

# KOIL MEVASSER

KAHAL JOSEPH CONGREGATION • 10505 SANTA MONICA BOULEVARD, LOS ANGELES, CA 90025 • 310.474.0559 • WWW.KAHALJOSEPH.COM

## SHABBAT NAHAMU

### Hear O Israel

Rabbi Marc D. Angel

This week's Torah reading includes the Shema--the classic statement of Jewish faith: Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. We are commanded to recite this passage each morning and each evening as a confirmation of our "accepting the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven".

This passage must be recited with devotion and concentration. The general custom is to place one's hands over the eyes while reciting the first verse of the Shema, as a way of increasing one's level of concentration. Among many Sephardim, the custom is to hold the hand over the eyes in such a way that one's fingers are formed into the Hebrew letters shin, dalet, yod--spelling out the name of God, Shaddai.

Given the centrality of this mitzvah, we would naturally expect the recitation of the Shema to be a highlight of Jewish spirituality. In reciting the Shema, we focus intently on the Unity of God and on our vital relationship with the Almighty.

The Talmud, though,



reports a surprising story (Berakhot 13b).

Rav was an outstanding student of Rabbi Yehuda haNasi, the famed compiler of the Mishnah. Rabbi Yehuda was known as the leading sage of his generation, a man of impeccable erudition and piety. Rav attended Rabbi Yehuda's classes every day, and was attentive to his teacher's words and gestures. But he was perplexed. He commented to Rabbi Hiyya that he never saw Rabbi Yehuda haNasi

"accepting upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven" i.e. he never saw Rabbi Yehuda saying the Shema. Rabbi Hiyya replied: when Rabbi Yehuda brushes his hand over his eyes--that's when he recites the Shema and accepts upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven.

We learn that the great Rabbi Yehuda haNasi

### Prayer Schedule

#### SHABBAT NAHAMU PARASHA VA'ETCHANNAN

Friday, July 23rd

Minhah & Arbit 7:00 pm

Candle Lighting 7:42 pm

Saturday, July 24th

Shaharit 8:30 am

Tehillim Reading 6:00 pm

Minhah & Arbit 6:45 pm

Motzei Shabbat 8:22 pm

#### WEEKDAYS

Sunday, July 25th

Shaharit 7:30 am

Monday to Thursday

Shaharit 6:30 am

#### EREV SHABBAT

#### PARASHA EKEV

Friday, July 30th

Minhah & Arbit 7:00 pm

Candle Lighting 7:39 pm

performed this central mitzvah of faith in such an inconspicuous way that even his devoted student didn't notice him doing so! His spirituality was so deep and so in-

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

ternal that it did not manifest itself in a manner visible to others.

It is sometimes mistakenly believed that a "spiritual" person is someone who "looks" or "acts" in a distinctively "spiritual" manner. People sometimes think that to be spiritual one must shake and shudder, pray in a loud voice, close one's eyes in prolonged meditation, etc. The story about Rabbi Yehuda haNasi's recitation of the Shema teaches us that true spirituality can be (should be!) entirely natural and unnoticed by others. The goal of spirituality is not to impress others, but to come close to God in a personal way. True spirituality requires privacy--a private and intimate sense of being in God's presence.

Jewish folk tradition speaks of 36 hidden righteous people in each generation, upon whom the existence of the universe depends. Significantly, these 36 righteous people must be "hidden"--no one can tell who these individuals are; even they can't tell if they're among the 36. The most righteous people are those whose righteousness often goes undetected, who conduct themselves with modesty, who shun the public spotlight. Righteousness, like spirituality, flourishes

in an environment of privacy and humility. As the prophet Micah taught (6:8): "And what does the Lord require of you: only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

### **Shabbat Shalom**

(Continued from page 4)

The best way to discover what is unique about a civilization is to search for words it contains that are untranslatable into other languages. It is said that the Bedouin have many words for sand and the Inuit many terms for snow.

The Greek word *megalopsuchos* – literally the "great-souled" person, one blessed with wealth, status and effortless superiority – has no equivalent in either Judaism or Christianity, two cultures that valued, as Greece did not, humility. Shema is untranslatable – understandably so since it belongs to biblical Hebrew, the world's supreme example of a culture of the ear.

This is a fact of great consequence and should affect our entire understanding of Judaism. The existence of the verb *lishmo'a* and the absence of the verb [to command] tells us that biblical Israel, despite its intense focus on Divine commandments, is not a faith that values blind, unthinking, unquestioning obedience.

There is a reason for the commands . . . There is a profound congruence between the commandments and the laws that govern nature and history. An arbitrary ruler demands blind obedience. G-d is not an arbitrary ruler; therefore He does not demand blind obedience. Instead, He wishes us as far as possible to understand why He has commanded what He has commanded. . . .

To be sure – this should go without saying – obedience to the commandments should never be conditional on understanding them. It is a contradiction in terms to say that one who does not understand or agree with a law is free to break it. Anyone who thinks this has not understood what a law is. But it does mean that ours is a searching, questioning, rational, intellectual faith, one that calls for the full exercise of the mind.

*Shema Yisrael* does not mean "Hear, O Israel". It means something like: "Listen. Concentrate. Give the word of G-d your most focused attention. Strive to understand. Engage all your faculties, intellectual and emotional. Make His will your own. For what He commands you to do is not irrational or arbitrary but for your welfare, the welfare of your people, and ultimately for the benefit of all humanity."

In Judaism *faith is a form of listening*: to the song creation sings to its Creator, and to the message history delivers to those who strive to understand it. That is what Moses says, time and again in Deuteronomy. Stop looking: listen. Stop speaking: listen. Create a silence in the soul. Still the clamour of instinct, desire, fear, anger. Strive to listen to the still, small voice beneath the noise.

Then you will know that the universe is the work of the One beyond the furthest star yet closer to you than you are to yourself—and then you will love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. In G-d's unity you will find unity – within yourself and between yourself and the world—and you will no longer fear the unknown.

### **Shabbat Shalom**

#### **Learn the Haftarah**

Wouldn't you like to chant the final portion from the Torah on Shabbat—the portion known as the Haftarah? Reserve a Haftarah by calling Sarah at 310.474.0559. The Haftarah portion can be dedicated in honor of a family event such as a memorial, a bar/bat mitzvah, or a baby-naming. Then, schedule time with Saeed Jalali & learn your haftarah with authentic Baghdadi ta'amim, Iraqi melodies for singing the Torah & Tanakh.

## In Memoriam

It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and to donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend prayer services in honor of loved ones.

### Sunday / 14 Av

Moshe ben Yehezkel  
Eliyahu ben Mordechai Mizrahie  
Pinchas ben Channah

### Wednesday / 17 Av

Yaacov Yonah ben Yonah Yitzhak  
Sabiha bat Gurjiya Horesh  
Masoodah bat Tirkie

### Thursday / 18 Av

Kadoori ben Sasson

### Friday / 19 Av

Ester bat Rivka

*Names with asterisks are missing family members' information. To update, please call the office at 310.474.0559.*

## Refuah Shlemah

*Please include these individuals in your prayers:*

Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal  
Tov bat Sulha Mitana ▪ Matilda  
Louisa ▪ Yaheskel ben Regina  
▪ Ayala bat Naomi ▪ Khayah  
Noa bat Sara ▪ Haim ben Mor-  
dechai ▪ Pnina bat Esther ▪  
Yosi ben Esther ▪ Victor ben  
Latif ▪ Ramah Regina bat  
Farha ▪ Aziza bat Sara ▪  
Merna bat Marsel ▪ Judith bat  
Malka ▪ Ofek ben Yochai ▪  
Efrayim Zev ben Fayga ▪  
Sulha Matana bat Mozelle

### To Publish Notices In the Newsletter

To publish information regarding life events such as births, bar/bat mitzvahs, graduations, weddings, anniversaries or passings, call the synagogue office at 310.474.0559 by Wednesday afternoon.

## Community News

### SHABBAT KIDDUSH

is sponsored  
in honor of  
the Bat Mitzvah of

Claire Samuels

by her grandparents  
Ruby & Joe Samuels

### MAZAL TOV

Claire Samuels  
on your Bat Mitzvah

Congratulations  
to your parents  
Benedicte & Jeffry Samuels  
to your grandparents, and  
to your entire family

### SHABBAT MITZVOT

We now offer for donation the following Mitzvot on Shabbat: **1. Petichat Hechal** The opening of the ark where the Torahs are kept; **2. Carrying of the Sefer Torah and Sefer Haftara;** **3. Hakamat Sefer** The lifting and showing of the Torah; **4. Mashlim\*** The seventh aliya to the Torah who recites Kaddish; **5. Maftir\*** The last aliya to the Torah which includes the reading of the Haftara (read by the clergy unless member reading has been preapproved).

Since we count on your donations to the synagogue to keep our membership fees as low as they are, we suggest a minimum donation for all those who are called to the Torah of \$126 or multiples of \$18 or \$26. We appreciate your support. \*Paid members may call the office to book the Mashlim or Maftir in advance, in memory of a departed relative. You will receive confirmation before Shabbat if you will receive the aliya or if there is a conflict. The member may also reserve any other aliya in advance by calling the office. Non-members interested in reserving aliyot should contact Sarah in the office for availability at 310.474. 0559, 11 am-4 pm, Monday through Thursday.

Shabbat Nahamu  
Parasha Va'Etchanan  
Parasha pages 755-776  
Haftara pages 776-779

## WELCOME

to our Guest Speaker  
Rabbi Avi Navah

who will be speaking  
on the topic of

*The Journey to a  
Mitzvah-Centered Life*

Norma & Sam Dabby  
Talmud Torah

Kahal Joseph's  
after school classes for  
kids ages 5 to 13 are  
registering for 2010-2011

For information call  
310.474.0559 or e-mail  
[molly@kahaljoseph.org](mailto:molly@kahaljoseph.org)

SHABBAT SHALOM

# Va'Etchanan 5770

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is one." These words are the supreme testimony of Jewish faith. Each word is worthy of careful study, but it is the first – the verb *Shema* – that deserves special attention. There was a profound difference between the two civilizations of antiquity that between them shaped the culture of the West: ancient Greece and ancient Israel. The Greeks were the supreme masters of the visual arts: art, sculpture, architecture and the theatre.

Jews, as a matter of profound religious principle, were not. G-d, the sole object of worship, is invisible. He transcends nature. He created the universe and is therefore beyond the universe. He cannot be seen. He reveals Himself only in speech. Therefore the supreme religious act in Judaism is *to listen*. Ancient Greece was a culture of the eye; ancient Israel a culture of the ear. The Greeks worshipped what they saw; Israel worshipped what they heard.

This is how Hans Kohn put it in his *The Idea of Nationalism*. The ancient Greeks were "the people of sight, of the spatial and plastic sense . . . as if they thought to transpose the flowing, fleeting, ever related elements of life into rest, space, limitation . . . The Jew did not see so much as he heard . . . His organ was the ear . . . When Elijah perceived G-d, he heard only a still, small voice. For that reason the Jew never made an image of his G-d."

That is why the keyword of Judaism is *Shema*. G-d is not something we see, but a voice we hear. This is how Moses put it elsewhere in this week's sedra, describing the supreme revelation at Mount Sinai:

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You *heard the sound* of words but *saw* no form; there was only a voice. (Deut. 4: 12)

This has systemic implications for the whole of Judaism. Its way of understanding the world, and of relating to it, is fundamentally different from that of the Greeks, and of the philosophical tradition (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others) of which they were the founders. A listening culture is not the same as a seeing culture. In this week's study I want to explore one of the many aspects of this difference.

The Mosaic books are, among other things, a set of commandments, 613 of them. That is the primary meaning of the word Torah – namely *law*. It would seem to follow that a book of commands must have a verb that means "to obey", for that is the whole purpose of an imperative. Obedience stands in relation to command as truth does to statement. *Yet there is no verb in biblical Hebrew that means to obey*. This is an utterly astonishing fact. . . . The word the Torah uses is quite different, namely *lishmo'a*, *Shema*, "hear".

The verb *lishmo'a* is a key term of the book of Deuteronomy, where it appears in one or other forms some 92 times (by way of comparison, it appears only 6 times in the whole of Leviticus). It conveys a wide range of meanings, clustered around five primary senses:

[1] to listen, to pay focused attention, as in "Be silent, O Israel, and listen

[*u-shema*]" (Deut. 27: 9)

[2] to hear, as in "I heard [*shamati*] Your voice in the garden and I was afraid" (Gen. 3: 10)

[3] to understand, as in "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand [*yishme'u*] each other" (Gen. 11: 7)

[4] to internalize, register, take to heart, as in "And as for Ishmael I have heard you" (Gen. 17: 20), meaning, "I have taken into account what you have said; I will bear it in mind; it is a consideration that weighs with Me".

[5] to respond in action, as in "Abraham did [*vayishma*] what Sarah said" (Gen. 16: 2). This last sense is the closest *shema* comes to meaning "to obey".

It has yet other meanings in rabbinic Hebrew, such as "to infer", "to accept", "to take into account as evidence" and "to receive as part of the Oral tradition". No English word has this range of meanings. Perhaps the closest are "to hearken" and "to heed" – neither of them terms in common use today. Psychotherapists nowadays sometimes speak of "active listening", and this is part of what is meant by *Shema*.

(Continued on page 2)