud to be true to our Torah and our Jewish way of life.

Spotlight

When we stay true to our Yiddishkeit, Hashem will help us, sometimes even in miraculous ways.

Light it Up



On Chanukah, we light the menorah each night in a window or doorway that faces a street to publicize the great miracles Hashem does for His beloved nation!

Main Miracle

The most famous miracle on Chanukah had to do with the Menorah! After the discovery of one single, small jar of pure oil, the *Kohanim* lit the Menorah, expecting the oil to last for one night. To their surprise and delight, the flames burned for 8 days, until new pure oil was brought.[1]

Torah Challenge

Chanukah is the 25th day of the month of *Kislev* on the Jewish calendar. Can you open a Chumash and find the hidden meaning in the 25th word of the Torah? What do you think is the significance of this word?

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A Closer Look



Chanukah is so much more than just an amazing story about the miracles Hashem performed for the Jews in ancient Israel. It's a holiday with a deeper meaning that has impacted the Jewish nation for more than 2,000 years.

The Greeks had a unique culture. They came from Yefes, one of Noach's sons[2], blessed with a special talent for creating beauty. That's why they focused so much on outward beauty—strong muscles, perfect art, music, literature, fancy buildings, and stylish clothing. Their intelligence and philosophy were also admired. But there was a big problem: all this beauty and knowledge was just for physical pleasure and without any spiritual purpose.

When the Greeks conquered a country, they didn't just take over the land and demand taxes. They wanted everyone to live like them. They built libraries in big cities for people to learn Greek ideas and opened gymnasiums to exercise and socialize. These gyms had statues of Greek gods to promote idol worship. The Greeks tried to replace the culture of the people they conquered with their own—a process called assimilation, when people adopt the dominant culture around them.[3]

Most nations didn't mind this. After all, who wouldn't want to be like the most powerful empire?

The Jews didn't agree. When Israel became part of the Greek empire, they weren't interested in Greek libraries, gods, or philosophies. They were only interested in serving Hashem, and everything was used for that purpose. For example, they sang zemiros, used their best dishes, and wore special clothing to make Shabbos beautiful. The beauty of Greece could only be used in the service of G-d, but never as an end in itself. The Jews knew that their lifestyle was perfect just as Hashem designed it!

This steadfast adherence to our lifestyle and traditions made the Greeks angry. They couldn't stand the idea that another culture might be better than theirs, so they worked harder to get the Jews to assimilate.[4]

Sadly, some Jews were tempted by the Greeks' way of life. They thought Greek clothing, names, and ideas were more exciting than their own. These Jews, called *Misyavnim*, were embarrassed by Jewish traditions and acted as Greek as possible. Worse, they pressured their Torah-true friends to follow them.

The Greeks, together with the *Misyavnim*, made life hard for Jews who were loyal to the Torah. But these Jews didn't give up. With Hashem's help, the Maccabees—a tiny army of Torah-true Jews—fought back and miraculously pushed the Greeks out of Israel. They helped the Jewish people rediscover their roots and connection to Torah.

That's what makes Chanukah so special: by lighting the menorah and celebrating for 8 days, we recognize the great miracles Hashem performed for His beloved nation. When we exert ourselves to serve Hashem, we receive Divine assistance, often in amazing ways!

Think of something you're proud of — a talent, skill, or object. How would you feel about giving it up?

Did You Know?

The Midrash[5] compares the Jews to the olive, and its primary by-product, olive oil. Other liquids mix easily together, but oil always stay separate and on top.



Based on this, why do you think the Jews are specifically compared to olive oil?

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Story of Chanukah

Jewish Year/Secular Year	Event
0/3760 BCE	Creation of the World
2448/ 1312 BCE	Hashem takes the Jews out of Egypt and gives them the Torah at Har Sinai
2928/832 BCE	Construction of first Beis Hamikdash
3338/423 BCE	Destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash *(Galus Bavel)*
3400/358 BCE	Purim *(Galus Paras Umadai)*
3408/353 BCE	Rebuilidng of second Beis Hamikdash *Alexander the Great conquers Israel at around the same time as the Beis Hamikdash was completed, introducing Greek culture (called Hellenism) to the Jews*
3644/168 BCE	The War of the Maccabees *(Galus Yavan)*
3648/164 BCE	Chanukah Miracle
3830/70	Destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash *(Galus Edom)*
Today	Modern day!

Which happened first, Chanukah or Purim?

Who's Who

Antiochus The king of the Assyrian Greek Empire, Antiochus IV was also known as Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus the Madman! He was an unusually harsh and cruel ruler who was known for doing strange things.

Matisyahu Chashmona'i Matisyahu was the son of Yochanan Kohein Gadol, also known as Matisyahu Chashmona'i. At the time of the Chanukah story, Matisyahu was an elderly man, a *tzaddik* and leader of the Jews.

Chashmona'i sons Yehuda Hamaccabi, and his brothers – Yochanan, Shimon, Elazar, Yonasan

The Chashmona'i family were Kohanim, from the family of *kohanim gedolim*. These were the five sons of Matisyahu, each of whom was a *tzaddik* and *talmid chacham*. They led the Jews in battle against the Greeks, and secretly taught Torah despite the Greek's terrible decrees.

Misyavnim Jews who abandoned their Torah way of life, to look, act, and live like Greeks.

Maccabim The small Jewish, Torah-true army who fought against the Greek army.

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Long Long Ago...

The story of Chanukah[6] takes us back about 2,200 years, during the reign of Antiochus, the king of the Assyrian Greek Empire. Antiochus was a cruel and self-obsessed ruler who erected statues of himself everywhere and was intent on Hellenizing the Jewish people.

Under Antiochus, the Jewish people were severely oppressed. Antiochus enacted laws that banned important *mitzvos* like keeping *Rosh Chodesh* and Shabbos, having a *bris milah* and learning Torah. Jews who disobeyed these laws were punished terribly—they were humiliated, beaten, thrown off cliffs, or killed with swords.

Antiochus also replaced the real *Kohein Gadol* with Jason, one of the *Misyavnim*. Jason focused on collecting taxes for Antiochus and spreading Greek ways. He built gymnasiums near the *Beis Hamikdash*, where people would exercise and worship the Greek gods. Many Jews became *Misyavnim*, and lost their pride in being Torah-true Jews. They were dazzled by the beauty and excitement of the Greek lifestyle.

When the Greek soldiers took control of *Beis Hamikdash*, they didn't just steal the precious *keilim*[7] and make a mess; they destroyed every possible holy item that was stored there, including the precious sealed jars of olive oil that were needed for the Menorah. They erected statues of Greek gods and of Antiochus and sacrificed pigs on the holy *Mizbe'ach* (altar) to their gods! This was a horrific blow to the Jews, who knew how the *Beis Hamikdash* was being disgraced by the Greeks and the *Misyavnim*.

But not everyone gave up! Matisyahu, an elderly leader from the Chashmona'i family of *kohanim gedolim*, stood strong. Along with his five courageous sons—Yochanan, Shimon, Yehuda, Elazar, and Yonasan—and a handful of others[8], Matisyahu was determined to protect the Torah and fight back against the Greeks.

The turning point came in Modi'in, a small town near Jerusalem. The Greek soldiers gathered the townspeople and demanded that the Jews sacrifice a pig to the Greek gods. The soldiers singled out Matisyahu, who adamantly refused, even when the Greeks offered to let him just pretend to participate. One of the *Misyavnim*, eager to impress the Greek soldiers, rushed forward to sacrifice the pig instead.

With a surge of strength, Matisyahu grabbed a sword and killed the man, and then he and his sons turned on the Greek soldiers, killing them all. Matisyahu raised his voice over the shouts of battle, calling out with a fierce cry, "*MI LA'HASHEM ELAI!*" ("Whoever is for Hashem, JOIN ME!") His words pierced the hearts of the bystanders, igniting their courage. They ran for the hills around Modi'in, and the Jewish rebellion officially began. The little army called themselves the *Maccabim* after their slogan, M*i* Ka*mocha* Ba*'eilim* H*ashem* (Who is like You among the mighty, Hashem).

Each day of battle began with intense prayer, fasting, and *teshuvah* (repentance). The Jewish soldiers would then attack the Greeks in small groups and destroy their supplies. Even though they had way fewer soldiers and weapons, Hashem helped them against all odds, and they kept winning. Antiochus sent his best generals with huge armies to defeat the Jews, but the Jewish fighters, with both their strong faith and Hashem on their side, kept winning!





MACCABI

מ = מי Who

כ = כמוך Is Like You

ב = באלים Among the Mighty

י = ה' Hashem

The fight against the Greek armies was only part of the battle! The cultural battle continued. Slowly, however, many were inspired by the Maccabim to return to their Torah values. They were doing teshuvah and rededicating their lives to Hashem and His Torah.

After three years of fighting, the Jews finally recaptured Jerusalem and began purifying the *Beis Hamikdash*. They removed the pigs, idols, and dirt left by the Greeks and reconstructed anything that had been destroyed. The Chashmona'im could not use the *Mizbe'ach*, as it had been used for idol worship, and it would have to be rebuilt completely. The one job that they could do was to light the Menorah!

As they prepared to light the Menorah, the *kohanim* could not find even one jar of oil that was sealed and pure. After searching every corner, they found a single jar, with enough oil to last one night. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days, giving them time to prepare more pure oil[9]. We light the menorah during Chanukah to publicize this great miracle.

The hardest battle, reigniting the Jewish spirit and rededicating the service in the Beis Hamikdash, had been won with the rekindling of the Chanukah lights. Hashem showed clearly that He was happy with their *teshuvah*.

Shlomo Hamelech teaches us, "סוּס מוּכָן לְיוֹם מִלְחָמָה וְלַה' הַתְּשׁוּעָה *The horse is prepared for the day of war, but victory belongs to Hashem." (Mishlei 21:31)*

How did the Maccabi warriors apply this lesson to their battle with the Greeks?



Korny Korner

What's the best thing to put into your sufganiyot?

Your teeth!

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Why are We Celebrating?

A Light Unto the Nations!

Chanukah is a special time to shine bright and show the world that we are proud to be Jewish! When we light the menorah each night, we're not just lighting little lights; we're sharing a powerful message. We're saying, "We are so lucky to be Jewish! Even in a world full of darkness, the light of the Torah guides us. If we adhere to Hashem and His Torah despite any difficulty and against all odds, our world will become a better, brighter place, just like in the days of the Chanukah story."

The menorah also reminds us that a little light can push away a lot of darkness.

So, as you light the menorah this Chanukah, remember: you're not just lighting up your home—you're lighting up the whole world with Torah, purpose, and joy!

Give Thanks and Praise

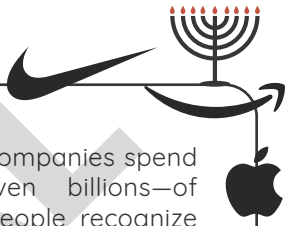
Why is it that on Chanukah, unlike Purim, according to most halachic authorities, there is no mitzvah to make a special seudah?

The Bach[10] explains that there is a fundamental difference between the sin and the teshuvah process of Chanukah and Purim.

In the Purim story, the Yidden sinned physically, by eating incorrectly (at Achashveirosh's party). To do teshuvah, they fasted, as directed by Queen Esther. When their salvation came, the Chachamim made a mitzvah to have a seudas Purim.

On Chanukah the sin was a laxity in avodas Hashem, which is spiritual. This led to a decree by the Greeks to abolish the daily sacrifice, and their contamination of the oil to prevent us from doing the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah. When the Jews did teshuvah and exerted themselves spiritually, Hashem saved them, and He performed the miracle of the Menorah. The Chachamim then instituted a Yom Tov that would be celebrated spiritually - saying words of praise, giving thanks to Hashem, and lighting a menorah.

Logo logic



Did you know that big companies spend millions—sometimes even billions—of dollars to make sure people recognize them? Think about it: when you see the Nike swoosh, the Apple logo, or the Amazon arrow, you instantly know what those companies are, right? That's because they work super hard to make their logos famous and unforgettable.

But guess what? Judaism has its very own "logo," and it doesn't cost a single penny! Wherever you go in the world, whether it's a big city or a tiny village, no matter what country or time in history, there's one thing that tells everyone, "This person is Jewish." What is it? The menorah!

When people walk by homes or apartments and see a menorah glowing in the window during Chanukah, it's like a bright advertisement. It sends a clear message: "This is who I am. I am Jewish, and I am proud of it!" Just like companies who show their identity through their logo, when we light the menorah, we show the world that we're connected Hashem and to our Jewish identity.

Eilecha

Eilecha, Hashem Ekrah
V' el Hashem Eschanan

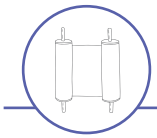
To you I call, to you I plea
Hashem I know you'll answer me

Shema Hashem
Vechaneni
Hashem Heyeh Ozer Li

I know you're there
I know you hear
And so I'll turn to you in prayer

I raise my voice to you each day
His child's cry he won't ever turn away
Shema Hashem Vechaneini
Hashem Heyeh Ozer Li

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Beauty without Substance

When we celebrate Chanukah, we emphasize the foundational differences between the values of ancient Greece and Judaism.[11] Greek values stemmed from an obsession with external beauty.[12] As Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi (author of *The Kuzari*) warned, "Beware the wisdom of Greece, for it has no fruit, only flowers." Fruit provides nutrition and sustenance, while a flower, though very pretty, eventually withers and dies. Greek society valued the external and superficial, believing that only physical experiences—what they could taste, touch, or understand—were real. This contrasts sharply with Torah thought, which teaches that everything in the physical world has spiritual meaning and purpose and can be used to serve Hashem.

When the Greeks first encountered the Jews, they were excited to find a culture as intellectually advanced as theirs. They prized the intellect and saw it as evidence of humanity's greatness. However, they were surprised and frustrated that the Jews retained their unique culture and were uninterested in sharing their sacred knowledge or adopting Greek ideas. One Greek king was successful in forcing the Jews to translate the Torah into Greek, but other than the basic translation, Jewish leaders resisted sharing their holy wisdom.

When King Antiochus came to power, he was angry at the Jews for refusing to accept Greek ideals and its culture, despite its emphasis on physical beauty and intellectual achievements. When Jews said, "No, thanks! We're good!" to Greek ideals, Antiochus targeted mitzvos that epitomized Jewish values and forbade them.



Rosh Chodesh: To the Greeks, time was a fixed mathematical concept. Judaism teaches that we actually control time, as we decide when the new month begins. We sanctify the new month and transcend time, actively determining its beginning.



Bris Milah: The Greeks celebrated the perfection of the human body. Jews, through *bris milah*, show that physical bodies are incomplete without spiritual purpose, a concept completely contrary to Greek ideals.



Keeping Shabbos: Keeping Shabbos reminds us that Hashem created the world, and still runs it, something the Greeks denied. They also did not understand the idea of "kedushah" (holiness) in anything, let alone in time. Therefore, they outlawed Shabbos.



Torah Study: Torah is the wisdom of Hashem and is often way above human intellect, a concept the Greeks could not fathom. In their lexicon, "seeing is believing."

Although the Greeks had magnificent temples for their gods, the idea of a beautiful building devoted to one unseen G-d was baffling. To prove their hatred of our beliefs, they stormed the Temple, defiled it, and offered pigs on the *Mizbe'ach*.

Despite these efforts, the Torah-true Jews remained steadfast. They continued to take pride in the Torah and their way of life, even under threat of death. For them, life without Torah was unimaginable, and they fought their battles with the unshakable confidence that they were fighting a war for Hashem and for Judaism!

When the Maccabees reclaimed the *Beis Hamikdash*, they discovered that much of it had been damaged. The Menorah was gone, and they could only find one small jar of pure oil—just enough for one day. Even so, they used it to light a makeshift menorah made from spears.[13] Hashem performed an amazing miracle, and the oil burned for eight days!

But why did the miracle happen with oil? Why didn't Hashem just make a new Menorah appear? The message of Chanukah isn't about fancy objects or outward appearances. It's about finding the deeper, hidden beauty—the spiritual meaning behind everything. That's why the miracle came through the oil, not the Menorah itself. Even though there was other oil available, it wasn't spiritually pure. The focus was on serving Hashem in the best possible way.

Every moment of life has both physical and spiritual sides. Deciding on which one to focus is a challenge we face every day. The miracle of the oil reminds us that while physical things matter, they're not the most important. What really counts is the spiritual meaning behind them.

On Chanukah, we highlight the fact that we are a nation that experiences life for a greater purpose. When we light the menorah, we remind ourselves and anyone who sees the flames, that our resistance to assimilation will always stay strong, that Judaism will always exist, and that we will always be Hashem's beloved nation.

Choose a mitzvah that you think epitomizes Jewish values and explain why you chose that mitzvah.

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What are the Laws of the Menorah?

When?

The menorah is lit after sunset on each night of Chanukah, beginning with the night before the 25th of Kislev, and must stay lit for at least a half hour after it's dark outside.[20] On Friday night, we must light earlier – before Shabbos begins, so it may need extra oil (or extra-long candles) to burn into the night.[21]

Where?

The menorah is lit in a doorway or window that faces a street or a place that people can see.[22]

With What?

The menorah can be lit with oil or with candles, though olive oil is preferable. An extra candle called a *shamash* is used to light the menorah flames.[23]

By Whom?

Everyone of the proper age has a mitzvah to light the menorah or be at the lighting! Customs vary as to exactly who lights.[24]



How?

On the first night of Chanukah, one candle is lit. Each night after that, one candle is added to the menorah so that by the eighth night, eight candles are lit.[14]

Step 1: Prepare the candles/oil and the *shamash* near a window or doorway. Make sure the flames can burn for at least a half hour after it's dark outside![15]

Step 2: Gather with your family (or friends!) when everyone is home.[16]

Step 3: Light the *shamash*.[17]

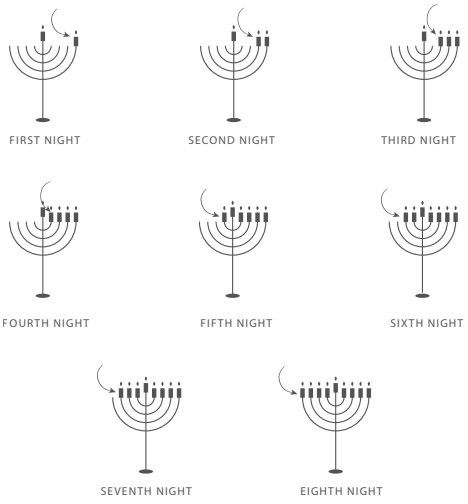
Step 4: Say the brachah, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה

Say the brachah בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה

(On the first night, also say the brachah בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה)[18]

Step 5: Light the menorah!

Step 6: It is customary to sing two special songs, *Haneiros Hallalu* and *Ma'oz Tzur*, immediately after lighting the candles. This is also a good time to learn a little bit of Torah or discuss the miracle of Chanukah! Some people gaze at the lights for some time.[19]



Zoniac Challenge

How many candles will you use in total if you light the menorah each night with a shamash?

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Halachic Details

When?

There are different customs regarding the exact time to light the menorah. Some light at sunset, some 1/2 hour after sunset, and some at nightfall (i.e. *tzeis hakochavim* - the appearance of three medium size stars).[25] Some specifically light after Maariv (the evening service) is recited. Ideally, a person should follow the custom of his or her father. If this is not known or is inapplicable for any reason, one should follow the custom of the local community.

It is obligatory to put in enough oil or use a long enough candle to burn for at least 1/2 hour after nightfall. If you are lighting early, you need to add more oil, so there is enough to last this long.

If you forgot or were not able to light at the correct time, you may still light the menorah the entire night. It is preferable to do it when people are still outside, or at least still awake in the house where you are lighting.

On Friday afternoon, the Chanukah candles should be lit before the Shabbos candle lighting time (if one accepted Shabbos already, it is forbidden to light Chanukah candles). It is preferable to daven Minchah before lighting.[26]

Remember to use more oil or bigger candles on Friday, so that they burn for 1/2 hour after nightfall.[27]

When lighting on Saturday night, some authorities say that one should light Chanukah candles before Havdalah, while others say after Havdalah. One should follow their family custom.[28] One may not use the menorah as the Havdalah candle, as we may not derive any benefit from the Chanukah candles.[29]

Where?

Originally, the menorah was placed outside the house, on the left side of the doorway. Since antisemitism was so common throughout Jewish history, it became customary to place the menorah inside the house, near the doorway or by a window that faces a street. It is preferable to light where people outside can see it; however, you can still light a menorah anywhere in the house because people in the home will see it. In Israel, it is customary to light outside in a special box that prevents the flames from blowing out.[30]

The lights of the menorah should be no lower than three *tefachim* from the floor (approx. 10.5 inches). It is preferable to be lower than 10 *tefachim* from the floor (approx. 35 inches),[31] but it is more important to light by the window, even if the window is above that height.[32]

It should be no higher than 20 *amos* from ground level (35.5 ft).[33] However, someone living in an apartment building higher than 35.5 feet from ground level may still light, as long as their menorah can be seen by other people either inside the apartment or from a facing building.

If many people are lighting in one household, they should make a slight separation between their menorahs so that the number of candles is easily noticeable.[34]

With What?

Candles or any type of oil can be used for the menorah, but it is best to use olive oil.[35]

The menorah should not be gas or electric.[36]

If you can afford it, buying a beautiful menorah is a special way of elevating this mitzvah.[37]

All the candles or wicks should be on the same level, none higher or lower than the others.

There is no requirement to use a menorah. You can use candles that stand on their own (like in a glass jar) or tea lights, as long as the candles are all the same height and placed close together.

By Whom?

Men, women, and children of the proper age are all obligated in the mitzvah of menorah. In Sephardic families, the father of the house lights one menorah, and everyone participates with his lighting. In Ashkenazic homes, each person may light their own menorah. However, a husband and wife are considered one "unit," and only light one menorah.[38]

If you will not be home at the time when your family is lighting the menorah, ask a rabbi what to do.

Lighting a menorah where others can see it is called "pirsumei nisa," "publicizing the miracle."

How do the halachos of the menorah achieve this goal?

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Tell me more about the Shamash

The *shamash* is used for two reasons: to light the wicks of the menorah, and to make sure that the menorah flames are not used for anything other than the mitzvah itself.

Let's explain this further.

We are not allowed to use the light of the Chanukah candles to see things with. Why? To show that the purpose of the menorah is for a mitzvah, not illumination.[39] Therefore, we add a regular, non-menorah candle so that the glow of the candles is not just from the menorah fires, but also from the *shamash*, and if someone does use the light, it will be from the light of the *shamash*. The *shamash* should be placed in a way that shows that it is not one of the Chanukah candles. Most often, the menorah has a branch that is higher or lower than the rest for the *shamash*.[40]

We may not light the *shamash* from the Chanukah candles, even from a different menorah.[41]

Do not remove the *shamash* from the wick until the flame catches onto most of the wick.[42]

How will you be part of lighting the menorah this year?

How?

The prevalent custom is to prepare the candles/oil from right to left, but light them from left to right. On the first night, light the one on the right. On the second night add one to the left, and light that one first, followed by the one on the right. Each night of Chanukah, add a new one to the left and light that one first, continuing left to right.[43]

The menorah should not be moved after it has been lit.[44]

If the menorah was lit properly but went out, it is preferable to relight it, but you are not required to do so.[45] Once it is past the requisite half hour, there is no need to relight it.[46]

If you are sleeping away from home, it is best to light your own menorah.[47] Second best is to share in the owner's lighting by giving him a small amount of money.[48] If you are just eating out, light your menorah at home.

Special Tefillos on Chanukah

Each day of Chanukah, we recite the full Hallel during *Shacharis*. This beautiful *tefillah*, often sung from beginning to end, is a heartfelt expression of praise and gratitude to Hashem for His kindness the countless miracles He has performed in the past, continues to perform today, and will perform in the future.[49]

The *tefillah* "*Al Hanisim*" is added to *Shemoneh Esrei* as well as *Birchas Hamazon (bentching)*.[50] *Al Hanisim* summarizes the story of Chanukah and thanks Hashem for the miracles and kindness He did for the Jewish people during the time of the Maccabees.

If you forgot *Al Hanisim* in *bentching* or *Shemoneh Esrei*, it is not repeated, but there is a special *harachaman* that can be recited at the end of *bentching* or davening.[51]

What else do I need to know?

It is customary for women not to do work (activities like sewing or doing laundry) for the first half hour after lighting the candles. This serves as a reminder that the light of the Chanukah candles cannot be used for any other purpose. The women took on this custom since they had an important role in overcoming the Greeks.[52]

Although not required, it is customary to have special, festive meals on Chanukah to celebrate the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash and *mizbe'ach* that took place during Chanukah. We sing songs that thank and praise Hashem, which makes the meal into a *seudas mitzvah*.[53]

Chanukah parties should be combined with words of Torah[54] to show that the true miracle of Chanukah was the triumph of Torah.

If a poor person needs money for Chanukah candles, he is required to sell his possessions to buy candles, and the community is obligated to provide for him.[55]

It is customary to light a menorah in shul every evening before *Ma'ariv*. Some shuls light in the morning as well. It is placed at the southern wall of the shul, just like the menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash*.[56]



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ZONIAC QUESTION:

I understand that when the oil lasted for 8 days instead of 1, that was an incredible miracle! But what about that first night? The oil was supposed to last for that first night, so that wasn't really a miracle! Why do we celebrate for 8 nights?

Here are 8 approaches to answer this question:

1. The Kohanim divided one night's oil into eight portions. Miraculously, each portion lasted an entire night.[58]
2. The Greeks ransacked the Beis Hamikdash for many days in search of oil to defile. Despite their strength and numbers, they overlooked one flask. A few weak, battle-weary Jews found it immediately.[59]
3. Wanting the oil to last, the Kohanim made the wicks one-eighth of the normal thickness. Nevertheless, the flames burned just as brightly as if the wicks had been the normal thickness.[60]
4. On the first night, the contents of the jar were emptied into the menorah. This would enable the menorah to be lit for one entire day. However, after filling the menorah, it was discovered that the jar miraculously was still full. This miracle repeatedly occurred for each of the days. Hence, there was a miracle on each of the eight days.[61]
5. In one account, the text reads "and there wasn't enough (oil) it to burn *even* one day..."[62]
6. Seven days commemorate the miracle of the oil, and one day commemorates the miracle that a few weak Jewish soldiers defeated the mighty Greek legions.[63]
7. Calendar calculations and other historical sources indicate that the 25th of Kislev, the first day of Chanukah, fell on Shabbos that year. Therefore, the Kohanim needed to light the menorah before sunset Friday night, and consequently needed a little more than a night's-worth of oil. The jug of oil was only enough to last the regular amount of time, but burned for longer due to Shabbos.[64]
8. The Mitzvah of Bris Milah was forbidden under the reign of Antiochus, and after the military victory, the Jews were once again able to openly perform this commandment. In order to commemorate the fact that we were able to resume performing this commandment which occurs on the eighth day of a baby boy's life, we have eight days of Chanukah.[65]

This is a famous question asked by the Beis Yosef. There are a whopping 100+ answers to this question! Can you think of any?

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Science Center

How olive oil was made

Pure olive oil is known in Hebrew as *"shemen zayis zach,"* and is made of the first drops of oil that come out of the olive. The Mishnah states[57] that there are 3 olive crops and there is nothing better than the first oil of the first crop. It then goes on to explain the process of making olive oil.

Step 1: The fully ripe olives from the top of the tree are picked.

Step 2: The olives are brought to the olive press and are crushed, not ground in a mill.

Step 3: The olives are then placed in baskets.

Step 4: The oil that oozes out of the baskets without being squeezed is *shemen zayis zach*.

Step 5: The olives are then pressed with a beam, and the oil that drips out of the baskets is considered the second grade of oil.



Minhagim



"I Like you a Latke"

Potato latkes have become synonymous with Chanukah! These fried circles of delicious goodness are perfectly crisp on the outside, soft on the inside, and absolutely addictive! You can't just have one!

The reason why we eat latkes is really to celebrate the oil more than the potato! In fact, potatoes were only part of the Jewish diet for the last 500 or so years, while Chanukah has been celebrated for more than 2000 years. Before potatoes, Chanukah was celebrated with fried cheese latkes, pancakes, or other vegetables. But since potatoes were delicious, inexpensive, and easy for everyone to access, they became a staple on every Chanukah table.



Legacy of Yehudis

The custom to eat dairy on Chanukah comes from the incredible story of Yehudis, a widow living in Jerusalem in Israel during the Greek oppression. The city was suffering terribly from the wicked Assyrian-Greek general Helifornus, who had cut off the city's food and water supply. The Jews in the city were going to die! Yehudis secretly went into the Greek camp and told Helifornus that she would give him secrets about the Jewish army. He believed her and even threw a party in Yehudis's honor. Later, Yehudis was alone with the general, and served him salty cheeses that made him thirsty, and strong wine that made him drunk and sleepy. When Helifornus was asleep, she took his sword and decapitated him! Yehudis then snuck out of the camp with the head of Helifornus hidden in her basket and brought it back to the city. The Jews displayed Helifornus's head on the city walls, and in a panic, the army ran away!

To remember and celebrate the brave actions of Yehudis, and her willingness to do whatever it takes to save her city, we eat cheese on Chanukah. Many have the custom of eating cheese which reminds us of Yehudis's bravery.[66] Latkes are also common, maybe because of the oil.

"Gelt Ready, Gelt Set... Go!"

Giving gifts of money, called "Chanukah gelt," is an ancient tradition, although we do not know the exact source. It may be because *tzedakah* was often given to those who could not afford oil for their menorahs,[67] or because Chanukah is a special time for Torah study and we are rewarding the children for studying Torah.[68] In any case, giving Chanukah gelt is an exciting and time-honored part of Chanukah and continues to this day!

There is no real source for Chanukah gifts, although it is probably in place of Chanukah gelt. Instead of giving children money to buy themselves toys, many parents skip the part of taking their kids to the store and just give the gift!

Dizzy for Doughnuts

The *minhag* to eat doughnuts goes as far back as the time of Rabbi Maimon, the father of the Rambam, who lived in the 1100's![69] In order to commemorate the miracle of the long-lasting oil, we eat oily (that is, fried) foods. Years ago, the most common food to fry was dough, and the *sufganiyah*, or doughnut, was born! Whether filled with custard or jelly, plain or powdered, the custom to eat doughnuts is one that we are delighted to uphold.

Dreidels

What would Chanukah be without a dreidel game? Legend has it that the Jews would hide in caves around Israel to study Torah, since the Greeks would kill anyone they found learning Torah. These brave Jews would keep dreidels with them, so that if a Greek soldier would come across them, they could quickly hide their scrolls and pull out an innocent spinning top, pretending to be playing instead of learning. Nowadays, we play dreidel to remember their bravery and willingness to risk their lives for the study of Torah![70]

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Small Flames of the Menorah

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book2 pg.288

Every year, as we light our menorah, my children express their disappointment that our little flames seem so insignificant next to all the elaborate decorations and lights of our non-Jewish neighbors. How can I help them appreciate the greatness of our small flames amidst all the glamor?

This is a perfect opportunity to teach your children a vital lesson about Torah and about life in general: the importance of internal quality. Many things may seem glorious on the outside, but what's inside is what really counts, and we must never lose focus of this. Indeed, our rabbis tell us, *(Pirkei Avos 4:20)* "Don't look at the bottle but at what is inside," or as the saying goes, "don't judge a book by its cover."

There is much more to the flames shining in our windows than meets the eye. The light of the menorah commemorates the miracle of the small jug of oil, which contained enough oil for only one night, yet miraculously lasted for eight nights. This miracle was the culmination of the Jewish nation's victory over the Greeks. For many years, the Greeks tried mightily to get the Jews to embrace their Hellenistic culture, torturing them and enacting decrees against Torah study and mitzvah observance. With the fire of the Torah burning in their hearts, the Jews defied their decrees, even endangering their lives to study Torah and keep all the mitzvos.

Their perseverance and self-sacrifice made them worthy of a great miracle, and Hashem empowered the small and weak group of Jewish warriors to triumph over the mighty Greek army. The light of the menorah represents the eternal light of the Torah, and the miracle of the oil symbolizes the triumph of Torah over foreign Greek culture.

This everlasting light of the Torah is what lights up the darkness of our long exile and has warmed our hearts throughout the ages, helping us survive the horrors of the inquisitions and holocausts. As the Chovos HaLevavos writes, just as a little bit of light has the ability to dispel the vast darkness, a small amount of truth can chase away much falsehood. So far from being insignificant, the tiny flames of the Chanukah candles shine brighter than all the flashy lights and ornaments, symbolizing the victory of Torah-true life over anti-Torah influences, the very essence of a Jew and the eternity of our religion.

In a society caught up in the glamor and glitz of external beauty, this is an important lesson to internalize. One example of this is when seeking a potential spouse. While a person should certainly choose a marriage partner who appeals to them, the primary focus should not be on outward appearance. Torah outlook, personality, and good character traits are so much more important in any relationship, and certainly when establishing a Torah-true home and raising children.

So look at your menorah burning bright and internalize the lesson of Chanukah. What makes someone a Jew is not bagels and lox, and not even Israel. While it's a holy land and we're always looking to live there, it's not what makes us Jews. What makes a person a Jew is the Torah. Only the study of Torah and observing its laws has sustained us throughout the ages and their many challenges, and Torah is what will bring the ultimate redemption.

IN SHORT: *The small flame of the menorah shines brighter than all the bright lights. It represents the light of the Torah, which lights up the darkness of our exile and warms our hearts, keeping us connected to Hashem for eternity.*

Got questions about Judaism? Curious about something?

Join **Ask the Rabbi Live** with Rabbi Chaim Mintz **Tuesday Nights** at **9PM**!

Go to **oorah.org/asktherabbi** to join as well as watch previous questions.

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Zoniac Zone



Key Takeaways

You can take the lesson of Chanukah and apply it to your everyday life. Remember, the menorah is not just to publicize the miracles to others, but also for ourselves! The menorah broadcasts the message, "We are Hashem's beloved nation! He loves us and watches over us!" Ask yourself, "If Hashem does so much for me, what am I doing for Him?"

You can do this! Bring the joy and light of Torah to your everyday life, and make Hashem part of your world. Thank Hashem for everything He does, and then enjoy the wonderful world He has given us!



A Meal to Remember

Yehudit heard the whispers around her—soft, persistent—growing into a low buzz as she walked from the cafeteria line to a table, her kosher airline meal balanced carefully on her tray. The U.S. Army wasn't the usual place for a Jewish girl, but it was exactly where Yehudit wanted to be. She dreamed of becoming a doctor, and through the Army Medical Corps, she would earn her medical degree while fulfilling her deep desire to serve her country with honor.

Back in middle school, high school, and even her first year of college, keeping kosher hadn't felt like a big deal. She was a vegetarian, so avoiding non-kosher food had been relatively easy. The college cafeteria offered plenty of whole fruits and vegetables, and the nearby grocery store carried the rest.

But life on the training base was different. Yehudit felt as if a spotlight followed her wherever she went. The base didn't have the flexible options her college had provided, and she wasn't allowed off base to shop for fresh food. That left her with pre-packaged kosher airline meals. They weren't exactly gourmet, but they got the job done. The hardest part, though, was sitting down at the table and explaining why she ate them—every single day.

Yehudit slid into her seat, peeled back the two layers of plastic wrapping, and braced herself for the inevitable comments. Her neighbor, Gianna, wrinkled her nose. "Why do you eat those things, anyway?"

For a moment, Yehudit hesitated, debating whether to brush off the question with a fake excuse about a rare dietary condition. But instead, she decided to tell the truth. "I keep kosher," she said, meeting Gianna's eyes. "I'm Jewish, and we only eat kosher food."

Gianna blinked, surprised, then shrugged. "Oh. Cool." Without missing a beat, she launched into a spirited argument about one of their earlier training demos.

As Gianna talked, Yehudit felt relief wash over her. But more than that, she felt a quiet, unfamiliar power. Growing up, being Jewish had never made her stand out—she had always blended in. Now, for the first time, she had proudly embraced her identity in the face of curiosity and scrutiny.

Yehudit looked around the room, realizing she had taken her place—not just as a cadet, but as herself. She was Jewish. She did Jewish things. And she would succeed, not in spite of her identity, but because of it.

Her resolve strengthened. She could do this. She would serve her country and achieve her goals, all while staying true to her values, Jewish pride, and spiritual integrity.

Because, after all, *that's who she was*. A proud Jew.

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Are you a Jewish American or an American Jew?

What do you consider yourself, first and foremost Jewish, or first and foremost an American? See how many of these you can answer! Are you happy with your results?

1. What is today's secular date?
   What is today's Jewish date? *(including year)*
2. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
   Who wrote *Megillas Esther*?
3. Who was the first president of the United States?
   Who was the first Jewish king?
4. Name 5 contemporary famous Americans.
   Name 5 contemporary *Gedolim*.
5. What is one thing that only the president can do?
   What is one thing that only the *Kohen Gadol* was able to do?
6. What is the date of Halloween?
   What is the date of *Lag Ba'omer*?
7. What are the words to Pledge of Allegiance?
   What are the words of *Asher Yatzar*?
8. How many books are there in the Harry Potter Series?
   How many books are there in *Tanach*?







Zoniac Dilemma

Jeremy was an ordinary sixth grader who loved hanging out with his friends, stressing over science tests and history projects, and devouring hamburgers. One chilly December Friday morning during their winter vacation, his neighbor Kyle invited him to join his family downtown for the annual Christmas parade.

"It'll be fun," Kyle promised enthusiastically. "There's this amazing light show, people dressed as Santa and his elves handing out free stuff, a hot cocoa stand, and tons of performers. You've got to come!"

Jeremy hesitated. "I'm not sure," he said. "My family's Jewish. We don't really celebrate Christmas."

Kyle grinned and waved off Jeremy's concern. "No problem, dude. My mom even checked—the hot cocoa's kosher, and we'll totally be back before sundown!

It's not about celebrating Christmas; it's just a fun afternoon out. So, are you in?"

What do you think Jeremy should do?





COVER UNCOVERED

The cover depicts the message of Chanukah. Boys and girls from different eras stand alongside a Maccabee, some atop a dreidel and gelt. Oil remains separate from water, symbolizing that Jews maintain their own identity. Above them, the menorah shines through the darkness, illuminating Jews throughout our long exile with the eternal light of Torah.



Daily Challenge

Find spiritual meaning in something physical.

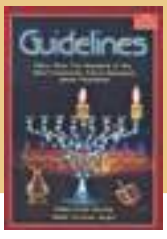
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Sources

1) Mesechas Shabbos 21b
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3) Rav Samson Rafael Hirsh, Moadim B'hashkafas Rav Hirsch
4) Miraculous Journey by Yosef Eisen
5) Shemos Rabbah 36:1
6) Based on Megillah Antiochas, and Ch. 3 of Rambam Hilchos Chanukah
7) See Avodah Zara 43a
8) Rashi Devarim 33:11
9) Ra"n on Menachos 85b
10) Tur, Orach Chaim 670
11) Based on Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch on Chanukah
12) See Zohar Shemos 237
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14) Shulchan Aruch 671:2
15) See Shulchan Aruch 672:1 & 675:2
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22) Shulchan Aruch 671:5
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24) See Shulchan Aruch 671:2
25) See SA 672:1 & MB 672:1 & Biur Halacha there.
26) Shulchan Aruch 672:2, Mishna Berurah 672:11, Sha'ar Hatziyun 17, Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:105
27) Mishna Berurah 679:2
28) Shulchan Aruch 881:2 & Mishna Berurah 681:3
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30) See Shulchan Aruch 671:5 & 671:7 & M. B. 671:37
31) Shulchan Aruch 671:6
32) Mishna Berurah 671:27
33) Shulchan Aruch 671:6
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36) See Tzitz Eliezer 1:20 ch 11-12 & 20:19, Yechave Da'as 4:38, Kaf Hachaim 673:19 and others
37) Mishna Berurah 673:28
38) Shulahn Aruch 671:2 & Mishna Berurah 671:9
39) See Mishna Berurah 673:8
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41) Mishna Berurah 674:3
42) Biur Halacha 673:2 "hadlaka"
43) Shulchan Aruch 676:5
44) See Mishna Berurah 674:1 & Shaar Hatziyun 672:12
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49) Shulchan Aruch 683
50) Ibid 682:1
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57) Menachos 8:4, 86a
58) Beis Yosef on Tur 470:1
59) HaMeiri in Lehodos U'lehallel; Sefer HaEshkol, Chanukah 6:13
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67) See Magen Avraham 670:1
68) Lekutei Levi Yitzchok, Igros pg. 358; Sha'arei Halacha U'minhag , Vol. 2 Siman 283
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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Guidelines to Chanukah

What is Chanukah?

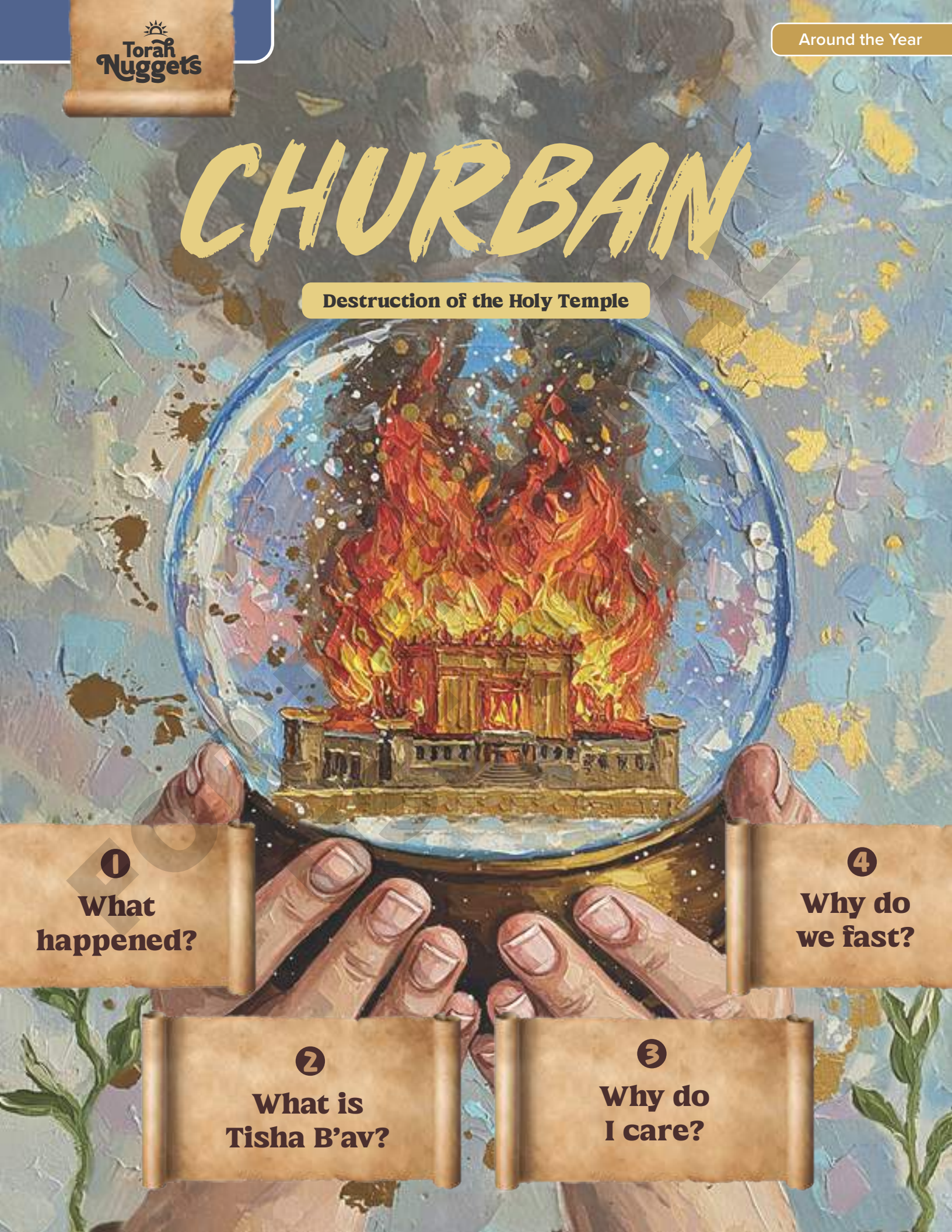
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/what-is-chanukah/

Chanukah 101 – An Oorah Holiday Guide

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/10-minutes-to-a-better-chanukah/

CHURBAN

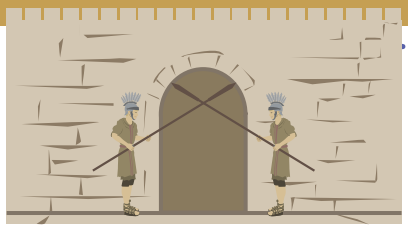
Destruction of the Holy Temple



1. What happened?
2. What is Tisha B'av?
3. Why do I care?
4. Why do we fast?

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

What happened on our fast days?



In a Nutshell

There are six fast days on the Jewish calendar, when everyone over the age of bar or bas mitzvah (with some exceptions) may not eat or drink anything. These fast days are not just "recommended," but an obligation and a mitzvah to keep! Fast days are meant for *teshuvah;* some of them are connected to the *Churban*, the destruction of both Batei Mikdashim (holy temples) as well. In this unit, we are going to focus on the fast days that are connected to the *Churban*.

Fasts for the Churban

There are four fast days that are connected to the Churban. Each one of these days signifies an event that was a turning point in Jewish history, and specifically in the timeline of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

ASARA B'TEVES (The 10th of Teves) Asara B'teves marks the day when the Jews passed the point of no return and were going to be forcibly expelled from their land. On this day over 2400 years ago, the army of Nevuchadnetzar surrounded the city of Yerushalayim[1] and slowly starved the thousands of Jewish people who were taking refuge inside.

Asara B'Teves falls out in the winter, usually in early January, and is the only fast day that can be observed on Friday due to its significance as "the beginning of the end" of an independent Jewish nation.

SHIVAH ASAR B'TAMMUZ (The 17th of Tammuz) This fast marks the day when both the Babylonians (on the 9th of Tammuz) and the Romans (on the 17th of Tammuz) broke through the walls of Yerushalayim and began their destruction of the city and the brutal massacre of its inhabitants.

Shiva'h Asar B'Tammuz usually falls out in July, and marks the beginning of a three-week period of gradually intense mourning leading up to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

TISHA B'AV (The 9th of Av) On this day, both the Babylonian army in 423 BCE and the Roman army in 70 CE set our holy Beis Hamikdash aflame after plundering its treasures, and dragged the surviving Jews to be captives or sold as slaves.

Tisha B'Av usually falls out in August, and is the only one of the *Churban*-related fasts to be a full day long. It begins in the evening at sundown, and is over the following day at nightfall.

TZOM GEDALIA (The fast of Gedalia) On this day, the third of Tishrei, we mourn the murder of Gedalia, the last governor of Eretz Yisrael (Israel). After that, the last Jews left and the land of Israel lay abandoned[2].

Tzom Gedalia is the day after Rosh Hashanah, which is usually in September.

Spotlight

We mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and our distance from Hashem's Holiness.

Other Fasts

These two fasts are not related to the Churban, but are obligations nonetheless.

TAANIS ESTHER On the 13th of Adar (usually in March), we fast to remember Hashem and that fasting and *teshuvah* can help nullify a bad decree, as happened by the *neis* of Purim.[3]

YOM KIPPUR Also unrelated to the *Churban*, we fast for 25 hours on the 10th of Tishrei (usually in September), to do *teshuvah* and achieve atonement[4]. This is the only fast day specifically commanded in the Chumash.[5]

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The Beginning of the End

Most people understand why we fast on the 10th of Teves, 17th of Tammuz, and Tisha B'Av, as they mark the process of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the end of Jewish life in Israel on two separate occasions. But why do we have a fast day for the assassination of Gedaliah ben Achikam?

He may have been a great rabbi and leader, but throughout Jewish history, many great leaders have been killed. Think about the Ten Martys who were brutally murdered by the Romans, like Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava[6], who was a great *Tanna* who was brutally executed by the Romans for ordaining students at a time when *semicha* was banned. The Romans pierced his body with 300 spears[7], yet we do not have a fast day in his memory. What makes Gedalia's death so important that every Jew is obligated to mourn it every year on Tzom Gedaliah?

Gedaliah's assassination was so much more than the loss of one man, no matter how great he and his individual influence may have been. Gedalia's death was the final blow to Jewish independence after the destruction of the First Temple. More than that, it was a tragedy caused by Jews turning against each other. The fast of Tzom Gedaliah reminds us that internal hatred and division can be just as dangerous as any enemy from the outside.

Who Was Gedaliah and What Happened to Him?

Gedaliah ben Achikam was chosen by the Babylonians to be the governor of the remaining Jews in Eretz Yisrael after the First Beis Hamikdash was destroyed in 423 BCE. Most of the Jewish people had been exiled to Bavel, but some were allowed to stay and live under Gedaliah's leadership. He encouraged the Jews to rebuild their lives, plant crops, and have hope for the future[8].

However, not everyone supported Gedaliah's leadership. A man named Yishmael ben Nesanyah, who was from the royal family of Yehudah, believed that Gedaliah was a traitor for working with the Babylonians. He planned to assassinate him, and Gedaliah was warned by his loyal friend, Yochanan ben Kareiach, multiple times about this threat. But Gedaliah refused to believe that a fellow Jew would do such a thing[9]. His insistence on not listening to *lashon hara* was misplaced in this instance, since a person should take precaution when warned of harm, without actually accepting the words as true[10].

On, or just after, Rosh Hashanah, Yishmael and his men came to Gedaliah, pretending to be friendly. While Gedaliah was hosting them for a meal, they suddenly attacked, killing him and many others[11]. After this, fear and chaos spread. The remaining Jews in the land panicked and fled to Egypt, officially ending Jewish self-rule in Eretz Yisrael for that time[12].

The Rambam explains[13] that the fast (which is held on the third of Tishrei, as one cannot fast on Rosh Hashanah) is about both mourning Gedaliah's death and also understanding the consequences. His assassination led to the complete collapse of Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael. The Jewish people had lost their land, their Temple, and now even the small community that had remained.

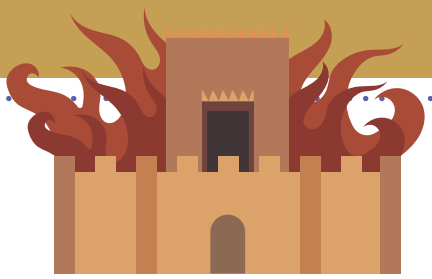
Fast days are meant to make us think and do *teshuvah*, not just feel uncomfortable and sad[14]. The first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins—idolatry, immorality, and murder[15]. But Gedaliah's death reminds us of a different kind of tragedy: when Jews turn against each other. Even though the first Beis Hamikdash fell due to widespread *avodah zarah*, the final blow to Jewish settlement after its destruction came from an act of internal betrayal. This pattern repeated itself later, with the second Beis Hamikdash being destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred).

By fasting on Tzom Gedaliah, we are reminded that both external and internal dangers threaten Jewish survival. Whether it is abandoning Torah values or allowing hatred and division to tear us apart, our actions shape the future of our nation.

Why don't we fast on the day that the Chofetz Chaim, or Rashi, died?



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What happened on Tisha B'Av?

Reason to Cry

Tisha B'Av is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar, a day marked by immense tragedy and suffering throughout Jewish history. The origin of this day's sorrow dates back to the times of the *Meraglim* (spies). When Bnei Yisrael heard their discouraging report about Eretz Yisrael, they cried in despair, fearing they would never enter the land. Hashem responded with a chilling decree:
"You cried for nothing, so I will establish this as a night of crying for generations."[16]

From that moment on, Tisha B'Av became a day of devastation for the Jewish people, as countless tragedies have unfolded on this very date—most notably, the destruction of both Batei Mikdash. The echoes of this sorrow continue to be felt, as we reflect on our history and mourn the suffering our nation has endured.

A Future Yom Tov

Despite the immense sorrow that Tisha B'Av has brought throughout history, it is not meant to remain a day of mourning forever. Chazal teach us that in the future, when Mashiach comes and Hashem brings the final *Geulah*, Tisha B'Av and the other fasts of mourning will be transformed into days of joy and celebration. The Navi Zechariah prophesies:

"כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת, צוֹם הָרְבִיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית יְהוּדָה לְשָׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמוֹעֲדִים טוֹבִים..."

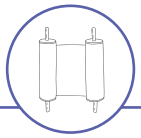
"Thus says Hashem, Master of Legions: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month will be for the house of Yehudah for joy and for gladness, and for festive times." [17]

The very day that has been marked by destruction and exile will become one of rebuilding and redemption. The tears of suffering will be replaced with tears of joy, and instead of fasting, we will celebrate the return of Hashem's presence to Yerushalayim. On that day, all the pain of our long exile will be understood as part of a greater plan, leading to the ultimate *Geulah Shleimah*.

It Happened on Tisha B'av

- **The Sin of the Spies** (1312 BCE)
  After scouting Eretz Yisrael, the Meraglim (spies) returned with a negative report. The nation cried in despair, lacking faith in Hashem. As a result, Hashem decreed that this night of "crying for nothing" would become a night of real tragedy for generations.
- **Destruction of the First Beis Hamikdash** (423 BCE)
  The Babylonians, led by Nevuchadnezzar, destroyed the First Beis Hamikdash massacring thousands and exiling most of the Jewish people to Babylon.
- **Destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash** (70 CE)
  The Romans, led by Titus, destroyed the Second Beis Hamikdash, killing and enslaving hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions, of Jews.
- **The Fall of Beitar** (135 CE)
  The final Jewish stronghold of the Bar Kochba Revolt fell to the Romans, leading to the slaughter of over 500,000 Jews.
- **Plowing Over of Yerushalayim** (136 CE)
  Hadrian plowed over the site of the Beis Hamikdash and turned Yerushalayim into a pagan city called Aelia Capitolina, forbidding Jews from entering.
- **The First Crusade Begins** (1096 CE)
  Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade, leading to the massacre of tens of thousands of Jews in France and Germany.
- **The Expulsion from England** (1290 CE)
  King Edward I expelled the Jews from England, forcing them to leave behind their homes, synagogues, and possessions.
- **The Expulsion from Spain** (1492 CE)
  The Spanish Inquisition, led by Ferdinand and Isabella, expelled the Jews from Spain on Tisha B'Av, causing immense suffering and exile.
- **The Start of World War I** (1914 CE)
  World War I began on Tisha B'Av, leading to global upheaval that ultimately set the stage for the Holocaust.
- **The Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto** (1942 CE)
  On Tisha B'Av, the Nazis began mass deportations of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka, where they were murdered in the gas chambers.
- **AMIA Bombing in Argentina** (1994 CE)
  The Jewish community center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires was bombed, killing 85 people and injuring hundreds.

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What Are We Really Mourning?

Tisha B'Av is a day filled with sorrow. We mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the suffering of our people, and the tragedies that have occurred throughout Jewish history. But the reason we cry on this day goes back much further—to an event that happened in the desert, soon after the Jewish people left Egypt.

The Gemara[18] teaches that on the night of Tisha B'Av, the Jewish people cried after hearing the spies' negative report about Eretz Yisrael. They were afraid to enter the land, believing it was impossible to conquer. Even though Hashem had performed open miracles for them like the plagues in Egypt, the splitting of the sea, the *mon* falling from the sky—they doubted He would help them this time. Hashem responded: *"You cried for nothing; I will establish this night as a time of crying for generations."*

At first, this sounds harsh. Why should one night of tears lead to so much suffering throughout history? Wasn't it natural for them to feel afraid? But their mistake wasn't that they cried—it was why they cried compared to their level of greatness. Instead of trusting that Hashem was with them, they believed they were alone. Instead of seeing the challenges ahead as part of a greater plan, they saw only darkness. On their level, they should have realized that Hashem would be there to help them overcome the challenge.

That night that the Jewish nation sat and cried after hearing the spies' report, something devastating happened: the Jewish people momentarily forgot that Hashem loved them and was personally involved in their lives. They lost the trust they had shown when they accepted the Torah and declared *"Na'aseh v'nishma."* They doubted that Hashem would continue to help them, despite all He had done.

"You cried because you imagined I wasn't on your side," Hashem said. "I will show you what life looks like when I'm not on your side."

This was not an angry response from a frustrated parent—it was a reality check. **Hashem's presence in our lives depends on how much we let Him in.** If we push Him away and act as if the world runs on its own, He will let us experience life as if He is distant. But when we recognize His presence, when we trust Him even in difficult times, we allow Him to be close to us.

The Torah tells us[19], *"If you walk with Me casually (as if events happen randomly, without My involvement)... I will walk with you casually."* This means that the way we relate to Hashem determines the way He relates to us. If we assume everything happens by chance, Hashem will let us experience life that way. But if we open our hearts to His love and guidance, we will see that He is involved in every moment of our lives.

The mistake of the spies is not just a story from the past—it is a challenge we face today. We often find ourselves crying over things that seem unfair, feeling lost when life doesn't go the way we planned. We forget that Hashem is involved in our lives, and think that we are on our own.

But Tisha B'Av reminds us that this mindset is the very thing that led to our greatest suffering. The exile, the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and so many of our national tragedies all stemmed from a failure to recognize Hashem's presence. Just like in the desert, when we believe we are alone, we bring upon ourselves a world where Hashem feels distant.

The solution is simple, yet powerful: **let Hashem in.** See Him in your daily life, in both the struggles and the successes. Trust that even when things seem difficult, He has a plan. When we do this, we transform our pain into connection, and our exile into the beginning of redemption.

When you fast this year on Tisha B'Av, when you sit on the floor and mourn, don't just cry over the past—think about the present. Ask yourself: *Am I making the same mistake as the spies? Am I pushing Hashem away by believing that He isn't here with me?*

Tisha B'Av is not just about feeling sad—it's about fixing the mistake that caused this day to become one of mourning in the first place. If we use this day to strengthen our awareness of Hashem, to recognize that He has never abandoned us, then maybe next year, Tisha B'Av will no longer be a day of tears. Instead, it will be a day of joy, when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt and Hashem's presence is fully revealed once again.

How can the sin of the meraglim (spies) affect the way you approach a life challenge?

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Why do we care?

Teshuvah Time



The mistakes and events of the past are not remembered for the sake of history, but to encourage us to take a closer look at our own thoughts and actions and examine where we can do better. We must take this time to see if our choices measure up to the standards of Torah and mitzvos. Jewish history, especially as we remember it on these fast days, seems overwhelmingly depressing. But we can channel that emotion to motivate us to evaluate our own mistakes and do *teshuvah*, and thereby merit the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash.

Past, Present, Future

The loss of the Beis Hamikdash is not a sad history lesson that we recount a few times a year to make sure we don't forget it. The Beis Hamikdash was more than a place to serve Hashem and bring *korbanos*; it was the conduit for the holiness and *Shechina* of Hashem to permeate the Jewish nation. Without the Beis Hamikdash, the Jewish nation was no longer united physically or spiritually, leading to widespread decline of Torah and Torah values. We fast four times a year to acknowledge and mourn the fact that we are distanced from Hashem.

Corny Corner

Why do archaeologists lead sad lives?

Because their career lies in ruins.

Total Purification

The Beis Hamikdash offered each Jew a chance to completely cleanse themselves of *aveiros*. Through the *avodah* of bringing *korbanos* (sacrifices), they would be inspired to do *teshuvah* and reach incredible spiritual heights. Without the ability to draw close to Hashem and cleanse ourselves of aveiros, we continue to suffer, both spiritually as our growth remains stunted, and physically as we lack the immense blessings the Beis Hamikdash once brought[20].

Never a Peaceful Moment

"Since the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, not a day has passed without a curse."[21]

From the moment the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the world has been in a state of spiritual and physical decline. The presence of Hashem, which was once so clear in the world, became hidden. Because of this, suffering, hardships, and difficulties became part of everyday life.

Before the destruction, the Jewish people had a direct connection to Hashem, and blessings flowed through the Beis Hamikdash. But without it, we constantly struggle, both in our personal lives and as a nation. The pain that we experience today—whether sickness, poverty, or exile—is all part of the ongoing impact of the Churban. This reminder pushes us to long for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, when the *avodah*, with its blessing and closeness to Hashem, will return.

For the Love of G-d

As Hashem's chosen nation, when the Jews are exiled and oppressed, the world either denies Hashem's presence or thinks that Hashem is unable or unwilling to take care of His nation that He promised to protect. This opened the narrative that Hashem abandoned the Jews as His nation and moved on to "other" nations as His chosen people. Such a concept ignores Hashem's direct promise to us in the Torah that Hashem will never reject us, even when we are in *galus*[22]. When we mourn the *Churban*, we are also mourning the desecration of Hashem's honor.

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How Can We Cry for Something We Never Had?

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi Book1 pg. 290

Tishah B'Av is a day of mourning over the loss of the Holy Temple (Beis Hamikdash) and the many tragedies that have befallen our people. But how are we supposed to feel a sense of loss over something we never experienced? And living today with such an abundance of blessing, both material and spiritual, what is there to mourn?

It is certainly difficult to feel the tragedies that happened long ago, or mourn something that we never experienced. However, the very fact that we can ask this question is possibly the saddest testimony to our current state. Precisely because we don't know what we are missing, we think that life is great. We don't know what it's like to have the Divine Presence in our midst, to be fully alive and standing in Hashem's presence in the Beis Hamikdash, as well as throughout the Holy Land.

As any Jew can testify, when performing certain mitzvos one can occasionally experience an overpowering feeling of inspiration, in which he or she will feel especially connected to Hashem. Some people feel spiritually uplifted after they learned Torah for many hours. Others become inspired at *Kol Nidrei* or *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur, dancing with the Sefer Torah on Simchas Torah, or opening the door for Eliyahu HaNavi at the Pesach Seder. Some women are deeply inspired when lighting the Shabbos candles and davening for the wellbeing of their children. Other people have this special feeling when visiting certain holy places, such as the Kosel, the Western Wall.

The list goes on, but every person has their special moments in which they feel connected to Hashem. During those uplifting moments, when one feels a true connection to Hashem, all physical pleasures become meaningless, and one would not give up those moments of pure joy and inspiration for anything.

We must realize that in the times of the Beis Hamikdash, the Divine Presence dwelled in our midst, and the Jews felt these wonderful feelings constantly, multiplied many times over. In this rarified atmosphere they were able to feel Hashem's precious Fatherly warmth smiling down at them and showering them with overwhelming goodness.

In addition, without a Beis Hamikdash, we are missing so much. During the time of the Beis Hamikdash, there were dozens of mitzvos that were performed that cannot be done today. The daily service in the Beis Hamikdash included many different offerings, both daily and on special occasions. And of course, there was the national pilgrimage three times a year, which gave every single Jew an opportunity to absorb some of the great holiness of the Beis Hamikdash.

Being in the Beis Hamikdash on these occasions elevated the Jewish nation to great heights, and the infusion of spirituality kept them on an elevated plane throughout the year. All of this is lacking and cannot be attained today without the performance of these mitzvos. Every mitzvah brings us closer to Hashem, and without these mitzvos we are severely lacking in our connection to Hashem.

Of course, as the Talmud teaches, Hashem is always with us — even in exile — and we are always able to connect with Him. But that strong, palpable feeling of a loving connection that we had in the times of the Beis Hamikdash is not there.

These are some of the reasons why the life we live in exile isn't the real thing, and we are dead in comparison to what life is meant to be. We may feel as if we are "hanging in there," doing the mitzvos to the best of our abilities, and holding onto our faith that the Final Redemption will come soon. We have to do our best to bring the world back to the way it is supposed to be, a world in which Hashem and His beloved nation will be as happy and close to each other as a joyful bride and groom.

IN SHORT:

If we would realize how much we are lacking today in our connection to Hashem without a Beis Hamikdash, we would surely mourn.

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Why is fasting important?

Stop sign

The purpose of a fast is not to starve yourself, to punish your body, or to lose weight. A Jewish fast is intended to make us pause in our race to accomplish "life" and do some soul-searching, and to recognize our *aveiros* and their results[23]. We do not fast to feel depressed about what happened in the past, but to learn from our ancestors and the lessons that their lives-and deaths!- teach us.

Teshuvah Time

The Torah teaches us (*see Teshuvah unit*) that anytime you feel like you've made a mistake or blocked your connection with Hashem, you can repair and strengthen your connection to Hashem through the process of *teshuvah*. However, no one says that *teshuvah* is easy! It can be daunting to really sift through your thoughts, words, and actions, identify what is blocking your connection to Hashem, feel real regret, and create a plan for the future so that you're less likely to make that mistake again.

This is where fast days come to the rescue! Six times a year, we are forced out of the clockwork pace of our lives and into a day where things are just...off. We can't eat or drink, we feel kind of icky and empty, but we have a chance to look past our daily routines and think deeply about how we can become better servants of Hashem.

Take the Escalator

Hashem is a kind, benevolent, and constantly giving Father. He doesn't want us to be starving and dizzy for no reason! He wants us to be close to Him, and gave us a way to amplify our *teshuvah* so that we can be closer to Him, sooner! *Teshuvah* on its own is powerful. *Teshuvah* combined with fasting is even more powerful, and *teshuvah* while fasting along with the rest of the Jewish people is like shooting your *teshuvah* through a rocket ship!

Often, people will do anything they can do to make the fast day pass by, like watching movies or sleeping for hours. While a person would still get "credit" for fasting as long as they didn't actually eat or drink, they've wasted their chance to use the power of their fasting to catapult their connection to Hashem.

Korban

In the time of *korbanos*, sacrifices, there was a process where the fat of the animal was burned on the *mizbeiach*, and the blood was poured as well. These *korbanos* would help the person become closer to Hashem and do *teshuvah*. We cannot offer sacrifices without a Beis Hamikdash, but when we fast, we are burning our fat and using the nutrients in our blood more so than when we have a steady stream of nutrition. Therefore, it is as if we are still bringing Hashem a *korban*, and we can achieve *teshuvah* this way.

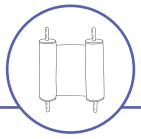


Stay Strong

In the last few centuries our bodies have become weaker, and we are not able to handle fasting as well as we used to. Fasting is very difficult for our weak bodies, and a rabbi might tell you not to fast, or to break your fast early so that you won't be really sick. You can still achieve the levels of *teshuvah* and connection that fasting brings, by eating foods that aren't so exciting, and keeping in mind the meaning and value of the day. It's harder to stay focused on the seriousness of *teshuvah* when you're busy with iced coffees and acai bowls, so you need to tone down your focus on food and reach out to Hashem.

Fasting induces frailty, which means your body is tired and weak. Frailty, in turn, generates humility. It reminds a person that they are not all-powerful and that they rely on Hashem for strength. Feeling small and humbled in this way opens the heart to honest reflection. A person is more likely to recognize their mistakes, feel sorry for what they have done wrong, and truly want to change for the better.[24]

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Fast Track

In many cultures and religions outside of Judaism, physical ascetism, which means depriving the body of its needs and wants, is often seen as an ideal. Excessive fasting, poverty, and not getting married are seen as the highest form of service to their religion. Judaism is quite different, rarely encouraging ascetism except in specific circumstances and for specific periods of time.

The Torah teaches us that life is meant to be lived with a balance between physical and spiritual needs. The goal is not to reject the physical world but to use it in a way that brings a person closer to Hashem. A key idea in Yiddishkeit is that the physical and spiritual worlds are deeply connected. Instead of rejecting physical existence in favor of spirituality, you are meant to use the physical world as a tool to strengthen and express your spiritual side. In this life, the physical and spiritual are intertwined, and it is up to you to use both to reach your highest potential and fulfill your ultimate purpose.

You can access the spiritual through the physical. This is why you prepare for Shabbos by cleaning your home, cooking delicious meals, and wearing your best clothing. A peaceful and tidy home creates an atmosphere of calm, good food brings joy and satisfaction, and dressing in fine clothes adds a sense of honor and importance to the day. These actions are not just about comfort or appearance—they help you shift your mindset away from the ordinary and toward a deeper connection with Hashem. By elevating the physical, you create an opening for spiritual growth.

The opposite is true as well. Judaism does not encourage extreme self-denial, but it does believe that sometimes, limiting physical comforts can help a person grow spiritually. Fasting is not about suffering for its own sake but about using physical discomfort to create a deeper awareness of our spiritual side.

When you are fasting, you stop eating and drinking for a period of time. This leads to feelings of hunger and weakness, which serve as reminders that humans are not completely independent and that we rely on Hashem for our strength and survival. These physical sensations can help shift your focus away from everyday material concerns and toward more meaningful thoughts. The emptiness that you feel in your body can reflect a deeper spiritual longing, pushing you to think about your relationship with Hashem and their purpose in life.

When a person fasts, they feel more vulnerable and humble, which makes it easier to take an honest look at their actions and recognize where they have gone wrong. This self-reflection is an important step toward change. By experiencing discomfort, a person is reminded of their need to rely on Hashem, and this can inspire them to return to a better path.

Fasting can also be viewed as a personal offering to Hashem. In the times of the Beis Hamikdash, people would bring sacrifices as a way of showing their devotion and seeking closeness to Hashem. Today, in the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, giving up food and comfort during a fast can serve a similar purpose. It is a way of demonstrating that a person's spiritual growth and connection to Hashem are more important than their physical desires. This act of self-control strengthens a person's commitment to their values and their faith.

However, fasting is not meant to be an act of suffering with no purpose. The goal is not simply to feel hungry or weak, but to use those feelings as a tool for spiritual reflection and connection. When fasting is done with the right mindset, it helps a person step away from their usual distractions and focus on their relationship with Hashem. It serves as a reminder to improve oneself, appreciate what Hashem provides, and seek a deeper connection to holiness.

Don't waste it!

List things you can do on a fast day to access the spiritual momentum of the day.



Torah Challenge

"וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוְּארֵי בִנְיָמִין אָחִיו וַיֵּבְךְּ, וּבִנְיָמִן בָּכָה עַל־צַוָּארָיו."

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he and his brother Binyamin cried on each other's shoulders. Binyamin cried because he foresaw the destruction of the Mishkan, which was in the territory of Yosef. Why did Yosef cry?

HINT: The Beis Hamikdash was built in the territory of Binyamin

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Rules and Regulations

Fast days in General

Any person over Bar or Bas Mitzvah should fast, which means not eating or drinking anything from the beginning of the fast (sunset the day before for Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av, or that morning at dawn for other fasts) until the end (nightfall).

Those who are truly too weak to fast, such as pregnant or nursing women, or those with certain medical conditions, should consult a rabbi and ask what they should do. Some may be advised to fast for part of the day, or not at all. If one feels sick while fasting, one should consult a rabbi as well to find out if they should break their fast.

Children below the age of bar/bas mitzvah, or those who are not fasting for medical reasons, should not indulge in special treats or parties.

The "Three Weeks"

The three weeks from the fast day of the 17th of Tammuz until the 9th of Av mark a period of gradually increasing mourning, commemorating the increasing torture of the Jewish people under the Babylonians and Romans, culminating in the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the exile of the Jewish people. During these three weeks, we observe certain restrictions to minimize our joy and happiness.

Music We do not listen to live music, which brings happiness[26]. Some people will not listen to any music at all, even recorded music![27]

Weddings Marriages are not performed during the Three Weeks, although engagements are certainly permitted. [28]

Shehecheyanu Some people avoid wearing or using something on which we would normally say a "*shehecheyanu*" bracha, such as an expensive new watch or piece of clothing.

Haircuts Ashkenazim do not get haircuts or shave during the Three Weeks, just like a mourner. Many Sefardim allow until the week of Tisha B'Av.

The "Nine Days"[29]

Beginning from Rosh Chodesh Av until midday after Tisha B'av (9 days), Ashkenazim go into a higher level of mourning than the rest of the Three Weeks. According to Sefardic tradition many of these laws are kept only during the week of Tisha B'Av, until after the fast.



Bathing and Showering We take short showers just long enough to get clean, instead of long, luxurious, refreshing showers and baths. Some people will take only cold showers or lukewarm. Sephardic custom is to refrain from showers only during the week of Tisha B'Av.



Meat and Wine Unless participating in a *simchah*, like a *bar mitzvah* or *siyyum* (a party after someone finishes learning an entire *sefer*), we do not eat meat or chicken, or drink wine, since these foods bring enjoyment/pleasure.



Laundry Other than small children who get very dirty, we do not wear freshly laundered clothing or do laundry during the Nine Days. Therefore, many will wear their clothing for a short time before the Nine Days start, to ensure they aren't fresh anymore.



Be Safe! Because of the long list of terrible things that happened to the Jews during the first 9 days of Av, some are careful not to do anything specifically dangerous. This includes water-related activities like boating, travelling unnecessarily, or undergoing surgery that can be pushed off. [30]

Tisha B'av [25]



Washing We do not wash our bodies (unless something is really dirty). For Netilas Yadayim in the morningor after using the bathroom, we wash only until the knuckles.



Lotion We do not put on any lotions or perfume.



Shoes We do not wear leather shoes.



Good Morning! We don't even greet each other with a cheerful "Hello!"



Sitting on Chairs We sit on the floor or on low chairs like mourners, focusing on the terrible history of the day. After midday, we can sit on regular chairs and do productive activities like cleaning or cooking.



Torah We are not allowed to learn Torah, except for Tisha B'Av related topics.

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Tefillos of Fast Days/Tisha B'av

FAST DAYS IN TEFILLAH

On fast days, we add certain tefillos and leining (reading from a Torah portion) that help us connect to the meaning of the day.

Avinu Malkeinu: Written by Rabi Akiva, this *tefillah* is a heatfelt plea to Hashem to help us in spiritual and physical matters. It is not said on Tisha B'av, but is included in the *tefillos* of all the other fast days.

Aneinu: The *tefillah* of *Aneinu* is a special supplication recited on fast days, asking Hashem to answer our prayers and show mercy in times of distress. It is said by everyone during Mincha *Shemoneh Esrei* in the bracha of *Shema Koleinu*. Someone who is not fasting would not say *Aneinu*.

Leining: On these fast days, we *lein* from Shemos 32:11-14 and 34:1-10, which includes Moshe Rabbeinu's plea for mercy after the *chait ha'egel* (sin of the golden calf), Hashem's response and instructions to carve the second set of *Luchos*, and The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy (*Yud-Gimmel Middos Harachamim*), emphasizing Hashem's compassion and willingness to forgive.

These *pesukim* are chosen because they show us the power of *teshuvah*.

The Haftarah for Minchah on all these fast days is Yeshayahu 55:6–56:8, which begins with *"Dirshu Hashem b'himatzo,"* a call to seek Hashem while He is near, reinforcing the theme of *teshuvah*.

TISHA B'AV TEFILLOS[31]

Megillas Eichah: a *megillah* read after Maariv on Tisha B'av night. It vividly describes the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash and the immense suffering that followed. Written by the *navi* Yirmiyahu[32], to warn of the coming devastation, the book mourns the loss of Yerushalayim, the exile of the Jewish people, and the horrors of starvation and death. It reminds us that Hashem's punishments are meant to guide us toward *teshuvah* and that redemption is possible. Despite its mournful tone, *Eichah* ends with hope, pleading for Hashem's mercy: *"Hashiveinu Hashem eilecha v'nashuva, chadeish yameinu k'kedem,"* "Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return; renew our days as of old."

Tallis and Tefillin: Men do not wear their *tallis* or *tefillin* until Mincha, which is after midday, when the mourning restrictions ease somewhat.[33]

Tachanun and Avinu Malkeinu: There is no *Tachanun* or *Avinu Malkeinu*.

Kinnos: *Shacharis* is followed by *Kinnos*. These are special prayers that express sorrow over various tragedies that have happened to the Jewish people throughout history. Although most *kinnos* focus on the destruction of the Batei Mikdash, others remember events like the martyrdom of ten Jewish sages, the massacres of Jewish communities during the Crusades, and even the burning of the Talmud in medieval Paris. Some communities have added *kinnos* that mourn tragedies such as the Holocaust.

The *navi* Yirmiyahu wrote the first *kinnah* after the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, and over the centuries, many scholars and poets composed additional *kinnos* to reflect on later tragedies.

We should try and understand the *kinnos*, not just read the words, so it's a good idea to use a translated *kinnos*.

One is not allowed to learn Torah on Tishah B'av.

Can you think why this would be?

Tefillah Time

In Shemoneh Esrei, we say

תְּקַע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל לְחֵרוּתֵנוּ וְשָׂא נֵס לְקַבֵּץ גָּלֻיּוֹתֵינוּ וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יַחַד מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ׃

Sound the great shofar for our liberty, and raise a banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth.

Since the beginning of our *galus*, Jews have been scattered across the globe. This bracha expresses our deep longing for the day when every Jew will return to our true home together, united, in the land Hashem gave us.

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Zoniac Zone



Key Takeaways

The four fast days that commemorate the destruction of the Batei Mikdash, Tzom Gedaliah, Asarah B'Teves, Shiva Asar B'Tammuz, and Tisha B'Av, are not just about remembering history. They are meant to inspire us to do *teshuvah*, reflect on our actions, and strengthen our connection to Hashem. These fasts remind us that we are still in exile and should long for the final *geulah*, when the third Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt.

Fasting is not just about physical discomfort; it is a tool to help us pause and think. It pushes us to step away from distractions and focus on our spiritual growth and connection to Hashem. The restrictions of the Three Weeks and Nine Days are also meant to help us internalize this message. When we observe these days properly, our *tefillos* and *teshuvah* reach Hashem more powerfully, bringing us closer to the time when mourning will turn to joy and redemption will come.

Someday We Will All Be Together

Ruby had never really cared much about Jewish history. To her, it was just a bunch of old stories about people she had nothing to do with. What did it matter? So when her friends at TheZone started talking about fasting on *Shivah Asar B'Tammuz*, she rolled her eyes.

"Wait, you're not eating or drinking anything today? That's insane. Why would you do that?" she asked, incredulous.

Her *TorahMate*, Leah, smiled. "It's not just about not eating. Today marks the day when the walls of Yerushalayim were breached. It was the beginning of the end for the Beis Hamikdash."

Ruby shrugged. "So? That was, like, forever ago."

Leah's face grew serious. "It's part of our history, Ruby. This day started three weeks of tragedy for the Jewish people—destruction, exile, suffering." She paused, then added, "Imagine if America was destroyed today. No home, no country, no safety. That's kind of what happened to us."

That hit a little differently, but Ruby shrugged it off.

Over the next few weeks, everyone at camp seemed to be talking about the Beis Hamikdash, the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades—like they actually *felt* it. Ruby started to wonder if she was missing something. They spoke about Jews from centuries past like they were family, like their pain was *our* pain. But Ruby? She felt nothing.

Then came Tisha B'Av. She sat on the floor, listening as Rabbi Davidowitz spoke.

"The Beis Hamikdash wasn't just a building," he said, his voice filled with longing. "It was a time of glory, of closeness to Hashem, of miracles. The Jewish people were united like never before. We stood together, stronger than any enemy, connected to something greater than ourselves." His voice lowered. "And then we lost it. Not because of war. Not because of armies. We lost it because we weren't unified anymore. We fought each other. We looked down on each other. And when we fell apart, our Beis Hamikdash fell with us." He looked around the room, his eyes burning with hope. "But we can get it back. We can bring Mashiach. When you learn with your TorahMate, when you let someone cut in front of you, when you keep Shabbos, you can bring back that perfection."

As the haunting melody of *'Someday We Will All Be Together'* filled the room, something clicked inside Ruby. This wasn't just *their* story—it was *her* story. Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu, King David… they weren't just historical figures. They were *her* ancestors. This was *her* nation. *Her* history.

The tears came before she even realized it. This is what it meant to be part of a nation.

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Acheinu

אַחֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
Brothers, sisters, all of Yisroel
We shed bitter tears of hardship and of fear
We stand in battle for our souls
through galus all these years

אַחֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
Hear your children cry out painful wails
Through the shackles of exile, your spirit must withstand the trial
Between the land and sea,
we pray redemption sets us free

Chorus x2:

הַמָּקוֹם יְרַחֵם
Please have mercy on your nation
Take us out of tzara and bring us bracha
Show us light, ignite the spark
Shine the sunlight out of darkness
Don't stall, please hear our call
The time is now

אַחֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, אַחֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַנְּתוּנִים בְּצָרָה, בְּצָרָה וּבַשִּׁבְיָה
הָעוֹמְדִים בֵּין בַּיָּם וּבֵין בַּיַּבָּשָׁה
הַמָּקוֹם יְרַחֵם, יְרַחֵם עֲלֵיהֶם
וְיוֹצִיאֵם מִצָּרָה לִרְוָחָה,
וּמֵאֲפֵלָה לְאוֹרָה, וּמִשִּׁעְבּוּד לִגְאֻלָּה,
הַשְׁתָּא בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב

Chorus

Don't stall, please hear our call
The time is now

Zoniac Challenge

Put these in the right order:

1. Bais Hamikdash is set on fire
2. Enemy surrounds the city of Yerushalayim
3. Enemy kills thousands of Jews and drags everyone else to slavery or captivity
4. Enemy breaks through the walls of Yerushalayim
5. Enemy loots the Beis Hamikdash and steals its treasures

Zoniac Dilemma

Sam was ready for Tisha B'Av. He had a whole lineup of movies to keep his mind off the hunger, and honestly, he was pretty proud of himself for fasting. *Whatever gets me through the day,* he thought. *That's the goal.*

But something nagged at him—a little voice whispering that maybe zoning out in front of action movies wasn't exactly the point.

Fine, he grumbled, scrolling for a Holocaust film. *I'll make myself sad.*

But was that really the goal of Tisha B'Av?

Was he getting through the day — or missing the point entirely?



Did You Know?

A person's *tefilllos* are more readily accepted when they are fasting, since they are slightly removed from Olam Hazeh[34].

Daily Challenge

Think of one way Galus affects you today.

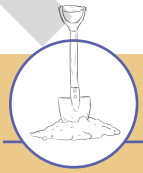
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Sources

1) Melachim II 25:1
2) Yirmiyahu 39-44
3) Mishnah Berurah 686:2
4) Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3, Hilchos Shevisas Asor 1:1
5) Vayikra 16:29, 23:27
6) Midrash Eleh Ezkerah
7) Sanhedrin 14a
8) Melachim II 25:22-24, Yirmiyahu 40:7-12
9) Yirmiyahu 40:13-16
10) Niddah 61a
11) Yirmiyahu 41:1-3
12) Ibid 17-18
13) Rambam Hilchos Taaniyis 5:2
14) Ibid, 5:1
15) Yoma 9b
16) Taanis 29a, based on Bamidbar 14:1
17) Zechariah 8:19
18) Taanis 29a
19) Vayikra 26:21-24
20) Tosafos Bava Basra 21a
21) Maseches Sotah 48a
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24) Rabbi Mayer Twersky, The Fast Past to Teshuvah
25) Shulchan Aruch 554-555
26 Mishnah Berurah 560:13
27) Igros Moshe 1:166; Tzitz Eliezer 15:33:2
28) Shulchan Aruch 551
29) Ibid
30) Ibid 554 and Emes V'Yaakov
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32 Eichah Rabbah 1:1
33) Shulchan Aruch 555:1
34) Mabit Shar Tefilla Ch. 13 - Beis Elokim

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



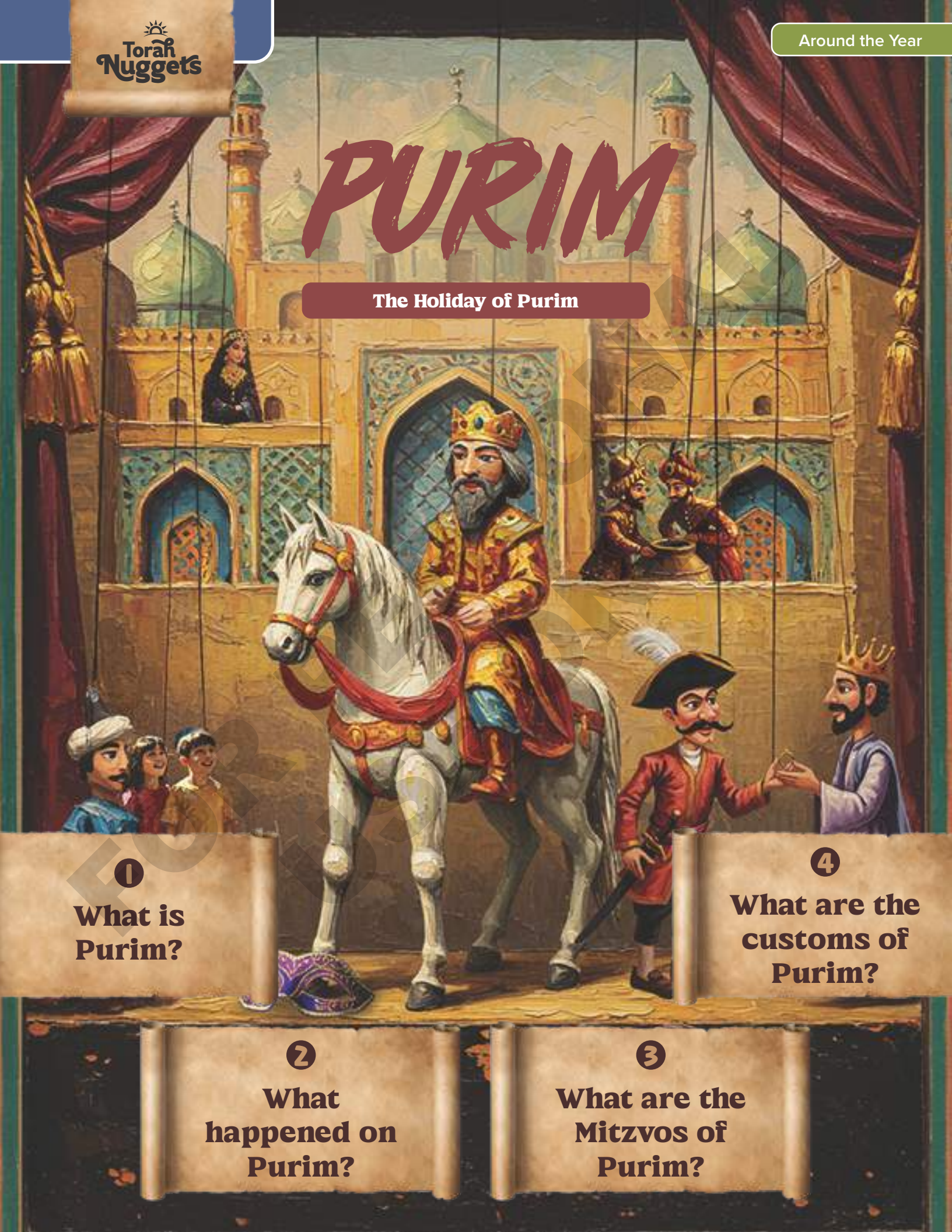
Tishah B'av
Texts, Readings, And Insights

The Three Weeks, The 17th of Tammuz, and the 9th of Av
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/the-three-weeks-and-9th-of-av/

Laws and Lessons of The Four Fasts
torahmates.org/jewish-resources/laws-and-lessons-of-the-four-fasts/

PURIM

The Holiday of Purim



1. What is Purim?
2. What happened on Purim?
3. What are the Mitzvos of Purim?
4. What are the customs of Purim?

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What is Purim?

In a Nutshell

Purim is the day we commemorate the fact that Hashem saved the Jews from complete annihilation. We celebrate and remember the timeless message that Hashem loves His nation and takes care of us at all times.

Why is it Called Purim?

Purim means "lottery" in ancient Persian. The holiday was thus named since Haman had thrown lots to determine when he would carry out his wicked scheme.

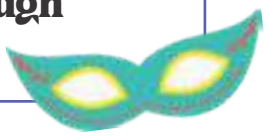
Long Story Short

The story of *Esther* and *Mordechai* looks totally natural: a king, a queen, some politics, a bad guy, and a wild plot twist. But it was one apparent "coincidence" (read: hidden miracle) after another that led to the Jews' salvation. Klal Yisrael was in serious danger: Haman had convinced the king to sign a law allowing everyone to kill every Jew on the 13th of Adar. It was a plan for the total destruction of the Jewish people. But behind the scenes, Hashem was arranging their salvation. Haman fell into his own trap, and the whole story turned upside down. The Jews were saved, and their enemies were defeated. That's the miracle of Purim: Hashem saved us without any open miracles, but when you look closely, it's clear—Hashem was guiding everything from behind the scenes. It was a new kind of miracle: a *neis nistar* - hidden in nature, but just as powerful as the open ones.



Spotlight

Learn to see through Hashem's "Mask"!



Relationship Reset

Purim is probably the most exciting day of the year. It's filled with costumes,[1] parties, *mishloach manos* (gifts of food), and nonstop fun! But beneath it all is a celebration of something huge: Hashem's love for us—then, now, and always. When Hashem took us out of *Mitzrayim* (Egypt), He revealed Himself in glorious, powerful and awesome open miracles like *Krias Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea), and *Matan Torah* (when we got the Torah). But generations later the open miracles stopped. The *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, prophecy diminished, and Jews began to wonder: Is Hashem still watching over us? Did our sins cause Him to give up on us? That's when the Purim story put their doubts to rest forever. Purim reminds us that even when things look like 'nature' or 'coincidence', Hashem is always there with us, pulling the strings from Above. We just need to look for Him, and we'll certainly see Him behind His mask.

The Four Mitzvos of Purim

Purim isn't just full of fun—it's full of mitzvos! There are four special mitzvos of Purim. We read *Megillas Esther* - the fascinating chain of events orchestrated by Hashem Himself. We give *Mishloach Manos*, two ready-to-eat foods to a fellow Jew. We also give *Matanos La'evyonim*, money to the poor, so everyone can celebrate with dignity. And finally, we enjoy a festive *Mishteh*, a joyful Purim *seudah* (meal) filled with gratitude and celebration.

Torah Challenge

The Torah hints at Haman's and Esther's names.

1. After Adam ate from the Eitz Hada'as, Hashem says:
   "הֲמִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לְבִלְתִּי אֲכָל מִמֶּנּוּ אָכָלְתָּ?"
   "Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?"[2]
2. Hashem warns Bnei Yisrael what will happen if they sin:
   "...וְאָנֹכִי הַסְתֵּר אַסְתִּיר פָּנַי"
   "I will surely hide My face..."[3]
   Find Haman and Esther's hidden names!

Bonus: Why is each posuk fitting for the person it hints to?"

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Seeing Past the Mask



The name "Purim" means "lots," referring to the lottery Haman used to pick the day to destroy the Jews.[4] A lottery symbolizes randomness, where something is picked without rhyme or reason. And yet, the very name of the holiday of Purim hints to its secret: what seems random is actually Hashem's perfect plan. That's the miracle of Purim. There were no seas splitting, no fire coming down from Heaven, just a series of seemingly ordinary events that joined together to reveal an extraordinary master plan. The queen is deposed. An orphaned Jewish girl becomes queen. A plot is overheard. The king can't sleep. None of it looks miraculous—but that's the point. Hashem was guiding everything, but from behind His mask of nature and random coincidence.

Purim occurred at a critical juncture in history – the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, and the Jews were exiled and felt forsaken. Things looked bleak.[5] This is why the message of Purim was so critical. Hashem showed *Klal Yisrael* that He was still with them and would always be. But now, they would have to learn how to recognize Him from behind the facade of nature. Perceiving Hashem in His open miracles took no effort at all. The Jews were almost forced to see Hashem's hand. Now, in this new stage, the Jews had to choose to recognize Hashem. They had to search for Him and invest in their relationship with Him. This was definitely a much harder job, but also a much more rewarding one.

This brings us to one of the most noticeable features of *Megillas Esther*: Hashem's name is not mentioned even once! The most common word in the entire Megillah is *HaMelech*—"The King." Chazal teach that whenever the Megillah says *HaMelech* without specifying *Achashverosh*, it is a hint to the King of Kings, Hashem Himself.[6] This idea is at the heart of Purim. *HaMelech* can be seen as either an earthly king or the hidden King of the universe. Every twist in history is the hand of Hashem, working from behind the curtain. On Purim, we train ourselves to see Him, not only when His presence is obvious, but also when He hides Himself within nature, within politics, and within history.

Megillas Esther literally means *The Scroll of Esther*. But beneath the surface, both words carry a deeper message. The word *Megillah* comes from the same root as *legalos*, to reveal. The name Esther comes from the word *hester*, to hide.[7] So Megillas Esther can also mean *Revealing the Hidden*[8]. And that is the essence and message of the Purim story. It is all about the revelation (*gilui*) of Hashem's hand precisely when He seems most hidden. Even our Purim costumes hint at this idea—we wear masks and disguises, just like Hashem "wears a mask," as the Torah says, *"V'ani hastir astair panai"* – I will surely hide My face.[9] In this era, Hashem's miracles come disguised as coincidence and the natural-looking flow of cause and effect.

Even today, Hashem rarely shows His hand openly, but He is still here, guiding history from behind the scenes. Purim teaches us that even when Hashem hides, we can still see Him if we know how to look.[10]

Where else do you find that when you choose to invest in something, the results are more meaningful than if you were forced into it?

Seeing Through the Mask

Mordechai and Esther were able to "see through the mask" and recognize that Hashem was in control. Their actions often appeared counterintuitive at the time, but they ultimately saved the Jewish people.

- Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman appeared to have triggered Haman's hatred, but Mordechai knew the Jews had already been judged in Heaven for bowing to Nevuchadnezar's idol, and bowing again would only worsen the Heavenly decree against the Jews.[11]
- After the decree, Mordechai didn't run to the palace to beg for mercy, although he had saved the king's life and was respected at court. Instead, he first responded with *teshuvah*. He wore sackcloth, cried out in the streets, and called the Jewish people to repent.
- Esther davened and fasted for three days before risking her life to approach Achashverosh uninvited. This was hardly a way to make herself look more appealing! However, she knew success wouldn't come from her charm or appearance, but from tefillah and teshuvah.

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The Story!

Jewish Year/Secular Year	Event
0/3760 BCE	Creation of the World
2448/ 1312 BCE	Hashem takes the Jews out of Egypt and gives them the Torah at Har Sinai
2928/832 BCE	Construction of first Beis Hamikdash
3338/423 BCE	Destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash *(Galus Bavel)*
3401/357 BCE	Esther becomes queen
3405/356 BCE	**PURIM MIRACLE**
3408/353 BCE	Rebuilidng of second Beis Hamikdash
3622/164 BCE	Chanukah Miracle
3828/68 CE	Destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash *(Galus Edom)*
Today	Modern day!

The Cast



Achashverosh The king of the massive Persian Empire. He wasn't born into royalty; he started out as a stable boy, but married Vashti to gain power.[29] He was insecure and often made foolish or extreme decisions to prove himself.



Vashti The evil Queen of Persia. She was wicked like her cruel grandfather, Nevuchadnezzar, who destroyed the Beis Hamikdash. Vashti would humiliate Jewish girls and force them to work on Shabbos.



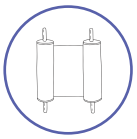
Mordechai HaYehudi The leader of the Jewish people. He refused to bow to Haman and inspired the Jews to do teshuvah. He was Esther's cousin[30] and raised her like a daughter. Chazal say that Mordechai married Esther.[31]



Esther HaMalka A Jewish orphan who became queen of Persia. Her real name was Hadassah[32]but she followed Mordechai's instructions to hide her identity from Achashverosh, and so she is called Esther[33], which means hidden. Esther had royal lineage - she was a descendant of King Shaul. She was a neviah (prophetess)[34] and wrote the Megillah with Mordechai.[35]



Haman The lowest advisor in the palace who rose in power to become second to the king. He was arrogant and filled with hate for the Jews, just like his ancestor and archenemy of Klal Yisrael, Amalek.



The Story of Purim

About 2,400 years ago, the Persian Empire ruled 127 countries, pretty much the entire civilized world.[12] At its head was King Achashverosh. Sitting on his throne, Achashverosh miscalculated a prophecy. The *nevi'im* had foretold that after 70 years of *galus*, the Jews would return to Eretz Yisroel and the *Beis HaMikdash* would be rebuilt. But according to his calculations, 70 years had passed and nothing had happened. So Achashverosh and his smug advisors drew a conclusion: Hashem must have rejected the Jews. [13] To celebrate what he thought was the final chapter of Jewish history, Achashverosh threw a party—180 days of glory and indulgence. Then he threw a second party, seven days long, just for the people of Shushan.[14] He even invited the Jews, hoping to win them over. Mordechai, the leader of Klal Yisrael, warned the Jews that it was forbidden to attend the party, but unfortunately, many disregarded him and went anyway. This sin, along with the fact that the Jews had previously bowed to Nevuchadnezzar's idol, caused a harsh decree to be written in Heaven against the Jews.

Achashverosh's party quickly became crude and vulgar. A drunken argument broke out, regarding which country had the most beautiful women. To prove his point, Achashverosh ordered Queen Vashti to appear immodestly before the guests, a degrading and absurd request. Hashem caused the immoral and shameless Queen Vashti to suddenly look disfigured.[15] Horrified at her appearance, she refused Achashverosh's command, humiliating the king in front of the entire kingdom. He turned to his advisors, but none dared speak, except one minor official, Haman.[16] Hashem placed him there at just the right moment, and Haman, experiencing his own frustrations with his wife, advised the king to have Vashti executed.[17]

The king followed through, and Vashti was killed. But when the effects of the wine wore off, Achashverosh deeply regretted his rash decision. Surrounded by only low-level palace staff to advise him, he made another mistake and agreed to something unthinkable for royalty: a beauty contest to choose the next queen.[18] Esther was taken to the palace, where she stood out from the other contestants. Mordechai had told her not to let anyone know her background. She was a mystery. She was no longer a young woman,[19] hardly wore makeup, and did no self-promotion. All she possessed was a quiet grace.[20] And yet, she was chosen to be queen!

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Mordechai stayed near the palace to keep an eye on Esther. As a member of the *Sanhedrin*, Mordechai knew all seventy languages.[21] He was therefore able to understand Bigsan and Seresh, two guards who were plotting to kill the king, even though they spoke in a foreign language. He passed this information along to the king through Queen Esther, and their plot was foiled. Strangely, Mordechai got no reward for saving the king's life. Hashem was setting the stage for the Jews' salvation.

Soon after, Haman was promoted above all other officials. Haman was on top of the world. But when he saw that Mordechai refused to bow to him, his joy turned to rage. A Jew defying him? Haman wanted revenge not just on Mordechai, but on *every single* Jew in the kingdom. He offered Achashverosh money to wipe them out entirely. The king agreed and even handed Haman his royal signet ring, which gave Haman total power. A date was chosen by *pur* (lottery), the 13th of Adar. Letters were sent across the empire, giving people permission to slaughter Jews and take their property.

The decree was devastating. It looked like it was the end of the Jewish people. Mordechai put on sackcloth and ashes. He cried out in the streets. He begged his people to return to Hashem.

He then sent a message to Esther. Esther agreed to take on the life-threatening mission of showing up uninvited to speak to Achashverosh. She told Mordechai: "Gather all the Jews and don't eat or drink for three days." She did the same. It was *Nissan*, and that year, all the Jews fasted and did not have a *Pesach seder*.[22] The nation joined together in *teshuvah*. They prayed and they wept.

With a prayer on her lips, Esther stepped toward the king's throne. Miraculously, Achashverosh welcomed her.[23] He promised to grant her anything, up to half his kingdom.[24] But Esther didn't rush. She invited him and Haman to a private banquet. At the party, she invited them both to another one. Haman was elated. But when he saw Mordechai again, he was consumed by fury. His friends advised him to build a gallows, 50 *amos* tall, and then rushed, in the middle of the night, to get the king's permission to hang him. But Hashem had already accepted the Jews' teshuvah, and arranged for Haman's downfall.

That night, the king couldn't sleep. He asked for his royal chronicles to be read. Hashem made the page fall to the story of how Mordechai saved the king's life.[25] Achashverosh realized that no reward had been given and decided he must repay Mordechai. Just that moment, Haman arrived. Before he could ask permission to hang Mordechai, the king asked his most trusted advisor, "What should be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman, conceitedly assuming the king wanted to honor him, described an elaborate procession with the honoree being led on the king's horse, wearing royal clothes. The king loved the idea—and told him to do it for Mordechai!

Haman's humiliation was huge but not complete. Haman's own daughter, mistakenly thinking it was Mordechai leading Haman in honor, dumped garbage on her father's head from a window. When she realized the truth, she jumped to her death.[26] The tide was turning. Haman arrived home distraught and filthy. Before he could even wash up[27], he was summoned to Esther's second banquet. This time, Esther spoke up. She revealed that she was Jewish, and that Haman was plotting to kill her and her people.

Achashverosh was shocked and infuriated. Charvona, a palace servant, suggested hanging Haman on the very same gallows he had built for Mordechai. The king agreed.[28]

The enemy was gone. But the threat of genocide remained. The decree allowing Jews to be attacked still stood, and Esther and Mordechai couldn't cancel it. Although Achashverosh gave them his signet ring, the law was that no decree sealed with the king's ring could be undone. So Esther and Mordechai issued a new decree: Jews were now allowed to defend themselves. When the 13th of Adar came, Hashem gave the Jews tremendous success. Not a single Jew was killed, and Hashem had confused and weakened their enemies, allowing the Jews to kill them. Even Haman's ten sons were killed. What had seemed like politics had clearly been *Hashgacha Pratis*, the Divine Hand orchestrating everything. Behind the mask of happenstance, Hashem was performing miracle after miracle, arranging the Jews' salvation.

The Jews understood. This wasn't just about rescue from death. It was about reconnection. They realized that even in exile, Hashem was with them. He had never left and never would. Yes, He rarely did open miracles, but the Jews had learned to see through what looked like coincidence and recognize Hashem's hand carefully guiding every detail. As on, the Jews reaccepted the Torah, this time not from fear or awe like at Har Sinai, but from pure love of Hashem.

What is the most miraculous part of the Purim story?



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Mitzvos of the Day

Megillah Time

What? On most *Yomim Tovim*, we say *Hallel* to thank Hashem for the miracles He did. But on Purim, we do something different: we read the *Megillah*, because telling the story is our *Hallel*![36] As we read each twist and turn, we uncover Hashem's hidden hand behind every detail.

Who? Every man, woman and old-enough child is obligated to hear the *Megillah*.[37]

When? Both at night and in the morning, just like the Jews davened night and day for their salvation.[38]

How? From a *kosher Megillah*, written on parchment.[39] It also needs to be heard in person - not over Zoom or even a microphone.[40] The Megillah must be read from the scroll, not by heart, and in the correct order. If you missed a few words, you may still be able to fulfill the mitzvah by saying those words from a Chumash, as long as you then catch up and hear most of the Megillah from the one reading.[41]

Brachos of the Megillah Before reading the *Megillah*, the reader recites three *brachos*:[42] *Al Mikra Megillah, She'asah Nisim la'Avoseinu* and *Shehechiyanu* (Sephardim only say this at night).[43] When hearing *Shehechiyanu* in the morning, have in mind that it applies to all the day's *mitzvos*![44]

Upgrade Your Mitzvah It is best to hear the Megillah with ten or more people, to make the miracle more public.[45]

Matanos La'evyonim

What? On Purim day, there's a special mitzvah to give money to at least two poor people. The tzedakah can be given in the form of money or food.[46] Each poor person should receive enough to buy a simple meal.

Who? Men and women are obligated in this mitzvah. A poor person who receives *Matanos La'evyonim* should also give *Matanos La'evyonim*, even if it is from the money he/she receives.[47]

How? Don't know who qualifies? Give to your local Orthodox Rabbi or a trusted tzedakah organization who will distribute the funds on Purim day.

More Tzedakah, More Mercy Purim is a time to give freely. All year long, we're careful with our *tzedakah*, checking if the cause is legitimate. But on Purim, the halacha is different: we give to anyone who asks, no questions asked.[48] This generous spirit reflects the overflowing joy of the day. And something incredible happens in return: when we give without judgment, Hashem gives to us the same way, listening to our *tefillos* with mercy, answering with kindness, even if we might not "deserve" it.[49] This is one reason Purim is such a powerful day for prayer!

Priority It's better to spend more on Matanos La'evyonim than on your Purim Seudah and Mishloach Manos![50]



Mishteh: The Party

What? It is a mitzvah to have a delicious, festive meal on Purim, that ideally should include bread,[51] meat[52] and wine.[53] Eat, drink, sing, and rejoice! We drink more than usual, so much so that we blur the line between "*blessed is Mordechai*" and "*cursed is Haman*."[54] There are many reasons given for this unusual requirement. It's about seeing how everything is from Hashem, the sweet and bitter alike. Another reason is to remind ourselves of the miracles of the Purim story which happened through wine parties, like Vashti's downfall and Esther's rise to royalty, and Haman's execution.[55] Additionally, when a person drinks, it lowers their guard and brings out parts of a person that are usually hidden inside.[56] That's exactly what happened on Purim. Hashem's love and care for the Jewish people had been hidden during the Persian exile, but through the Purim story, it was all revealed. We realized that even when Hashem seems hidden, He's still with us the whole time.

How? Eating the meal is pretty straightforward, but there are lots of opinions on how to fulfill the mitzvah of drinking. Some drink more, some just a little.[57] Ask your local Orthodox Rabbi for guidance. But whichever way you go, make sure you don't forget the basics: wash your hands, make a *berachah*, and add *Al Ha'nisim* to your bentching.[58]

Who? Both men and women alike take part in the Purim seudah, though women should not get drunk.

When? While it is also good to eat and be joyous on the night of Purim,[59] the mitzvah of *mishteh* is to celebrate with a festive meal during the day, after *mincha*. But let the joy spill over! The meal can continue into the night too.[60]

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Final Will and Testament

"*Nichnas yayin, yatzah sod*." When wine enters, the secret comes out.[61] On Purim, this teaching becomes especially relevant. There is a requirement to drink *ad d'lo yada, until we don't know* and can't distinguish between "Blessed is Mordechai" and "Cursed is Haman." But the goal is not to lose control. It's to reveal. Alcohol takes down the barriers we usually put up. It reveals the deepest part of a person, shows what he really wants. As Jews, the truth that defines us is our innermost desire: *Retzoneinu la'asos retzoncha*; our will is to do Hashem's will.[62] That's the secret that emerges when the wine enters and the walls come down on Purim.

The *Chasam Sofer* writes that with the miracle of Purim, the Jewish people were transformed and our very *essence* shifted.[63] We didn't just escape Haman—we redefined who we were. We reaccepted the Torah—but this time, with love. This idea is based on the Gemara, which says that at *Matan Torah*, Hashem held Har Sinai over our heads like a barrel and declared: "If you accept the Torah—great. If not—here will be your burial."[64] But if we were forced into accepting the Torah, maybe we aren't fully bound by our acceptance. The Gemara quickly resolved the 'legal' loophole by saying that even if that would be true, the Jews reaccepted the Torah in the days of Achashveirosh. In the times of Esther and Mordechai, all the Jews reaccepted the Torah, but this time, it wasn't under pressure, awe or fear. It was with deep love and joy. And that moment reshaped the Jewish soul forever. We became fully subservient to Hashem and His Torah. With Purim, the essence of every Jew transformed into a pure desire to do Hashem's will.

The *Rambam* teaches a halacha that gives insight into our psychological or spiritual makeup. Usually, if someone was forced to do something, the action is not considered valid. However, if someone is "forced" to do a mitzvah and ultimately says "I want to," we consider it as if he did it willingly.[65] Why? Because deep down, *every Jew wants to do Hashem's will*. This Jew is saying the truth - he really does want to do the mitzvah! Any refusal to do a mitzvah is due to an external cause. If we would take that cause away, a Jew would certainly want to do the mitzvah. When those outer layers are peeled away, what's left is the *ratzon pnimi*, the inner will. On Purim, that will emerges. At Har Sinai, we accepted the Torah out of *awe*, even fear. On Purim, we accepted the Torah *out of love*. We wanted it. No one forced us. That second acceptance changed who we are and what we most deeply want.

This explains a fascinating aspect of Purim. Every *Yom Tov* is split— half for Hashem and half for us. That means that on Yom Tov, Hashem wants us to daven and learn Torah and focus on spiritual pursuits, but also eat a festive meal and enjoy ourselves physically.[66] However, two days are different: Purim and Yom Kippur. They seem like opposites—one is all feasting and laughter, the other fasting and solemnity. But Purim and Yom Kippur are closer than you think. The name of Yom Kippur can be read as "Yom k'Pur" - "a day like Purim." In reality, Purim and Yom Kippur are not an exception to the rule of *chetzyo laHashem v'chetzyo lachem*. They are really one Yom Tov split into two parts![67] Both days achieve the same goal: they reveal our innermost essence by removing the external factors that can block us from accessing it. On Yom Kippur, Hashem removes our *yetzer hara*. On Purim, He removes the pressure of the nations, as the *Megillah* says, "a fear of the Jews fell upon the nations".[68] With both barriers lifted, our true will is free to emerge. That's why drinking plays a special role on Purim. Drinking wine helps reveal our deepest, innermost desire, that quiet truth that we're always carrying inside: "*Retzoneinu la'asos retzoncha*" – "our will is to do Your will!"

The Gemara teaches that a person's character is discerned in three ways: b'Koso, b'Kiso u'v'Ka'aso," his 'cup', his 'wallet' and his anger'."[69] What do you think these words are referring to, and why do they say so much about a person?

Mishloach Manos



On Purim day, we send at least two ready-to-eat foods to at least one fellow Jew.[70] We want to make sure everyone has enough food for the Purim *seudah* (meal) and spread friendship and unity. Haman saw that the Jews were divided and disconnected,[71] which weakened Hashem's protection and made them easier to destroy. So the Sages gave us a powerful mitzvah to help us reconnect: *Mishloach Manos*. It's especially meaningful to send *Mishloach Manos* to someone you've had tension with or to someone new in your neighborhood who might feel alone. After all, Haman didn't care who we were, he targeted every Jew. This mitzvah reminds us to go to the other extreme and to care for every Jew.[72]

Upgrade Your Mitzvah Some say it's ideal to send it through a third person, based on the wording "*mishloach*" *manos*—"sending" gifts.[73] (This is in contrast the usual rule that it is better to do a mitzva yourself rather than through a messenger.)

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Minhagim (Customs)

Read It Out Loud!

During the Megillah reading, there are four special *pesukim* that everyone in shul says out loud together:[76] "*Ish Yehudi*" (2:5), "*U'Mordechai yatza*" (8:15), "*LaYehudim...*" (8:16), "*Ki Mordechai...*" (10:3). The reader then repeats each one after the *tzibbur* (congregation) says it. There's also a custom to read the names of Haman's ten sons (9:7–9) all in one breath to show how they all fell at once—just like Hashem planned it. [77]

Dressing Up(side Down)

Purim is all about what's hidden. Unlike the open miracles of Pesach or Chanukah, the Purim miracle was disguised in everyday events. Wearing costumes[78] reminds us that Hashem was hidden in the story, working behind the scenes the entire time.[79] It also reflects how, at the time, the Jews only pretended to serve idols, and Hashem only pretended to be ready to destroy them. We dress up to echo that double disguise.[80] Additionally, costumes help protect the dignity of the poor, who collect charity on Purim without shame.[81] And they also recall Mordechai himself, who dressed in royal robes as the tides changed and Haman's downfall began.[82]



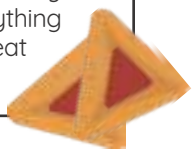
Bang Out Haman!



We use a *gragger* (noisemaker) on Purim to make noise every time Haman's name is mentioned in the Megillah.[74] This is because there's a mitzvah in the Torah to and wipe out the memory of Amalek, the nation that attacked us when we left *Mitzrayim*.[75] We read about this mitzvah from the Torah on *Shabbos Zachor*, the Shabbos before Purim. Haman was a descendant of Amalek, so we make noise when his name is read during the Megillah to symbolically "erase" him.

Meaning of the Hamantash

The classic *hamantash* is a cookie filled with a *mohn* (poppy seeds) filling. In Yiddish, "hamantaschen" means "poppy-seed pockets." We eat seed-based foods on Purim to remember how Daniel kept kosher and survived in the palace by eating seeds.[83] Additionally, *Tash* in Hebrew means "to weaken." We eat *Haman-tashen* to celebrate the weakening of Haman and the hope that Hashem will always weaken our enemies.[84] The hidden filling also reminds us that even when miracles aren't obvious, Hashem is still hidden behind the scenes, guiding everything. Nowadays *hamantashen* are filled with everything from fruit to chocolate and even to meat – you name it, it's a flavor!



Purim-like Miracles Through the Ages

Here are some famous "local Purim" dates, celebrated for their Purim-like miracles:

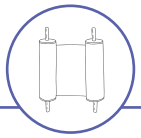
Purim of Rhodes — 1840 (14 Adar): In 1840, the Jews of Rhodes faced a terrifying blood libel. Local Greeks accused them of murdering a child for ritual purposes. Many Jews were imprisoned and tortured as the community feared the worst. But in a miraculous turn of events, the missing child was found alive and well. The Sultan himself issued a public decree declaring the Jews innocent. The decree was signed on the 14th of Adar, Purim day! From then on, the Jews of Rhodes celebrated a "Double Purim" every year, with special tefillos and songs to thank Hashem for saving them.

Stalin's Death — 1953 (18 Adar 5713): Joseph Stalin *y"sh* (*yemach shemo*, may his name be erased), dictator of the Soviet Union, had been preparing mass deportations of Jews under the false "Doctors' Plot." He died a few days after Purim, on March 5, 1953. His death halted the plan completely. Many Jews saw this as a modern "Haman" falling on Purim.

Nazi Executions "Purimfest" — October 16, 1946: Ten top Nazi war criminals were hanged at the Nuremberg Trials. One of them, Julius Streicher *y"sh*, cried out before he was hanged, "Purimfest 1946!" eerily referencing the ten sons of Haman who were also hanged on the same Hebrew date!

The Gulf War Ends: 1991 was a time of real fear in Israel. Saddam Hussein *y"sh*, the ruler of Iraq, threatened to destroy the Jewish state. Sirens wailed in the middle of the night as people scrambled into sealed rooms, wearing gas masks to protect themselves from chemical attacks. Then, suddenly, on Purim morning, February 28—the 14th of Adar, the attacks suddenly stopped, and the war was over.

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The Real Jewish Resistance

Purim isn't just something that happened, it's a blueprint for how Jews survive in exile and respond to threats. Throughout the ages, there have been countless "Hamans": tyrants, decrees, and threats to wipe us out. But we respond the "Purim way" and turn to Hashem in prayer and teshuvah, and again and again, we see hidden miracles, sudden turnarounds, and unexpected salvations.

In the summer of 1942, as Nazi General Erwin Rommel's army stormed through North Africa, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael faced a terrifying threat. Rommel's next target was British Palestine, and his reputation for unstoppable battlefield brilliance, combined with chilling reports of Nazi atrocities in Europe, sent shockwaves through Eretz Yisrael. By that point, millions of Jews had already been murdered in ghettos, mass shootings, and death camps. The Warsaw Ghetto was sealed. Deportations to Auschwitz and Treblinka were underway. European Jewry was being systematically erased, and now the nightmare seemed ready to engulf the Jews of the Middle East too. SS killing squads had already been dispatched, under the command of Walther Rauff *y"sh*, inventor of the mobile gas van. Their mission: to annihilate the Jewish population of the Middle East once Rommel succeeded. It looked like the end, not just of Jewish communities, but of *Klal Yisrael* itself.

Instead, something miraculous happened.

Like in the Purim story, a powerful enemy with a genocidal plan stood poised to strike. And like in the days of Esther and Mordechai, the Jewish people responded, not with weapons, but with fasting, prayer, and deep *teshuvah*. In *Yerushalayim*, Jews packed the *shuls* day and night, crying out and saying Tehillim. The Gerrer Rebbe, Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, led a massive *asifah* in the Churva Shul, calling for unity and repentance. Tefillos were held at the *kevarim* of the Ohr Hachaim, Shimon Hatzaddik, and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron. Thousands fasted, even secular Jews, united in their desperation and recognition of their complete dependence on Hashem. Rommel advanced swiftly—until he suddenly didn't. At El Alamein, a remote town in Egypt, British forces unexpectedly halted him.

Rommel's defeat at El Alamein hinged on an astonishing twist of fate that was so bizarre it could only be explained as the hand of Hashem. In June 1942, the Americans had been warned to change their military code after it was discovered the Nazis were intercepting their communications. But due to a mysterious delay, the outdated code continued to be used for one more week. During that time, Rommel intercepted a U.S. message revealing that the British planned to make their final stand at Mersa Matruh. He mobilized all his resources based on this information. But at the last minute, the British unexpectedly shifted their defense line to El Alamein—a move unknown to Rommel. Rommel ignored his own officers' warnings about British fortifications at El Alamein because his outdated "reliable" intelligence told him otherwise. Expecting minimal resistance at El Alamein, he walked straight into the British army's hands. Ironically, an American failure to fix their security breach in a timely manner is what led to the Nazi's fall! The Nazi plan to invade Palestine collapsed.

What seemed like a chain of military flukes, errors, and delays was a clear act of Divine Providence protecting the Jews of Eretz Yisrael from annihilation. Just like in Shushan, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael had fasted and prayed, and Hashem turned the tide and saved them. The extermination plan was never carried out. Rommel was later disgraced and died mysteriously after being accused of a conspiracy against Hitler. The Battle of El Alamein is remembered in history as a turning point in World War II. But for us, it is remembered as something more—a modern-day Purim, when a Haman-like enemy wanted to wipe us out and we turned to Hashem in *tefillah*. And just like then, He saved us once again.

What similarities do you see between the salvation of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael and the salvation of the Jews in the Purim story?



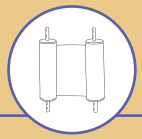
Corny Corner

What do you call a grape that complains a lot?

Wine-yi

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Zoniac Zone



Purim...Every Day of the Year

The Purim story looked like a bunch of random events—a queen gets kicked out, a new one takes her place, an evil plot is made, and that plot gets stopped. But when you zoom out, you see a master plan, perfectly timed by Hashem. That's not just a Purim thing. It's an everyday thing! Sometimes life feels confusing, unfair, or without purpose. But Purim teaches us to see through the mask—to see the *hashgachah*, the hidden hand of Hashem guiding everything. (It's the *mohn* in the *tash*!) And just like Mordechai and Esther, we can respond with tefillah, teshuvah, and trust in Hashem—even when we're not sure how it'll all turn out. So don't leave Purim behind when you take off your costume. Carry its message with you—every day of the year!



Mishloach Manos Mission



Jacob Cohen had once been one of TheZone's participants. His summer at TheZone had lit something inside him. He loved learning, davening, and being surrounded by friends who cared. All he wanted after that summer was to go to yeshiva.

But it didn't work out the way everyone hoped. His parents, still growing in their own Torah journey, chose a school that was academically stronger—but not the right fit for Jacob. The transition overwhelmed him. He struggled in class, felt like an outsider, and slowly began to shut down.

By the end of the year, Jacob was back in public school. He stopped answering his TorahMate's calls. TheZone staff kept reaching out, but the connection was fading.

The next summer, his parents said he would not be coming back to camp. "He's just not in a good place right now," his mother said. The summer after that—still no. Two years had gone by, and it seemed like Jacob was gone for good.

Until Purim. That day, TheZone counselor, Yosef Kalman Singer, and a few friends were in the Cohen family's neighborhood. They thought of Jacob—how much potential he had, how much they missed him—and decided to take a chance. They had a beautiful *Mishloach Manos* package ready, filled with treats and a handwritten note: *"Your Oorah family is thinking of you. We miss you."*

They called Jacob, but no one answered. "Let's go anyway," Yosef Kalman said. "He needs to know we haven't forgotten him." It took time to get there, but they made it. No one answered the door, so they gently placed the package by the entrance and walked away, hoping the message inside would be louder than words.

It was. A few weeks later, TheZone staff was stunned to see Jacob's name on the summer applications. And not just Jacob—his older brother signed up too! That summer, the Cohen boys were back. And so were the smiles, songs, night activities, warmth, and meaning that only a summer at TheZone could bring. The *Mishloach Manos* hadn't just delivered candy—it delivered hope and reconnection. Sometimes, one bag at the door is all it takes to bring someone home.



"MEM"ory Aid

A good way to remember the Mitzvos of Purim is to remember they all start with the letter Mem. Megillah, Mishloach Manos, Matanos Le'evyonim, and Mishteh (Another word for Seudah that focuses on the drinking part of the party).

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Zoniac Challenge

See Past the Illusion!



Check out this strawberry shortcake. What color are the strawberries?

Looks red, right? Surprise—it's actually made of only gray and greenish pixels! Your brain is just filling in the color based on what it expects to see. This is called color constancy, and it shows how much our surroundings shape what we think is true. Scientists explain that our brains are wired to make fast judgments based on patterns. But sometimes, that shortcut leads us to see things that aren't really there—or miss what is.



Purim was the ultimate optical illusion. Nothing was the way it seemed.

Esther: a Persian queen or a secret Jew on a mission?

Haman: rising to power or heading to his downfall?

13–14 Adar: a death sentence for the Jews or a day of feasting and joy?

The salvation: random coincidence or Hashem running the show?

All these twists and turns happened over nine years! Only by looking back could the Jews see that every detail was part of Hashem's master plan. That's the real message of Purim! We learned to question what we see and look deeper, revealing Hashem's hidden Hand pulling all the strings with love.

Zoniac Dilemma

The Last Mishloach Manos

Rina carefully tied a large bow around the last box of Mishloach Manos and smiled. She had done an outstanding job; she had to admit. The five boxes looked perfect, just as she had dreamed of them this whole month. This year had been tough. She had transferred to a new school and was slowly finding her place. Giving Mishloach Manos felt like the perfect way to take a step closer to being part of the group. She was especially excited to give one to Na'ama, a friendly, outgoing girl she had just finished working with on a Megillah project. They had had so much fun together! Was this the start of a real friendship? Later that afternoon, there was a knock at the door. Rina opened it and gasped. A girl dressed as a witch grinned back at her—it was Zahava, one of the most popular girls in class. She had come all the way from another neighborhood just to bring Rina Mishloach Manos! Rina felt a glow of warmth. Maybe she really was being accepted.

A few hours later, her father dropped her off on Na'ama's block. She held her final Mishloach Manos box tightly. As she walked toward Na'ama's large, elegant home, she passed a small house with a sagging front porch—and paused. Sitting there was Rachel, a girl in her class who mostly kept to herself. She rarely spoke, always sat alone at lunch, and never worked with a study partner. She looked up and smiled shyly. Rina's hand tightened around the box. It was her last one. She had been waiting all month to give it to Na'ama. But now… Rachel was sitting there, alone on Purim. She looked at the box. Then at Rachel. Then at Na'ama's house.

What should she do? What would you do?

Daily Challenge

Spot one "coincidence" that happened today and say, "Hashem, I know this is from You!"

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Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



The King's Treasures / Megillas Esther



Purim: Its Observance and Significance

What is the Origin of Hamantaschen and Why Do We Eat Them on Purim?

torahmates.org/jewish-resources/what-is-the-origin-of-hamantaschen-and-why-do-we-eat-them-purim/

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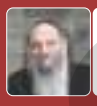
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