

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 27

WE'RE ALMOST AT THE VERY END OF THE FRIDAY EVENING SERVICE.

- We will continue on page 47 with the paragraph at the bottom of the page.
- Someone please read the first three words in Hebrew for us: מִגֵּן אֲבוֹת בְּדַבְרֹוֹ.
- In English, the first four words in the paragraph at the bottom of the page read “Shield of our ancestors by His promised word.”
- Actually, a more accurate translation of the Hebrew would be: “Shield of our forefathers (or ancestors) with His word.”
- *Who is this talking about—who is the “Shield”?*
- *And what is a shield?*
- *And what is God’s “word”?*
- *How could God shield our ancestors with His word?*
- Think of some ways in which we’re shielded or protected if we do what the Torah teaches us.
- *But why might we reasonably believe this is true, that with His word God actually shielded the Jewish people who came before us?*
- One way is that for thousands of years the Jewish people studied and followed the Torah, and even though terrible things happened to them, they survived and succeeded as a people—when all the great nations around them died out.

SOMEONE PLEASE READ THE NEXT THREE WORDS IN HEBREW (מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים בְּמַאֲמָרוֹ).

- The first word in the Hebrew is מְחַיֶּה.
- I’m not going to ask you to read the translation in your סִדּוּר because it’s misleading.
- A better translation into English would read: “. . . who brings life to the dead with His utterances.”
- *What’s an “utterance”?*

- ***And what could it mean, that by what God says, God brings life to the dead?***
- We don't have any regular examples of people coming back to life after they died and were buried—whether or not God said anything.
- ***But are there any other kinds of dead people—other than those who died and were buried?***
- Maybe you have known someone who was alive but seemed dead.
 1. Someone who no longer cared about anything or anyone.
 2. Someone who had lost a loved one—a husband or wife, a parent, or a child who had died.
 3. Someone who had tried many things in life but always felt like a failure.
- ***So how could an “utterance” of God bring such people back to life?***
- ***Where can we find the words that God has uttered, what God wants us to do, other than in the Torah and other sacred books?***
- We can also learn what God wants us to do from other people.
- Other people can be living examples of God's word—they can teach us what God wants by how they behave.
 1. If they show respect to all people, it's as if God is speaking to us *through* them.
 2. If they show kindness to all people, it's as if we are reading God's word *through* them.
 3. If they're fair with all people, we see how God's blessings flow *through* them.
- ***So what can we learn from all this?***
 1. That some people are not yet buried in the ground, but they're dead inside—in their hearts and minds.
 2. That God's word, the blessings and commandments of God that we learn through the Torah, can bring such people back to life.
 3. And that each of *us*, who know and find happiness in God's Torah, can help to bring such dead people back to life.

NOW THE NEXT PART OF THE PARAGRAPH IS NOT HARD FOR US TO UNDERSTAND.

- The Hebrew reads: הָאֵל (הַמֶּלֶךְ) הַקָּדוֹשׁ שְׂאִין כְּמוֹהוּ.
- In English it says: “Holy God (Holy Sovereign) beyond compare.”
- ***What does it mean to say that no other god can compare to our God?***
- People believe in all kinds of gods—but only our God is the creator and controller of *all* creation.
- In other words, some people treat *things*, like money and possessions, as if they have the power to give them what God gives us, what we get from

the word of God—all the good that comes to us when we live up to the מצוות, God’s commandments.

- People make gods out of all kinds of *things*, in a way worshipping them, treating them as if they will bring happiness and fulfillment, peace and contentment, into their lives—which they never do.

THE NEXT PART OF THE PARAGRAPH BEGINS WITH THE HEBREW WORD הַמְּנִיחַ.

- Would someone please read the Hebrew words beginning with הַמְּנִיחַ and continuing to לְהַקְלִיב:
- הַמְּנִיחַ לְעַמּוֹ בַּיּוֹם שֶׁבַת קְדָשׁוֹ, כִּי בָּם רָצָה לְהַנִּיחַ לְהַקְלִיב.
- And now the English, beginning with “Who bestows rest . . .” and stopping at the end of that sentence.
- ***What does it mean to say that God “bestows” rest on us?***
- God has made it a מצוה, a commandment, *not* to work on שַׁבָּת.
- ***But why should God command us to rest on שַׁבָּת when so many of us are forced to work or do other things on שַׁבָּת that aren’t at all restful?***
- Let’s stop here for a minute and figure out what a commandment is.
- ***What is a commandment?***
 1. It’s like a very serious order from someone who is much more powerful than we are.
 2. Do you ever get commandments from anyone more powerful than you—like your bosses, teachers, or traffic cops?
 3. What are some examples of the commandments they give you?
- ***Do we always obey all these commandments?***
- ***So is it true that we can choose not to do what we’re told to do, even if we’re commanded by God?***
- ***But why should we obey the commandments, especially God’s commandments?***
- ***Do you think that each of us as individuals would have more or less strength, health, happiness, and fulfillment in our life if we followed God’s commandments?***
- Moreover, if we follow God’s commandments, like not working on שַׁבָּת but instead making it a special time in our lives, the whole Jewish people will be stronger, healthier, happier, and more fulfilled.
- ***Why should we care what happens to the other Jewish people, not just here but all over the world?***
- Because what happens to the whole Jewish people—whether it’s good or bad—eventually happens to us too.