

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDTUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 13

FOR OUR LAST COUPLE OF CLASSES WE’VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE עֲמֻשׁ, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 30.

- We saw that in addition to the first two lines that we know very well, there are three paragraphs that follow, which are also part of the עֲמֻשׁ.
- And the last time we met we talked about the תְּצִיץ mentioned several times in the third paragraph on page 31.
- ***Does anyone remember the English word for תְּצִיץ?***
- We probably also talked about how, when we say the עֲמֻשׁ in the morning service, which is when we wear a טְלִית or prayer shawl that has תְּצִיץ, we take the תְּצִיץ in our hand.
- ***And what are the תְּצִיץ to remind us of when we take them in hand.***

NOW LET’S TURN TO PAGE 32.

- Let’s all read together as a class the first four words of Hebrew on page 32: אֱמֶת וְאִמּוֹנָה כָּל-זֶאת.
- And now those first words in English: “We affirm the truth...”
- The translation from Hebrew to English in our Siddur is a bit misleading.
- If we translate those four Hebrew words literally, they say: “True and certain is all this. . . .”
- ***But what is the “all this” that the prayer says is true and certain?***
 1. ***Is it what came just before this prayer—the עֲמֻשׁ and the three paragraphs it includes?***
 2. ***Or is it what comes after these words—the first whole paragraph on page 32?***
 3. ***What do you think?***
- It may be both—some of the things mentioned in the three paragraphs we’ve just read and some of the things in the one we’re about to read—that we’re saying are true and certain.
- ***What is the phrase אֱמֶת וְאִמּוֹנָה pointing to, what is it that we can rely on?***
 1. God has delivered the Jewish people in the past and will again in the future, despite worldwide anti-Semitism.

2. Our deliverance rests on קַבֵּלְתָּ עוֹל מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם, our “acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven”—which means that we carry out God’s will, taught to us in the Torah, as the mission of our people.
3. *If that seems far-fetched, ask yourself: If the Jewish people had not kept learning the Torah and doing God’s will for thousands of years, would we still be here today?*
4. So we should remember these things when we pray אֱמֶת וְאַמוּנָה.

LET’S WORK OUR WAY BACKWARDS—STARTING WITH THE THIRD PARAGRAPH OF THE שְׁמַע ON PAGE 31, AND THEN GOING TO THE SECOND AND FIRST PARAGRAPHS—TO SEE WHAT IT IS WE’RE TO THINK IS TRUE AND CERTAIN.

- The first thing to remember as אֱמֶת וְאַמוּנָה is that God took our people out of slavery in Egypt, and saved us many other times in our history.
- The second thing to remember, from the second paragraph of the Shema, is that our people survive and do well when we follow the מִצְוֹת, God’s commandments.
- And the third thing we have to remember as true and certain, from the first paragraph of the שְׁמַע, is that to follow God’s מִצְוֹת we have to *take them to heart*, which means we have to learn them and teach them, at home and elsewhere, all the time.
- Most of all, what’s אֱמֶת וְאַמוּנָה, true and certain—told to us in the paragraph we’re about to read on page 32—is that we, the Jewish people, are only alive here today because we are God’s people, because we put our trust in God and accept the Torah.
- So when we sing אֱמֶת וְאַמוּנָה on Friday night, these are some of the things we may remember as true and certain.

THE NEXT PART OF THE SERVICE, BEGINNING IN THE MIDDLE OF PAGE 32, CONSISTS OF FOUR SENTENCES.

- Let’s read each one in Hebrew and then our siddur’s English translation.
- מי כְּמִכָּה בְּאֵלִים יְהוָה מִי כְּמִכָּה נֶאֱדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ נוֹרָא תְהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פְלֵא
- “Who is like You, Adonai, among all that is worshipped! Who is like You, majestic in holiness, working wonders.”
- מַלְכוּתְךָ רָאוּ בְּנֵיךָ בּוֹקֵעַ יָם לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה זֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַמְרוּ
- “As You divided the sea before Moses, Your children beheld Your sovereignty. ‘This is my God’ they proclaimed.”
- יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד
- “Adonai shall reign throughout all time.”
- וְנֶאֱמַר כִּי־פָדָה יְהוָה אֶת יַעֲקֹב וּגְאָלוֹ מִיַּד חֲזָק מִמֶּנּוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה גֹּאֲלֵנוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל

- “And thus it is written: ‘Adonai has rescued Jacob; God redeemed him from those more powerful.’ Praised are You, Adonai, Redeemer of the people Israel.”
- ***What are these sentences about? What event are they describing?***
 1. ***Do you believe that God opened the sea so that the Hebrews could escape from Pharaoh and his army?***
 2. ***Do you think the Hebrews had to do anything to make that happen?***
- Our most knowledgeable rabbis tell us that first, the people had to work up their courage and get themselves to the edge of the sea and then had to step into the water—they had to put their trust in God—before God opened the sea for them.
- ***If God saved the Hebrews from the Egyptians, why did God allow 228,000 innocent people to die in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami?***
- Could people have done something to prevent those deaths?
 1. For several decades before that tsunami, people created a warning system in the Pacific Ocean to sound the alarm when a tsunami was coming, so it would be possible to get to a safe place.
 2. Scientists and technical experts tell us that no one needs to die in a tsunami and, if we had such a warning system in the Indian Ocean, hardly anyone at all would have died on December 26, 2004.
- ***What do you think this teaches us?***
- Perhaps we can learn from this that God, who has given us the Torah and the free will and intelligence to use it, makes it possible for us to save ourselves if we use what we’ve been given.
- The next to the last sentence in the prayer reads: הַהוֹה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד —“God will rule forever and ever.”
- ***What do you think it means that God will rule forever?***
- God who gives us the power to save ourselves—from people like Pharaoh or disasters like a tsunami—will not change; we can always depend on God’s Torah and the free will and intelligence God gives us to use it.
- And so very last line of the prayer reads: כִּי־פָדָה יְהוָה אֶת יַעֲקֹב —“for God redeemed (or saved) Jacob.”
- ***But why would God only redeem Jacob?***
- Actually, since all of us, the Jewish people, are known as the House of Jacob, God saved the Jewish people.
- It doesn’t mean that individuals did not die, but that the *Jewish people*, unlike all the other peoples of the ancient world, like the Romans and Greeks, did not die but still live today as a people—in every one of us.
- Incidentally, what does it sound like when we sing מִי בְּמִצְרָיִם?

