

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDDIR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 17

TODAY WE'RE GOING TO CONTINUE TALKING ABOUT THE הַמִּצְוָה ON PAGE 35B.

- *Can someone remind us of what “הַמִּצְוָה” means?*
- *And how do we say this prayer?* [STANDING AND IN A VERY LOW WHISPER]
- *Does anyone remember the first thing we do when we stand to say the הַמִּצְוָה, and why we do it?* [THREE STEPS BACK, THEN THREE STEPS FORWARD, RECOGNIZING GOD AS RULER OF ALL]

SO NOW LET'S LOOK AT THE FIRST FULL PARAGRAPH OF THE הַמִּצְוָה ON PAGE 35B.

- Someone please read the paragraph in English for us.
- *What stands out for you the most as you read the paragraph?*
- In the first part it mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.
 1. *Who were these people and why were they special?* [THEY WERE THE FIRST JEWS; THEY TRIED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD WANTED OF THEM AND TO DO IT]
 2. *We call these people the “patriarchs” and “matriarchs,” which means what?* [THE FATHERS AND MOTHERS WHO CAME FIRST]
- The second part of the paragraph talks about how God remembers the good deeds of the patriarchs and matriarchs and, because of them, will send a “redeemer,” a לְאוֹיֵל in Hebrew, to their children’s children—which could include us!
 1. *What’s a לְאוֹיֵל?* [SOMEONE WHO SAVES SOMEONE ELSE FROM DANGER]
 2. *What can it mean that God sends a לְאוֹיֵל to redeem us?*
 3. Suppose you went to the beach and saw someone drowning; no one else was around and you thought maybe you could save the person’s life if you tried to rescue him; you were afraid but you thought about

what God would want you to do; so you jumped into the water, swam out to the person, rescued him, and saved his life.

4. *Who was that person's "גואל"—you or God? Did God send you to be that person's redeemer?*

- *How can it be possible for us to redeem people who live long after we do, to do מצוות that affect people long after our own lives are over?*
 1. *Can you think of any examples?*
 2. *If we helped to build a school, and the school taught people to do מצוות, and the school continued teaching people long after we were gone, would that make us redeemers of those people?*
- In this first paragraph we begin by praising God, which is another way of saying we think God is wonderful—and why!
 1. Because the patriarchs and matriarchs, the fathers and mothers who were the first Jews, believed in God;
 2. And because they believed in God, they wanted to do the things that God asks us to do or refrain from doing;
 3. And because they followed the מצוות, they redeemed the people who came after them—that's us too!
 4. Which means that from all their מצוות we learn how to live our own lives, so we too do מצוות, and our lives can be full of love and kindness, fairness and justice.

LET'S GO ON TO THE PARAGRAPH THAT BEGINS "YOUR LOVE SUSTAINS THE LIVING" ON PAGE 35B.

- Someone please read it in English for us.
- *So what's the paragraph about?* [SICKNESS AND DEATH—NOT FUN SUBJECTS BUT AN INEVITABLE PART OF LIFE]
- To understand this paragraph, it's helpful if we consider these two things separately.
- Someone please read the first three words of Hebrew in that paragraph:
 1. מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחַסֵּד—“who sustains the living with loving-kindness.”
 2. Another way of saying this would be, it's God's love that keeps us alive.
- *But what does that mean?*
 1. Perhaps it means that even when we don't take good care of living things—like our flowers, our pets, people we love, and even ourselves—we and they don't die right away, because God keeps us alive for a long time, even when we don't take care.
 2. Or it could mean that when we don't take care of living things and they begin to die, as long as they're still alive, God will bring them completely back to life if we will begin to take care of them again.

- Someone please read the next four words in Hebrew in the second paragraph.
 1. מַחְיֵה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים—“who brings the dead to life with great mercy.” [READ SLOWLY]
 2. ***How can we understand bringing the dead back to life?***
 3. Of course, we know there are situations when someone stops breathing for a short time and then they’re revived.
 4. ***But other than the movies, do you know of any situations where someone died—they were dead and buried—and then came back to life?***
- Now there’s two parts to this phrase:
 1. First, bringing the dead back to life; and
 2. Second, doing so with great mercy, which means with kindness.
- Let’s think about the idea of mercy first.
 1. ***How do we feel when someone we love dies?***
 2. So it would be merciful, in other words very kind, if God brought them back to life.
- ***But can you think of any way that God actually brings millions of people back to life after they die and are dead and buried?***
 1. There are some people who, after they die, everyone wants to forget—they were unkind or unfair, mean or even cruel to other people—and after they die they really are dead and buried, completely forgotten.
 2. But there are other people who, because they tried to do what God wants—they were almost always kind and fair to others, loving and just—and we never forget them, they remain with us, in our hearts and thoughts every day of our lives, living on long after they’ve died.