

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 21

WE'RE CONTINUING TODAY WITH THE עֲמִידָה, THE PRAYER WE SAY IN A WHISPER WHILE STANDING.

- We're on page 36 at the third paragraph.
- Someone please read the first five words in Hebrew for us:
 1. אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, רְצֵה בְּמִנוּחֵינוּ
 2. And in English: "Our God and God of our ancestors, find favor in our [שְׁבֹת] rest."
- ***What does it mean to ask God to "find favor" in something we do?***
- So we're asking God to be pleased with our not working on Shabbat.
- ***If we're not working, what are we supposed to be doing on Shabbat?***
 1. ***Are we supposed to sleep most of the day?***
 2. ***Are we supposed to just hang out, watch TV, and eat lots of good food?***
 3. ***Is it okay to spend the day playing games, shopping at the mall, cleaning out the garage?***
- ***What should we be doing on Shabbat?***
- We should be doing something called "*spiritual* exercise."
- ***What would be examples of spiritual exercise on שְׁבֹת?***
 1. First, letting ourselves off the hook of weekday pressures from a job or schoolwork—trusting God that if we rest on שְׁבֹת rest won't hurt us
 2. Strengthening our experience of serenity and being part of a community by praying with a congregation
 3. Spending a lot of time sharing with people we love and who love us
 4. Listening attentively to others to better understand them
 5. Showing kindness, especially to "strangers"—newcomers who don't know anyone—by greeting them and inviting them to a שְׁבֹת meal
 6. Studying Torah with a group and talking about how to be a *mensch*—a human being who lives with integrity, morality, and dignity—and how to repair the world
 7. Sharing meals together where we talk about what's happening in our lives and sing joyfully

- If we're *not* going to synagogue, studying Torah, or showing the people we love how much we love them by doing kindnesses, maybe asking God to be pleased with us anyway is a way of reminding ourselves that we can do much better in all those ways.

SOMEONE READ THE NEXT FIVE WORDS IN HEBREW:

- קְדֹשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְתֵן חֶלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ
- Since our סידור doesn't translate these words very well, I'll suggest a translation [SLOWLY]: "Sanctify us with Your commandments and give us our share in Your Torah."
- Now, there are two *very* important words in this phrase.
- ***What's the Hebrew word for "מצוות"?***
- And we know there are two kinds of מצוות: negative and positive.
- ***What's an example of a negative מצוה —something we're not supposed to do?***
- ***What's an example of a positive מצוה, something we are supposed to do?***
- The other very important word in this phrase is "sanctify."
- So what does it mean to sanctify something?
 1. ***Does anyone remember the Hebrew word for "holy"?***
 2. ***What does קדוש mean?***
- So a commandment, a מצוה, is something that God wants us to do.
- And if we're sanctified by doing the מצוה, that means we have, in effect, set ourselves aside for a special purpose devoted to God.
- To really understand what it means to be set aside for a special purpose, we have to think about all our *regular* purposes—all the things we usually do.
- ***As young people, what are some of the things that we spend a lot of time doing?***
 1. Going to school
 2. Studying for school
 3. Learning new things—like video games, horseback riding, dancing, or martial arts
 4. Playing with friends and pets
 5. Even working (if we have some kind of regular job to do)
 6. Doing things with parents and possibly brothers and sisters
- ***But what might we be doing if we were doing God's commandments or מצוות?***
 1. We might be visiting someone who's sick.
 2. We might be returning someone's lost property.
 3. We might be studying Torah.

4. We might be donating blood or doing some other kind of **מְצוּוֹת** to help the community.
 5. We might join others to do a cleanup project in a local park or beach area.
 6. We might be teaching someone something that we have been given the opportunity to learn.
- Of course, some of you may be thinking to yourself: That sounds boring and I'd rather be doing 10 other things.
 - But that would be a mistake, because you might well discover that doing the **מְצוּוֹת** is often inspiring and fulfilling, much more rewarding than playing games or shopping, after which we often feel empty and bored.
 - ***Does anyone have an idea of what all these things have in common—their special purpose?***
 - They're things that we do *not* for selfish reasons but because God wants us to do them to make the world a better place—to repair the world.
 - But they're also things that make us feel better about ourselves, help us to see our real value in the world.
 - So when we read the words **קְדֹשֵׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיךָ**, “sanctify us with your commandments,” we might be thinking:
 1. God has made *me* for a special purpose.
 2. I'm not here just to go to school or play or work.
 3. My special purpose is to do the **מְצוּוֹת**, to repair the world and myself by following God's commandments.
 4. Because I can help change the world and make it the way that God wants it to be.
 5. That's something very important for me to do—in fact, it's the one *enduring mission of my life*, something for me to *always* do no matter what else I'm doing.

NOW WHEN WE DO THIS, SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL HAPPENS . . . WE GET MARRIED!

- Does anyone know the Hebrew word for marriage.
- It's **קְדוּשָׁתוֹ**.
- Does that sound like another word we've been talking about?
- Of course—**קְדוּשָׁה**!—holiness, to be set aside for a special purpose.
- When we marry someone, we set ourselves aside for a special purpose, to share our lives completely, often to create a family with another person.
- So when the **סִדּוּר** says **קְדֹשֵׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיךָ**, “sanctify us with your commandments,” we also understand it means that when we, the Jewish people, do the **מְצוּוֹת**, we become like married partners with God.
- It's like the Jewish people and God get married, becoming devoted to the special purpose of repairing the world by doing the **מְצוּוֹת**.

- ***Do you think that the world needs much repairing?***
- By the way, repairing the world is called **תְּקוּן עוֹלָם**, which we'll talk more about in the future.

READ THE NEXT EIGHT WORDS IN HEBREW, BEGINNING WITH שְׂבַעְנוּ.

- **שְׂבַעְנוּ מִטּוֹבְךָ וְשִׂמְחָנוּ בִּישׁוּעָתִיךָ, וְטַהַר לִבְנוּ בַתּוֹרָתְךָ.**
- The translation of the Hebrew reads: “Satisfy us from Your goodness and gladden us with Your salvation and purify our heart to serve You in truth.”
- The first part of the sentence says, “satisfy us from Your goodness.”
- We’ve been talking about doing God’s **מִצְוֹת**, the commandments.
- So if we do the **מִצְוֹת**, something good happens and we should feel good, feel satisfied, happy deep inside.
- ***Can you think of an example?***
 1. ***How would you feel if you stood up for someone who was being bullied at school and saved that person from a beating?***
 2. ***How would you feel if you had helped another student who was having problems with schoolwork and, with your help, the other student passed an exam?***
- And then it says, “gladden us with Your salvation.”
 1. Now the Hebrew word for salvation is **יְשׁוּעָה**, which means to be rescued or saved from some kind of real danger.
 2. ***Can you think of any way in which, if we follow God’s מִצְוֹת, it could keep us out of some dangerous situations and make us very glad we did?***
 3. If we follow the **מִצְוֹת**—for example, never lying or stealing—we’re much less likely to mess up our lives.
- And the last few words say, “purify our heart to serve you in truth.”
- ***Does anyone have any idea of what that might mean?***
 1. Well, the first thing it might mean is that we make up our mind to tell the truth, no matter what!
 2. That we don’t lie to ourselves or anyone else about whether or not we’ve done the **מִצְוֹת**?
 3. ***What would be an example of lying to ourselves about doing or not doing a מִצְוָה?***
 4. For example, we would be lying to ourselves if we tell ourselves that we’re kind to people, when in fact we gossip about them or pass on tales about them when they’re not around.
 5. ***What would be an example of lying to someone else about doing or not doing a מִצְוָה?***

6. It's a **מצוה** to honor our parents, so telling them that we will respect their wishes and then failing to do so, that's a lie.

NOW THERE'S ONE MORE THING ABOUT THESE WORDS THAT'S VERY IMPORTANT.

- It says we're to purify *our* heart—which is a way of saying, make us so we want to do the right thing—as if all of us had *one* heart instead of many hearts.
- ***What could it mean that we're all supposed to have one heart?***
- Maybe it means:
 1. That God wants *all of us together*, as a whole people, as the Jewish people, doing the **מצוות**—like treating others fairly and with kindness.
 2. And that it's much easier to tell the truth and do the right thing when we're not alone, when everyone around us is also telling the truth and doing the right thing.