

RAV'S TURNTABLES: TORAH STUDY THROUGH MUSIC

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# **Rav's Turntables: Torah Study through Music**

www.ravsturntables.com

## **Statement**

As a teacher in Cincinnati's Kulanu Reform Jewish High School, I experimented with music in the classroom. I played Jazz at the beginning of class to calm and focus rambunctious teenagers. I also taught a class in which I used contemporary music to highlight the teachings of Mussar. Both experiments proved successful. Now as a 7th grade teacher, I often start class with Godcast, an incredibly successful video platform that teaches about the weekly parsha. However, I find that video stunts the imagination of students by providing defined illustrations with a defined narrative. There is also no alternative to Godcast to offer quick, informative lessons on the weekly parsha for educators to use during class. These experiences, and my background as a professional DJ, inspired me to create a Godcast alternative by pairing diverse contemporary music to a particular lesson from the weekly parsha and its surrounding commentary. I will complete all weekly parshayot in Genesis and Exodus, with an eye towards completing the Torah.

## **Significance of the Study**

In studying Genesis and Exodus, my goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the Genesis and Exodus narratives and illuminate their lessons with rabbinic to modern commentary. In creating this resource, I hope to find accessible modes to teach the Torah's powerful lessons and build a website accessible to educators for use in the classroom.

## **Methodology**

Each Torah portion in Genesis and Exodus will be read in full and studied with at least one pre-haskalah and one post-haskalah commentary. After completing study, I will choose one, specific lesson to focus on, find applicable commentary, and search for a contemporary piece of music that compliments the lesson. Some pieces will have lyrical significance, and others will reflect a particular mood. To connect the music to the parsha, I will write discussion questions and reflections that stimulate discussion and reiterate the specific lesson. This process will be transformed into a website and recorded in a document to be submitted for capstone.

GENESIS

EXODUS

LEVITICUS



NUMBERS

DEUTERONOMY

MORE TORAH

# TORAH + MUSIC

# WELCOME TO RAV'S TURNTABLES!

“

I often think in music.  
I live my daydreams in music.  
I see my life in terms of music.

– Albert Einstein



The Torah is the Jewish story book, our collective narrative, that directs our moral compass and challenges us to be a light in the world. Yet much of our Torah is told with sparse details. To color in the missing detail, rabbis over the past 2000 years have crafted stories and rationales to fill in the cracks. In that same tradition, Rav's Turntables seeks to fill in the cracks with music. Torah comes alive through



study, and music adds an emotional depth to Torah Study that leaves a lasting impression on the soul.

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GENESIS

EXODUS

LEVITICUS



NUMBERS

DEUTERONOMY

MORE TORAH

# B'REISHIT

Genesis 1:1-6:8

# 5777

October 29th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- **God creates the world and everything in it in six days and rests on the seventh. (1:1-2:3)**
- Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, where they eat the forbidden fruit and are subsequently exiled. (2:15-3:24)
- Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain kills his brother, Abel. (4:1-24)
- Adam and Eve have another child named Seth. The Torah lists the ten generations from Adam to Noah. (4:25-5:32)
- God regrets having created human beings and decides to destroy everything on earth, but Noah finds favor with God. (6:5-6:8)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/breishit>))

“

According to the normal order of the world, a King does not build a palace based on his own ideas.

Instead, he consults an architect. The architect does not build based on his own ideas, but instead draws blueprints and drafts to calculate where to place rooms and doors. So too, when God made the world he looked into the Torah [the blueprint] and only then created the world.

– Midrash Rabbah 1:1



What A Wonderful World  
Louis Armstrong

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How do the first two chapters of B'reishit and the song *What a Wonderful World* relate to each other?
- Thousands of years ago, our ancestors stared at the skies and saw the marvels of the earth and wondered how it all started. B'reishit was the definitive answer. For us, B'reishit is not a scientific account of creation, yet still holds great wisdom for modernity. What can B'reishit teach us about how we view the natural world? How does *What a Wonderful World* reflect the awe and wonder of nature?
- What are the rabbis teaching us about the Torah in Midrash Rabbah? How is the Torah a blueprint for our world?



The Creation of Man - Marc Chagall, 1958

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# NOACH

Genesis 6:9-11:32

# 5777

November 5th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- The earth becomes corrupt and God decides to cause a flood that will destroy the world, sparing only Noah's family and the animals that Noah gathers together on the ark. (6:9-8:22)
- Life starts over again after the Flood. The Noahide Commandments (<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-noahide-laws/#>) are listed, and God uses a rainbow to make a symbol of the first covenant. (9:1-17)
- **People start to build a city and the Tower of Babel. God scatters the people and gives them different languages to speak. (11:1-9)**
- The ten generations from Noah to Abram are listed. (11:10-11:32)

(Reform Judaism  
(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/noach>))



“

The Netziv writes in his commentary to the Tower of Babel, uniformity of thought is not a sign of freedom but its opposite

– Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

People are People  
Depeche Mode

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- The Tower of Babel story explains the diversity of the world. Why did God dislike the idea of one people with one language and one religion?
- Depeche Mode sings: "So we're different colours, And we're different creeds." Do you think the world is a better place for cultural and religious diversity?
- Commentator Abravanel (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/631-abravanel-abarbanel>), explained that before the Tower of Babel, the people treated each other with



Babel Revisted - Julee Holcombe, 2004

kindness and generosity. But when the began building the Tower, the people began arguing and seeking individual credit for all the work. It caused jealousy between the people and even led to hatred of one another. Depeche Mode sings: "I can't understand, What makes a man, Hate another man." What makes a person hate another person?

- Why does the Netziv (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/ne>) teach that freedom requires diversity of thought? Do your friends usually agree with you or do they offer different perspectives?

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GENESIS

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# LECH L'CHA

Genesis 12:7-17:27



# 5777

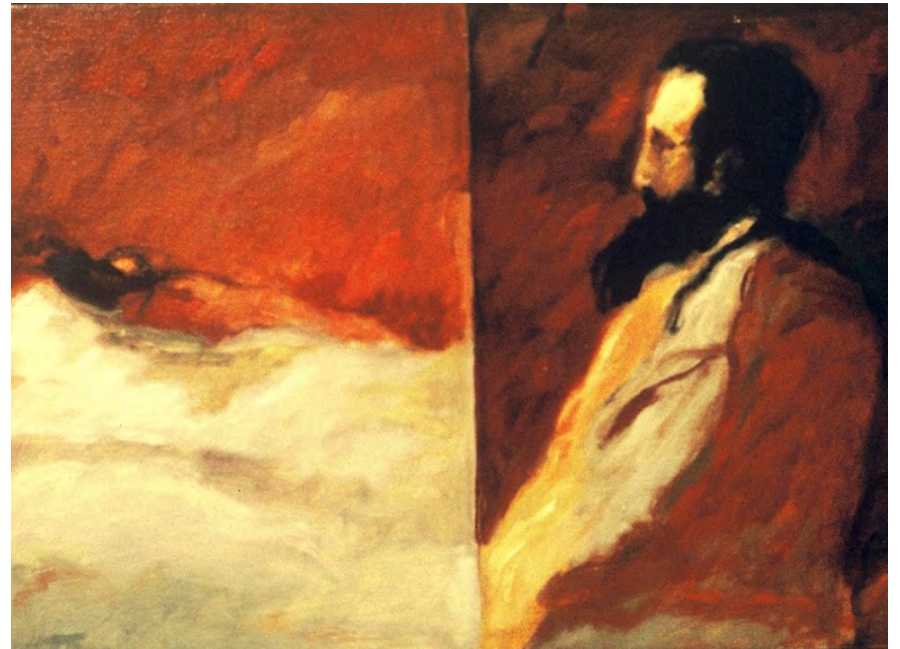
November 12th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- Abram, Sarai, and Lot go to Canaan. (12:1-9)
- Famine takes them to Egypt, where Abram identifies Sarai as his sister in order to save his life. (12:10-20)
- Abram and Lot separate. Lot is taken captive, and Abram rescues him. (13:1-14:24)
- Abram has a son, Ishmael, with his Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. (16:1-16)
- God establishes a covenant with Abram. The sign of this covenant is circumcision on the eighth day following a male baby's birth. (17:1-27)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/lech-lcha>))



Anthony Dubovsky - Abraham, 1992

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How does Yaron Herman Trio's song Lamidbar



“

[Lech l'cha] literally means go to you, for your benefit and for your good, and there I will make you into a great nation...Moreover, I will make your character known in the world.

– Rashi

(To the desert) make you feel? Does it make you feel safe and secure or like you are stepping into the unknown?

- Does Rashi's commentary make sense to you? If you were Abram, how would you feel leaving your homeland and parents' house for good? Would God's promise sweeten the deal?
- At the end of Parshat Noah, Abram's father Terah takes the family and 'sets out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan' (Gen.11: 31). However, they never make it to Canaan and stop in Haran where Terah died.

Do you think Abram's journey with his father helped prepare him for the journey God asked him to take?

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# VAYEIRA

Genesis 18:1–22:24



# 5777

November 19th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- **Abraham welcomes three visitors, who announce that Sarah will soon have a son. (18:1-15)**
- Abraham argues with God about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (18:16-33)
- Lot's home is attacked by the people of Sodom. Lot and his two daughters escape as the cities are being destroyed. Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt. (19:1-29)
- Lot impregnates his daughters, and they bear children who become the founders of the nations Moab and Ammon. (19:30-38)
- Abimelech, king of Gerar, takes Sarah as his wife after Abraham claims that she is his sister. (20:1-18)

“

Why is the story of Abraham's circumcision [Genesis 17: 23-27] followed by God's visitation? God came to visit while Abraham was recuperating, to make clear the importance of the mitzvah of bikkur cholim [visiting the sick].

– Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 86b





- Isaac is born, circumcised, and weaned. Hagar and her son, Ishmael, are sent away; an angel saves their lives. (21:1-21)
- God tests Abraham, instructing him to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. (22:1-19)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/vayeira>))



Abraham and Three Angels - Marc Chagall, 1966

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Why is Bikkur Holim so important?
- Zach Sobiech had terminal cancer and died at the age of 18 in 2013. In his song, he sings, "And I needed a way to climb and grab a hold of the edge | You were sitting there holding a rope." What metaphor does Zach use to describe the feeling of being sick? How does he describe the act of Bikkur Holim from the perspective of the sick person?
- How do those who visit the sick become angels of God?

Clouds

Zach Sobiech



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# CHAYEI SARAH

Genesis 23:1-25:18





# 5777

November 26th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- Abraham purchases the cave of Machpelah in order to bury his wife Sarah. (23:1-20)
- Abraham sends his servant to find a bride for Isaac. (24:1-9)
- Rebekah shows her kindness by offering to draw water for the servant's camels at the well. (24:15-20)
- **The servant meets Rebekah's family and then takes Rebekah to Isaac, who marries her. (24:23-67)**
- Abraham takes another wife, named Keturah. At the age of one hundred and seventy-five years, Abraham dies, and Isaac and Ishmael bury him in the cave of Machpelah. (25:1-11)

“

Love is rooted in giving. We love that which we give to, not necessarily those who give to us.

– Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler



(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/chayei-sarah>))

Love Is a Verb

John Mayer

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Jewish tradition teaches that Isaac and Rebekah's relationship started with infatuation and grew into a deep love. What is the difference between infatuation and love?
- John Mayer sings, "Love is a verb. It ain't a thing, It's not something you own, It's not something you scream." How does this relate to Rabbi Dessler's teaching?
- In their first interaction, Rebekah's kindness stands out to the servant. When looking for friends or partners, what characteristics do you seek? Are these characteristics acted out or material?



Rebekah at the Well - Michael J. Das, 1967

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# TOL'DOT

Genesis 25:19-28:9



# 5777

December 3rd, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- Rebekah has twins, Esau and Jacob. (25:19-26)
- Esau gives Jacob his birthright in exchange for some stew. (25:27-34)
- King Abimelech is led to think that Rebekah is Isaac's sister and later finds out that she is really his wife. (26:1-16)
- **Isaac plans to bless Esau, his firstborn. Rebekah and Jacob deceive Isaac so that Jacob receives the blessing. (27:1-29)**
- Esau threatens to kill Jacob, who then flees to Haran. (27:30-45)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/toldot>))

“

We may note the contrast between the two [blessings]. On the one hand Esau was promised abundance, fatness, power and dominion – material blessing. But the Abrahamic mission, the blessing of seed and the promise of the land were not bequeathed to Esau, since such a spiritual blessing cannot be conferred by succession but only granted to the one who is deserving of it.

– Nechama Leibowits







Isaac Blessing Jacob - Gioachino Assereto, 1640s

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Nehama Leibowitz teaches that Jacob was deserving of the blessing he received, despite deceiving his father to receive it. Do you think Jacob deserved his blessing? What if it was God's plan?
- What is the difference between the material blessing of Esau and the spiritual blessing of Isaac?
- Damian Marley sings, "I've got joy in abundance, I've got life full of substance." Is this a material or spiritual blessings? What would a Jewish life full of substance look like?

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# VAYEITZEI

Genesis 28:10-32:3



# 5777

December 10th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- **Jacob dreams of angels going up and down a ladder. God blesses him. Jacob names the place Bethel. (28:10-22)**
- Jacob works seven years in order to marry Rachel, but Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Leah, Rachel's older sister. (29:16-25)
- Jacob marries Rachel but only after having to commit himself to seven more years of working for Laban. (29:26-30)
- Leah, Rachel, and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah, give birth to eleven sons and one daughter. (29:31-30:24)
- Jacob and his family leave Laban's household with great wealth. (31:1-32:3)



(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/vayeitzei>))

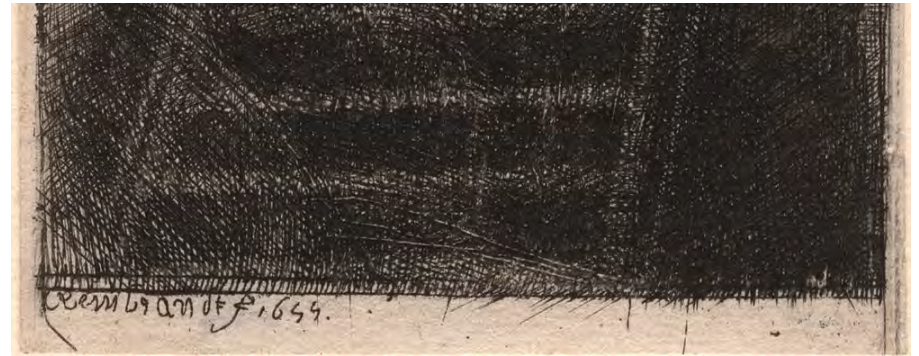
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The ladder is a projection of what is in the heart, and the angels are the feelings, the emotions, that are in the heart, that in some cases raise us up toward our aspirations and in some cases drag us down in the other direction. Jacob's dream is a dream of the vicissitudes of the heart.

– David Curzon

## VICISSITUDE (NOUN)

Regular change or succession from one thing to another, or one part of a cycle to the next; alternation; mutual succession; interchange.



Jacob's Ladder – Rembrandt, 1655

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- If we imagine the ladder as a projection of our heart, with the angels representing our emotions, what lifts you up toward your aspirations? What pulls you down?
- How does *Climbing up Iknimaya* relate to this spiritual movement? How does the music make you feel at the beginning, middle, and end of the song?
- Human beings are created *b'tzelem elohim* – in the image of God. With that in mind, where do our emotions come from? Does God have emotions?

Climbing Up Iknimaya - The Path  
To Heaven  
Avatar Soundtrack - James Horner

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MORE TORAH

# VAYISHLACH

Genesis 32:4-36:43





# 5777

December 17th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- **Jacob prepares to meet Esau. He wrestles with a "man," who changes Jacob's name to Israel. (32:4-33)**
- Jacob and Esau meet and part peacefully, each going his separate way. (33:1-17)
- Dinah is raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, who was chief of the country. Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi take revenge by murdering all the males of Shechem, and Jacob's other sons join them in plundering the city. (34:1-31)
- Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin and is buried in Ephrah, which is present-day Bethlehem. (35:16-21)



- Isaac dies and is buried in Hebron. Jacob's and Esau's progeny are listed. (35:22-36:43)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/vayishlach>))



Jacob and the Angel - Benn (Bencjon Rabinowicz), 1954

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“

It is frustrating not knowing what God is, but rather only catching glimpses of the Divine in who we are and in what God does. We struggle with answers, to be sure. But in the process of struggling, we teach and we learn. It is as if when God removed humanity from the Garden of Eden, the easy answers were exiled with Adam and Eve. The nature of the world is that there are many answers: to find them, we must search with an open heart and mind, be

- The rabbis offer many interpretations of who Jacob is wrestling with: the guardian angel of Esau (*B'reishit Rabbah* 77:3), an angel in the guise of a shepherd (*Tanchuma* to Genesis 32:25), with himself against the face of evil (*Bereshit/Genesis: A New Translation*). In your interpretation, who is Jacob wrestling with?
- The name Yisrael means "struggles with God." To be a part of the People of Israel means to wrestle with our understanding of God. How have you struggled with your belief or disbelief in God?
- Jason Mesches sings, "I don't know who or what God is." Rabbi Stanway says that can be frustrating. But Am Yisrael has wrestled

attentive to the world and to  
each other, and speak and listen  
in equal measure.

– Rabbi Cy Stanway

with God for as long as it has  
existed. There are many modern  
understandings of God like finding God in  
relationships, in nature, or in our values.  
How do you understand God?

If God's a Giraffe  
Jason Mesches

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# VAYEISHEV

Genesis 37:1-40:23







# 5777

December 24th, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- **Jacob is shown to favor his son Joseph, whom the other brothers resent. Joseph has dreams of grandeur. (Genesis 37:1-11)**
- After Joseph's brothers had gone to tend the flocks in Shechem, Jacob sends Joseph to report on them. The brothers decide against murdering Joseph but instead sell him into slavery. After he is shown Joseph's coat of many colors, which had been dipped in the blood of a kid, Jacob is led to believe that Joseph has been killed by a beast. (Genesis 37:12-35)
- Tamar successively marries two of Judah's sons, each of whom dies. Judah does not



permit her levirate marriage to his youngest son. She deceives Judah into impregnating her. (Genesis 38:1-30)

- God is with Joseph in Egypt until the wife of his master, Potiphar, accuses him of rape, whereupon Joseph is imprisoned. (Genesis 39:1-40:23)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/vayeishev>))

Jacob & Sons / Joseph's Coat  
Joseph & The Amazing Technicolor  
Dreamcoat

Sale of Joseph - Karoly Ferenczy, 1900

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Why do you think Joseph's brothers hate him?
- In Bereshit Rabbah 84:7, the rabbis teach that Joseph, "behaved like a boy, penciling his eyes, curling his hair, and lifting his heel." A) What are your initial reactions to this? B) What negative characteristics of Joseph are the rabbis attacking?
- What do you think of Elie Wiesel's

“

Jacob refused him nothing. He owned the most beautiful clothes, for he liked to be regarded as graceful and elegant. He craved attention. He knew he was the favorite and often boasted of it. Moreover, he was given to whims and frequently was impertinent. Arrogant, vain, insensitive to other people's feelings, he said freely whatever was on his mind. We know the consequences: he was hated, mistreated, and finally sold by his brothers, who in truth were ready to kill him.

– Elie Wiesel



assessment of Jacob and Joseph? How does it  
relate to the song?

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MORE TORAH

# MIKEITZ

Genesis 41:1-44:17





# 5777

December 31st, 2016

## PARSHA RECAP

- Joseph interprets Pharaoh's two dreams and predicts seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine. (41:1-32)
- Pharaoh places Joseph in charge of food collection and distribution. (41:37-49)
- Joseph marries Asenath, and they have two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. (41:50-52)
- **When Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food during the famine, Joseph accuses them of spying. He holds Simeon hostage while the rest of the brothers return to Canaan to retrieve Benjamin for him. (42:3-42:38)**
- **The brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin and for more food. Joseph continues the**

“

Do not say, “Since I have been humiliated, let my neighbor be humiliated. Know that, when you humiliate another person, you are humiliating the image of God.

– Genesis Rabbah 24:7

Humiliation

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (Disney)



**test, this time falsely accusing Benjamin of stealing and declaring that Benjamin must remain his slave. (43:1-44:17)**

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/mikeitz>))

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Why does Joseph orchestrate a scenario to humiliate his brothers? Think back to last week's parasha.
- Which Jewish concept, and popular Dan Nichols song, are the rabbis referring to in Genesis Rabbah? How does this concept factor into your belief of God?
- How does the song *Humiliation* make you feel? Have you ever been humiliated? What does it feel like?
- Why does the Torah illuminate the imperfections of so many main characters? What would the Torah be like if every character had no flaws and always acted perfect?



Joseph Et Frères In Égypte - Salvador Dalí, 1967



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GENESIS

EXODUS

LEVITICUS



NUMBERS

DEUTERONOMY

MORE TORAH

# VAYIGASH

Genesis 44:18-47:27





# 5777

January 7th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- **Judah pleads with Joseph to free Benjamin and offers himself as a replacement.**  
(44:18-34)
- Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and forgives them for selling him into slavery.  
(45:1-15)
- Although the famine still rages, Pharaoh invites Joseph's family to "live off the fat of the land." (45:16-24)
- Jacob learns that Joseph is still alive and, with God's blessing, goes to Egypt.  
(45:25-46:33)
- Pharaoh permits Joseph's family to settle in Goshen. Pharaoh then meets with Jacob.

“

There were many people present in Pharaoh's house and other Egyptians pleading with Joseph to pardon Benjamin. Their compassion and been deeply stirred by Judah's plea, and Joseph could not overcome them all.

– Nachmanides on Genesis 45:1

Wake Up Everybody (feat. Common)



(47:1-12)

- With the famine increasing, Joseph designs a plan for the Egyptians to trade their livestock and land for food. The Israelites thrive in Egypt. (47:13-27)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/vayigash>))

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Nahmanides commentary argues that the power of the people convinced Joseph, not just Judah's voice alone. What role does a leader's voice play in societal change? What role do the people play?
- Judah makes a plea for justice. What pleas are you making to fix the world? Who should receive our pleas?
- Wake Up Everybody is about realizing the plight of our world and joining together to fix it - the essence of Tikkun Olam. How do you repair our world? How do you seek justice?

& Melanie Fiona)  
John Legend & The Roots



Joseph reveals himself, 1270

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MORE TORAH

# VA-Y'CHI

Genesis 47:28–50:26





# 5777

January 14th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- Jacob blesses his grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh. (48:1-20)
- Jacob's twelve sons gather around his deathbed, and each receives an evaluation and a prediction of his future. (49:1-33)
- Joseph mourns his father's death and has Jacob embalmed. Jacob is buried in Hebron in Machpelah in the land of Canaan. (50:1-14)
- **Joseph's brothers say, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him!" So they sent this message to Joseph, "Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your**



Jacob blessing the children of Joseph - Rembrandt, 1656

**brothers, who treated you so harshly. Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him. (50:15-17)**

- Joseph assures his concerned brothers that he has forgiven them and promises to care for them and their families. (50:18-21)
- Just before he dies, Joseph tells his brothers that God will return them to the Land that God promised to the patriarchs. The Children of Israel promise Joseph that they will take his bones with them when they leave Egypt. (50:22-26)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/va-ychi>))

“

Great is peace, for even the tribal ancestors resorted to a fabrication in order to make peace between Joseph and themselves.

– Genesis Rabbah 100:8

Oseh Shalom עושה שלום  
Nava Tehila

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What does this episode teach us about the Jewish value of Shalom Bayit, or Peace of the Home?
- The translation of *Oseh Shalom* is: May the one who makes peace in the high heavens make peace of us, all Israel, and all who inhabit the earth. Amen. When you sing this song, what are you praying for? What will make your prayer come true?
- Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk teaches that, "Peace without truth is a false peace." Do you agree that there can be no true peace if lying is involved or that peace is worth the price of lying (Genesis Rabbah)?

# CHAZAK CHAZAK V'NITCHAZEIK | חזק חזק ונתחזק

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MORE TORAH

# SH'MOT

Exodus 1:1-6:1



# 5777

January 21st, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- **The new king of Egypt makes slaves of the Hebrews and orders their male children to be drowned in the Nile River. The midwives refuse. (1:1-22)**
- A Levite woman places her son, Moses, in a basket on the Nile, where he is found by the daughter of Pharaoh and raised in Pharaoh's house. (2:1-10)
- Moses flees to Midian after killing an Egyptian. (2:11-15)
- Moses marries the priest of Midian's daughter, Zipporah. They have a son named Gershom. (2:16-22)
- God calls Moses from a burning bush and commissions him to free the Israelites from Egypt. (3:1-4:17)
- Moses and Aaron request permission from

“

We may understand how Hebrew women would muster the courage to disobey the king's orders and refuse to kill Hebrew children. But consider the significance of their deed if Shiphrah and Puah were valiant Egyptian women who rebuffed the great pharaoh. They did not say, “My country, right or wrong...” The case of the Hebrew midwives is proof that dissenting individuals can resist evil and thus start a whole process of liberation.

– Rabbi Pinchas Peli



Pharaoh for the Israelites to celebrate a festival in the wilderness. Pharaoh refuses and makes life even harder for the Israelites. (5:1-23)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/shmot>))

Glory

Common & John Legend

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What is civil disobedience? Can you think of modern examples in which someone stands up to their government or oppressor in search of justice, like Shiprah and Puah in Sh'mot?
- Common raps, "Freedom is like a religion to us." As a Jew, do you agree that freedom is like a religion to us? What role does freedom play in your Judaism?
- Many commentators (Philo, Abravanel, Shadal) understand Shiprah & Puah to be Egyptian women (translating *ha-meyalledot*



The Golden Haggadah, Unknown Artist - c. 1320



*ha-ivriyot* as midwives to the Hebrews  
instead of Hebrew midwives). Do you agree  
with Rabbi Peli's commentary that this  
makes their deed even more honorable?

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MORE TORAH

# VA-EIRA

Exodus 6:2-9:35

# 5777

January 28th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- Despite God's message that they will be redeemed from slavery, the Israelites' spirits remain crushed. God instructs Moses and Aaron to deliver the Israelites from the land of Egypt. (6:2-13)
- The genealogy of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and their descendants is recorded. (6:14-25)
- Moses and Aaron perform a miracle with a snake and relate to Pharaoh God's message to let the Israelites leave Egypt. (7:8-13)
- The first seven plagues occur. God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh rescinds each offer to let the Israelites go. (7:14-9:35)

(Reform Judaism

([http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/va-eira\)\)](http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/va-eira)))



Growing Up  
Macklemore & Ryan Lewis



“

יהוה is not meant to be a mere identifying label. Such was not the main function of names in the ancient Near East. Rather, the name is intended to connote character and nature, the totality of the intricate, interwoven, manifold forces that make up the whole personality of the bearer of the name....therefore, God's reply to Moses (Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh in Exodus 3) expresses the quality of Being.

– Nahum Sarna

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- In the beginning of Va-eira, God uses the name יהוה and tells Moses that God went by אל שדי to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Why does God have multiple names in the Torah? How do names represent us?
- Nahum Sarna teaches that יהוה comes from the root ה-י-ה - to be, and that יהוה represents the totality of God's presence. Why is it important to Judaism to have a fluid understanding of God?
- Philosopher Hugo Bergmann writes that אהיה (Eh-yeh) is an imperfect tense - I will be. It teaches us that God is the yet-to-be-perfect I. How does Growing Up relate to this understanding of God? Where do you find God?

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EXODUS · LEVITICUS



NUMBERS · DEUTERONOMY

B0



# 5777

February 4th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- God sends the plagues of locusts and darkness upon Egypt and forewarns Moses about the final plague, the death of every Egyptian firstborn. Pharaoh still does not let the Israelites leave Egypt. (10:1-11:10)
- God commands Moses and Aaron regarding the Passover festival. (12:1-27)
- **God enacts the final plague, striking down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt except those of the House of Israel. Pharaoh now allows the Israelites to leave. (12:29-42)**
- Speaking to Moses and Aaron, God repeats the commandments about Passover. (12:43-13:16)

“

Our first appearance in world history in the role of God's chosen people.. took place at this season. It is accordingly fitting that we should commemorate this event by performing such acts as would re-enact within us that spiritual achievement, thus perpetuating its impact on us for all time.

– Sefer Ha-hinukh (Unknown Author)

Redemption Song  
Bob Marley

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- This parasha contains the climax of the Exodus narrative – the Israelites leaving Egypt. Why has Judaism designated this narrative as its most important? Why are we commanded to relive this story every Passover?
- Bob Marley sings, "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery | None but ourselves can free our minds!" Does the Passover seder emancipate our minds? What responsibilities come with redemption?
- Judaism instills that actions shape character, not the other way around. What actions and rituals does our community partake in that shape character? What actions during the Passover seder build morality?



Departure of the Israelites by David Roberts – 1829

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MORE TORAH

# B'SHALACH

Exodus 13:17+17:16



# 5777

February 11th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- The Children of Israel escape across the Sea of Reeds from Pharaoh and his army, who drown when God drives back the sea. (13:17-14:31)
- Moses and the Israelites sing a song praising *Adonai*. (15:1-21)
- **In the wilderness, God provides the grumbling Israelites with quails and manna. God instructs the Israelites to gather and prepare on the sixth day food needed for Shabbat. (15:22-16:36)**
- **The people complain about the lack of water. Moses hits a rock with his rod and brings forth water. (17:1-7)**
- Israel defeats Amalek, Israel's eternal enemy. God vows to blot out the memory of Amalek from the world. (17:8-16)

“

“That I may test them” (Ex 16:4)  
– Since bread from Heaven required no preparation they will have leisure time enough for everything and I will then see if they use it “to follow My instructions or not”.

– Or Ha-hayyim



(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/bshalach>))

Parents Just Don't Understand  
DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- *"And the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day's portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not."* How is manna a test of character? Why do we act differently when things are provided for us than when we provide for ourselves?
- Parents Just Don't Understand taps into the disconnect between parents providing for their children and their children's desires. What do you wish your parents knew about being a teen? What do you think your parents might want you to know about raising you?



Manna in the desert by Richard Seewald, 1964



- God just pulled off the greatest miracle in the entire Torah – saving the Israelites from Pharaoh in Egypt – and the Israelites immediately begin complaining. How do you think God felt hearing these complaints? Can you think of parallel scenarios in the modern world?

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# YITRO

Exodus 18:1–20:23

# 5777

February 18th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- Yitro brings his daughter Zipporah and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to his son-in-law Moses. (18:1-12)
- Moses follows Yitro's advice and appoints judges to help him lead the people. (18:13-27)
- The Children of Israel camp in front of Mount Sinai. Upon hearing the covenant, the Israelites respond, "All that God has spoken we will do." (19:1-8)
- After three days of preparation, the Israelites encounter God at Mount Sinai. (19:9-25)
- God gives the Ten Commandments aloud directly to the people. (20:1-14)
- Frightened, the Children of Israel ask Moses to serve as an intermediary between

“

Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai and handed it on to Joshua. Joshua handed it to the elders, and the elders handed it to the prophets. The prophets handed it on to the people of the Great Assembly.

– Pirkei Avot

L'dor Vador  
Josh Nelson Project





God and them. Moses tells the people not to be afraid. (20:15-18)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/yitro>))

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What does it mean to receive Torah? As Josh Nelson sings, how do we protect the chain that Pirkei Avot began to articulate?
- *We affirm that Torah is the foundation of Jewish life. We cherish the truths revealed in Torah, God's ongoing revelation to our people and the record of our people's ongoing relationship with God. - CCAR Statement of Principles, 1999*

Is the Torah the foundation of your Judaism?

- *The Torah was not given to angels. (Berachot 25a) Why do the rabbis teach us this? What does it mean about the stories in the Torah?*



Giving of the law at Sinai by Thomas Zacharias, 1966

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MORE TORAH

# MISHPATIM

Exodus 21:1–24:18





# 5777

February 25th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- Interpersonal laws ranging from the treatment of slaves to the exhibition of kindness to strangers are listed. (21:1-23:9)
- Cultic laws follow, including the commandment to observe the Sabbatical Year, a repetition of the Sabbath injunction, the first mention of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals, rules of sacrificial offerings, and the prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk. (23:10-19)
- The people assent to the covenant. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascend the mountain and see God.

Moses goes on alone and spends forty days  
on the mountain. (24:1-18)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/mishpatim>))

Oppression  
Ben Harper

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Twice in this parasha the Torah teaches not to wrong or oppress a stranger because of our former status as strangers in Egypt. How has this commandment shaped the modern Jewish experience?
- How does Ben Harper's song define oppression? As Jews, how do we fight this oppression?
- *Ger was the term applied to the resident non-Israelite who could no longer count on the protection of his erstwhile tribe or society...The ger was to be given every consideration, and care must be taken that not only their rights but their feelings as*

“

The fact that “you were strangers in the land of Egypt” is certainly no adequate motivation for not oppressing or vexing the stranger. On the contrary, how often do we find that the slave or exile who gains power and freedom, or anyone who harbors the memory of suffering to himself or his forbears, finds compensation for his former sufferings, by giving free rein to his tyrannical instincts, when he has the opportunity to lord it over others?

– Nehama Leibowitz



*well were safeguarded. They must never be shamed... -Rabbi Plaut*

Who are the *erim* in our society? Have we lived up to the Torah's teaching or fallen short? What can we do to pursue this vision of never oppressing the ger?



Nun-Navi by Mark Podwal, 1978



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MORE TORAH

# T'RUMAH

Exodus 25:1-27:19





# 5777

March 4th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- **God asks the Children of Israel to donate gifts (*t'rumah*) for the building of the Tabernacle so that God may "dwell among them." (25:1-9)**
- Instructions for the construction of the Ark, table, and menorah are provided. (25:10-40)
- Detailed directions are given on how to build the Tabernacle. (26:1-27:19)



(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/trumah>))

We Are The World 25  
Artists for Haiti



Ark of the Covenant and Temple Fixtures, 300-400  
CE

“

The in-dwelling of God among the people cannot take place as long as the people are passive and do nothing to help bring the sacred into the world.

”And let them make me a sanctuary—that I may dwell among them.” (Ex 25:8)

My dwelling among them is on the condition that they make the sanctuary. . . . Man must start out on the path towards God . . . in order for God to meet him half-way as his partner in the act of sanctification.

– Rabbi Pinchas Peli

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How do you take an active role in our synagogue? How do your actions bring holiness to our community?
- What ways does We Are The World suggest for bringing holiness into the world?
- What does "the in-dwelling of God" look like in our world? What does being on the path towards God look like?

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MORE TORAH

# TITZAVEH

Exodus 27:20-30:10





# 5777

March 11th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- The children of Israel are commanded to bring pure olive oil for the ner tamid "a constantly burning light," above the sanctuary. (27:20-21)
- Aaron and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, are chosen to serve as priests. (28:1)
- God instructs Moses to make special clothes for the priests. (28:2-43)
- Aaron and his sons are ordained in a seven-day ceremony (29:1-29:46)
- Aaron is commanded to burn incense on an acacia altar every morning and evening. (30:1-10)

“

The Torah and Human combined comprise the Lamp of God on earth. The Torah is the flame issuing from the flash of God that dwells in the heavens. Human, comprising body and soul, is the torch that draws light from it.

– Yedaiah ben Abraham Bedersi

I Will Be Light

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/ttzaveh>))

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How do you, the torch, carry the flame of the Torah into the world?
- Matisyahu sings, You've got one tiny moment in time | For life to shine, to shine | To burn away the darkness.

What can we do to shine light onto the world? How can we be light?

- What does our Ner Tamid over the ark mean to you? What aspects of our community does it inspire?



Beit Alpha Mosaic, Ner Tamid over Ark of the Covenant

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MORE TORAH

# KITISA

Exodus 30:11-34:35



# 5777

March 18th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- Moses takes a census of the Israelites and collects a half-shekel from each person (30:11-16)
- God tells Moses to construct a water basin and to prepare anointing oil and incense for the ordination of the priests. Bezalel and Oholiab, skilled artisans, are assigned to make objects for the priests and the Tabernacle. (30:17-31:11)
- **The Israelites are instructed to keep Shabbat as a sign of their covenant with**



**God. God gives Moses the two tablets of the Pact. (31:12-18)**

- The Israelites ask Aaron to build them a Golden Calf. Moses implores God not to destroy the people and then breaks the two tablets of the Pact on which the Ten Commandments are written when he sees the idol. God punishes the Israelites by means of a plague. (32:1-35)
- Moses goes up the mountain with a blank set of tablets for another 40 days so that God will again inscribe the Ten Commandments. Other laws, including the edict to observe the Pilgrimage Festivals, are also revealed. (34:1-28)
- Moses comes down from the mountain with a radiant face. (34:29-35)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/ki-tisa>))

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How does celebrating Shabbat act as a sign of the covenant with God? What does your Shabbat celebration look like? Does it reflect your commitment to Judaism?

“

The weekday existence does not allow the national genius and the Divine goodness residing within it, with all its spiritual aspirations to justice and righteousness, tranquillity and peace, to be fully realized.

The bustle and confusion of everyday affairs stifles the spiritual majesty of the Divine soul whose luster is prevented from illuminating the predominant material reality.

– Rav Kook

Sabbath Prayer  
Fiddler on the Roof





- In many homes, parents offer their children blessings every shabbat. Sabbath Prayer from Fiddler on the Roof is in the same vein. What blessings or wishes have your parents bestowed upon you? Are they similar or different from the blessings sung in Fiddler?
- What are possible benefits of celebrating Shabbat every week? How can we benefit from a weekly ritual?



Moses breaks the tablets by Marc Chagall, 1931-1939

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GENESIS EXODUS LEVITICUS



NUMBERS DEUTERONOMY MORE TORAH

# VAYAK'HEIL

Exodus 35:1–38:20





# 5777

March 25th, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- Moses teaches the rules of Shabbat. (35:1-3)
- Moses asks the Israelites for a donation of gifts and those who are skilled help build the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle] under the direction of Bezalel and Oholiab. (35:4-38:20)

“

He [Moses] prefaced [the discussion of the details of] the work of the Mishkan with the warning to keep the Sabbath,

(Reform Judaism  
(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/vayakheil>))

denoting that it [i.e., the work  
of the Mishkan] does not  
supersede the Sabbath.

– Rashi on Exodus 35:2

Ki Eshmera Shabbat  
Dan Nichols & Eighteen

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What does Rashi teach us about the importance of Shabbat, if building God's dwelling place does not supersede it?
- Ki Eshmera Shabbat is a classic piyut (or liturgical poem) written by Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra in the 11th century. Its translation says, *"Should I keep the Sabbath, God will watch over me. It is a sign forever between God and me."* Does this notion of Shabbat align with your own? Is Dan Nichol's musical setting of this piyut calming? Does it reflect the peacefulness of Shabbat?





- Cultural Zionist Ahad Ha'am taught, "More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people." How does this apply to today? How does Shabbat maintain the Jewish people?

Dura Europos Synagogue: Moses reading the Torah, 244 CE

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GENESIS

EXODUS

LEVITICUS



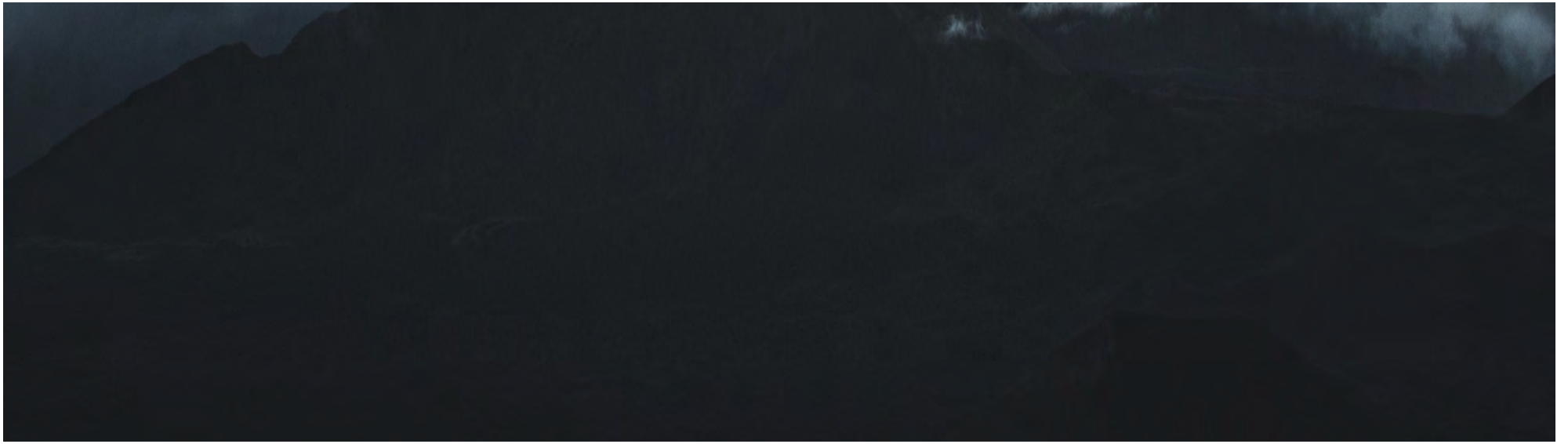
NUMBERS

DEUTERONOMY

MORE TORAH

# P'KUDEI

Exodus 38:21-40:38



# 5777

April 1st, 2017

## PARSHA RECAP

- A statistical summary of the materials used for the Tabernacle and an account of producing the priestly vestments are recorded. Moses blesses the Israelites for the work they did. (38:21-39:42)

- Upon God's instruction, Moses sets up the *Mishkan* and the priests are anointed and consecrated. (40:1-33)
- A description is given of a cloud that covers the *Mishkan* by day and a fire that burns by night, indicating God's Presence therein. (40:33-38)

(Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/pkudei>))

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- The words of Entering the Cloud come from Psalm 99: "God spoke to them in a pillar of cloud; they obeyed God's decrees, the law that God gave them." How does the image of God as a cloud compare to pop culture images of God? Is it more or less relatable?
- In contrast to other religions in the Ancient Near East, the Torah tells that human action – mainly the building of the sacred sanctuary – brought the cloud God into their midst. How do we bring God into our midst?

“

The entire Sanctuary was filled with Israel's love and the longing for God, because the Sanctuary and its utensils had come from the people's donations and their strong desire to express their love of God. As a result, the Shekhinah rested upon them, filling every single possible place. That is what is meant by “the glory of Adonai filled the Sanctuary.” (Ex 40:34)

– R. Yaakov Aryeh of Radzimin

Entering the Cloud  
Nava Tehila





- Rav Yaakov Aryeh teaches that our presence, love and dedication result in God's presence. When was the last time in our community that you experienced that feeling?



Moses and Aaron by Morris Hirshfield

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GENESIS

EXODUS

LEVITICUS



NUMBERS

DEUTERONOMY

MORE TORAH

# SONG SUGGESTION?

Fill out the form below and we will add your  
teaching to our site!



# SONG SUGGESTION?

We're always looking to collaborate!

Fill out the form below and tell us your awesome idea. We'll post it on our site and give you credit!

Name

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Torah Portion \*

Song Title & Artist \*

Example: What a Wonderful World by Louis Armstrong



How does this song enhance your understanding of the Torah portion? \*

Do you have a Jewish text that compliments the song?

SUBMIT

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## Website Content

### B'reishit

- Music: What a Wonderful World by Louis Armstrong
- Commentary: According to the normal order of the world, a King does not build a palace based on his own ideas. Instead, he consults an architect. The architect does not build based on his own ideas, but instead draws blueprints and drafts to calculate where to place rooms and doors. So too, when God made the world he looked into the Torah [the blueprint] and only then created the world. (Midrash Rabbah 1:1)
- Food for Thought:
  - How do the first two chapters of B'reishit and the song What a Wonderful World relate to each other?
  - Thousands of years ago, our ancestors stared at the skies and saw the marvels of the earth and wondered how it all started. B'reishit was the definitive answer. For us, B'reishit is not a scientific account of creation, yet still holds great wisdom for modernity. What can B'reishit teach us about how we view the natural world? How does What a Wonderful World reflect the awe and wonder of nature?
  - What are the rabbis teaching us about the Torah in Midrash Rabbah? What is Louis Armstrong teaching us in What a Wonderful World?
- Art: The Creation of Man - Marc Chagall, 1958

### Noach

- Music: People are People - Depeche Mode
- Commentary: The Netziv writes in his commentary to the Tower of Babel, uniformity of thought is not a sign of freedom but its opposite. (Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks)
- Food for Thought:
  - The Tower of Babel story explains the diversity of the world. Why did God dislike the idea of one people with one language and one religion?
  - Depeche Mode sings: "So we're different colours, And we're different creeds." Do you think the world is a better place for cultural and religious diversity?
  - Commentator Abravanel, explained that before the Tower of Babel, the people treated each other with kindness and generosity. But when they began building the Tower, the people began arguing and seeking individual credit for all the work. It caused jealousy between the people and even led to hatred of one another. Depeche Mode sings: "I can't understand, What makes a man, Hate another man." What makes a person hate another person?
  - Why does the Netziv teach that freedom requires diversity of thought? Do your friends usually agree with you or do they offer different perspectives?
- Art: Babel Revisted - Julee Holcombe, 2004

### Lech L'cha

- Music: Lamidbar - Yaron Herman Trio
- Commentary: [Lech l'cha] literally means go to you, for your benefit and for your good, and there I will make you into a great nation...Moreover, I will make your character known in the world. -Rashi
- Food for Thought:

- How does Yaron Herman Trio's song Lamidbar (To the desert) make you feel? Does it make you feel safe and secure or like you are stepping into the unknown?
- Does Rashi's commentary make sense to you? If you were Abram, how would you feel leaving your homeland and parents' house for good? Would God's promise sweeten the deal?
- At the end of Parshat Noah, Abram's father Terah takes the family and 'sets out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan' (Gen.11: 31). However, they never make it to Canaan and stop in Haran where Terah died.  
Do you think Abram's journey with his father helped prepare him for the journey God asked him to take?
- Art: Anthony Dubovsky - Abraham, 1992

#### Vayeira

- Music: Clouds by Zach Sobiech
- Commentary: Why is the story of Abraham's circumcision [Genesis 17: 23-27] followed by God's visitation? God came to visit while Abraham was recuperating, to make clear the importance of the mitzvah of bikkur cholim [visiting the sick]. — Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 86b
- Food for Thought:
  - Why is Bikkur Holim so important?
  - Zach Sobiech had terminal cancer and died at the age of 18 in 2013. In his song, he sings, "And I needed a way to climb and grab a hold of the edge | You were sitting there holding a rope." What metaphor does Zach use to describe the feeling of being sick? How does he describe the act of Bikkur Holim from the perspective of the sick person?
  - How do those who visit the sick become angels of God?
- Art: Abraham and Three Angels - Marc Chagall, 1966

#### Chayei Sarah

- Music: Love is a Verb by John Mayer
- Commentary: Love is rooted in giving. We love that which we give to, not necessarily those who give to us. — Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler
- Food for Thought:
  - Jewish tradition teaches that Isaac and Rebekah's relationship started with infatuation and grew into a deep love. What is the difference between infatuation and love?
  - John Mayer sings, "Love is a verb. It ain't a thing, It's not something you own, It's not something you scream." How does this relate to Rabbi Dessler's teaching?
  - In their first interaction, Rebekah's kindness stands out to the servant. When looking for friends or partners, what characteristics do you seek? Are these characteristics acted out or material?
- Art: Rebekah at the Well - Michael J. Das, 1967

#### Tol'dot

- Music: Count Your Blessings by Nas & Damian Marley



- Commentary: We may note the contrast between the two [blessings]. On the one hand Esau was promised abundance, fatness, power and dominion — material blessing. But the Abrahamic mission, the blessing of seed and the promise of the land were not bequeathed to Esau, since such a spiritual blessing cannot be conferred by succession but only granted to the one who is deserving of it. — Nechama Leibowits
- Food for Thought:
  - Nehama Leibowitz teaches that Jacob was deserving of the blessing he received, despite deceiving his father to receive it. Do you think Jacob deserved his blessing? What if it was God's plan?
  - What is the difference between the material blessing of Esau and the spiritual blessing of Isaac?
  - Damian Marley sings, "I've got joy in abundance, I've got life full of substance." Is this a material or spiritual blessings? What would a Jewish life full of substance look like?
- Art: Isaac Blessing Jacob - Gioachino Assereto, 1640s

#### Vayeitzei

- Music: Climbing Up Iknimaya - The Path to Heaven by James Horner (Avatar Soundtrack)
- Commentary: The ladder is a projection of what is in the heart, and the angels are the feelings, the emotions, that are in the heart, that in some cases raise us up toward our aspirations and in some cases drag us down in the other direction. Jacob's dream is a dream of the vicissitudes of the heart. — David Curzon
- Food for Thought:
  - If we imagine the ladder as a projection of our heart, with the angels representing our emotions, what lifts you up toward your aspirations? What pulls you down?
  - How does Climbing up Iknimaya relate to this spiritual movement? How does the music make you feel at the beginning, middle, and end of the song?
  - Human beings are created b'tzelem elohim - in the image of God. With that in mind, where do our emotions come from? Does God have emotions?
- Art: Jacob's Ladder - Rembrandt, 1655

#### Vayishlach

- Music: If God's a Giraffe by Jason Mesches
- Commentary: It is frustrating not knowing what God is, but rather only catching glimpses of the Divine in who we are and in what God does. We struggle with answers, to be sure. But in the process of struggling, we teach and we learn. It is as if when God removed humanity from the Garden of Eden, the easy answers were exiled with Adam and Eve. The nature of the world is that there are many answers: to find them, we must search with an open heart and mind, be attentive to the world and to each other, and speak and listen in equal measure. - Rabbi Cy Stanway
- Food for Thought:
  - The rabbis offer many interpretations of who Jacob is wrestling with: the guardian angel of Esau (B'reishit Rabbah 77:3), an angel in the guise of a shepherd

(Tanchuma to Genesis 32:25), with himself against the face of evil (Bereshis/Genesis: A New Translation). In your interpretation, who is Jacob wrestling with?

- The name Yisrael means "struggles with God." To be a part of the People of Israel means to wrestle with our understanding of God. How have you struggled with your belief or disbelief in God?
- Jason Mesches sings, "I don't know who or what God is." Rabbi Stanway says that can be frustrating. But Am Yisrael has wrestled with God for as long as it has existed. There are many modern understandings of God like finding God in relationships, in nature, or in our values. How do you understand God?
- Art: Jacob and the Angel - Benn (Bencjon Rabinowicz), 1954

#### Vayeishev

- Music: Jacob & Sons // Joseph's Coat from Joseph & The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat
- Commentary: Jacob refused him nothing. He owned the most beautiful clothes, for he liked to be regarded as graceful and elegant. He craved attention. He knew he was the favorite and often boasted of it. Moreover, he was given to whims and frequently was impertinent. Arrogant, vain, insensitive to other people's feelings, he said freely whatever was on his mind. We know the consequences: he was hated, mistreated, and finally sold by his brothers, who in truth were ready to kill him. — Elie Wiesel
- Food for Thought:
  - Why do you think Joseph's brothers hate him?
  - In Bereshit Rabbah 84:7, the rabbis teach that Joseph, "behaved like a boy, penciling his eyes, curling his hair, and lifting his heel." A) What are your initial reactions to this? B) What negative characteristics of Joseph are the rabbis attacking?
  - What do you think of Elie Wiesel's assessment of Jacob and Joseph? How does it relate to the song?
- Art: Sale of Joseph - Karoly Ferenczy, 1900

#### Miketz

- Music: Humiliation from The Hunchback of Notre Dame
- Commentary: Do not say, "Since I have been humiliated, let my neighbor be humiliated." Know that, when you humiliate another person, you are humiliating the image of God. — Genesis Rabbah 24:7
- Food for Thought:
  - Why does Joseph orchestrate a scenario to humiliate his brothers? Think back to last week's parasha.
  - Which Jewish concept, and popular Dan Nichols song, are the rabbis referring to in Genesis Rabbah? How does this concept factor into your belief of God?
  - How does the song Humiliation make you feel? Have you ever been humiliated? What does it feel like?
  - Why does the Torah illuminate the imperfections of so many main characters? What would the Torah be like if every character had no flaws and always acted perfect?
- Art: Joseph Et Freres In Ægypto - Salvador Dalí, 1967

#### Vayigash

- Music: Wake Up Everybody by John Legend & The Roots
- Commentary: There were many people present in Pharaoh's house and other Egyptians pleading with Joseph to pardon Benjamin. Their compassion and been deeply stirred by Judah's plea, and Joseph could not overcome them all. — Nachmanides on Genesis 45:1
- Food for Thought:
  - Nahmanides commentary argues that the power of the people convinced Joseph, not just Judah's voice alone. What role does a leader's voice play in societal change? What role do the people play?
  - Judah makes a plea for justice. What pleas are you making to fix the world? Who should receive our pleas?
  - Wake Up Everybody is about realizing the plight of our world and joining together to fix it - the essence of Tikkun Olam. How do you repair our world? How do you seek justice?
- Art: Joseph reveals himself, 1270

#### Va-y'chi

- Music: Oseh Shalom by Nava Tehila
- Commentary: Great is peace, for even the tribal ancestors resorted to a fabrication in order to make peace between Joseph and themselves. — Genesis Rabbah 100:8
- Food for Thought:
  - What does this episode teach us about the Jewish value of Shalom Bayit, or Peace of the Home?
  - The translation of Oseh Shalom is: May the one who makes peace in the high heavens make peace of us, all Israel, and all who inhabit the earth. Amen. When you sing this song, what are you praying for? What will make your prayer come true?
  - Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk teaches that, "Peace without truth is a false peace." Do you agree that there can be no true peace if lying is involved or that peace is worth the price of lying (Genesis Rabbah)?
- Art: Jacob blessing the children of Joseph - Rembrandt, 1656

#### Sh'mot

- Music: Glory by Common & John Legend
- Commentary: We may understand how Hebrew women would muster the courage to disobey the king's orders and refuse to kill Hebrew children. But consider the significance of their deed if Shiprah and Puah were valiant Egyptian women who rebuffed the great pharaoh. They did not say, "My country, right or wrong..." The case of the Hebrew midwives is proof that dissenting individuals can resist evil and thus start a whole process of liberation. — Rabbi Pinchas Peli
- Food for Thought:
  - What is civil disobedience? Can you think of modern examples in which someone stands up to their government or oppressor in search of justice, like Shiprah and Puah in Sh'mot?
  - Common raps, "Freedom is like a religion to us." As a Jew, do you agree that freedom is like a religion to us? What role does freedom play in your Judaism?
  - Many commentators (Philo, Abravanel, Shadal) understand Shiprah & Puah to be Egyptian women (translating ha-meyalledot ha-ivriyot as midwives to the Hebrews)



instead of Hebrew midwives). Do you agree with Rabbi Peli's commentary that this makes their deed even more honorable?

- Art: The Golden Haggadah, Unknown Artist - c. 1320

#### Va-eira

- Music: Growing Up by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis
- Commentary: יהוה is not meant to be a mere identifying label. Such was not the main function of names in the ancient Near East. Rather, the name is intended to connote character and nature, the totality of the intricate, interwoven, manifold forces that make up the whole personality of the bearer of the name....therefore, God's reply to Moses (Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh in Exodus 3) expresses the quality of Being.— Nahum Sarna
- Food for Thought:
  - In the beginning of Va-eira, God uses the name יהוה and tells Moses that God went by אל שדי to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Why does God have multiple names in the Torah? How do names represent us?
  - Nahum Sarna teaches that יהוה comes from the root ה-י-ה - to be, and that יהוה represents the totality of God's presence. Why is it important to Judaism to have a fluid understanding of God?
  - Philosopher Hugo Bergmann writes that אהיה (Eh-yeh) is an imperfect tense - I will be. It teaches us that God is the yet-to-be-perfect I. How does Growing Up relate to this understanding of God? Where do you find God?
- Art: Second Meeting with Pharaoh - The Brick Testament

#### Bo

- Music: Redemption Song by Bob Marley
- Commentary: Our first appearance in world history in the role of God's chosen people as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation took place at this season. It is accordingly fitting that we should commemorate this event by performing such acts as would re-enact within us that spiritual achievement, thus perpetuating its impact on us for all time. — Sefer Hahinukh (Unknown Author)
- Food for Thought:
  - This parasha contains the climax of the Exodus narrative - the Israelites leaving Egypt. Why has Judaism designated this narrative as its most important? Why are we commanded to relive this story every Passover?
  - Bob Marley sings, "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery | None but ourselves can free our minds!" Does the Passover seder emancipate our minds? What responsibilities come with redemption?
  - Judaism instills that actions shape character, not the other way around. What actions and rituals does our community partake in that shape character? What actions during the Passover seder build morality?
- Art: Departure of the Israelites by David Roberts - 1829

#### B'shalach

- Music: Parents Just Don't Understand by DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince

- Commentary: “That I may test them” (Ex 16:4) - Since bread from Heaven required no preparation they will have leisure time enough for everything and I will then see if they use it “to follow My instructions or not”. — Or Ha-hayyim
- Food for Thought:
  - "And the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not." How is manna a test of character? Why do we act differently when things are provided for us than when we provide for ourselves?
  - Parents Just Don't Understand taps into the disconnect between parents providing for their children and their children’s desires. What do you wish your parents knew about being a teen? What do you think your parents might want you to know about raising you?
  - God just pulled off the greatest miracle in the entire Torah - saving the Israelites from Pharaoh in Egypt - and the Israelites immediately begin complaining. How do you think God felt hearing these complaints? Can you think of parallel scenarios in the modern world?
- Art: Manna in the desert by Richard Seewald, 1964

#### Yitro

- Music: L’dor Vador by Josh Nelson
- Commentary: Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai and handed it on to Joshua. Joshua handed it to the elders, and the elders handed it to the prophets. The prophets handed it on to the people of the Great Assembly. - Pirkei Avot 1:1
- Food for Thought:
  - What does it mean to receive Torah? As Josh Nelson sings, how to we protect the chain that Pirkei Avot began to articulate?
  - We affirm that Torah is the foundation of Jewish life. We cherish the truths revealed in Torah, God's ongoing revelation to our people and the record of our people's ongoing relationship with God. - CCAR Statement of Principles, 1999
- Is the Torah the foundation of your Judaism?
- The Torah was not give to angels. (Berachot 25a) Why do the rabbis teach us this? What does it mean about the stories in the Torah?
- Art: Giving of the law at Sinai by Thomas Zacharias, 1966

#### Mishpatim

- Music: Oppression by Ben Harper
- Commentary: The fact that “you were strangers in the land of Egypt” is certainly no adequate motivation for not oppressing or vexing the stranger. On the contrary, how often do we find that the slave or exile who gains power and freedom, or anyone who harbors the memory of suffering to himself or his forbears, finds compensation for his former sufferings, by giving free rein to his tyrannical instincts, when he has the opportunity to lord it over others? — Nehama Leibowitz
- Food for Thought:

- Twice in this parasha the Torah teaches not to wrong or oppress a stranger because of our former status as strangers in Egypt. How has this commandment shaped the modern Jewish experience?
- How does Ben Harper's song define oppression? As Jews, how do we fight this oppression?
- Ger was the term applied to the resident non-Israelite who could no longer count on the protection of his erstwhile tribe or society...The ger was to be given every consideration, and care must be taken that not only their rights but their feelings as well were safeguarded. They must never be shamed... -Rabbi Plaut

Who are the gerim in our society? Have we lived up to the Torah's teaching or fallen short? What can we do to pursue this vision of never oppressing the ger?

- Art: Nun-Navi by Mark Podwal, 1978

#### T'rumah

- Music: We Are the World 25 - Artists for Haiti
- Commentary: The in-dwelling of God among the people cannot take place as long as the people are passive and do nothing to help bring the sacred into the world. "And let them make me a sanctuary—that I may dwell among them." (Ex 25:8)  
My dwelling among them is on the condition that they make the sanctuary. . . . Man must start out on the path towards God . . . in order for God to meet him half-way as his partner in the act of sanctification. — Rabbi Pinchas Peli
- Food for Thought:
  - How do you take an active role in our synagogue? How do you actions bring holiness to our community?
  - What ways does We Are The World suggest for bringing holiness into the world?
  - What does "the in-dwelling of God" look like in our world? What does being on the path towards God look like?
- Art: Ark of the Covenant and Temple Fixtures, 300-400 CE

#### T'tzaveh

- Music: I Will Be Light by Matisyahu
- Commentary: The Torah and Human combined comprise the Lamp of God on earth. The Torah is the flame issuing from the flash of God that dwells in the heavens. Human, comprising body and soul, is the torch that draws light from it. — Yedaiah ben Abraham Bedersi
- Food for Thought:
  - How do you, the torch, carry the flame of the Torah into the world?
  - Matisyahu sings, You've got one tiny moment in time | For life to shine, to shine | To burn away the darkness.

What can we do to shine light onto the world? How can we be light?

  - What does our Ner Tamid over the ark mean to you? What aspects of our community does it inspire?
- Art: Beit Alpha Mosaic, Ner Tamid over Ark of the Covenant



## Ki Tisa

- Music: Sabbath Prayer from Fiddler on the Roof
- Commentary: The weekday existence does not allow the national genius and the Divine goodness residing within it, with all its spiritual aspirations to justice and righteousness, tranquillity and peace, to be fully realized. The bustle and confusion of everyday affairs stifles the spiritual majesty of the Divine soul whose luster is prevented from illuminating the predominant material reality.— Rav Kook
- Food for Thought:
  - How does celebrating Shabbat act as a sign of the covenant with God? What does your Shabbat celebration look like? Does it reflect your commitment to Judaism?
  - In many homes, parents offer their children blessings every shabbat. Sabbath Prayer from Fiddler on the Roof is in the same vein. What blessings or wishes have your parents bestowed upon you? Are they similar or different from the blessings sung in Fiddler?
  - What are possible benefits of celebrating Shabbat every week? How can we benefit from a weekly ritual?
- Art: Moses breaks the tablets by Marc Chagall, 1931-1939

## Vayak'heil

- Music: Ki Eshmera Shabbat by Dan Nichols & Eighteen
- Commentary: He [Moses] prefaced [the discussion of the details of] the work of the Mishkan with the warning to keep the Sabbath, denoting that it [i.e., the work of the Mishkan] does not supersede the Sabbath. — Rashi on Exodus 35:2
- Food for Thought:
  - What does Rashi teach us about the importance of Shabbat, if building God's dwelling place does not supersede it?
  - Ki Eshmera Shabbat is a classic piyut (or liturgical poem) written by Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra in the 11th century. Its translation says, "Should I keep the Sabbath, God will watch over me. It is a sign forever between God and me." Does this notion of Shabbat align with your own? Is Dan Nichol's musical setting of this piyut calming? Does it reflect the peacefulness of Shabbat?
  - Cultural Zionist Ahad Ha'am taught, "More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people." How does this apply to today? How does Shabbat maintain the Jewish people?
- Art: Dura Europos Synagogue: Moses reading the Torah, 244 CE

## P'kudei

- Music: Entering the Cloud by Nava Tehila
- Commentary: The entire Sanctuary was filled with Israel's love and the longing for God, because the Sanctuary and its utensils had come from the people's donations and their strong desire to express their love of God. As a result, the Shekhinah rested upon them, filling every single possible place. That is what is meant by "the glory of Adonai filled the Sanctuary." (Ex 40:34) — R. Yaakov Aryeh of Radzimin
- Food for Thought:
  - The words of Entering the Cloud come from Psalm 99: "God spoke to them in a pillar of cloud; they obeyed God's decrees, the law that God gave them." How does

the image of God as a cloud compare to pop cultures images of God? Is it more or less relatable?

- In contrast to other religions in the Ancient Near East, the Torah tells that human action - mainly the building of the sacred sanctuary - brought the cloud God into their midst. How do we bring God into our midst?
- Rav Yaakov Aryeh teaches that our presence, love and dedication result in God's presence. When was the last time in our community that you experienced that feeling?
- Art: Moses and Aaron by Morris Hirshfield

### **Sources**

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