

# GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

[www.gatherthepeople.org](http://www.gatherthepeople.org)

## FAMILY SIDDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 3

**LAST TIME WE TALKED ABOUT THE FIRST OF THE TWO FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICES ON SHABBAT—CALLED קַבְּלַת שַׁבָּת.**

- *Who remembers what קַבְּלַת שַׁבָּת means?*
- And we talked about welcoming שַׁבָּת in the sense of getting ready for a very special time, a time when we're going to be the best we can be.

**IN THIS SESSION WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT TWO MORE PSALMS IN THE קַבְּלַת שַׁבָּת SERVICE.**

- *Do you remember who wrote the Psalms that are in the סִידוּר?*
- *By the way, what's the "סִידוּר"?*
- The סִידוּר is our communal prayerbook, which shows us *what* and *how* to pray together as Jewish community.
- *Why do we go to services and use a prayerbook; why don't we just go out into nature and pray our own personal prayers?*

**ON PAGE 16 OF OUR סִידוּר, YOU'LL FIND PSALM 96.**

- It starts with the words: "Sing a *new* song to Adonai."
  1. *First, who is "Adonai"?*
  2. Adonai is "our Lord."
  3. *What kind of person do you have in mind who you call a "lord"?*
  4. Usually we're thinking of someone who acts like our master, controlling us and mistreating us.
  5. But the basic meaning of Adonai, the Hebrew word for lord, does not mean someone above us who controls and mistreats us, but one who provides a foundation below us to support us and sustain us.
- *And why should we want to sing a new song to God at the beginning of שַׁבָּת?*
  1. Because, although in one sense God is creating the world every moment, it's on שַׁבָּת when we celebrate that in another sense God finished the creation.
  2. As we have already said, although in some ways the creation is always changing, the laws that God made to rule the creation do not change.

3. It's a reminder that every week we have a chance to make ourselves new, to stop doing things we shouldn't do and to begin doing the things we should do by following God's laws that we learn from the Torah.
4. If we make ourselves new in some way every week, we can sing a new song to God every week.
- In the second and third lines of Psalm 96 it says: "Sing to Adonai, bless His Name, proclaim from day to day His salvation."
  1. *Can anyone help us to understand what "salvation" means?* [HERE, TO BE SAVED]
  2. *Can you imagine how, if we believe in God and do what the Torah teaches, we will be saved? Saved from what?*
  3. *What kind of things do we avoid—what are we saved from—if we believe in God and follow what the Torah teaches us?*

#### **BY THE WAY, *WHAT IS THE TORAH AND WHERE IS IT?***

- Judaism recognizes that God must have had some kind of plan in "mind" before creating the universe, and our tradition, called the *הַרְוּחַ*, teaches that "God looked into the Torah and created the world."
- Apart from being the blueprint for the physical creation, the Torah specified the moral-spiritual infrastructure of the creation, the moral and ethical commandments, the 613 *מִצְוֹת*, which are the foundation of a Jewish society.
- God gave the Torah orally to Moses, we believe on Mount Sinai after the people had left Egypt, and some 40 years later he wrote the written Torah, after which he passed it on to the priests and the people.
  1. There is some confusion and controversy between the rabbis and scholars regarding the oral Torah and the written Torah. If you would like to know the *modern* orthodox understanding of these matters, we recommend reading a handout titled: "Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) Commentary on the Relationship of the Oral Torah and the Written Torah"—which is very helpful.
  2. The written Torah came to reside in the Holy of Holies—the innermost part of the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary constructed by Moses as a place of worship for the Hebrew tribes, and later in the Temples in Jerusalem—but it wasn't until much later, around the year 200 of the common era, that the preparation of the oral Torah for publication was complete.
  3. In time, copies of the written Torah found their way into the sanctuaries of our synagogues.
  4. And, possibly best of all, the written Torah has been taken up into the minds of innumerable Jews around the world.

- *What do you think it means to “proclaim God’s salvation from day to day”?*
- *What does it mean to “proclaim” something?*
  1. The Hebrew word that’s translated as proclaim is בְּשִׁרָוֹ.
  2. The root letters of the word are ג-ש-ב, which have the basic meaning of bodily flesh.
  3. But here our body “proclaims” in the sense that we use it in a way that’s mindful of its godly purpose, which is to fulfill our mission as Jews by helping others to see the awesome power of God.
  4. So the word בְּשִׁרָוֹ says to us that we should put our whole body into proclaiming, telling ourselves and anyone else who will listen and learn, that we can be saved by God and Torah.
- Toward the end of the Psalm, we usually sing the line that begins with יִשְׂמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם, meaning let the heavens rejoice, and then goes on to say: and let the earth rejoice and the sea roar.
  1. This sounds like everything is happy—not only us but everything that God has created.
  2. Our rabbis teach us that the reason we become happy is that we choose to do what God wants us to do, what we were created to do, which are told to us in both the written Torah and the oral Torah, which we know as the Talmud.

**THE NEXT PSALM IN THE שַׁבָּת קַבְּלַת שֵׁנַי SERVICE IS PSALM 97, ON PAGE 17.**

- And the first words are: “Adonai has ruled, let the earth be joyful.”
- And then in the last part of the next sentence it reads: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne.”
- So we have to answer some questions to figure out what this means:
  1. *What’s a “foundation”?* [LIKE THE BOTTOM OF A BUILDING]
  2. *What’s “righteousness”?* [DOING RIGHT, WHAT GOD’S LAW TELLS US]
  3. *And what’s “justice”?* [DOING WHAT’S FAIR]
- *So what does the first part of this Psalm tell us?*
  1. That God is in charge of the world—that’s the part where it says Adonai has *ruled*.
  2. God makes the rules by which everything works.
  3. And God’s rules favor those who do what’s right and fair—that’s the part where it says God’s throne rests on righteousness and justice.
  4. *Why should we be very happy about that?*
- But wait a minute!

1. *What about all the times when people who behave badly succeed in some way?*
  2. *Why does that happen?*
  3. *Why is it that the bully at school or abusive co-worker gets away with their bad behavior?*
  4. *What do you think happens to the people who behave badly when everybody else does what's right and fair?*
- The last lines in this psalm tell us that “Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright of heart.”
    1. *What might that mean?*
    2. For those of us who want to do what's right and fair, God shows us the way, lights a path for us so we're not in darkness.
    3. *And finally, can anyone tell us where we'll find the maps for that path?*