WEEKDAY DAVENING INFORMATION

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<th>Sunday 1/27</th>
<th>Monday 1/28</th>
<th>Tuesday 1/29</th>
<th>Wednesday 1/30</th>
<th>Thursday 1/31</th>
<th>Friday 2/1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Earliest Talit</td>
<td>6:12 AM</td>
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<td>Gedolah</td>
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<td>Mincha - Maariv</td>
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<td>Tzait</td>
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<td>Maariv Only</td>
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Memorial Scrolls Trust is gathering all holocaust-saved Sifrei Torah loaned to various congregations, including to Ahavat Achim over 40 years ago, at Reform Temple Emanu-El in New York City, on Tue., Feb. 5, at 6:00PM. To attend or volunteer to transport our Torah, please email Ben at bmmmpl@aol.com. Admission is free.

Super Bowl Shabbat kiddish lunch will be Feb. 2. Four volunteers needed to cook. Sponsors needed at the following levels: 1st Quarter - $54, Halftime - $72, 3rd Quarter - $118 and Final - $180. To volunteer and/or sponsor, contact Randi at randi.spier@gmail.com or 201-777-0731. SPONSORS SO FAR: 3rd Quarter - Garfunkel and Spier; Halftime - Bernstein, Greene, Plotnick, K&A Wigod and S. Wigod; 1st Qtr.: Agress, Greenbaum/Goldman, Joseph, Mayer and Santacruz.

We regret to inform you of the passing of Morton Goldstein, beloved father of Deborah Kempin.

1 in 3 U.S. families struggle or have struggled with the need for diapers. Please donate diapers by dropping them off at Ahavat Achim, as follows:
- Sunday, Feb 3, 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM
- Sunday, Feb 10, 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM
- Monday - Friday, during Shacharit or 7:00 - 9:00 PM (except on Shabbat).

Teen volunteers are needed, and this would be a great way to earn chesed hours for school. For additional info, e-mail diaperdrive@ahavatachim.org.

Mazel Tov to Renee & Larry Freund on Andy’s engagement to Orly Goldberg!

May the beautiful couple be elevated in the building of a faithful house of Israel.
Kiddush
Information
★ To sponsor a Kiddush ($1000/$613/$318, plus scotch) email Gail at gplotnick@aol.com.
★ If you are around when the Rabbi says “על המזון”, your assistance in clean up would be appreciated.

Adult Education
★ GEMARA SHIUR - On Winter Hiatus.
★ DAYTIME TORAH VOYAGES - Thursdays at 1:00 PM.
★ FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT - After Kiddush.
★ PEREK ON THE LAWN, Pirkei Avot Periodic Shiur.

Community Events
★ Feb. 2 - Escape Room Experience, working with friends to solve physical puzzles, riddles, and electronics and locks. Dinner will be served. Shomrei Torah, Sat night, at 7:30 PM. Cost is $45 per person. RSVP to mrsricklis@gmail.com.
★ Notice of Special Membership Meeting
A Special Membership meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 6, 2018 at 8:35 PM following Maariv. The agenda for the Meeting is to vote on the proposed hiring of a security guard for Shabbat morning and other high attendance occasions on an ongoing basis at the cost of approximately $15,000 per year, with the expense to be covered by a Security Fee to be charged to all members at approximately $150 per year. The expense and fee for the remainder of the current fiscal year will be prorated.
★ As provided in the Constitution, those physically unable to attend the meeting(s) may be allowed to vote by proxy in the discretion of the President. Absentee ballots shall be permitted only for those members who notify the President in writing, at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting that they will be unable to attend the meeting in person: 1) because they will be outside of the New York Metropolitan area; or 2) due to an unavoidable work-related conflict.

Gita Cooperwasser Youth Program
★ Youth groups start at 10:00 AM!
★ Contact our Youth Director Aliza Kaplan to discuss our children's youth programming at youthdirectoraliza@ahavatachim.org.

Tot Shabbat
★ 10:40 AM, with the Shabbat reading often featuring a surprise story teller.

Stay & Play
★ Next get together will be in the spring on April 6. See you then.

Teen Hashkama
★ Feb. 16
★ Mar. 23
★ May 11
★ June 22

Pirkei Avot
Teen Learning
★ 10:40 AM. For details contact Ben at Benjamin.greenbaum@frisch.org.

Ahavat Achim Future Events
★ Feb. 1 - Friday night Oneg, with Rabbi Shestack discussing “What's Nava's Hebrew birthday this year? The Halachic Battleground of Adar 1 & Adar 2”
★ /NCSY Friday Night Lights
★ Feb. 2 - Special Membership Meeting
★ Feb. 3 to 10 - Diaper Drive
★ Feb. 6 - Special Membership Meeting
★ Feb. 16 - Special Membership Meeting
★ Feb. 23 - Comedy Night starring Eli Lebowicz and Ari Ginsburg
★ Mar. 2 - Friday night Oneg
★ Mar. 9 - Yachad/Yavneh Shabbatton
★ May 4 - Dr. Avivah Zornberg Scholar in Residence
★ May 11 - Suedah Shlishit sponsored by Kira & Andrew Wigod
★ June 1 - 2nd Annual Baruch Crawl
★ June 8 - Suedah Shlishit sponsored by Eli Zezon in memory of Shlomo Ben Eliyahu
★ June 22 - Suedah Shlishit sponsored by Eli Zezon in memory of Baroch

Points To Ponder
★ 2nd - What reasons do Yitro give for revamping the justice system?
★ 4th - What prompts Rashi in this aliyah to say that the Jewish people were "k'ish echad b'lev echad" as a prerequisite to receiving the Torah?
★ 5th - According to verse 9 in this aliyah, what is the purpose of the revelation?
★ 6th - Shabbat Table Discussion: There are two opinions about which commandments make up the Ten commandments as presented in this aliyah. Which commandments are questionable? why?

Answers to Points To Ponder

Shirley Vana has dedicated this week’s Covenant & Conversation (used with permission of the Office of Rabbi Yitzchok) in memory of her beloved mother Necha bat Yitzchok.

Ahavat Achim Future Events
★ Feb. 1 - Friday night Oneg, with Rabbi Shestack discussing “What's Nava's Hebrew birthday this year? The Halachic Battleground of Adar 1 & Adar 2”
★ /NCSY Friday Night Lights
★ Feb. 2 - Special Membership Meeting
★ Feb. 6 - Special Membership Meeting
★ Feb. 10 - Lizard Guy Event, sponsored by Kira & Andrew Wigod
★ Feb. 23 - Comedy Night starring Eli Lebowicz and Ari Ginsburg
★ Mar. 2 - Friday night Oneg
★ Mar. 9 - Yachad/Yavneh Shabbaton
★ May 4 - Dr. Avivah Zornberg Scholar in Residence
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SUPER BOWL SHABBAT
Kick-Off Cook-Off Kiddush Lunch

2.2.2019

4 volunteers needed to help cook your favorite dishes in the shul kitchen

Sponsors needed at the following levels:
1st Quarter - $54, Halftime - $72
3rd Quarter - $118 and Final - $180

To volunteer or sponsor, please contact Randi at randi.spier@gmail.com or 201-777-0731
Ahavat Achim Presents: The Lizard Guys

Join us for a fun show with lizards, snakes, turtles, frogs & bugs!

Raffle  Photo Booth  Coloring

Sunday, February 10, 2019 2-4 PM
18-25 Saddle River Rd
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

Price for Admission: Bring an unopened diaper donation to be distributed by Jewish Family & Children’s Services of Northern NJ. Sealed inner packs from a larger box are acceptable*

Can’t make it, but still want to donate? e-mail diaperdrive@ahavatachim.org

RSVP to diaperdrive@ahavatachim.org for the chance to win a raffle prize!
Ahavat Achim Presents

Second Annual Saturday Night

COMEDY
WITH WINE AND DESSERT

Saturday, Feb 23
8:30 PM/Doors Open at 8:00
18-25 Saddle River Road Fair Lawn

Featuring
ELI LEBOWICZ
and
ARI GINSBERG

$12 pp before Feb 1 / $15 pp before Feb 23
$20 pp at door

Tickets at evenresponse@AhavatAchim.org
Sponsor this event for $100!
Includes 4 tickets & reserved seats
Mount Sinai and the Birth of Freedom

The revelation at Mount Sinai – the central episode not only of the parsha of Yitro, but of Judaism as a whole – was unique in the religious history of mankind. Other faiths (Christianity and Islam) call themselves religions of revelation, but in both cases the revelation of which they spoke was to an individual (“the son of God,” “the prophet of God”). Only in Judaism was God’s self-disclosure not to an individual (a prophet) or a group (the elders) but to an entire nation, young and old, men, women and children, the righteous and not-yet-righteous alike. From the very outset, the people of Israel knew something unprecedented had happened at Sinai. Moses had no doubt that it was an event without parallel:

“Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?” (Deut. 4:32–33).

For the great Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages, its significance was primarily epistemological. It created certainty and removed doubt. The authenticity of a revelation experienced by one person could be questioned. One witnessed by millions could not. God disclosed His presence in public to remove any possible suspicion that the presence felt, and the voice heard, were not genuine.

Looking at the history of mankind since those days, it is clear that there was another significance also – one that had to do not with religious knowledge, but with politics. At Sinai a new kind of nation was being formed, and a new kind of society – one that would be an antithesis of Egypt, in which the few had power and the many were enslaved. It was to be, in Abraham Lincoln’s words in the Gettysburg Address, “a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Indeed without the covenant at Mount Sinai, Lincoln’s words might have been inconceivable. For nowhere else do we find anything like the politics of Mount Sinai, with its radical vision of a society held together not by power but by the free consent of its citizens to be bound, individually and collectively, by a moral code and by a covenant with God.¹

¹ “The government of the Israelites was a Federation, held together by no political authority, but by the unity of race and faith, and founded, not on physical force, but on a voluntary covenant.” Lord Acton, Essays in the History of Liberty (Liberty Press, 1985), 7
Standard works on the history of the politics of freedom trace it back through Marx, Rousseau and Hobbes to Plato’s Republic, Aristotle’s Politics, and the Greek city states (Athens in particular) of the fifth century BCE. This is a serious error. To be sure, words like “democracy” (rule by the people) are Greek in origin. The Greeks were gifted at abstract nouns and systematic thought. However, if we look at the “birth of the modern” – at figures like Milton, Hobbes and Locke in England, and the founding fathers of America – the book with which they were in dialogue was not Plato or Aristotle but the Hebrew Bible. Hobbes quotes it 657 times in The Leviathan alone. Long before the Greek philosophers, and far more profoundly, at Mount Sinai the concept of a free society was born.

Three things about that moment were to prove crucial. The first is that long before Israel entered the land and acquired their own system of government (first by judges, later by kings), they had entered into an overarching covenant with God. That covenant (Brit Sinai) set moral limits to the exercise of power. The code we call Torah established for the first time the primacy of right over might. Any king who behaved contrarily to Torah was acting ultra vires (beyond legitimate authority), and could be challenged. This is the single most important fact about biblical politics.

Democracy on the Greek model always had one fatal weakness. Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill called it “the tyranny of the majority.” J.L. Talmon called it “totalitarian democracy.” The rule of the majority contains no guarantee of the rights of minorities. As Lord Acton rightly noted, it was this that led to the downfall of Athens: “There was no law superior to that of the state. The lawgiver was above the law.” In Judaism, by contrast, prophets were mandated to challenge the authority of the king if he acted against the terms of the Torah. The classic example is the accusation God tells Elijah to make to King Ahab for seizing Naboth’s vineyard: “Thus says the Lord: Would you murder and take possession?” (1 Kings 21:19).

Individuals were empowered to disobey illegal or immoral orders. The first example was the Hebrew midwives who “feared God and did not do what the Egyptian king had commanded” (Ex. 1:17). Another key moment was when King Saul ordered his servants to kill the priests of Nob, who had given shelter to David, “But the king’s servants would not raise a hand to strike down the priests of the Lord” (Samuel 22:17). It was on this tradition that Calvin – inspiration of the seventeenth-century Puritan radicals in England and America – drew, when he said “prophets and teachers may take courage and thus boldly set themselves against kings and nations.” It was on the same tradition that Thomas Paine based his pamphlet Common Sense (1776), widely credited at the time as the inspiration that led to the American revolution. Historically, it was the covenant at Sinai and all that flowed from it, not the Greek political tradition, that inspired the birth of freedom in Britain and America, the first people to take that road in the modern age.

“It was the covenant at Sinai and all that flowed from it, that inspired the birth of freedom in Britain and America, the first people to take that road in the modern age.”

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2 Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, bk. 1, chap. 15; John Stuart Mill, introduction to On Liberty
3 J.L. Talmon, The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy (Secker and Warburg, 1955)
4 Lord Acton, Essays in the History of Liberty, 13
5 On civil disobedience in Judaism, see the essays by Moshe Greenberg, Maurice Lamm and Milton Konvitz in Contemporary Jewish Ethics, ed. Menachem Kellner (Sanhedrin Press, 1978), 211–254; and Harold Schulweis, Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey (Jewish Lights, 2008)
The second key element lies in the prologue to the covenant. God tells Moses:

“This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel. ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me. Now, if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured possession, for the whole earth is Mine. You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...’” (Ex. 19:3–6)

Moses tells this to the people, who reply: “We will do everything the Lord has said” (Ex. 19:8). Until the people had signified their consent, the revelation could not proceed. The principle at stake was that there is no legitimate government without the consent of the governed, even if the governor is Creator of heaven and earth. I know of few more radical ideas anywhere.

To be sure, there were sages in the Talmudic period who questioned whether the acceptance of the covenant at Sinai was completely free. There is a famous statement in the Talmud:

“And they stood under [normally translated as, “at the foot of”] the mountain” (Ex. 19:17) – this teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain above them like a cask and said to them, “If you accept the Torah, it is well, but if not, this will be your burial place.”

What the sages are doing here is to question whether the Israelites really had a free choice at Sinai. They had not yet entered the land. They were dependent on God for their food, water and protection. Where could they go, and to whom could they turn, if they said no to God?

The Talmud itself says that “Nonetheless, they re-accepted it in the days of Ahasuerus,” that is, at the time described in the book of Esther – one of the only two books in the Bible that does not contain the name of God. In that context there could be no question of divine coercion. However, at the simplest level, this is the significance of the two covenant renewal ceremonies, one at the end of Moses’ life, as the Israelites were about to enter the land (Deut. 29–31), the other at the end of Joshua’s life, when the people had conquered the land (Joshua 24). The covenant was renewed precisely so that no one could say that it had been entered into coercively when there was no alternative.

At the heart of Judaism is the idea – way ahead of its time, and not always fully realised – that the free God desires the free worship of free human beings. God, said the rabbis, does not act tyrannically with His creatures.

The third, equally ahead of its time, was that the partners to the covenant were to be “all the people” – men, women and children. This fact is emphasised later on in the Torah in the mitzvah of Hak-hel, the

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8 The phrase comes from the American Declaration of Independence
9 Shabbat 88a
10 Ibid.
11 The other is Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs.
12 Avoda Zara 3a
septennial covenant renewal ceremony. The Torah states specifically that the entire people is to be gathered together for this ceremony, “men, women and children” (Deut. 31:10–13). A thousand years later, when Athens experimented with democracy, only a limited section of society had political rights. Women, children, slaves and foreigners were excluded. In many respects this held true until very recently. In Britain, women did not get the vote until 1918. In America, women’s suffrage was complete only in 1920, though some states had enacted it earlier.

According to the sages, when God was about to give the Torah at Sinai, He told Moses to consult first with the women and only then with the men. This is the meaning of the verse “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel” (Ex. 19:3). The house of Jacob, our sages tell us, refers to the women. The Torah, Israel’s “constitution of liberty,” includes everyone. It is the first moment, by thousands of years, that citizenship is conceived as being universal.

Perhaps the greatest testimony to the politics of the Hebrew Bible was given by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in an unpublished manuscript discovered after his death:

*The Jews provide us with an astonishing spectacle: the laws of Numa, Lycurgus, Solon are dead; the very much older laws of Moses are still alive. Athens, Sparta, Rome have perished and no longer have children left on earth; Zion, destroyed, has not lost its children…. What must be the strength of legislation capable of working such wonders, capable of braving conquests, dispersions, revolutions, exiles, capable of surviving the customs, laws, empire of all the nations...to last as long as the world?...any man whosoever he is, must acknowledge this as a unique marvel, the causes of which, divine or human, certainly deserve the study and admiration of the sages, in preference to all that Greece and Rome offer.*

With the revelation at Sinai, something unprecedented entered the human horizon, though it would take centuries, millennia, before its full implications were understood. At Sinai, the politics of freedom was born.

Shabbat shalom

“With the revelation at Sinai, something unprecedented entered the human horizon...the politics of freedom was born.”

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53 Mekhilta, ad loc