

Jewish Holidays

A Text-Based Course

Written by
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Conceived, Edited, and Presented by

Ner LeElef

Subjects included:

1. Rosh Hashana
2. Yom Kippur
3. Sukkos
4. Chanukah
5. Purim
6. Pesach
7. Shavuos
8. Ninth of Av

You can help improve this course and create new ones
Comments, Questions and Suggestions

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Ner LeElef Courses

The goal of Ner LeElef Courses is to help you, the Jewish educator, in your crucial work of spreading the knowledge of Torah. Many Rabbis & teachers have told us that in addition to their own shiurim that they prepare, they would be glad to use others' materials if the quality and usability were high. We therefore offer these courses as our attempt to fill a need.

Please Note:

- Please use as much of the course (or as little!) as you like – there are no firm rules about what to teach or how.
- Email us (dkornbluth@nerleelef.com) for a file you can cut and paste
- Note that this is a ‘work-in-progress’ – *a first attempt* at creating material that will be interesting to the students and user-friendly to the teacher. We would be delighted to have your corrections, comments and suggestions as to how to improve this course. We are also most interested in knowing how relevant (or not) you found the material, and if you would like more. Please email all comments to dkornbluth@nerleelef.com. If you would like to be on the email list to receive further courses, please email.
- Note also that these classes, and the course as a whole, are only beginnings. They are not at all exhaustive or complete. It is literally a ‘taste of Torah’ – to get students in the door for a set amount of time, to give them a basic framework with which to understand Jewish ideas and practices, and to give you the teacher a sense of what they are interested in and where to put your focus. If students are particularly interested in a subject, you can add in classes (based on sources in the appendices here or your own material). If students are less interested in a subject, you can skip it entirely.
- There is no charge for using this material. We do ask that each time you use it, you email us (dkornbluth@nerleelef.com) to let us know how students responded and to share any suggestions you may have. This will enable us to gauge effectiveness and improve in the future.

Wishing you much hatzlacha in all your endeavors

Ner LeElef

Text-Based Courses

What is a “text-based” course?

This Jewish Holidays Course is a *text-based* course. That is to say, both teachers and students are supposed to see the sources themselves. Two different documents were prepared explicitly for this purpose: a *Sources* document for the students which contains only the sources; and an *Educators’ Guide* for the educator, which contains the same sources in the same order (numbered identically on each document for ease of identification), along with explanations, background information, suggested questions and answers, etc.

Please note that if you wish to simply lecture without giving students the handouts (whether because of personal preference, time constraints, etc), you may of course do so and we are happy to help in whatever way we can.

Why use a “text-based” course?

When possible, we strongly suggest giving students the handouts and having them read the sources for themselves. Most students today cannot pay attention to a long lecture - they will learn and enjoy more by being more involved. By reading and struggling with Jewish texts themselves, a whole new part of Judaism will be open to them. We consider their learning of Jewish texts as important as the actual ‘information’ they learn, if not more so!

How should the course be taught?

Educators decide how best to use the material. For those educators who choose to follow the standard structure, the *Educators’ Guide* is quite self-explanatory. Each subject is broken-up into sections, and students will normally see 2-3 sources at a time.

Some students may ‘look ahead’ in the document. If you are concerned about this, you can specifically ask them not to, or perhaps edit the document and only give them certain sources at a time. In general, we do not feel that their ‘looking ahead’ is a major problem – it may actually help them get interested.

How long should the course take?

This is an 8 part course. Most classes should last approximately one hour, but you can add or delete parts as you wish. The material does not need to be taught in one sitting. In other words, *any class can be ‘broken-up’ into two or more sessions*

Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashanah and the Mitzvah of Shofar

Educator:

In this class we will give some basic understanding of Rosh Hashana and its customs and commandments. The foremost mitzvah associated with this day is the blowing of the shofar. In this class we will give several approaches to understanding this mitzvah and how it relates to the day of Rosh Hashanah.

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur have taken such a hold of Western life, especially American, that they are printed on mainstream non-Jewish calendars. In cities with large Jewish populations, it is expected that Jewish workers get the day off and Jewish students in public schools do not come to school.

What are these holidays all about?

Today we will look a little deeper at Rosh Hashana

Theme of Rosh Hashana

In Judaism, the start of a new year is a time to take stock of how our lives are progressing. It is too easy to progress through our busy lives without pausing to consider the path we are taking, and without contemplating whether or not we are fulfilling our potential. Rosh Hashanah serves as a stop sign to reflect on the previous year and to plan for the next. The mitzvah of hearing the sounds of the shofar facilitates this process.

Educator:

The following section includes interesting notes and background about Rosh Hashana. If you want to go through the textual section of the class well, in a one-hour sitting, then these notes should be gone through very briefly. If there is more time available, you may want to 'see where the class goes' with these notes – many of them can easily be expanded and all are good for sparking discussion.

Interesting Notes:

- Name of holiday can also refer to the 'beginning of Change'
- Rosh Hashana was the day the first human being was created¹. Furthermore, Sarah, Rachel and Channah were granted Divine remembrance on these days – they were all barren until then. Joseph was freed from Egyptian prison where he

¹ This may be a good opportunity to emphasize the universalistic aspects of Judaism, which is often portrayed as less universalistic than other religions and philosophies. In fact, we mark our calendar (ie the year 5777) from the creation of the first human, unlike other calendars (Christian, Muslim as two favorite examples) which are based on the events of their creators and adherents. While our method is particular (a separate Jewish people needs to exist), our goal is universal.

had been held for twelve years. Historically and mystically, truly a day of new beginnings!

- Rosh Hashana is the only holiday to be celebrated for two consecutive days in Israel also (other holidays one in Israel and two in Diaspora)
- Every festival has its special foods. It is customary to eat sweet² foods on the evenings of Rosh Hashana to symbolically express the prayer that the coming year be pleasant and sweet. Symbols have real meaning. Short prayers are said corresponding to the food being eaten. For example on the apple dipped in honey, we say, “May it be Your will to renew us for a good and sweet year.” The Hebrew is often a play on words. For instance with beets (selek) we say, “May it be His will that our enemies withdraw (yistalku)”. All of these foods are meant to arouse us as to the meaning of the day. This part of the meal is referred to as ‘simanim’ – the symbols
- First day of Rosh Hashana (unless Shabbos, then moved to second day) there is a custom called Tashlich: we proceed to a body of water (ie seashore, river bank or well) and symbolically cast our sins into the sea, based on the verse at the end of the Book of Micah “And You will cast (tashlich) all their sins into the depths of the sea”. We shake out our pockets of crumbs, etc over the water, signifying that we shed ourselves of our sins and strive for a pure heart. Kurdish Jews leaped in the water and swam to “cleanse themselves of sin”. Chassidim sent burning floats on the water, signifying that their sins were burned and washed away.
- Normal prayerbook called the *siddur*, which means *order* as in order of prayers. A special holiday prayerbook is called a *machzor*, which means cycle, possibly referring to the cycle of holidays that we pass through each year.
- Three books are opened on Rosh Hashana: the completely righteous are immediately inscribed and sealed to live; the completely wicked are immediately inscribed and sealed to die; those in the middle are held in the balance until Yom Kippur – if they repent and tip the scales, they are sealed to live, if not, they are sealed to die.
- Not quantity of sins or merits that count: judgment is qualitative; there are individual acts that are considered weightier than many sins.
- Rosh Hashana judgment does not refer to a person’s place in the Garden of Eden or the World to Come, or their time spent in Gehinnom – all of these are determined after a person’s death. Rather Rosh Hashana determines the coming year: is the person worthy of life and peace or death and affliction.
- Anger is to be avoided throughout the entire year, but especially on Rosh Hashana. The holiday represents a new beginning, and at a mystical level how we act on it affects the entire year.

² For the same reason, bitter foods are not eaten on Rosh Hashana

[Source 1]

Story of U'nesaneh Tokef

Rabbi Amnon of Mainz was the leading scholar of his generation. The Christian nobles of the city continually pressured him to convert, but he refused. They would not accept his refusal and kept pestering him and pressuring him. One day, exasperated, he put them off by saying, "give me three days to think about it", even though he had no intention of converting. Overwrought with remorse at having made the mere suggestion he might leave Judaism, he fasted and wept for three days. Summoned after three days, he refused to go to meet the ruler. When he explained he would always remain a loyal Jew, he was tortured and his limbs torn from his body. Dying, on the day of Rosh Hashana, he asked to be brought to synagogue where he composed and recited the U'nesaneh Tokef prayer, whose haunting melody and words are part of our service even today.

- We will learn more about the Shofar in a few moments. Great Ninth Century sage R' Saadia Gaon listed ten reasons for blowing the shofar. We will deal with some of them later in the class. For now, let us simply describe the blasts:

Tekiah: one long blast

Shevarim: three medium blasts, together adding up in length to one *tekiah*

Teruah: nine short blasts, also all together adding up to a *tekiah*

Textual Section: The Shofar

Optional Point of Discussion: Ta'amei Hamitzvos

Depending on how long you have and what you want the class to focus on, this may be a good opening to explain the advantages and disadvantages of studying ta'amei hamitzvos ('The Reasons for the Commandments').

Before we try to understand the mitzvah of shofar, let us consider the whole idea of understanding mitzvot at all

Whenever we discuss the meaning of mitzvot, the following idea must be kept in mind: Reasons for mitzvot are called ta'amei hamitzvot in Hebrew, literally meaning "the taste of the mitzvot". Some explain that all these explanations can never fully give the reasons behind the commandments since they are of Divine origin and can never be fully understood by mere mortals. All we get is a 'taste' – a little bit of understanding.

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter explains that just as the nutritive value of foods is independent of their tastes, so too the spiritual value inherent in every mitzvah exists whether we know reasons for them or not. In other words, the mitzvot affect us whether we understand them deeply or not.

But the taste is what makes eating an enjoyable experience! Having a deeper understanding of the mitzvot makes Torah observance more spiritually satisfying. People who understand what they are doing and why they are doing it will enjoy the experience more and be more enthusiastic about doing more mitzvot.

Of course, we should do the mitzvot whether we understand them or not. Additionally, there are layers upon layers of depth in every mitzvah, we cannot think that we have ever fully understood all of a mitzvah's significance

[Source 2]

Shofar Story

Ferdinand and Isabella, King and Queen of Spain, kicked the Jews out of Spain in 1492. It was the end of the Golden Era of Spanish Jewry. Hundreds of thousands died trying to escape. Many others relocated to Turkey and other locations.

Tens of Thousands of others became Conversos – pretending to be Christian in public but keeping Jewish traditions in private, usually in the cellars.

One of these was Don Fernando de Aguilar, conductor of the royal orchestra in Barcelona. He longed to hear the sounds of the Shofar on Rosh Hashana but to do so would be extremely dangerous, worthy of death. He devised a plan and announced a special concert on Rosh Hashana itself featuring various world melodies.

In the midst of Church officials and royalty attending the concert, the Shofar was blown to the secret joy of the conductor and fellow Conversos in the audience!³

In this section, we will present three aspects of the symbolism of the mitzvah of blowing the shofar:

- (1) The shofar symbolizing the call to repentance;
- (2) The shofar blow symbolizing G-d's coronation;
- (3) The blow of the shofar as symbolizing the purity of a person before sin.

1st Symbol: Call to Repentance

The Talmud teaches us that Rosh Hashana serves as a day when G-d examines our actions during the previous year:

[Source 3]

Four times a year the world is judged...On Rosh Hashana all of the inhabitants of the world pass before G-d...⁴

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון...בראש

³This story shows how beloved the Mitzvah of Shofar has always been to the Jewish people. But what is it really about...

Optional Point of Discussion: Why does G-d Judge Us?

You may want to ask the students why Judgment is important, ie why does a loving G-d judge people?

One approach to an answer is to compare the relationship between us and G-d to that between children and parents. Parents who don't care about their kids don't get involved in what they do or really care what they do. But Parents who DO care about their kids DO give them rules and try to teach them proper behavior. Judging actions – out of love and a desire for improvement, not out of anger – is one important component of education.

Note that it is only ONE aspect of education - there is only One Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur a year! The rest of the year is filled with different messages.

Maimonides writes:

[Source 4]

Even though the mitzvah of blowing a shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree of G-d, nevertheless there is a lesson hinted in it.

It is saying to us “Wake up sleepers from your sleep and slumberers from your slumber! Examine what you have done, repent for your misdeeds, and remember your creator!”

Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 3:4)

אע"פ שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה

כלומר עורו ישינים משנתכם ונרדמים

The Sefer HaChinuch explains why this is done specifically on Rosh Hashanah:

[Source 5]

Since people are physical beings they can only become inspired from an external source, as we see that when soldiers rush into battle they trumpet and shout in order to inspire themselves to fight better.

לפי שהאדם בעל חומר לא יתעורר

⁴The passage continues, “like benei maron.” There are several opinions as to how to translate this phrase. For our purposes it suffices to understand that it refers to the way in which G-d judges people.

<p>Rosh Hashanah is the day designated for the judgment of all the inhabitants of the world, as the Rabbis taught “On Rosh Hashanah all the inhabitants of the world pass before G-d as benei maron”... therefore a person must get inspired to request mercy from the Master of mercy, and the sound of the shofar can greatly inspire those who hear it.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 405</p>	<p>וגם כן ביום ראש השנה שהוא היום</p>
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How would you summarize this idea?
 What does the blowing of the shofar hope to achieve?

2nd Symbol: G-d’s Coronation

The shofar blowing is meant to serve for us as a yearly reenactment of the coronation of G-d as king of the world. This idea is addressed in the Gemara:

[Source 6]

<p>[G-d says]</p> <p>Recite before Me verses about Kingship, Remembrance and the Shofar.</p> <p>Verses of kingship in order to make Me king over you;</p> <p>Remembrance in order that I shall remember you in a good light.</p> <p>With what shall you accomplish this?</p> <p>With the shofar.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tractate Rosh Hashana (16a)</p>	<p>אמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות</p> <p style="text-align: center;">מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם</p> <p>זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ובמה</p> <p style="text-align: right;">בשופר</p>
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What does the Question “BeMah - With what shall you accomplish this?” refer to? The remembrances or the Kinship as well?

The Ritva explains:

[Source 7]

<p>The correct interpretation is that [the final clause about Shofar] is referring to both of them.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ובמה בשופר.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">עיקר הפי' דאכולהו קאי</p>
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<p>How shall we make G-d king and how shall we be remembered in a good light?</p> <p>Through the blowing of the shofar⁵.</p>	<p>במה ראוי להמליכו ולהזכיר זכרונו לפני בשופר</p>
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The conduct of blowing a shofar at a coronation is something which had a real life parallel in Biblical times:

He explains further:

[Source 8]

<p>For it is written “The nation blew on a shofar and made Saul king over them”, and the kingship of above is structured like the kingships of below.</p>	<p>שכן כתיב ויתקעו העם בשופרות ומליכו</p>
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According to this interpretation, the blowing of the shofar is a yearly coronation for G-d as king of the world, done on the anniversary of the worlds’ creation.

The necessity of acting [ie doing a physical act such as blowing a shofar] at the coronation is explained by Rabbi Avraham of Sokatchav (Ne’os Desheh, I, 153):

[Source 9]

<p>It should have been enough to accept G-d</p>	<p>היה די בקבלת עול מלכות שמים בלב</p>
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⁵Regarding the question as to why the Talmud does not give a reason for reciting verses about the blowing of the shofar, the Ritva writes:

<p>If you will ask that there has been no reason given for the verses about the shofar? The answer is that it is not necessary to give one; since we blow the shofar we also recite verses about the shofar blowing.</p>	<p>וכי תימא ועדיין לא נתן טעם לפסוקי שופרות י”ל דלא</p>
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We can also ask how the blowing of the shofar causes us to be remembered in a good light. Many explain that the shofar, made of a rams’ horn, in reminiscent of the binding of Isaac, who had a ram substituted for him as an offering to G-d. That event, in which our forefathers Abraham and Isaac showed absolute dedication to G-d, serves as a source of merit for their descendants to this day.

Interesting Point of Discussion:

This illustrates an important principle: The more of ourselves we put into a goal, the greater chance we have to succeed. If we involve our senses in our attempt to make G-d king over us, it will have a greater impact than trying to do it through thought alone. This is a fundamental idea that explains why there are so many mitzvot rooted in seemingly mundane actions.

We have now seen the second aspect of the shofar.
How do you understand it? How would you summarize it?

3rd Symbol: Purity

Rosh Hashana, as the anniversary of the creation of the first human, is the day for us to reflect upon our path and strengthen our commitment to living a spiritually meaningful life. The blowing of the shofar reminds us of our elevated beginning, reinforces the collective memory of the spiritual heights we have reached, and gives us a glimpse of what we are trying to accomplish.

Shem Meshmuel writes:

[Source 10]

We say (in the Rosh Hashanah prayers) “this is the day of the beginning of Your actions; a remembrance of the first day”.

Rosh Hashanah is like an echo of the creation of the world. My father of blessed memory taught that the idea of the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is meant to echo that which is written regarding the first human “and G-d blew into the nostrils a life-giving soul”...

The original creation of humankind was in order to elevate the entire world to serve G-d, and it was for this purpose that G-d blew the life-giving soul into the first person.

Similarly on every Rosh Hashanah, which is the renewal of this breath of life through the blowing of the shofar, is for the

והנה אנו אומרים זה היום תחילת מעשיך

וע"כ יש לומר דכמו בריאת האדם

<p>purpose of fixing that which the first people corrupted.⁶</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shem Meshmuel Rosh Hashanah section 1</p>	
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The blowing of the shofar should remind us of the blowing of the soul into the first person, and the mission that began at that moment. It is to remind us of the holy soul that we possess, which gives us our great spiritual potential. We should be reminded to rededicate ourselves to this mission of elevating the world in the service of G-d.

Ramchal (Ma'amar Hachachma) takes this idea further:

[Source 11]

<p>The first major step towards the perfection of the world was accompanied by a shofar blowing, as the verse states⁷ “The sound of the shofar was gaining in strength”.</p> <p>The final fixing of the world in the future, when good will completely triumph over evil, as it is written⁸ “he will blow a great shofar blast”...</p> <p>We are commanded to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah to reinforce the perfection that began at the giving of the Torah and to prepare the future for what will be done then.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">החיזוק הא' שנעשה לטוב נעשה על ידי</p>
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The blowing of the shofar is to remind us that our efforts at tikkun olam, perfecting the world, should not be seen in isolation, but rather as a step in a long process having roots in the giving of the Torah and ending with the coming of the Mashiach.

⁶Adam and Chavah were not successful in their role to elevate all of creation to serve G-d, rather they stumbled and violated G-ds' instruction not to eat from the tree of life (according to many opinions, this actually occurred on the first of the month of Tishrei, i.e. Rosh Hashanah).

⁷In the verses describing the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

⁸In the prophecy describing the coming of the Messiah.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur

Background:

Yom Kippur is a unique day on the Jewish Calendar. It is considered the holiest day of the year. It is in some respects a very strict day: there is no eating or drinking; no sexual relations; no bathing; no anointing the body with oil (this was an ancient pleasurable hygiene practice); and no wearing of leather shoes (lots of symbolism). There is a mitzvah to do teshuva (repent), much of the day is spent in prayer

Is Yom Kippur a Sad Day?

It sounds it when you think of the don'ts.

BUT traditionally Yom Kippur is considered a happy⁹ day! Think how good it feels to come clean, apologize, own up to our mistakes, be forgiven, and move on! No more guilt! That is a happy day¹⁰!

Educator:

The following section includes interesting notes and background about Yom Kippur. If you want to go through the textual section of the class well, in a one-hour sitting, then these notes should be gone through very briefly. If there is more time available, you may want to 'see where the class goes' with these notes – many of them can easily be expanded and all are good for sparking discussion.

Interesting Notes:

- This was the one day a year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, sealed off by a curtain, where the Holy Ark rested. In it were the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Holiest person¹¹ of all people, in the holiest place of all places, on the holiest day of all days!
- Interpersonal sins not forgiven therefore important to seek forgiveness before YK for any wrongs committed
- Confession to a priest doesn't work in Judaism...Go directly to G-d. Public confessions are standardized, so we are not revealing anything unique. Private ones – unique to the individual – are kept between the individual and G-d.
- There is a custom to give charity generously all the Ten Days, but especially on Erev Yom Kippur.

⁹But not light-hearted

¹⁰There is a sense of sorrow, trepidation which is mixed with joy: there is Someone who cares what we do, our actions do have meaning and consequences. Parents who don't care what their children do or hold them accountable for their behavior do not show love but lack of love. It is the same with G-d. There is justice, thank G-d, but also mercy. Could we survive without either of them?

¹¹He had to be pure and holy to come back alive and not all did They used a rope to pull out the ones who didn't make it!

- The numerical value of the Hebrew letters of the word *Hasatan*, the Accuser or Adversary, add up to 364, one less than the number of days in the year. According to the Midrash¹², this teaches us that Satan, which is in fact the evil inclination personified, hurls his accusations against the Jewish people for 364 days each year. Yom Kippur is the exception. On that day the evil urge has no power over the Jewish people.
- It is considered a religious duty to eat well¹³ on the day before Yom Kippur.
- We read the Book of Jonah
- Custom to wear **white clothing**, symbolizing purity and cleanliness from sin.
- **Kol Nidrei**: Before sunset the Holy Ark is opened, two Torah scrolls are removed and the beautifully haunting melody (passed down through the generations) of Kol Nidrei is recited. The words *Kol Nidre* mean “all vows” and the text is a declaration that nullifies vows, reflecting Judaism’s great apprehension over the violation of vows. Yet the prayer has taken on a much bigger place in the hearts of the Jewish people.

[Source 1]

Kol Nidre Story

A Jewish soldier, captured by the Germans during WWII, related:

“In those terribly years when we beheld the destruction of European Jewry, the Kol Nidre prayer intoned in the prison camps became an expression of Jewish unity. A large number of Jewish soldiers crowded in to the spacious hall. They wore insignia of all ranks and military services. One could distinguish British, Canadian, Australian, Dutch, Polish, Czech, South African and Yugoslav soldiers by their uniforms. It was difficult to distinguish some of them as Jews. In that exalted hour, however, with the chanting of Kol Nidre, Jewish suffering was all too clearly reflected in their eyes.

All of us were especially astonished, however, when at the very last minute, when services were just about to begin, one of the highest ranking officers in the camp appeared in the hall. It had never once occurred to us that he was a Jew, nor did he give us any cause to suspect him. Hidden in the heart of this extremely assimilated Jew was a chord which vibrated in response to the sound of Kol Nidre.

TEXTUAL Part of the Class

In this section we will discuss three defining features of Yom Kippur:

- Yom Kippur as a day of forgiveness of sins

¹² Socher Tov 27

¹³ In fact, eating and drinking on the 9th of Tishrei, the day before fasting, is considered having gained merit as if the person fasted on the 9th and the 10th! The last meal before the fast begins is called the *Seudah Mafseket* and must be finished with time left over before sunset.

- Yom Kippur as a day of teshuva and
- Yom Kippur as a day of fasting.

We will learn about each of them and how these three components relate to each other.

Educator:

The main idea that we will attempt to present is that the fasting of Yom Kippur is part of the process by which we rise above our mundane daily existence. The elevated perspective acquired on Yom Kippur enables a person to essentially be a different person than throughout the year, which is the main prerequisite for forgiveness. This will also add understanding to the question of what teshuva is, and why G-d should forgive us for our wrongdoings.

Section I: Yom Kippur as a day of forgiveness of sins

The Torah states clearly the designation of Yom Kippur as a day for the forgiveness of the sins, and the association between forgiveness and fasting:

[Source 2]

(29) This shall be for you as an eternal law: In the seventh month on the tenth of the month you shall <i>afflict your souls</i> , you shall do no work, both the citizen and sojourner among you.	(כט) והיתה לכם לחקת עולם בחדש
(30) For on this day (G-d) will atone for	(ל) כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם
Leviticus 16	

The wording *afflict your souls* is unique. What do you think it refers to?

Maimonides codifies what is meant by “afflicting your souls”:

[Source 3]

There is another mitzvah on Yom Kippur, and that is to refrain from eating or drinking. This is what is written in the verse “You shall afflict your souls”, and we have an oral tradition the thing that afflicts the soul is fasting...We also have an oral tradition that one may not bathe, anoint themselves, wear (leather) shoes or have sexual relations on this day.	מצות עשה אחרת יש ביום הכיפורים והיא
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¹⁴ Maimonides, Laws of Resting on the Tenth 1:4-5.

It is a mitzvah to refrain from these just as it is a mitzvah to refrain from eating and drinking¹⁴.

A famous Chassidic master, the Apter Rebbe, said:

As for the afflictions of Yom Kippur, who needs to eat on that holy and awesome day?

That is a high level! Most of us aren't there. Fasting is hard for us. And it is important. But is it enough?

If someone wronged you and then fasted without apologizing or really thinking they did something wrong, would you forgive them? Should you?

On Yom Kippur, fasting is necessary but not enough to achieve forgiveness. It is also necessary to repent from one's wrongdoings.

[Source 4]

(6) Even though repentance and crying out to G-d are always effective, in the ten days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur it is exceptionally appropriate and is accepted immediately...¹⁵

(7) Yom Kippur is the time of teshuva for all, for the individual and for the group, and is the peak of forgiveness for the Jewish people.

Therefore all are obligated to repent and confess (their transgressions) on Yom Kippur.

(ו) אע"פ שהתשובה והצעקה יפה

(ז) יום הכפורים הוא זמן תשובה לכל

לפיכך חייבים הכל לעשות תשובה

This combination of teshuva, fasting and Yom Kippur bring about forgiveness.

Section II: Yom Kippur as a day of teshuva

What do you think:

Why should *teshuva* bring about forgiveness?

¹⁵ "...as it is written "Seek out G-d when G-d is found"."

The deed is still done and cannot be undone – so what has really changed?! An ex-convict is always an ex-convict, isn't he? How can we wear white as if our sins have been returned to non-existence and we are pure – is it really so?

How do you think Teshuva works?

A deeper understanding of what teshuva is necessary. Maimonides explains what is meant by teshuva:

[Source 5]

<p>What is repentance?</p> <p>It is that wrongdoers should disconnect themselves from they have done wrong, to the degree that they no longer even think about it.</p> <p>They should firmly decide never to do that thing again...they should regret having done it in the past...so that the One Who knows the inner workings of people would attest to the fact that they will not return to that sin.¹⁶</p>	<p>ומה היא התשובה הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד...וכן יתנחם</p>
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Maimonides emphasizes that a person should disconnect, no longer think about the sin. Is this really the same person anymore?

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>The Concept of Teshuva</u></p> <p>The word in Hebrew used for repentance is Teshuva.</p> <p>The sum total of the teshuva process is that, in essence, a person changes and basically declares that <i>“I am different now. I have re-evaluated, repented, and I am not the same person who did those things.”</i>¹⁷</p> <p>In other words, the process of teshuva is no less than changing oneself into a new person, one who no longer has a connection to the previous transgressions. Just as one person is</p>	
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¹⁶ Maimonides Laws of Repentance 2:2

¹⁷ Similar to the following:

<p>It is the way of repentance to...change ones' name, as if to say, “I am a new person. I am not the same person who did those things”.¹⁷</p>	<p>מדרכי התשובה להיות...משנה שמו כלומר אני אחר</p>
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not held responsible for the wrongdoings of another, the “new” person that emerges after teshuva is not held responsible for the wrongdoings of the “former” person.

Teshuva does not literally mean repentance; it means “returning”. What we are trying to do is to become someone else – but not someone new! To return to our ‘real selves’ that have been covered up by our less than spiritual lifestyles.

Section III: Yom Kippur as a day of fasting

We have seen how the teshuva process enables us to achieve forgiveness.

But what is the connection between forgiveness and fasting?!

A story about Fasting and Not Fasting:

About 150 years ago a cholera epidemic broke out in Vilna, Lithuania, and claimed many lives. The Days of Awe approached and the epidemic was still at its height. Physical weakness and hunger increased the danger of hunger spreading still further. Hence, Rabbi Israel of Salant, the founder of the Mussar movement, issued a proclamation, which was displayed in all synagogues of the city, ordering that no one was to fast on the forthcoming Yom Kippur, that less prayers were to be recited, that walks were to be taken outside to breathe fresh air, and that each and every person was to help his neighbor physically, financially, and morally. Fearing that in their awe of Yom Kippur, the inhabitants would not heed his admonition, R. Israel ascended the bimah of the great synagogue in Vilna after the conclusion of the Morning Service, took out wine and cake, made Kiddush and ate the cake in the presence of the entire congregation.

This story is of course the exception. Most of us are healthy enough to fast every year. But why do we? Judaism is not an ascetic religion. We have no monks or convents. We do not believe in harming ourselves. So what is it about our fasting on Yom Kippur which causes forgiveness? Why is fasting necessary?

Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzato explains how the fasting helps in this regard:

[Source 6]

The significance of Yom Kippur is that G-d has prepared for the Jewish people one day, on which repentance will be accepted more readily, and wrongdoings can be readily eradicated...and to return those who repent to their level of holiness and closeness to Him, from which they were

ענין יום הכפורים הוא, שהנה הכין האדון

<p>distanced through their wrongdoings.</p> <p>On this day a great spiritual light shines forth that helps to bring all of this about. However in order to receive this light, one must observe the commandments of the day. This is especially so regarding the afflictions, for through the afflictions we disassociate ourselves from physicality to a great degree, and approach, albeit slightly, the level of angels¹⁸.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Derech Hashem 4:8:4</p>	
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Maharal¹⁹ adds further insight as to the function of the “five afflictions” in achieving this new elevated state:

[Source 7]

<p>All of the mitzvot that G-d has commanded us to do on this great and holy day are intended to remove the physicality from the person until they become angelic. This is why we are commanded in the afflictions, to remove or lessen our physicality so that the person can be as holy as an angel...</p> <p>On Yom Kippur G-d commanded us in the five afflictions so that the soul will not be constricted by the body...and since the soul has five names; nefesh, ruach, neshama, yechidah and chayah, this is an indication that there are five aspects to the soul.... Parallel to this we have the five afflictions, to remove the physicality (on all five levels)²⁰.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">וכן כל המצות שצוה השם יתעלה ביום וביום הכפורים צוה השם יתעלה למעט</p>
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The essence of this idea is expressed by the Nesivos Shalom²¹:

¹⁸ The idea of our being angelic on Yom Kippur manifests itself in several customs of the day, including the public recital of the “Baruch Shem” prayer after the Shema out loud, which during the year is said quietly. (Tur Orach Chayim 619).

¹⁹ Drasha LeShabbat Shuvah.

²⁰ Maharal goes on to explain how each of the five afflictions is specifically coordinated with each of the five aspects of the soul.

²¹ Nesivos Shalom Volume 2, 167

[Source 8]

This is the idea that “the essence of the day brings atonement”:

The essence of this great and holy day is that G-d elevates the Jewish person on it to a perspective higher than the low and petty world in which the wrongdoing was committed, therefore by default all of the sins are atoned for...through that the person connects to G-d on this day they are elevated to be with Him.

וזה ענין עיצומו של יום מכפר. עיצומו של

The forgiveness process of Yom Kippur can be defined as follows:

First the person goes through the teshuva process, disassociating themselves from the person that they were;

Second, the Five Afflictions and abstention from physical behavior allows their inherent spirituality to shine forth

Therefore, this helps them become new people (with different priorities and outlooks), no longer the people who transgressed; These people are therefore ‘deserving’ of forgiveness.

In other words, the higher perspective given by the Yom Kippur experience disconnects the person from the previous state in which the wrongdoings were committed. Once the person loses their connection to the wrongdoing, atonement comes naturally.

Sukkos

Succos

*"You shall rejoice on your festival"*²²

*"You Shall dwell in Sukkot seven days ... so that your descendants shall know that in Sukkot I caused the Children of Israel to dwell when I brought them out of Egypt"*²³

Introduction

On the holiday of Succos (or Sukkos), we live in temporary huts and shake the Four Species, celebrating G-d's protection of the Jewish people in the Sinai Desert before entering Israel. The name of the holiday, Sukkot, actually means "booths" or "huts."

Sukkot occurs in the autumn, five days after Yom Kippur. Its placement immediately following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is meant to convey that after achieving atonement and rededicating ourselves to growth, we celebrate with confidence in G-d's goodness. Succos itself lasts for seven days, followed by Shemini Atzeres²⁴ and Simchas Torah²⁵.

Educator:

Most Jews know of Yom Kippur but know little of Succos. They often only see Judaism as serious. It is important to emphasize the happy, fun parts of Judaism – such as Succos – in order to balance their perspective.

Joy:

The week of Succos is referred to in the Torah as “zman simchaseinu”, the time of our rejoicing. As quoted above, there is a special commandment to rejoice in the festival. In the Temple in Jerusalem there were nightly celebrations throughout the holiday that went on all night long. This feeling of happiness starts even before the holiday. It doesn't take them long to learn how to build it better and more quickly than their parents! There are wonderful meals eaten in the Sukkah, with singing, happiness and enjoying time with the family.

Four Species:

Waving the Four Species – or the Lulav Bundle – is one of loveliest of all Jewish "rites". The Torah tells us to take “*the fruits of a pleasant tree, and palm branches, and thick leafy boughs, and willows of the brook, and rejoice before your Lord G-d*” (Lev 23:40). The esrog is taken in the left hand and the other three species are taken together in the right hand. The two are brought together and shaken in all directions.

²² Deut 16:14

²³ Lev 23:42,43

²⁴ which is one last day to bask in the presence of G-d before entering the yearly cycle.

²⁵ when we mark the completion of the yearly cycle of Torah readings with great joy

There are many explanations as to the symbolism and depth of the Four Species.

- The Esrog has both taste and smell, representing Jews with both Torah learning and good deeds.
- The Lulav has taste (its dates) but no smell, representing those with Torah learning but no good deeds.
- The myrtle (hadas) has scent but no taste, representing those with good deeds but no Torah.
- The willow has neither taste nor smell, representing Jews lacking both Torah learning and good deeds.

On Sukkot, all four come together in one beautiful bundle, showing that true service of G-d requires true unity among Jews. If one of the species is missing, the entire bundle is invalid.

At a mystical level, the Four Species look like letters of G-d's name (Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh). The etrog resembles the yud, the curving myrtle the heh, the lulav the vav, and the bent willow the final heh. By bringing the Lulav-bundle together, we are bringing God's name together and helping to reestablish the fundamental unity of the universe.

The Sukkah:

The primary mitzvah of the holiday of Succos is that of living in the succah. It is not a mitzvah that we just “do”, like eating matzah, but is a mitzvah that encompasses our entire life for the week of Succos. We eat in these huts, and weather permitting, sleep in them as well. In this class we will attempt to gain insight into the reasons behind and meaning of this mitzvah.

TEXTUAL SECTION

Outline

Section #1: Commemoration

Section #2: Growth

Section #3: Why Now? Tur and Ramban

Section #4: Agricultural Lessons

Appendix: Two Kinds of Mitzvot

Section #1: Commemoration

Why do we live in the Sukkah?

[Source 1]

<p>You shall dwell in booths for seven days; all citizens of Israel shall sit in booths. In order that all of your generations shall know that I settled the Jews in booths when I brought them out of Egypt; I am the Lord your G-d.</p>	<p>(מב) בַּסֹּכֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֶזְרָח (מג) לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסֹּכֹת וּיקרא כג</p>
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We live in Sukkot to help us remember that when the Jewish people traveled in the desert for 40 years, they themselves dwelled in succot.

The nature of those succot long ago is subject to a disagreement in the Gemara:

[Source 2]

<p>It was taught “That I settled the Jews in booths”: Rabbi Eliezer said that this refers to the clouds of glory. Rabbi Akiva said He made for them actual booths. Talmud Succah 11b</p>	<p>תניא כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל ענני כבוד היו דברי רבי אליעזר רבי עקיבא אומר סוכות ממש עשו להם</p>
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Either way, this is something worth commemorating:

[Source 3]

<p>“That I settled the Jews in booths”: <i>this refers to the clouds of glory.</i> This is Rashi’s interpretation and is correct in terms of the simple meaning: We are enjoined to remember the great acts that G-d did for us, the remarkable event of us residing in the clouds of glory like a succah...²⁶</p>	<p>כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל ענני</p>
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²⁶... Since it already explained that the heavenly cloud surrounded them by day and the pillar of fire at night, it was able to say without clarification “in booths”, that G-d made for them clouds of glory to protect them...

²⁷ומפני שכבר פירש שענן ה' עליהם יומם ועמוד האש בלילה, אמר סתם כי בסכות הושבתי, שעשיתי להם ענני כבודי סכות להגן עליהם

Nachmanides	רמבן ויקרא כג, מג
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***Question:** If a miracle was performed for the Jewish people in the desert – ie that they dwelled in miraculous clouds of glory, then it makes sense to have a holiday to commemorate it. But if the Jews lived in portable booths the whole time, what is the big deal? Why are we having a holiday about it?*

Rabbeynu Bachya explains:

[Source 4]

<p>According to the opinion that says that G-d made for them actual booths, we are commanded to make succot like those in order that through the mitzvah of Succah it will become revealed and well-known the elevated state of existence the Jews had in the desert. They traveled in the desert with masses of men, women, and children in a place where it is not the nature of man to live...even in that place G-d prepared for them all of their needs and they were not lacking anything.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ad loc</p>	<p>דעת האומר סכות ממש עשו להם,</p>
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The clouds of glory were not just a protection against the physical dangers of the desert:

[Source 5]

<p>The clouds of glory that G-d encompassed the Jewish people with, in addition to their physical benefits of serving as a covering and protection for them, had an even more important function on a spiritual level.</p> <p>Just as the clouds physically elevated the Jewish people from the ground and separated them from the people around them, so too the clouds brought to them a state of enlightenment that came to them alone, apart from other nations, removed them from the ephemeral world and elevated them over its' inhabitants. This was done at that time for the Jewish people to help bring them to their natural high state of existence,</p>	<p>כי הנה ענני הכבוד שהקיף הקב"ה את</p> <p>כמו שעל ידי העננים ההם היו נמצאים</p>
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<p>and the effect of this remains for every Jew in every time.</p> <p>The spirit of holiness emerges from G-d and surrounds every righteous person to remove them from the surrounding people. This notion renews itself on the holiday of Succos through the sitting in the succah.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Derech G-d 4:8</p>	<p>שׂאמנִם אור קדושה נמשך מלפניו ית' </p>
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Question: How would you summarize this explanation?

Answer: While being surrounded by clouds of glory for 40 years is certainly miraculous, several million people surviving 40 years in the desert in temporary huts with no local source of food or water is no less impressive. While this may lack the overt drama of clouds of glory, staying alive and well in that precarious state is worth commemorating.²⁸

Section #2: Growth

The purpose of performing this mitzvah is not just for the sake of remembering the past:

[Source 6]

<p>The roots of [the] mitzvah [of living in the succah] are based in what is written in the Torah, in order to remember the tremendous miracles that G-d did for our ancestors in the desert when they left Egypt. They were enveloped in clouds of glory so that they should not be harmed by the sun in the day and the chill of the night.</p> <p>Others say that there were actual booths that they lived in. Through the remembering of the wonders that G-d did for us and our ancestors we should become more vigilant in our performance of the mitzvos of G-d, and we will be able to receive G-d's goodness, and this is the desire of G-d, to do good for the world</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sefer HaChinuch²⁹</p>	<p>מִשְׂרָשֵׁי הַמִּצְוָה, מֵהַ שְׂמִפּוּרֵשׁ בְּכַתּוּב [שֶׁ],</p> <p>שְׂלֵא יִזִּיק לָהֶם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בַּיּוֹם וְקָרַח בַּלַּיְלָה.</p> <p>וַיֵּשׁ שְׂפִירְשׁוּ שְׂסוּכוֹת מִמֶּשׁ עֲשׂוּ בְנֵי</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ל</p> <p>זֶהוּ חִפְצוֹ בְרוּךְ הוּא שְׂחַפֵּץ</p> <p style="text-align: right;">לְהִיטִיב:</p> <p>חִינוּךְ שְׂכָה</p>
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²⁸ The Aruch HaShulchan (Orech Chayim 625) explains that according to Rabbi Akiva's booth-explanation, the Succah represents the greatness of the Jewish people, whose trust in G-d allowed them to enter a hot desert and rely on G-d for their protection, having only flimsy physical dwellings themselves.

²⁹ #325

How would you summarize this?

In other words:

Contemplation of the good that someone has done for us will naturally lead to a desire to repay that good. Reenacting the experience of our ancestors will help us to appreciate the kindness G-d did for them in the desert, which will have the effect of increasing our desire to do G-ds' will.

We have seen that the mitzvah of Sukkah reminds us of what happened in the desert and inspires us to develop our connection with G-d and grow.

According to this, though, Why Now?

Section #3: Why Now? Tur and Nachmanides

Being that the Jews began their journey in the Spring (the month of Nissan), why is Succos observed in the Fall (the month of Tishrei)?

[Source 7]

<p>Even though we left Egypt in the month of Nissan, we were not commanded to build succot during that time because it is at the start of the summer season and it is normal for people to make a succah for shade then. Therefore it would not be apparent that we are building them for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah.</p>	<p>ואע"פ שיצאנו ממצרים בחדש ניסן לא עשייתנו בהם שהם במצות הבורא יתברך ולכן צוה אותנו שנעשה בחדש השביעי</p>
<p>Therefore we were commanded to make them in the seventh month which is the start of the rainy season and it is normal then for people to re-enter their homes, so we who leave our homes to go into the succah show everybody that we are fulfilling the mitzvah of G-d.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tur³⁰</p>	<p>אה לכל שמצות המלך היא עלינו לעשותה</p>

How would you summarize the Tur's explanation?

The words of Nachmanides quoted before provide a different answer:

³⁰ Tur Orach Chayim 625

[Source 8]

<p>G-d has commanded us at the beginning of the summer season to remember the exodus in its month and time, and commanded us to remember the miracle that happened to them the entire time they wandered in the desert at the start of the winter season.³¹</p>	<p>והנה צוה בתחילת ימות החמה בזכרון מי עמידתם במדבר בתחלת ימות הגשמים</p>
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Question: How would you summarize Nachmanides' explanation?

Answer: The exodus from Egypt and the subsequent time spent in the desert was such a seminal time in our collective past that through Pesach and Sukkos we 'bookend' the year with remembrances of it.

Section #4: Agricultural Festival

Another explanation is advanced for the mitzvah of succah. The three major holidays in the Torah are described primarily in terms of the agricultural season in which they occur:

- Pesach is *Chag Hakatzir*, the holiday of reaping.
- Shavuot is *Chag Habikkurim*, when the first fruits ripen.
- Succot is referred to as *Chag Ha'Asif*, the holiday of the gathering.

[Source 9]

<p>The holiday of the reaping the first growths of your handiwork that you planted in your fields, and the holiday of the gathering at the end of the year when you collect your handiwork from the fields. Exodus 23: 16</p>	<p>וְחַג הַקָּצִיר בְּכוֹרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע בַּשָּׂדֶה בְּצֵאת הַשָּׁנָה בְּאֶסְפָּךָ אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיךָ מִן הַשָּׂדֶה שמות כג, טז</p>
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[Source 10)

<p><i>The holiday of the gathering-</i> this refers to Succos. When you collect your handiwork- during all the summer months the produce dries out in the fields. At the time of this holiday it is gathered into the house before the rains come. Rashi³²</p>	<p>וְחַג הָאָסִיף - הוּא חַג הַסּוּכוֹת: בְּאֶסְפָּךָ אֶת ג אוספים אותה אל הבית מפני הגשמים: רש"י</p>
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³¹ See above

³² Ad loc

How would you summarize this Rashi? What does celebrating Sukkot have to do with the ‘timing of the gathering’?

[Source 11]

<p>During that time that the produce is collected everyone would like to go in from the fields to their houses to reside in them, and G-d was concerned that perhaps through establishing themselves in their houses the people will become haughty from having their needs fulfilled, which leads to becoming base and rebellious. Kli Yakar</p>	<p>לפי שבזמן אסיפת התבואה מן השדה כל ששה התורה אולי על ידי ישיבת קבע ירום לבבו כי מצאה ידו כביר וישמן ויבעט. ויקרא כג מג</p>
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Rabbi Chaim Freidlander³³ expands upon this theme:

[Source 12]

<p>The Torah commands us to leave our permanent homes and to enter temporary ones, to a home built of the remnant of the field produce³⁴. This is to teach us that it is neither the grain nor the grapes that we rely upon that gives us our security. Even the remnant, that we ascribe little importance to, that can provide our shelter and protection if G-d desires. This will reinforce our belief that G-d is the one who provides for us. The is the “exile to the Succah”, leaving our homes to live under G-ds’ shade, so that we should recognize that everything we merited to gather from the fields comes from G-d.</p>	<p>ציוותה עלינו התורה לצאת מדירת קבע ג דמהימנותא (בצל האמונה) להכיר כי מה שזכינו לאסיף...הכל מתנת שמים.</p>
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³³ Sifsei Chaim Volume 1 page 329

³⁴ This refers to the sechach of the succah, which is to be made of branches and others forms of unprocessed vegetation.

Appendix: Two Kinds of Mitzvot

The link between Succos occurring at the end of the gathering season, as well as the way that the mitzvah of Succah works in tandem with the mitzvah of the Four Species, is explained beautifully by the Meshech Chachmah:

[Source 13]

<p>G-ds' Torah has in it mitzvot that help people battle against their inherent nature, and other mitzvot that help people refine their inherent nature.</p> <p>Take for example the mitzvah of Succah, after a person toils in the field plowing, planting, sectioning, reaping, and bundling; toils in the field to gather the produce, fills the storehouse with the produce and rejoices in the result of the labor, it would be so sweet to be able to rest at home. At that moment the Torah instructs us to leave our homes and to enter temporary dwellings. This goes against the natural human desire and elevates the tendencies and feelings of people to rise above the physical...</p> <p>However there are other mitzvot that are in tune with human nature, only that they contain points of higher wisdom in specific details according to G-ds' wisdom...It is human nature to celebrate at the time of the gathering of the produce with the produce that has been gathered, as is common throughout the world. For this the Torah comes and specifies four species and instructs us to rejoice with them for seven days...³⁵</p>	<p>משך חכמה ויקרא כג מב הטבע, ויש מצות שהם כפי הטבע, רק עראי, (סוכה ב) וזה נגד הטבע לקדש כחות האדם באה התורה והגבילה ד' מינים ידועים בקבלה ואמרה ושמחתם לפני ה' ז' ימים..</p>
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³⁵ The Meshech Chachmah goes on to explain that the Halachot regarding the need for a priori intent in building a succah are due to the need to overcome our nature in the performance of that mitzvah.

Chanukah

Chanukah

On Chanukah (sometimes spelled Hanukah) we celebrate (1) our victory³⁶ over the Greeks³⁷ who attempted to force us to abandon³⁸ Judaism and (2) the miracle of the oil: With only one day's worth found in the Temple after the war, it lasted eight days, giving us time to produce new oil. To commemorate these events the Rabbis of the time enacted the holiday of Chanukah, with a mitzvah to light the menorah to remember the miracles that happened then. The holiday therefore lasts eight days and occurs on the 25th of Jewish month of Kislev, in the middle of winter.

Each night, we light our Chanukah Menorahs and the festival is thus called the Festival of Lights. Children also play with spinning dreidels, and we eat foods cooked in oil (ie latkes) to remember miracle of oil.

Educator's Background

The main issue that we will address in this class is the famous question of the Bais Yosef: Why is Chanukah celebrated for eight days if there was enough oil for the first day? The first day wasn't particularly miraculous! The holiday should have been for the seven miraculous days.

We will advance an answer that illustrates one of the fundamentals of Jewish belief.

Outline

- Section 1: What is Chanukah?
- Section 2: Vinegar and Oil
- Section 3: Back to Basics
- Section 4: The Man Who Nursed His Child

Section 1: What is Chanukah?

Many of you know the story of Chanukah. We beat the Greeks. Found the Oil. It was only supposed to last one day and lasted eight. A miracle!!

The Bais Yosef asks a famous question: Why is Chanukah celebrated for eight days if there was enough oil for the first day?

³⁶ In the year 165 B.C.E.

³⁷ And their sympathizers, the Hellenist Jews

³⁸ the Greeks legislated against the performance of many of the fundamental precepts of the Jewish religion, such as the observance of Shabbos and performing a bris milah. Additionally, the Greeks brought a halt to the service in the Bais Hamikdash

Can you think of why? What are your answers?

Some answers³⁹ include: 1- One eighth of the oil burned each day, meaning that each day had a miracle. 2- One day commemorates the military victory. 3- One day is for the miracle of finding the oil. 4- One day is to celebrate the annulment of the decrees.

We are going to look into a deep answer to this question, and along the way find out a lot about Chanukah itself:

[Source 1]

What is Chanukah?	מאי חנוכה
The rabbis taught:	דתנו רבנן
On the 25th day of Kislev, the eight days of Chanukah begin, on which eulogizing and fasting are prohibited. When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the oil there. When the House of the Chasmonians prevailed and conquered them, oil was sought (for the daily lighting of the Lamp in the Temple) and only one vial was found with the seal of the high priest intact. It only contained enough oil for one day, but a miracle occurred, and it lasted eight days.	בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה
The next year these days were established as holidays, with praise and thanks (given to G-d).	מ
Shabbos 21b	שאוּם ימים טובים בהלל והודאה

Question: How would you summarize the Talmud's description of the essence of Chanukah?

Answer: The Gemara is well aware that there were various miracles of Chanukah. Rashi there explains that the Gemara is asking which miracle is the real essence of the holiday. The gemara answers that the miracle of the oil is the essence of the holiday. Keep this in mind when we see the Maharal later on.

Consider another source, this time from the Grace After Meals (*Bentching*) and the special holiday additions to daily prayers (*the Amidah*)

³⁹ It may be beneficial to supply other answers to this question, to give over the principle of "eilu v'eilu", that there are many meaningful and equally true lessons to be learned through analysis of this question. There is even a sefer, entitled "Ner L'maya", which consists entirely of 100 answers to this question.

[Source 2]

In the days of Mattisyahu son of Yochanan, High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the evil Greek Empire stood against Israel, trying to cause them to forget Your Torah and take them away from Your Will, You in Your great mercy stood up for them during their hardships. You fought for them, judged for them, and took revenge for them. You gave over the strong to the few, the many to the weak, the impure to the pure, the evil to the good, the malicious to those who toil in Your Torah, and made for Yourself a great and holy name in Your world. And for Your nation, Israel, you brought a great salvation and rescue until this day. Later, You brought Your children to Your habitation and they cleansed your Sanctuary, purified your Holy Place and kindled lights in the courtyards of Your Holy Place. And they established these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your holy name.

בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול,
ו

ס, ד

קדשך. וקבעו שמונת ימי חנוכה
אלו, להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול:

Question: How would you summarize this source's description of the essence of Chanukah?

Answer: Kindling the lights is at most a minor point here, and even that kindling is unclear – is it kindling the special Chanukah lights or perhaps the 'standard' Menorah of the Temple service? The main point of this prayer is clearly the war against the Greeks. Students should know that the oil lasted eight days – exactly as long as was needed to prepare new oil for the Temple.

Is there a contradiction between the sources? If so, can the sources be reconciled?

Educator: It is important that students understand the apparent contradiction between the texts, as it is the basis for this entire session.

Optional Exploration

Students may want to know why we attempt to 'reconcile' texts. A simple answer is that the Talmud was a closed collection of sources and disputes that were edited very carefully. Often there are different views, but when the editors included generic statements such as those above, they are meant to be taken as authoritative.

Fundamentally, there are no contradictions, but often different aspects are emphasized. Part of the delight of Torah study is trying to understand the depth of what we are learning. It may be a good idea to ask the student, which aspect of the holiday does he/she feel is the essence of the holiday. In day to day practical life, it would seem that beating the Greeks was since we were allowed to live as Jews (they had forbidden Torah study, circumcision, Shabbat, etc). On the other hand, our holidays are not just the history of battles: the light of the menorah represents spirituality and truth, larger issues than swords and chariots. Don't give away too much...

Section 2: Vinegar and Oil

Let us look elsewhere in the Talmud to deepen our understanding of miracles:

[Source 3]

One Erev Shabbos, [Rabbi Chanina] noticed that his daughter was sad. He asked her why. She replied, "I got the vessel of oil mixed up with the vessel of vinegar, and lit the Shabbat light from the wrong one!" He said to her, "My daughter - why should that trouble you? He Who ordained that oil should burn can also ordain that vinegar should burn." It is taught that [the vinegar] burned all night and all day, until some of it was used for Havdalah (the ceremony at the end of Shabbos)
Taanis 25a

חד בי שמשי חזייה לברתיה
תנא
היה דולק והולך כל היום כולו עד
שהביאו ממנו אור להבדלה

Question: Does Rabbi Chanina's teaching help you understand anything about Chanukah?

Answer: the point of the Rabbi Chaninah story is that all of life is a miracle. We get used to oil burning so that doesn't seem miraculous, whereas an abrupt break in nature (vinegar burning or the splitting of the sea) is termed a miracle. But all this is from our mortal view. For G-d, it is not 'harder' to make vinegar burn than to make oil burn. For more on Rabbi Chanina, see footnotes⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Sefer HaToda'ah (based on Pri Tzaddik, Pesach 32) adds an important insight:

The approach we've seen is best summarized by Nachmanides:

[Source 4]

From the great and obvious miracles we should come to appreciate the hidden miracles.

Exodus 13:16

ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים

The Ramban, Nachmanides, has brought up the idea that there are two types of miracles.

Question: What are some examples of each?

Answer: Revealed miracles are much rarer. Examples most students will have heard of from the Passover Haggadah: The sea splits to let the Jewish People through. Moses' staff turns into a snake. The oil burns for eight days. Hidden miracles are more common but less obvious: Purim; The lady who strangely misses a flight for the first time in her life, and it tragically crashes. The survival of the Jewish People through thousands of years of persecutions and pogroms, without a country, outlasting all the Empires and nations that sought our destruction. For Chanukah, the defeat of the Greeks.

It was necessary to establish as a belief in the hearts of the Jewish people that all of the acts of creation are dependant upon the will of G-d. Inhabited lands and desert, the sea and the wind, the clouds and the fire, all are G-d's handiwork and are continuously run by G-d. There is no nature; rather all is run by G-d. After this belief was established in their hearts, that all of nature is from G-d's word; then they merited to see miracles and a supernatural way of life.

This is like the story of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who said "The One who decreed that oil should light can decree that vinegar should light". We can ask, why did he mention the fact that oil lights, he could have just said that G-d can make vinegar to light?

He was coming to teach us that the way to achieve the miraculous is by instilling in ourselves that natural processes are also directed by G-d. The fact that oil burns is also from G-ds' will, and that will can also make vinegar to light.

It has already been pointed out that the gematria of "Elokim" (G-ds' name) is the same as "Hateva" (nature).

אלא שהיה צריך שתקבע האמונה בלב

וכמו המעשה ברבי חנינא בן דוסא

'אלקים' בגימטריא:

Section 3: Back to Basics - What was the essence of Chanukah?

Consider these words from the Maharal:

[Source 5]

The essence of the establishment of the [holiday of the] days of Chanukah was the defeat of the Greeks, except that it wasn't apparent to them that this victory was a miracle ... therefore the miracle of the lights of the Menorah was done for them so that they would know that everything was a miracle from G-d, Blessed be He.

Maharal⁴¹ of Prague

...עיקר מה שקבעו ימי חנוכה

מהר"ל נר מצוה כ"ב

Question: How can we now understand the Talmud's explanation of the essence of Chanukah?

Answer: It would seem that when the Talmud says that the essence of the holiday is the oil, it is referring to the immense educational impact of learning about the Big or Revealed Miracles. The end-goal of those miracles, though, is to realize that all of life – ie the victory over the Greeks and even our day to day lives, are miracles.

Summary of Miracles:

The word for a miracle in Hebrew is "nes". The same word also means a flag (as we say in the daily prayer "raise a flag (nes) to gather in the exiled". What is the bond between a miracle and a flag?

When Neil Armstrong raised the American flag on the moon, his intention was not merely to show American control over that specific spot on the moon where he placed it. Rather, the placement of the flag was meant to show American control over the entire area surrounding it.

The performance of a miracle (nes) serves a similar role. There is nature, and there is a G-d controlling nature. However, being that we perceive nature as "natural", G-d's controlling hand is not readily apparent. The purpose of a miracle is for us to see that it is G-d controlling what goes on in the world. The one who *breaks* the rules of nature is the one who *makes* the rules of nature. In this manner a miracle is like a flag, showing

⁴¹ Ner Mitzvah p.22

control not only of the ability to do miracles but also of the control over nature as a whole⁴².

Section 4: The Man Who Nursed His Child

Consider the following passage from the Talmud:

[Source 6]

The Rabbis taught: There was once an incident with a man whose wife died and left him a nursing child, he was so poor that he could not pay a wet-nurse. A miracle happened to him; his breasts opened like a woman's and he nursed his child.

Said R. Joseph: Come and see how great the man must have been that such a miracle was wrought for him.

Abaye said to him: On the contrary, Behold how lowly the man must have been that the nature of mankind changed in him and nothing occurred to enable him to earn enough money to pay a nurse.

Shabbos 53b

ת"ר מעשה באחד שמתה אשתו

אמר רב יוסף בא וראה כמה גדול

א"ל אביי אדרבה כמה גרוע אדם זה

Question: How does Abaye's explanation fit in what we've seen above?

Answer: The concept is fascinating. G-d created, creates, and controls nature. He hides Himself in this world (*hester panim*) in order that we should earn our own spirituality. If G-d is too obvious, then there is no free will. For G-d to openly break with the rules of the world in an obvious miracle is far from ideal – we lose our free will and our ability to earn our own reward. G-d then prefers to be slightly “behind the scenes” and have us think about it a little in order to see His Hand.

Summary and Main Point of the Class

If Chanukah was only seven days long, it would imply that only the extra seven days of the menorah burning was done by the hand of G-d.

By celebrating Chanukah for eight days, we are expressing our belief that the fact that the oil burned on the first day is also something to be seen as “miraculous”; the fact that it is a miracle that we see every day does not make any less noteworthy.

⁴² It should be noted that the word “nes” is the root of the word “nisayon”, a spiritual challenge. Once again, the purpose of a nisayon is to show the person being tested not only of their ability to pass that particular test, but even more to show them the spiritual level which they are on.

Appendix 1: A Hallel Exercise

Have students read the following quote, and then look in the siddur to see the verses of Pesukei DeZimra and Hallel. Ask them if they notice the different themes and then see if the Talmudic statement is more understandable⁴³.

[Source 7]

<p>Rabbi Yossi said: "I wish that my portion would be with those who recite Hallel every day".</p> <p>Is that so?</p> <p>Didn't the Rav teach that someone who recited Hallel every day is denigrating and blaspheming G-d?</p> <p>[Explanation:]</p> <p>When he (Rabbi Yossi) said it he was referring to [what we call] Pesukai DeZimra.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Shabbos 118b</p>	<p>אמר רבי יוסי יהא חלקי מגומרי הלל בכל איני והאמר מר הקורא הלל בכל יום הרי זה כי קאמרינן בפסוקי דזמרא</p>
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Appendix 2: Kochi veOtzem Yad

Later on in the same section mentioned above, the Maharal also refers to the concept of "Kochi veOtzem Yadi," which translates as "My power and the might of my hand." Let us see the context and the verses themselves on this subject. How do you think it fits into our discussion?

[Source 8]

Be careful that you do not forget the LORD thy God...

12 in case that when you have eaten and are

יֵא הַשֶּׁמֶר לְךָ, פֶּן-תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-ה'
יְיָ פֶּן-תֹּאכַל, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ; וּבְתִים

⁴³ Basically, hallel focuses on the miraculous. PZ on the appreciation of G-d in every day life. We are supposed to do the latter, not over-focus on the former.

satisfied, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

13 and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

14 then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;

15 Who led you through the great and awesome desert ... Who brought forth water for you out of the rock;

16 Who fed you Manna in the wilderness ...

17 and you may say in your heart: 'My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.'

Deut 8: 11-17 11

יג וּבְקָרְךָ וְצֹאֲנֶיךָ יִרְבּוּ, וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב

יד וְכֶסֶף, לְבַבְךָ; וְשָׂכַחְתָּ אֶת־ה'

טו הַמּוֹלִיכְךָ בְּמִדְבָּר הַגָּדֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא,

טז הַמְאַכְלֶךָ מִן בְּמִדְבָּר ...

יז וְאָמַרְתָּ, בְּלִבְבְּךָ: כִּי־יַעֲצֹם

דְּבָרִים ח':

The verses describe that we have a natural tendency (and not a good one!) to attribute things to our own powers, and to forget that G-d is running the world. Miracles, big and small, help us avoid this mistake.

Purim

Purim

Purim is a joyous holiday where we dress up in costumes, have festive meals with friends and family, eat special pastries⁴⁴ and ... we drink! In fact, Purim is so happy that it makes the entire month happy: "When Adar arrives, we increase our joy." (Talmud - Taanit 29a)

The name of the holiday is Purim, which literally means "lots" - ie the Feast of Lots: The wicked Haman drew lots to decide which day the Jews would be destroyed. The holiday reminds us how Esther and Mordechai saved the Jewish people from destruction about 2500 years ago, at the hands of our Hitler-like enemy, Haman who had planned to exterminate all of the Jewish subjects throughout the vast Persian Empire. It occurs on 14th or 15th of the Jewish month of Adar, which usually occurs in February.

There are four main commandments of the day: (1) We listen to the Scroll of Esther (called Megillat Esther) being read in synagogue; (2) We distribute gifts (or money) to the poor; (3) We make a special feast and (4) We give presents to neighbors and friends.

Educator:

Students should have some basic familiarity with the events in Megillat Esther in order to proceed. If they know the basics, you can move on immediately. If not, you can either speak about it for a few moments, or use the appendix here for a summary of the Megilla.

Purim and the Other Holidays

In contrast with all other Jewish holidays (with the exception of Chanukah), Purim is not mentioned in the Torah, but was enacted by the leading Sages of its time. In other words, it is 'only' a Rabbinic holiday, not a Torah one. With that in mind, see the next source:

[Source 1]

All of the holidays will be nullified (in Messianic times) but the days ⁴⁵ of Purim will never be nullified, as it says (Esther	שכל המועדים יהיו בטלין, וימי הפורים לא
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⁴⁴ Called Hamantaschen

⁴⁵ Purim is referred to in the plural because in most places it is celebrated on the 14th of Adar, but in a few cities in Israel it is celebrated on the 15th.

9:28) “These days of Purim will never leave the Jewish people and its memory will not be lost to its’ children”. ⁴⁶	
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This statement is difficult on two levels:

- (a) Why will all other holidays be nullified in the times of Mashiach, and
- (b) Why is Purim be the exception to that rule?

How do you understand this?

We find a similar statement regarding the text of Megillat Esther:

[Source 2]

Rabbi Yochanan said “The Prophets and the Writings will be nullified in the future, but the five books of the Torah will not be nullified”...	בי יוחנן אמר הנביאים והכתובים עתידים
Rabbi Shimon Ben Lakish said “Also Megillat Esther and the laws will not be nullified”. ⁴⁷	

Here too we find that the story of Purim occupies a level reserved for the five books of the Torah, above that of the works of the prophets and the other Writings.

Question: *What is so unique about the Purim story which causes it to be so important?*

The Hidden G-d

There is another teaching of the Sages regarding the Purim story:

[Source 3]

Where is Esther hinted to in the Torah ⁴⁸ ? “I will hide ⁴⁹ my face on that day” (Deut 31:18).	אסתר מן התורה מנין ואנכי הסתיר
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G-d acts in the Purim story with “a hidden face”⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Midrash Mishlei section 9.

⁴⁷ Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 1:5.

⁴⁸ Although the Purim story occurred much later than the writing of the Torah, its’ message was foreshadowed there.

⁴⁹ The word for “hide” in Hebrew is the same as Esther.

⁵⁰ This is the reason why many have the custom to wear costumes or masks on Purim.

A wonderful example of this is that although the Scroll of Esther is an account of G-d saving the Jews from the plans of Haman, we do not find any mention of G-d anywhere in the Megillah!

It is a great irony! What we have is a holiday which on the one hand is so important that it will remain even after other holidays are gone, while on the other hand it is hard for us to see what was even miraculous about it, as G-d's role is hidden.

Explanation of the Pachad Yitzchak

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner⁵¹ uses the following parable:

[Source 4]

<p>Imagine two people are given the job of recognizing people at night.</p> <p>The first of them lit a flashlight in order to see the faces of the people that came. The second did not have a flashlight, and therefore had to train to learn to recognize people's voices.</p> <p>When it comes to the question of which of them could recognize the people more clearly, the first one could, as seeing the face provides greater clarity than hearing the voice.</p> <p>On the other hand, the second person has an advantage over the first, in having developed the new skill of recognizing voices, while the first one has not.</p> <p>In the morning, when the sun rises, the first will put out the flashlight, for it is of no use during the day. This one will have gained nothing in the night to help in the day. The second one will always have the new skill of recognizing voices at his disposal, even during the day.</p>	<p>משל לשני בני אדם שנצטוו להכיר אנשים האחד הדליק נר והביט בפני האנשים ונמצא, לענין הברירות והבהירות הראשון אבל לעומת זאת, יש להשני עדיפות על ונמצא, דאחר כך, לכשיעלה עמוד השחר,</p>
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⁵¹ Pachad Yitzchak Purim 34

Question: How would you summarize this idea? Does it answer our question? How?

Answer: One who can recognize someone in any circumstance, even when there is no light, has a great advantage. It is the same thing with seeing G-d. Purim enables us to see G-d even when He is hidden.

The Purim story is fundamentally different than other stories of our salvation. The Jewish people were saved through the confluence of several “natural” processes: Esther becoming queen, Mordechai overhearing the assassination plot, Haman disturbing the sleep of the king, Achashverosh at that moment remembering being saved by Mordechai, and so on. These events occurred over a period of nine years. G-d's name is not mentioned because G-d was acting “behind the scenes”, with a hidden face. Our commemoration of Purim is recognizing the ability of G-d to save us without overt miraculous interaction. This can be compared to the one who learns to recognize people through hearing their voices, without any light as a visual aid.

[Source 5]

Will we mention the exodus from Egypt in Messianic times? No, for it says “Behold days are coming, says G-d, and they will no longer say ‘G-d lives, who elevated the Jews from the land of Egypt’, rather ‘G-d lives, who elevated and brought the Jews from the lands of the north and from all the places they have been scattered to’” ⁵² .	וכי מזכירין יציאת מצרים לימות המשיח
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Question: Why will Pesach and the other holidays no longer be necessary in Messianic times?

Answer: The exodus from Egypt is the basis for the three Biblical festivals. In that exodus, the hand of G-d was overt. Whether a plague, splitting of the sea or the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai, G-d was interacting with the world in a miraculous manner not seen before or since. The holidays are meant for us to remember and relive how G-d has full control over the forces of the world and can change those forces at will.

In Messianic times, G-ds’ presence will once again be clear to the world. Therefore, Pesach and its’ attendant holidays will no longer be needed. Seeing the hand of G-d in past miraculous events can be compared to the one who sees the faces of the people with a flashlight. Messianic times are compared to the rising of the sun, when keeping the flashlight lit serves no purpose.

Explanation of the Ramchal

⁵² Brachos 12a.

Ramchal explains⁵³ that our current state of existence is moving constantly towards Messianic times. From our perspective this is not apparent. From our perspective history seems to move in random directions. True, technology develops, but history seems to have little sense of pattern or purpose. Empires come and go. The Greeks. Romans. British. French. Americans. Now maybe the Chinese... it doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

This is only because we are not attuned to the Divine plan. Limited as we are, we have no way of understanding how different world events are helping us progress towards the final goal.

[Source 6]

<p>In every action that G-d performs in the world, there are two aspects, the revealed and the hidden...</p> <p>the hidden aspect is the deep design inherent in all of what G-d does, to bring humanity to a general state of perfection. ... there is no action, great or small, whose inner purpose is not leading to this perfection...</p> <p>In the future G-d will let the Jewish people understand how even the afflictions they underwent were for the good, and prepared them for the state of being blessed...</p> <p>In our current time the actions of G-d are not understood by us at all, they can only be seen on their surface and their true essence is hidden. Their inner essence is all the same: they are all purely good and not at all bad, and this is certainly not clear or understandable now. In Messianic times this will be at least visible and graspable: how all of the plans of G-d were deep ways for our benefit in the end</p>	<p>כי ודאי בכל מדה ומדה שהוא ית"ש מודד הנסתר היא העצה העמוקה הנמצאת כי יודיע דרכיו הקב"ה לעתיד לבא לעיני והנה עתה אין מעשי ה' מובנים לנו כלל,</p>
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Based on this, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander⁵⁴ clarifies our issue:

[Source 7]

<p>Now we can understand the words of</p>	<p>מעשה נבין היטב את דברי חז"ל: כל</p>
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⁵³ Da'as Tevunos 54.

⁵⁴ Sifsei Chaim II page 222

Chazal: “All of the holidays will be nullified (in the times of Mashiach) but the days of Purim will never be nullified”.

The common denominator between the Messianic revelations and the revelations of Purim is the understanding of how evil served as a means to bring about the revelation of G-ds’ unity; that everything develops as G-d wills it to, despite the appearance of evil. This will be the revelation in the future, that everyone will understand retroactively how everything was leading to the Divine purpose. This is also the revelation of Purim: within the hidden actions, without and overstepping the boundaries of natural events, the Divine plan was revealed.

“All of the holidays will be nullified”: this means that the future revelations will be greater and more elevated than those that the Jewish people have experienced until now, therefore all of those miracles will be secondary to those of the future. However this approach of revealing the Divine plan, which is the common denominator between the revelations of the future and the Purim story, these will be primary and recognized even then⁵⁵.

כל המועדים יתבטלו – היינו הגילויים

***Question:** How would you summarize this approach? What does Purim have in common with the Messianic times? Why will the other holidays become superfluous?*

***Answer:** This approach⁵⁶ views the Purim story as a microcosm of how we will understand the ways of G-d in Messianic times. Purim's status as the “preview” to Messianic times is what gives it its’ special status which will never be lost. The Spiritual Revelations of the future will be so powerful that the other holidays will no longer be necessary, but the lesson of Purim will remain – the absolute unity of G-d, and the inner dimension of the Divine plan.*

⁵⁵ Sifsei Chaim ibid.

⁵⁶ While in the previous approach the focus was on the events of the Exodus as opposed to the events of Purim

Appendix: A Summary of the Scroll of Esther

King Ahausuerus ⁵⁷ of Persia rules the entire civilized world, including 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. He holds a huge feast ⁵⁸ for all his subjects in the capital city of Shushan. At the feast, Ahausuerus asks Queen Vashti to parade naked⁵⁹ in front of his guests. She refuses⁶⁰. He gets angry and has her killed.

Against her will, our heroine Esther is chosen in a royal beauty contest to be the new queen. She is taken to the Palace, but keeps her Jewish identity secret. Providentially, our hero Mordechai overhears⁶¹ two guards planning to assassinate the king. He tells Esther, and the plot fails. Mordechai's act is recorded in the royal chronicles, yet the king doesn't know⁶² anything about it.

The evil Haman becomes the king's Prime Minister and decrees that everyone must bow to him. Mordechai refuses ⁶³ to bow, and Haman is enraged. Furthermore, when Haman finds out that Mordechai is a Jew, he seeks to destroy the entire Jewish people. Haman complains to the king: "The Jews keep their own laws and refuse to be like everyone else⁶⁴." Haman bribes the king, who is happy to take the money and let Haman do the dirty work.

⁵⁷ His name is pronounced and sometimes spelled Achashverosh; Persia is now known as Iran.

⁵⁸ Our prophet Jeremiah predicted that our exile from Israel would last 70 years. His prophecy came true, but Ahausuerus miscalculated and thought the seventy years had passed. The party was essentially a celebration of his final victory over the Jews. He flaunted his disdain for the conquered Jews by wearing the special clothes of the High Priest, and by displaying holy vessels stolen from the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem. He invited the Jews to the feast as well, in effect asking them to accept their own downfall. Unfortunately, many Jews attended.

⁵⁹ The circumstances of Vashti's death are a classic example of how the world works "measure for measure," for she was wicked and had forced Jewish girls to do work on Shabbat, naked.

⁶⁰ Being no more moral than her husband, she had been willing to display herself, until she was struck with a terribly embarrassing skin disease.

⁶¹ The guards were speaking a rare Persian dialect that they assumed no one could understand. Like all members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court, Mordechai was required to know 70 languages, and therefore understood them.

⁶² The royal chronicler was an anti-semite and wanted the act forgotten.

⁶³ Here are two explanations for Mordechai's refusal. First, Haman put an idol around his neck and Jews are forbidden to bow to idols. Second, there was no idol and technically Mordechai could have bowed, but he refused to in an attempt to reawaken the Jewish community to their heritage and religion.

⁶⁴ His claim is a startling echo of Anti-semitic venom spewed throughout the centuries, "the Jews insist on being different ...let us kill them."

Mordechai fasts and prays⁶⁵ on the news of our impending destruction, trying to inspire the entire Jewish People to turn to G-d. He informs Esther of the evil plan and urges her to plead to the king for mercy. Esther fears approaching the king without being called, for it is well known that one can be killed for doing so. Mordechai explains the seriousness of the situation and how it may be that G-d put Esther in this position just for this purpose. Esther agrees to risk her life and approach the king. She tells Mordechai: have the Jewish people fast⁶⁶ for three days to appeal to G-d's mercy.⁶⁷

Esther is received favorably by the king, who agrees to join her at a special banquet⁶⁸, at which she asks if he will come to a second banquet. The night following the first banquet, the king is unable to sleep⁶⁹, and spends the time reviewing the "royal chronicles," and for the first time becomes aware that Mordechai saved his life.

In the morning, Haman enters the Palace area to talk to the king⁷⁰. Before he can speak, the king asks Haman: "What should I do in order to give someone great honor?" Assuming the king means him, Haman suggests having the person put on royal clothing, ride the king's white horse, and be led through the city in great glory. Ahasuerus likes the idea, and tells Haman to do everything he said . . . for Mordechai! Mordechai is then paraded on horseback through the streets of Shushan, with Haman leading⁷¹ the way.

At the next banquet, Esther tells the king of her identity and the genocide plan. Outraged⁷², the king demands to know who would dare threaten her people. Esther points

⁶⁵Everything that happens does so for a reason. If G-d is allowing such a threat to appear, prayer and introspection are essential to the process of self-correction. Throughout history, Jews have held special prayer assemblies and fast days whenever threatened.

⁶⁶ The Fast of Esther which occurs the day before Purim is probably named after this fast which she commanded, but actually commemorates the fast that Jews always hold before any battle - to remind ourselves that true deliverance comes from spiritual strength, not physical strength.

⁶⁷ G-d's name actually doesn't appear in the entire Book of Esther. Many of those living at the time of this nine-year long saga may not have been aware of how G-d was arranging everything step-by-step that everything should be in place when needed.

⁶⁸She rightly concluded that plying him with food, wine, and lots of honor would help turn him to her side.

⁶⁹ Angels kept him up in order that he should find out about Mordechai.

⁷⁰Haman came seeking the king's permission to hang Mordechai on the tall gallows he'd just had built.

⁷¹The verse (6:12) mentions that Haman's head was covered, referring to the fact that his daughter had planned dumping her toilet bowl on Mordechai as he would lead her father on the horse. She dumped it out on her father, not realizing the switch that had taken place. Once she saw her father look up at her covered in excrement, she jumped off the balcony and killed herself

⁷² What changed from his happy acquiescence to our destruction? Commentators suggest that Haman represents the active antisemites throughout history, who have openly sought to oppress and destroy us. The king represents the silent antisemites, who will let things happen and not lift a finger to save him. In this case, the fickle king's feelings for Esther let him switch sides quickly

to Haman!⁷³ Haman is aghast. Realizing he has lost, he "falls all over" Esther, pleading for mercy. The king thinks Haman is accosting the Queen and Haman is hung on the same gallows⁷⁴ he'd prepared for Mordechai.

Since the original decree to annihilate the Jews was sealed by the king, by Persian law it cannot be withdrawn. Instead, the king issues a new decree, giving the Jews the right to defend themselves. The Jews rejoice⁷⁵ at their salvation, and their enemies cower in terror.

Throughout the kingdom, the Jews defeat their enemies in one day. Purim is celebrated on the day they celebrate their victory, the 14th of Adar. In the capital city of Shushan, the fighting takes an extra day, and so there and other ancient walled cities⁷⁶ (including Jerusalem today) celebrate on the 15th of Adar⁷⁷.

Mordechai and Esther enact an annual holiday, with feasting, giving gifts to the poor, food to friends, and reading of the Megillah (sorry, this summary doesn't count!).

⁷³Deeply connected to G-d and truth, she instinctively pointed to the wicked king Ahausuerus who had happily let everything happen, but angels pointed her finger to Haman in order that the king should help the Jews.

⁷⁴ This is a wonderful example of the "venahafokh" (switching) theme of Purim, where what Haman planned for the Mordechai, happened to him, and what our enemies planned for the Jews as a whole, happened to them.

⁷⁵ They do not only rejoice over their physical salvation, but also about their renewed dedication to Judaism.

⁷⁶Those that were walled from the time of Joshua.

⁷⁷ This "second" Purim is referred to as Shushan Purim.

Passover

Passover

Background for Educator:

This class will

- (a) share a basic background of ideas about Passover and
- (b) in the textual section, focus on the concept of freedom within Judaism and deepen students' relationship to the holiday

Background Students Should Know

Abraham and Sarah had Isaac. Isaac married Rebecca who had Jacob. Jacob has twelve sons who become the twelve tribes of Israel. Famine forced the twelve tribes down to Egypt where they were welcomed and protected through gratitude to Joseph who had kept Egypt well supplied throughout the famine. Politics changed and we were oppressed and enslaved. Together with his siblings the prophetess Miriam and the prophet Aharon, Moses led the Jewish people out of Egypt. The holiday of Passover is focused on our redemption from Egypt, and the Haggadah that we read during Passover tells the story of Passover.

Opening Question

Passover is Judaism's most popular holiday:

- 1/10 of American Jews light Shabbat candles
- 1/2 fast on Yom Kippur
- 9/10 observe Pesach in some way.

Why is it so popular? What do you think?

There are many explanations, including (a) it focuses on a positive message of freedom and redemption that gives hope; (b) it overlaps with Easter (c) it is family-centered. (d) it is child-centered and creates warm memories. Can you think of anything else?

Educator:

The following section includes interesting notes and background about Pesach. If you want to go through the textual section of the class well, in a one-hour sitting, then these notes should be gone through very briefly. If there is more time available, you may want to 'see where the class goes' with these notes – many of them can easily be expanded and all are good for sparking discussion

Interesting Ideas:

- Passover is an eight day holiday (seven in Israel) that occurs in the Springtime.
- Pesach – literally means to pass over, thus the English name. Confounding all logic the Egyptians refused to let us go. In the final plague that G-d put upon the Egyptians to force them to “let us go”, firstborns were killed. Jews slaughtered a lamb and put the blood on the doorpost in order to indicate to the angel of death that he should “pass-over” the house and not harm anyone.
- Also called Chag HaMatzot, the holiday of Matzot and zman cherusainu, time of our freedom
- There are many mitzvot on Passover. Some of the most central are the eating of matzah on first night, getting rid of and not eating all chametz (leavened) products for the entire holiday, drinking the four cups of wine and reading the Haggadah on the first night
- **What is Chametz?** Flour that has been exposed to water within the first 18 minutes of baking become Chametz, or leavened: it rises. In the weeks preceding the holiday, we clean our homes of chametz and on the night of the 14th, a search is done around the house. On a spiritual level we get rid of the chametz inside of us – the ego that rises and hurts us and our relationships.
- **Seder** The talmud set up an order – a *seder* – of ceremonies, it has become the popular name for the Passover evening feast, including telling the wonderful story of the Exodus from Egypt.
- **Four Cups** we drink four cups of wine corresponding to the four different terms of Redemption that G-d used;
- **Bitter Herbs** we eat bitter herbs during the seder in order to remind us how the Egyptians embittered the lives of our forefathers
- **Matzos** Shmurah Matzah on first night – watched from time of harvest to insure that no contact with water and still has the status of matzah, not bread.
- **Reclining** in each generation we are to regard ourselves as if we personally were freed from Egyptian bondage. Therefore we recline at different points during the meal in the manner of free people and royalty
- As the Midrash explains, G-d saved us from slavery on account of four mitzvot that Israel observed in Egypt: They kept their Jewish names, they learned the

Hebrew language, they were all friends with each other, and they did not give up their Jewish customs.

- **Afikoman** one of the matzahs is broken and half is hidden away during the meal. Children love trying to find the matzah and then holding it ransom: the adults need to eat it to finish the seder and are usually willing to pay for it!
- **Haggadah** the age-old text we read together during the seder. It guides a person through the seder and is the way we recount the story of the exodus from Egypt. It is a masterpiece and can be understood at many levels.

Old Passover Joke

A Jewish man was waiting in line to be knighted by the Queen of England. He was supposed to kneel and recite a sentence in Latin. Comes his turn, he kneels, the Queen taps him on the shoulders with the sword ... and in the panic of excitement he forgets the Latin line. Thinking quickly, he recites the only other line he knows in a foreign language which he remembers from the Passover Seder: "Mah nishtana ha-lailah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-leilot." The puzzled Queen turns to her adviser and asks, "Why is this knight different from all other knights?"

Optional Tangent

A Thought about Questions

At the Passover Seder, the youngest asks the Four Questions:

"Why is this night different from all other nights?"

1. On all other nights we may eat chametz and matzah, but on this night -- only matzah.
2. On all other nights we eat any vegetables, but on this night -- we eat marror.
3. On all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night -- twice.
4. On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night -- we all recline.

* * *

In fact, the Talmud (Pesachim 114b) explains that the reason why we do so many things differently on Pesach night is so that the children should ask questions (as the Torah states (Exodus 13:14), "And it will be when your son 'inquires' of you.)

But why do we encourage questions on Passover night? Why not just tell the story? It is a pedagogical principle that learning is best understood and longest remembered if it engages the interest and curiosity of the student. We want to instill a deep and lasting lesson about who we are and where we come from, and therefore want to arouse the children's interest as much as possible.

Textual Section

Outline

Section 1: Freedom as a Means or Freedom as an End?

Section 2: Slavery: Who needs it anyway?

Appendix 1: A new look at matzah

Appendix 3: THE PASSOVER - "FREEDOM GAME"

Educator:

The central idea of this class is to present what is meant that Pesach is *zman cheiruseinu*. When discussing freedom, it is more important to appreciate the “freedom for” than the “freedom from”. The freedom we are celebrating is not the lack of a foreign power ruling over us, rather the process by which we emerged as the nation to receive and fulfill the Torah. The freedom achieved in the exodus from Egypt was the preliminary step to Kabbolas HaTorah, which is the mission of our people. Freedom can be made significant through the actions of those made free. In the 1970’s-80’s, the rallying cry at the protests on behalf of the Russian Jews was “Let my people go”, taken from the words that Moshe said to Pharaoh. However, the essential ending, “so that they shall serve me”, was left off. All too often, freed people have used their freedom to oppress others (think of George Orwell's Animal Farm or the killing of the upper class by the French peasant class at the time of the French revolution); the freedom our ancestors received was to enable them to fulfill their spiritual path

The next question is why there was a need for the slavery in the first place; why not just have the Jewish people be free? We will show how the slavery and exodus from Egypt serves as the moral impetus for the performance of some of the mitzvos of the Torah, thereby giving meaning to the avdus/cheirus process. The particular mitzvah of eating matzah will then be discussed along the lines of this theme, shedding light on this observance.

Discussion of Freedom: It may be beneficial to begin the class with a group discussion of what freedom means. Is it a value in and of itself or a means to an end? (It may be both). How are we to relate to the exodus from Egypt on a personal level? How can it impact our lives? If due to the setting or time constraints a discussion is not possible, the teacher could raise these points at the start to have the listeners think a bit before beginning.

We will see sources for the idea that the physical redemption was for a spiritual purpose, and not an end in and of itself:

Section 1: Freedom as a Means or Freedom as an End?

For what purpose were we freed? Was the Freedom we yearned for a Means or an End?
If it was a means, towards what? What do you think?

Consider the first time Moshe approached Pharaoh:

[Source 1]

<p>Then Moshe and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh: “So said G-d the G-d of the Jews- ‘send out my nation so that they may joyously serve me in the desert’”. Exodus 5:1</p>	<p>וְאַחַר בָּאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ</p>
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This concept is clear in many verses throughout the Torah, most famously at the end Shema:

[Source 2]

<p>I am G-d your G-d who has brought you out from the land of Egypt in order to be as a G-d for you; I am G-d your G-d. Numbers 15:41</p>	<p>אֲנִי יְדֹד אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם</p>
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Consider also the following commentary:

[Source 3]

<p>The reason why they were saved and left Egypt was in order to receive the Torah at Sinai and fulfill it...</p>	<p>והיא העיקר והסיבה שנגאלו ויצאו ומפני כן, כי היא כל עיקרון של ישראל , ם חינוך שו</p>
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⁷⁸A very similar explanation is given by the Maharal:

וכמו שאמר השם למשה [שמות ג', י"ב] וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים
על ההר הזה, ופירוש הפסוק כלומר, הוציאך אותם ממצרים יהיה לך אות שתעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה, כלומר שתקבלו התורה שהיא העיקר הגדול שבשביל זה הם נגאלים והיא תכלית הטובה שלהם. וענין גדול הוא להם, יותר מן החירות מעבדות, ולכן יעשה השם למשה את צאתם מעבדות לקבלת התורה, כי התפל עושין אות לעולם אל העיקר

This Next Source (#4) is an Optional Deeper Example of the Concept

This idea is expressed in the interpretation⁷⁹ of one of the laws of the Seder:

[Source 4]

The entire Exodus from Egypt was for the purpose of serving G-d at Mount Sinai;

Therefore, between the third cup [of wine] which corresponds to salvation, and the fourth cup [of wine] which corresponds to the Giving of the Torah, there should be no interruptions;

For an interruption would indicate that these are two separate concepts, and this is not so, for they are intertwined, and if not for the one there would not be the other

... כל היציאה היתה בכח תעבדון את

שם משמואל בשלח תרע"ב

[RETURN HERE TO MAIN TEXT SECTION]

In this first section we have seen the question of whether Freedom was a Means or Freedom was an End? Can you summarize the central idea?

Section 2: Slavery: Who needs it anyway?

⁷⁹ומפני שארבע כוסות תקנו נגד ארבע לשונות של גאולה ולשון שלישי וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה. והרביעי ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם. לכך אמרו בין שלישי לרביעי לא ישתה. והטעם כי אלו שני דברים אין הפסק ביניהם. כי לכך גאל השי"ת את ישראל להיות להם לאלהים והם יהיו עמו. ודבר זה מבואר בכתוב בכל מקום אשר מזכיר יציאת מצרים יאמר אני ה' אלהיכם אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים להיות לכם לאלהים. הרי יאמר בפירוש כי עצם ההוצאה להיות ישראל לו לעם והוא יהיה להם לאלהים. וכן בכל מקום מזכיר כך ודבר זה יסוד האמונה. ואף בתחלת הדברות אמר אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים כי יציאת מצרים שיהיה לאלהים לישראל. וא"א שיהיה פירוד והבדל ביניהם למי שמבין סודות התורה. ולכך בין שלישי לרביעי לא ישתה שלא יעשה הפסק. והדברים אלו הם דברים יקרים ונכבדים מאד:
מהר"ל דברי נגידיים עמוד לא

Important Point: We now understand that the purpose of the Jews achieving freedom was in order to enable them to fulfill their spiritual mission. However, we must ask why was it important or necessary for them to go through slavery at all⁸⁰; why couldn't they have developed as a free people and then received the Torah?

The idea we want to present is that going through a stage of being oppressed and downtrodden developed the sensitivities of the Jewish people in a way that could not have been done without the slavery. Many of the mitzvos of the Torah that address correcting social injustices are based on the experience we had as slaves, which enabled us to have particular sympathy and care for others in a less fortunate position. This is what gives meaning not only to the freedom of Pesach, but also causes us to appreciate what we gained through the slavery.

[Source 5]

<p>And a stranger you should not wrong nor oppress, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt Exodus 22:20</p>	<p>וְגֵר לֹא תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם שמות כב כ</p>
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[Source 6]

<p>The stranger living among you should be like a citizen of yours; and you should love him like yourselves, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt Leviticus 19:34</p>	<p>כְּאֶזְרַח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אֶתְכֶם ויקרא יט לד</p>
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[Source 7]

<p>And you should love the stranger for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt Deuteronomy 10:19</p>	<p>(יט) וְאַהֲבַתֶּם אֶת הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם דברים י יט</p>
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[Source 8]

<p>Because whomever was never a stranger cannot feel the pain of the stranger, but one who was himself a stranger understands the pain of the stranger, and 'whatever is hateful to you do not do to your fellow' Kli Yakar Breishit 47:21</p>	<p>כי כל מי שלא היה גר מימיו כלי יקר בראשית מז, כא</p>
<p>We should learn from this precious mitzvah to have mercy on a person who is</p>	<p>ויש לנו ללמוד מן המצוה היקרה</p>

⁸⁰We will not discuss the different ideas brought down about various aveiros of the avos "causing" the slavery

in a city that is not his birthplace, or the place of his family... and with these character traits we should merit to have mercy from G-d, and the blessings of Heaven should rest on our heads.

Chinuch 431

חינוך תלא

Educator: Class Summary

In the first section we saw that the point of freedom was to be close to G-d. Freedom was a means not an end. In the second section we learn about one of the most important lessons of Pesach: to remember the time that we as a people were oppressed, and to use that memory to instill in us the will to help others who are oppressed. This can also be done on an individual level. Every person undergoes suffering. We can give meaning to that suffering by using it as a springboard to help others that find themselves in similar situations.

Appendix 1: A New Look at Matzah

We can now approach a deeper understanding of the mitzvah of eating matzah. Most may probably be aware that we eat matzah because that is what the Jews ate on their way to freedom.

However, this is only half of the story. The Haggadah refers to matzah as “the poor bread that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt”; not when they left, but while they were slaves!

Matzah was the staple that they were fed while being slaves, and matzah is also the bread to symbolize their freedom. This duality is an expression of the idea that once free we do not want to forget the days of slavery. Rather, we will use the memory of those days to guide our actions as free people. The opening line of the Haggadah is **הָא לְחֶמֶא עֲנִיָא דִּי אֶכְלוּ** **אֲבֹהֵינוּא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כֹּל דְּכִפִּין יִיתִי וְיִיכּוּל. כֹּל דְּצָרִיךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסֹח**. The memory of our forefathers being restricted to matzah in Egypt inspires those who do not have what to eat to come and join us at our meal. [This can also deepen our understanding of the mitzvah to eat maror at the Seder. We do not want to forget the slavery; we want to remember its' bitterness to help us become better people. The Sefas Emes adds that in the Haggadah maror is discussed after matzah. This teaches us that we can only see the benefits of the slavery having achieved freedom].

Appendix 2: Yosef Mendelovich

The year is 1978 and the man's name is Yosef Mendelovich. The setting: a dank cell, deep within the bowels of the Christopol prison the Soviet Union. The date is April 12. On the Jewish calendar it is the 14th of Nisan, one day before the start of Passover. Yosef is a prisoner. He is a gaunt human shell, and he is about to light a candle. Made of hoarded bits of string, pitiful droplets of oil, and stray slivers of wax, this is a candle fashioned by Yosef's own hands. The candle is lit -- the search for chametz begins.

Sometime earlier Yosef had complained of back problems. The infirmary in hell provided him with mustard to serve as a therapeutic plaster. Unused then, this mustard would later reappear as maror -- bitter herbs -- at Yosef's seder table. A long-saved onion bulb in water has produced a humble bit of greenery. This would be his karpas. And the wine? Raisins were left to soak in an old jelly jar, water occasionally added, and fermentation was prayed for. This was wine. The Haggadah which Yosef transcribed into a small notebook before being imprisoned had now been set to memory. The original was secretly passed on to another "dangerous" enemy of the State: Anatoly Sharansky.

Is Yosef free? He cannot do whatever he wants. He has been denied even the liberty to know when the sun shines and the stars twinkle. For Yosef the world of free men doesn't even begin to exist.

Yet, Yosef, perhaps, is more free even than his captors. Clearly self-aware, he knows is prepared to pay any price to have it. Today he walks the streets of Israel, studies Torah, and buys box after box of matzah to serve at his Seder. He is a free man now, just as he was even behind those lifeless prison walls.

Self-awareness means that we are able to stand outside of ourselves; to look within and assess our goals, values, priorities, direction and truthfulness. Unaware of these things, we remain mired in a dense fog of confusion and doubt. Can we ever be fully self-aware? Probably not. But aware enough to set ourselves free? Yes, and this is one of life's most pivotal challenges.

Achievement and maintenance of freedom is available only through the ongoing struggle for self-awareness. This process of clarification, coupled with the conviction to follow wherever it may lead, is the only way to achieve a spiritually sensitive, value-driven life of liberty. Ironically, this freedom can land you in a prison where you are the captor, while your guards are the prisoners. Just ask Yosef Mendelovich -- one of the freest people who ever walked the earth. -- from the Passover Survival Kit by Shimon Apisdorf

Appendix 3: THE PASSOVER - "FREEDOM GAME"

BY RABBI STEPHEN BAARS, Aish HaTorah Washington, DC

Of the following list, who is the most enslaved person and who is the most free?

- 1) "Three years ago I was taken by the KGB and put in a labor camp in Siberia, I am told when to get up, when to go to bed and everything between."
- 2) "I was ship-wrecked on a desert island. I can do anything I want, but there's nothing to do here."
- 3) "I'm a heavy heroine addict. I live my days just to get the next high. Luckily I inherited a large fortune that allows me to support my habit."
- 4) "I worked hard all my life to become rich. At the height, I was worth around \$25 million. Then came the crash. The bank took everything - my business, my house, even my car. I now work 9-to-5 in a sweatshop, struggling to make ends meet. When I had money, I used to take exotic vacations and dine in the finest restaurants. Life was fun. Now I'm lucky if I can afford takeout."
- 5) "In the country I live in, cigarettes are banned. I used to smoke two packs a day. Now I can't get them and I'm very depressed."
- 6) "I used to be a top college athlete and was headed for a pro career. Then last year I dove into a pool that was too shallow and broke my neck. I'm now completely paralyzed from my chin down. All I think about all day long is what I used to be able to do."
- 7) "Last year I tried to commit suicide but a policeman caught me just before I jumped. I was institutionalized. There's no possibility here for me to do what I really want to do - kill myself."

Shavuos

Shavuos

The name⁸¹ of the holiday means “weeks” relating to the seven weeks from the 2nd day of Passover to the holiday of Shavuos. Shavuos is the holiday of Matan Torah – the Giving of the Torah. We celebrate G-d’s giving of the Torah.

Educator:

This class includes the sub-headings listed here. Please note that the first four sections (Why Count, Milk, Ruth, Other Customs) are simply to let everyone know the basics of the holiday. They should be gone through fairly quickly in order to leave sufficient time for the Main Texts section, which is much deeper and thought-provoking. The ‘interesting ideas’ section can be skipped, or used before or after the Main Texts section.

Class Outline:

1. *Why Count? What is the connection⁸² between Passover and Shavuos?*
2. *Eating Milk Meal*
3. *Book of Ruth*
4. *Other Customs*
5. *Interesting Ideas*

Main Texts

Appendix

1. Why Count? What is the connection⁸³ between Passover and Shavuos?

1. On morning of second day of Passover a barley offering (omer) was to be brought symbolizing the earth’s awakening fertility – an early-maturing crop, this symbolized the beginning of the harvest. The wheat crop matured 7 weeks later, and this time span was counted, referring to counting of the Omer. This is the agricultural aspect of the holiday.

⁸¹Tur Barekes (author of the Or ha-Chayim) writes that the Festival should be pronounced Shevuos (oaths) rather than Shavuos (weeks) -only a minor vowel change in Hebrew because the Holiday celebrates our oath not to exchange God for another power and God’s oath not to exchange us for another people.

Interestingly, the English name for the holiday, “pentecost” comes from the Greek words meaning 50 days – which is correct.

⁸² Notice correspondance of Succos to Passover, yet day missing: Shmini Atzeres = Shavuos. Our sages refer to Shavuos as *Atzeres*, comparing it to Shemini Atzeres, the holiday following immediately after Sukkos. The essence of Shavuos then is a conclusion to Pesach, and the 50 days are seen as preparation, not an interruption.

⁸³ Notice correspondance of Succos to Passover, yet day missing: Shmini Atzeres = Shavuos. Our sages refer to Shavuos as *Atzeres*, comparing it to Shemini Atzeres, the holiday following immediately after Sukkos. The essence of Shavuos then is a conclusion to Pesach, and the 50 days are seen as preparation, not an interruption.

2. At a deeper level, Passover is the holiday of freedom – we left Egypt and every year we leave of our ‘Egypt’s’. But what were we freed for? What is the point of freedom? Shavuot! On Shavuot we got the Torah.

2. Eating Milk Meal

There is a widespread custom to eat a dairy meal on Shavuot. Does anyone know why?

Some of the explanations are:

1. Dairy hints at the Torah which was received on this day, as King Solomon describes it as "honey and milk" ([Song of Songs](#) 4:11).
2. Until the Torah was given, we were allowed to eat any meat. At Mt Sinai, we were commanded to eat only meat that was from Kosher animals and was ritually slaughtered. The utensils we had been using were not ready to use until they had been properly made Kosher: in the meantime we eat dairy foods.
3. The numerical value of the word Chalav, milk, is 40 corresponding to the 40 days Moses spent on Mount Sinai
4. To remember the *shte'i halechem*⁸⁴ (two bread) offering that was brought on Shavuot during the times of the Temple.

3. Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot. Why?

1. She was the paradigm of converts and at the giving of the Torah we all ‘became Jews’. Also, every year we ‘renew’ our commitment to Judaism.
2. Ruth converted and acquired the Torah through suffering and poverty, which reminds us that the Torah can only really be acquired through a willingness to work hard for it
3. The story of Ruth happened at harvest time, as is the holiday.
4. The numerical value of RUTH = 606. Since all humans were commanded in the 7 Noahide laws, when she became Jewish she got 606 new mitzvot to add up to the 613 of the Torah. Reading it now reminds us of these points.
5. King David was born and died on Shavuot, and he was a descendant of Ruth.

4. Other Customs

- Homes and synagogues are filled with greenery commemorating the harvest festival aspect of the day, and the fact that the giving of the Torah took place on a mountain full of greenery.
- Many stay up entire night studying, in anticipation of receiving the Torah
- There is also a special mystical prayer service, *tikun leil Shavuot*, that is studied and recited on Shavuot night.
- The holiday is seen as the Great Marriage between G-d and the Jewish People, with the Torah as the Ketubah, the marriage contract. Indeed, Sephardic communities read aloud a poetic Ketubah about the impending marriage, with Heaven and Earth as witnesses. Some congregations open the ark, remove the

⁸⁴ Ie because we eat the milk and meat separately and eat two different loaves of bread for them.

Torah scrolls and then publicly read the text of this *ketubah*, written by R.Yisrael Najara. The text speaks of the love of the groom (God) and the bride (the Jewish People) for each other, and stipulates their obligations to each other.

5. Interesting Ideas

- The Ten Commandments form the basis for all world morality. Where they penetrated, idolatry is gone. In societies where they did not gain access, idolatry still exists to a certain degree.
- Exodus 19:2 states that *Israel encamped before the mountain*, and it uses the singular form of the verb encamped. Our sages taught that when they encamped at the foot of Mt Sinai in order to receive the Torah, they were like one person with a single heart. This was necessary because they it is only possible to receive the Torah when the entire Jewish People is united by love and harmony.
- Exodus 19:2 teaches us that the Torah was given in the midbar, the desert or wilderness. Why was it not given in the Land of Israel? For one thing, this was an indication that it was given for the benefit of the whole world, not just the Jewish People. And why in the desert? Just as the desert is empty and pure, one needs to be empty and pure of heart to receive the Torah

Main Textual Section

Educator:

The subject here is Matan Torah, using the Gemara on Shabbos 88b as the basic text. Through the analysis of this gemara, we will provide an important insight into the purpose and focus of the Torah lifestyle and hopefully give the listeners an appreciation for the depth of the teachings of Chazal.

The ideal way for the class to be presented is for the teacher to read through the text with the students twice, and then to give a several minute break for them to formulate their own questions about the text. This leads to greater involvement on their part as well as a feeling of satisfaction when “their” questions are answered. Not all of their questions may be dealt with in our analysis; those not dealt with may be addressed at the end or at another time. If the forum does not allow for that, the teacher can ask the pertinent questions on his own

Source 1:

<p>Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: When Moses ascended to heaven, the ministering angels said to G-d: “Master of the world, what is this ‘born of woman’ doing amongst us?”</p>	<p>אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי בשעה שעלה משה הקדוש ברוך הוא רבונו של עולם מה</p>
<p>G-d answered: “He has come to receive the Torah”.</p>	<p>אמר להן לקבל תורה בא אמרו לפניו חמודה גנוזה שגנוזה לך תשע</p>
<p>They said to G-d “This precious hidden treasure which You have hidden for 974 generations before the world was created, You want to give it to flesh and blood? What is a human to be remembered; or the son of a man to be considered? G-d ... give Your glory to the heavens!”</p>	<p>אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה החזיר</p>
<p>G-d said to Moses: “Give them an answer”.</p>	<p>אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם מתיירא אני</p>
<p>Moses said: “I am afraid that they will burn me with the fire of their mouths”.</p>	<p>אמר לו אחוז בכסא כבודי וחזור להן</p>
<p>G-d said to him: “Grab on to my throne of honor and give them an answer” ...</p>	<p>אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם תורה שאתה</p>
<p>Moses said: “Master of the world, this Torah that You are giving to me, what is written there?”</p>	<p>אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ</p>
<p>“I am G-d your Lord who took you out of Egypt”.</p>	<p>אמר להן למצרים ירדתם לפרעה</p>
<p>Moses said to the angels: “Did you go down to Egypt? Were you slaves to Pharaoh? What do you need the Torah for?”</p>	<p>שוב מה כתיב בה לא יהיה לך אלהים</p>
<p>What does it say further? ‘Do not have for yourselves other gods’. Do you live among the nations of the world that worship idols?</p>	<p>שוב מה כתיב בה זכור את יום השבת</p>
<p>What does it say further? ‘Remember the day of Shabbat to make it holy’. Do you do work that you should need rest?</p>	<p>שוב מה כתיב בה לא תשא משא ומתן יש</p>
<p>What does it say further? ‘Do not swear</p>	

<p>falsely' Do you have business dealings?</p> <p>What does it say further? 'Honor your father and mother' Do you have a father or mother?</p> <p>What does it say further? 'Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal.' Is there jealousy amongst you? Is there the evil inclination amongst you?"</p> <p>The angels immediately admitted that G-d was right, as it says (a second time):</p> <p>"What is a human to be remembered; or the son of a man to be considered? G-d our Master, Your name is great in the whole world" but the phrase "give your glory to the heavens" is not written a second time.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Shabbos 88b-89a</p>	<p>שוב מה כתיב בה כבוד את אביך ואת אמך</p> <p>שוב מה כתיב בה לא תרצח לא תנאף לא</p> <p>מיד הודו לו להקדוש ברוך הוא שנאמר</p> <p>ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך וגו' ואילו תנה</p>
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Here are some questions about the text. [As with anything else in Torah, an exhaustive list cannot be prepared.]

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: What is the significance of the adjective "born of woman", why not just say "person"? 2: What does it mean that the Torah was hidden for 974 generations before the creation of the world? Why 974? How can anything be around before the creation of the world? 3: Again, why "flesh and blood"; why not "people"? 4: Why did G-d direct Moses to answer them? Did G-d Himself not know the answer? Why should Moses have to justify G-d's decision? 5: Why was Moses afraid of being burned by their fire? What does this image mean? 6: What does "grab on to my throne of glory" mean? Is it like "base" in tag that he won't be touched? 7: Moses explained that the Torah does not apply to angels. If so, what were they thinking?? If they <u>did</u> know the content of the Torah, then isn't it obvious that it was written for human beings and not angels? And if they <u>didn't</u> know the content of the Torah, why were they fighting for it

Educator:

The main idea we will explain is that the text we know as the Torah can be understood on many levels:

→ The debate at the time of the giving of the Torah was if it should be given in the form that we have it, or whether it should remain on some spiritually abstract plane.

→ The rebuttal of Moses was that the Torah also needs to be understood and lived on its most elemental level, and this is something that can only be done by people.

→ What do we learn from this? The purpose of life as seen by the Torah is to live within the physical world and uplift it, not to try to function on the level of angels and ignore our physical state. We will present sources that support this understanding and show how this answers the difficulties raised before.

Let us take a look at the following sources. All⁸⁶ deal with one⁸⁷ central theme.

Source 2:

... we have a truthful tradition that all of the text of the Torah is made up from names of G-d; that the words can be broken up in different ways to form Divine names⁸⁸.

For example, the first verse in the Torah can be broken up as “barosh yisbarah elohim”, and this is true of all of the Torah... This is what requires us to disqualify a Torah scroll that is missing even the letter “vav” from a word whose meaning is not changed by its’ absence, or if a letter “vav” is added unnecessarily, even though it seemingly does not make a difference. This is what caused great teachers to count every word and letter and to write books on this topic...

It seems that the Torah written in black fire upon white fire was written in this manner; with the letters consecutive without any interruption or forming of

... יש בידינו קבלה של אמת כי כל התורה

משל כי פסוק בראשית יתחלק לתיבות

⁸⁶ More appear in the appendix

⁸⁷ [Educator: these sources explain the idea of the Torah existing on different levels, with Moses receiving the lowest of them].

⁸⁸ See also teshuvot haRadbaz Chelek gimmel siman 643

⁸⁹ hakdamah to peirush on Chumash, towards the end

words. The Torah can be read as names of G-d or in our manner of reading it with commandments. It was given to Moses in the form of commandments but he was also taught the method of reading it as names of God.

Ramban⁸⁹

Source 3:

It is known that the Torah is written before G-d with letters not formed into words. We have been taught that in each spiritual world the letters are formed into different words in a way that is understood by the spiritual beings of that level, to each type of angel in their own way.

For the people of this world the letters form the story of the exodus from Egypt, the spies and the like.

The angels have no connection to or appreciation of our physical world but people have a connection to all to the spiritual worlds - many people have merited teaching even of the G-dly throne.

Therefore the Torah is fitting for people, for they appreciate it on its low level also, as opposed to the angels who only grasp it on its' higher levels.

Chasam Sofer⁹⁰

ידוע כי התורה היתה כתובה לפניו ית"ש

Source 4:

This very Torah that we have, from the first letter to the last, is what the angels were learning in heaven before Moses brought it down. It cannot be that they were leaning it in the form that we have, for the Torah discusses things which are not applicable to them at all, such as death and ritual impurity, therefore it must have been in a more ephemeral casing

זו התורה מבראשית ועד לעיני כל ישראל

⁹⁰ Chiddushei Chasam Sofer on the Gemara in Shabbos

according to their spiritual level.

Shach⁹¹

Based on these sources we can understand the following Midrash:

Source 5:

When Moses merited receiving the Torah, first he made a blessing over it and then learned it.

Rabbi Eliezer said: “What blessing did Moses make on the Torah? Blessed is G-d, our G-d, ruler of the world; who has selected this Torah and sanctified and desired those who fulfill it.

Devarim Rabba, 11:6

משה בשעה שזכה לקבל התורה תחלה

אמר ר"א איזו היא הברכה שבירך משה

Fundamental Idea to Summarize and Understand:

We see here that there were many “Torahs” in existence. Mattan Torah was the choosing of one of them to be given to the Jewish people.

Answers to the questions raised before that fit with this explanation (there of course may be other answers):

Question 1: What is the significance of the adjective “born of woman”, why not just say “person”?

Answer 1: The adjectives “born of woman” and “flesh and blood” in place of “people” is meant to emphasize the base physicality of humans, strengthening the angels’ claim that people cannot receive the spiritual essence which is the Torah. (Childbirth is a very physical way for a person to come into this world, and “flesh and blood” describes people on a purely physical level).

Question 2: What does it mean that the Torah was hidden for 974 generations before the creation of the world? Why 974? How can anything be around before the creation of the world?

Answer 2: The idea of 974 is that the Torah was given after 26 generations⁹² of human life. The verse refers to the Torah as “davar tzivah le’elef dor”, therefore it must have been around for 974 generations in order for Mattan Torah to be in generation 1,000.

⁹¹ al Hatorah Bereishis 1:1

⁹² Adam to Noach was ten generations. Noach to Avraham was ten, and Avraham to Moshe was 6.

The angels were emphasizing that the Torah existed before the creation of the world – meaning it exists outside of the reality that we know, outside of our realm. This Torah is what the angels were claiming as their own.

Question 3: Again, why “flesh and blood”; why not “people”?

Answer 3: Same as #1 above

Question 4: Why did G-d direct Moses to answer them? Did G-d Himself not know the answer? Why should Moses have to justify G-d’s decision?

Answer 4: Of course G-d knew the answer! The point is that if Moses does not know the answer then it would be pointless to give him the Torah! Moses is the transmitter of the Torah to the world, if he does not understand the mission; he cannot be the one to transmit it. This indicates to us that we must know what the Torah is about, how it is supposed to affect our lives. It is not enough for G-d to know it or even for the angels to learn about it!

Question 5: Why was Moses afraid of being burned by their fire? What does this image mean?

Answer 5: The image of being burned by the fire of the angels is that they have such a high level of spiritual intensity that Moses felt the limitations of humans and considered the possibility that the angels were correct that the Torah should remain in its “essential” form.

Question 6: What does “grab on to my throne of glory” mean? Is it like “base” in tag that he won’t be touched?

Answer 6: The instruction to “grab onto the kisei hakavod” is a reminder that because of their lower status, and because of their attachment to the physical world, people have the ability to bring honor to G-d in a way that the angels can’t, and therefore the Torah should be given to them, on their level, to enable them to complete the task.

Question 7: Moses explained that the Torah does not apply to angels. If so, what were they thinking?? If they did know the content of the Torah, then isn’t it obvious that it was written for human beings and not angels? And if they didn’t know the content of the Torah, why were they fighting for it

Answer 7: The angels knew and Moses knew that the Torah has many levels. Moses’ answer is that it is G-d’s wish that the Torah should be fulfilled down to its most basic level, by people who have yetzer hara, jealousy, family stresses, and job stresses and to rise above their inclinations.

We close with a Gemara regarding Shavuos whose meaning is clear in light of what we have learned:

Source 6:

<p>Rabbi Eliezer said: “All agree that on Shavuos one needs to enjoy this world [ie with food and drink].</p> <p>For what reason is this so? For on this day the Torah was given”.</p> <p>Rabbah said “All agree that on Shabbat one needs to enjoy this world. For what reason is this so? It is written ‘You shall call Shabbat a day of pleasure’”.</p> <p>Rabbi Yosef said: “All agree that on Purim one needs to enjoy this world. For what reason is this so? It is written ‘days of feasting and joy’”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Pesachim 68b</p>	<p>אמר רבי אלעזר הכל מודים בעצרת</p> <p>אמר רבה הכל מודים בשבת דבעינן נמי</p> <p>אמר רב יוסף הכל מודים בפורים דבעינן</p>
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Question: The obvious question is that while for Shabbos and Purim the verses state clearly that there is a need to enjoy food and drink, for Shavuos the gemara just asserts “it was the day that the Torah was given”. So what? Why should that require food and drink⁹³?

Answer: The whole point of the Torah being given to humans is that we try to serve G-d through the physical world, not by avoiding it. If we avoid physicality⁹⁴ on this day, this whole point has been lost!

SUMMARY

- The Torah is a spiritual document. There are many levels to it, more mystical and holy than we can imagine. It was given to us because the lower levels apply to us and we can uplift ourselves and our lives through it, and sometimes we can even grasp the higher levels, deeper levels of understanding and connection. Angels can only access the higher parts .

⁹³ Learned from ‘lachem’

⁹⁴ At a deeper level, consider the Sefas Emes Shavuos 5661

איתא בגמ' הכל מודין בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם שהוא יום שניתנה תורה לישראל. כי הורדת התורה מן השמים הוא התפשטות אור התורה למטה. וכמו כן בבניי בעצמם הארת הנשמה בגוף. כי האדם כולל שמים וארץ. נשמה גי' השמיים. ועיקר נשמה יתירה קיבלו בניי במתן תורה אנכי ה' אלקיך. ולכן אז נתבטל הגוף אל הנשמה. וז"ש נמי לכם שאז הלכם מתבטל אל השורש

- The highest level of the sulam discussed in the Mesillas Yesharim is kedusha, which does not mean asceticism; rather it means doing things in the physical world and elevating them.
- Are there or could there be Jewish convents or monasteries? No! There is no Halacha that a Rabbi or cohen not marry. Our role models also don't sit celibate on a mountain top. We don't avoid the physical – the Torah is our guide to adding meaning and spirituality to our lives, to raising our lives.

Appendix: Extra Sources

The following are sources that deal with the questions raised before in a way consistent with our theme (the numbers correspond to the question numbers):

Maharal Tiferes Yisrael perek 24 (1)

ומפני כי משה היה ילוד אשה, ואין לילוד אשה שתוף עם העליונים ומדרגתם שאין שייך בהם ילוד אשה רצה לומר בעל חומר שזה נקרא ילוד אשה והמה נבדלים, ולכן אמרו מה לילוד אשה בינינו

Ruach Chayim Avos 1:1 (in note) (2,5,6)

אמרו לפניו חמדה גנוזה כו' קודם שנברא העולם אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם רצונם לומר שהתורה היא גנוזה באצילות ואי אפשר שישגיגה שכל אנושי והיא קדומה לכל והאדם מאוחר לכל ואין התורה נערכת אליו כי אם תנה הודך על השמים למלאכים שהם למעלה מהזמן. וכן מה שאמר משה מתירא אני שמא ישרפוני בהבל שבפיהם רצה לומר שהמלאכים המה אש לוהט קרובים לעצמות התורה שהיא אש על גבי אש כידוע ברוחניות והמלאכים הם גם כן אש בפועל ההשכלה ברוחניות וזה נקרא הבל שאין בו חטא. והבל פירושו שאינו גשמי והאדם מקיים התורה בגשמיות. אמר לו הקב"ה אחוז בכסא כבודי והחזר להם תשובה רצה לומר כי ידוע שמה שאמרו (תהלים קו, מח), ברוך ה' אלקי ישראל מן העולם ועד העולם קאי על עולם הבינ"ה ועד עולם מלכו"ת. ועל ידי הכנעת היצר של האדם כייף כל הדינין ועל ידי זה מתיחדים למעלה בינ"ה ת"ת ומלכו"ת. וזהו מה שאמרו (סנהדרין מג ע"ב), הזובח את יצרו כו' כאלו כבדו להקב"ה בשני עולמים כו'. וכל עיקר הכנעת היצר הוא על ידי התורה כמו שכתוב (קידושין ל ע"ב), בראתי יצר הרע בראתי תורה תבלין. תורת חסד תבלין להמתיק ועל ידי המתקנתו יתגדל כבוד מלכות שמים וזהו אחוז בכסא כבודי והחזר להם תשובה רצה לומר מפני האחיזה שיש לך בכסא כבודי על דרך (ישעיה מג, ז) כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו בגין כבודי לקשטא ולתמכא בעמודין תקיפין. ועל ידי זה יתגלה כבוד כסא מדת מלכות שמים לקבל כל השפעות עליונים ולזה הפעולה מתיחס משה אל התורה יותר ממלאכי השרת כיון שאחוז בכסא כבודו שהיא כלולה מהכל ונשמת משה גם כן כלולה מן הכל

Akeidas Yitzchak sha'ar 104 (2).

המה קטרגו לומר שהתורה שקדמה תשע מאות ושבעים וארבע דורות. וזה כי הכתוב אמר דבר צוה לאלף דור, ומהידוע כי משנברא העום עד שנתנה התורה עברו עשרים וששה דורות, אם כן קדמה תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות. והכל מליצה נאה להורות על קדימתה לעולם, כי הנה העשרים וששה דורות הם הזמן שהיה העולם תוהו קודם נתינתה, שעליו אמרו אלפים שנה קדמה תורה וכו'

Tisha B'Av

Tisha B'Av

Educator:

This class includes the sub-headings listed here. Please note that the first four sections (Background and Observances) are simply to let everyone know the basics of the holiday. They should be gone through fairly quickly in order to leave sufficient time for the Main Texts section, which is much deeper and thought-provoking.

Outline

Background

Observances

Main Texts

What are we missing?

Summary

Appendix

Background

Tisha B'Av – literally the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av - is the yearly Jewish day of national mourning. An incredible number of tragic events have befallen the Jewish people on Tisha B'Av, primarily the destruction of the first and second Temples. Therefore it has been designated to be our day of mourning, even for events that occurred on other days.

Maimonides summarized some of the main things that occurred:

Source 1:

<p>Five calamities occurred on the ninth of Av:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It was decreed upon the Jewish people in the desert that they would not enter Israel [because of the spies]• The first and second Temples were destroyed• A large city called Betar, which had tens of thousands of Jews, and they had a great king and the Jews and [even] the sages believed that that he was the Messiah, [the city] fell to the non-Jews and they all were killed and there was great distress like the destruction of the Temple• And on this day destined for disasters, the evil Turnus Rufus	<p>ותשעה באב וחמשה דברים אירעו בו</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• נגזר על ישראל במדבר שלא יכנסו• וחרב הבית בראשונה ובשנייה• ונלכדה עיר גדולה וביתר שמה• ובו ביום המוכן לפורענות חרש <p>רמב"ם תענית ה,ג</p>
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plowed the Sanctuary and its environs... Maimonides Tannit 5:3	
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The calamities in Jewish history occurring on this day have continued through modern times. The expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain – which directly and indirectly led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews - was on Tisha B’Av 1492. World War I, which started the half-century of bloodshed culminating in the Holocaust, started on Tisha B’Av 1914. See the appendix for a list of other tragedies which occurred.

Observances

- The day of Tisha B’Av is the climax of a period of mourning which begins on the 17th of Tammuz, increasing in intensity until the day of Tisha B’Av.
- On Tisha B’Av itself, we do not eat or drink⁹⁵, we do not bathe, do not wear leather shoes or engage in marital relations. Not a pleasant day. That is the point.
- These observances are parallel to those observed during the week of Shiva, the most intense time of mourning.

Main Texts

Educator:
The objective of this class is to attempt to instill meaning and understanding into the day of Tisha B’Av and its’ practices.
The question that must be addressed is:
→ Why are we crying over something that happened almost 2000 years ago? → “There is no use crying over spilled milk”, so why are we still mourning?
The main idea that will be expressed is that mourning the loss of the Temple has inherent value. The process of appreciating and feeling a loss for what we are missing will itself help us move closer to regaining what was lost.

Let us consider a fascinating Talmudic teaching:

Source 2:

Anyone who mourns over Jerusalem will merit to see its joy;	כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה
And one who does not mourn over Jerusalem will not merit to see its joy	ושאינו מתאבל על ירושלים אינו רואה
Ta’anis 30b	תענית ל:

⁹⁵ Sick, weak, elderly, pregnant and nursing women should consult their rabbis

What does this mean? How do you understand it?

Source 3:

<p>... on something which is lost, it is great foolishness to cry.... But on something that is not despaired on, and there is hope – then crying is appropriate ...</p> <p>crying itself is a cause for consolation of Zion, as it says in the Medrash ...</p> <p>In the merit of this [crying] the Temple will be rebuilt.</p> <p>Meschech Chochman Eicha 2:20</p>	<p>... שעל דבר הנאבד שטות גדול</p> <p>רק על דבר הבלתי מיואש ויש תוחלת</p> <p>הבכיה סבה לנחמות ציון...</p> <p>שבשכר זה יבנה המקדש ב"ב אכ"ר. משך חכמה איכה ב,כ</p>
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How would you summarize this idea?

The idea is that feeling a sense of loss over the destruction can lead to an elevated relationship with G-d.

How does this work? Consider the following two sources:

<p>Educator: background must be given here: What the kruvim (cherubs⁹⁶) were, they were positioned on the Aron in the Holy of Holies, their positioning was reflective of the closeness between the Jewish people and G-d.</p>

Source 4:

<p>How were the Keruvim positioned?</p> <p>Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar [disagreed]</p> <p>One said their faces were to each other</p> <p>And the other said their faces faced the Temple [ie apart]</p>	<p>כיצד הן עומדין רבי יוחנן ור' אלעזר</p> <p>חד אמר פניהם איש אל אחיו</p> <p>וחד אמר פניהם לבית ולמ"ד פניהם איש אל אחיו הא כתיב</p>
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⁹⁶ It is advisable to stay away from words that the listeners may have their own preconceived associations with. The word "cherub" to today's secular westerner conjures up images of an angelic baby in diapers shooting arrows on Valentines Day. It is better to "define and switch", use the secular word once so that they will know what you mean, and then switch to the Hebrew term.

<p>And according to sage who said the keruvim faced each other, the verse says, 'and their faces were towards the Temple'!</p> <p>It is not difficult.</p> <p>[They faced each other] when Israel was fulfilling the Divine Will</p> <p>[They faced apart] when Israel was not fulfilling the Divine Will</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Baba Batra 99a</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">לא קשיא</p> <p>כאן בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום</p> <p>כאן בזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של</p> <p>בא בתרא צט.</p>
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Source 5:

<p>Reish Lakhish said:</p> <p>When the gentiles entered the Sanctuary they saw the Keruvim embracing each other</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yoma 54b</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">אמר ריש לקיש</p> <p>בשעה שנכנסו נכרים להיכל ראו כרובים</p> <p>יומא נד:</p>
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Central Question for the students:

Do you notice a problem in these two sources? What is it? What is perplexing?

The problem is that the Temple was destroyed as a result of the sins of the Jews, which means that they were *not* fulfilling the Divine Will. According to the Talmud in Baba Basra, they should have been facing apart from each other! When the Gentiles entered the Temple, why did they find the kruvim intertwined in an embrace?

Source 6:

<p>... as we said, immediately at the time of the destruction when the Jews saw that their enemies had entered the Sanctuary – which they hadn't believed possible – immediately they all did <i>teshuva</i> (repented) – and immediately the Jewish People were considered in the category of 'fulfilling the</p>	<p>...⁹⁷ ואמרנו שתיכף בשעת החורבן</p>
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⁹⁷ והענין בזה על פי מה שאמרנו בישוב קושית הריטב"א ז"ל על מה שאמרו (יומא נד ע"ב) בשעה שנכנסו אור"ה להיכל ראו כרובין המעורין זה בזה וכו', והקשה מדאמרין (ב"ב צט.) שכשאין עושין רצונו של מקום פניהם לבית והוא הדין בכרובים דצורתא כדמוכח ביומא דמראין להם כרובים דצורתא ראו חבתכם וכו', ואם כן בזמן החורבן שלא היו עושין רצונו של מקום איך ראו אותם מעורין זה בזה

<p>Divine Will, and the keruvim embraced one another.</p> <p>And in the Yerushalmi... and the Midrash...it says that on the Ninth of Av, on the day of destruction, then was born⁹⁸ the Maschiach, and it is for this reason as above.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Pri Tzaddik Adar</p>	<p>ובירושלמי (ברכות פ"ב ה' ד) ובמדרש פרי צדיק אדר</p>
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How would you summarize this explanation? What does it mean?

- When the Jews experienced the destruction and realized what they were lacking, the process of healing began.
- Even for us, if we can tap in - a little bit – to what we lost, we move closer to getting ‘it’ back in our own lives

What are we missing?

We have seen that the process of mourning itself is the beginning of renewal.

In order to begin to mourn, it is important to have an idea what it is we are mourning. Certainly the loss of life during the destruction was great, and the loss of our sovereignty was significant – and deserve to be mourned. But we also focus on and mourn something even deeper and more essential.

⁹⁸ At a simple level, this means the potential for Moschiach and/or the concept of Moschiach:

The Maharal explains the depth of the idea that Mashiach (messiah) (again, define and switch) was born on Tisha B'Av:

<p>This birth is not a physical birth like every [regular] birth, for the sages do not speak of the physical reality, rather abstract from physicality.</p> <p>Their intention in saying, ‘The Messiah was born’ was that the underlying power of the Mashiach now existed in the world.</p> <p>Before the destruction of the Temple, the concept of Mashiach did not exist, for completion [ie the existence of the Temple] does not necessitate it</p> <p>...but after the destruction, there was a new power in the world that had not existed previously, for the lack [of the Temple] was a cause for its existence</p>	<p>והלידה זאת אינה לידה ממש גשמית כמו שהיה ורצונם לומר 'שנולד המשיח', דהיינו מצד עצם כח וזה כי קודם שחרב הבית לא שייך משיח בעולם</p> <p style="text-align: right;">נצח ישראל</p>
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While many view the Temple as a place for the bringing of offerings, this was not the primary importance of it to the Jewish people⁹⁹.

The main purpose of the Temple was to function as a place for G-d's presence to openly manifest itself in the world, for "hashra'as hashechina" (the dwelling of G-d's presence)

Source 7:

And they will make for me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them Exodus 25:8	וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתֵי בְּתוֹכָם:
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Important Question: If the Temple's main function was to bring G-d closer to the world, readily apparent in our daily lives – then what does the destruction mean?

Educator
This is a central point to explain and make sure is understood: <i>When the Temple stood, G-d's presence in the world was much more clearly visible¹⁰⁰. With the loss of the Temple, we lost the ability to clearly see the Divine hand in the running of the world. Since then, G-ds' presence in the world is hidden, and is therefore so much harder to perceive.</i>

The following Medrash illustrates this point:

Source 8:

When they burned [the Temple] G-d said: Now I have no place on earth; The entire world is not Mine, rather I will remove My Presence from it	... כיון ששרפוהו אמר הקב"ה שוב אין לי ילקוט שמעוני רמז תתקצו
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⁹⁹ In fact, even this aspect of the Temple was not just for the Jewish people but for all of humanity

¹⁰⁰ In the words of Rabbi Chaim Friedlander (Sifsei Chayim volume 3 pg. 247):

בית המקדש לא נועד רק למקום עבודת הקרבנות, שעל ידה זכה האדם להתקרב אל השי"ת באופן פרטי. ביהמ"ק בעיקרו היה צינור ההשפעה שעל ידה עבודת הקדשים שנעשתה בו, שרתה השכינה בארץ ישראל בפרט והשפעתה הגיע לכל העולם. ובבית המקדש למדו להכיר באופן מוחשי את גילוי כבודו יתברך והשגחתו, וע"י זה חיזקו את השראת השכינה בעם ישראל.

וזה גם טעם המצוה של עליה לדגל, "שלוש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך אל פני האדון ה'..." כפי שהאדם הכין את עצמו להתקרב אל הקב"ה, להרגיש ולחוש שעומד לפני ה', באותה המידה היה הוא זוכה לראות את פני ה' – גילוי שכינה.

וכן מבאר הגד"ח מוולאזין זצ"ל את טעם עשרה ניסים שהיו בביהמ"ק: "כי כל הנסים היו כדי להראות לישראל התנהגות השם יתברך עם האדם בעשותו רצונו יתברך שמו שהוא מתנהג עמו למעלה מהטבע כמו שהיה בבית המקדש" א"כ בית המקדש היה מקום ששם ראו באופן מוחשי את השגחת השי"ת וגילוי כבודו יתברך בבריאה

¹⁰¹ אמרו בשעה שבקש הקב"ה להחריב את בית המקדש, אמר כל זמן שאני כתובה אין האויבים נוגעים בה, אלא אכבוש עיני ממנה ואשבע עליה שלא אזקק לה עד עת קץ ויבאו אויבים ויחריבו אותה, מיד השיב הקב"ה ימינו והחזירה לאחוריו שנאמר השיב אחור ימינו מפני אויב, באותה שעה נכנסו אויבים להיכל ושרפוהו באש,

The Temple was the place where G-d's presence was clearly evident. Every Jew was mandated to have exposure to this three times a year, and through that was able to draw strength for the times where the Divine presence was harder to detect. With the loss of the Temple, we no longer can ever see as clearly G-d's hand in the world, making our efforts all the more difficult.

For many of us, relating to stones, offerings, etc – difficult. But Tisha Be'Av is more than that. We are live with this nagging consciousness that 'there is more'. Inside, we wish that G-d were more a part of our lives. And He can be, even in our modern world. But on Tisha Be'Av we mourn that the reality that in our reality, G-d is not readily apparent. Often feels distant. Is hard to see. And that is a true loss.

Summary

While Tisha B'Av is a sad day, ultimately its' message is one of optimism. We are not mourning the past to depress ourselves with thoughts of lost glory. Rather we are reflecting on our loss, for developing the appreciation of what we once had will itself be the merit which help us achieve and exceed our former greatness.

At the beginning of this class we saw the following source:

Source 9

Anyone who mourns over Jerusalem will merit to see its joy;	כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה
And one who does not mourn over Jerusalem will not merit to see its joy Ta'anis 30b	ושאינו מתאבל על ירושלים אינו רואה תענית ל:

The Kedushas Levi gives a deeper translation:

Source 10

"Anyone who mourns over Jerusalem will merit to see its joy." The principle is that all the powers of a person are pulled after thought	כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה
The entire essence of a person follows what they think about	בזה שהאדם חושב נמשך כל עצמות
And so, when a person thinks in holiness	ונמצא כאשר האדם חושב בקדושה

<p>and mourns over Jerusalem, his thoughts and essence are in holiness;</p> <p>The word 'zocheh' (merit) is [related] to the word 'hizdaccus' [purity], for then a person is purified and right away sees some joy, that is a small part of the joy of Jerusalem, how it will be in the future</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kedushas Levi Eichah</p>	<p>קדושת לוי איכה</p>
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The elevated state reached by someone who mourns over Jerusalem is itself a glimpse of the heightened spiritual awareness of future times.

Appendix: Ohr Somayach's List¹⁰² of Tisha Be'Av Calamities
by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

Hebrew Year	Common Year	Event
2448	(1312)	Spies return from 40 days in Israel with evil reports of the Land of Israel. Jewish people cry in despair, give up hope of entering the Land of Israel.
3340	(421)	Destruction of First Temple by the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar. About 100,000 Jews killed during invasion. Exile of remaining tribes in southern kingdom to Babylon and Persia.
3830	70	Destruction of Second Temple by Romans, under Titus. Over 2,500,000 Jews die as a result of war, famine and disease. Over 1,000,000 Jews exiled to all parts of the Roman Empire. Over 100,000 Jews sold as slaves by Romans. Jews killed and tortured in gladiatorial "games" and pagan celebrations.
3892	132	Bar Kochba revolt crushed. Betar destroyed - over 100,000 killed.
3893	133	Turnus Rufus ploughs site of Temple. Romans build pagan city of Aelia Capitolina on site of Jerusalem.
4855	1095	First Crusade declared by Pope Urban II. 10,000 Jews killed in first month of Crusade. Crusades bring death and destruction to thousands of Jews, totally obliterate many communities in Rhineland and France.
5050	1290	Expulsion of Jews from England, accompanied by pogroms and confiscation of books and property.
5252	1492	Inquisition in Spain and Portugal culminates in the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. Families separated, many die by drowning, massive loss of property.
5674	1914	Britain and Russia declare war on Germany. First World War begins. First World War issues unresolved, ultimately causing Second World War and Holocaust. 75% of all Jews in war zones. Jews in armies of all sides - 120,000 Jewish casualties in armies. Over 400 pogroms immediately following war in Hungary, Ukraine, Poland and Russia.
5702	1942	Deportations from Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka concentration camp begin.
5749	1989	Iraq walks out of talks with Kuwait.

¹⁰² <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1088>

5754	1994	The deadly bombing the building of the AMIA (the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina) which killed 86 people and wounded some 300 others.
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