***PATH OF THE PROPHETS:***

***A STUDY GUIDE***

Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz

***Living the Bible: Exploring Protest (Chapter 1)***

**The Call to Abraham**

Read the following biblical passages regarding the call and covenant to Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-9, 13:14-18, 15:1-17, 17:1-27

1. *“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.”* (Gen. 12:2)

What does it mean to be a blessing, as an individual and as a people?

2. *“For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.”* (Gen.18:19)

In what sense are we Abraham’s children; and how are we chosen?

**Abraham’s Argument**

Contrast Abraham’s protest to God in Gen. 18:16-33 with the binding of Isaac in Gen. 22:1-19.

1. *“Abraham came forward and said, “Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?*

*Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”* (Gen.18:23, 25)

On what basis does Abraham, and we, have the right to challenge authority, be it human or divine?

Why does Abraham not challenge God regarding the sacrifice of Isaac, and how do we resemble Abraham in this regard?

**Argument and Protest**

For the protest of Moses read Numbers 14; for Job read the book in its entirety.

1. *“Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have forgiven this people ever since Egypt.”* (Num. 14:19)

What strategy does Moses give us in appealing to a higher power to change their mind?

2. “*By God who has deprived me of justice…my lips will speak no wrong, nor my tongue utter deceit. Far be it from me to say you are right; until I die I will maintain my integrity.” (Job 27:2, 4-5).*

What do we learn from Job’s dramatic words?

3. *“Every debate that is for the sake of heaven (mahloket l’shem shamyaim) will make a lasting contribution. Every debate that is not for the sake of heaven will not make a lasting contribution.”* (Avot 5:20)

What worthy debates should we be having in our personal and communal lives today?

4. *“For three years there was a dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai…. Then a voice from heaven announced: both are the words of the living God…”(*Eruvin 13b)

What issues come to mind where you perceive both sides to be right?

5. *“[Beit Hillel prevailed] because they were gentle and modest, and studied both their own opinions and the opinions of the other school, and always mentioned the words of the other school with great modesty and humility before their own.”* (Eruvin 13b)

How can we, personally and communally, make our debates more worthy?

6 *“It says something about Judaism that both Hillel and Shammai, and many of their followers, remain revered figures…even when they embody opposite approaches to the law and life itself. It isn’t simply the answer that is prized; it is the argument itself, the culture of disputation, the wrestling with the truth.”* (Rabbi Joseph Telushkin)

How can we honor the culture of disputation in Judaism and in our country?

7. *“There may be a time when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”* Elie Wiesel

How have we failed to protest in the face of injustice, and what can we do about it?

8. “*Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of his own family and does not do so is held responsible for the transgressions of his family. Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions for the people of his community and does not do so is held responsible for the transgressions of his community. Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of the world and does not do so is responsible for the transgressions of the entire world.”* (Talmud, Shabbat 54b)

What transgressions of family, community, and world have weigh most heavily upon you?

9. *“There are some things in our society to which we should never be adjusted. We must never adjust ourselves to racial discrimination and racial segregation. We must never adjust ourselves to religious bigotry. We must never adjust ourselves to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. We must never adjust ourselves to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence…”* Martin Luther King, Jr.

What is our unfinished business concerning racial discrimination, religious bigotry, economic inequality, and violence today?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Civil Disobedience (Chapter 2)***

**The Defiance of the Midwives**

For the prelude to the midwives’ actions read Ex.1:1-3, then their actions 1:15-21.

1. *The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.* (Ex.1:17)

What does the “fear of God” mean in our lives?

What gives us the motivation and strength to practice civil disobedience?

What injustices call for resistance today?

**Courage and Resistance**

Read the story of Rahab’s courage and resistance in Joshua 2:1-23, and the story of Esther in Esther 4:1-17 and 7:1-10.

1. *“I know that the Lord has given the country to you…for the Lord your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below.”* (Joshua2: 9, 11).

What are the real reasons Rahab is willing to risk her life? When should we be like that?

2. *“Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!”* (Esther 4:16)

What made Esther overcome her initial reluctance to face the king? What are our fears about taking a brave stand, and how can we overcome them?

3. *“Be strong and resolute, be not in fear, for the Lord your God marches with you.”* (Deuteronomy 31:6)

How does faith alleviate our fears?

4. *“Courage is never to let your actions be influenced by your fears.”* Arthur Koestler

How can courage change the course of my life today?

5. *“A person who negated a king’s command because he was occupied with a mitzvah, even a minor one, behold, he is not liable.”* Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 3:9

What examples of this have occurred in Jewish history? Does this apply to conscientious objection to military service?

6. *“Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right.”* Henry David Thoreau

How does Thoreau’s position have relevance today?”

7. *“When I look through my binoculars, I see children.”* (Colonel Eli Geva)

Did Geva do the right thing by refusing to lead the assault on Beirut? What circumstances call for such action today?

8. *“One may well ask: ‘How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?’ The answer lies in the fact there are two types of laws: just and unjust. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”* (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

On what basis should we decide what laws to obey and what to resist? What unjust laws, policies or practices need change in our society?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Freedom (Chapter 3)***

**Moses’ Encounters**

The brief story of Moses’ birth and youth is found in Ex.2:1-22. His encounter at the burning bush is in Ex.3:1-4:21. The story of his return to Egypt and encounters with Pharaoh spans Ex. 4:24-13:16. The Exodus itself, until Sinai, is described in Ex.13:17- 18:27.

1. *“Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors.”* (Ex.2:11)

What does it mean to “go out” and witness today?

2. *“When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: “Moses! Moses!” He answered, “Here I am.”* (Ex.3:4)

What calls are in need of our response, “Here I am”?

3. *“But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage.”* (Ex.6:9)

What obstacles crush our spirit and prevent us from hearing the call to freedom?

**Freedom**

1. *“The highest type of freedom in Judaism is herut. This implies spiritual freedom, not merely a cessation from work….That is why Passover is called Zeman Herutainu, the holiday of freedom. This is not merely the freedom from bondage of Egypt but… the Jewish people becoming a people. Pesach is a celebration of spiritual freedom, not mere physical freedom.”*  (Nachum Ansel)

How can we work toward greater “spiritual freedom” in our lives?

2. *“God took us out from slavery (avdut) to freedom (herut), from despair to joy, from mourning to celebration, from darkness to radiance, from enslavement to redemption.”* (Passover Haggadah).

How has the transformation described in the Haggadah happened in our history-personal, familial and communal?

3. *“In every generation each person should see themselves as if they went out from Egypt.”* (Pesach Haggadah)

How can we fulfill the charge of the Haggadah?

4*.”The writing was God’s writing, inscribed (harut) upon the tablets. Read ‘freedom’ (herut) rather than ‘inscribed’ upon the tablets.”* (Avot 6:2 on Exodus 32:16)

How do the commandments set us free?

5. *“True freedom, in the rabbinic view, lies in servitude to God. The Israelites had been Pharaoh’s slaves; in the wilderness they became God’s servants- the Hebrew word (avadim) is the same…. He brought them…not at all a way of life free from regulation but rather a way of life to whose regulation they could and did agree. The Israelites could be free only insofar as they accepted the discipline of freedom.”* (Michael Walzer)

In what ways do we practice the “discipline of freedom”?

6. *“You can live in a dictatorship and be free- on one condition: that you fight the dictatorship. The man who thinks with his own mind and keeps it uncorrupted, is free. But you can live in the most democratic country on earth, and if you’re lazy, obtuse or servile within yourself, you’re not free. Even without any violent coercion, you’re a slave. You can’t beg your freedom from someone. You have to seize it.”* (Ignazio Silone)

In what ways are we free and not free as citizens?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Equality (Chapter 4)***

**The Daughters’ Challenge**

The challenge of the five daughters is contained in two chapters of Numbers, 27:1-11 and 36:1-12.

1. *“Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father’s kinsmen!”* (Num.27:4)

What is the unfinished agenda for equality for women today?

2. *“And the Lord said to Moses: The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just….”* (Numbers 27:7)

What is the unfinished agenda for equality for minorities and others today?

3. *“The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just…. The plea of the Josephite tribe is just.”* (Num. 27:7, 36:5)

On what issues of inclusion and equality might we benefit from seeing both sides and effecting compromise?

**Equality**

The story of humanity’s creation is found in Genesis 1 and 2.

1. *“And God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image of God created them; male and female God created them.”* (Genesis 1:27)

*“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?”* (Malachi 2:10)

*“Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O Children of Israel?”* (Amos 9:7)

*“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”* (Isa.56:7)

What is the basis, in your view, for inclusion and equality in society?

2. *“You shall have one law for stranger and citizen alike….”* (Leviticus 24:22) *“There shall be one law for you and for the resident stranger; it shall be law for all time throughout the ages. You and the stranger shall be alike before the Lord; the same ritual and the same rule shall apply to you and to the stranger who resides among you.”* (Numbers 15:15-16)

What relevance does the Torah idea of one law for citizen and stranger have today (and who is the stranger)?

3. *“Understand that ‘one law for you’ means that the law applies equally to all of you.”* (Talmud-Ketubot 33a)

In what way is our political system discriminatory?

4. *“Equality is the mother of justice, queen of all virtues.”* (Philo)

Is there a place for affirmative action and remedial actions to correct inequality?

5. *“It is a sacred duty to express most emphatically the complete religious equality of the female sex.”* (Breslau Reform rabbinical conference-1845)

What inequalities remain in religion, in government, and in the workplace?

6. *“We must render visible the presence, experience, and deeds of women erased in traditional sources….To expand Torah, we must reconstruct Jewish history to include the history of women, and in doing so alter the shape of Jewish memory.”* Judith Plaskow

How can we reconstruct the lost voices of women in the Bible and beyond?

7. *“All people deserve dignity, integrity and equality. Therefore, we accord the same treatment both to homosexuals and heterosexuals that we now apply regardless of gender, age, disability, and birth religion. As we celebrate the love between heterosexual, so too do we celebrate the love between gay and lesbian Jews. As we affirm that heterosexual marriages embody kedushah [holiness], so do we affirm that kedushah resides in committed relationships between gay or lesbian Jews.”* (Reconstructionist Movement)

Why is this statement of marriage equality still controversial, and where do you stand?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Rebuke (Chapter 5)***

**Samuel’s Warning**

The Torah’s admonition about kingship is found in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Samuel’s rebuke of the people is described in I Samuel 8 and 12. Other prophetic rebukes, like Elijah’s, are recorded in I Kings- see especially chapters 13, 14, 18, 21. Isaiah (17) and Jeremiah (11) also rebuke.

1. *“All the elders of Israel assembled and came to Samuel at Ramah, and they said to him, “You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways.”* (I Sam. 8:4)

How have our children, or our leaders, let us down (and visa-versa)?

2. *“Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations.”* (I Sam.8:5)

What changes need to take place in our families, communities and country?

3. *“When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the priests. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life….”* (Deut.17:18-19)

How can we, and our leaders, be held more accountable?

**Rebuke**

1. *“You shall surely rebuke your kinsman; incur no guilt because of him.”* (Lev. 19:18)

What circumstances in my life call for warning or rebuke?

2. *“But if the other will not rebuke him, he will hate him in his heart, and will cause him harm either then or at some other time.”* (Sefer ha-Hinnukkh, 3:81, #239)

How has the failure to rebuke hurt myself or others?

3*. “When one person wrongs another, the latter should not remain silent and despise him….Rather, he is commanded to make the matter known and ask him: Why did you do this to me? Why did you wrong me regarding this matter? If afterwards, [the person who committed the wrong] asks to forgive him, he must do so.”* (Maimonides, Hilchot De’ot 6:6)

When do we “let it go” and when do we speak up? Must we always forgive?

4. *“He who rebukes another …should administer the rebuke in private, speak to the offender gently and tenderly, and point out that he is only speaking for the wrongdoer’s own good….”* (Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 6:7)

What are the consequences of rebuking in the right way, and the wrong way?

5. “Whoever has the possibility of rebuking [sinners] and fails to do so is considered responsible for that sin, for he had the opportunity to rebuke them.” (Maimonides, Hilchot De’ot 6:7)

How do we become culpable when we fail to rebuke?

6. *“And I declare to [Eli the high priest] that I sentence his house to endless punishment for the iniquity he knew about-how his sons committed sacrilege at will- and he did not rebuke them.”* (I Sam.3:13)

How have I failed my children for not rebuking properly or at all?

7. *“Love your critics and hate your flatterers.”* (Rabbi Yonah Gerondi, Shaare’ Teshuvah 13C)

What is to be gained from the advice of this medieval sage?

8. *“Love unaccompanied by criticism is not love….Peace unaccompanied by reproof is not peace?”* (Genesis Rabbah 54:3)

How are love and criticism linked?

9. *“Unconditional love is not uncritical love.”* Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz

How does this statement apply to family and community?

10. *“[Judaism is] a religion that will not worship power and the symbols of power-for that is what idols really were and are…. Judaism is a sustained critique of power. That is the conclusion I have reached after a lifetime of studying our sacred texts.”* (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks)

How does Judaism express its “sustained critique” of power, and how do I?

11. “Had there been only a single verb I would have known that the law applies to a master reproving his disciple. How do we know that it applies even to a disciple reproving his master? From the phrase, *hokeach tokhiach*, implying, under all circumstances.” (Baba Metzia 31a)

Under what circumstances should we criticize our teachers?

12. If two people were feuding, Aaron would walk up to one, sit down next to him and say, “My child, don’t you see how much your friend is tearing her heart out and rending her clothes.” The person would then say to himself: “How can I lift up my head and look my friend in the face? I would be ashamed to see her because it is I who treated her foully.” Aaron would remain at his side until he had removed all rancor from his heart*.*Afterwards, Aaron would walk over to the other person, sit down next to her and say: “Don’t you see how much your friend is eating his heart out and tearing his clothes.” And so this person, too, would think to herself: “Woe unto me! How can I lift up my head and look my friend in the face? I would be ashamed to see him because it is I who treated him foully.” Aaron would sit with this person until she, too, had overcome the rancor in her heart. And finally when these two friends met, they would embrace and kiss each other. That is why it is said [that when Aaron died], *And they wept for Aaron thirty days, the entire House of Israel* (Numbers 20:20).” (Avot d’ Rabbi Natan, chapter 12)

How can we emulate Aaron and be a peacemaker?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Righteousness (Chapter 6)***

**Nathan’s Confrontation with David**

The initial, and positive, encounter of Nathan with David is told in II Sam.7:1-29. His epic confrontation with the king spans II Sam 11-12.

1. *“You acted in secret, but I will make this happen in the sight of all Israel and in broad daylight.”* (II Sam.12:12)

What are our secret sins?

2. *“David said to Nathan, “I stand guilty before the Lord!”* (II Sam.12:13)

What are sins of omission and commission, individually and communally?

*3. “And Nathan replied to David, “The Lord has remitted your sin; you shall not die. However, since you have spurred the enemies of the Lord by this deed, the child about to be borne to you shall die.”* (II Sam.12:13-14)

For what sins will our repentance atone…and not atone?

**Accountability and Righteousness**

1. *“All is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is granted.”* (Avot 3:19)

How is this teaching manifest in our personal lives?

2. *“Free will is bestowed on every human being. If one desires to turn to the good way and be righteous, he has the power to do so. If one wishes to turn toward the evil way and be wicked, he is at liberty to do so….Every human being may become righteous like Moses our teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam; merciful or cruel, miserly or generous, and so with all other qualities.”* (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance, 5:1-2)

What choices have I made make me morally accountable?

3. *“Don’t remain passive when you see another about to act evilly, lest you share in the guilt.”* (Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom p.76.)

How has passivity led us astray?

4. *“The irresistible is often only that which is not resisted.”* Justice Louis Brandeis

How does this adage apply to me?

6. *“The difference between the wicked and the righteous is that the wicked are controlled by their hearts and the righteous have their hearts under their control.”* (Genesis Rabbah 34:10)

When have emotions overcome me to my dentriment?

7. *“At first the Evil Impulse is like a passer-by, then he is called a guest, and finally he becomes a master of the house.”* (Talmud, Sukkah 52b)

What examples from world and personal history come to mind?

8. *“Who is a hero? He who subdues his Evil Impulse.”* (Simeon be Zoma, Pirkei Avot, 4:1)

When has self-control rendered you heroic?

9. *“Whoever can stop the members of his household from committing a sin, but does not, is held responsible for the sins of his household.*

*If he can stop the people of his city from sinning, but does not, he is held responsible for the sins of the people of his city.”* Talmud, Arakhin 16b

For what sins of family and community are we responsible due to lack of action?

10. *“A rich man came to Jacob and sought his advice. Why must I give to the poor? Because they are responsible for your freedom, said Jacob. The man was astonished. How does giving to the poor bring about my freedom? You see, said Jacob, either the key to a man’s wallet is in his heart, or the key to a man’s heart is in his wallet. So, until you express your charity, you are locked inside your greed.”* (“Jacob the Baker”, Noah Ben Shea)

Do we do our share to help the poor? Is our key in our heart of our wallet?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Repentance (Chapter 7)***

**Judah’s Transformation**

Judah’s journey is chronicled from the betrayal of his brother (Ge.37), to the incident with Tamar (Gen. 38), to the leadership role among his brothers (Gen.43), to his encounter with Joseph (Gen.44)

1. *“Then Judah said to his brothers, “What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh.”* (Gen.37:26-27)

How do we defend yet betray our brothers?

2. *“She is more in the right than I…”* (Gen.38:26)

What confessions do we need to make to begin repentance?

3. *“For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!”* (Gen.44:34)

For what can we show greater empathy and be worthy of forgiveness?

**Repentance**

The story of Cain and Abel is found in Gen. 4. Passages in Deut. 4 and 30 highlight return to God, as do selections from Jeremiah in chapters 3,4,7, etc. The short book of Jonah (four chapters) revolves around the repentance of the people of Nineveh.

1. *“Sin crouches at the door…yet you can be its master.”* (Gen.4:7)

What are our temptations, and how can we overcome them?

2. *“God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out.”* (Jonah 3:5-10)

How can repentance change our lives?

3. *“One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is more beautiful than all the life in the world to come.”* (Talmud, Avot 4:17)

What good can come to our family and community from our repentance?

4. *“Repentance means that the sinner forsakes his sins, casts them out of his mind, and resolves in his heart to sin no more.”* (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance, 2:2)

What sins can we overcome at this time, and how?

5. *“Among the paths of repentance is for the penitent to: a) constantly call out before God, crying and entreating; b) perform charity according to his potential; c) separate himself far from the object of his sin; d) change his name, as if to say-I am a different person and not the same one who sinned; e) change his behavior in its entirety to the good and the path of righteousness; f) travel in exile from his home. Exile atones for sin because it causes a person to be submissive, humble and meek of spirit.”* (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance, 2:4)

What steps of Maimonides apply to my life?

6. *“There are four steps to repentance: confession, remorse, asking forgiveness/repairing damage, and accepting responsibility to never repeat the sin.”* (Saadia Gaon, Book of Beliefs 5:5)

Is my repentance complete?

7. *“Rabbi Eliezer said, ‘Repent one day before your death.’ His disciples asked him, ‘But does a person know what day he [or she] is going to die? He said, ‘All the more reason, therefore, to repent today, lest one die tomorrow.’”* (Talmud Shabbat 153a)

What repentance have I left undone and what degree of urgency is there to complete it?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Forgiveness (Chapter 8)***

**Joseph’s Forgiveness**

Joseph’s forgiveness is told in Genesis 45 and 50; the chapters in-between fill in the story of the family in Egypt.

1. “*Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you.”* (Gen.45:5)

To whom can we extend forgiveness, and why?

2. “*God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God…..”* (Gen.45:7-8)

What is the larger purpose I discern in my life?

3. “*But Joseph said to them, “Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children.” Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.* (Gen.50:19-21)

What sins do we need to be fearful about; and for what mistakes do we reassurance?

**Forgiveness**

The pardon of the Israelites takes place in Numbers 14. God’s forgiveness of the Nineveh and Jonah’s reaction to it are described in Jonah 3 and 4.

1. *“To err is human; to forgive, divine.”* (Alexander Pope)

How do our mistakes measure up to our forgiveness?

2. *“God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out.”* (Jonah 3:5-10)

What examples of repentance in people we know should lead to our forgiveness?

3. *“For a little while I forsook, but with vast love I will bring you back. In slight anger, for a moment, I hid my face from you. But with kindness everlasting I will take you back in love- said the Lord your redeemer.”* (Isa.54:7-8)

What instances of neglect and anger are hindering our compassion and forgiveness?

4. “[*Moses said to God] Forgive, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have forgiven this people ever since Egypt.” And the Lord said, “I forgive, as you have asked. Nevertheless…none of the men who …disobeyed Me shall see the land that I promised on oath to their fathers; none of those who spurn Me shall see it.”* (Numbers 14:19-23)

How can we forgive another person but still hold them accountable?

5. *“The Hebrew salach implies not the absolution of sin but the suspension of anger.”* (Jacob Milgrom)

How can this understanding of *selicha* help us in our relationships?

6. *“At first God intended to create the world by justice alone, but then God realized that the world could not endure and therefor gave precedence to mercy, allying it with justice.”* (Rashi)

What does Rashi’s famous comment say about how we should act?

7. *“What does God pray? May it be My will that My compassion overcomes My anger, and that it may prevail over My justice when My children appeal to Me, that I may deal with them in mercy and in love.”* (Talmud, Berachot 7a)

How is “God’s prayer” an example for us?

8. *“I wanted to be free, so I let it go.”* Nelson Mandela

What do we need to let go in order to be truly free?

9. *“I set her down by the river, but you are still carrying her.”* (Zen parable)

What are we still carrying that hinders our compassion?

10. *“I will remember the courage of my friend in stone, and his unkindness in sand.”* (Persian parable)

How does our attitude influence our capacity to forgive?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Kindness (Chapter 9)***

**Naomi,Ruth and Boaz**

Ruth’s declaration and act of *hesed* is contained in the first chapter of the Book of Ruth, but it is worthwhile to read the entirety of this short book to capture the spirit of compassion throughout. For Abraham’s kindness toward the strangers see Genesis 18; for Rebecca’s see Genesis 24.

1. “*Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the LORD has struck out against me.”* (Ruth 1:13)

What makes us embittered?

2. *“But Naomi said…May the Lord show hesed (kindness) to you, as you have shown hesed to the dead and to me.”* (Ruth 1:8)

How can we show *hesed* to the living and to the dead?

3. “*But Ruth replied, “…your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”* (Ruth 1:16)

How can we affirm our peoplehood and our faith and thereby show kindness?

**Kindness**

1. *“You shall each revere his mother and his father”* (Lev.19:3); *“You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old.”* (Lev.19:32)

What more can we do to love and respect our parents and our elders?

2. *“You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.”* (Lev.19:10)

How can we be more generous to the needy, personally and as a society?

3. *“Do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman.”* (Deut.15:7)

How do we shut our eyes and our heart and our hand to the needy around us?

4. *“On three things the world stands: on Torah, on Avodah (prayer) and on Gemilut Hasadim (acts of kindness).* (Avot 1:2)

What acts of kindness are part of my life?

5. *“Rabbi Simon said, “When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, ‘Let him be created,’ whilst others urged, ‘let him not be created…’ Hesed said, ‘Let him be created, because he will practice acts of hesed;”* (Genesis Rabbah 8:5)

What qualities or acts most define you?

6. *“The quality of mercy…is twice blessed: it blesses him that gives and him that takes.”*  (Shakespeare- The Merchant of Venice)

How does practicing kindness bless others and ourselves?

7. *“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, not the might man in his might, nor the wealthy man in his wealth. But let him that glories, glory in this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who does hesed, justice and righteousness in the world. For in these things I delight, says the Lord.”* (Jeremiah 9:12)

What is our false worship, and what can we do to correct this?

8. *“Compassion is the feeling of empathy which the pain of one being of itself awakens in another; and the higher and more human the beings are, the more keenly attuned are they to re-echo the note of suffering which, like a voice from heaven, penetrates the heart… the very nature of his heart must teach him that he is required above everything else to feel himself the brother of all beings, and to recognize the claim of all beings to his lobe and beneficence. Do not suppress this compassion, this sympathy, especially with the sufferings of your fellow. It is the warning voice of duty, which points out to you your brother in every sufferer….”* (Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb 17:125-126).

How can we become more empathetic?

9. “*This quintessential word lies at the heart of Jewish thought and feeling. All of Judaism’s philosophy, ethics, ethos, leaning, education, hierarchy of values, are saturated with a sense of, and heightened sensitivity to rachmones.”* Leo Rosten, The Joys of Yiddish

Why should compassion be central to our lives?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Healing (Chapter 10)***

**Naaman’s Healing**

The story of Naaman is told in II Kings 5:1-17. It is preceded by the healing of the Shunamite’s woman’s son, II Kings 4:1-37. The precursor tale involving Elijah and the widow of Sidon’s son is told in I Kings 17:2024.

1. *“When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent a message to the king: “Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come to me, and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”* (II Kings 5:8)

What makes us reluctant and afraid (like the king) to take on bold missions, and what can we learn from Elisha’s response?

2. *“But his servants came forward and spoke to him. “Sir,” they said, “if the prophet told you to do something difficult, would you not do it? How much more when he has only said to you, ‘Bathe and be clean.’”* (II Kings 5:13)

When do we make things more complicated than they need to be, and why?

3. *“…when I bow low in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant in this.” And he said to him, “Go in peace.”* (II Kings 5:18-19)

What compromises to we make to get by? Are we as understanding as Elisha?

**Healing and Saving a Life**

1. *“You shall keep My laws and**My rules by the pursuit of which man shall live…”* (Lev.18:5)

What is the foremost purpose of the commandments?

2. *“You shall not stand idly [stand by the blood] of your neighbor.”* (Lev.19:6)

In what ways are we standing idly by?

3. *“Whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved an entire world.”* (Talmud, Sanhendrin 4:5)

When a how have you saved, or transformed, a life?

4. *“The saving of life supersedes the Sabbath.”* (Talmud, Shabbat 132a)

What tasks need to be the highest priority in your life, and why?

5. *“We did everything to save lives despite Shabbat…we are here because the Torah orders us to save lives.”*

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| ( Mati Goldstein, commander of the ultra-orthodox Jewish Zaka rescue organization, while working on the Sabbath during the 2010 Haiti earthquake mission)    What life saving or transformational work awaits you? |

6. *“It is a religious precept to desecrate the Sabbath for any person afflicted with an illness that may prove dangerous; he who is zealous is praiseworthy while he who asks questions sheds blood.”* (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 328:2)

What more do we need to do to heal ourselves, or a loved one?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Hope (Chapter 11)***

**Jeremiah’s land purchase and prophecy**

The account of Jeremiah’s transaction and scroll writing is found in chapter 32. His prior incitements and public tribulation is described in chapter 25-26. Examples of his message of consolation and hope are contained in chapter 31. His castigation of Israelites for reneging on their responsibility to release slaves is in chapter 34.

1. *“Yet You, Lord GOD, said to me: Buy the land for money and call in witnesses—when the city is at the mercy of the Chaldeans!”* (Jer.32:25)

“What tangible acts can we do to demonstrate hope?

2. “*Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: “Take these documents, this deed of purchase, the sealed text and the open one, and put them into an earthen jar, so that they may last a long time.”* (Jer.32:15)

What would you write in an ethical will that you want to be remembered for a long time?

3. *“I will give them a single heart and a single nature to revere Me for all time, and it shall be well with them and their children after them.”* (Jer.32:29)

In what ways to we need to unify our families and our country so it will be well with us?

**Hope**

1. *“As long as there is life, there is hope.”* (Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 9:1)

What are your most cherished hopes?

2. *“As for me, I will hope always, and add to the many praises of You.”* (Psalms 71:14)

How does faith give you hope?

3. *“I am a Jew because in every age when the cry of despair is heard, the Jew hopes.”* (Edmund Fleg, Why I Am a Jew, p.94)

Why have the Jewish people been such exemplars of hope?

4. *“We have not yet lost our hope; the hope of two thousand years, to be a free people in our own land….”* (HaTikvah-“The Hope”- national anthem of Israel, from the poem by Naphtali Imber)

How is the modern Israel as symbol of hope?

5. *“Such a people, which discounts its present and has the eye fixed steadily on its future, which lives as it were on hope, is on that very account eternal, like hope.”* (Heinrich Graetz)

What qualities engender hope?

6.  *“There is no hope unmingled with fear, and no fear unmingled with hope.”*  (Baruch Spinoza)

How are hope and fear connected in your life?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Compassion (Chapter 12)***

The tales of compassion, Jonah and Ruth, are both among the shortest books of the Bible, and can easily be read in their entireties (see also Ch. 9). The compassion of Joseph is expressed in Gen. 43.

**Jonah’s Lesson**

1. *“The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast, and great and small alike put on sackcloth…God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out.*” (Jonah 3:5,10)

How can we be more forgiving and compassionate to those who have repented?

2*. “This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved.”* (Jonah 4:1)

When and why have we been distrustful and resentful of repentance and forgiveness?

3. *“And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!”* (Jonah4:11)

What people and what causes deserve our greater concern?

**Compassion**

1. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lev.19:18)

Who might benefit from my greater compassion?

2 *“For I desire kindness, not sacrifice.” (Hosea 6:6)*

In what ways can I be a kinder, gentler person?

3. *“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?”* (Malachi 2:10)

How are people you struggle to relate to like yourself?

4. *“Jews are compassionate children of compassionate parents, and one who shows no mercy for fellow creatures is assuredly not of the seed of Abraham, our father.”* (Talmud, Betzah 32a)

What are my best expressions of compassion?

5. *“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat.”* (Proverbs 25:21)

How can I treat my adversaries more humanely?

6. *“He who is merciful when he should be cruel will in the end be cruel when he should be merciful.”* (Midrash Samuel)

When must I practice tough love or active opposition to those I care about?

7. *“Do not suppress this compassion, this sympathy especially with the sufferings of your fellowman…See in it the admonition of God that you are to have no joy so long as a brother suffers by your side”* (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb, chap. 17, section 126).

What suffering in our community, country and world must we address?

8. *“This quintessential word lies at the heart of Jewish thought and feeling. All of Judaism’s philosophy, ethics, ethos, learning, education, hierarchy of values, are saturated with a sense of, and heightened sensitivity to rachmones.”* (Leo Rosten, The Joys of Yiddish)

What will it take to for others to call me a mensch?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Joy (Chapter 13)***

The story of Miriam begins in Ex. 2; her moment of celebration is recounted in Ex.15. Miriam’s criticism of Moses and subsequent punishment is told in Num.12, and the brief mention of her death begins Num.20.

**Miriam’s celebration**

1. *“Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels.”* (Ex.15:20)

What do you have to celebrate in your own life, and in the life of your community and people?

2. *“And Miriam chanted for them:*

*Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously….”* (Ex.15:21)

What is the connection between your joy and your faith?

3. *“So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted.”* (Num. 12:15)

How can we return to the path of joy after we have suffered sadness or made mistakes?

**Joy**

1. *“Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”* (Ps. 30:6)

What enables us to move on after a tragedy or crisis?

2. *“Eat your bread with joy; drink your wine with a merry heart.”* (Eccles.3:22)

Why should our “default” mode be joy?

3. “Who lives in joy does his Creator’s will.” (Ba’al Shem Tov)

How is joy a religious obligation?

4. *“In the world to come we will be asked: Why were there times when you could have rejoiced and did not?”* (Talmud)

What times of missed joy come to mind, and why did this happen?

5. *“In this world, there is no perfect joy, unmixed with anxiety; no perfect pleasure, unmixed with envy….”* (Peskita Kahana 29: 170a)

When and how were your times of joy mixed with anxiety or sorrow?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Faith (Chapter 14)***

The story of Caleb is told in Numbers 13-14. Abraham’s journey of faith can be gleaned from his saga in Genesis 12-22.

**Caleb’s Spirit**

1. *“Caleb hushed the people before Moses and said, “Let us by all means go up, and we shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.”* (Num.13:30)

What situations have you faced that called for optimism in the face of pessimism?

2. *“If the LORD is pleased with us, He will bring us into that land, a land that flows with milk and honey, and give it to us; only you must not rebel against the LORD.” (Num.14:8)*

What is the source of your optimism and faith?

3. *“But My servant Caleb, because he was imbued with a different spirit and remained loyal to Me—him will I bring into the land that he entered, and his offspring shall hold it as a possession.” (Num.14:24)*

How can we evince the “different spirit” of Caleb in the face of our own challenges?

**Spirit and Faith**

1. *“So I promised you when you came out of Egypt, and My spirit is still in your midst. Fear not!”* (Haggai 2:5)

How does God’s spirit sustain us ?

2. *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit-said the Lord of Hosts.”* (Zech. 4:6)

How does faith trump might or power?

3. *“Faith is clearer than sight.”* Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk

How does faith enable us to discern things we might otherwise not see?

4. *“Faith sees beyond fate.”* Noah benShea

How is this true in your life, and in the life of our people?

5. *“In Judaism faith is…the capacity of the soul to perceive the abiding…in the transitory, the invisible in the visible.”* Rabbi Leo Baeck

Can you give specific examples of special insights driven by your spirituality or faith?

6. *“With faith, there are no questions, and without faith there are no answers.”* Chofetz Hayim

What questions still concern you; what answers have you arrived at?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Prayer (Chapter 15)***

The story of Hannah’s prayer and subsequent birth of Samuel is told in I Samuel 1-2. Actual examples of personal prayer by individuals are scarce in the Bible. Yet Hannah’s prayer (I Samuel 2:1:10), like Jonah’s prayer (Jonah 2:3-10) and David’s prayer (II Samuel 22) and the vast collection of Psalms they resemble can be read for their intense spiritual feeling.

**Hannah’s Prayer**

1. *“In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while.”* (I Sam.1:10)

What circumstances lead us to prayer?”

2. *“Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress.”* (I Sam.1:16)

When have we misjudged another and missed their distress?

3. *“Then go in peace,” said Eli, “and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him.” She answered, “You are most kind to your handmaid.” So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast.”* (I Sam. 1:17-18)

How can prayer (not to mention a kind word) help us?

**Prayer**

1. *“What is the service (sacrifice) of the heart? It is prayer.”* (Talmud, Ta’anit 2a)

How does prayer change us?

2. *“Prayer is the expression of man’s longing and yearning for God in times of dire need and of overflowing joy”(*Kauffman Kohler).

Why prayer in times of need and in times of joy?

3. “*Out of the depths have I called You*.” (Ps.130:1)

What should we expect when we pray?

4. *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; those crushed in spirit God delivers.”* (Ps. 34:19) *“God heals their broken hearts, and binds up their wounds.”* (Ps.147:3)

How does prayer heal a broken heart?

5. *“The heart’s cry to God is the highest form of prayer.”* *“Tears smash through the gates and doors of heaven.”* (Zohar)

What is your definition of an answered prayer?

6. *“Prayer invites God’s presence to suffuse our spirit; God’s will to prevail in our lives. Prayer may not bring water to parched fields, nor mend a broken bridge, not rebuild a ruined city. But prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will.”* (Heschel, adapted, in Mishkan T’filah)

What are the possibilities, and limitations, of prayer?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Humility (Chapter 16)***

Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Ba’al is told in I Kings Ch. 18; his flight to the desert in Ch. 19, and his problems with Ahab and Jezebel Ch. 21. Moses’ emotional struggles are especially evident in Numbers 11-12. The strange story of Pinchas in found in Numbers 21.

**Elijah’s Experience**

1. “*He said to him, “Why are you here, Elijah?” He replied, “I am moved by zeal for the LORD, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life.”* (I Kings 19: 9-10)

How does God’s question and Elijah’s answer resonate with us?

2. “*And after the fire—a soft murmuring sound. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his mantle about his face and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice addressed him: “Why are you here, Elijah?”* (I Kings 19: 12-13)

Why is God’s question repeated?

3. *“The LORD said to him, “Go back by the way you came…and anoint Elisha… to succeed you as prophet.”* (I Kings: 19: 15-16)

How are we taught humility?

**Humility**

1. *“*[*Through pride we are ever deceiving ourselves. But deep down below the surface of the average conscience a still, small voice says to us, something is out of tune.*](about:blank)*”* Carl Jung

How are we deceiving ourselves, and what is out of tune?

2. “*The human voice can never reach the distance that is covered by the still small voice of conscience.”*  Mahatma Gandhi

What is our conscience trying to tell us?

3.*“This is a novum in history. The idea that a leader’s highest virtue is humility must have seemed absurd, almost self-contradictory, in the ancient world….humility and majesty could not coexist. In Judaism, this entire configuration was overturned. Leaders were to serve, not to be served. Moses’ highest accolade was to be called eved Hashem, God’s servant.”* Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

How can we maintain humility when we amass power and prestige?

4. *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”* C.S. Lewis

In what ways can we incorporate Lewis’ distinction?

5. *“Those who have humility are open to things greater than themselves while those who lack it are not. That is why those who lack [humility] make you feel small while those who have it make feel enlarged. Their humility inspires greatness in others.”* Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

What are the blessings of humility?

6. *“…to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”* Micah 6:8

What constitutes a humble walk with God?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Peace (Chapter 17)***

Isaiah’s vision is most notably articulated in Ch.60:18-22 and 66:21-25. His famous passage on justice (read on Yom Kippur) is from Ch. 58.

**Isaiah’s Vision of Peace**

1. *“And they shall beat their swords into plowshares; and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war.”* (Isa.2:4)

How can we realize peace as an individual, a family and a nation?

2. *“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb…”* (Isa.11:6)

With whom/what must we reconcile to make peace?

3. *“The cry “Violence!” shall no more be heard in your land….”* (Isa.60:18)

Who is crying out for help?

**Peace**

1. *“Seek peace, and pursue it.”* (Ps.34:15)

How can we be a seeker of peace?

2. *“Be of the disciples of Aaron, one who loves peace and pursues it.”* (Avot 1:12)

Who are heroes of peace that we can emulate?

3. *“The blessing of the Holy One is peace.”* (Meg.18a)

How does God offer us peace?

4. *“One who creates peace at home builds peace in all Israel.”* (Simeon ben Gamliel)

What can we do in our own homes to further peace?

4. *“Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding.”* (Albert Einstein)

What challenges of tolerance and understanding stand before us?

5. *“Don’t stop after beating the swords into ploughshares, don’t stop. Go on beating and make musical instruments out of them.”* Yehuda Amichai

What are the most inspirational examples of peace in our world today?

6. *“Peace is the beauty of life. It is sunshine. It is the smallest of a child, the love of a mother, the joy of a father, the togetherness of a family. It is the advancement of man, the victory of a just cause, the triumph of truth.”* (Menachem Begin)

What are the foundations for a peaceful society?

***Living the Bible: Exploring Wisdom (Chapter 18)***

The public reading of the Torah by Ezra is described in Nehemiah 8. Moses’ declaration on standing in the covenant is recorded in Deut.29. Josiah’s discovery and recitation of the lost scroll is found in I Kings 22-23.

**Ezra’s Reading of the Torah**

1. *“On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding.”* (Neh. 8:2)

What are we doing to bring Torah to ourselves and those around us?

2. *“They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading.”* (Neh. 8:8)

What does it mean to “translate” and to “give sense” to Torah for our generation?

3. *“This day is holy to the LORD your God: you must not mourn or weep,” for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching.”* (Neh. 8:9)

What might sadden us when reading Torah, and why should we celebrate instead?

**Wisdom**

1. *“It is a tree of life to them that hold fast to it.”* (Proverbs 3:18)

How is the Torah a tree of life for us?

2. *“Give me Yavneh and its sages,”* (Gittin 56b)

What does this rallying cry mean today?

3. *“From the time the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken away from the prophets and given to the sages…a sage is even greater than a prophet!”* (Baba Batra 12a)

Should we aspire to be a sage rather than a prophet?

4. *“The Bible is the portable homeland of the Jews.”* Heinrich Heine

How does the Bible impact our lives?

5. *“Torah is a Jew’s sense of self, the beginning of it, and the foundation stone of it.”* Chaim Potok

In what sense do you define yourself by the Torah?

6. *“Genesis is the saga of a family. Exodus shows how that family became a people. [The Torah] tells who we are, where we came from, and what we are supposed to be.”* Letty Pogrebin

What part of your identity is shaped by the Torah and by your faith?

7. *“Torah is, effectively, our genetic code. Whether we embrace Torah and live it, reframe it and live informed by its values, we always react to it-and that is a defining element of our experience on this planet.”* David Lerman

How has reacting to the Torah and to religious experiences changed your life?