



This week's bulletin is sponsored in honor of the Schachter family visiting from Israel this Shabbat.



שבת פרשת ואתחנן/שבת נחמו
SHABBAT PARSHAT VAETCHANAN
SHABBAT NACHAMU
 13 AV/AUGUST 5

Haftorah is Isaiah 40:1-26 (this is the first of the שבע דנחמתא – the Seven Haftorot of Consolation] . Pirkei Avot Chap 4. The final time for Kiddush Levanah of Av is Sunday night, August 6 (15 Av).

FRIDAY NIGHT
MINCHA - 7:00 PM
CANDLE LIGHTING - 7:49 PM
TZAIT - 8:53 PM

SATURDAY
HASHKAMA/YOUTH - 8:20 AM
SHACHARIT MAIN - 9:00 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA - 9:29 AM
GEMARA SHIUR - HIATUS
MINCHA - 7:35 PM
SHKIA - 8:07 PM
MAARIV/HAVDALAH - 8:52 PM

BULLETIN INFORMATION
TO REQUEST A BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT (BY 7:00 PM WEDNESDAY) OR DEDICATE A BULLETIN FOR \$36 (\$54 W/PHOTO), EMAIL SEPLOTNICK@GMAIL.COM.

CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM
18-25 SADDLE RIVER ROAD
FAIR LAWN, NJ 07410-5909
201-797-0502

נא לא לדבר בשעת התפילה
 PLEASE NO CONVERSATION DURING SERVICES



	Sunday (8/6)	Monday (8/7)	Tuesday (8/8)	Wednesday (8/9)	Thursday (8/10)	Friday (8/10)
Earliest Talit	4:53 AM	4:43 AM	4:55 AM	4:57 AM	4:58 AM	4:59 AM
Shacharit	8:15 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM	6:25 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM
Gedolah	1:37 PM	1:37 PM	1:36 PM	1:36 PM	1:36 PM	1:36 PM
Mincha - Maariv	7:45 PM	7:45 PM	7:45 PM	7:45 PM	7:45 PM	7:00 PM
Shkia	8:05 PM	8:04 PM	8:03 PM	8:02 PM	8:00 PM	
Tzait	8:50 PM	8:49 PM	8:48 PM	8:47 PM	8:45 PM	

חמשה עשר באב/ 15th of Av, Monday, August 7



We conduct ourselves in a somewhat festive manner. We say neither Tachanun nor the series of "יהי רצון" after the Torah reading, and we omit Tachanun at the preceding Mincha on Sunday. We say אל ארך אפים ל-א. For more information, see Page 2.

Fair Lawn Mikvah Renovation Project Kickoff Event.

For almost three decades the Fair Lawn Mikvah has helped enhance and elevate the Kedusha and Tahara of our community. The renovation, beautification and upkeep of our Mikvah is the responsibility of all of us. To help raise the much needed funds for the upkeep and future renovations of our community Mikvah, there will be a kickoff event on Sunday, August 13, 7:00 PM, at Shomrei Torah. The evening will include a delicious fleishig buffet dinner catered by Ma'adan and a night out with Soul Farm. The event is free with a sponsorship. The level of sponsors are: \$350 per person, \$500 per couple, or \$1000 per couple who will be recognized with their name on a plaque at the entrance of the Mikvah. Don't delay in making your reservation since we are limited to 75 people. All three sponsorship options also enable you to attend our Mikvah Gala Evening which is being planned for November 5. For more information contact Dossy Brandstatter at 201-401-2386 or mikvahfairlawn@gmail.com. To RSVP or sponsor online, visit www.shomrei-torah.org/event/mikvahkickoffevent.



Kiddush Information

- ☆ If you are in attendance when the Rabbi says “על המחיה”, your assistance in clean up would be appreciated.
- ☆ Kiddush setup for this Shabbat: Baron, Felberbaum, Zarabi
- ☆ Kiddush setup for next Shabbat: Schwed, Solomon, Winchester, Heller
- ☆ To sponsor a Kiddush (\$1000/\$613/\$318 plus scotch) send an email to gplotnick@aol.com.

Community Events

- ☆ Aug. 6 – Peak-Of-The-Summer BBQ, hosted at DARCHEI NOAM. [Rain date is Aug. 13.] For info, contact Oren Kravetz at okravetz@outlook.com.

Mah Jong

- ☆ A special Mah Jong game in honor of Mah Jong legend Arielle Schachter’s visiting Fair Lawn this Shabbat with her family, to be held at Eita Latkin’s home, 40-11 Marie Ct., at 3:30 PM.

Gita Cooperwasser״ו

Youth Program



- ☆ YOUTH GROUPS RESUME IN THE FALL (TOT SHABBAT STILL IN THE PLAYROOM).

- ☆ Parents, ensure that your children are in groups or with you at all times.
- ☆ NO FOOD DURING GROUPS!

Adult Education



- ☆ CHUMASH CLASS - Shabbat morning before Shacharit.
- ☆ GEMARA SHIUR with Rabbi Josh Abramson - One Hour Before Mincha on Shabbat.
- ☆ RETIREES’ SHIUR - Resumes August 7.
- ☆ FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT - After Kiddush, but on hiatus this Shabbat.
- ☆ LEARNING ON THE LAWN, Pirkei Avot Monthly Shiur, will be Aug. 12.

Ahavat Achim Future Events

- ☆ Aug. 26 - Kiddush sponsored by the Sonnenblick family in honor of Avi’s Aufruf and upcoming marriage to Tova Medetsky
- ☆ Sept. 2 - Sarah & Leah Katter’s B’not Mitzvot
- ☆ Sept. 16 - Seudat Shilishit sponsored by the Agress family on Yahrzeit of Amy’s father Ha’Rav Yisroel Yehuda Ben Ephraim Michal Ha’Levi Pruzansky״ר.
- ☆ Oct. 6 - Kiddush is sponsored by the Winchester family on the Yahrzeit of Steve’s mother Helen Winchester, Miriam Hendl bas Shimon״ו
- ☆ Nov. 18 - Andrew Wechsler Bar Mitzvah
- ☆ Feb. 10 - Yachad Shabbaton

Book Club

- ☆ Want to read ahead, the next book will be [A Gentleman in Moscow](#) by Amor Towles.



TU B’AV. Tu B’Av was a joyous holiday in the days of the Beit Hamikdash marking the beginning of the grape harvest. Yom Kippur marked the end of the grape harvest. On both days the unmarried girls of Jerusalem would dress in white garments and go out to dance in the vineyards, and there were no holy days as happy for the Jews as Tu B’Av and Yom Kippur [Ta’anit 30b-31a.] The holiday also celebrated the wood-offering brought in the Temple [Nechemiah 10:35]. Other reasons for celebrating on Tu B’Av :

- While the Jews wandered in the desert for forty years, female orphans without brothers could only marry within their tribe, to prevent their father’s inherited land from passing to other tribes. On 15 Av of the 40th year the ban was lifted.
- That same year, the last generation forbidden to enter Israel died out.
- The Tribe of Benjamin was allowed to intermarry with the other tribes after the incident of the Concubine of Gibeah (see Judges 19-21).
- Cutting wood for the Beit Hamikdash’s main altar was completed for the year.
- Roman occupiers permitted burial of the massacre victims at Bethar. Miraculously, the bodies had not decomposed even after over a year.

☆ (1st) Keep all the mitzvot so that you’ll dwell safely on the land - incentive to participate. 2) Be precise. Don’t add or subtract - incentive to listen and learn. 3) You have seen the power of God - belief that backs the observance. ☆ (4th) We do. The 10 commandments. ☆ (4th) The word “shamor” replaces “zachor” the midrash explains that God said both simultaneously. One halachic consequence is that despite being bound, women are obligated in the positive mitzvot of shabbat because of the linkage of shamor and zachor, the positive and negative commandments of the day. ☆ (5th) The sin of the golden calf. If it is a new covenant, perhaps they are given a chance to move on without the burden of the sin of the golden calf. ☆ (6th) Be careful not to let success get in the way of seeing God’s hand in your life.

Answers to Points To Ponder

Points To Ponder

Answers Bottom Left

- ☆ (1st aliyah) After 3 chapters of a brief review of the history of the Jews in the wilderness, Moshe changes his focus to the future and explains what he’s doing and why. He gives 3 introductory remarks to this new stage of the speech, what are they?
- ☆ (4th aliyah) Who makes the covenant with God? What is the substance of the covenant?
- ☆ (4th aliyah) Which words are different in the first rendition of the 10 commandments? (Hint. the answer is in the first paragraph of lecha dodi)
- ☆ (5th aliyah) What story is left out of this rendition of Matan Torah? Why?
- ☆ (6th aliyah) In the Torah, a different paragraph beginning with the word “v’hayah” follows the first paragraph of shema, what is the main message of the paragraph?

COVENANT & Conversation

A STUDY OF THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SACKS



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I am deeply touched that Covenant & Conversation has been generously sponsored by The Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl ז"ל. Maurice was a visionary philanthropist on a vast scale, driven throughout his life by a sense of Jewish responsibility. Vivienne was a woman of the deepest humanity and compassion, who had a kind word for everyone. Together, they were a unique partnership of dedication and grace, for whom living was giving. Through their Charitable Foundation, they continue to bring blessings to Jewish communities around the world.

— RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS



THE MAURICE WOHL
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Philosophy or Prophecy?

Va'etchanan 2017 / 5777

What was the first commandment? On this there are two fascinating disagreements in Judaism. One was between Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) and the author of the Halakhot Gedolot, written in the period of the Gaonim, probably by R. Shimon Kayyara (eighth century), that for the first time enumerated in a systematic way the 613 commands. The other was between Maimonides and the poet and thinker Judah Halevi (c. 1080-c.1145). These were two different arguments, and they touched, as we will see, on fundamentals of faith.

“What was the first commandment? On this there are two fascinating disagreements in Judaism.”

The first is simply this. Maimonides counts the opening line of the Ten Commandments, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery,” as a positive command, to believe in God.¹ The Halakhot Gedolot does not count it as a command at all. Why not?

Nahmanides (1194-1270), in defence of the Halakhot Gedolot,² speculates that its author counted among the 613 commands only the specific laws enjoining us to do this or avoid doing that. The commands are rules of behaviour, not items of faith. Faith in the existence of God, or acceptance of the kingship of God, is not itself a command but a prelude to and presupposition of the commands.

¹ Maimonides, Sefer haMitzvot, positive command 1.

² Nahmanides, Hasagot to Sefer haMitzvot, ad loc. This is not Nahmanides' own position. In his Commentary to the Torah (to Ex. 20:2), he counts the first verse of the Decalogue as a commandment in its own right, adopting a view similar to that of Maimonides.

He quotes a passage from the Mekhilta: “You shall have no other gods besides me.” Why is this said? Because it says, “I am the Lord your God.” To explain this by way of a parable: A king of flesh and blood entered a province. His servants said to him, “Issue decrees for the people.” He, however, told them, “No. When they accept my sovereignty, I will issue decrees. For if they do not accept my sovereignty, how will they carry out my decrees?”

According to Nahmanides, the Halakhot Gedolot must have believed that the verse, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” is not itself a command, but a statement of why the Israelites should be bound by the will of God. He had rescued them, liberated them, and brought them to safety. The first verse of the Decalogue is not a law but a statement of fact, a reason why the Israelites should accept God’s sovereignty.

Thanks to the archeological discoveries about which I wrote in the previous Covenant and Conversation, we now know that the biblical covenant has the same literary structure as ancient near eastern political treaties. These treaties usually follow a six-part pattern, of which the first three elements were [1] the preamble, identifying the initiator of the treaty, [2] a historical review, summarising the past relationship between the parties, and [3] the stipulations, namely the terms and conditions of the covenant.

Seen in this context, the first verse of the Ten Commandments is a highly abridged form of [1] and [2]. “I am the Lord your God” is the preamble. “Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” is the historical review. The verses that follow are the stipulations, or as we would call them, the commands. If so, then the Halakhot Gedolot as understood by Nahmanides was correct in seeing the verse as an introduction to the commands, not a command in its own right. That is the first disagreement.

The second was between Maimonides and Judah Halevi. For Maimonides, the first command is to believe in God, creator of heaven and earth:

The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realise that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being. . . If it could be supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist. If however it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent, He alone would still exist. . . To acknowledge this truth is a positive command, as it is said: “I am the Lord your God” (Ex. 20:2, Deut 5:7).³

Judah Halevi disagreed. Halevi was not only the greatest of medieval Hebrew poets, he also wrote one of Judaism’s theological masterpieces, The Kuzari. It is framed as a dialogue between a rabbi and the King of the Khazars. Historically, the Khazars were a Turkish people who, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, ruled a considerable area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, including southern Russia, northern Caucasus, eastern Ukraine, Western Kazakhstan, and northwestern Uzbekistan.

³ Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah, 1:1-5.

Many Jewish traders and refugees lived there, and in 838 the Khazar King Bulan converted to Judaism, after supposedly holding a debate between representatives of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths. The Arabic writer Dimashqi writes that the Khazars, having encountered the Jewish faith, “found it better than their own and accepted it”. Khazaria thus became, spiritually as well as geographically, an independent third force between the Muslim Caliphate and the Christian Byzantine Empire. After their conversion, the Khazar people used Jewish personal names, spoke and wrote in Hebrew, were circumcised, had synagogues and rabbis, studied the Torah and Talmud, and observed the Jewish festivals.

The Kuzari is Judah Halevi’s overarching account of Judaism, cast in the form of an imagined conversation between the King and a rabbi that led to the King’s conversion. In it, Halevi draws a portrait diametrically opposed to Maimonides’ account. Judaism, for Halevi, is not philosophical but counter-philosophical. It’s not about abstract concepts but about concrete experiences: the taste of slavery, the feeling of liberation, the realisation on the part of the people that God had heard their cry and set them free. The God of Abraham is not the God of Aristotle. The prophets were not philosophers. Philosophers found God in physics and metaphysics, but the prophets found God in history. This is how Halevi’s rabbi explains his faith to the king of the Khazars:

I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land, after having brought them through the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way. . . (Kuzari I:11)

He goes on to emphasise that God’s opening words in the revelation at Mount Sinai were not, “I am the Lord your God, creator of heaven and earth” but “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Kuzari I:25). The covenant God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai was not rooted in the ancient past of creation but in the recent past of the exodus.

What is at stake in this difference of opinion between Maimonides and Halevi? At the heart of Judaism is a twofold understanding of the nature of God and His relationship to the universe. On the one hand God is creator of the universe and the maker of the human person “in His image”. This aspect of God is universal. It is accessible to anyone, Jew or gentile. Aristotle arrived at it through logic and metaphysics. For him, God was the “prime mover” who set the universe into motion. Today, many people reach the same conclusion through science: the universe is too finely tuned for the emergence of life to have come into being through chance. Some arrive at it not through logic or science but through a simple sense of awe and wonder (“Not how the world is, but that it is, is the mystical” said Wittgenstein). This aspect of God is called by the Torah, Elokim.

“At the heart of Judaism is a twofold understanding of the nature of God and His relationship to the universe.”

But there is a quite different aspect of God which predominates throughout most of Tanakh. This is God as He is involved in the fate of one family, one nation: the children of Israel. He intervened in their history. He made a highly specific covenant with them at Sinai – not at all like the general one He made with Noah and all humanity after the Flood. The Noahide covenant is simple and basic: it involved a mere seven commands. The Sinai covenant, by contrast, is highly articulated, covering almost every aspect of life. This aspect of God is signalled by the use of the four-letter name for which we traditionally substitute the word Hashem.⁴

Maimonides, the philosopher, emphasised the universal, metaphysical aspect of Judaism and the eternal, unchanging existence of God. Judah Halevi, the poet, was more attuned to the particularistic and prophetic dimension of Judaism: the role of God in the historical drama of the Jewish people.

Maimonides was the greatest halakhist and philosopher of the Middle Ages, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that here, at least, the Halakhot Gedolot and Judah Halevi were closer to the plain sense of the text. Even the greatest thinker is not right all the time, which is why Judaism remains a conversation scored for many voices, each with its own insight into the infinite inflections of the Divine word.

“Judaism remains a conversation scored for many voices, each with its own insight into the infinite inflections of the Divine word.”

Shabbat Shalom.



For more material from Rabbi Sacks, or to join his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org

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⁴ On the two aspects and names, see Kuzari IV:1-3; and Ramban to Exodus 3:13.