

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDTUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 10

LAST WEEK WE TALKED ABOUT THE בְּרָכוּ, WHICH IS ON PAGE 28

- ***Does anyone remember what we do when we say the בְּרָכוּ?***
- We bow from the waist—not bending the knees—and we’re upright before we say Adonai.
- ***Does anyone remember what it means to “bless God”?***
 1. We don’t bless God with our *words*.
 2. It’s with our deeds, what we actually *do*.

THE NEXT PART OF THE SERVICE, WHICH COMES RIGHT AFTER THE בְּרָכוּ, INCLUDES THE BLESSINGS OF THE מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים.

- The first blessing before the מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים is on page 28.
- Would someone read that first blessing in English.
- ***So what is this blessing about?***
 1. First, it’s saying that we’re thankful that the whole universe—the billions of galaxies and their innumerable stars and suns and planets—continues its ways according to God’s plan.
 2. The planets and stars and galaxies are not just flying around out of control in a million different directions.
 3. When we look through a telescope into the night sky—how many of you have done that?—we see that everything is happening by a kind of “Divine Intelligence,” or in ordinary words, by God’s command.
- When we say this prayer with our congregation, we do so silently, and then the leader sings the last part to let everyone know that we’re moving on.
- It sounds like this. [SING HATIMAH]
- So let’s move on to the second blessing before the מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים, on page 29.
- ***Would someone read it for us in English?***
- ***What’s this blessing about?***
 1. It says something about us, about humankind.
 2. It says that God loves us by giving us the Torah, so we can do the right thing and be happy.

- ***Are these two blessings the same or different?***
 1. The first one is about how God rules the universe.
 2. The second one is about how God wants us to rule ourselves by following the Torah.
 3. ***Is there any difference in how God’s laws affect the stars and galaxies and how they affect us?***
- We usually sing this blessing in synagogue—and it sounds like this.
[SING AHAVAT OLAM]

SO LET’S MOVE ON TO THE שמע ON PAGE 30.

- Will someone read it for us in Hebrew.
- ***Can we all chant it now the way we do in the Friday evening service?***
 1. Of course, we can chant it now as a kind of practice—that is, we would not actually be praying.
 2. Because of that, it’s not appropriate to mention God by name, so in place of “God” we say “השם,” which literally means “the name.”
 3. So we would say the first line of the שמע: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ: הַשֵּׁם אֶחָד.
 4. So let’s chant it that way now: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַשֵּׁם אֶחָד.
- And let’s read it together in English.
- ***What does it mean to say that God is our God and that God is one?***
 1. Let’s start with the idea that God is one, like no other.
 2. There is no other god like our God Who rules everything and everybody, including us!
 3. Other people have different ideas: they believe that God is divided into three parts or that there are many gods.
- ***How do we know about our God?***
 1. ***What’s our source of information about God?***
 2. ***Does the Torah answer all our question about God?***
 3. ***What kind of questions does the Torah not answer?***
- When we say the שמע, we draw out the last syllable of the last word, אֶחָד, and we emphasize the final letter, ד, which sounds like this.
[CHANT SHEMA USING הַשֵּׁם]

 1. If you look at the last word, you’ll see that the second to last letter is a ח, which has the numerical value of eight, and which is emphasized to remind us that God is the master of the seven heavens and the earth—kind of like all the things we talked about in the first blessing.
 2. The last letter of the last word, ד, has the numerical value of four, which is emphasized to remind us that God is the master of the four most important parts of our lives—the spirit (intuition—*atzilut*), the mind (knowing—*beriah*), the heart (feeling—*yetzirah*), and the body

(doing—*assiyah*)—kind of like the things that are part of the second blessing.

3. ***How can it be true that, if God is the master of the most important parts of our lives, we are free to choose to do whatever we want, regardless of God's commandments, the תּוֹצֵא?***
4. It's true because, although God has created us with free will—as we know, we can do whatever we want—God controls the *consequences* of our choices, whether good or bad.
5. No matter what we hope for, plan, and expect from the choices we make, especially if they involve bad behavior like lying, stealing, gossiping, and such, the way things typically turn out are nothing like what we imagined before we began our wrongdoing, because at the start we didn't think the end result would be our embarrassment, shame, guilt, and the like.

SO WHAT MIGHT WE HAVE IN MIND WHEN WE SAY THE עֲמֵשׁ?

- We have one and only One God.
- We know our God from the Torah.
- God didn't go on vacation after creating the creation, but masterminds or rules its continuation and the behavior of every molecule and atom.
- We may not understand this right away, but in time we come to see that, although we have free will to choose what we want, our God rules everything and everybody, all the heavens and the earth, and all of us!