

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 22

WE'RE CONTINUING ON PAGE 36 IN THE סידור, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE THIRD PARAGRAPH.

- We'll start with the Hebrew sentence that begins with וְהִנְחִילֵנוּ.
- Someone read the sentence up to שְׁמַךְ, which reads: וְהִנְחִילֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרַצוֹן שְׁבַת קִדְשֶׁךָ, וְיִנּוּחוּ בָּהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִקְדָּשֵׁי שְׁמֶךָ.
- A more direct English translation than our siddur gives would be: “Grant us as a heritage, Adonai our God, with love and favor, Your holy שְׁבַת, and may Israel who sanctifies Your Name rest on it.”

LET'S TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS SENTENCE IS SAYING TO US.

- When we pray these words, we're saying to God: “Give us שְׁבַת as a *heritage*. . . .”
- ***What's a “heritage”?***
 1. It's something that's *passed down*—like from grandparents to parents to children, not only for years but for decades and centuries.
 2. It's something we *inherit*—like when someone dies and in their will leaves money to someone.
- But in the prayer we're asking God to give שְׁבַת to us—for ourselves, for our children, for their children, and so on forever—so that the Jewish people will always have שְׁבַת.
- So far it's been working.
- But then the sentence goes on to say that God should give the שְׁבַת to us, to the Jewish people, because we are the ones who sanctify שְׁבַת and rest on it.
- ***So, again, what does it mean to sanctify something or make it holy?***
 1. For the past few class sessions we've talked about the Hebrew word for “holy.”
 2. ***Does anyone remember what that Hebrew word is?***
 3. ***Does anyone remember the basic meaning of קָדַשׁ?***
 4. First, it's to set something aside for a special purpose.
- The Jewish people are to set שְׁבַת aside for a special purpose, so that God will give it to us forever as a heritage.

- ***But if God is going to give it to us as a heritage, why do we have to make it holy—why do we have to sanctify it, to set it aside for a special purpose?***
- One way to understand God’s blessings, like שְׁבֵת, is that they’re *opportunities*—they give us a chance for something very special—but we have to do things to take advantage of them because they’re not automatic.
- And with Shabbat we have to sanctify the day—set it aside for a special purpose—and rest on it if we want to keep it as a heritage.

LET’S CONTINUE AT THE TOP OF PAGE 37.

- We’re going to do something now that we haven’t done before in studying the סידור.
- I’m going to read the Hebrew at the top of page 37 and translate the paragraph, phrase by phrase.
- As we do so, at the same time, you’re going to see how our סידור translates the Hebrew.
- Some of the changes are subtle, barely recognizable, some are fairly important. So we’ll see what you think about them and try to understand why the rabbis may have made the changes.
- We thank you (מִוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ) [What’s the difference between “proclaiming” God and “thanking” God?—relationship], for you are He (שְׂאֵתָה הוּא), Adonai our God, and the God of our forefathers (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ), forever and ever (לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד). Rock of our lives (צוּר צוּרֵינוּ), shield of our salvation (מָגֵן יִשְׁעֵנוּ), you are He from generation to generation (אַתָּה הוּא לְדוֹר וָדוֹר). We thank you and tell your praise (נִוְדָה לָךְ וְנִסְפָּר תְּהִלָּתְךָ) [What’s the difference between we “praise you” and “tell your praise”?] for our lives delivered into Your hands (עַל נַפְשֵׁנוּ הַמְסוּרִים בְּיַדְךָ), and for our souls that are appointed to You (עַל נַפְשֵׁנוּ הַמְסוּרִים לָךְ) [What’s the difference between “in Your charge” and “appointed to you”?—passive vs. active], and for Your miracles that every day are with us (וְעַל נִסֵּיךָ שֶׁבְּכָל יוֹם עִמָּנוּ), and for Your wonders and goodness that are at all times (וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ עַרְב וְבֹקֵר (וּטְוֹבוֹתֶיךָ שֶׁבְּכָל עֵת הַטוֹב כִּי) (וְצִדְקָתְךָ). The Good (One) for never ended is Your compassion (לֹא כָלוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ) and the compassionate One for never ended are Your kindnesses (וְהִמְרַחֵם כִּי לֹא תָמוּ חַסְדֶיךָ), always have we put our hope in You (מֵעוֹלָם קִוִּינוּ לָךְ).
- ***Do the changes, slight as they seem to be, change our understanding of our relationship with God?***
- ***What does this tell you about English translations in our סידור?***

IN THE PARAGRAPH WE HAVE BEEN READING, IT SAYS THAT OUR SOULS ARE APPOINTED TO YOU — וְעַל נְשְׁמוֹתֵינוּ הַפְּקוּדוֹת לָךְ—USING THE HEBREW WORD נְשְׁמוֹתֵינוּ—FOR “OUR SOULS.”

- ***Does anyone have an idea of what the soul is?***
- Let's see if we can learn some more about the soul.
 1. One of the Hebrew words for soul is נְשָׁמָה, which we can see in נְשְׁמוֹתֵינוּ.
 2. The שׁוֹרֵשׁ of that word, the three letters that tell us its basic meaning, is נ-ש-מ.
 3. That basic meaning has to do with *breath* or *breathe*.
- If we look in the first book of the Torah, which in English is called Genesis but in Hebrew is בְּרֵאשִׁית, chapter 2, verse 7 tells us about how God created human beings
- It says: וַיִּצָר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֶפְרָ מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים—“And Adonai our God formed human of the dust from the ground, and he *blew* into his nose the soul of life.”
- So our soul is called נְשָׁמָה in Hebrew, which means breath, because the Torah says God breathed it into us.
- Of course, that's *not* a scientific explanation of why we human beings have a soul, because the Torah is not a book about science but about morality, teaching us what's right and wrong, good and evil.
- The phrase that God blew into our nose our נְשָׁמָה is a way of saying God intended every human being to have a soul.
- So the נְשָׁמָה is something God created in all people, beginning with the first human.
- ***But what exactly is our נְשָׁמָה; what was it that God breathed into us?***

ONE THING WE KNOW IS THAT OUR נְשָׁמָה, THE SOUL OF EVERY HUMAN BEING, IS IN SOME WAYS LIKE GOD—NOT THE SAME AS GOD, BUT LIKE GOD.

- ***So what are some of the things we know about God, what God is like?***
- God can be compassionate and just.
- So, like God, we can be kind and fair?
- We know that God has absolute free will, can choose do anything.
- Like God, we have free will—we can choose to do the right thing or the wrong thing.
- So far we've said that every person has a נְשָׁמָה, which is the part of us given to us by God, that can choose to do right or wrong.
- But there's another thing about our נְשָׁמָה that's important:

1. ***Do you think that each of us has a unique נְשָׁמָה—each one special, one of a kind—or that all of our souls are the same?***
2. Consider that each of us has special and unique ways in which can be kind and fair to other people.
3. If we make a real effort to show kindness to another person, especially when it's difficult to do so, our kindness will be unlike that of any other person—it will be uniquely valuable to the person receiving it.
4. If we make a real effort to be fair to another person, especially when it's difficult to do so, our fairness will be unlike that of any other person—it will be uniquely valuable to the person who gets it.
5. Sometimes we can feel that uniquely valuable part of ourselves when we're doing a מְצוּה.
6. Maybe that's why our מִסְוֶרָה, our Torah tradition, teaches that the reward for doing a מְצוּה is how we feel in doing the מְצוּה.
7. ***Did you ever feel like, more than anything else, you really wanted to do something that was kind or fair for someone?***
8. When that happens, when we act on that feeling, we become aware of our unique soul—that we have the power to bring God's goodness into the world in our own unique way.

**IN ONE PLACE OUR PARAGRAPH SAYS לָךְ הַפְּקֻדוֹת לְךָ—
“OUR SOULS ARE APPOINTED TO YOU”—THAT IS, TO GOD.**

- ***But what might it mean to “appoint” our unique soul to God?***
- ***What does it mean to “appoint” someone to something?***
- When we appoint someone to a job, for example, what we're doing is telling that person, you have certain tasks you must do and someone over you who will be supervising you and evaluating your work.
- ***So what does it mean that our souls are appointed to God?***
- Maybe it means that we have been *created* by God to do the tasks, the מְצוּוֹת, that God commands us to do, for which we are judged by God's law that brings us pain or happiness according to our free-willed choices.