



By the grace of G-d

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INSTITUTE**

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No One Forgotten.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents . . . . .	1	Kiddush . . . . .	57
Dedication to Rebbe . . . . .	2	Special meals . . . . .	58
Preface . . . . .	4	Special dress . . . . .	59
Introduction . . . . .	5	Havdalah . . . . .	60
G-d . . . . .	5	Melave Malka . . . . .	61
Man . . . . .	7	Land of Israel . . . . .	62
Torah . . . . .	8	Moshiach . . . . .	64
Mitzvos . . . . .	13	The Next Step . . . . .	65
Reward and Punishment . . . . .	14	13 Principles of Faith . . . . .	66
After Life . . . . .	15	Holidays . . . . .	68
Blessings . . . . .	17	Elul . . . . .	69
Tzitzith . . . . .	24	Rosh Hashanah . . . . .	71
Tefillin . . . . .	25	Ten Days of Repentance . . . . .	73
Prayer . . . . .	28	Yom Kippur . . . . .	75
Selection of Prayers . . . . .	31	Succos . . . . .	78
Shemoneh Esrai . . . . .	36	Hoshana Rabbah . . . . .	80
The Daily Services . . . . .	39	Shemini Atzeres . . . . .	81
Insight and Outlook . . . . .	40	Simchas Torah . . . . .	82
Talmud Torah . . . . .	43	Chanukah . . . . .	83
Kashrus . . . . .	44	Chamishah Oser B'Shvat . . . . .	86
Acts of Kindness . . . . .	48	Purim . . . . .	87
Tzedakah . . . . .	49	Pesach . . . . .	90
Ahavas Yisroel . . . . .	50	Pesach Sheni . . . . .	99
Mezuzah . . . . .	51	Lag B'Omer . . . . .	99
Teshuva . . . . .	53	Shavuos . . . . .	101
Shabbos . . . . .	54	Aleph Institute Programs . . . . .	104
Lighting Shabbos Candles . . . . .	55		
Kabbalas Shabbos . . . . .	57		

# DEDICATION

## THE REBBE

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory (1902-1994), the seventh leader in the Chabad-Lubavitch dynasty, is considered to have been the most phenomenal Jewish personality of modern times. To hundreds of thousands of followers and millions of sympathizers and admirers around the world, he was—and still is, despite his passing—"the Rebbe," undoubtedly, the one individual, more than any other singularly responsible for stirring the conscience and spiritual awakening of world Jewry.

The Rebbe was born in 1902, on the 11th day of Nissan, in Nikolaev, Russia, to the renowned kabbalist, talmudic scholar and leader, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson. Rebbetzin Chana (1880-1964) was known for her erudition, kindness and extraordinary accessibility. Her courage and ingenuity became legend when during her husband's exile by the Soviets to a remote village in Asian Russia she labored to make inks from herbs she gathered in the fields — so that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak could continue writing his commentary on kabbalah and other Torah subjects. The Rebbe was named after his great-grandfather, the third Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, with whom he later shared many characteristics.

To Save a Life: There is a story told about the Rebbe's early life that seems to be almost symbolic of everything that was to follow. When he was nine years old, the young Menachem Mendel courageously dove into the Black Sea and saved the life of a little boy who had fallen from the deck of a moored ship. That sense of "other lives in danger" seems to have dominated his consciousness of Jews drowning in assimilation, ignorance or alienation, and no one hearing their cries for help—whether on campus, in isolated communities, or under repressive regimes. From early childhood he displayed a prodigious mental acuity. By the time he reached his Bar Mitzvah, the Rebbe was considered an illuy, a Torah prodigy. He spent his teen years immersed in the study of Torah.

Marriage in Warsaw: In 1929, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson married the sixth Rebbe's daughter, Chaya Mushka Shneerson, in Warsaw. Chaya Mushka, born in 1901, was chosen by her father to accompany him in his forced exile, because of his work of spreading Judaism in communist Russia, to Kostroma in 1927. For sixty years she was Rabbi Schneerson's life partner; she

passed away on 22 Shevat in 1988. Rabbi Schneerson later studied in the University of Berlin and then at the Sorbonne in Paris. It may have been in these years that his formidable knowledge of mathematics and the sciences began to blossom.

Arrival in the U.S.A.: On Monday, Sivan 28, 5701 (June 23, 1941) the Rebbe and the Rebbetzin arrived in the United States, having been miraculously rescued, by the grace of Almighty G-d, from the European holocaust. The Rebbe's arrival marked the launching of sweeping new efforts in bolstering and disseminating Torah and Judaism in general, and Chassidic teachings in particular, through the establishment of three central Lubavitch organizations under the Rebbe's leadership: Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch ("Central Organization For Jewish Education"), Kehot Publication Society, and Machne Israel, a social services agency. Shortly after his arrival, per his father-in-law's urging, the Rebbe began publishing his notations to various Chassidic and kabbalistic treatises, as well as a wide range of responses on Torah subjects. With publication of these works, his genius was soon recognized by scholars throughout the world.

Leadership: After the passing of his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, in 1950, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson reluctantly ascended to the leadership of the Lubavitch movement, whose headquarters are at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, New York. Soon Lubavitch institutions and activities took on new dimensions. The outreaching philosophy of Chabad-Lubavitch was translated into ever greater action, as Lubavitch centers and Chabad Houses were opened in dozens of cities and university campuses around the world.

Dear Reader,

It is my pleasure and privilege to present you with an updated version of the Aleph Institute handbook, "Judaism: Facts and Fundamentals". Hopefully, this handbook will be able to give you a somewhat better understanding of Judaism.

Please see the back pages for a list of programs and services the Aleph Institute provides. If there is any area that is not listed and where we can be of help, do not hesitate to contact us. This applies for those incarcerated, the families of those incarcerated and those in the re-entry programs.

As you will find, this booklet is extremely brief, providing a synopsis of the "facts and fundamentals" of Judaism. We have many courses available where one can study in greater detail, and we encourage everyone to partake in these courses. The costs are nominal. In addition, we make available to men's and women's institutions both audio and video media. Please write and we will send you copies.

Please note that we update our website constantly. Although most inmates do not have access to the Internet, families and chaplains do. Please encourage them to browse regularly. Our website address is [www.alephne.org](http://www.alephne.org).

We publish a weekly one-page newsletter. There is also a longer newsletter available. Please ask the chaplain at your institution to e-mail us and we will add them to the e-mail list.

A special mention of gratitude goes to the board of directors and the volunteers at Aleph, may G-d Almighty bless you for your kindness. To our dedicated staff and colleagues who remain focused in their work, and who recognize that we are working with human beings—gems—together may we be successful with rebuilding the lives of those with whom we work.

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5th Teves, 5777

How would you define Judaism?

Anthropologists might claim that Judaism is a culture. Theologians would claim that it is a religion. Sociologists might venture that Jews, coming in as many shades and colors as they do, constitute a distinct culture.

True, Judaism has cultural and religious elements. It also has genetic components. For example, all members of the priestly tribe dating back to Aaron have similar genetic markers. Yet Judaism is much more.

In essence, Judaism is a way of life. It prescribes and proscribes the actions of man from the day of his birth to the time of his passing, and beyond. Judaism is also a process; one that helps man progress from being centered on self to being centered on G-d.

Finally, Judaism represents a way of looking at the world; a view of reality that sees the hand of heaven behind the seemingly random events of history.

Yet, what does it mean to be a Jew? What makes Judaism different from other religions? How do we know that the Torah is "true"?

These are just some of the questions we hope to cover in "Judaism, Facts and Fundamentals". We will look at the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of being Jewish. We will address some of the myths and mistaken beliefs people have about Judaism. And we will show you how to strengthen your relationship with your Creator through understanding as well as belief.

Yet The Aleph Handbook is only an overview, which means that it will not cover a lot of situations that you may face. Whenever these occur, you should contact a rabbi who truly knows Jewish law and tradition and who understands the constraints that you face, and who can recommend the path that's right for you.

The core of Judaism, and of all existence, is G-d.

Maimonides (1135-1204), the great Jewish philosopher, physician, and scholar, opens his Mishneh Torah by saying, "The foundation of foundations, and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them, came into existence only from the truth of His Being." This statement about the existence of G-d dictates several things.

First: There is only one prime cause and force in the universe. G-d existed

*"In essence,  
Judaism is  
a way of life."*

before creation and will continue to exist forever. He is both eternal and unchanging. Anything and everything—including time and space, the stars, the forces of nature, good and evil, mankind, and all of existence—derives from, and is totally united with G-d.

***Nothing exists outside of G-d.***

Second: G-d has no physical form, yet is perfect in every manner of being. Maimonides states, "G-d is one. He is not two, or more than two, but one. The oneness of any of the individual things that exist in the universe is unlike His unity. In other words, G-d's unity is both unique and indivisible. This also means that G-d has no shape, form, or matter. G-d is above and beyond anything that we can conceive. Again, we return to Maimonides, "He is the Knower. He is the Subject of Knowledge, and He is the Knowledge itself. All is one."

Third: G-d is the vitalizing Force of existence. Some philosophies believe that G-d set up the world and monitors it from "afar," allowing the cosmos to run on its own. This is similar to a watchmaker who installs a battery and lets the watch run, interceding only when "forced".

Judaism rejects this concept. Although G-d's presence is hidden from our mortal eyes, G-d continually sustains creation. If G-d withdrew His sustaining force even for the slightest second, everything would cease to exist.

Not only does G-d continually sustain creation, G-d actively guides all that occurs through Hashgocha Protis, "Divine Providence." The Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) stated that everything contributes to fulfilling the Divine Plan. Even the leaves swaying in the wind express Divine Providence and divine intent. As creations, we will never know the Divine Intent behind a particular act; however, the Torah does teach us the Divine Intent behind creation at large.

What is the Divine intent according to the Torah?

After describing the first six days of creation, the Torah states (Beraishis 2:3), "And G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it; because He rested from all His work that G-d created to do." The last two words imply that something remains "to do." What remains "to do" is man's duty to perfect himself and the world around him. In effect, man's job is preparing the world to be a proper dwelling place for G-d.

To help us accomplish that goal, G-d "blessed" each of us with a unique set of talents and capabilities that we can use: a) to perfect our own soul and b) to elevate "our portion of the world."

All this sounds very nice and noble, yet man is complex and faces many drives. How can the spiritual aspect of man deal with the very physical world in which we live?

It's a question that theologians, philosophers, scientists, and psychologists have been trying to address for centuries. About 70 years ago, Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl came up with an explanation, and perhaps, the answer.

Frankl believed that in previous generations, man's responsibilities to himself, his family, and his community gave meaning to his life. Recently, however, social/political systems (and to a certain extent, technology) have addressed most of our immediate needs, leaving us feeling empty and forcing us to search for meaning.

Frankl theorized that the inability to find acceptable meaning is at the root of addiction, aggression and/or depression. It's a phenomenal insight into man's psyche.

Theoretically, man should be satisfied after his basic needs are met; however, it's obvious that, in general, man wants or needs something more—and that is, to fulfill his or her role in perfecting creation. How do we know this?

When the Bible describes the creation of animals, it uses the Hebrew word vayeetzer, "formed. This word contains the letter yud. When the Bible describes the creation of man, vayeetzer is spelled with two yuds. This teaches us that man is essentially different from animals. Both man and animals have a vital soul with emotional and intellectual faculties. (In an animal, the emotion dominates. When man behaves properly, however, his intellect controls and guides the emotions.) Besides the vital soul, man has an "intellectualizing" soul. It is the soul symbolized by the extra yud in vayeetzer. Properly channeled, it enables man to transcend himself. For example, it is what leads man to art, music, philosophy, and religion. It is that which drives man to seek meaning.

Jews have a third soul, as well. It is called a Nefesh Elohis, a G-dly soul. According to Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), the Nefesh Elohis is truly a part of G-d Above. Like a flame that soars upward, the G-dly soul yearns to merge with its Creator. However, it cannot without losing its identity. So, in His kindness, G-d gave us the Torah. It expresses Divine will and wisdom and enables the soul to "connect" to G-d without becoming nullified. The Torah helps us satisfy our inner drive for meaning in our life, while providing the tools we need to elevate the world around us.

The word "Torah" is related to the Hebrew word horaah, which means "instruction."

The Torah is the guidepost for our life. The Torah consists of five "books.

1. Beraishis (Genesis) begins with creation and describes the lives of the patriarchs, Avrohom (Abraham), Yitzchok (Isaac), and Yaakov (Jacob) and the matriaches, Sarah, Rivkah (Rebecah), Rochel (Rachel) and Leah.
2. Shmos (Exodus) describes the "birth" of the Jewish people through their sojourn in, and liberation from, Egypt. It also contains the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle).
3. Vayikra (Leviticus) describes the life of the Jewish people in the desert and the service of the tribe of Levi in the Mishkan.
4. Bamidbar (Numbers) continues describing the journeys of the Jewish people in the desert.
5. Devorim (Deuteronomy) restates the laws given by Moshe (Moses). It ends with the death of Moshe at the border of the land of Israel.

The Five Books of Moshe is part of what is called the Written Law. However, when Moshe received the Torah on Mount Sinai, he received the Oral Law, too. It is a body of knowledge that is required to explain the Torah. For example, the Torah contains the commandment to wear phylacteries, tefillin. But it does not tell us what tefillin should look like, how to make them, or how they should be worn. The Oral Law supplies this information.

At first, the Oral Law was passed down from teacher to disciple. When it was feared that the tradition may be lost, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi committed it to writ-

### The Ten Commandments

- |                                                                                                |                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. I am the L-rd your G-d Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage | 5. Honor your father and mother.                                |
| 2. You Shall have no other gods before Me.                                                     | 6. You shall not murder.                                        |
| 3. You shall not take the Name of the L-rd your G-d in vain.                                   | 7. You shall not commit adultery                                |
| 4. Remember to observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy.                                        | 8. You shall not steal (i.e, kidnap people to sell into slavery |
|                                                                                                | 9. You shall not bear false witness.                            |
|                                                                                                | 10. You shall not covet.                                        |

ing. This became the Mishna. However, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi wrote in a very abbreviated style, so the sages recorded their tradition of understanding in the Gemarah. Together, the Six Orders of the Mishna and the 60 Mesechtas, or “tractates,” of the Gemarah make up the Talmud.

When Jews speak of the “Bible,” it not only means the Torah and Talmud, it means other sacred literature as well. In Hebrew, the Bible is known as the Tanach, an acronym for Torah, Neviim (Prophets), Kesuvim (Writings). The Prophets consist of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as 12 minor prophets. Kesuvim includes Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemia, and Chronicles.

The Tanach (Bible) is a treasure house of wisdom. No other society, culture or religion has anything that compares to it. It is the ultimate expression of the way man should live and what can happen if man follows his own drives. For that reason, the Torah is called by several popular expressions: Toras Chaim, Toras Moshe, and Toras Emes.

### **TORAS CHAIM, THE “TORAH OF LIFE”**

The Torah does not just deal with man's relationship to G-d, it covers every facet of life, including:

Agriculture: “You shall not plant the vineyard with mixed seeds.” Devarim 22:9

Business: “A perfect and just weight shall you have; a perfect and just measure shall you have.” Devarim 25:15

Ethics: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Vayikra 19:18

Civil Law: “If indeed the theft be found in his hand, whether an ox or donkey or sheep, still alive, he must pay double. Shmos 22:3

Furthermore, events in the Bible are not just “stories” of the past. They are also paradigms, allegories, and models for us to use in the present and future. For example, Noah built an ark to protect himself from the floodwaters of the world. So too, we must protect ourselves from influences that can overwhelm us.

Noah survived by building and entering an ark. The Hebrew word teiva, ark, can also mean a “word”. According to the Baal Shem Tov, we too should seek refuge... in words of Torah. These words will give us the strength and the protection we need to withstand the storms around us.

Obviously, we can read the Torah on many levels. However, to do it properly,

you need to follow a number of rules that were handed down by the rabbis. For example, perhaps the most misquoted verse in scripture is, “But if there be a fatality, then you shall award a life for a life; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot; a burn for a burn, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise. (Shmos 21:24) According to the secular world, the verse teaches that one who injures another should be punished by receiving the same injury in return.

This does not make sense for a number of reasons. Let's say that a robber took money from a photographer and injured his eye in the process. According to the previous line of reasoning, we would have to injure the thief's eye to execute justice. However, most would agree that a photographer's eye is “important” to his work. Injuring the thief's eye therefore, would not be the same.

As a result, the literal meaning of “an eye for an eye” cannot be correct. The Torah must be referring to something else. How do we know? The Hebrew term used in the phrase “eye for an eye” is tachas, which means “in place of.”

Elsewhere in the Torah, tachas refers to monetary compensation. So the Rabbis knew that it must mean monetary compensation here, as well.

If the Torah wanted us simply to pay someone we injured, why didn't it say so?

The answer is, we could easily have missed the point! The Torah is also emphasizing that we must feel another person's pain as if it were our own. If we could simply “get away with” paying someone for damages, we could easily lose the compassion that we are supposed to feel. Therefore, the Torah of Life teaches us an “eye for an eye.”

### **TORAS MOSHE, THE “TORAH OF MOSES”**

The Torah was given to the Jewish people through Moshe Rabbeinu (“Moses, our teacher”). Some philosophies and religions try to mimic the role of Moshe. These religions believe that the man of G-d serves as a gatekeeper. They believe that, as G-d's representative, Moshe has the power to grant or deny personal requests, e.g., you have to go through him in order to reach G-d. Judaism rejects this. Judaism teaches that every person has a direct, special and personal relationship to G-d. When we pray, we pray directly to G-d, not to anyone else. We are permitted to ask Moses, any tzaddik (righteous person,) or departed loved one to “intercede” on our behalf. However, we don't have to go to, or through, anyone, and that includes Moses our teacher.

So what was Moses' role? Moses served as a facilitator. His main purpose was to help people strengthen their relationship with G-d. Yet Moses served another purpose as well. In addition to a facilitator, Moses served as a *dugma chaya*, a living example of what man should achieve. Finally, the Zohar calls Moses the "faithful shepherd". It could also be translated as "a shepherd of faith". Moses nurtured and sustained the faith of the Jewish people in G-d.

### ***TORAS EMES, THE "TORAH OF TRUTH"***

The Hebrew word for truth, Emes, is spelled aleph, mem, tav. These are the first, middle and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This teaches us that one quality of truth is consistency from beginning to end. The Torah has that quality. It is consistent to its own set of rules, from the first word in the Book of Beraishis to the last word in the Book of Devorim. For example, G-d has several descriptive names in the Torah, such as Elo-him, Ado-shem, etc. Each name refers to a specific quality or attribute. Every time that particular name appears in the Torah, it is describing G-d as He is revealed through that attribute.

There's another aspect to the Torah of Truth. The Torah states that first there was water, then plants, then animals and finally man. Scientists agree with this evolution. The Torah even alludes to "the big bang theory" of the creation of the universe. The first sentence of the Torah is commonly translated inaccurately as "In the beginning G-d created the Heavens and the Earth".

Translating it accurately, the Torah states, "The beginning (of creation) was produced by the Divine power that relates to nature, which first created hashamayim and then created earth. The word hashamayim actually combines two words, aish "fire" and mayim "water. In essence, hashamayim describes a hot gaseous nebula! According to the Torah, this nebula represented the process of beginning. It then cooled and resulted in the planet Earth!

At this point, you might be thinking, "What about the age of the earth? Haven't scientists found that it is several billion years old?" Scientists use carbon dating to measure the age of objects. It is based on the fact that radioactive carbon decays at a steady rate, all things being

equal. But the fact is, all things weren't equal. The earth may have had greater amounts of ozone or higher temperatures and pressures which would have changed the results. In other words, the assumption behind carbon dating is suspect.

Just for the sake of argument, let's assume that the scientific view is accurate and the world is "billions of years old." We can still resolve any conflict. An omnipotent G-d created the world in seven days. Had the results evolved according to nature, it would have taken billions of years. In other words, science measures phenomena in terms of cause and effect, but the world was created in a supra-natural way.

There is still another way to demonstrate the truth of the Torah. For example, the Torah states that an animal must have split hooves and chew its cud to be kosher.

The Torah names four animals that have one sign of kashruth but not two: the hare, the hyrax, the camel and the pig. No other animals have ever been found with one, but not both signs!

We could go on presenting "proofs," but perhaps the greatest testimony to the truth of Torah is the revelation of G-d on Mount Sinai. Virtually every other religion was started by an individual who claimed some type of revelation. This individual shared his knowledge with a select group of disciples who taught the masses.

Judaism is different. Judaism (and the Jewish nation) came into being when G-d gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai, the 6th of Sivan in the year 2448. This revelation occurred in front of over 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60! Every one of them experienced the same revelation. So did their wives and children. In addition, many non-Jews who had left Egypt with the Jewish people

*"G-d gave the Torah to the Jews, through Moses, on Mount Sinai, the 6th of Sivan in the year 2448. More than 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60 experienced this revelation."*

also experienced it.

The point is, millions of people witnessed and experienced the giving of the Torah. They transmitted what they saw to their children and their children's children, down through the generations until today. No other religion, philosophy, or belief has anything that can compare to the Revelation of G-d on Mount Sinai!

### **MITZVOS, THE COMMANDMENTS**

The Torah contains many commandments.

The Hebrew word mitzvah, commandment, is related to the Hebrew word meaning "connection" or "joining." A mitzvah joins the One who commands (G-d) with the one who obeys (man). When most people think of commandments, they think of the 10 Commandments. These were written on tablets and given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The 10 Commandments are found in Shmos, 20:1-14. In addition to the 10 Commandments, there are many other commandments in the Torah. In all, the Torah contains 613 mitzvos. There are 365 negative mitzvos (you shall not . . .) and 248 positive mitzvos (you shall . . .).

The 365 negative commandments correspond to the blood vessels that are divided into 365 sections. The negative commandments also correspond to the 365 "sinews" in the soul, as well as to the 365 days of the solar year. Fulfilling a negative commandment purifies the body and soul, elevating them to a greater holiness.

The 248 positive commandments correspond to 248 limbs (sections) in the human body and 248 "organs" in the soul. Fulfilling a positive commandment strengthens and enhances the relationship of the body and soul to the Creator. In addition to these 613, there are seven mitzvos of the sages. They were instituted to enrich our relationship to G-d. The seven are:

- Lighting candles before Shabbos and Yomtov
- Celebrating Chanukah
- Celebrating Purim
- Ceremoniously washing hands before eating bread
- Making a blessing before eating or drinking and for certain occasions
- Saying Hallel (Psalms of praise) on holidays and Rosh Chodesh
- Turning an area into a private domain using a technique called an eruv

The total number of commandments, therefore, is 620. By Divine Providence, the Torah section containing the 10 commandments has 620 letters!

Most of the Torah's commandments only apply when we have the Holy Temple

and a king and sovereignty over Biblical Israel. Other commandments apply to a king or high priest. As a result, only about 369 (or 270) mitzvos apply today. Men are obligated to perform these commandments. Women are exempt from performing positive mitzvos that are associated with a specific time, such as wearing tefillin. However, women do perform three positive mitzvos (that also apply to men): the mitzvah to separate a portion of dough to recall the portion that was given to the priests; the mitzvah of lighting candles before Shabbos and yomim tovim (Jewish holidays), and the laws regarding family purity.

### **The Nature of the Mitzvos**

Even though the concept of a mitzvah is spiritual, virtually all the mitzvos deal with physical things. For example, women need to physically kindle Shabbos lights. Men must wear tefillin weekdays. The idea is that these mitzvos not only connect G-d to man, they also elevate the physical world, thereby preparing it to be a fit dwelling place for G-d's presence. The act (whether it is in speech or deed) is called the "body" of the mitzvah. However, mitzvos also have a "soul" and that consists of the energy, concentration, and intention behind it. For example, one can put on tefillin while half asleep and mumbling the words of prayer. Did you perform the mitzvah of wearing tefillin? Yes, you fulfilled your obligation. Was it the best way to perform the mitzvah? Not really.

On the other hand, you can concentrate on the meaning of tefillin as you don them and remind yourself of its significance often as you pray. You fulfilled your religious obligation, just as above, but it was an entirely different experience. The energy, concentration and intention behind any act is called the kavana. The more kavana that you have, the "higher" the mitzvah goes in the heavenly spheres and the greater its ability to draw down Divine light and blessing. (See also Kavana in the chapter on Prayer.)

### **REWARD AND PUNISHMENT**

According to the Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria, everyone must fulfill all 613 mitzvos in thought, speech, and deed to perfect his or her soul. Whenever a person performs a mitzvah, he draws down blessings upon himself and into the world. After the person dies, he "experiences" the G-dly energy that he brought into the world as a reward in Heaven.

If one commits a misdeed, he doesn't bring holiness into the world, but the opposite, G-d forbid. But G-d is merciful, so He gives us an opportunity to do

teshuvah, return/repentance, and rectify the situation while we're alive.

If a person fails or is unable to do teshuvah, does not elevate his "portion" of the world, or needs to fulfill one or more mitzvos, he must come back down in this world! What's more, the person has to reincarnate again and again until he has rectified any misdeeds, completed his personal task of refining the world, and/or fulfilled all the mitzvos in thought, speech and deed.

Fortunately, most sages agree that we have gone through reincarnation enough times to be almost finished. The job of perfecting ourselves and the world at large will be completed through Moshiach (the Jewish Messiah).

The concepts of reward and punishment are linked to two other concepts, good and evil. In general, the non-Jewish world blames evil on Satan who battles G-d for control of the universe. Judaism rejects this view. Only one force (G-d) exists in the universe, not two. According to our sages, G-d created the potential for evil to enable man to exercise free will.

The Zohar (Zohar II, p. 163a) offers a parable: A king desired to test the moral strength of his only son, so he orders a charming and clever woman to try to seduce the crown-prince. For the test to be valid, the "harlot" had to use all her charms, without betraying her mission in the slightest way. Any imperfection on her part would mean disobedience (to the king) and failure of her mission. While the "harlot" uses all her seductive powers, she inwardly desires that the crown-prince should not succumb to them.

Our sages call the "harlot" the yetzer hara, our selfish (evil) inclination. It seeks to undermine one's relationship to G-d by focusing on one's selfish desires. Balancing the yetzer hara is the selfless inclination, the yetzer tov. It wants man to focus on G-d's will. It's up to man to decide which one he follows.

### **AFTER LIFE**

As we mentioned before, once a person passes away, he or she enjoys the G-dly radiation that comes from all the mitzvos they performed on Earth. They also benefit when the living perform mitzvos (e.g., give charity, say Kaddish, etc.) on their behalf. At the same time, they stay connected to their beloved ones below, celebrating their joys and grieving together in their sorrows. However, before a person's soul can enjoy the rewards of heaven, it must be "cleansed" of any association with the physical world and its impurities.

Depending on the severity of the cleaning that is necessary, the soul may have to descend to Gehinnom, or purgatory (from the verb "to purge"). Rabbi Yosef Wineberg, in Lessons in Tanya, explains the concept as follows:

"The purgatory (Gehinnom) where the soul is cleansed of the "stains" of sin so that it may enter Paradise to enjoy the radiance of G-d's glory, operates on the principle of "measure for measure," i.e., punishment in kind. Thus, sins of commission caused by the heat of passion and lust are cleansed in a "Gehinnom of fire," while sins of omission, due to indolence and coolness (i.e., lack of fervor), are cleansed in a "Gehinnom of snow."

Once man has been purified, through the process of Gehinnom or through the efforts of those below, the person enters Gan Eden, the Garden of Eden.

As is obvious by now, the Jewish view of Gan Eden and Gehinnom differs completely with the view taken by non-Jewish philosophers. They see heaven as a place of eternal bliss and "hell" as a place of eternal punishment.

Judaism rejects this.

Good is permanent while evil is temporary.

Eventually, good will win out and the world will become purified and elevated. At that point, G-d will resurrect every Jew who ever lived and all righteous non-Jews to experience an open revelation of G-d in all His Glory down here on Earth. This is the era of the ultimate reward, called Olam HaBa, the World to Come.

### ***"What Blessing?"***

Rabbi Nachman Raphael Kahan was exiled to Siberia for the "crime" of teaching Torah to children. After years of deprivation, he was finally allowed to return home. Entering the synagogue in Leningrad for the first time, a fellow Lubavitcher Chasid approached him and said, "When people see each other after a long absence, they typically say the blessing, "Shehechyanu" marking the occasion. But what blessing do you say when meeting someone that you have heard about, but never met before?" The Chasid didn't wait for Rabbi Kahan to think of answer, but said. "One takes a bit of whiskey, says "L'Chaim (to life!) and makes the blessing "Shehacol Nihiye Bidvaro!"

See blessings P. 17

### **BLESSINGS**

Ideally, everything we do should in some way be linked to G-d, as our sages say, "In all your ways know Him" and "Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven."

Blessings help us achieve that goal. The Hebrew word for blessing is bracha, which is linked to the Hebrew word bircav, meaning "(bending through) the knees." Chassidic philosophy explains that blessings draw down G-dly energy from above while elevating the earthly things below.

In general, blessings fall into three categories: blessings that connect to the pleasure we receive from eating, drinking, etc.; blessings that are associated with Divine commandments; and blessings that acknowledge G-d in all our affairs. Our sages have ruled that it is not enough to merely "think" a blessing or prayer, it must be physically said so that you can hear it yourself.

### ***Blessings Upon Rising***

The first thing we say when we open our eyes is Modeh Ani ("I thank"). It is not really a blessing, but a prayer thanking G-d for giving us the gift of another day of life. We say Modeh Ani in bed, even before washing our hands and rinsing our mouth.

Modeh ani lifanecha	I offer thanks before You,
melech chai vikayam	Living and Eternal King,
shehechezarta bi nishmasi	For You have restored my soul in me
b'chemla	With mercy.
rabba emunasecha	Great is Your faithfulness.

After saying Modeh Ani, we wash negel vasser, "nail water." While we sleep, the Jewish soul "reports on the day's activities" to the world above. At this point, only a "residue" of life remains in the body. This is comparable to 1/60th of death. When the soul returns to the body, the spiritual impurity associated with this level of death remains on the fingertips. Therefore, many people keep a vessel of water and a small basin by their bed at night. Then, in the morning, even before getting out of bed, they first pour water over the right hand, then over the left, right, left, right, and left. After that, they get out of bed. Other people wash negel vasser as soon as possible after rising. Once fully dressed, we

wash in the same way again, and say the following blessing:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu	"Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,
Melech HaOlam	King of the universe
Asher Kiddeshanu	who has sanctified us
B'mitzvosov V'tzivanu	with His commandments, commanding us
Al Nitilas Yadaim.	to wash our hands."

By making this blessing, we dedicate our hands (i.e., actions) to serving G-d. We follow this with a number of blessings that correspond to the activities that occur after we rise.

For example, the next blessing recognizes G-d's role in creating our physical body and the system that eliminates waste. In addition to saying this blessing now, we say it after leaving the bathroom and washing our hands as instructed above:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu	"Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,
Melech HaOlam	King of the universe
Asher Yatzar Es HaAdam	Who formed man
Beh Chochma	with wisdom
Uvoro Vo Nkavim, Nkavim,	and created him with many orifices
Chalulim, Chalulim, Galui	and many cavities. It is revealed
V'Ydua Lifnei Kisei Kvodecha	and known before Your Throne of Glory
She'im Yesasaim Echad Maihem	that if one of them were blocked
O Im Yipaseach Echad Meihem	or if one of them were opened,
Ei Efshar Lhiskayem Afilu Sha ah	it would be impossible to exist even for
Echas. Baruch Atah Ado-noy	one moment. Blessed are You
Rofeh Kol Basar	Who heals all flesh
U'Mafli La'asos.	And performs wonders."

The following prayer is similar to Modeh Ani, yet uses the name of G-d:

Elo-hai, Neshama Shenasata Bi	"My G-d, the soul which You have given
	within me
Tahora Hee	is pure.
Atah Berasa, Atah Yetzartah,	You have created it. You have formed
	it.
Atah Nefachta Bi,	You breathed it into me.
V'Atah M'Shamra b'kirbi	You preserve it within me

# BLESSINGS

## BLESSINGS UPON RISING

V'Atah Asid Litla Mimeni      You will eventually take it from me,  
U'lhachazira Bi Lasid Lavo.      and restore it within me in the time to Come

Modeh Ani Lfanecha Ado-noy Olo-hai      I offer thanks to you, L-rd my G-d,  
V'alohai Avoisai,      and G-d of my fathers,  
Ribon Kol HaMaasim      Master of all works  
Adon Kol HaNeshomos      L-rd of all souls.  
Baruch Atah Ado-noy      Blessed are You, L-rd  
Hamachazir nshamos lfgarim meisim.      Who restores souls to dead bodies.

After referring to the descent of the soul into the body, we thank G-d for giving us the natural order of the world and the natural superiority of man in the following blessing. The word sechvi in the blessing below means "rooster" and teaches us that G-d created the natural order of life. It also means "heart," i.e., one grasps the concept so thoroughly that it is felt in one's heart. In that context, we thank G-d for giving us the ability to tell the difference between light (good) and darkness (evil):

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
Hanosain L'sechvi Vina      who gives the rooster understanding  
L'havchin Bain Yom Ubain Liela.      to discern between day and night."

The following verse can also be read on many levels. In it, we thank G-d for both sight and insight:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
Pokeach Ivrim.      Who opens the eyes of the blind

When you are asleep, you are not in control of your movements. When you wake up, you take control of your body once more! The following blessing thanks G-d for giving us the ability to physically move our limbs. Therefore, even one who is incarcerated should say the following:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
Matir Asurim.      Who releases the bound."

# BLESSINGS

## BLESSINGS UPON RISING

Most animals spend their lives facing the ground. In this blessing, we thank G-d for enabling us to live in an upright manner, both physically and spiritually:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
Zokeif Kfufim.      Who straightens the bowed."

Just like a body needs clothing for beauty and protection, the Jewish soul must be clothed in words of Torah and good deeds. This blessing thanks G-d for giving us the ability to clothe one's body and one's soul!

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
Malbish Arumim.      Who clothes the naked."

Usually, when we go to bed, we are very tired. Yet we wake up feeling much better. This blessing thanks G-d for giving us a new feeling of strength and of hope every day.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
HaNosain Lyaeif Koach.      Who gives strength to the weary.

Most (2/3) of the Earth is covered by water. In this blessing, we thank G-d for giving us dry land!

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
Rokah HaAretz al Hamayim.      Who spreads the earth over the waters.

In the next blessing, we thank G-d for the ability to walk. Yet there is a deeper meaning as well. Each of us has a mission in life and G-d guides and directs us to perform that mission through Divine Providence. When we recognize that G-d is directing our steps from Heaven, we can feel much more secure in this world!

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
Hameichin Mitzadei Gaver.      Who directs the steps of man."

The following blessing is "tied in" with shoelaces. It thanks G-d for giving us what we need to go out and work, such as shoes!

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
Melech HaOlam      King of the universe  
SheAsah Li Kol Tzarki.      Who has provided me with my every need."

According to our sages, the next blessing refers to a belt or sash that separates the more animal parts of our body from the more spiritual. It also symbolizes our strong attachment to G-d.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam Ozer Yisroel B'Gevurah.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe Who girds Israel with might.”
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The next blessing refers to our custom of wearing something on our heads. A head covering teaches us that G-d's wisdom is infinitely “greater” (i.e., incomparable) to our own!

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam Oter Yisorel B'Sifara.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe Who crowns the people Israel with glory.”
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The next three blessings recognize the differences that exist among people. For example, a non-Jew can eat and drink everything. A slave receives food, clothing, and shelter from his master. And women are typically very sensitive to spirituality and G-dliness. As a result, they do not need to perform positive mitzvos connecting with specific times and events. Even though non-Jews, slaves, and women do not have to work as much on their relationship with G-d as Jewish men, nevertheless, men should not be jealous. Instead, men must thank G-d for the opportunities He has given them.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam She Lo Asani Goy.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe Who has not made me a non-Jew.”
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Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam She Lo Asani Oved.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe Who has not made me a slave.”
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(Women do not say the following)

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam She Lo Asani Isha.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe Who has not made me a woman.”
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When we sleep, we aren't thinking. So, things that are very silly can appear very

real. In the same way, the Yetzer hara, man's selfish inclination, can trick a person into erring, but only if that person is “sleeping” and not thinking about G-d. In the next blessing, we thank G-d for removing sleep from our eyes and we ask for His protection every day.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam HaMavir Sheina Me'Veini Usnuma MaAfapai.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.”
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We make the following blessing over the ability to understand G-d's Torah by studying the Talmud (Oral Law) and its commentaries:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam Asher Kiddeshanu B'mitzvosov V'tzivanu Al Divrei Torah.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe.” Who has sanctified us with His commandments, commanding us concerning words of Torah.”
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The next blessing thanks G-d for giving us the written Torah, the Five Books of Moses.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam Nosain HaTorah.	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe Who gives the Torah.”
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Once we've made blessings over the Torah, we immediately recite some passages from it. In this passage, Aaron and his sons, who are Cohanim, priests, are commanded to bless the Jewish people. This three-part blessing comes to us in the merit of our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov.

V'yedaber Ado-noy el Moshe Laymore Daber El Aaron V'el Banav laymore Co S'varchu Es B'nai Yisroel, Emor Lahem, Y'vorech'checha Ado-noy V'Yishmarecha, Ya'er Ado-noy Panav Aylecha Vichuneka.	And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus, shall you bless the children of Israel say to them, “The L-rd bless you and guard you. The L-rd make His countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you.”
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Yisa Ado-noy Panav Aylecha      The L-rd turn His face to you  
 V'yaseim L'cha Shalom          and grant you peace."  
 V'samo Es Shmi Al                And they shall set My name upon the  
 B'nai Yisroel                        children of Israel  
 V'Ani Avarcheim.                  and I will bless them."

### **BLESSINGS FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS**

In addition to morning blessings, we also make blessings over food and on special occasions and situations. For example, before smelling different spices, say:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
 Melech HaOlam                        King of the universe  
 Borei Minei B'samim.                Who creates various spices."

After hearing thunder, a hurricane, or an earthquake, say:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
 Melech HaOlam                        King of the universe  
 Shecocho U'gvuroso Malai Olam.    Whose power and might fill the world."

Upon seeing lightning or shooting stars, say:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
 Melech HaOlam                        King of the universe  
 Oseh Maasai B'raishis.              Who re-enacts the work of creation."

Upon hearing bad tidings, G-d forbid, say:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
 Melech HaOlam                        King of the universe,  
 Dayan HaEmes                        the true Judge."

Upon hearing good tidings, say:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
 Melech HaOlam                        King of the universe,  
 HaTov v'Hamativ.                    Who is good and does good."

There is a special blessing one says after recovering from a severe illness, crossing the sea or desert, leaving prison, or being rescued from a life-threatening situation. We only say it with a quorum (ten men) at a time when the Torah is read.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu      "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
 Melech HaOlam                        King of the universe,

HaGomel                                Who bestows goodness  
 L'Chayavim Tovos                  upon the culpable for He has  
 Sh'Gmlani Tov.                        bestowed goodness upon me."

### **TZITZITH**

Tzitzith are ritual fringes (for men) that are attached to a garment with four corners. The mitzvah of tzitzith is mentioned twice in the Torah:

"...they are to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to attach a thread of Techeiles (blue thread) on the fringes of each corner. They shall be to you as tzitzith, and you shall look upon them and you shall remember all the commandments of the L-rd and fulfill them, and you will not follow after your heart and after your eyes by which you go astray—so that you may remember and fulfill all My commandments and be holy to your G-d..." Bamidbar 15:38

"You Shall make for yourself twisted cords upon the corners of your covering, wherewith you cover yourself." Devorim 22:12

Short term, this mitzvah consists of one positive and one negative lesson:

- a) to remind us of all the commandments so that we observe them.
- b) to prevent us from following the inclinations of our heart and eyes.

This mitzvah also has long-term goals:

- a) to help us remember and observe the commandments of G-d.
- b) to help us elevate ourselves to a level of sanctity and devotion to G-d.

How can the sight of the tzitzith help us realize our spiritual side?

Tzitzith hints at the 613 precepts of the Torah. The numerical equivalent of the word tzitzith is 600 and the edges of the garment have five knots each made of eight threads, totaling 613.

The five knots indicate that we must bind ourselves to the five Books of Moses, while the eight threads suggest the eight organs that attract man to sin: the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, hands, feet, genitals, and the heart. Tzitzith remind man of his Divine obligation (the 613 precepts of the Torah) and of his need to guard against desires related to the organs mentioned.

Just like a uniform identifies a soldier, tzitzith is part of the uniform of a Jew. Many people wear a four-cornered wool or linen garment called a tallis koton under their shirt so that they can fulfill this mitzvah. Married men also wear tzitz-

ith when they don a large tallis (prayer shawl) during morning prayers.

Before putting on your talis koton, place the threads in your left hand, look at them to make sure that they haven't been torn off, and say this blessing:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d
Melech HaOlam	King of the universe,
Asher Kiddeshanu	Who sanctified us
B'mitzvosov	with His commandments,
V'tzivanu	commanding us
Al Mitzvas Tzitzith.	concerning the mitzvah of tzitzith.”

What you need to know: Tzitzith are permitted in the BOP and in the DOC (the four-cornered garment should be worn beneath one's shirt and the fringes should be tucked in, so that they do not show).

### **TEFILLIN**

The commandment to wear tefillin is found in Devorim 6:8 “You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they should be for a reminder between your eyes.

Our sages explain that tefillin consist of two small leather boxes with leather straps. Each box contains four Torah sections inscribed on parchment. These passages cite:

- (1) The Shema (Devorim 6:4-9)—the unity of The One G-d.
- (2) Vehayah (Devorim 11:13-21)—the concept of reward and punishment.
- (3) Kadesh (Shmos 13:1-10)—our duty to remember the redemption from Egyptian bondage.
- (4) Vehayah (Shmos 13:11-16)—the obligation of every Jew to teach his children (and students).

The mitzvah applies to men and boys who are 13 and over. The tefillin shel yad, “hand-tefillin,” are worn on the “weaker” arm, i.e., a right-handed person wears them on his left arm, and a left-handed person wears them on his right arm. In either case, the tefillin should rest against the heart, the seat of the emotions. The straps of the tefillin are wound seven times around the arm and three times around the middle finger of that hand. We wear the tefillin shel rosh, the “head-tefillin,” at the hairline above the forehead, so it rests upon the seat of the intel-

lect.

Wearing tefillin on the arm opposite the heart, and on the head, teaches us that we must submit our mind, heart and actions to the Almighty. It also teaches us that the intellect must rule over the emotions. Sadly, many people let their emotions control the mind, and then use their intellect to rationalize their behavior.

Wearing tefillin helps us to overcome this tendency. It also helps us unite our intellect, emotion, and action, thereby devoting all our faculties to G-d.

The question can be asked, “If tefillin symbolizes devoting oneself entirely to G-d, shouldn't I wait until I become observant before wearing them? The answer is that each mitzvah has its own value, and its own reward. The fact that a person does not regularly do a certain mitzvah or mitzvos should not prevent the person from performing other mitzvos. Along the same lines, the fact that a person does perform a particular mitzvah should not prevent the person from performing another. In addition, our sages say that “One mitzvah leads to another.” Eventually, the more you do and the more you learn, the more you will want to take on many mitzvos. In the meantime, though, wear tefillin even if you don't relate to it now.

There's another point that we should make. G-d gave us time so that we could spiritually grow, develop, and evolve. Putting on tefillin or performing any other mitzvah should be viewed as one more step along that path, one more way we connect to our Source.

### **SELECT LAWS OF TEFILLIN**

Tefillin should only be worn on weekdays. On Shabbos and festivals, including chol hamoed (intermediate days of a festival), we do not wear tefillin. (In some congregations, however, tefillin are donned on chol hamoed.)

Tefillin are worn during the morning prayers. However, if for some reason it was impossible to wear them in the morning, you may don them later in the day, but not after sunset.

A person should stand when putting on tefillin.

Step 1. Take the hand-tefillin first out of its container, and position it on the bicep of the weaker arm. Adjust the tefillin so it rests against the heart.

Step 2. Before tightening the straps, recite the following blessing:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu	“Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,
Melech HaOlam	King of the universe

Asher Kiddeshanu                      Who has sanctified us  
 B'mitzvosov V'tzivanu                with His commandments, commanding us  
 L'ho-niach Tefillin.                      to put on tefillin."

One should not interrupt while putting on tefillin. If one made any type of interruption, he should say the following blessing before donning the head tefillin:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
 Melech HaOlam                      King of the universe  
 Asher Kiddeshanu                      Who has sanctified us  
 B'mitzvosov V'tzivanu                with His commandments, commanding us  
 Al Mitzvos Tefillin.                      concerning the mitzvah of tefillin."

Step 3. Tighten the strap by wrapping it over both the leather base of the hand-tefillin and the bicep twice. You should now have three loops around the bicep in the shape of the letter shin).

Step 4. Wrap the leather straps seven times down the length of your forearm, winding the remaining strap around your palm.

Step 5. Place the head-tefillin above the forehead, so that the knot in the back rests on the nape of the neck. Position the head-tefillin so that it is above the hairline and centered between the eyes. Run the two straps down your front (of the person) with the black sides facing outward.

Step 6. Unwind the strap from your palm. Loop it around the middle finger, around the lower phalanx near the palm, again around the middle phalanx, and again around the lower phalanx. The shape should look similar to the letter yud. Wind the remaining strap around the palm. (The straps of both the hand- and head-tefillin must always be worn black side up.

One should not interrupt the act of putting on tefillin. The only exception is to answer "Amen" when hearing someone else making the blessing over tefillin.

The tefillin should be placed on the bare arm without anything intervening. If for some reason you cannot put the hand-tefillin on, you can still don the head-tefillin, and vice versa. In each case, say the appropriate blessing:

L'Haneach Tefillin over the hand-tefillin, and Al Mitzvos Tefillin over the head-tefillin.

One should be constantly and respectfully aware of the tefillin while wearing them.

It is customary to remove the tefillin after morning service. On Rosh Chodesh (the first of the month), we remove them before musaf (the additional service of the morning). (Those who wear tefillin on chol hamoed remove them before the Hallel prayer).

To remove your tefillin, stand, unwind the strap around the middle finger. Remove the head-tefillin using your "weaker" hand. Store the head-tefillin in the tefillin bag. Remove the hand-tefillin and place it in the bag. It is customary to put the head-tefillin on the right and the hand-tefillin on the left inside the bag. When a tallis (prayer shawl) is worn during prayer, it should be put on first. However, you should remove the tefillin before the prayer shawl once the services have concluded.

On Tisha b'Av, the tefillin are not put on for the morning service, but are worn for the afternoon service.

The tefillin must be handled with due respect and reverence. If you drop them, G-d forbid, you should give charity. Some men fast. (Ask your rabbi what to do.)

Prayer said while wearing tefillin

Say the Shema. We place our hand over our eyes while saying the first line of Shema.

Shema Yis-ro-el	"Hear, O Israel,
Ado-noy Elo-heinu	the L-rd is our G-d,
Ado-noy Ech-od	the L-rd is One."

You can find the complete Shema in the section on prayer.

What you need to know: The Federal, state and many county jails permit tefillin to be part of an inmate's property.

### **PRAYER**

The Hebrew word for prayer, tefillah, is related to the word p'lillim, which means to "judge oneself." Prayer helps us work on ourselves so that we can become better people. At the same time, our sages compare prayer to Jacob's ladder that reached from earth to the Heavens. Prayer enables us to talk directly to G-d, thereby attaching ourselves to Him!

In general, our prayers fall into four groups. We praise G-d, thank G-d, confess our transgressions to G-d, and ask G-d to fulfill our requests. Many of these prayers were established by Ezra and the men of the Great Assembly around the time of the Second Temple. Over the next 800 years, the actual order and

form of our prayers became fixed. These prayers were recorded in a siddur, which means “order. The oldest known siddur is that of Rav Amram Gaon, Head of the Yeshiva of Sura in Babylon (present-day Iraq). It is about 1,100 years old.

#### PREPARING FOR PRAYER

Before praying, we should generate awe and love for G-d by concentrating on how he manifests His presence. This should be done in great detail, either from this world up to the highest spheres or from the highest spheres down to this lowly world. The idea is to realize how great G-d is and how He invests energy into all of creation, from the tiniest quark to the most massive black hole, past, present, future, all derive from Him; and there is no place devoid of Him.

Another approach is to consider one’s own life; what one has done, where one is spiritually, what one can look forward to (the end of life). Once a person realizes how far he or she is from G-dliness, one will desire to come close to G-d. This desire should drive one’s prayers. Interestingly, the effort to pray is called *avodah*, which means service, i.e., service of the heart. In the book *My Prayer*, Rabbi Nissan Mindel explains:

“The plain meaning of *avodah* is ‘work.’ We work with a raw material and convert it into a refined and finished product. In the process, we remove the impurities, or roughness, of the raw material, whether it be a piece of wood or a rough diamond, and make it into a thing of usefulness or beauty. The tanner, for example, takes a raw hide and by various processes converts it into a fine leather. *Tefillah* (prayer), in the sense of *avodah*, is the ‘refinery’ where the impurities of character are done away with.”

In addition to formal prayers, Judaism also encourages us to “talk to G-d” each in his/her own language and own way. This “conversation” can take place anywhere and about anything. Everything can be revealed—one’s hopes, fears, requests, and complaints. In fact, G-d desires our complete reliance on Him for all our needs, no matter how small, and so we are encouraged to express ourselves often.

Perhaps the greatest example of that self-expression is *Tehillim*, which literally means “praises” but more commonly is referred to as Psalms. King David composed most of them. Moses, and even Adam, also composed psalms. The 150 chapters of Psalms reflect virtually every emotion available to man. No other literature has ever come close to the beauty, power and simplicity of Psalms. It is

unique, not only in its ability to express the days of our lives, but in the way Jews have adopted Psalms to express their own heartfelt needs. Perhaps the most well-known Psalm is Number 23:

A Psalm by David.

The L-rd is my shepherd. I shall lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside still waters.

He revives my soul;

He directs me in paths of righteousness for the sake of His Name.

Even if I will walk in the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff – they will comfort me.

You will prepare a table for me before my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil; my cup is full.

Only goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and

I will dwell in the House of the L-rd for many long years.

The 150 chapters of Psalms are divided into five books that correspond to the Five Books of Moses (Torah). They can also be divided into the days of the week and month. It is customary to say the Psalm that corresponds to one’s age. If a person is 30 years old, he/she would say the 31st Psalm because it is actually one’s 31st year.

#### ***KAVANA (Prayer Intentions)***

Whether one is saying Psalms, praying, or performing a *mitzvah*, one should do it with energy, concentration and intention; this is known as *kavana*. Often, we pray or do *mitzvos* mindlessly, out of habit. To a certain extent, *kavana* is the act of breaking that habit. Maimonides in his *Laws of Prayer* (4:16) writes, “*Kavana* means that the worshipper must clear his mind of all private thoughts and regard himself as standing before the Divine Presence. If his thoughts are wandering or occupied with other things, he should not pray. . . . He should pray quietly and with feeling, not like one who is trying to unload a burden. . . . There are a couple of “tricks” to help you with this challenge. One is to verbally tell yourself to “empty your head of irrelevant thoughts.” Another trick is to point to each word as you read it. Another trick is to speak the word loud enough for you to really hear and understand it.

**SELECTION OF PRAYERS**

The following selection of prayers is taken from the daily prayer book:

*You may contact Aleph Institute for your own siddur (prayerbook).*

A father is happiest when children love and respect each other. So, too, G-d showers His love and kindness on us when we show love, respect, and kindness to our bretheren!

Hareini M'kabel Alai	"I hereby take upon myself
Mitzvahs Asaeh	to fulfill the mitzvah,
Shel V'ahavta L'reyecha Kamocha.	"love your fellowman as yourself."

In general, there are three dimensions to existence: space, time, and soul (soul meaning the person). This beautiful prayer links all three with a request for G-d's blessings.

Mah Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov	How goodly are your tents, O Jacob,
Mishkanosecha Yisroel.	Your dwelling places, O Yisroel
V'ani B'rov Hasdecha Avo	And I, through Your great kindness come
Beisecha Eshtachave	to your House; I bow to
el Heichal Kadshecha B'yirasecha.	Your holy sanctuary in awe of You
V'ani Sfilasi L'cha Ado-noy	And may my prayer to you, L-rd, be at
Es Ratzon	an auspicious time
Elo-him B'rov Chasdecha	G-d, in your abundant kindness
Anaini B'emes Yishecha.	Answer me with Your true salvation."

For 20 centuries, the Jewish people have prayed for the Third Holy Temple to be built, ushering in the Era of Moshiach. This prayer expresses that longing:

Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha	"May it be Your will before You
Ado-noy Elo-heinu V'elohay Avoseinu	L-rd, G-d, and G-d of our fathers
She'yibane bais Hamikdash	to rebuild the Holy Temple
Bimhere Biyameinu	speedily in our days
V'sain chelkeinu b'sorasecha	and give us our portion in Your Torah."

The next prayer beautifully describes our Creator and the Rock of our faith:

Adon Olam Asher Mawlach	"L-rd of the Universe Who reigned
B'terem Kol Yitzer Nivrah	Before anything was created;

L'ais Naasa B'Chevzto  
 Kol Azai  
 Melech Sh'mo Nikra  
 V'Acharae Kichlos HaKol  
 Lvado Yimloch Norah  
 V'hu Haya, V'hu Hoveh,  
 V'hu Yihyeh B'Sifara  
 V'hu Echad V'Ain Shaini  
 L'Hamshil Lo L'Hachbira  
 B'Li Raishis, B'li Sachlis  
 V'Lo HaOz V'Hamisra  
 V'hu Aili V'Chai Go'ali  
 V'tsur Chevli B'ais Tzara  
 V'hu Nisi Umanos Li  
 M'nas Cosi B'yom Ekra  
 B'yado Afkid Ruchi  
 B'ais Ishan V'aira  
 V'im Ruchi Giviyasi  
 Ado-noy Li  
 V'Lo Ira.

At the time when by His Will  
 All things were made,  
 then His Name was proclaimed King.  
 And after all things will end,  
 Alone, the Awesome One will reign  
 He was, He is,  
 and He will be in glory.  
 He is One and nothing  
 Can compare to Him, to consort with Him  
 Without beginning, without end,  
 Power and dominion are His.  
 He is my G-d and my living Redeemer  
 The rock of my lot in a time of distress  
 And he is my banner and my refuge  
 My portion on the day that I call.  
 Into his Hand, I entrust my spirit  
 At the time that I sleep and when awake  
 And with my soul and body  
 G-d is with me  
 I shall not fear."

**BARUCH SH'AMAR**

This prayer introduces the portion of the morning service called "songs of praise. Baruch Sh'amar contains the word baruch, "blessed," 13 times. It hints to G-d's 13 attributes of mercy. The number 13 is also the numerical value of the word, echad, one. Before saying the prayer, stand up, gather the front tzitzit of the tallis koton or tallis gadol and say:

L'shaim Yichud	"For the sake of the Union of
Kudsha B'rich Hu	the Holy One blessed Be He
U'shechintay	with His Shechina (Divine Presence)
I'yachada Sheim	to unite the Name
Yud-Hay B'Vav-Hay	Yud-Hay with (the name) Vav-Hay
b'Yechuda	in a perfect and
Sh'lim B'shaim Kol Yisroel.	complete union in the name of all Israel.
Baruch Sh'amar	Blessed is He who spoke,

V'Haya HaOlam  
 Baruch Hu,  
 Baruch Omer V'Oseh  
 Baruch Gozer Umkayeim  
 Baruch Oseh V'Reishis  
 Baruch M'Racheim  
 Al HaAretz  
 Baruch M'Racheim  
 Al HaBrios  
 Baruch M'shalem Sachar Tov  
 Lirayav, Baruch Chai L'ad  
 V'kayam  
 Lanetzach. Baruch Podeh U'Matzil  
 Baruch Sh'mo.  
 Baruch Atah Blessed are You  
 Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam  
 HaEl HaAv HaRachaman HaMehulal

and the world was made  
 Blessed is He;  
 Blessed is He who says and does  
 Blessed is He who decrees and fulfills  
 Blessed is He who creates the universe  
 Blessed is He who has compassion  
 on the earth  
 Blessed is He who has compassion  
 on the creatures  
 Blessed is He who rewards well those  
 who fear Him; Blessed is He who  
 lives and exists forever,  
 Blessed is He who redeems & saves  
 Blessed is His name.

L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe  
 benevolent G-d, merciful Father,  
 praised by the mouth of his people  
 exalted and glorified by the tongue of  
 His pious  
 ones and His servants and by the  
 songs of Dovid Your Servant  
 We will exalt You, L-rd our G-d  
 with praises and songs; we will exalt,  
 laud and glorify You, proclaim You King  
 and mention Your Name, our King, our  
 G-d  
 You are the only One – the life of the  
 worlds, King  
 praised and glorified is  
 His great Name forever and ever  
 Blessed are You, L-rd, King  
 who is extolled with praises."

B'feh Amo  
 M'Shubach Um'foar Bilshon Chasidav

V'Avadav U'vShirei Dovid Avdecha

Nehalelcha Ado-noy Elo-heinu  
 B'Shvachos u'Vzmiros, N'Gadelcha  
 U'nshabecha, u'nfarecha,  
 V'Nazkir Shimcha V'Namlich-cha Malkeinu Elo-heinu

Yachid Chay HaOlamim Melech

M'shubach Um'foar Aday  
 Ad Sh'mo HaGadol.  
 Baruch Atah Ado-noy Melech  
 M'Hulal Batishbachos.

At this point, it is customary to kiss the ends of the two front tzitzith.

**SHEMA**

Shema describes the relationship of the Jewish people to our Creator. In the Shema, we proclaim the Unity of G-d, our submission and devotion to the reign of G-d, love of G-d, self-sacrifice for G-d, and our responsibility to study Torah and teach our children and students. We recite the Shema in every morning and evening service, then once again before retiring for the night. It is the hope of every religious Jew, at the time of his passing, to have Shema on his or her lips.

Shema Yis-ro-el  
 Ado-noy Elo-heinu  
 Ado-noy Ech-od

"Hear, O Israel,  
 the L-rd is our G-d,  
 the L-rd is One.

Baruch Sheim  
 Ke-vod Mal-chu-so  
 Le-olom Vo-ed

Blessed be the name of  
 of His glorious Kingdom  
 forever and ever.

Ve-ohavtah Ays Ado-noy Elo-He-chah  
 Bechol Levov-cha Uve-chol Naf-she-chah

You shall love the L-rd your G-d  
 with all your heart, with all your  
 soul,  
 and with all your might.

Uve-chol Meo-de-chah.  
 Ve-ho-yu Ha-de-vorim Hah-eleh  
 Asher Ah-no-chee Me-tzav-chah Ha-yom  
 al Le-vahveh-chah.  
 Veshi-nan-tom Levah-ne-chah

And these words  
 that I command you today  
 shall be upon your heart.

Be-dibar-tah Bom,  
 Be-shiv-techah Be-vai-se-chah  
 Uve-lech-techah Va-derech  
 uve-shoch-be-chah Uve-ku-me-chah.

You shall teach them  
 thoroughly to your children  
 and you shall speak of them  
 when you dwell in your house.  
 and when you walk on the way  
 when you lie down and when  
 you rise up.

Uke-shar-tom Le-os Al Yah-de-chah

You shall bind them as a sign  
 on your hand

Ve-hah-yu Le-toh-tah-fohs Bain Einechah.

And they shall be for a  
 reminder between your eyes

Uche-savtahm Al Me-zuzos      And you shall write them upon the doorposts  
 Bei-sechah U-vi-sh'or-ehchah      of your house and upon your gates."  
 Ve-ho-yo, Im Sho-mo-a Tish-me-u El Mitz-vo-sy, Ah-shar Ono-chi me-tza-ve  
 Es-chem Ha-yom, Le-ah-ha-vo Es Ado-noy Elo-Hay-chem Ul-ov-do Be-chol  
 Le-vav-chem Uve-chol naf-she-chem. V'na-sa-ti M'tar Artz-chem B'ito yoreh  
 Umal-kosh, Vi'asafta D'gan-necha V'si-roshi-cha, V'yitz-harech-cha. Ve-no-sa-  
 tee ay-sev Be-sod-cho Leev-hem-te-cho Ve-o-chal-to Ve-so-vo-to. Hee-shom ru  
 lo-chem Pen Yif-teh le-vav-chem, Ve-sar-tem Va-a-vad-tem Elo-heem Ah-chay-  
 reem Ve-heesh-ta-cha-vee-sem Lo-hem. Ve-cho-ro Ahf Ado-noy Bo-chem Ve-o-  
 tzar Es Ha-sho-ma-yeem Ve-lo Yee-yeh Ma-tar Ve-ho-a-do-mo Lo See-tayn Es  
 Ye-vu-lah, Va-a-vad-tem Me-hay-ro May-al Ho-o-retz Ha-to-vah ah-sheer Ado-noy  
 No-sayn Lo-chem. V'samtem Es D'varei Eleh al L'vavchem V'al Naf-Shechem  
 U'kshar-tem Osam L'os al Yed-chem V'ha-yu L'Totafos Bein Einechem. Ve-lee-  
 mad-tem O-som Es be-nay-chem Le-da-bayr Bom, Be-shiv-te-cho. B'vay-secha  
 u'vLech-techa V'aderech U'vishoch Bicho U'vikumecha. Uch-sav-tom Ahl Me-zu-  
 zos Bay-se-cho U-veesho-re-cho. Le-ma-an Yeer-bu Ye-may-chem Vee-may  
 Ve-nay-chem Ahl Ho-ah-do-mo, Ah-sheer Neesh-ba Ado-noy La-ah-vo-say-chem  
 Lo-says Lo-hem, Kee-may Ha-sho-ma-yeem Ahl Ha-aretz.

"And it will be, if you will diligently obey My commandments, which I enjoin upon you this day, to love the L-rd your G-d and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give rain for your land at the proper time, the early rain and the late rain, and you will gather your grain, your wine, and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be sated. Take care lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods and bow down to them. For then the L-rd's wrath will flair up against you, and he will close the heavens so that there will be no rain and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will swiftly perish from the good land that the L-rd gives you. Therefore, place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul, and bind them for a sign on your hand, and they should be a reminder between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, to speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall inscribe them on the door posts of your house and on your gates—so that your days and the days of your children may be prolonged on the land that the L-rd swore to your fathers to give to them for as long as the heavens are above the earth."

Va-yo-mer Ado-noy El Mo-she Lay-more. Da-bayr El Be-nay Yis-ro-el Ve-o-mar-  
 tah Alay-hem Ve-o-su Lo-hem Tzee-tzees ahl Kan-fay Veeg-day-hem Le-do-ro-  
 som, Ve-nos-nu Lo-hem Tzee-tzees Al ha-ko-nof, Pe-seel Te-chay-les. Ve-ho-yo  
 Lo-chem Le-tzee-tzees, Ur-ee-sem O-so, Uz-char-tem, Es Kol Mitz-vos Ado-noy,  
 Va-ah-see-sem, O-som. Ve-lo So-su-ru ah-cha-ray Le-vav-chem Ve-ah-cha-ray  
 Ay-nay-chem Ah-sheer Ah-tem zo-neem Ah-cha-ray-hem. Le-ma-an teez-ke-ru  
 Va-ah-see-sem Es Kol Mitz-vo-soy, Vee-he-yee-sem ke-do-sheem Lay-lo-hay-  
 chem. Ah-nee Ado-noy Elo-Hay-chem, ah-sheer Ho-tzay-see Es-chem, May-eretz  
 Mitz-ray-yeem Lee-he-yos Lochem Lay-lo-heem, Ah-nee Ado-noy Elo-Hay-  
 chem. Emes.

"And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to attach a thread of techeiles (blue thread) on the fringes of each corner. They shall be to you as tzitzith, and you shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of the L-rd and fulfill them, and you will not follow after your heart and after your eyes so that you go astray—so that you may remember and fulfill all My commandments and be holy to your G-d. I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d; I, the L-rd, am your G-d. True."

### **SHEMONEH ESRAI**

Shemoneh Esrai means "eighteen." It refers to the number of blessings that originally made up this prayer. The prayer is also known as the Amidah, or "standing" prayer. We pray Shemoneh Esrai standing with our feet together, like a soldier who stands at attention before his commanding officer. We only look into the siddur and do not interrupt for anything!

The Shemoneh Esrai contains three themes. The first three blessings praise G-d. The next 13 blessings contain requests for ourselves and the Jewish people at large. The last three blessings thank G-d and ask for His continued presence in our lives.

In Shemoneh Esrai, the essential Jewish soul that is a part of G-d connects and becomes unified to its G-dly Source. We emphasize this by declaring, "My L-rd, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise," before we begin Shemoneh Esrai. We also emphasize our nullification by bowing at specific times during the prayer.

At first glance, it may seem strange to request such mundane things as good health, livelihood, etc., in Shemoneh Esrai. But this is a perfect place to state our needs because our ego is not involved. Rather, we are asking for the ability to fulfill G-d's will in a physical world unhindered by obstacles.

You can find the text of the Shemoneh Esrai in any traditional prayer book.

Select Laws of Shemoneh Esrai

During Shemoneh Esrai, we bow four times:

1. When saying the first word, Baruch, "Blessed," we bend our knees. At the second word, Atah, "You," we bow our heads. At the third word, Ado-noy, "L-rd," we raise up.
2. We repeat this at the end of the first blessing. At Baruch, we bend our knees. At Atah, we bow forward. And at Ado-noy, we raise up. Then we finish the blessing by saying, magain Avrohom.
3. When we say the words, Modim Anachnu Lach, "We thankfully recognize..." we simply bow without bending the knee.
4. Before the end of Shemoneh Esrai, we find the blessing, hatov shimcha v'lecha naeh l'hodos, "it is fitting to offer You thanks. . . . At the first word, Baruch, we bend our knees. At the second word, Atah, we bow our heads. At the third word, Ado-noy, we stand straight.

During certain times of the year, we add special parts to Shemoneh Esrai. For example, during the 10 days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we mention the idea of doing tshuva, "return-repentance," before the King. On fast days, we ask G-d to forgive us and hear our cry for help. On Rosh Chodesh and the intermediate days of Pesach and Sukkos we ask G-d to accept our prayers on these special occasions. And on Purim and Chanukah, we recall the miracles that occurred.

In the second blessing, we change certain parts of Shemoneh Esrai to correspond to the summer and winter seasons in Israel. In the summer we say morid hatal, "He causes the dew to descend." In the winter we say mashiv haruach u'morid hageshem, "He causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall."

In the blessing of Baruch aleinu, we also switch. In the summer we say, v'sain b'racha, "and place your blessing" and in the winter, we switch to vsain tal umatar l'vrocha, "and place dew and rain for a blessing."

Shemoneh Esrai is so important, that the one who prays at the head of the congregation repeats it with 10 men present. This way, people who do not know this

prayer can also take part in it! We also join in three ways:

1. Whenever we hear the name of G-d, Ado-noy, we say, Baruch Hu, u'Varuch Sh'mo, "Blessed is He and Blessed is His name." And at the end of every blessing, we say "Amen!"
2. When the leader repeats Shemoneh Esrai, we say Kedusha, "praise of sanctification" at the end of the second blessing. The prophet Isaiah says the angels declare, "Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." The expressions, "Blessed is the glory of the L-rd from its place" and "The L-rd shall reign forever; your G-d O Zion, throughout all the generations. Praise the L-rd!" are associated with the angels. When the entire congregation stands in unison, feet together, and says the same words, we too are like angels praising G-d.
3. When the leader says, Modim," we acknowledge," we bow and quietly say a special prayer at the same time. One reason is that this prayer thanks G-d for the many things He does for us; and we join in expressing this thanks so it doesn't appear that we are ungrateful in any way. Shemoneh Esrai ends with shalom, peace. Our sages say that peace is the greatest blessing of all.

### **SIX REMEMBERANCES**

At the end of our prayers, we mention six things that the Torah commanded us to recall:

1. [So that you] remember the day you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.
2. But beware and carefully guard your soul lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they be removed from your heart all the days of your life; make known to your children and to your children's children [what you saw] on the day when you stood before the L-rd your G-d at Chorev (Sinai), when you received the Torah.
3. Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt; how he met you on the way, and cut down all the weak who straggled behind you, when you were weary and exhausted; and he did not fear G-d. Therefore, when the L-rd your G-d will relieve you of all your enemies around you, in the land which the L-rd your G-d gives you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under Heaven. Do not forget.

4. Remember, do not forget, how you provoked the L-rd your G-d to wrath in the desert.
5. Remember what the L-rd your G-d did to Miriam on the way, as you came out of Egypt.
6. Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it!

### **THE DAILY SERVICES**

Jews pray three services daily, corresponding to our Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prayer services also correspond to the times when offerings were made in the Holy Temple. Daily offerings were brought every morning and afternoon, while offerings could be burned all night.

### **SHACHARIS**

The morning service is the longest of the three. It follows the structure of a ladder. It begins with morning blessings, followed by Psalms and sections from Tanach to make us more aware of the importance of G-d in our lives. We then say Shema, proclaiming our devotion to G-d. The Shema is followed by Shemoneh Esrai, which contains our requests. After Shemoneh Esrai, we say extra Psalms and prayers of supplication and gratitude, then end with Aleinu (this prayer was composed by Joshua, Moshe's disciple. It praises and thanks G-d for choosing us from among the nations of the world).

On Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh (the first of the month), and festivals, we add an extra service after the morning prayers: Musaf, "Additional Service," corresponds to an offering that was brought in the Holy Temple for that particular day.

### **MINCHAH**

Minchah, the afternoon service, consists of Ashrai (Psalm 145 with a two-line introduction from Psalm 144), Shemoneh Esrai, Tachanun (prayer of forgiveness), and Aleinu.

### **MAARIV**

Maariv, the evening service consists of three prayers. Similar to the morning, we say Shema. We follow it with Shemoneh Esrai. We end the evening service with Aleinu.

### **KRIAS SHEMA AL HA'MITAH**

It is customary for Jews to reflect on the day's activities, and to put "our house in order" (from a spiritual point of view) before going to sleep for the night. We do this during a service called Krias Shema al ha'Mitah, "Reading Shema upon

one's bed." It consists of several brief prayers. They include a statement forgiving anyone who may have angered us during the day. We say this because we do not want others to be punished for anything they may have innocently done to us, and similarly, we don't want to be punished for anything we may have innocently done to someone else.

Krias Shema also includes the complete Shema prayer, as well as prayers asking to be forgiven for any misdeeds and asking for our sleep to be sweet and healthy. The service ends with the following blessing:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy

Elo-heinu Melech HaOlom

Hamapil Chevlei Shaina Al Aeina

UsNuma Al Afapai,

Umeir L'eshan bas ayin.

"Blessed are You, L-rd

Our G-d, King of the Universe,

Who causes sleep upon my eyes  
and slumber upon my eyelids,

And Who gives light to the apple of the  
eye.

V'Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha

Ado-noy Elohai Velohay Avosai

SheTashkivaini L'shalom

V'SaAmidani L'Chaim Tovim

U'ishalom

V'Al Yvahaluni Rayonai

V'Halomos Rayim V'Hirhurim Rayim

UsHai Mitasi Shlaima Lifanecha

V'Haer Eynei Pen Ishan HaMaves

And May it be Your will,

L-rd my G-d and G-d of my fathers,  
to let me lie down in peace

And raise me up to a good life  
and to peace.

Let my thoughts not trouble me,  
nor bad dreams, nor sinful fancies,  
and may my bed be perfect before You.  
Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep  
that of death.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy

HaMaeir L'Olam Kulo B'Chvodo

Blessed are you, L-rd,

Who in His glory gives light to the  
whole world."

Ideally, one should not speak, eat or drink after saying this blessing.

### **INSIGHT AND OUTLOOK**

According to our sages, a person should serve G-d with joy. Interestingly, many people equate joy with "happiness," which is a feeling of energy and pleasure rolled into one. Hebrew and Yiddish don't have a word for "happiness. The word for joy, simchah, combines a feeling of attachment, love, purpose, hope, and

optimism. It expresses the knowledge that one is doing what one is supposed to; and that is attaching oneself to G-d. For example, if a great king asked you for a favor, you would carry it out with affection and attachment; that feeling is joy.

It is easy to serve G-d with joy as long as things are going along relatively well. But what if they are not? What if a person is feeling dissatisfied or is upset for one reason or another? How is a person supposed to feel and act? If the feeling comes from watching another person get something that you want, you should know that the Torah forbids envy. Above and beyond this, you should also know that our sages called this world, *alma d'shikra*, "a world of falsehood." Often, what appears to be a great blessing may actually be the exact opposite!

For example, suppose a person wins the lottery. True, he can buy whatever he wants. But from now on, he has to protect himself from all sorts of phone calls. From now on, he'll never be "one of the boys." From now on, he will be viewed with envy and judged for what he does or does not do with his money. At the same time, he will view his buddies with mistrust, wondering when they are going to ask for a loan. Chances are, he will also have acquired different standards. His clothes, car, house, won't be good enough anymore. In effect, he's gained money and lost everything else, including his peace of mind.

On the other hand, what appears to be a curse can turn out to be a blessing. For example, if a person had a flat tire on the way to the airport and missed the flight, that would appear to be pretty negative. But if the plane had engine trouble, then the flat tire could very well have saved his life. Similarly, stuttering could appear to be a curse, but if it drives the person to overcome his challenge and to become a good speaker, then it was a blessing in disguise.

A true story: The son of a coworker was a star football player in college. However, a near-fatal car crash left him paralyzed from the waist down. When I tried to comfort the father, he told me that, instead of a tragedy, his son felt that it was a "wake up call from Heaven!"

Shocked, I asked the father to explain. He said that his son had been partying his life away, and as a result of the accident, he had learned what was really important. True, the son lost his ability to walk. But he felt that it was "a small price to pay" for becoming a better person and for gaining a clearer perspective

on life!

On a slightly different level, the idea of *alma d'shikra* teaches us that it is never as good as it looks. For example, a friend once inherited a mansion. From the outside, it looked magnificent and people envied the family who lived there. Inside, it was expensive to heat, things were falling apart, and it was infested with bats! The point is, the things we desire always come with strings attached. Understanding that a) a curse can really be a blessing and b) the "good" things that we see are never as good as they look, can give us perspective. There is another way to put things in perspective. King Solomon asked the wise men throughout his kingdom for a way to achieve spiritual equilibrium; some way to cheer himself when he was sad, and some way to become a bit more sober-minded when he was feeling too overly joyous due to his material success. One day, a jeweler offered King Solomon a ring carved with three Hebrew letters, *gimmel*, *zayin*, *yud*.

"What do these letters mean?" King Solomon asked.

"They stand for three Hebrew words that mean, "This, too, will pass," the jeweler replied. And so it is. The positive and the negative things in life will pass. They are part of the cycle of life, and no one, not even King Solomon, can avoid them.

If a person is upset because of an injustice, one should meditate on what the sages say (*Pirke Avos* 2:1): "Know what is above you – an Eye that sees, an Ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book." Nothing is ever forgotten. If someone appears to have "gotten away with something," it's not true. Whether in this life or the next, the person will get what he truly deserves. Finally, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe told someone, *Tracht gut vet zein gut*. "Think good and it will be good. Jews are called "believers, sons of believers." The Hebrew word for faith is *emunah*. It really means "conviction. Our conviction must be that a) G-d is the very definition of goodness; therefore, whatever G-d does is ultimately for the good and b) it is His definition of goodness that applies, not ours. By thinking good, we are "asking" G-d to reveal the goodness that is inherently there, and to make it obviously good, so that we can appreciate it.

To that end, the word *emunah* is related to the word, *uman*, "craftsman." This hints that we must work on our faith like a craftsman works on his skills. Faith begins where our knowledge ends. Therefore, the more Torah knowledge we

have, the greater our faith in G-d.

### **TALMUD TORAH**

In Devorim 5:10, the Torah states, “Learn them and safeguard them so that you will be able to do them. Without learning, it’s impossible to know what to do.

For example, one of the 10 commandments is “Honor your father and mother.

The question is, how do we fulfill this mitzvah? The Torah teaches us that we fulfill it by honoring them (as long as their wishes don’t contradict the Torah), speaking to them with respect, and by providing them with their needs, etc.

In addition to helping us understand our religious obligations, learning Torah has other benefits. For example, when a person learns Torah, he or she becomes united with the Wisdom of the Creator. That is why our sages said, “Talmud Torah k’neged kulam”. “Studying Torah is equal to all the mitzvos”.

Studying Torah (the Wisdom of G-d): it leads to performing mitzvos that represent the Will of G-d. For example, it is G-d’s Will that we honor our parents.

Learning Torah naturally leads us to perform that (and every other) mitzvah in the best way possible. And since learning Torah is also a mitzvah, it connects us to both the Wisdom and Will of the Creator at the same time.

In general, our sages have said that one should learn in the morning and in the evening. “The morning” usually means right after prayer, as the Code of Jewish Law (27:1) states, “After prayer, a person should establish a fixed time for Torah study. This session should be firmly established and should not be skipped. . . .”

The Lubavitcher Rebbe encouraged everyone to learn a portion of the Torah with Rashi’s commentary every day; a portion of the Chassidic book, Tanya; and a portion each day from Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, or his Book of Mitzvos. In addition, one should say a portion of Psalms every day, to complete the entire book of Psalms every month.

The mitzvah of learning Torah applies to every person, rich or poor, young or old. If a person lacks the knowledge or materials, he or she should support others who can study, by donating to a yeshiva (Jewish school), purchasing books, etc., for those who wish to study.

As a way to help us fulfill this mitzvah of Talmud Torah, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi M. M. Schneerson, of sainted and blessed memory, encourages everyone to purchase Jewish books. Having holy Jewish Books around demonstrates

to all who visit that Jewish values are important. At the same time, their presence reminds one to use them. At a minimum, try to have a Chumash (Five Books of Moses), a book of Psalms, and a siddur (prayer book).

There is another mitzvah that can be associated with the Torah, and that is to write a Sefer Torah. As you probably know, a Torah is handwritten on parchment by a specially trained scribe. It contains 304,805 letters. To fulfill the mitzvah of writing a Torah, it is the custom for each person to purchase a letter. Interestingly, the merit of buying a letter in a Sefer Torah is alluded to in the book of Daniel:

“...There shall be a time of trouble such as there never was since there was a nation until that time. At that time, your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book.” (Daniel 12:1)

Your local Aleph representative can help you perform these mitzvos.

### **KASHRUS**

In Vayikra 11:9, the Torah presents the signs of kosher animals, birds, fish, and insects, and permits or prohibits various species of animals. The Torah also has many other laws that deal with eating, such as not to eat the sinew of the thigh of an animal, not to mix milk and meat, etc. All dietary laws fall in the category of kashrus, or kosher. Kosher means “fit” or “proper.”

The laws of keeping kosher are decrees that G-d gave to us at Mount Sinai. Nevertheless, our Rabbis have found many reasons for the laws of kashrus. One of the most famous has become a common saying: “We are what we eat.” This adage recognizes that foods affect spiritually the person who consumes them. Therefore, if something is not kosher, it’s incompatible with one’s soul. Spiritual incompatibility is one explanation for the laws of kashrus. Yet researchers have found many health benefits, as well. For example, pig meat may have

*“Think good  
and it will  
be good.”*

trichinosis. Eating milk and meat together is hard to digest. However, these are side issues, for no matter how healthy or unhealthy a particular item may be, its kosher status represents the Will of G-d. Therefore, kashrus is not a set of laws that can become outdated through sanitation, food inspection or production.

#### Meat, Dairy and Pareve

In general, there are three categories of food: meat, dairy and pareve (neither milk nor meat).

#### Meat

Any meat or fowl and/or food made with meat or fowl products, like soup or gravy, are fleishig (meaty). Similarly, meat ingredients in any product (including liver pills), must meet all requirements for kosher meat. Among them:

1. The animal must chew its cud and have split hooves.
2. The animal must be slaughtered according to Jewish law by a skilled and carefully trained shochet (ritual slaughterer).
3. The permissible parts of the animal must be salted before cooking.

There are many additional laws concerning the kashrus of the meat we eat.

#### Dairy

The term milchig, "dairy," refers to all types of milk, butter, cream and yogurt, and every variety of cheese, whether hard or soft. It also refers to milk derivatives, such as sodium caseinate and lactose. Even the smallest amount of dairy in a food causes the food to become dairy. Therefore, you should not eat or use these foods with meat products.

Dairy foods require certification verifying that the milk and cheeses:

1. Are from a kosher animal.
2. Have no meat-fats, or any kind of meat substances mixed into them.
3. Contain no non-kosher substances.

#### **Pareve**

Foods that are not meat or dairy, or derivatives of them, are considered pareve, "neutral."

Pareve foods can generally be served with either meat or dairy meals, can be prepared in meat or dairy pots, and may be served on meat or dairy dishes. However, pareve foods cooked in a meat pot may only be served on meat dishes. Similarly, pareve foods cooked in dairy pots may only be served in dairy dishes.

Pareve food cooked with meat or dairy products becomes fleishig or milchig, respectively. If the pareve food only touched milk or meat, you can wash it, and the food will remain pareve, as long as a) the pareve and meat or milk items are room temperature or cooler, and b) none of the items have been mixed with pungent or sharp foods such as onions, lemons, pickles, etc.

It is not necessary to have a separate set of dishes for pareve foods. However, it is common to set aside serving trays and especially bakeware as pareve.

These are always washed separately from meat and dairy dishes. You should also have separate dish sponges, dish towels, draining boards, etc.

Below are some laws pertaining to pareve foods.

**Fish:** All fish must have both fins and scales to be kosher.

**Eggs:** Eggs must be opened and examined. A blood spot in an egg, whether raw, cooked, or fried, renders that egg treife, "unkosher." Each egg should be opened into a glass and examined before being cooked or mixed with other eggs. If you find a blood spot the whole egg should be discarded and the vessel washed in cold water.

**Leafy Vegetables and Grains:** Green leafy vegetables and certain grains and fruits that could contain worms and insects must be inspected before they can be used. You should examine these foods thoroughly and wash them in cold water to remove any worm or insect. An insect does not, however, make the food or utensil not kosher. You can simply remove it. It is also common to find worms in packages of noodles, grains, etc., especially if they have been stored for a long time.

**Oil:** In recipes where oil or shortening is required, it must be pure vegetable shortening, as many oils contain animal fats. To ensure that the oil being used is free of animal fats, it must be under strict rabbinic supervision.

\* An increasing number of food manufacturers are adding dairy ingredients to their products to provide extra Vitamin D and calcium. For example, candy and cereal often contain milk products, as do some low-calorie sweeteners. Often, commercial kashrus organizations will publish bulletins describing changes in

the conditions of items, product labeling mistakes, or other vital information.

### ***Separating Meat and Dairy***

The prohibition against combining meat and dairy foods is mentioned in the Torah, elaborated in the Talmud, and passed down through the generations of the Prophets and Rabbis. This prohibition applies three different ways.

**Eating:** We must not eat any meat and dairy foods or their derivatives together.

**Cooking:** We must not cook any meat and dairy foods together. The term “cooking” includes baking, frying, roasting, etc.

**Benefiting:** We must not have any benefit from meat and dairy foods cooked together, such as selling them or doing business with such foods.

To avoid any transgression, it's customary to have two sets of dishes, silverware, and cleaning utensils.

### **Waiting Between Meat and Dairy**

Here are some rules about separating meat and dairy foods:

You shouldn't have meat and dairy foods at the same meal even if they were prepared separately and even if you wait between eating.

After eating dairy, you should rinse your mouth and eat something pareve, ideally a food with a hard consistency. Most people wait one-half hour after eating dairy before they will eat meat or meat products. Other people wait one complete hour. Certain hard cheeses (Swiss, parmesan, or cheeses that have been aged) that stick to your teeth or take longer to digest require waiting six hours before eating meat.

If you eat meat, you must wait six full hours before eating dairy. If you find a small piece of meat between your teeth after six hours, you should remove it and rinse your mouth. However, you do not have to wait another six hours.

People who are on a special diet and children under nine years old should consult a qualified rabbi. If there are no special problems, you should train children early to wait between eating meat and dairy foods.

The six-hour waiting period is standard for all Jews, except those groups that have halachically established other customs.

If you taste food but do not chew or swallow the food, spitting it immediately from your mouth, you don't have to wait. You should still rinse your mouth well. However, if you have chewed or swallowed even the smallest amount of food,

you have to wait the full amount of time.

If pareve foods were prepared in meat or dairy utensils that were used within the last twenty-four hours, then even though that item may not be eaten with the opposite type of food, the waiting period is not necessary.

However, if the pareve food is sharp or spicy, then even if the utensils were not used with hot meat or dairy foods, respectively, within the last 24 hours, it may not be eaten with the opposite food types.

Concerning the waiting period for these, and the definition of the terms sharp, spicy, and hot, consult a qualified rabbi.

**What you need to know:** According to Jewish Law, only food prepared under Rabbinical supervision can be certified kosher. However, the federal prison system provides a common fare diet with many kosher items.

The PA DOC has stated that it will not provide kosher food unless ordered to do so by the courts. Currently, one inmate has begun legal proceedings to challenge the existing policy. Inmates wishing to join should write to Aleph Institute (North East), and we will forward their letter to the attorney handling the case.

## **ACTS OF KINDNESS**

Our sages say the world stands on three things: Torah, Prayer, and Acts of Kindness.

So far, we've discussed the mitzvahs of tefillah and Talmud Torah. Gemilus Chassadim means “acts of kindness.”

The Torah states, “After the L-rd your G-d shall you walk . . . and unto Him shall you cleave” (Devorim 13:5). Our rabbis wonder, “How is it possible for a human being to copy the Divine Presence?”

They answer that the commandment to “walk after the L-rd your G-d” means to mimic His attributes and ways. For example, as G-d is called merciful and gracious, so should you be merciful and gracious. As G-d clothed Adam and Eve when they were naked, so should you clothe those in need. As G-d visited Abraham after he circumcised himself, so should you visit the sick. As G-d comforted Isaac after the passing of his mother Sarah, so should you comfort mourners.

The mitzvah of performing acts of kindness applies to the poor and the rich, to the living and for those who passed on, to those who deserve and those who do

not. There's no limit to the acts of kindness that we could, or should, perform.

What acts qualify as gemilus chassadim? The mitzvah of performing deeds of kindness applies to both Jews and non-Jews and covers any kind of personal service that one performs for another. Typically, acts include

- lending money or an object
- providing hospitality
- visiting and comforting the sick (either in person or by mail or by phone)
- clothing those in need
- comforting mourners (either in person or by mail or phone)
- restoring peace between husband and wife, or any two people

What you need to know: Although there are a lot of limitations in prison, one can still perform many acts of kindness, and every act is a mitzvah.

### **TZEDAKAH**

Tzedakah (supporting a person in financial need) is another act of kindness. tzedakah is usually translated as "charity," but its true meaning is "righteousness." The less fortunate deserve to be helped and the donor is commanded to provide it.

The mitzvah to help the less fortunate is found twice in the Torah. Vayikra 25:35 states, "And if your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself, then you shall assist him, both the stranger, or sojourner, that he live with you.

The mitzvah is also found in Devorim 15:7-10, "If there be among you a needy man, any one of your brethren within any of your gates in the land that the L-rd your G-d gives you, you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand in the face of your needy brother. But you shall open wide your hand to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need...."

Interestingly, the Hebrew word meaning "to give" is notain. In Hebrew it is spelled the same way backward and forward. According to our sages, this teaches us that the one who gives also receives in return.

Abraham was the first person to donate 10% of his wealth to tzedakah. This is one reason that Maimonides writes, "We must be careful to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah more than any of the other positive commandments, for tzedakah is a sign of a righteous person, the trademark of Abraham's children. . . ."

The Torah provides a number of different ways to give tzedakah. They include

providing food or clothing to the poor, helping a needy bride and groom, and offering hospitality to strangers. If you don't have money, you can give tzedakah spiritually by helping others learn about their Jewish heritage. According to Rabbi Levi (Vayikra Rabba 24), "If you don't have anything to give him, comfort him at least with consoling words."

It is customary to give tzedakah every day except Shabbos and holidays. It is a custom for all Jews to give before praying and for girls and women to give before lighting Shabbos and Yom Tov candles.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe established a fund called Keren Hashana, "annual fund." The person submits an amount of money that corresponds to the days of the year and the fund will distribute a portion to charity, each day on the person's behalf.

For example, there are 354 days in the Jewish year (and 383 in a leap year). If a person could only afford to donate three cents a day, he could send Keren Hashana \$10.62 (354 x \$.03), and every day, the fund would distribute it for him. You can arrange for this through your Aleph representative.

### **AHAVAS YISROEL**

Leviticus 19:18, the Torah commands us "You shall love your fellow like yourself." This is the mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel, "love of a fellow Jew. Our sages teach that the souls of Jewish people are a "portion" of G-d. This means that the souls of all Jews come from the same source. Only our bodies separate us as individuals. Therefore, the commandment "love your fellow Jew as yourself" can be taken literally, because your fellow Jew is a part of yourself! In fact, our sages have said that the Jewish people make up one spiritual body. The rabbis serve as the "eyes" of the congregation. Those who are involved with the needs of the community are the "hands." Those who financially support Torah scholars are called the legs.

The point is, the Jewish people are truly one. Every person is important and no person is more important than any other. Nine Moseses could not form a minyan (a the required quorum of ten men), but ten Jews who may not have learned Hebrew can. In fact, our sages have said that the Divine Presence hovers over ten Jews, without exception.

In the book, Judaism: Thought and Legend, Rabbi Meir Meiseles writes:

“What lies at the root of peace, happiness, and everything which is good and beautiful in the world? The invariable answer would be love. Not a superabundance of sentiment gushing out upon everyone, nor ostentatious philanthropy, but a simple, impartial, warm feeling of kinship with everyone, irrespective of person and place, a feeling which is nurtured on the knowledge that everyone is a living soul, that everyone at bottom resembles ourselves and is our natural brother.”

Our sages taught that the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed because people hated each other without reason. Showing love, sensitivity, and respect to others above and beyond reason can help rebuild it, speedily in our days.

### MEZUZAH

It is the custom of a king's palace to have guards at every gate and every door. The guards serve two functions: they publicize the special importance of the location, and protect the contents and individuals within.

From a Jewish perspective, attaching parchment scrolls called mezuzos to the doorpost of practically every room serves the same purpose. They proclaim that the house is devoted to Jewish ideals. At the same time, they protect the contents and the individuals (both while they are inside and are out of the house). The mezuzah actually refers to a parchment scroll that contains the two Biblical passages that mention this Divine commandment (Devorim 6:4-9 and 11:13-21), “and you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.” The scroll is inscribed in the same manner and using the same script as a Torah. The outside of the mezuzah contains the Divine name Shah-dai. In addition to being one of the names of G-d, it is an acronym for three Hebrew words that mean “Guardian of the doorways (homes) of Israel.”

Select Laws Concerning the Mezuzah

1. Homes, offices, public buildings, the gates to private courtyards, even the gates to a city require mezuzos.
2. All doors of the house, including the doors leading to corridors, pantries, porches, fire escapes, etc., should have a mezuzah.
3. A prison or a synagogue does not require a mezuzah. In addition, mezuzos should not be affixed in inappropriate places, e.g., the entrance to toilets, bath-

rooms, showers, locker rooms, etc.

4. No additions should be made to the text of the mezuzah.
5. Outside the Holy Land, the duty of affixing a mezuzah in a rented apartment begins on the 30th day after moving into such flat or apartment.
6. The mezuzah is rolled so that Shema, which is on the right-hand side of the written page, should be placed on the top, with the writing inside from left to right.
7. Before being affixed, place the mezuzah in a protective cover or case. It could be made of glass, wood, metal, or any other material.
8. The mezuzah should be affixed on the right side of the doorpost entering the room. The top should be at a 45-degree angle pointing in to the more important room. The laws of affixing a mezuzah are detailed, therefore a Rabbi should be consulted when affixing the mezuzah.
9. It should be placed two-thirds of the way up the doorpost.
10. It is a custom to kiss the mezuzah when passing.
11. Before affixing a mezuzah (or many mezuzos), say the following blessing:  

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu	"Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,
Melech HaOlam	King of the universe,
Asher Kiddeshanu B'mitzvosov	who has sanctified us with His commandments,
V'tzivonu	and commanded us
Likboa Mezuzah.	to affix a mezuzah.”

12. It is a custom to check mezuzos (and tefillin) at least twice every seven years. Many people have the custom to check them more often. (Unfortunately, printed, improperly written, and otherwise un-kosher mezuzos have flooded the public market. In addition, many mezuzos that were originally proper have since faded or cracked due to age or weather. A competent authority should periodically check all of one's mezuzos.)

What you need to know: Although we do not hang a mezuzah on a door in prison, the Rebbe once related that his father-in-law, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, traveled a lot and never spent a night without a mezuzah in his possession. Although he would not put a mezuzah on his door in the hotel, he would keep one with him.

For information concerning where to acquire kosher mezuzos, contact your local Aleph representative.

### **TESHUVAH**

Teshuvah means “return.” It is the ability to renew our relationship with G-d after we have jeopardized it. In a sense, teshuvah is greater than Torah because it enables us to overcome the spiritual damage that we caused by transgressing G-d’s commandments.

In the words of Maimonides (the Laws of Teshuvah):

“If a person transgresses any of the mitzvos of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command, whether willingly or unintentionally, when he repents and turns away from his sin, he must confess before G-d, Blessed be He. As Bamidbar 5:6-7 states, ‘If a man or a woman sins against one’s fellow man . . . they must confess the sin that they committed.’ This refers to a verbal confession. This confession is a positive command.” (1:1)

What constitutes teshuvah? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart never to commit them again. As Isaiah (55:7) states, “May the wicked abandon his ways....” Similarly, he must regret the past as Jeremiah (31:18) states, “After I returned, I regretted. [One must reach the level where] He Who knows the hidden will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again. (2:2)

In essence, Maimonides defines teshuvah in terms of the “3Rs” of regret, recite, and resolve. There’s another act involved, as well: rectify. If possible, a person should try to repair whatever damage was done, both materially and spiritually. For example, if a person took something, he or she must return it to its owner. If the owner isn’t known, the person should give the equivalent value to charity. Similarly, if a person wronged another by speech, he should seek to set the record straight with those who heard him. He should also ask the person who was wronged for forgiveness.

The process of teshuvah should also drive the person to better himself, especially in those areas of weakness. For example, if a person was dishonest in some way, he or she should look for opportunities to make society a better place by promoting honesty in one’s relationship with others, in the home, and in the workplace. Our sages said that a person should continually do teshuvah until one’s misdeeds can be accounted asmitzvos because they were the cause of so much good!

### **SHABBOS**

“And G-d rested on the seventh day... and He blessed it and made it holy.”

Beraishis 2:3

“Remember the Shabbos day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the L-rd your G-d; in it you shall do no type of work, neither you, your son, daughter, servant, maid-servant, cattle, nor the stranger within your gates; for in six days the L-rd made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that exists within, and rested on the seventh day; therefore, the L-rd blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Shmos 20:8-11

Shabbos is one of the greatest gifts given to the Jewish people. It is indeed a day of rest. But it’s more than that. Shabbos is a day of rejuvenation, physically, mentally, and emotionally. It is an island of sanity and serenity in the sea of confusion called life. Above all, it is a reflection of the Time to Come, when mankind will be liberated from our selfish nature.

Shabbos serves as a sign that G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Shabbos also serves as a sign that G-d chose the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and charged us to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” to the world.

The dual nature of Shabbos is hinted at by two words. The first word is zachor (remember). As the Ten Commandments in Shmos 20:8, states, “Remember the Shabbos to sanctify it. The second word is shamor, to guard. In Devorim 5:12, the Torah states, “Guard the Shabbos to sanctify it. According to our sages, G-d communicated both words at the same time to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai.

How do we fulfill the commandment to “Remember the Shabbos to sanctify it?” According to our sages, we do it through many acts that serve to separate ourselves from our daily lives, leaving the world with its worries behind. These include lighting Shabbos candles, dressing in different (fresh) clothes, reciting kiddush over wine or grape juice, and eating special foods such as challah. In addition to acts that emphasize the holiness of Shabbos, we try to avoid all types of creative labor even though they may be fun, relaxing, “therapeutic,” etc. Shabbos is a time to “let go and let G-d.” Our job is to relax and enjoy the day.

Saturday evening, we can enter the world again. The following story illustrates the attitude that we should have.

“It’s G-d’s Problem!”

On Shabbos, we have to view that all our work is done, whether or not it actually is. Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of this occurred in December 1999. Back then, most software used two digits to describe the year. This worked well up through 1999. Once the calendar turned to January 1, 2000, however, people feared that the computers would switch to 1900, causing chaos. Experts predicted that banks would lose track of deposits and accounts. The electronic navigation systems on large oil tankers would stop working. The software that kept airplanes flying could suddenly have bugs.

At the time, a neighbor of mine worked as a senior programmer for Westinghouse. His division built atomic-powered, electric generating plants, such as the one at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania. To operate these plants, they generated millions of lines of code and virtually all of that code used the two-digit scheme for recording dates. Needless to say, the team responsible for developing the appropriate software patch worked long hours. But even they didn’t know whether the patch would take care of everything. As the day approached, I asked my neighbor what he thought might happen.

“I really don’t know,” he replied honestly. “But I’m not going to worry about it.” “You’re not going to worry about it?” I responded incredulously. “Why not?” He looked at me and smiled. “Because January 1st is Shabbos. So it’s G-d’s problem, not mine.”

### ***Lighting Shabbos Candles***

When G-d formed the world, He said, “Let there be light. In an essay, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of sainted and blessed memory, asked the rhetorical question, “Why was light created first when no one was around to benefit?” The Rebbe explains that light wasn’t as much a result of creation as its purpose and goal. Through the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles, G-d gave women the merit to repeat this process of “Let there be light!” every week of the year. From a historical perspective, our sages say that our matriarch Sarah had a miraculous lamp that remained lit in her tent from one Shabbos to the next. Once she passed away, the same miracle occurred with Isaac’s bride, Rivkah. According to our sages, she began blessing the Shabbos lamp from the age of

three.

Today, the women of the home have the responsibility for lighting candles. Through this pure and simple act, she changes the atmosphere of her house from the mundane to the holy. At the same time, she officially welcomes the Shabbos queen into the home and helps kindle the Divine spark in every Jewish being.

In addition to married women, girls of age three and over are encouraged to light their own candles as a part of their education. The young girl should light before her mother in case she needs help.

It is customary to put a few coins into a tzedakah pushka (charity box) before lighting the candles. The proper time to light Shabbos candles is 18 minutes before sunset Friday. Young girls should light before this time. Traditionally, women light two Shabbos candles, corresponding to the words shamor and zachor. Some married women add a candle for each child, recognizing that every individual brings his or her unique light into the world.

What you need to know: A woman at home can light Shabbos candles on behalf of her husband. However, if no woman will be lighting them, each man should light the candles and say the blessings. Most institutions permit this procedure. If you encounter a problem with this, please have your rabbi contact Aleph.

Once the candles have been lit, they should be allowed to burn until they go out. A Jewish individual should NOT extinguish them.

Procedure for lighting Shabbos candles:

1. Light the candles.
2. Spread your hands out around the candles.
3. Draw your hands inward in a circular motion three times to accept Shabbos.
4. Cover your eyes with your hands and say the blessing:

Baruch Atah Ado-noy

Elo-heinu Melech HaOlam

Asher Kiddeshanu B’mitzvosov

V’tzivanu Lehadlik Ner Shel

"Blessed are You L-rd

Our G-d King of the Universe

Who sanctified us with His commandments

Commanding us to light the lamp of

Shabbos Kodesh. the holy Shabbos." Uncover your eyes and bask in the glory of Shabbos. The time of lighting candles is especially favorable. People customarily add their own prayers to G-d, asking for health and happiness. Their prayers are readily accepted because they are said while performing the mitzvah of lighting the Shabbos candles. CAUTION: The candles must be lit before sunset. It is prohibited to light candles after sunset.

### **HOLIDAY CANDLES**

In addition to lighting candles in honor of Shabbos, women light them to honor festivals.

CAUTION: When lighting after the onset of a festival, do not strike a match. Instead, light the fire from a flame burning continuously since the onset of the festival, such as a gas pilot or candle.

What you need to know: The chapel should contain candles and matches. If you have a problem securing or lighting candles for Shabbos, contact your Aleph representatives.

### **KABBALAS SHABBOS**

Before the Friday evening service that ushers in the Shabbos, we say several Psalms and hymns. The service is called Kabbalas Shabbos, "welcoming Shabbos. Our sages compare Shabbos to both a queen and a bride. Just as a welcoming committee always greets the queen whenever she visits, so too, we welcome in the Shabbos queen every week through Psalms and hymns. The most famous of these prayers is L'Cha Dodi, "Come, My Beloved," by Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, of Sfas, Israel. Having "officially" welcomed the bride, we begin Maariv, the evening service.

### **KIDDUSH**

Shabbos and holiday meals begin with the kiddush. It is a prayer that contains blessings over wine or grape juice and the holiness of the special day (e.g., Shabbos or Yom Tov). Any male over 13 or female over 12 can recite kiddush. In some places, one male recites kiddush for all those present. The kiddush cup should hold a minimum of three ounces of liquid. The one who recites kiddush drinks at least two ounces and distributes the rest. Friday evening, everyone

stands while the kiddush is being recited. On Saturday afternoon, standing is a matter of custom. Everybody answers "Amen" at the end of the blessing over the wine and at the end of the blessing over the special day (two separate blessings). The Friday night kiddush testifies that G-d created the world, rested on the seventh day and gave it to us. The afternoon kiddush speaks about Shabbos as a sign forever between us and G-d.

What you need to know: Most institutions accommodate the requirement for grape juice on Friday night and Saturday since it is a religious obligation. If this is a problem, please have your rabbi contact Aleph.

### **SPECIAL MEALS**

On Shabbos and Yom Tov, it is a mitzvah to eat one festive meal in the evening and another the following day, for lunch. (When Yom Tov occurs on two consecutive days, we have evening and day meals both days.) The Shabbos and Yom Tov meals begin when the head of the household makes kiddush over wine or grape juice. Afterwards, everyone ritually washes their hands for Hamotzi.

1. Fill the k'vort (container) with water.
2. With the k'vort in your left hand, pour water over your right hand, up to the wrist, three times.

Take the k'vort in your right hand and pour water over your left hand in the same way.

Baruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu  
Melech HaOlam  
Asher Kiddeshanu  
B'mitzvosov V'tzivanu

"Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
King of the universe  
who has sanctified us  
with His commandments, commanding  
us  
to wash our hands."

Al Natilas yadaim.

After the family members and guests gather around the table, the head of the house lightly draws the knife across one of the challahs to indicate the place of cutting, then raises both challahs and recites hamotzi, the blessing over the challah. Everyone responds "Amen." He cuts a piece of challah for himself, dips it in salt, and eats it so that there is no lapse in time between the blessing and the act of eating. Then he distributes challah to all those present. Each person

eats a piece before resuming conversation.

A traditional Shabbos or Yom Tov meal includes wine, fish, and meat or chicken, as well as many other delicacies. It also includes songs, words of Torah, and stories of our sages.

To conclude, everyone recites the blessings after the meal, in keeping with the Torah commandment, "When you have eaten and are satisfied you shall bless G-d, your G-d." Devorim 8:10 The Talmud records that Moses developed the first blessing, Joshua formulated the second, and Kings David and Solomon formulated the third. Our rabbis were responsible for the rest.

### **SPECIAL DRESS**

On Shabbos and Yom Tov, it is the custom to wear special clothes. During the times of the Talmud, many people didn't have special clothes for Shabbos or Yom Tov. Some would roll their cloaks up during the week, and unroll them for Shabbos or Yom Tov. Today, many people have a special suit, tie, or jacket that they only wear on these occasions.

What you need to know: Some institutions allow inmates to don different clothes for Shabbos. Whenever possible, you should set aside special or clean clothes for Shabbos and the Jewish holidays.

### *HEARING THE TORAH IN THE SYNAGOGUE*

On Shabbos and Yom Tov, it is the custom to attend services at the synagogue and to listen to the Torah reading during the morning. The Torah is also read on Shabbos afternoon.

### *MAINTAINING A SHABBOS ATMOSPHERE*

Shabbos is a time for relaxation. It's a day for family and friends. During Shabbos, we leave the world behind us. On this day, we combine spiritual pursuits like learning with physical rest, great food and fine clothes. It's the best of both worlds!

### *SHALOSH SEUDOS*

On Shabbos, it is a mitzvah to eat shalosh seudos, "the third meal." According to the Talmud (Shabbos 118A), a person who enjoys three meals on Shabbos will have a good judgment in the World to Come. Some people eat bread. Others have cake. It is also the custom to sing songs and share words of Torah. Shalosh seudos must begin before sunset. If it is a meal with bread, it may con-

tinue until after dark, yet it remains Shabbos for those participating, even if three stars have come out and it is night. Shabbos is over when those having shalosh seudos have said the grace after a meal, and prayed the evening service.

### HAVDALAH

After Shabbos ends, we say the havdalah prayer (havdalah means partition,) to separate the holy day of Shabbos and the rest of the week. One shouldn't do any work or eat any food before saying havdalah. However, if one has to do work after Shabbos, but before havdalah, one can rely on the special words we say in the evening Shemoneh Esrai prayer on Saturday night. (See your prayer book for details.) One can also say the words baruch hamavdil bain kodesh l'chol, "Blessed is the One Who separates between the holy and the mundane." Ideally, you should say havdalah over grape juice. In addition to making a blessing, "boray pri hagafen," over wine or grape juice, we say blessings over spices, fire, and the One who separates the holy and the mundane.

Why spices? Smelling spices can comfort broken spirits. Now that Shabbos is over, we need a lift. Smelling spices provides that boost.

After wine and spices, we say a blessing over a special havdalah candle, one that has two wicks. (If you don't have a havdalah candle, you can unite the flames of two candles.) After the blessing, we hold our fingernails to the light to see the difference between light and dark reflected on our hands. The last blessing is havdalah itself ("Blessed art Thou, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, who makes a distinction between the holy and the ordinary"). If you forgot to say havdalah Saturday night, you can say it anytime until Tuesday sunset. In this case, say a blessing on wine and havdalah, but not the blessings on spices and fire.

### *HAVDALAH FOR YOM TOV*

We also say the havdalah prayer at the end of Yom Tov.

If Yom Tov ends in the middle of the week, we do not say the blessings over fire and spices. If Yom Tov ends on Friday night, we do not say havdalah since the holiness of Shabbos is even greater than that of Yom Tov.

If Yom Tov starts after Shabbos (i.e., Saturday night), we do not make a separate havdalah prayer. However, we refer to havdalah in the Yom Tov evening kiddush, saying, "Blessed art Thou, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, who makes a distinction between the holy (i.e., Shabbos) and the holy (i.e., Yom

Tov).”

We make the blessing for fire on the Yom Tov candles, not a separate havdalah candle. However, we do not make the blessing over spices since the holiness and joy of yom tov makes up for the departure of our Shabbos soul.

#### MELAVE MALKA

Just as we welcomed the Shabbos queen with a special service, Kabbalas Shabbos, we accompany her out with a special meal called melave malka, “escorting the queen.” The Talmud relates that we receive many rewards and benefits from having a melave malka. The Talmud also explains that food eaten for melave malka nourishes the luz bone. This small bone is located on the top of the spine. Our sages say that it never decays and that G-d will use it to resurrect us in the days of the Messiah.

Some people make a point of eating bread for melave malka. If you are too full, or if no bread is available, you can have some cakes, cookies, or even fruit.

Whatever you eat, have in mind the mitzvah of melave malka.

Traditionally, we mention the name of Eliyahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet) on Saturday nights, since he will signal the advent of the Messiah. Also, he is responsible for recording the fact that we kept the mitzvah of Shabbos. We also share words of Torah during a melave malka.

In addition, Chassidim customarily tell stories about the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), the founder of the Chassidic movement, or other great rabbis and tzaddikim. These stories help strengthen our faith in G-d and our spiritual leaders.

So far, we’ve discussed all the ways that we fulfill the mitzvah of zachor (see section on Teshuva), “Remembering the Shabbos to sanctify it.” We also have a mitzvah of shamor, “Guarding the Shabbos to sanctify it.”

Shamor refers to guarding the day – and the uniqueness of the Jewish people – by avoiding any work. It affirms our belief that G-d truly provides our livelihood and sustenance. All the good of the past week is elevated on Shabbos.

Simultaneously, Shabbos is the source of all the blessings of the week to come.

The Torah forbids work. But work isn’t necessarily the same as effort. In the Jewish legal sense, “work” refers to the 39 general categories of creative activity (melacha) used to build the Mishkan (portable sanctuary that the Jews carried in the desert). These melachos (types of work) include weaving, dying, building, etc. By ceasing such creative work one day a week, we relinquish our control

over our environment and remind ourselves that G-d is the Creator and its Master.

#### LAND OF ISRAEL

The Jewish people are connected by G-d to Eretz Yisroel, the Land of Israel. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (RASHI), the famous 11th century scholar, begins his commentary on the Torah by quoting his father who was also a Talmudic scholar. Rabbi Isaac said, “The Torah, which is the law book of Israel, should have begun with the verse: “This month shall be to you the first of the months,” which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it begins with the account of creation? In order that He might give them the heritage of the nations. For should the nations of the world say to Israel, “You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan (the Land of Israel),” Israel may reply to them, “All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed, He gave it to them, and when He willed, He took it from them and gave it to us.” Abraham received the land of Israel as a heritage. As the Torah states (Beraishis 7:5-7), “And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son and all their substance that they had acquired, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to the land of Canaan and they came into the land of Canaan. And Abram passed through the land of Canaan to the place of Shechem, to Alon Moreh. And the Canaanite [tribe] was then in the land. And the Eternal appeared to Abram and said, ‘Unto your seed will I give this land....’” G-d’s pledge was formalized in the ceremony in which Abraham took four animals and divided them. (The four animals represented the four times the Jewish people would be exiled.) This ceremony, called the Bris bein HaBesarim (“Covenant between the Pieces”) took place in 1743 BCE.

G-d re-established the right of the Jewish people to the land at Mount Sinai with the giving of the Ten Commandments in the year 1315 BCE. Forty years later, the Jewish people entered the land and began to conquer it. The Jews remained on the land for the next 3,000 years! During that time, they settled Hebron and Shechem (the Torah records the purchase of both areas). They also settled in Tiberias, Safed, Jerusalem, and dozens of other cities. The Jews built the First and Second Holy Temples. And even after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, the Jews retained their connection to the land of Israel. Of the 613 commandments in the Torah, the vast majority of

mitzvos are associated with the Land of Israel.

Our sages ask, why is the land called Eretz Yisroel? They answer, “Because the land ‘runs’ to do the will of its Master.” In Hebrew, the word for land, *eretz*, has the same root as *ratza*, to run. It also shares the same root as *ratzon*, will. The lesson is that G-d “owns” the Land of Israel. In fact, the Torah (Devorim 11:12) testifies that Israel is “a land that the L-rd your G-d cares for; the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.”

What’s more, G-d gave it to the Jews as long as they follow the laws of the Torah and perform mitzvos. If the Jews, G-d forbid, follow their own inclinations, then eventually, the land will cast the inhabitants out (G-d forbid). However, if the Jews follow the ways and the will of G-d, the land will blossom for them. Throughout history, no other nation has been able to truly settle the land or make it blossom because no other nation has such a close and intrinsic relationship with G-d.

The First and Second Holy Temples represent the ultimate expression of the relationship between the Jewish people, the Land of Israel, and the Holy One, blessed be He. The First Temple lasted 410 years and was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Bavel in 422 BCE. The Second Temple was built 70 years later. It lasted 420 years. The Romans destroyed it in 68 CE. The Temple is called the *Bais HaMikdash* (the Holy Temple that stood in Jerusalem). It was the place where the Divine Presence was revealed on earth, and nowhere was it more revealed than in the Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies, a chamber 30 feet square, contained the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments. The Ark measured approximately four feet long by two and a half feet wide. The distance from the wall of the chamber to the side of the Ark was 15 feet. Similarly, the distance from the other side of the chamber to the other side of the Ark was also 15 feet. Even though the Ark was a physical object located in the Holy of Holies, it did not take up space! It was a direct manifestation of the Divine Presence.

During the times of the Holy Temples, all males would journey to Jerusalem for Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot. They would offer sacrifices and participate in joyous celebrations. It was a time “to see and be seen” (i.e., by G-d).

Today, we no longer have the Holy Temple. But while the buildings have been destroyed, the Divine Presence remains. For that reason, it is forbidden to visit

the location where the Temple once stood. Instead, we can pray by the Western Wall. It is not part of the Temple itself. Rather, it is part of an outer wall that surrounded the Temple.

May the Third Holy Temple be built in Jerusalem, speedily in our days!

## MOSHIACH

The word Moshiach means anointed. According to Maimonides (Hilchos Melachim 11:1), “Moshiach will re-establish the Kingdom of David, as it ruled in the beginning, in days of old. He will rebuild the Holy Temple, gather in all the dispersed children of Israel, and will re-establish all the laws, including the sacrificial offerings and Sabbatical and Jubilee years as discussed in the commandments of the Torah....

Maimonides continues (Hilchos Melachim 11:1), “He will cause all the nations of the world to serve and worship the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, ‘For then I shall overturn to the nations a pure speech, with which they shall all call out to the Name of the L-rd, and serve Him as one unified group that carries a load on their shoulders, shoulder to shoulder.’”

In other words, Moshiach will be a human with free will. He will be a Torah scholar and sage, who is exalted in both intellect and holiness, yet someone who represents the ultimate in humility. Moshiach will maintain an intense and personal interest in each individual. Through his wisdom, his understanding and his knowledge, he will help us to maximize our talents and capabilities. Through this selflessness, he too, will rise in his relationship with G-d.

Moshiach will purify and elevate the world so that all mankind can recognize and accept G-d as the true Ruler and King of creation. As Maimonides states in the Laws of Melachim 12:5, “In that era, there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance and all delights will be as freely available as dust”. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. The Jews will therefore be great sages and know the hidden matters, and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the extent of mortal potential; as it is written (Isaiah 11:9), “For the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed.”

This is the Jewish vision of the Messianic Era. During this period, sorrow and sadness, pain and confusion, want and desire will disappear. G-d will become

the ultimate reality and we will devote ourselves to strengthening the relationship between G-d and this physical world.

At some point during this period, Jews who have passed on will be resurrected to once again live as souls in bodies. This time, however, they will be cured of any illness or defect, so they can worship G-d with a complete heart and soul.

According to many sages, righteous non-Jews will also be resurrected.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, of sainted and blessed memory, Rabbi M. M.

Schneerson, quoting the Midrash Yalkut Shemoni, has stated, "The time of your redemption has arrived." Even though the world remains engrossed in physicality, the Rebbe is telling us that Moshiach can be revealed at any moment. We

can speed up the process by advancing in matters of Torah and mitzvos. Each mitzvah we do, each act we perform, brings us one step closer to that time.

Non-Jews, too, can help by performing deeds of goodness and kindness.

Together, we really can make the dream of a better world a true and lasting reality. May it happen immediately!

#### THE NEXT STEP

Living a Jewish life is a process, not a destination. Whether a person is born Jewish or converted, one proceeds on a path of spiritual growth, observing more and more. The key is to have set times for learning, at least a little in the morning and a little in the evening. One should also learn practical laws, as well as those things that interest you, e.g., Jewish philosophy, mysticism, history, etc. No matter what you learn, success comes from concentration and from reviewing the material often.

In general, learning is most effective when it's done out loud and with someone else. In fact, the classic style of study is with a study partner. The idea of study partners makes a lot of sense for many reasons. Having a partner can keep you from becoming too lazy to learn. A partner can help explain a concept. At the same time, when you explain something to your partner, you strengthen the learning experience for yourself, as well.

In addition to a study partner, every person should have a rabbi, someone who can answer questions of Jewish law and practice. Ideally, you should also have a mashpia, a spiritual advisor. This is a person who can help you grow spiritually. Your rabbi can be your mashpia. Your mashpia can also be someone who is older or more religious. Whoever you choose, he or she should be someone who is ready to listen and to help guide you along the path of Torah.

One final story. For several years, the rabbis of the Talmud debated the question, "What is the most important sentence in the Torah?" Finally, the time came to render a decision. The first rabbi got up and stated that Shema Yisroel Adonoy Elo-heinu Adonoy Echad, "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One," is the most important sentence in the Torah because it crystallizes man's relationship to G-d. Another rabbi spoke. He believed that V'ahavta Lireyecha Camocha, "You should love your neighbor as yourself," is the most important sentence because it summarizes man's relationship to his fellow man. Finally, a third rabbi spoke. "In my opinion, Es Hakeves Echad Taaseh Baboker v'Ais Hakeves Hasheini Taaseh Bain Haabayim, "You shall offer one lamb in the morning and the second lamb toward evening," is the most important sentence in the Torah. The rabbi was met by jeers. The Holy Temple was destroyed. No one could offer sacrifices. What good was this sentence? "Please let me explain," the rabbi began. "The entire purpose of the Torah is to do, to keep trying, day in and day out, morning and evening. Noble ideas and brilliant concepts are merely words in the wind without action. By commanding us to offer one lamb every morning and another lamb every evening, the Torah is teaching us that action is the key to accomplishment. Needless to say, the rabbis agreed. We hope that this book will lead you to take those steps. May your journey be a pleasant and productive one, and may we meet on the streets of Jerusalem with Moshiach.

### 13 PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

The following 13 Principles of Faith are more than list important ideas. Formulated by Maimonides, they represent the very foundation of the Jewish way of life. No wonder that many people recite them every morning after Shacharis prayers.

I believe with complete faith:

1. That the creator, blessed be His Name, creates and guides all creatures, and that He alone made, makes, and will make everything.
2. That the Creator, blessed be His Name, is absolutely unique and that there is nothing else like Him and that He alone is our G-d, He alone always was, and He alone always will be.
3. That the Creator, blessed be His Name, is not a physical being, that nothing physical can ever affect Him, and there is nothing in the world which is compa-

rable to Him.

4. That the Creator, blessed be His name, is the first and the last.
5. That to the Creator, blessed be His name, and to Him alone, it is proper to pray, and it is not proper to pray to anyone [or anything] else besides Him.
6. That the words of the prophets are true.
7. That the prophecy of Moses our teacher, may peace be upon him, was true, and that he was the father of all the prophets, those who came before him, and those who came after.
8. That the entire Torah now in our hands is the same Torah that was given to Moses our Teacher, may peace be upon him.
9. That this Torah will not be exchanged, nor will there ever be another Torah from the Creator, blessed be His Name.
10. That the Creator, blessed be His Name, knows all the deeds of men and all their thoughts, as it is said, "It is He Who fashions the heads of them all together; it is He who understands their deeds"
11. That the Creator, blessed be His Name, rewards those who keep His commandments.
12. In the coming of Moshiach, and even though he may delay, I still wait every day for him to come.
13. That those who died will be brought to life at whatever time it shall please the Creator, blessed be His Name and exalted is His remembrance forever and for all eternity.

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1135 CE – 1204 BCE). Also known as the Rambam. The Rambam authored The Book of Commandments, Guide for the Perplexed, and his 14-volume codification of Jewish Law, the Mishneh Torah.

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, translated by Rabbi E. Touger.

## *The Yomim Tovim*

Each Jewish holiday is eagerly awaited, and when it comes, is royally greeted in the most festive manner. Many of our most cherished memories are connected to these Yomim Tovim. Spending the seder together with grandparents and other family members, the solemn prayers in shul (synagogue) on the High Holidays, the sound of our singing filling the streets as we enjoy the kiddush meal outside in the succah, and the dancing lights of the menorah all awaken in us a very special feeling of Jewishness.

The Yomim Tovim bring to mind our very rich heritage, the history of our ancestors and G-d's special love towards the Jews throughout the generations. Yet they are not only reminders of the past to be "traditionally" observed today, but also indicate the recurrence of the special Divine Powers which were manifested at certain times in the past which are renewed every year at the same time.

We celebrate different types of holidays throughout the year. Those indicated in the Torah are known as Biblical holidays. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the High Holidays, are the days which G-d revealed to us as being most opportune for beseeching Him and requesting of Him a good and healthy year for ourselves and our families. Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos all remind us of G-d's special involvement with the fate of the Jewish people in miraculously taking them out of Egypt, giving them His most treasured gift, the Torah, and protecting them constantly throughout the forty years in the desert.

Then there are the holidays of Chanukah and Purim, known as rabbinical holidays. They were established for all generations by our sages as very festive holidays reminding us of great miracles performed for us by G-d. They stand out as a sign of G-d's everlasting and continuous protection of the Jewish people. Rabbinical holidays are not governed by the same laws as Biblical holidays, but are marked with special prayers, laws, and customs of their own.

Each holiday and special occasion is marked with its own unique observance. To the homemaker, the coming of each Jewish holiday also brings to mind the various traditional foods to serve particular to that occasion, in addition to the

regular kiddush meals. The significance and history of each holiday, its special laws and customs, and the food traditionally served are described in the following pages. The holiday meals follow the Shabbos pattern, but can be freshly cooked, enhancing the spirit of the festive meals, and allowing for more variety. All of the holidays and special occasions are presented here in the order in which they occur throughout the year.

At the end of this section you will find a chapter on the Jewish calendar, which is based upon the movement of the moon. This chapter explains not only the significance of the lunar calendar system, but also the meaning of Rosh Chodesh, why we have leap years, how they are determined, and why the holidays have an added day outside the Land of Israel.

We hope that the insights and information contained in the following pages will enrich and deepen your experience of the Jewish holidays throughout the years to come.

## ***The Month of Elul***

Preparing for the New Year

The King in the Field

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Chassidism, liked to use this parable in describing our preparations during Elul for the High Holy Days to follow in the month of Tishrei: A king resided in his palace all year. Those who wished to gain an audience with him traveled great distances to the palace, and even then, were faced with difficulties seeing the king. But once a year, the king would leave his palace and go out into the fields and towns to receive everyone graciously. Even the simplest person had a chance to speak to him or request something from him. G-d, King of Kings, is also “in the field” once a year, during the month of Elul. He is eager to listen to us during this time. We are grateful to avail ourselves of this opportunity to return to Him and beseech His aid.

Repentance, Prayer, Charity

Three key activities in Elul have the power to nullify any harsh judgment and enable us to receive a favorable outcome during Tishrei. Through teshuvah (repentance or return), we return to our initial good selves, as a Jew by his very

nature is good and desires no evil. Through tefillah (prayer), we cleave to the Creator, Who is the source of our soul, and for Whom our soul is always yearning. By giving tzedakah (charity), we are performing a deed that is really only just (tzedek means justice). We are merely the guardians of the wealth extended to us by G-d, and are His messengers for distributing it to those in need. It is not entirely kindness we practice by giving of our wealth to others, rather justice, for in truth, we are not the real owners of our riches.

During Elul we listen to the shofar, a call to repentance, every day after morning services (except on Shabbos and the day before Rosh Hashanah). We add Psalm 27, with its allusions to the holidays of Tishrei, to our daily prayers. In the final days of Elul, in the very early hours of the morning, we highlight our preparation for the new year with the selichos, health and forgiveness prayers for forgiveness.

Hatoras Nedorim is recited preferably on Erev (the day preceeding) Rosh Hashana to nullify one’s vows except those made to one’s fellows, such as a promise to repay a debt. It is said in shul before at least three men (preferably ten men), and includes personal intentions, such as increasing one’s performance of a particular mitzvah.

And so, Rosh Hashanah will find us well prepared, as we enter the month of Tishrei with joy in our hearts and confidence that G-d, in His mercy, will grant us a truly good and blessed year.

Rosh Hashanah

The Head of the Year

Our New Year’s Day is a day for deep soul-searching and resolution. Yet, as its very name indicates, Rosh Hashanah – Head of the Year – is not just the beginning of another cycle; it is the head of these days. Just as the brain is the chief of the body, directing and integrating all of a person’s functions and behavior, so, in the same way, is this day of Rosh Hashanah directing the course of the ensuing new year. Through it, the life force, blessing, and sustenance for the days that follow are provided. On Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of the creation of man, the inhabitants of the world are judged anew.

The main themes of Rosh Hashanah, as expressed in our prayers, are the following: a) coronation – we accept anew G-d's kingship over us each year, and b) blessings – we ask G-d to grant us a year of life, health, and happiness. Although Rosh Hashanah is a day of awe and a time for solemn reflection and self-evaluation, it is not a day for sadness. We have faith in G-d's mercy and are confident that He loves us despite our many faults. Therefore we approach Rosh Hashanah with happiness. Since it is the day for ensuring that the new year will be better than the one before, we cannot be sad. "This day is holy to G-d your G-d; do not mourn and do not weep... for the joy of G-d is your strength." Nehemiah 8:9-10.

### **The Shofar**

The most special mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah is hearing the blowing of the shofar (ram's horn), which symbolizes the coronation of G-d as King of the universe. It brings to mind many great events that involve a ram's horn: the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the binding of Isaac on the altar at Mount Moriah, and the heralding of the coming of the Messiah. The sounding of the shofar is a call to look into one's soul and improve one's ways, as expressed by Maimonides: "Awake you sleepers from your sleep, and you slumberers, arise from your slumber – examine your deeds, repent, and remember your Creator." Hilchos Teshuvah, Chapter 3.

The shofar is the oldest of wind instruments. As simple, primitive, and relevant to Jewish history as it is, its piercing sounds penetrate our core and bring us closer to G-d and the observance of His commandments. As the prophet affirms, "Shall the shofar be blown in a city and people not tremble?" Amos 3:6

### **Special Food and Customs**

Rosh Hashanah has numerous special customs, many of which are connected with the holiday meal.

- On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, we dip our challah into honey instead of salt. This custom may continue until Hoshana Rabbah, depending on the individual family's custom. Right after the blessing over challah, a sweet apple is dipped into honey and a special prayer is said asking G-d for a sweet year.

- The head of a fish is usually eaten, signifying our hope to be the "head," representing righteousness and an example for all. A popular way to prepare the fish is to stuff it with the same mixture used for gefilte fish and then cook it like regular gefilte fish.

- On the second night, a fruit which was not eaten previously during the season is put on the table, preferably at the time of candle-lighting. When the shehechyanu blessing ("Who has granted us life, sustained us, and brought us to this season") is made by women at candle-lighting, and by men during kiddush, this fruit is kept in mind. When keeping a new fruit in mind, it should be in front of the woman during candle-lighting, and she should light the candles close to the beginning of the kiddush meal, which is permitted on Yom Tov, as it does not coincide with Shabbos. Or, preferably, the woman should have in mind a new garment that she is wearing for the first time, at the time of candle-lighting. The new fruit is eaten right after kiddush on the first night. Often it is a pomegranate, because this is one of the fruits for which the Land of Israel is praised in the Torah. It is said, as well, to contain 613 seeds, equal to the number of our commandments.

- Tzimmes is a sweet carrot dish generally eaten on Rosh Hashanah and throughout the month of Tishrei. The Yiddish word for carrots is meren, which also means increase. Tzimmes thus symbolizes the desire to have our merits increase above our shortcomings.
- Honey cake has always been a traditional and popular dessert during this time.
- Many people use round challahs and round farfel for soup to express the hope that the new year will likewise be rounded out and perfect, and bring the best to everyone. In addition, the word farfellen represents the hope for a falling away of our misdeeds of the past year.
- There is a custom not to eat nuts because of the similar numerical equivalent of the letters in the word for nuts (egoz) and the word for sin (chet). A very practical reason not to eat nuts is to help keep the throat clear for the long prayer services of the Yom Tov.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, after the afternoon services, we customarily "throw" our sins into a body of fresh water which has in it live fish. This custom is known as tashlich, from the statement, "And you shall cast away (tashlich) all

your sins...” (Micah 7:19). If the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos, tashlich is said on the second day.

Since this holiday is the Head of the Year, it sets the pattern for each of the days to come. For this reason we should be extra careful in everything we do, think, and say on this all-important day. Whether praying or serving food, making blessings, eating, or conversing at the table, we try to keep in mind at all times that this is Rosh Hashanah, and as this day goes, so will the rest of the year. It is customary not to nap during the day so that we should be up and alert when receiving our verdict for a good year.

After the services on the first night Rosh Hashanah, we all greet one another with the good wishes of: L’shana Tova Tikosaivu V’saichosaimu May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.

### ***Ten Days of Repentance and Return***

#### A Significant Week

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the days in between are known as the Ten Days of Teshuvah (repentance or return).

During these days we are especially careful in all the mitzvos of teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah (see Elul).

The seven days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are highly significant and should be filled with Torah and mitzvos to the fullest measure. Not only is this the last week before Yom Kippur, it is also the first complete weekly cycle of the new year and serves as an atonement for all the Sundays, Mondays, etc. of the past year.

The third of the ten days, the day after Rosh Hashanah, is the Fast of Gedalia (see Fast Days).

The Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur has a special distinction. It is known as Shabbos Shuva (Shabbos of Return) because of the beginning of the Haftorah of this Shabbos: “Return Israel unto G-d.” Hosea 4 It is customary for rabbis to speak to their congregants on this day of the importance of teshuvah, repentance and returning to G-d’s ways.

#### Special Customs

An interesting custom symbolic of forgiveness is kaparos (atonement). Men and women each take a rooster or hen, respectively, and say a short prayer while holding and circling it above their heads. It is hoped that the realization that this animal is going to die, a fate which we ourselves might or will deserve, will bring us to total repentance.

It is preferable to observe this custom during the morning before Yom Kippur. Some women practice this custom during the week between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The chicken or the equivalent value of the chicken is then given to charity, as charity brings forgiveness and averts harsh decrees.

Kaparos can also be observed with money instead of a live chicken. The money is also waved aloft and the prayer is said, substituting “This money will go to charity” for “This fowl will go to death.” Afterwards, the money is given to charity. During all ten days of repentance, additional sentences are inserted in different parts of the daily prayers, emphasizing the fact that we are now amidst these days of awe. Many Jews have the custom of continuing the selichos (Prayers for Forgiveness) during the weekdays between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

### ***Yom Kippur***

#### The Day Before Yom Kippur

Among the many preparations for the day of awe known as Yom Kippur, and perhaps one of the most important, is the seeking of forgiveness from friends, relatives, and acquaintances, for actual wrong done or to soothe bad feelings that may have arisen during the year. This is one aspect of our behavior that cannot be forgiven by G-d unless forgiveness is first sought from those we have wronged. Another custom practiced on Erev Yom Kippur is that of going to the mikvah and immersing ourselves in it so that we become pure in preparation for Yom Kippur. It is customary too, during that day, that parents bless their children. The afternoon service, Minchah, is said early in the afternoon. The Viduy

(confession) prayer is included in the Amidah (standing prayer).

It is a mitzvah to eat two full festive meals on Erev Yom Kippur. The meal just before the fast is eaten in the late afternoon and is finished no later than 20 minutes before sunset. So important is it to eat well before Yom Kippur that we are told it is equal to the mitzvah of fasting on Yom Kippur itself. To ease our fast, the food we serve at this meal should not be salty or spicy. Partaking of a festival meal at this time demonstrates our faith in G-d's abundant mercy and our confidence in being forgiven and sealed for a good year.

It is traditional to eat kreplach at this meal. Kreplach are pieces of dough filled with ground meat or chicken, then cooked or baked and served with soup. Only chicken kreplach are served on Erev Yom Kippur because no red meat is eaten on this day. This special traditional dish alludes to our hope that kindness will "cover" any strict judgment we may deserve.

#### Forgiveness – an Eternal Gift

"I have forgiven" are the eternal words spoken by G-d on the tenth of Tishrei, after Moses prayed to G-d and fasted for forty days on behalf of the Jewish people. This day became Yom HaKippurim, the Day of Atonement, for all generations. Any time a Jew sincerely repents, he is forgiven, but this day has a special power because of the forgiveness granted to the Jews on the original Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur and all the laws pertaining to it start before sunset, as do all the holidays, with candle-lighting by the woman of the house. A twenty-four hour candle is also lit in the house in honor of the holiday, as we cannot honor it with festive meals. The light also reminds us of the Second Tablets that were given to the Jews on this day, for light symbolizes Torah. This is in addition to any yahrzeit candles.

On Yom Kippur, as on the Sabbath, no melachos (work) may be done. The machzor (holiday prayer book) should be brought to shul before sunset. Since women begin the holiday when they light candles and may not carry, they should be sure to get their machzors to shul earlier in the day. Indeed, Yom Kippur is referred to in the Torah as Shabbos Shabbason, a total rest day just

like Shabbos. In fact, the double wording teaches us that even if Yom Kippur comes out on Shabbos, the laws of Yom Kippur are observed on that day and are not postponed, unlike other fast days when they occur on Shabbos.

On Yom Kippur, five activities are specifically prohibited: eating or drinking, anointing oneself with perfumes or oils, washing (for pleasure), wearing leather shoes, and marital relations.

Men go to shul in their white garments, called kittels, and women often dress in light colors or white, which symbolizes purity.

#### Special Prayers

The evening services begin with the chanting of Kol Nidre. During each main prayer we say Viduy (confession), beating the heart with the right hand at each phrase as we enumerate all the sins we may have committed. We ask G-d for forgiveness. The Viduy is phrased in the plural ("We have sinned"), for all Jews are considered as one body, and we are all responsible for one another.

One of the unique prayers of Yom Kippur is the Avodah section in the Musaf Prayer, which describes in detail the great and awesome service performed on Yom Kippur by the high Priest in the Holy Temple. This service was highlighted by the entry of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies, the place where the original tablets of the Ten Commandments were kept. Only on this one day a year, and only after much preparation, was the High Priest allowed to enter.

Described are his preparations, the service, and the exciting conclusion: when the red string at the window of the Temple turned white, the Jews knew they were granted forgiveness. The High Priest then emerged safely from the Holy of Holies. If his concentration or purity of thought had wavered but an instant, he would not have been able to withstand the intense revelation of G-dliness within the Holy of Holies.

The fifth and final prayer on the day of Yom Kippur is the Neilah prayer, which is said after the Minchah (afternoon) services. The fifth prayer service is unique to the day of Yom Kippur. Neilah (locking) is the closing time of our prayers, when G-d's inscription for us for the coming year is sealed. We muster together all our remaining strength to say the prayer with real devotion. Everyone recites out loud Shema Yisroel and the sentences which follow it, and the prayer culmi-

nates with the final blowing of the shofar.

The evening services are then said, quietly, but in a mood of triumph and confidence in having been sealed for a good and healthy year. Afterwards, if it is a clear night, the “Sanctification of the New Moon” blessing should be said for the month of Tishrei, if it has not yet been said.

As at the conclusion of every Yom Tov, havdalah is said, but with the distinction that after Yom Kippur the blessing over light is included, as during Yom Tov we were prohibited from using fire. Fire is not included in the havdalah of the other holidays because it is permitted to cook on those days. Care should be taken that the havdalah light be kindled from a pre-existing flame, lit before Yom Kippur. The fast is not broken until havdalah is said.

Everyone goes home to break the fast. That night or early the next morning we are already involved in building the Succah, so that no time should elapse between all the good resolutions for the coming year and the actual doing of the mitzvos.

## ***Succos***

The Season of Our Rejoicing

The “Ten Days of Awe and Repentance” are followed by the “Season of Our Rejoicing.” This is one of the names given to the holiday of Succos, for the Torah commandment to “rejoice” is more often used in connection with the holiday of Succos than for any other Yom Tov.

Succos is indeed a time of rejoicing. Following closely after Yom Kippur, the day of forgiveness, it is a time of starting the new year fresh. Succos begins with the fifteenth day of Tishrei, at the time of ingathering of the crops, a further cause for rejoicing, as one looks with a sense of pride and accomplishment upon the fruits of his labor of the previous months.

The seven-day holiday of Succos is one of the Sholosh Regolim, the three festi-

vals when all Jewish males over the age of 13 were commanded to celebrate the Yom Tov in the proximity of the Holy Temple. The other two Sholosh Regolim are Pesach and Shavuot. Women and children joined in these pilgrimages whenever possible.

The Temple celebration during Succos was highlighted by the celebration of water-drawing for the holiday offerings. This ceremony was unique in that during the year the libations on the Altar were performed with wine, but on Succos plain water was used. Yet it is said that “whoever has not seen the joy at the place of the water-drawing has never seen true joy in his life!” Succah 51 The joy expressed in this ceremony was the joy of the pure and simple acceptance of G-d’s will, as symbolized by clear water, as opposed to the acceptance that is based on understanding, symbolized by wine.

The Succah – A Symbol of G-d’s Protection

The dominant mitzvah is, of course, the succah. The succah is built before the holiday begins. Almost anything can be used for the walls, but the roof covering must be schach, which is plant-life material meeting certain specifications. Evergreen branches, corn stalks, and bamboo are popularly used. During the entire festival we live in these temporary dwellings as much as possible.

The succah is symbolic of the clouds of glory which protected the Jews during the 40 years in the wilderness. These clouds of glory, serving as a shade and a shield were an ever-present reminder of G-d’s kindness and love for His children. As we sit in the succah, we too are aware of and grateful for G-d’s protection.

All meals must take place only in the succah unless it rains. Care is taken on Shabbos to carry food between the house and the succah only if an Eruv has been put up before Shabbos, if needed. The most appealing meals are prepared for the succah, and the fanciest dishes and accessories are brought out to dress the succah table. Many observe the custom of decorating the succah beautifully. The succah is a place of rejoicing and festivity for the whole family.

It is considered very desirable to have poor people as guests in one’s Succah for each of the festive meals, corresponding to the heavenly guests who are

said to visit every succah. The mitzvah of dwelling in a succah is unique in that the person's whole body participates in it. We fulfill the mitzvah by entering and eating something, as long as it is with the awareness that this mitzvah was given to us in remembrance of our Deliverance from Egypt. On the first two nights of succos one makes the blessing "...to dwell in the Succah," if he eats a k'zayis (one ounce) or more of bread. Thereafter he makes this blessing if he eats bread, cake, or other food made of the five grains which is more than two ounces.

#### The Four Kinds

A most beautiful and meaningful mitzvah of Succos is the "the taking of the four kinds." The four plants enumerated in the Torah are the esrog (citron), lulav (palm branch), hadassim (myrtles), and Aravos (willows). This mitzvah is performed every day of Succos except on Shabbos. It should be done early in the day but is permissible until sunset. The lulav, Hadassim, and Aravos are taken in the right hand in a specific manner and the blessing is recited. The esrog is then taken in the left hand and held to the other three species. All are swayed together, in accordance with various customs. The resulting sight is quite beautiful and memorable to behold.

A left-handed person takes the lulav and other species in the left hand and the esrog in the right hand. While women are not obligated to do this mitzvah, they have generally taken it upon themselves to perform it throughout Succos. When "taking the four kinds" one should be careful to have the hand free of gloves, rings, etc.

This mitzvah can penetrate very deeply and have extraordinary relevance to our lives today. In our oral tradition, it is explained that each of the four kinds corresponds to a different type of person. The esrog symbolizes both refreshing taste (constant Torah learning) and a delightful fragrance (good deeds). The Aravah has neither of these qualities. Despite their differences, the Torah instructs us to take these four and bind them together, for they complement one another. So too does one Jew complement another. Only when there is true harmony among all the Jewish people can we hope for ideal existence. May it happen soon!

#### Yom Tov and the Intermediate Days

Outside Israel, Succos is celebrated for an additional (eighth) day (see calen-

dar). The first two days are Yom Tov, to which all the laws of Yom Tov apply. The third through seventh days of the holiday are called chol hamoed. These days are not highlighted with candle-lighting or kiddush meals. Only very necessary work may be done.

The seventh day is called Hoshana Rabbah. It is the last day of shaking the lulav and esrog. The holiday culminates in Shemini Atzeres, which is Yom Tov once again.

### *Hoshana Rabbah*

#### The Great Hoshana – Special Prayers

Hoshana Rabbah is the name of the seventh day of Succos, and is almost a holiday in itself. It is the final day of Chol Hamoed Succos (the Intermediate Days) and is the last day on which we can make the blessing on the waving of the "four kinds." Special prayers, called Hoshanas, are said towards the end of the morning services. These prayers are accompanied by the beautiful ceremony in which everyone circles the bimah (platform) seven times, lulav and esrog in hand.

Hoshana Rabbah is the final day on which G-d may change our inscription for a good year. Although the gates of heaven have officially been closed at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service, it is still possible for G-d to open them one last time on Hoshana Rabbah, as we ask Him to do in our prayers for this day. It is for this reason that we beat the Aravos (willow branches) on the floor during our prayers, driving away any harsh judgments. It is also customary to stay awake the night of Hoshana Rabbah to learn portions of the Torah and recite Psalms.

#### Holiday Meal and Kreplach

A special festive meal is eaten in the afternoon of this day, for this is the final occasion of the year on which to make the blessing "to dwell in the succah." The traditional dish of Hoshana Rabbah is kreplach, small triangular pieces of dough filled with ground, seasoned meat or chicken. The kreplach suggest the covering up of G-d's stringency with loving-kindness, for on this day, as on Yom Kippur, G-d may finalize a verdict for a good year for all His people. Kreplach are also traditionally eaten on Erev Yom Kippur and on Purim, for the same rea-

son.

## ***Shemini Atzeres***

A Special Day of Celebration

Shemini Atzeres corresponds to the eighth day of the holiday of Succos, but is a separate and a complete Yom Tov in its own right.

Rashi, one of our greatest commentators on the Torah, likened Shemini Atzeres to the special feast of a king for his beloved son. For a full week the king celebrated with all his kingdom. After this week of festivities, the king said to his son, "It is difficult for me to part with you. Please stay another day to celebrate." For the seven days of Succos we brought seventy sacrifices to the Holy Temple on behalf of all the nations. "If the nations of the world would have known the value the Temple had for them, they would have surrounded it with a fortress in order to protect it." Midrash Rabba. G-d set aside an eighth day of celebration on which only one holiday sacrifice was offered, this one on behalf of the Jewish nation. It became a day of unique celebration between G-d and His loyal children, the Jews.

The above parable can be linked to the name of the holiday itself. Atzeres means holding back, referring to the king who held back his son from leaving with the rest of the celebrants.

Outside of Israel, we still eat in the succah on Shemini Atzeres. Some go into the succah only for kiddush in the morning. In any case, the blessing for "dwelling in the succah" is not said.

The Hakofos ceremony in synagogue takes place after the evening service.

## ***Simchas Torah***

Rejoicing with the Torah

Outside the Land of Israel, Simchas Torah is celebrated the day after Shemini Atzeres, making a total of nine consecutive days of festivities. Simchah denotes

joy and great rejoicing. That is certainly the case on Simchas Torah. All the Torah scrolls are brought out from the ark, and everyone, scholars and laymen alike, dance around the shul, proudly taking turns clutching the holy Torah scrolls to their hearts. Everyone present becomes passionately involved in the hakafos, as these dances are called, for part of every Jew's inheritance is a love for the holy Torah which G-d gave us.

Even those not privileged to feeling this adequately during the year through study of the Torah can rejoice with all on Simchas Torah, as this is the time of singing and dancing, of joy without limitations and beyond understanding. This is a greater joy than that achieved through intellectual study alone.

In the Land of Israel, Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are celebrated on the same day. Accordingly, Chassidim there have the custom to take out the Torah scrolls for hakafos on the night of Shemini Atzeres as well.

On Simchas Torah all males over Bar Mitzvah age are called up to the Torah (called an aliya), and just this one time a year, even young boys get to have a special aliya called Kol N'arim, in which they are all called up together.

During the morning of Simchas Torah, the reading of the final portion of the Torah is completed. A second scroll, Bereshis Bara, which has already been rolled back to the beginning of the Torah, is then read. The cycle continues! The joy increases as the reader chants the first chapter of Genesis. For, in truth, one never finishes the learning of Torah. Its wisdom is infinite, and it is the eternal force that has connected the Jews to G-d for over 3,000 years.

## ***Chanukah***

The Miracle: Many Into the Hands of the Few

Whenever we sit and look into the flickering Chanukah lights, we recall the miracle that occurred over 2,000 years ago when a handful of valiant Jews stood victorious in battle over the hordes of their enemies. Whenever righteousness conquers evil despite overwhelming odds, it is an occasion for thanksgiving and

rejoicing, a miracle worthy of being commemorated forever. Still, this is not the primary message of dancing Chanukah lights, for the major miracle of Chanukah was the existence of those flames. After the Jews were victorious over their Greek oppressors, they wished to rekindle the menorah in the Holy Temple and to rededicate the Temple which had been spoiled by the enemy. But it would have taken eight days to prepare acceptably pure olive oil to burn, because all the available vessels of oil had been defiled by the Greeks. Before despair could fasten its grip, G-d demonstrated His everlasting kindness, and the Jews discovered a single small jar of olive oil, buried beneath the ruins, with the seal of the High Priest still intact upon its lid, clearly untouched by Greek hands. Although this provided only enough oil to burn for one day, they decided to light the menorah anyway, and behold, they had light from this oil for the entire eight days of the dedication.

The miracle of the discovery of a small amount of pure oil and its burning for eight days is the focus of the Chanukah celebration. It is therefore necessary to understand why it was so important for the Jews to find oil that was yet untouched by Greek hands. And why, since events were already in the realm of the miraculous, was an amount of oil sufficient for eight days not provided by G-d? The answer is clear when we consider the nature of the Greek exile of that time.

#### A Spiritual Victory

The Greeks were not trying to kill all the Jews, as was Haman, in the story of Purim, and later tyrants. Nor were they against Jewish culture or against Jewish study of the wisdom of the Torah. They had in mind a broader sense of destruction. They aimed to stamp out the Jews' belief and faith in G-d by eliminating their study and observance of those of His commandments, like circumcision and Shabbos, that were not based on human understanding, but on faith. With Judaism reduced to a rational structure, the Jews and their Torah would easily be assimilated into the dominant Greek culture and approach to life. This resistance to being stamped "Greek" at the cost of their traditional Jewishness is the reason why it was so important to find pure, untouched oil. With a small quantity of oil, they could be lighting the menorah, because this was sure to increase. This is a message for all of us as we watch the menorah's flames increase in

number and intensity night after night. The irreducible, uncompromisable faith of the tiny band of Maccabees, which is then miraculously rewarded by G-d, represents for us one of the secrets of Chanukah that has come down through the generations to illuminate and guide us today.

#### The Name of Chanukah

The name Chanukah suggests several possible meanings. The Hebrew letters that spell the word Chanukah – Ches, Nun, Vav, Chaf, and Hai – can be interpreted to mean:

- Rest on the 25th (Chanukah starts on the 25th of the month of Kislev).
- Dedication of the Temple which had been defiled by the Greeks but was now once again in Jewish hands.
- Education – a time to educate our youth in the purity of Torah which provides the strength in resisting the pressures of assimilation.

In fact, all three explanations together outline the story of Chanukah. From the third explanation was also born the custom of Chanukah gelt. Gelt, which means money, should be intended as a reward or an inducement for studying Torah.

#### The Menorah

The menorah should have a place for eight flames, in an even row, plus a place for the shamas (ministering) flame, which usually stands a little higher (or lower) than the others. The first night, one flame is kindled, and each night another candle is added until finally on the eighth night all eight candles burn brightly. The Chanukah flames are not lit directly but rather from the flame of the shamas. If no menorah is available, small metal caps or small glass cups may be used.

On the first night, we light the flame on the extreme right of the menorah. The following night, we add one immediately to the left and light it first. Then we kindle the lights of the previous nights. This pattern is followed nightly, adding lights from right to left, but kindling them from left to right.

Some people place their menorah in a window facing a public thoroughfare; oth-

ers place it in the doorway, opposite the mezuzah.

It is best to burn olive oil in commemoration of the actual miracles. Candles may be used instead, but certainly not electric lights or bulbs.

The flames are kindled with the appropriate blessing at either twilight or dark, depending on the family custom. In either case, they must burn for half an hour after nightfall.

On Friday night, Chanukah lights must be lit before the Shabbos candles. We are extremely careful about this, since it is forbidden to light any candles once Shabbos has begun and one must make sure that the lights will continue burning until after dark, by filling cups with much more oil than usual or by using longer candles. On Saturday night the Chanukah lights are lit after havdalah.

The man of the house lights for the household. If he does not light, the woman does. Children are permitted and encouraged to light their own menorahs.

#### The Dreidel

Since no work is permitted while the Chanukah lights are burning, and as the children now have some Chanukah gelt, they are sure to seize the opportunity to play dreidel. The dreidel is a small spinning toy with four sides. Each side has one letter – either nun, gimmel, hay, or shin – standing for the words nes gadol haya sham – “A great miracle happened there.” In Israel, the words are “A great miracle happened here,” with the Hebrew letter pay – the first letter of the Hebrew word poh (here) – replacing the shin for the word sham. Playing dreidel reminds us of those days when the Greek decrees forbade Torah study, and the children would play dreidel to disguise their Torah study whenever a Greek soldier appeared.

#### Latkes and Dairy

Because of the great significance of oil in the history of Chanukah, it is customary to eat latkes (potato fritters fried in oil) during the holiday. There is also a custom to eat dairy on Chanukah to commemorate its association with the way in which a clever woman, Yehudis, daughter of the High Priest, brought about

the downfall of a cruel Greek general and thus saved many lives.

### ***Chamishah Asar B'Shvat***

A New Year for Trees

The fifteenth day of the Hebrew month Shvat is also a New Year's Day. It is the Rosh Hashanah for trees. The day marks the beginning of the season in the Land of Israel when the trees begin to sprout and are judged as to their future. It is a time of rejuvenation and blossoming. It is also a time for man to relearn an important lesson.

“For man is the tree of the field,” the Torah tells us in Deuteronomy 20:19, and so, like a tree, man too must produce fruit. The fruits of mankind are Torah and good deeds. Just as a tree must bear fruit to stay healthy, so too must man engage in giving to others and furthering goodness in the world.

On Chamishah Asar B'Shvat it is customary to eat a lot of fruit. Some even have the custom of serving 15 kinds of fruit, corresponding to the date of the month, and reciting the 15 Songs of Ascent. Psalms 120-134. The more desirable fruits are specifically those fruits for which the Land of Israel is praised, namely: olives, dates, grapes, figs, and pomegranates. A new seasonal fruit should also be eaten on this day for the first time in the year and the blessing shehechyanu (“Who has granted us life, sustained us, and brought us to this season”) pronounced over it, in addition to the usual blessing for fruit. Bokser (carob) is a fruit traditionally associated with this day.

### ***Purim***

A Day of Joy and Elevation

Purim is fun. It is also a time of great spiritual elevation. This is not despite all the wild merrymaking that goes on during this day, but because of it. In general, there is a sort of topsy-turvy quality about Purim. Its history begins with the worst of all possibilities: a decree of death for all Jews. Suddenly each disaster turns into its opposite, and behold, the Jews again take upon themselves the yoke of Torah. Therefore, Haman's wicked decree was abolished, the Jews

were elevated, and the enemies were conquered. “For the Jews, there was light and joy, gladness and grace” (Book of Esther 8:16)

Purim commemorates the miracle that happened in Persia in the years between the First and Second Temples. It is not a holiday commanded by the Torah from the time of Moshe, but one decreed by rabbinical law. It is thus not ushered in by the lighting of candles, and work is not forbidden. However, one should avoid any unnecessary work in order to enjoy the festivities of the day.

### *Special Mitzvos of the Day*

The various mitzvos of Purim express the joy of the moment the Jews were delivered from their enemies. The mitzvos serve to perpetuate both the miraculous victory that occurred and the faith that it inspired for all generations. There are four main mitzvos:

- Reading of the Megillah – All men over the age of 13 and women over the age of 12 are obligated to hear the reading of the Megillah of Esther, the scroll in which the story of Purim is recorded. It is advisable, as with many mitzvos, to start the education of the child as early as possible, so we should encourage young children to listen to the reading of the Megillah, too. The children stamp their feet or wave special noisemakers (groggers) whenever wicked Haman’s name is mentioned.

Our rabbis stress that in order to fulfill one’s obligation of hearing the Megillah, one must hear every word. Nor may the Megillah be read backwards. The reader may not go back and reread missed parts.

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement, deepens our understanding of this saying by explaining that anyone who reads the Megillah backwards – as a story that happened many years ago – and doesn’t realize that the story of Purim, the story of constant Divine Providence guiding the “natural” events of the world, happens constantly as well, has not fulfilled his obligation to hear the Megillah.

The name of G-d is not mentioned once in the Megillah. Yet in viewing the entire story of Purim, it becomes clear that the unseen hand of Divine Providence shaped the events of Purim from beginning to end. The teaching for us is that even when no miracles take place openly before our eyes, miracles are happening constantly through G-d’s Providence as it is concealed in the natural world. It is compulsory for everyone to listen to the reading of Parshas Zochor, the

Torah reading for the Shabbos before Purim. This is a special portion which tells us to remember what Amalek, from whom Haman descended, did to the Jews when he attacked them without cause after the exodus from Egypt.

- *Mishloach Manos* – Everyone sends a gift of a minimum of two types of immediately edible foods to at least one friend. (Women send mishloach manos to women; men, to men.) More, and larger-sized, mishloach manos can be sent. Often these foods are presented in fancy boxes, or decorated in other ways, but this is not necessary. The minimum amount required is one ounce of solid food and at least three and a half ounces of liquid. Children should also participate in this mitzvah, and they have a wonderful time doing it.

- *Matanos L’Evyonim* – Everybody gives charity – at least a nickel each to two poor people. As we enjoy the holiday of Purim, it is certainly befitting that we remember the poor, so they too can enjoy the happiness of the day.

- *Seudas Purim* – A festive holiday meal in the late afternoon on the day of Purim, and before noon if Purim is on Friday.

- *Mach’tzis Hashekel* – Coins in any half-denomination amount (e.g., a half-dollar or the equivalent) are given in shul (synagogue) on the day before Purim (the Fast of Esther) or during the morning service on Purim.

### ***The Purim Feast and Traditional Foods***

The Purim feast is one of the happier events of the year. The whole family gathers together. Candles are lit (no blessing), and the blessing hamotzi is made on a sweet challah. The Purim meal is quite unusual and is celebrated with much merriment.

*Hamantashen* – three-cornered pastries stuffed with all kinds of delicious things – are eaten throughout the entire day. The challahs for the Purim feast, also shaped as hamantashen, are often filled with poppy seeds in memory of Queen Esther who led a three-day fast, during which she prayed to G-d to repeal the horrible decree against the Jews. She and her maidservants subsisted on seeds during the days of the fast. Today, many different fillings are used. The pastry

with its filling hidden inside reminds us of the miracle of Purim. This was a hidden miracle, because it came in a seemingly natural way and not through an obviously supernatural turn of events, as happened in the case of Chanukah. (For the Fast of Esther, the day before Purim, see Fast Days.)

During the Purim Feast, as on Erev Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah, kreplach are eaten. For Purim and Yom Kippur (Yom HaKippurim – a day that is like Purim) are quite similar in essence, even though the practices of Yom Kippur are preserved on Purim! All the heavenly blessings and bounty a Jew can draw for himself with the solemnities of Yom Kippur can be brought down and manifested through the service of utter joy on Purim.

The end of Purim is a signal that we have only thirty days until Pesach. Those who wisely plan ahead begin now to clean the home for that momentous holiday.

## *Pesach*

The Festival of Our Liberation

“Pesach is coming!”

This awareness always stirs a sense of excitement in every Jew as spring approaches. Replete with tradition and symbolism, Pesach portrays the ideal of freedom that is so vital to all mankind. The importance of Pesach is such that the story of our going out of Egypt is written in the same sentence as the First Commandment, “I am the L-rd, your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

Pesach is one of the Sholosh Regolim, the pilgrimages when it was a mitzvah for all males to celebrate the holiday in Jerusalem. Pesach lasts for eight days. The first two and the last two days are considered Yom Tov, and are ushered in with candle-lighting. The middle days are known as Chol Hamoed.

It is now more than 3,000 years since our ancestors were freed from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, yet every year at the seder table we are careful to tell the story in exquisite detail and with great enthusiasm. What is more, we are told, “Remember the day of your leaving Egypt each of the days of your life.” (Deuteronomy 16:3) Why? What meaning can this possibly have for us today? What is it about the Festival of Matzos that makes it so special to us? Matzah, charoses, and the other traditional foods of this day are all vivid in our minds, yet Pesach certainly means more to each of us than just the foods we eat.

Pesach is often referred to as z'man cheiruseinu, the season of our freedom. The Hebrew word for Egypt is Mitzrayim, meaning “limitations.” Perhaps the most imprisoning slavery of all, the cruelest limitation, is the bondage of those who do not even know that they are bound, and thus have no desire at all to escape from their limitations.

It says in the Passover Haggadah (just before the second cup of wine), that each of us, in every generation, must see ourselves as if we personally were taken out of Egypt. Each day we must experience this redemption from Mitzrayim (limitations). As individuals, we must seek to extricate ourselves from

enslavement to the pettiness of mundane lives based only on satisfying physical pleasures and material desires. We must elevate ourselves to a life of meaning, growth, and G-dliness in order to fulfill the needs of our Jewish souls.

#### The Days Before Pesach

On the night before Pesach, the search for chometz – foods containing leavened flour – is carried out, and in the morning all chometz is removed from the house. This important mitzvah is usually possible only after a few weeks of extensive housecleaning. On Erev Pesach, the day preceding Pesach, no chometz should be eaten from approximately 9:30 AM, depending upon location; check the Hebrew calendar for the exact time; and none should be in one's possession after about an hour later. If these deadlines are inadvertently missed, a rav should be consulted immediately.

After noon, neither matzah nor any of the other mandatory foods of the seder plate may be eaten. Apples and nuts, which are ingredients of charoses, are also customarily not eaten on Erev Pesach.

First-born males are obligated to fast on this day in memory of the tenth plague that befell the Egyptians when their first-born died, while the Jewish first-born were spared. However, through listening to a siyum (the conclusion of learning of a tractate of Talmud, which can be done over the phone), the need for fasting is eliminated.

The afternoon of Erev Pesach is the traditional time for baking matzah, but matzah baked earlier may be used.

Only after the kitchen is completely kosher for pesach, which usually doesn't happen until the night of Erev Pesach immediately before the search for chometz, may Pesach food be brought into the kitchen or placed in the refrigerator. Erev Pesach is usually a whirlpool of activity for the woman of the house and her helpers; all the Pesach dishes and utensils must be hauled out of storage and rinsed, and all the Pesach supplies brought in. Hopefully, all the matzah, wine, fish, meat, vegetables, aluminum foil, and so forth were obtained earlier in the week; however, the morning of Erev Pesach often sees a lot of last-

minute shopping.

Of course, the main concern of Erev Pesach is preparing the Seder meal. Erev Pesach is one of the busiest and most exciting days of the year. Its outcome, the Seder night, makes the bustle well worth the effort.

#### The Seder

“Why is this night different from all other nights?” With these words we begin once again our recital of the wonderful and miraculous story of our liberation from Egypt long ago. The Pesach Seder, the traditional holiday meal of the first and second nights of the festival, has throughout the ages been a unique opportunity for all members of the family – grandparents, uncles, aunts, and, of course, all the children – to join together in thanksgiving to G-d for His miraculous redemption of the Jewish people.

As we recall the many miracles G-d performed from the time of Abraham to the going out of Egypt, and afterwards, we again live through those times and are inspired by the wondrous ways of G-d. We recall the Ten Plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna from heaven that G-d fed us each day in the wilderness, and the eager anticipation with which the Jews awaited the giving of the Torah – the ultimate purpose of the deliverance from Egypt.

Our sages explain that on these anniversaries, the same Divine influence that brought about the miraculous events of old are again, by the process of recollection and remembrance, auspicious days. The singular atmosphere that surrounded the original events of the festival, with all its soul-stirring aspects, becomes reawakened, and actually recurs as we remember those events each year with the advent of Pesach.

The Torah commands us to “tell your children the story of Pesach.” Indeed, the children (and those young in Torah knowledge) play a major role in the Seder. Many of the unique practices of the Seder table – eating the matzah, dipping the maror in charoses, and sitting in a reclined position – are designed to stimulate the child's curiosity, which is expressed formally in the “four questions,” (usually asked by children at the seder) beginning with Mah Nishtanah of the

Haggadah: “Why is this night different from all the other nights?”

The Haggadah is a special book setting forth the pattern of the Seder. The Seder gets its name from the Hebrew word for order; it refers to the pattern, established by the sages, which begins with kiddush and continues through the telling of the story, the eating of matzah and maror, the meal, and culminating with the Praise of G-d (Hallel). We end with the words “Next year in Jerusalem,” looking forward to the future redemption, speedily in our days, to which G-d will bring us, just as He redeemed our ancestors in the past.

The word Haggadah comes from the word for “telling.” It recounts all the events and miracles of the liberation from Egypt and directs us in the course of the Seder: when to drink each of the four cups of wine, when to eat the matzah, and so on. It is available in many languages.

Using the Haggadah should not limit us in our discussion of the story of Pesach, but should rather serve as a stimulus for further inquiry and discussion. The Haggadah itself recounts how five of our greatest sages sat a whole night in discussion of the story of the going out of Egypt, until daylight signaled the time of the morning prayers. The story is concluded with the words, “Whoever increases in the telling of the going out of Egypt, behold, this is praiseworthy.”

#### The Seder Plate: Its Foods and Preparations

Just as the atmosphere of the Shabbos and holidays is largely a result of the preparations made by the woman of the house, so too will the smooth order in which the Seder is conducted largely depend on her.

In particular, all preparations for the Seder plate and the Seder meal should be completed in advance, so that the Seder can begin as soon as everyone returns from the holiday evening service. Remember that beginning the Seder as soon as possible is largely for the benefit of the children; so all efforts should be made to start as early as possible.

Preparing the Seder plate requires several hours of work. It is advisable to get other members of the house to help so that the work will be completed before the Yom Tov begins. It is best to prepare all the Seder foods before Yom Tov in

order to avoid halachic questions. Food prepared on Yom Tov may not be used for the second Seder or the following day.

The special foods we eat on Pesach are also food for thought. Every item on the Seder plate abounds in meaning and symbolism. The Seder plate has six items on it, arranged in a special order. The plate is placed on top of the covering of the three matzos and is placed in front of the head of the household. Some also have the custom of setting a separate Seder plate for each male participant age 13 and over.

The foods of the Seder plate are listed below, with the reason each is included, the method of preparing it, and its role in the Seder meal.

#### The Four Cups of Wine

In addition to the matzah, the items on the Seder plate, and the festive holiday meal itself, we drink four special cups of wine during the Seder, for wine is symbolic of freedom and happiness.

The four cups of wine correspond to the four expressions that refer to stages of G-d’s deliverance of the Jews: And I brought out; and I delivered; and I redeemed; and I took. The four cups are drunk in turn as kiddush – before the meal, immediately following blessings, after the meal, and at the very end of the Seder.

#### The Cup of Elijah

There is a fifth expression of redemption used in the Torah: And I brought. This is represented by the Cup of Elijah, usually set in the center of the table and filled at the end of the meal. A beautiful and large wine cup is usually reserved as the cup of Elijah. After the cup is filled, we go to the door to greet the Prophet Elijah, who is known to visit every Seder.

The honor of announcing the coming of the Messiah has been reserved for the Prophet Elijah. Every year, as we open the door for Elijah after telling the inspiring story of our ancestors’ deliverance from the exile in Egypt, we hope that we too will merit to hear from Elijah about the coming deliverance from our current exile, speedily in our days.

#### The Afikoman

At the end of the meal a small piece of matzah is eaten, known as the afikoman, which means dessert. The afikoman reminds us of the Pesach sacrifice, which was eaten at the conclusion of the Pesach meal. Today, the person conducting the Seder breaks the middle matzah of the three matzos on the Seder plate into two unequal parts and places the larger part in safe place. This is then eaten for afikoman before the saying of the blessings after the meal.

#### The Zeroah

A piece of roasted meat represents the lamb that was the special Pesach sacrifice on the eve of the exodus from Egypt. At the time of the Holy Temple, the Pesach sacrifice was brought to the temple in the afternoon before Pesach. Preparation: Roast a chicken neck on all sides over an open fire on the stove. Afterwards, some have the custom to remove most of the neck meat for the Seder. This should be done before Yom Tov; if cooked during Yom Tov it must be eaten on the day of Yom Tov, but not at night because roasted foods may not be eaten at the Seder due to their similarity to the Pesach sacrifice.

Role in the Seder: The zeroah is not eaten. After the meal, it is refrigerated and then used the following night for the second Seder.

#### The Betza

A hard-boiled egg represents the holiday offering from the days of the Holy Temple. This constituted the main part of the Pesach meal. Preparation: Boil one egg per Seder plate and possibly more for use during the meal.

Role in the Seder: Place one egg on each plate. As soon as the actual meal is about to begin, remove the egg from the Seder plate and use it during the meal. A popular way of using these eggs is to eat them with salt water, which is set on the table. Salt water should be prepared on Erev Shabbos if the first night of Pesach falls on a Friday night. If one forgot, an amount just enough for use on that night may be prepared. The eggs prepared this way are then served as an appetizer before fish.

#### The Maror

Bitter herbs remind us of the bitterness of the slavery of our forefathers in Egypt. Fresh horseradish or romaine lettuce are the most common choices. The greens must be washed extremely well before Yom Tov begins, and care must be taken to check for insects. Afterwards, they are dried very well.

Preparation: This must be done before Yom Tov begins. Peel the raw horseradish roots and rinse them off well. Dry them very carefully, since they will be eaten with the matzah later on for the “matzah and maror sandwich.” Not even a drop of water should be left on the horseradish.

Next, grate the horseradish with a hand grater or electric grater. (A word of warning: whoever gets this job will shed copious tears and cough a lot.) Covering the face with a cloth helps prevent inhaling the strong, bitter odor. The horseradish is placed on the Seder plate on top of a few cleaned, dried leaves of romaine lettuce, which is also maror.

Role in the Seder: After the recital of most of the Haggadah comes the ritual hand washing. Then the k'zaysim (small amounts of) matzah are eaten followed by maror, horseradish folded in romaine lettuce leaves. Immediately afterwards, one eats the Korach (Matzoh with maror in it) sandwich of horseradish wrapped in romaine lettuce leaves in between two pieces of matzah.

#### The Charoses

A mixture of apples, nuts, and wine resembles the mortar and bricks made by the Jews when they toiled for Pharaoh.

Preparation: Shell walnuts, peel apples, and chop finely. Mix together and add a small amount of wine. It is best to prepare charoses before Yom Tov. If preparing on Yom Tov, however, one must make sure not to grind any of the ingredients but rather mash them in an unusual manner. If the first night falls on Shabbos, one must also combine the ingredients in an unconventional manner, such as adding the mixture to the wine instead of vice versa.

Role in the Seder: This is used as a type of relish into which the maror is dipped, and then shaken off, before eating.

#### Karpas

This non-bitter root vegetable alludes to the backbreaking work of the Jews as

slaves. The Hebrew letters of karpas can be arranged to spell "Perach Samech." Perach means back-breaking work and Samech is numerically equivalent to 60, referring to the 60 myriads (10,000), equaling 600,000, which was the number of Jewish males over 20 years of age who were enslaved in Egypt. Preparation: Peel an onion or boiled potato. Cut off a slice and place on the Seder plate. Place a small bowl of salt water next to the Seder plate on the table.

Role in the Seder: After recital of kiddush, the family goes to the sink and ritually washes hands, but without saying the usual blessing. Then the head of the household cuts a small piece of the root vegetable used, dips it in salt water, and gives each person at the table a very small piece. The head of the household then says the appropriate blessing. Care should be taken that each person eats no less than 17 grams (about 1/2 ounce).

#### Chazeres

Usually romaine lettuce – more bitter herbs. Romaine lettuce too symbolizes the bitter enslavement of our fathers in Egypt. The leaves of the romaine lettuce are not bitter, but the stem, when left to grow in the ground, turns hard and bitter. So it was with our enslavement in Egypt. At first, Pharaoh's requests were soft and reasonable, so much so that the Jews volunteered to work. Gradually, the work evolved into forced and cruel labor.

Preparation: Romaine lettuce is often very sandy. Start well before Yom Tov. Wash each of the leaves separately, checking very carefully for insects. Pat gently with a towel and let it sit until completely dry, so that there will be no moisture to come in contact with the matzah.

Depending on how much romaine lettuce is needed, it can take several hours to prepare. This task should be completed before candle-lighting on the first night. Prepare enough leaves for both nights and store in the refrigerator. Soaking of the romaine leaves may not be done on Yom Tov.

Role in the Seder: Chazeres is used in conjunction with horseradish. It is used when eating the maror and when eating the matzah and maror sandwich. Place the leaves in two piles on the seder plate, one under the maror and one separately at the bottom. Keep a stack of cleaned leaves handy in the refrigerator in case additional leaves are needed.

#### Matzah – Unleavened Bread

All of the Seder plate items are placed on top of the three covered matzos, for the lesson of matzah is the foundation of the entire Pesach Seder. Matzah, a flat humble bread, is contrasted to yeasted bread that is inflated, attractive, and tasty. All leavened food is chometz, and we are forbidden to eat or even possess chometz throughout the holiday of Pesach.

The lightness and attractiveness of chometz-type food is a result of the leaven that fills it with air. In the same way, when we search for chometz in ourselves, we see how the chometz-like qualities, such as self-love, vanity, and arrogance, are also essentially empty.

Once the leavening process in baking is completed, the dough can rise no more. When matzah is being made, however, stringent precautions are taken not to leave the dough unattended for a second, lest it rise. When the Jews left Egypt, they did not have time to let their dough rise. They baked it immediately and it became matzah. Therefore, it is a special mitzvah for every person to eat at least a small piece, a k'zayis, of matzah on Pesach Seder nights, at least half of a hand-baked matzah, equivalent to one whole machine-baked matzah, which is approximately one ounce.

#### Shmurah Matzah

Matzah is made from flour and water that is prepared and baked very quickly. In order to make sure that it has no chance of fermentation, several precautions are taken months before the baking process. Matzah made accordingly is called shmurah matzah, i.e., guarded matzah.

There are different types of shmurah matzah. The strictest definition is flour that is guarded from the time the wheat is cut. The other definition is flour that is watched from the time the flour is ground. At least for the mandatory k'zayis that is eaten at the Seder, one should have handmade shmurah matzah made from flour which was guarded from the time the grain was cut. The matzos are round.

#### Combining Baked Matzah with Liquid

There are various customs that allow the combining of already-baked matzah or matzah meal with a liquid, to form such treats as matzah balls. This custom is known as g'broks dipping.

However, many people avoid this because if even the minutest particle of flour in the matzah or matzah meal remains unbaked and touches water or other liquids, it would become actual chometz. It is said that on Pesach all stringent measures are to be respected and applied; thus this practice of not eating g'broks is highly recommended. However, even those who do not eat g'broks make an exception on the eighth day of Pesach, which is observed as a Rabbinic ordinance outside of Israel.

### ***Pesach Sheni***

A "second Pesach," Pesach Sheni, arrives on the fourteenth day of the month of Iyar. The first Pesach Sheni occurred soon after the Jews left Egypt, when those Jews had been unable to participate in the Pesach offering one month earlier, because they had been impure at that time. They came to Moses to ask how they too could be included in the mitzvah. G-d was pleased with their request, and a second day for bringing the paschal lamb sacrifice was set aside for them. Pesach Sheni demonstrates the Jews' love for doing mitzvos. A person's eagerness to do a deed can often be measured by his reaction when not given the chance to fulfill it. It also teaches us that for a Jew it is never too late. We must never lose hope. G-d always provides another chance.

Though Pesach Sheni is not observed as a Yom Tov, it is still a special day. It is customary to eat matzah, and many of the people who eat the special round, handmade shmurahh matzah put some away at the end of Pesach to eat on this day. There is no prohibition against chometz, so bread and all other foods of the year are permissible.

### ***Lag B'Omer***

*The Counting of the Omer*

*"Today, we no longer have the Holy Temple. But, our sages state, only the stones have been destroyed, the Divine Presence remains."*

Fifty days separate the going out of Egypt from the giving of the Torah. Each day from the second night on was counted by the Jews, and each day's higher number reflected a progress from the previous day in the preparation to receive the Torah. We too are commanded to count each day from the second night of Pesach to Shavuot, the festival marking the giving of the Torah. We use this time to prepare ourselves, each day more than the day before, to be ready to receive the Torah anew.

The counting of these 49 days, which is done with a blessing every night after the evening prayers, is called "The Counting of the Omer." These days are given the name Omer from the offering which was brought to the Holy Temple on the second day of Pesach, the night on which the counting begins. The Omer offering is a certain measurement of grains from the new crop permitted to be used. An offering of barley was brought on Pesach, while on Shavuot, two loaves of bread baked from the wheat of the new crop were presented.

#### *The Students of Rabbi Akiba*

These days have yet another meaning for us in connection with the students of the great Rabbi Akiba, who lived almost 2,000 years ago. It was during the Omer period that many of Rabbi Akiba's students died during an epidemic. Our sages then declared that these days should be commemorated as partial mourning days for all times, for this was indeed a loss for the Jews. Therefore, during this time, or part of this time, according to different customs, rejoicing is curtailed and there are no weddings, no dancing, and no haircuts. On the thirty-third day of the Omer, the epidemic stopped. This day is called Lag B'Omer; the numerical value of the Hebrew letters comprising the word lag – lamed, gimel – is 33. This is a day of great rejoicing. Weddings and other celebrations are permitted. Also, boys who have reached the age of three during the first 32 days of the Omer now receive their ceremonial haircutting, the upsherenish, on this day.

#### *Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai*

There is yet another reason for the celebration of the thirty-third day of the Omer. It is the *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of the passing on, of our holy Sage, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. The *yahrzeit* of a great person is often marked with celebration, as on this day every year, the person's soul ascends to greater

heights in the eternal world. Because of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's uncompromising determination to teach Torah publicly, his death was decreed by the Romans. Forced to flee from his home, he hid in a cave with his son for 13 years. During this entire time, he and his son ate from a carob tree, which G-d miraculously made grow right outside their cave. There they also learned the deepest inner meanings of the Torah. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is also the

author of the Zohar, one of the earliest and more important written sources of kabbalah and Jewish mysticism.

*“Living a Jewish life is a process, not a destination.”*

It is written about Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai that, during his lifetime, no rainbow appeared in the sky. The rainbow, as G-d told Noah after the flood, is a sign that even if G-d is angry with the world, He will never again destroy it with a flood. Rabbi Shimon Bar

Yochai was so great and so influential, that while he

was alive, neither he nor any other Jew needed the reminder and guarantee of the rainbow

To remember the greatness of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, it has become a custom that on Lag B'Omer children are often taken on outings to parks or woods.

## Shavuos

The Giving of the Torah

Coming after 49 days of counting the Omer, the impatiently awaited Yom Tov of Shavuos heralds the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Jewish people then became a real nation and their identity was established with their acceptance of the Torah with the words, Na'aseh v'nishmah, “We will do and we will hear.”

First we accept upon ourselves to do as G-d commanded, and then we apply our intelligence to learn and understand the Torah. The entire Jewish nation witnessed an unparalleled revelation of G-dliness at Mount Sinai and pledged themselves for all generations to fulfill the task of being “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” We can see the connection of the exodus from Egypt is our receiving of the Torah and reaching, through it, a spiritual freedom even greater than the physical freedom we had already achieved.

It is the Torah that has been the preservation and motivating force of the Jewish people's existence throughout the ages. Cultures, diets, languages, and countries of residence all change; yet Torah remains constant because it is founded on an unconditional truth, the only kind of truth that can continue to ensure the unique existence of the Jewish people despite all odds. And only the truth of the Torah is unconditional, for it was given by G-d to the Jewish people to keep and guard for all generations, wherever they may be.

An interesting detail of the Shavuos story is related in the Midrash. Just prior to the giving of the Torah, G-d asked the Jewish people, “Who will guarantee the Torah? How can I be assured that the Torah would be cherished and observed throughout the generations?” The Jewish people offered many possible guarantors, from the patriarchs to the prophets and great men as yet unborn, but G-d was not satisfied. Only when the little children were suggested did G-d accept. It is only in the merit of the children that the Torah was given to us, and it is only through their merits that we have this guide to live by. Giving our children as guarantors for the keeping of the Torah is a sign of our pure commitment to the Torah and the transmission of it from generation to generation.

*“The entire purpose of the Torah is to do, to keep trying, day in and day out, morning and evening. Noble ideas and brilliant concepts are merely words in the wind without action.”*

Shavuos Customs

Shavuos is the Yom Tov of our accepting the Torah itself as a whole. It is one of the Sholosh Regolim (pilgrimage festivals). Many interesting customs are observed on this day.

On the eve of Shavuos it is customary for all men over 13 to stay up all night absorbed in the study of Torah, to show our eagerness to receive the Torah. The Torah reading on Shavuos is about the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. When the reader comes to the actual Ten Commandments, all congregants stand up. On the first day of Yom Tov it is customary to eat a dairy meal. Many people complement the dairy dishes with a complete Yom Tov meal,

after a one-hour interval. If the meat meal is eaten first, one must be careful to observe the six-hour waiting period before eating dairy. Cheese dishes, particularly blintzes, are traditionally served. Many reasons have been put forth for this, one being that on Shavuos the Jews received the Torah, which contains the laws of what one may and may not eat, and as the Jews were not yet well-versed in the laws of shechita (kosher slaughtering), they refrained from eating meat.

Shavuos is also the festival of fruits. On this day, the first fruits were brought to the Holy Temple in beautifully arranged baskets, and offered with great pageantry in an inspiring ceremony. For this reason, some people also have the custom on Shavuos of eating, for the first time that year, one kind of fresh summer fruit and saying the blessing shehechyanu.

Many people observe the custom of decorating their homes with fresh flowers on Shavuos in memory of Mount Sinai, a once-barren spot which came into full bloom when the Torah was given on its summit. Of course, the flowers are cut before Shavuos.

Shavuos is also the anniversary of the passing of King David, who descended from Ruth. Ruth was a modest, righteous woman who, because of her true love for Torah and mitzvos, accepted this Torah despite many difficulties, and converted to Judaism. It was because of her honest convictions and humble conduct that she had the merit to become the mother of the kings of Israel. From this line of great kings, our righteous Messiah will be born and will redeem us from exile. Like Ruth, we, the people of Israel, accept the whole Torah and all its mitzvos wholeheartedly and in complete faith. For these reasons, Megillas Ruth, the Story of Ruth, is read in shul on the second day of Shavuos in many communities.

### ***Aleph Institute Programs***

***Aleph Library*** — Religious books are expensive and our program understands that prisoners have very little or no money and cannot afford them. The Aleph

Institute's lending library allows prisoners access to these texts for religious studies thru the institution library. As the Aleph Institute library is part of the inter-library exchange, any book at the library is available to the prison library. Please have the institution library contact us at [library@alephne.org](mailto:library@alephne.org) with any question.

***Books and Religious Materials*** - The Books and Religious Materials program is similar to the Aleph Library program in the sense that religious texts are provided to the inmates for religious studies. The difference in these two programs is that the texts are completely free and distributed en masse.

***Chesed Mentoring Program*** - Prisoners need people to visit them to help keep their hopes up. The Chesed program provides volunteer visits, correspondence, emotional support and encouragement to inmates both prior to and upon their release from jail or prison.

***Holiday-Based Programs*** - The Jewish holidays should be practiced everywhere regardless of conditions. Aleph allows Jewish prisoners with no Jewish surroundings to practice their religion and celebrate holidays while incarcerated. The families of the prisoners are also afforded the opportunity to observe the holidays with their loved ones.

***In Prison Outreach*** - This program ensures that a rabbi visits each prison every two weeks to make sure that the Jews imprisoned at these facilities are given their rights to religious services, including anything from kosher meals to menorahs during Chanukah. This program is necessary to ensure that the religious rights of Jews in prisons are not infringed upon.

***Torah Studies Program*** - This program seeks to provide Jewish study material for the Jewish men and women who are otherwise separated from the Jewish community and cannot attend study groups or classes. We provide the courses for a nominal cost, recognizing that the average inmate earns no more than eleven cents an hour. We offer scholarships for the course and the necessary books for those inmates who are indigent. These courses seek to take otherwise "dead" time and transform it into a time of spiritual growth and advance-

ment.

**Torah Leadership Program** - This program takes certain inmates and gives them the necessary training to lead services at the institutions where they reside. These inmates become liaisons between the Aleph Institute and their institutions. In the past, we have taken these individuals to the Rabbinical College of America in Morristown, NJ, and provided them with one week of extensive training in a religious environment.

**Chanukah Gelt Program** – This program allows incarcerated Jewish men and women to send their children and grandchildren “Chanukah Gelt” (and toys). Inmates being torn from their families is most difficult during the holidays, and the pain and suffering that a child goes through when a loved one is incarcerated is sometimes unbearable. The toy children receive from their father, mother, grandfather or grandmother is heartwarming for them and becomes extremely meaningful.

**Job Placement Program** - One of the biggest dilemmas a Jewish inmate faces upon release from prison is not knowing where to turn or who will hire him or her. Prisoners leave incarceration with the disadvantage of being convicted who have been out of the work force for months, if not years. Aleph helps these individuals find employment and provides them with computer training courses. We also assist former inmates with their resumes and with interviewing skills.

**Religious Counseling** - Returning to society can be confusing and traumatic. Religious counseling with the ex-inmate on a one-to-one basis eases the transition from prison to society. If the former inmate or a loved one is interested in being assigned to a rabbi, he or she should complete the Re-entry form (please contact our office for the re-entry form).

**Community Transition Program** - This program works with local Jewish agencies to provide free medical care, counseling services, social work, and clothes, as well as a host of community programs that provide the tools necessary for the individual to become a productive member of society.

**Anonymous Meetings** - There are weekly AA, NA, GA and OA meetings led at the Aleph Institute. These meetings have proven to be a successful recourse for helping the tens of thousands of people afflicted with addictive behavior. For more information about these support groups, please visit their respective websites. They and they alone speak on behalf of their programs. Aleph Institute is proud to host these meetings.

**Holiday Programs** - Aleph has ongoing holiday programs to help ex-inmates or their families transition to society and find resources available during hardships. These meetings are open to the public – there is no sign-in process.

**Aleph House** - The Aleph Institute provides housing for ex-inmates upon their release. We subcontract with other facilities to provide the necessary housing. An inmate needing these services should write us for more information.

**Emergency Funds/Holiday Financial Assistance** - Aleph is able to assist in emergency situations. We realize it can be difficult with only one person trying to cover all basic necessities and will try to offer some assistance if we are able.

**Clothing Assistance** - Aleph also has ties to other agencies to help provide clothing for the children of inmates. We know how fast children can grow; We can also help adults who need work clothing and coats.

**Rabbinical Counseling** - Aleph rabbis will meet with with the prisoner and help with both individual and family counseling. During this time one should be able to talk about the changes occurring in your the family structure.

**Health Services** - This program works with local Jewish agencies to provide medical care to families of the incarcerated.

In loving memory of my parents

***Rabbi Yechiel & Mirel Vogel***

הרה"ח ר' יחיאל בן הר"ר יעקב קאפעל ע"ה  
ומרת מירל בן ר' נתן ע"ה  
by

***Rabbi & Mrs. Moishe Mayir Vogel  
and Family***

In memory of my parents:

***Rabbi Aaron and Shyrle Seidman***

and in memory of my parents-in-law:

***Ivan and Betty Romanhof***

by

***Rabbi & Mrs. Eli Seidman***  
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