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Guided Meditations For Torah Portions, Holidays and Healing (©, Judith Z. Abrams, 2001)

By Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Ph.D.

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Introduction

This is a collection of meditations inspired by the weekly Torah portions, holidays and healing processes. Jewish meditation, using Jewish texts and numerology, is a practice thousands of years old. I hope you find new joy and inspiration through the practice of this ancient discipline. Intermittently, Hebrew will be used in the meditations. If you do not know Hebrew, remain relaxed. Let the sound of the words become part of your meditation. Afterward, you can read the notes and find out what the Hebrew meant.

Before each meditation, find a quiet spot, empty your hands, sit comfortably with two feet on the floor, sit up straight and take a breath slowly and let it out slowly. Take a second breath slowly and, letting it out, begin to feel yourself let go of whatever physical pain is troubling you...another breath...let go of whatever emotional turmoil you're experiencing...another breath...whatever problems you are chewing over intellectually...another breath...let go of whatever conundrums of the soul agonize you. In all four worlds--physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual-- you are calm, free, floating.

How might you use these meditations?

Here are a few ways in which you might begin. First, you might want to meditate on each week's portion during your own private, daily prayer time. Second, you may want to use the meditation before you study the week's parshah alone or in a class setting, so that your soul is involved in your study as much as your mind. Third, as you hear the Torah read on Shabbat or on holidays, allow the meditation you've experienced to coalesce with the Torah reading.

In addition, these meditations can be used in the following ways:

- They can open the spiritual, meditative aspect of Torah to you. They might be used during services before or after the Torah service. In particular, these would be a good way to teach those interested in safely entering and exiting altered states of consciousness how to attain such states reliably.

- They can be used intellectually as a basis for *divrei Torah* (Torah talks) based on the Torah portions or as part of lesson plans for any given part of Torah or as the basis for instruction on Jewish meditation techniques.
- You can use them to help you evaluate yourself and your relationships by the guidelines of Torah.
- The meditations can be used to help you to become more familiar with the playful aspect of Torah, i.e., numerology
- The meditations can be used to reduce stress and physical pain. Controlled breathing and guided visualization are medically recognized to help produce a relaxed state which has been shown to reduce the experience of pain.

What is Jewish Numerology?

Roman numerals are represented by letters. Hebrew numbers are, as well. Indeed, every Hebrew letter has a numerological value, as listed in this table:

aleph=1	yud=10	kuf=100
bet=2	caf=20	reish=200
gimel=3	lamed=30	shin=300
dalet=4	mem=40	tav=400
hey=5	nun=50	
vav=6	samech=60	
zayin=7	ayin=70	
chet=8	pey=80	
tet=9	tsadi=90	

Numerology can be used to understand one facet of Torah's many meanings. It cannot, however, be used as a basis from which to derive Jewish laws. Instead, Jewish numerology should reveal the playful, fun voice of Torah. Normally, the numerical values of a word are added together and compared with words of a similar value. So, for example, the two-lettered word for that means life, *chai*, is connected to the number 18.

chet = 8

yud = 10

chai = 18

Another word with the numerological value of 18 is *ha'echad*, “the one”.

hey = 5

aleph = 1

chet = 8

dalet = 4

ha'echad = 18

So we might say that life is following the One and the One, i.e. God, is the essence of life.

Alternatively, the digits of the word may be added together and connections derived from that value. For example, in the opening sentence of the entire Torah, the central word is *et*. The word *et* signifies that a direct object follows and cannot be translated into English.

aleph = 1

taf = 400

et = 401

4 + 0 + 1 = 5

Using this form of numerology, we can relate the word *et*, to the word *shema* (listen).

shin = 300

mem = 40

ayin = 70

shema = 410

4 + 1 + 0 = 5

Perhaps the most significant word with the numerological equivalent of 5 is *baba*, “gate”.

bet = 2

bet = 2

aleph = 1

baba = 5

This form of the word “gate” is used in the title of three important tractates of the Talmud. We may also make the inference that having momentum toward God, and listening for God’s direction in one’s life is a path to opening a gateway to a righteous life. This playful approach to Torah will be used frequently in this volume.

Rosh Hashanah

An apple: the fruit Eve gave Adam. The fruit of knowledge. Sweet, with seeds. Even sweeter is honey--pure dripping enjoyment. Honey is also a preservative. We dip the apple in the honey...a concrete symbol of our wish to have knowledge...and to preserve our knowledge. See yourself keeping forgetfulness far from yourself and drawing learning and memory close. We have the preservative...and we have something to preserve. “*Aseh Toratcha keva* (Pirkei Avot 1:15)”. Let learning become a permanent feature of your life this year.

Notes

Apples, dipped in honey, are a traditional food eaten on the Jewish new year. The apple and the honey both symbolize Torah, as Torah is a tree of life (Proverbs 3:18) and its words are as sweet as honey (Ezekiel 3:13). Ivan G. Marcus' excellent book, *Rituals of Childhood*, explains this symbolism well and outlines other symbolic uses of food in Jewish educational and mystical settings. Honey is a preservative as are spices and salt, all items used in Jewish ritual and associated with a good memory which allows us to constantly keep Torah inside us. For example, spices are meant to help preserve one's learning at Havdalah.

Yom Kippur

You are at a trial. The evidence is being weighed. A defense is prepared. A prosecution is also readied. The bailiff calls, “All rise for the Judge now enters!” This moment, when the judge enters, in a robe...serious and stern...is scary. God is the judge. We each stand on trial. Our good deeds defend us. Our bad deeds accuse us.

It is time to think, to remember, to be afraid of this moment of remembering. Let us remember this day all year long, so that next year, we will not fear God's judgment.

Notes

The imagery of inscription in books of life and death on Yom Kippur according to the deeds one has committed in the past year is centuries old (B. Rosh Hashanah 16b). We may tend to remember the good and forget the bad. Fasting and meditating on Yom Kippur may allow us to remember more honestly our record during the past year. And a

continued elevated state of consciousness may help us improve our behavior and our lives in the coming year.

Sukkot

See yourself harvesting the consequences of all the deeds you sowed last year. What are you able to gather around you now? Flowers of kindness in full bloom? Prickly weeds; the product of gossip? With what kind of produce did you plant your garden? What satisfies you about your harvest? What will you do to make it as beautiful as you can imagine? What will you plant in the future?

Notes

Sukkot is the harvest festival and, as such, a time of evaluation. Sometimes the consequences of our actions take a long time to become manifest. When we harvest what we've planted we see the way that small differences at the start of any life venture can turn into radically different results.

Simchat Torah

See, in your mind, one of those human pyramids that modern cheerleaders make. Look down....You are standing on top of an enormous pyramid of smiling, glowing people. They are all the Jewish souls who have gone before you. They have made it possible for you to celebrate this day... Now look up. You are part of the base of a pyramid supporting Jews who have yet to come into this world...you are part of their support. You are wrapped in Torah as a wedding cake is wrapped in icing.

Notes

Simchat Torah, the holiday of Rejoicing in the Torah, is the day when the last section of Deuteronomy is read followed immediately by the first part of Genesis. This shows that the cycle of Torah recitation and learning never stops. Torah is transmitted through the generations by those who do not allow the cycle to stop with them.

Bereishit Genesis 1:1-5-8

The most important word in the first sentence of the whole Torah is *et*. The word *et* has no translation into English. It indicates a direction, momentum. The word *et* is

comprised of the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*, and the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *taf*...a direction...a purpose...an elevated goal you envision yourself attaining. Envision yourself moving toward a life of wholeness...claiming and using all your gifts, from a to z.

Notes

There are seven words in the first sentence of the Torah; fourteen in the second. These literary constructions underscore the importance of the number seven in this narrative about the seven days of creation.

There are two further items of interest regarding the word *et*. First, *et* is the greater part of the Hebrew word *emet*, “truth”. *Aleph* is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *mem* the middle one and *taf* the last one. The truth is momentum toward righteousness; an all-encompassing expression of appreciation for God’s creation.

Noah Genesis 5:9-11:32

You are in the ocean. Bright shining waves as far as the eye can see. Nothing on any horizon. You are neither cold nor wet. Just floating....
....After a long time a boat approaches but you wave it off. You are floating...floating.

Notes

The story of the flood can be a positive one. The solitude, quiet and relative security on an ark guided totally by God’s hand could provide comfort. An ark differs from a boat in that it has no steering mechanisms. The word *teivah*, ark, is only used in the Torah in reference to Noah’s vessel and to the basket in which baby Moses was sent off onto the Nile. In both cases, the hope of humanity was set afloat with God alone to steer the course.

Lech L’cha 12:1-17:27

Go. Grow. Recall the lowest depths to which you’ve sunk...in pain or sorrow. Remember the greatest heights to which you’ve climbed...in love and labor. Think of the vast variety of ways water reaches us. It comes from the depths of the earth and is literally a gift from the heavens. In your mind see the letters that form the words *lech*

l'cha. They extend as far down and as far up as they can go. Claim all of yourself--your entire range of being.

Notes

The words *lech l'cha* are symbolic not only in the way the letters themselves reach down and up but in their numerological aspect as well.

lamed = 30

chaf = 20

lamed = 30

chaf = 20

lech l'cha = 100

The word *mayyim*, water, which symbolizes Torah, is also equal to 100.

mem = 40

yud = 10

yud = 10

mem = 40

mayyim = 100

The journey that takes you to the depths and the heights of your being is as life-giving as water to a dry land; as important as Torah flowing through your life.

Vayeira Genesis 18:1-22:24

It's just Abraham and the ram. No Isaac, no boys, no donkeys. The light is multicolored and falling all around them. He puts his hand on the ram to kill it and he *becomes* the ram. At that moment, Sarah, seeing it all in a vision, laughs. Women are what they bear. Men are what they conquer and kill.

Notes

The binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) is one of the seminal stories of Torah. In it, Abraham, following God's commands and almost murders his son. At the last minute, an angel tells Abraham not to kill the boy; to take a ram instead. The identification of men with what they kill and the connecting blood between them is seen in the Temple's sacrificial cult and, to this day, by the display of horns and/or pelts of animals killed in the hunt.

Chayei Sarah Genesis 23:1-25:18

Rivkah. The smart one. The dutiful one. The hospitable one...That's how we traditionally understand Rivkah's story at the well. But that's not how it was. She was pouring the water over her head in pure abandon and pleasure. That's when Eliezer knew she was the right one. Be Rivkah: have Torah and pleasure and union.

Notes

In this parshah, Abraham's servant, Eliezer, is sent to Mesopotamia to pick out a bride for Isaac. He decides to look for a sign from God; waiting to see which woman will offer water to him and his camels (Genesis 24:11-20). The image of the well and water are symbolic of Torah, which is often likened to water (Sifre D. Piska 48). Like water, Torah is free to everyone, purifies, is eternal and priceless, etc. Rivkah rejoices symbolically in Torah. That's what draws Eliezer to her.

Toldot Genesis 25:19-28:9

Picture ultimate beauty in your mind....God sees beauty in all humanity. Torah makes us beautiful. Old age makes us beautiful. Righteousness makes us beautiful. See all the kinds of beauty you possess. Choose to see yourself as beautiful. Choose to trust God...to work with God instead of manipulating relationships to work for you. We have great powers to choose. Today, choose beauty.

Notes

This meditation on Jacob's manipulation of his brother, stealing Esau's birthright and his hasty retreat from home in fear of the consequences of his deed, comes from Talmud Derech Erets Zuta (59a), 9:5: "The adornment of God is humanity. The adornment of humanity are their garments. The adornment of Torah is wisdom. The adornment of old age is gray hair. The adornment of young persons is the fear of sin. The adornment of an ignoramus is a curse." In Shir HaShirim Rabbah 7:5¶2 we learn that the earth is God's tefillin. The position of the head tefillin can be a most prominent display of beauty or of shame, as when ashes are placed there during a public fast. Imagine the power in our hands! We can beautify God or shame God. Our deeds are much greater than we think.

Vayeitsei Genesis 28:10-32:3

Life. Babies. Leah is life, is babies. Spurned, sightless, suffering yet fruitful...staying in her tent, she comes closest to God. Recall a time when you were spurned. Now imagine Leah's tenacity and strength are with you...helping you. Know that you can survive this trial with her help.

Notes

The number 36 in Jewish numerology signifies double life (*chai* = 18) and is often taken to mean life in this world and in the next. Therefore, it is a deeply significant number in Jewish symbolism. This parshah outlines, among other things, how Jacob met and married two sisters, Rachel and Leah. The text makes clear that Jacob preferred Rachel but it is Leah who consistently conceived and bore him children. Leah's name equals 36 in numerology:

lamed = 30

aleph = 1

hey = 5

Leah = 36

Rearranging the letters of Leah's name produces these words: *ohel*, tent; *alah*, a warning and *ha'Eil*, God. Of all the matriarchs and patriarchs, then, Leah is the closest to home and closest to warnings against unrighteous behavior and to God.

Vayishlach Genesis 32:4-36:43

A starlit night... on a bluff by a river. Jacob is waiting to meet his brother after all these years. He hears a rustling in the brush. It is the servant boy he and Esau shared...now a grown man. They embrace and lie down to look at the stars and talk...just as they did when they were boys. The friend notices that Jacob limps but that Jacob is unafraid. Finally, Jacob's not running...not scheming. Says the friend, "Jacob, your body's bent but you straightened out your life. I guess from now on instead of calling you Yaakov-El, which means the one God makes bent, we'll have to call you Y'shar-El, the one God makes straight." They embrace and the friend crosses the river. Jacob waits for sunlight's rays to witness to his crossing.

Notes

Genesis 32:14-33 tells the story of Jacob's night vision by a river. He wrestles with some sort of being and limps away from the encounter with a new name: *Yisra El*, the one who struggles with God. This name can also be read *Y'shar El*, the one who God makes straight. In this meditation, the being is an old friend who helps Jacob mark the progression of his aging and maturity.

Vayeishev Genesis 37:1-40:23

You are in a dungeon. Solitary. It is completely dark. In the darkness, you suddenly see sparks of light rising and swirling, like fireflies...like lights from a bonfire on a summer night rising toward the stars...It is in the darkness that we see the sparks.

Notes

Joseph's story is one of continual ups and downs. He is a favored son who can interpret dreams and then he's dumped into a pit and sold down to Egypt in slavery. His new boss, Potifar, elevates him over all his other servants but when he won't sleep with the boss's wife, she has him put in prison. It is there that he recaptures his ability to interpret dreams. Sometimes it is only when we are in the pits, literally, that we rediscover our talents and see the light.

Mikkeits Genesis 41:1-44:17

We do not live by bread alone...we need food. Remember the pleasure that comes from good eating. Hold that memory. Now, recall a pleasurable moment of learning Torah....Now, remember a dream...a vision for your future. In Hebrew, a dream, salt and bread are all written with the same letters. See yourself wrapped in a cocoon of your dreams and of Torah and of sustenance. Envision yourself safe, whole, at one with your dreams.

Notes

The letters *chet*, *lamed* and *mem* can be rearranged to form many important words:

chalom = dream and to be healthy and strong

lacham = fight, intestines, eat or use as food,

lechem = bread

melach = salt

We dip bread in salt as a symbolic way of ingesting Torah (the bread) with a preservative (salt) so that we do not forget our learning. The result? A dream.

Hannukkah

Everyone has something of which they are ashamed. Everyone. Think of your most shameful moment....one that you have hidden and locked away. Now, picture light shining into the closet you kept shut and dark. Clean out that closet. Throw away the shameful things you have kept hidden and unspoken...let them go. In your mind's eye, see yourself confessing and being forgiven. Now you have room in your soul for new things; things of which you will be proud. Now there is room for the light.

Notes

This meditation is inspired by the way the Hebrew root of the word Hannukkah, *chet-nun-caf*, is used in the Torah. It is used to form the name of Adam and Eve's grandson, the son of Cain, Hanoch. Hanoch, we learn, was a righteous man who walked with God and died before his time (Genesis 5:21-24). We can imagine his shame at his father's fratricide; how he must have carried the stain of his father's sin all his life. The stress of carrying this guilt may have shortened his life.

Everyone has something of which they are ashamed. Secrecy is a far greater destroyer than sin. Hannukkah is about rededication; about cleaning away past errors and about starting anew. Then, the light can shine.

Vayigash Genesis 44:18-47-27

Hear yourself singing one note. Then hear many people singing that note. Then it breaks into a beautiful, choral harmony. When you are in pain or discouraged, listen for this music rippling across the generations through time. Other noises may try to drown it out but it remains audible...the prayers and praise of God from every generation echoing still. They say the universe is 90% invisible mass. Maybe part of that mass is this music that is the name *yud hey vav hey*.

Notes

In this parshah, Jacob's family is reunited. They are named (Genesis 46:8-27) and turn out to be 70 souls. Traditionally, we have learned that the Torah speaks in seventy

voices. Even though each of us sing only one note, there is richness and diversity we can hear as each person adds their timbre and vibrato to the mix.

We live our lives on the surface and tune out so much of what might enrich us and help us. Just try to tune in to that underlying, millennia-old choir of the Jewish people throughout the centuries.

Vayehi Genesis 47:28-50:26

You are strong. You are strong. You can strengthen yourself. All you have to do is hear God's call to you. Listen.... All you have to do is be in relationships; in a community. Stop...envision the web of relationships to which you belong. There is strength within you and others have strength to share with you. *Hazak, hazak v'nitchazak!* Be strong! Be strong! And let us be strengthened!

Notes

Each time we finish reading a book of Torah, we proclaim, "*Hazak, hazak v'nitchazak!*" "Be strong! Be strong! And let us be strengthened!" Torah is supposed to give us strength for life. But it only works if we are truly present when we study and if we study in community.

The numerology of the word *hazak* hints at this meaning. It's letters sum up to 115, which is also the numerological value of the words *Hineini*, "here I am!" and *anachnu*, "we". *Hineini* is the response to God's call (e.g., Genesis 22:1; I Samuel 3:4). It means, "I am here. I am ready. I am listening. I am truly present." But, suggests the numerology, an isolated spiritual experience is not enough. To achieve true enlightenment and strength each of us must belong to a "we"; to our community.

Shemot Exodus 1:1-6:1

You are walking in the desert. You pass a bush. You stop and really notice it. As you stay longer, relax more, allow warmth to flow through your body, you notice a white, comforting light emanating from the bush. You can only see and feel this light when you take the time to stop and relax. The light is in the bush. The light is in you, warming you, healing you, surrounding you with white light...with a sense of unity with all of God's creation.

Notes

This meditation is based on the numerological equivalency of *hineini* (115), “Here I am!” and *sneh* (115), “a bush”. Only when we are truly present can we see the flame in the bush.

Why is there a bush at all? Why didn't God just appear? Because love needs a vessel, a structure, to contain it. The bush, the word *sneh*, is mentioned five times in this story (Exodus 3:1-5) (and in only one other instance in Torah, Deuteronomy 33:16). In the account of the first day of creation, the world light, “or” also occurs five times (Genesis 1:1-5). The bush and this primordial light are connected...it was this first light of creation that Moses saw in the bush.

The name of God revealed in the burning bush is *Eheyeh Asher Eheyeh*, “I will be what I will become.” This name of God, in Jewish mystical tradition, has a healing power for those who are ill. Indeed, when we are ill, it is very hard to believe that we have any sort of future. This name of God reminds us that God is in the future tense and we have a future on earth and in the afterlife.

Va'eira Exodus 6:2-9:35

Imagine that you are the circuits in your computer, or the phone lines that connect you to the internet. A vast amount of information is flowing through you, *is* you. You need simply be still and let it flow. You cannot grasp the meaning of all this information but it is an intimate part of who you are and what your destiny is...There are levels and levels of meaning in our lives of which we are not aware. Sometimes, the best we can do is be still and not harm the circuit so the information flowing through us can be transferred. Poor Pharaoh! His heart hardening and him not knowing why.

Notes

Our lives are much larger, much more potent, than we generally imagine them to be. We transmit information, emotions and energy in every direction and are largely oblivious to their effects.

God is kind to us. God does not show us how often we are angels, messengers from God, to others. If God did show us we might become conceited or self-righteous. But know that the smallest action of yours may have consequences unforeseen by you.

It happened, once, that a woman would see a family walking to their synagogue as she was driving to hers. Each week, she saw them but they did not see her. And each week, she saw how happy they looked while they walked. So she began to walk to synagogue and it became a precious part of her observance of Shabbat. The people had no idea they were teaching the woman something.

You have no idea what you are teaching someone else. Just remember that the world is in perfect balance between destruction and salvation and your next, everyday action will tip the scale to one side or another. You are an angel; a messenger of God.

Bo Exodus 10:1-13:16

Your first anything. Your first kiss. Your first love. Your first baby. Your first serious illness. Your first death. Your first anything is memorable in a way that subsequent experiences are not. You have so much more of your ego on the line in any “first”.

God shares our firsts with us. God says, “Your first is My first, too. Let us share the experience together. Then neither of us will be alone.”

So God is with you at your first kiss, in your first love, with your first baby, in your first serious illness, by your side as you, for the first time, bury someone you love. God is the support that sees you through these “firsts”. That’s why every “first” thing belongs, in part, to God. It is this of which the offering of the first born reminds us.

Notes

At the end of Parshat Bo, Exodus 13:14-16, the connection between the tenth plague, the slaying of the firstborn, and the sacrificing of the firstborn of all creatures (and the dedication of all firstborn boys to the Temple cult) is made clear. It is an example of *midah k’neged midah*, measure for measure or, as is popularly known in American today, “karma” or “what goes around comes around”.

In addition, the last sentences of Parshat Bo indicate that “firsts” are different. Virginity, for example, is a gift that can be given away only once. Therefore, we should be careful to give it away in a meaningful relationship of commitment. Basically, this is what God asks of us: a recognition of the importance of firsts. After all, we’re God’s first chosen people and God would like to feel an affirmation of the life-long bond

between the Jewish people and God. In some senses, a seder is an anniversary feast; a recollection of the first time God took us out of Egypt and made us God's own people.

Beshallah Exodus 13:17-17:16

You are standing at the sea. The Egyptians are pounding down behind you. You look into the water. Just under its surface, you see bricks, big bricks! They are the words of the song at the sea...forming a pavement through the water to the Promised Land. The Israelites looked as if they were walking on water and they sang their way across. The Egyptians saw them do it but lost their concentration in the middle and sunk. The ability to be unselfconscious...to move forward praising God...gets you safely to the other side.

Notes

The Song at the Sea is recited every morning and a piece of it (*Mi Chamocha*) is included after the recitation of the Shema in the morning and evening. It is written so that it looks like a brick wall...or a brick road. The image of the Israelites almost hopskotching their way across the Red Sea is a joyful one.

A leap of faith is rarely easy to take. Our sages tell us, "Each tribe was unwilling to be the first to enter the [Red] sea [during the exodus]. Then Nachshon the son of Amminadav descended first into the sea [and then it parted]. (B. Sotah 37a)" God works in partnership with us. When God sees we are willing to do our part of the work, God starts doing the divine part.

Yitro Exodus 18:1-20:23

See yourself going down to the Red Sea, down the steps into a mikveh. The water is cool and purifying and washes over your head. Now...ascend Mount Sinai to receive Torah. Go up the steps of the bimah to accept Torah. The air at the top of the stairs and at the mountain peak is cool, too. In the middle, though, is heat, danger, weakness, fighting...the eternal enemy, Amalek, is coming to exploit your weakness.

The goal is to live the whole range of life, not just the coolness and not just the heat. See your life. Is it evenly spread over highs and lows? Envision yourself engaged in day to day life: are you neither over-invested nor overly-detached in this life's struggles? See yourself changing the balance in your life so that it works.

Notes

In *Parshat Beshallah*, we witnessed the parting of the Red Sea and the Israelites going through it. The motion of the story is downward, into the waterbed. After we arise from thence, Amalek, the force of radical, meaningless evil, comes and attacks us from behind (Exodus 17:8-16). The Israelites stand and fight. Then, we proceed to Mount Sinai where we receive Torah from the peak of the mountain's top. Thus, we have the whole range of geographical experiences: the depths of the sea to the plains to the mountains' tops.

What does the Torah mean to teach us by putting these events together? It is easy to live in the pure margins where miracles happen and Torah is given. That is not the goal of Jewish life. Rather, the goal is to be able to make smooth transitions from the mikveh's depths to the bimah's height through everyday life: carpooling, buying groceries, making your kids brush their teeth. Holiness is living in the whole range of experience.

Mishpatim Exodus 21:1-24:18

Recite the names of your best teachers. As you say their names, remember their lessons... feel their love and energy. Think of them, and these feelings and this energy when you recite the first prayer of the Amidah. See them as part of the long chain that leads from Avraham and Sarah to you and beyond you...into the future. Also think of them when you are sad or sick. You were worth their time. They loved you. You are a worthy link in the chain of tradition.

Notes

This parshah's meditation is adapted from *Rabbi Nachman's Tikkun HaKlali* (1984, Breslov Research Institute, Brooklyn, 718-769-0086) a book of Jewish spiritual and healing practices. There, it provides a long list of great teachers one would have encountered studying Torah and rabbinic literature. Simply reciting their names, and recalling the pleasure of learning associated with them, was thought to be a healing force.

This parshah is one long instructional explanation of the operational definition of living a righteous life according to the revelation on Sinai. The Ten Commandments are

a great visionary guide, but they need to be translated into reality, which is precisely what this parshah does.

Terumah Exodus 25:1-27:21

Tighten the muscles of your stomach. This is what tension feels like. Now, release these muscles. Allow a feeling of warmth and relaxation to move from the top of your head down through your neck...shoulders...chest...lower torso...legs...feet...toes. Imagine yourself feeling whole and happy in your body...in your emotions...your mind...your soul. Feel energy moving through your body, heart, mind and soul. What you are experiencing is the heart of creation's mystery...the unity of all the disparate parts of yourself...and the unity of all Jews.

Notes

In the second verse of this parshah (Exodus 25:2), God tells Moses to ask the children of Israel to make contributions to the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness in a spirit of volunteerism. The gifts are all to be given from the heart, *kol ish asher yidvenu libo*. In numerology, the words that describe the voluntary flow of energy that Moses released by his request (*yidvenu*) for contributions is significant.

yud = 10

dalet = 4

bet = 2

nun = 50

vav = 6

yidvenu = 72

Seventy-two = 4 x 18. A spirit of generosity brings one four-fold life; life in all four worlds the Kabbalah describes: the physical, the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual. Add to that the word *libo*, "his heart", i.e., the heart of the donor.

lamed = 30

bet = 2

vav = 6

libo = 38

Thus, *yidvenu libo* = 110 in numerology. This is equivalent to the words *am*, “people” (Genesis 11:6) and *kulchem*, “all of you” (Deuteronomy 1:22). When energy flows with a spirit of inclusiveness, embracing all the Jewish people, and all other peoples, we build God a fitting tabernacle in which to dwell here on earth.

Purim

Smile. Yes, go on and just smile. Now, remember a time when you smiled that smile for a reason: rejoicing in love, in family, in Torah study, in accomplishment, in freedom. Now feel safe: Your enemies are vanquished. They cannot touch you. You can erase them from your life. They are gone forever....leaving you...smiling.

Notes

Purim is a time of pure joy. We rejoice in our deliverance from a deadly foe. And this rejoicing is permitted as can be seen in the blessing recited after the reading of the Megillah:

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, [the God] who *fought* our fight and *vindicated* our cause and *executed* our vengeance and *punished* our adversaries for us and *visited* retribution on all the enemies of our soul. Blessed are You, O Lord, who avenges Israel on all their enemies. (B. Megillah 21b)

When someone has hurt us badly we do seek vengeance. There is no sense pretending that this is not so.

The five verbs italicized in the prayer above correspond to the five times Israel makes war with Amalek in the Scriptures (Exodus 17:8-16, Numbers 14:41-45, Judges 3:12-13, Judges 7:9-8:9, I Samuel 14:49-15:35). Our relationship with God is an all-encompassing one. When we are downtrodden and oppressed, when havoc has been wreaked on us, we want justice, if not vengeance. When God delivers that justice, we feel vindicated and glad.

Tetsaveh Exodus 28:1-30:10

Envision, in your mind, the course of your whole life as a river...There is quiet water where you paddle and float and watch fellow creatures on shore and in the water...There are rapids through which you steer your course...exhilarating spans of time with great change occurring...perhaps you have gone over a great waterfall...a death in the family, illness, bad luck....when no amount of paddling will help you. Afterwards, you felt little

connection between who you were before the falls and who you are after them. Your story is the thread that ties it all together...being able to tell your story is what keeps you together as a person...it is what keeps us together as a people.

Notes

Exodus 28:36 commands that a solid gold diadem saying “Holy to God” be made for Aaron and his sons to wear as they officiate at the sacrificial altar. This diadem is suspended on a thread of blue (the same color as the tsitsit). This blue ribbon is the basis for the metaphorical extension in this meditation. A river, from far above, looks like a blue thread. Our bodies change continually as do our emotions and positions in life. The only thing that holds us together as individuals (and as a people) is the story of our lives.

Ki Tissa Exodus 30:11-34:35

Quietly, in the stillness, ask yourself, “What am I making into an idol? What materialistic goals are running my life? How could I have more life in my life rather than choosing something that makes me feel dead? Now, quietly, resolve to choose life rather than death...the reality, not the fantasy.

Notes

The golden calf can best be understood when it is contrasted with the red heifer (Numbers 19:1-22). The red heifer is burned and its ashes are made into an agent which purifies from the ritual impurity which comes from touching a corpse as the golden calf is burned (Exodus 32:20) and administered to the Israelites as a way of purifying them from their sin. These two animals are photo negatives of each other. What makes one a sin and the other the ultimate purifying force in Judaism? One is dead and the other is alive, filled with the blood that is the central feature of Jewish worship until the Temple’s destruction in 70 C.E. Though the two animals might have been alike in appearance (a red heifer has a golden sheen to it) there is a world of difference between them. It is life which makes the difference between ultimate sin and ultimate redemption. This meditation is designed to help one reflect on whether one has chosen the decoy or the real thing.

Vayakheil Exodus 35:1-38:20

See the ark doors opening... the Torah is being brought out under an enormous tallit. The tallit is also a chuppah. The Torah's energy comes out and flows through you....surrounds you...comforts you...gives you strength...embraces you...as you would embrace a newborn. Now, take the Torah back to the ark...but let it's energy stay with you.

Notes

This parshah outlines all the details of the Tent of Meeting's construction. A better translation for "the Tent of Meeting" might be a Rendezvous Tent in which Israel and God, heaven and earth, met. At the heart of this meeting place is the ark containing the tablets of the covenant. In today's ark, we hold a Torah scroll. The scrolls are frequently wrapped in *tallitot* and then another layer of cloth when no ark is available. Mystical union with God through Torah is one of the most ancient ways we have of achieving spiritual enlightenment in Judaism. And it is as gentle and relaxed as having your old baby blanket wrapped around your shoulders.

Pekudei Exodus 38:21-40:38

You are in the presence of the ark. See the angels on top of the ark. Their wings outstretched to each other. On the wing of one you see *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad*. On the wing of another you see *Baruch shem kvod malchuto l'olam va'ed*. Where *echad* and *va'ed*, "one" and "forever", meet is where you can meet God.

Now look more closely at the ark. It looks solid at first but when you come closer, with your nose practically touching it you realize it's covered with scientific formulae, every novel ever written, all of human knowledge and creativity. We can be the vessels that hold God's holiness when we open ourselves to the Shema.

Notes

At the heart of the Holy of Holies was the ark. It had two winged cherubim on its lid with wings outstretched, one to another. The place where the wings almost touched each other was where God's presence was said to abide (Exodus 25:18-2).

The ark, in this meditation, sanctifies secular learning as a vessel for revelation. Secular learning is crowned, as it were, by a rich relationship with God (the Shema on the

wings of the cherubim) and can be associated with God's wisdom (the ten commandments which are in the ark) when we pursue the course God intends for our lives.

Vayikra Leviticus 1:1-5:26

David Melekh Yisrael chay v'kayyam 3x

Amen 3x

Sela 3x

L'netsach 3x

Va'ed 3x

Shalom Aleichem!

Notes

This meditation is actually part of the ceremony of *Kiddush L'vanah*, the blessing of the new moon in the liturgy of the Eastern tradition (e.g., Morocco, Tunisia). It is said at night, starting three days after the new moon and until the full moon in the middle of the Hebrew month. B. Sanhedrin 32a says not only that blessing the new moon in this way is a way of welcoming the Shekhinah, God's presence, but that women as well as men blessed the new moon with the blessing, "Blessed is the One who renews the moons."

In the Talmud of the Land of Israel (Berachot 9:2), it says that one sage (Rabbi Yose bar Nehuryah whose name means, literally, "The one increasing, the son of Enlightenment") said the blessing, "*Mekadiesh Yisrael um'chadeish chodashim*" "[Blessed is God...] who sanctifies Israel and renews the months." This blessing links the special marital relationship Israel has with God with the renewal of all creation. The difference between *m'kadeish* and *m'chadeish* is but one sound.

The beauty of this ritual is called to mind by the beginning of a new book in the yearly cycle of Torah readings and by the rituals it outlines. Sometimes, Leviticus' rituals seem utterly foreign to us. It is only when we begin practicing some rituals which are more distant from our own life experiences that we can begin to experience the glory of what our ancestors witnessed in the Tent of Meeting and, later, in the Temple.

In addition, this practice and this meditation remind us that just as the moon changes when it appears thinnest so we renew ourselves when we appear to be at our weakest.

Tsav Leviticus 6:1-8:36

Imagine you are a tiger pup. Your mother carries you by the scruff of your neck in her teeth. This is what it means to take on the yoke of heaven. God carries you and protects you but your movement and control are not under your control.

Now imagine that you are the mother tigress. You carry a pup in your teeth. This is the yoke of commandments...not something that controls you but that allows you to fulfill the role of nurturing your off-spring.

Notes

This parshah is sometimes paired with a special *maftir* (the last reading of the weekly Torah portion, Numbers 19:1-22) and *haftarah* (the selection from the prophets read each Shabbat) called Parah. The ceremony described in Numbers outlines how a red heifer is sacrificed and used to make a purifying concoction. The cow is utterly free and “has not yet yielded to a yoke (Numbers 19:2, Everett Fox, translator).” The Hebrew, whose poetry Fox so beautifully brings out, is “*lo alah aleha ol*”. The yoke of the kingdom of heaven is generally taken to be the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4). This is even hinted at in the first word of that sentence which can be seen as an acronym for the words, “Yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven”.

Shema

Ol

Malchut

Shmayim

The word *ol*, yoke, is in numerology equivalent to 100 ($70 + 30 = 100$). This is the numerological equivalent of *lech l'cha*; the command to journey, to find God's path for you in life. The yoke (i.e., the mitsvot), therefore, may at first look like a burden but they are really a way of freeing you.

Shemini Leviticus 9:1-11:47

Think of something or someone you miss. A long-ago lover, an ability you've lost, mistakes you wouldn't make if you'd only known the full ramifications of their consequences....You could spend your life regretting and mourning these things. But you have a life to live...Let go of these past impediments. Open your hands and heart and release it....Feel how much freer you are now that you have finally said goodbye.

Notes

In this parshah, Aaron loses his two sons, Nadav and Avihu. Moses commands Aaron and his two surviving sons not to mourn excessively (Leviticus 10:6). On a first reading, this may seem like cruelty on Moses' part. In reality, it reflects one of Judaism's greatest insights: mourning is a time-limited activity. One mourns but one does not do so in a self-destructive manner.

Tazria Leviticus 12:1-13:59

Imagine you are alone, climbing a mountain. At first, the earth is soft with pine needles and the gradient gradual....Then, you pass the tree line. The earth is stony and small flowers bloom close to the ground....You continue up the mountain. You keep thinking that you've reached the summit but each time you reach the peak you see there's more distance to go. Finally, there is no trail now, just rock. You reach the top...you turn slowly to take in the entire, incredible view. You are alone and at one with God's creation. Being alone...being alive....these are some of our greatest joys.

Notes

Leviticus 13:46 reports that a person with scale disease must dwell outside the camp, alone. The word alone, *badad*, is ten in numerology:

bet = 2

dalet = 4

dalet = 4

badad = 10

Badad's grammatical form seems connected to the root *levav*: heart or inner mind. That word is equivalent to 34 in numerology:

lamed = 30

bet = 2

bet = 2

levav = 34

The difference between heart and being alone is, in numerology, 24. There is a commandment that bridges this gap between loneliness and love: live!

vav = 6

chet = 8

yud = 10

vachai! = 24

Loneliness need not be a curse...we must just live with it fully and love will come.

Metsora Leviticus 14:1-15:33

In your mind, picture an enormous, shimmering, floating letter *shin*. It is hanging there in the air. You approach it until you feel yourself entering the letter. From its base rise three prongs: they are your past...your present...and your future. And all of your life's experiences are connected. You are whole and your life makes sense. There is order and connection between what appear to be disparate parts of your story.

Notes

This parshah is about falling sick, healing, birthing and moving into--and out of--the sick role. It is aptly summarized by the shape of the letter *shin*.. The three "legs" of the *shin* can represent one's past, present and future.

Even the letter's numerical value, 300, can be seen in this way:

lech l'cha the journey you have made (100)

+ *ol*, the responsibilities and hardships you are currently bearing (100)

+ *yimloch*, a future of complete confluence with God's will for your life (100)

300 = *shin*

The letter *shin* can be found on mezuzah holders. Try, as you cross each threshold, to feel the unity of your life and your experiences.

Pesach

Think back, to a year ago...last Pesach. What was occupying your thoughts? What puzzle were you in the middle of solving? Since then, who has died? Who has been born? Who has divorced? Who has married? Who has fallen ill? Who has been healed? You have made a journey, a pilgrimage, from last Pesach to this one. You've spent some time in the valley of the shadow. And you've spent some time on the peaks.

You are here. You have made it to another Seder. Take a breath. Enjoy this moment as richly as you can. And start a new year tonight.

Notes

Each year's seder is memorable. Some may have it in nursing homes or hospital rooms with just a piece of gefilte fish and some matsah. Their own tears are the salt water. Others may have enormous family seders with extended family and bitter contention about the afikomen. Others may have seder in homes with only their immediate family. It is a matter of reckoning and recognizing what we have become in the last year, this moment of the seder.

Shabbat Chol Hamoeid Pesach Exodus 33:12-34:26

When you move, you start with an idea...with a picture of where you're moving. Then you move gradually: you pick out a house, find schools, pack boxes, put them on a truck, take them off the truck, unpack boxes and begin to make a life again. It's a large change that we experience through small, gradual steps.

Picture the difference between kindness and meanness. Or envision the difference between courtesy and rudeness...or between joyful laughter and derision....The difference is tiny. Yet that tiny difference makes all the difference.

To leave your personal Egypt requires only small changes. You don't have to give up your entire lifestyle or personality...just make a tiny change...and see how liberated you feel. See yourself making just one change. Feel yourself begin to move out of Egypt.

Notes

To cause a change in direction or orientation, all one needs to do is change two percent of one's actions. That causes the balance to shift from 49% to 51%. This can be seen

graphically when comparing one of the enlarged letters in this parshah with another in the Shema. In this parshah, the verse reads, “For you shall not bow down to another God. (Exodus 34:14)” The word another is *acheir* and the *reish* in it is enlarged. In the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), we learn that God is one, *echad*, and the *dalet* is enlarged. The difference between these two enlarged letters is only one tiny pen stroke, yet that tiny difference makes all the difference when you’re leaving Egypt.

Last Day of Pesach/Yizkor

What part of Egypt can’t you let go of? What part of slavery is so appealing? What would those who have loved you best tell you to do? What would you tell yourself to do if you were your friend? Leave Egypt. The Sea is still open and you can pass through it to freedom. See how this thing you are clutching is really clutching you...burdening you. Imagine yourself truly free...not dreading looking in the mirror but proud in a healthy way...honest. Remember, today, those who have loved you and do their memory honor.

Notes

The seventh day of Pesach is a holiday with a Torah and haftarah reading. This meditation is drawn from the haftarah. This passage (II Samuel 22:1-22:51) is shaped like the Song at the Sea. This final verse (22:51) about a tower of strength ends both the haftarah and is part of the closing of the traditional blessing after meals. Sometimes we need to know that some source of strength will be there for us when we decide to make the difficult break with “Egypt” be it substance abuse, bad relationships or unfulfilling jobs.

The last day of Pesach is also a day of Yizkor, a memorial service for family members who have died. Imagining that these folks are present, a tower of strength as it were, sometimes helps put things in perspective.

Acharei Mot Leviticus 16:1-18:30

Remember a time when you had blood drawn for a test or you gave it as a donation. Imagine that the blood spurts and some drops are sprinkled on you. The blood is warm. It frightens you and the person drawing it from you. The blood contains information about you...from this blood you may find out whether you are healthy or ill. Nothing can

be substituted for your blood. Finding out the truth, by truly looking at yourself, is frightening...but truth is what makes for healing...for life.

Notes

This parshah places great emphasis on blood: how it may legitimately be shed in the Tent of Meeting and how it may not be shed elsewhere. The Torah specifies that no altar to God may be made of stones which are cut (Exodus 20:22). Living beings, however, may be cut and are elevated in the process: animals become sacrifices and male boys become Jews through sanctified cutting. Only living things are worthy of cutting. Stones, which have no blood, and therefore no life, cannot productively be cut.

Leviticus 17:14 tells us that the soul is in the blood. This parshah's haftarah, Ezekiel 22:1-19, mentions the word blood seven times. There are seven levels of heaven, seven lights in the Temple's menorah and seven days of the week. The importance of blood is then confirmed in space, thought and time.

Kedoshim Leviticus 19:10-20:27

Remember a time you were doing something wrong and you knew it...The tension of waiting to be caught soon far outweighed the pleasure of the illicit activity. You were afraid...afraid for your very self. All the ideas you had built your self-identity on were jeopardized by this one activity. You had to make a decision: would you stop or would you continue until...and perhaps after...you were caught? This fear is a holy thing...a good thing...a thing you want to treasure and preserve. It is part of what ties you to God.

Notes

This parshah restates the ten commandments and augments them. One of its most famous lines says, "You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:14)." God is the witness to our every deed. The deaf might not hear us curse them nor the blind see us put a stumbling block before them. But God observes our misbehavior. God's witnessing is a frightful thing in the best sense: it can help to keep us from lying to ourselves when we engage in self-destructive or sinful behavior.

Emor Leviticus 21:1-24:23

Just rest for a moment. Put down your work. Turn from the turmoil of emotion in your heart. Release your muscles and let go of physical pain as much as you can. Stop thinking about what your life means and how you can improve yourself...for just a minute. Feel yourself turning away from tension to relaxation.

Notes

Parshat Emor outlines the calendar of Jewish observance. It starts with Shabbat. Shabbat is the cornerstone of Jewish observance.

The letters that spell Shabbat, *shin-bet-taf*, rearranged, spell a word which can be interpreted either as *tasheiv*, “return” or as *teisheiv*, “sit” or “settle”. The essence of Shabbat is resting, staying still, recognizing that your worth stems not from what you do but from the fact that you are created in God’s image. Observing Shabbat is a way of helping you return to your higher self; the self that shows mercy....even to itself.

Behar Leviticus 25:1-26:2

Call to mind some issue or problem which you have visited and revisited over the years. How has your approach to the issue changed? How would you like to approach this issue in the future?

In your mind, see yourself dealing with this issue in an ideal way. How far are you from this goal? What would you have to do to reach it? What will it feel like when you do?

Notes

Parshat Behar is concerned with cycles of time, anniversaries and their significance. One of the most frustrating aspects of long-term spiritual growth is that seekers believe that they will be able to put some chronic, painful issues behind them. In almost every case, this cannot be achieved. Spiritual progress is more like a spiral staircase and less like a straight one. We continue to revisit old issues but we do so from a higher perspective.

The Hebrew language beautifully captures this conundrum. The root *shin-nun-hey* means both to change and to repeat. Perhaps only by repeatedly going over what we need to do can we truly change.

Behukotai Leviticus 26:3-27:34

You are on a mountaintop. Light is streaming down onto you in a continuous flow. Then, rising up beneath you, you feel the mountain open and light streams up from the earth...meeting the flow of energy from above. You are bathed in light...and warmth...and enlightenment. You let the upward flow carry you up...up...to a place of complete comfort, love and light.

Notes

The last word of this parshah is Sinai. In numerology, this word is 130:

samech = 60

yud = 10

nun = 50

yud = 10

Sinai = 130

This is the equivalent of *ein*

ayin = 70

yud = 10

nun = 50

ein = 130

which can mean a fountain (Genesis 16:7) sight (Exodus 10:5) eye (Exodus 21:26) or face (Numbers 22:11).

It is also equivalent to the ladder which Jacob sees in his dream (Genesis 28:12)

samech = 60

lamed = 30

mem = 40

sulam = 130

Thus, we can infer that the Torah revealed on Sinai is a fountain of insight and vision as well as a means for us to ascend to spiritual heights.

Bamidbar Numbers 1:1-4:20

See yourself as a small child. What was your name? What were your nicknames? Did anyone have endearing, fond private names for you? Who would have called you “friend” or “sibling”?

In your mind’s eye, see yourself growing up. Now what are your names and nicknames? When were you first “a worker” and “a taxpayer”? When were you first a person who voted in an election? See yourself as you are in the present. Are you parent, friend, volunteer, student? Are you “the weird one” or “the poor one” or “the one who was divorced”?

Be reborn. Name yourself as you are today and as you hope to be tomorrow and in eternity. Step up for yourself and affirm the self you know is inside you...your best self.

Notes

In the meditation for parshat Mishpatim, we contemplated the names of our teachers as a guide to comfort and enlightenment. In this meditation, we focus on our own names. Parshat B’midbar, the first in the book of Numbers, contains a detailed recounting of the people of Israel according to their names.

But the text hints at one’s ability to rename oneself; to be reborn into a new identity simply by declaring it. Numbers 1:18 states that as the leaders came to be counted they stated their family pedigrees. The verb which denotes this action is *vayityaldu*. It is the reflexive form of the root *yud-lamed-dalet* which has a core meaning of, “bearing” and “begetting”. Hence, it could mean, “begetting yourself” or “bearing yourself”. (This is the only place in the entire Tanach that this word occurs.) When you declare for yourself a new name or a new role, you participate significantly in your own rebirth.

Naso Numbers 4:21-7:89

God will bend you and plant you and settle you down.

God will help you break through, will light you up, will help you make decisions, will make you living Torah, will nourish you from the stockroom of insight. The-One-who-causes-things-to-be will help you turn your life around; will be present for you; will free

up your muscles and your mind, your heart and your soul, will make a vacant space inside that may be filled with blessings; will grant you a divorce from those things that are torturing you; will point you in the right direction; will make a solemn and intimate agreement with you and will make you happy and whole.

Notes

This meditation takes the words of the priestly benediction and alludes to their associative meanings in Hebrew and Aramaic.

- The root *bet-reish-caf*, is used in words that mean shoots or branches (B. Tamid 30a) and bending a vine into the ground to make it grow forth as an independent plant. (M. Sheviit 2:6, M. Kilayim 7:1).
- Shemer* is related to the word *v'yishm'recha*, literally, “And will guard you”. *Shemer* is the sediment that settles out of wine; the lees (e.g., B. Baba Metsia 60a).
- Or*, which often refers to light, can also mean to break through. *Orayta* is another way of saying “Torah” and the *Urim [v'Tumim]* (Exodus 28:30) are part of the priest’s way of making decisions given in clarity and perfection. *Urya* means “a storehouse” (B. Sanhedrin 98b) and *Ur* is where Avram, the first Jew, came from, a seat of moon-god worship.
- The root of the word *panav*, His face, is *pey-nun-hey*. This root can mean “to turn, to free up (e.g., by divorcing someone), a corner and empty.”
- *Elecha = Eil =God*. When God directs something at you, *elecha*, God is, in a sense, directing something to the Godlike in You or to God’s own self.

The priestly benediction is the section of Torah for which we have the most ancient extra-biblical proof of its existence. An amulet containing these words, exactly as we have them today, was found in excavations at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem dating from 3000 B.C.E.

The blessing is finely crafted, consisting of 3, 5 and 7 word lines. When arranged in a pyramid form, the middle words form a meaningful sentence: *Adonai panav elecha*, “God’s face is turned toward you.”

Shavuot

Relax...Allow your mind to clear...Now, picture the one new thing you've done this year of which you're proudest...the thing to which you'd like God to notice most. Visualize the journey it took to make that new thing happen...and how much you have changed in the process...When you feel hopeless, think about this journey you have made...You are destined to make many more new journeys. You were. You are. You will be.

Notes

On Shavuot, we celebrate the offering of first fruits in the Temple. The procession into Jerusalem to offer first fruits was like a parade in a county fair or rodeo in which prize produce was proudly displayed. The parade was accompanied by music and an atmosphere of celebration (M. Bikkurim 3:3-9).

The Israelite offering the first fruits would present them to the priest and recite a capsule summary of Jewish history familiar to many as part of the Passover Haggadah, here beautifully rendered by Everett Fox (*The Five Books of Moses*, Schocken, 1995):

An Aramean Astray my Ancestor; he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, as menfolk few-in-number, but he became there a nation, great, mighty (in number) and many. Now the Egyptians dealt-ill with us and afflicted us, and placed upon us hard servitude. We cried out to YHWH, the God of our fathers, and YHWH hearkened to our voice: he saw our affliction, and our strain, and our oppression, and YHWH took us out from Egypt, with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awe-inspiring (acts) and with signs and portents, and he brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now—here, I have brought the premier-part of the fruits of the soil that you have given me, O YHWH! (Deuteronomy 26:5-10)

This passage is important for many reasons. First of all, it is the only prayer that any lay-Israelite is commanded to say in the entire Torah. Second, it emphasizes not only the offering of the first fruits but the journey, the relationship between God and this Israelite, that yielded this produce. Third, each person's personal gift was a part of a larger celebration.

When pain, illness or hopelessness fill us, we lose touch with all that we've accomplished as well as with any sense that we have a future before us. The offering of

the first fruits, as reflected in this meditation, is designed to lift the individual out of the agonized “now” and see the whole sweep of that person’s life, past, present and future.

Beha’alotcha Numbers 8:1-12:16

Pain. It is hard to experience anything except pain in this moment. You feel cut off from your future and from who you used to be before. See, in your mind, what pain has done to your life....the good and the bad....See your past....See your present....See your future. You have a future. You are still coming into being. Focus on that future. Speak the name of God that heals: *“Eil na r’fa na lah....Eil na r’fa na lah.... Eil na r’fa na lo.... Eil na r’fa na lo....Eheyeh asher eheyeh [the One who will become]... Eheyeh asher eheyeh.”*

Notes

Moses’ prayer for his sister Miriam’s healing is the shortest in the Torah and one of the easiest to learn and use. It is 5 words totaling only 11 letters and is used in the meditation above. These eleven letters correspond to the 11 letters in the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush: “I will be what I will be. (Exodus 3:14)”.

That name of God has healing and salvific powers. First of all, it helps us connect with a future which seems distant to us by assuring us that God, too, is in a state of continual development. Second, as the bush from which God spoke was burned but was not consumed, we wish to be whole after the destruction illness wreaks on us (see B. Shabbat 67a). Third, this name of God was used by sailors to protect them against tidal waves. The sailors would beat the waves with clubs bearing this name of God to counter despair (B. Baba Batra 73a). The concept of a future is the key to all healing: it is the antidote to despair.

Shlach L’chah Numbers 13:1-15:41

Picture in your mind a brand-new silver goblet...shiny and perfect. See it, now, filled with pomegranate seeds and with red roses set all around its brim and set in a place between sun and shade. This picture shines, blossoms and attracts your gaze. This is beauty and life.

The Shema gives each of us this beauty: light and love; the chance to blossom. See yourself, purified like the cup; filled with goodness, like the pomegranate's seeds; overflowing with beauty, like the roses. You are beautiful.

Notes

At the very end of this parshah, the passage which commands us to wear *tsitsit*, which became the third part of the Shema, is found in its original context (Numbers 15:37-41). The root of the word *tsitsit*, *tsadi-vav-tsadi* or *tsadi-yud-tsadi* has many, interrelated meanings. It is used to make words that mean blossom, shine, gaze and flourish. The *tsitsit*, the tassels on the four corners of a garment's hem expressed one's identity. The hem was quite distinctive. For example, it could be used as a signature in the ancient Near East when pressed into a document written on a clay tablet (Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*. Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1990, 410).

The image used in this meditation is the one the Babylonian Talmud provides when describing the most beautiful man in the sages' society, Rabbi Yohanan (B. Baba Metsia 84a). The image is the embodiment of the idea of *tsadi-vav-tsadi*: it shines, blossoms and draws one's gaze. Indeed, the prayers that precede the Shema speak of love and light...foreshadowing the qualities found in the *tsitsit*. By wearing *tsitsit*, we are not only asserting our faithfulness to God, but we make ourselves beautiful and allow ourselves to see the beauty within us.

Korach Numbers 16:1-18:32

Picture a fire before you. It warms. It gives light. It changes food from raw to cooked. It casts gentle shadows...But it consumes and it can burn you and your property. Fire can be useful...and it can be dangerous.

Now picture a time when the fires of ambition or ego destroyed something you cared for. Re-imagine that moment with the fires under control. Allow the fire within you...be it excruciating pain, loneliness, unfulfillment, sadness, inability to find and maintain appropriate borders...to dampen a bit; to be controlled and beneficial. Then the fire will light your path to God.

Notes

This Torah portion is the central one in the book of Numbers. In it, Korach and his band rebel against the authority of Moses and Aaron. God destroys Korach and his followers with, among other things, fire (e.g., Numbers 16:35). Fire is the means by which animals are turned into offerings but fire is also God's way of exterminating those who offer fire incorrectly (e.g., Nadav and Avihu, Leviticus 10:1-7).

Fire is also the defining characteristic of Torah. According to the Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:2) the Torah is fire and it is surrounded with fire and engraved in fire and the hide is fire. Intensely studying Torah gives the individual this quality. For example, it is taught of Rabbi Yohanan ben Uzziel that, whenever he would study Torah, all the birds that flew over his head were burnt (B. Baba Batra 134a).

Chukkat Numbers 19:1-21:35

God instructs Moses to talk to the rock so that the Children of Israel might have water. Imagine you are the rock. How will you best respond? If someone hits you? Or if someone talks to you? You are part of God's creation. You have a gift to offer. How best can it be given? When do you punish yourself? When do you allow others to punish you? How could talking better bring out your inner gifts?

Notes

After Moses strikes the rock instead of speaking to it (Numbers 20:11) God decides to punish the entire generation by not allowing them to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12). While there are numerous theological and scholarly explanations as to why Moses' act was so heinous, this meditation draws on a more experiential interpretation of the story. Each of us has a gift to offer. Part of our task in this life is finding out how to bring forth that gift in order to best serve God. We are also charged with caring for ourselves enough that we can shepherd that gift until it is full-grown; ready for use. We cannot allow ourselves to be treated as nothing more than a rock that can be hit or walked over. We are a rock in the middle of a desert which gives forth water. We are one of God's special creations and deserve to be treated as such.

Balak Numbers 22:1-25:9

Remember a time when you had no choices...how suffocating that felt...how you fantasized that you wouldn't be trapped forever...that someone might see your plight and help you. And remember the pressure others put on you...not understanding the pain and suffocation of your situation. When there is no room to move forward or backward, to the left or the right, or even down...you can always go up. See yourself rising above your predicament...gaining perspective on the terrain of your life as you go.

Notes

Haftarah Balak is Micah 5:6-6:8. The last sentence of the haftarah is “It is told to you, person, what is good and what God seeks from you: just do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with your God.” These are the three basic principles that encompass all the mitzvot in the Torah. Habakkuk reduced them to one: “The righteous shall live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2:4)” (B. Makkot 24a). So when there seems nowhere to go, one must look upward, to the source of faith.

Pinchas Numbers 25:10-29:39

Envision in your mind all the gifts you have been given...from your mother...from your father... from siblings, grandparents, friends, aunts, uncles. Receive their gifts again by reviewing them in your mind and soul. This is yours...both the blessings and the curses. See yourself using your inheritance to repair relationships...repair the world...In this silence, accept the gifts God gives you.

Notes

Parshat Pinchas is concerned, in large part, with the issue of who will inherit what in the Land of Israel (e.g., Numbers 26:1-27:11). In addition, the haftarah for this portion is the extraordinarily well-known story of Elijah hiding in a cave and witnessing wind, earthquake, fire and then hearing the small, still voice.

This passage (I Kings 19:9-12) shares a great many parallels with the story of Hagar's banishment by Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 21:9-21). Both Ishmael and Elijah deride others before they are banished (Genesis 21:9 and I Kings 18:19-45). In both stories, the protagonist is banished (Genesis 21:9-14 and I Kings 18:46-4). In both, a bush gives them cover at their lowest point in the story (Genesis 21: 15 and I Kings 19: 4).

Both are attached to Be'er Sheva: Hagar wanders in its wilderness (Genesis 21:14) and Elijah departs for the desert from thence as well (I Kings 19:3-4). Both are sure they will die (Genesis 21:16 and I Kings 19:4). Both are saved by angels just as they are giving up hope (Genesis 21:17-20 and I Kings 19: 5-7).

To inherit something we must live ourselves. If we give up, wailing in the desert because of the pain our family has caused us, we would never be able accomplish something different for new generations and pass it on; keeping the chain unbroken.

Matot Numbers 30:1-32:42

What would it take for you to turn your life around? What would you have to give away or throw away? What would cause you to make amends after a bitter argument? Imagine what you would have to do physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually to take the first step in the right direction.

Notes

This Torah portion outlines the Moses sent the Children of Israelite to war aggressively with the Midianites (Numbers 31:1-20). When we think of life as a binary function, we miss the fullness of life. Some people, though dead, are still alive in memory and spirit. And some people, though their hearts beat and they walk and talk, are dead inside.

The Torah commentator Rabbeinu Bachya tell us that we have more than one life. It is said that Torah is a tree of life (Proverbs 3:18). Indeed, Torah is considered by Rabbeinu Bachya to be the source of not just one kind of life, but four:

A person merits four kinds of life by keeping the Torah and commandments:

(1) The normal life of a person as time marches on and the person exists in his body.

(2) Life after sickness that was near to death and from this the life is renewed as an old, worn-out vessel is renewed and returned to its beginning, as it is written: "His flesh shall be smoother than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth. (Job 33:25)"

(3) Life after forgiveness. After he has been an evil person--that such a person is considered as dead--and once he returned in repentance, behold he is living, as it is written: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the

wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn, turn from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)"

(4) Life after death, and this is what is referred to as revival of the dead.

And all four of these kinds of life are included in the expression, "Live in them!

(Leviticus 18:5)" (Rabbeinu Bachya on Leviticus 18:5)

Some experiences are so powerful that they change our identity for us.

Masei Numbers 33:1-36:13

Sit...relaxed. Envision a great crown descending from heaven on to your head. It is made of light...and sits lightly on your head...and sheds light on your head and body...And its smell is heavenly and rich...filled with cinnamon and saffron. This is Torah...Just stop, relax and receive its light from around of your self...

Notes

This is the last parshah in the book of Numbers and it has to do, as much of Numbers has to do, with inheritance. The symbol of inheritance in this meditation is the crown. Some inheritances one can only be born into, such as the priesthood, or royalty. But anyone may win the crowns of Torah and a good name (Pirkei Avot 4:17).

This meditation also plays on the pun that *keter*, a crown, sounds (although is spelled quite differently from) *keter*, incense. The root for crown, *caf-taf-reish* also produces words such as to wait, to hope, to surround, to wed, to engage, to see all sides. To inherit, to be crowned, involves reaching the meditative state of quietude and wholeness. One might be helped to reach this state by the use of incense during meditation. The recipe for the incense used in the Temple can be found in B. Keritot 6a or one may use a simple mixture of cinnamon, saffron and myrrh or other spices of one's choosing. They may be burnt or simply smelt. The exact mixture of spices is lost to us and, even if we had it, we are forbidden in the strongest possible terms, from making it. Ironically, then, the recipe is recited just after Ein Keiloheinu. The incense is the origin of the smelling of spices at Havdalah. At the first opportunity to use fire, Jews would rekindle their lights and their incense.

D'varim Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22

Look back on your life. See yourself as a young child, as a ten-year-old, as a teenager, as a young adult, and so on until the present day. Now envision the path ahead of you.

What is left to conquer? How will you reach your own promised land. Begin by looking at the journey in small steps from where you are until you reach where you want to be.

Identify your goal. Chart your course.

Notes

The Book of Deuteronomy is the “Second Telling” of the Torah. It is set as three speeches, delivered by Moses to the people of Israel. In this parshah, Moses reviews the events of their 40-year wandering in the desert and then charges the people to enter the Promised Land.

Va'etchanan Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

You have a wish in your heart. Everyone has wishes...prayers...hopes. How can you help these dreams become reality? Ask...plead...beg God to show you the right way.

Out of the most humble part of your soul...the part that knows how little you control in life...ask God to show you the right way to go. Along God's path lie treasures beyond your imagination...beyond even your greatest wish.

Notes

The name of this parshah, *va'etchanan*, is a hapaxlegomenon; i.e., it occurs only once in the Torah in this exact form (Deuteronomy 3:23). It means to implore, to plead to God. In gymmatría this word equals 515. This is also the numerical value of the word *hayashar*, “the right way”. The verse in which that word occurs is also in our parshah: “And you shall do that which is right and good in the sight of God that it may be will with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which God swore to your fathers, to cast out all your enemies from before you, as God has spoken. (Deuteronomy 6:18)”

Eikev Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25

Slowly. Slowly. Things happen slowly. Big changes don't happen overnight. We conquer our problems and projects a little bit at a time. Think of a goal you'd like to

achieve. Now think of how close you are to that goal right now. Now...see yourself taking the small, necessary steps you'd take to reach that goal...This is how we conquer things....bit by bit. Keep pace with God's plan....which may require more patience than your own.

Notes

This parshah outlines how God will make it possible for the Israelites of the desert to inhabit the Promised Land. It is not something that will be done in a hurry: "Adonai Your God will dislodge those peoples [that occupy the land] before you little by little (*m'at, m'at*). You will not be able to put an end to them at once, else the wild beasts would multiply to hurt you. (Deuteronomy 7:22)" This is a remarkable statement! Of course the Israelites want to just burst through the door and take over but they wouldn't be able to do that. And God will not wipe out the inhabitants all at once because then the land would revert to its natural and dangerous state. Therefore, the entrance into the Promised Land must be done slowly. Each of us searches for a particular promised land. To reach it we have to work slowly, *m'at m'at*, bit by bit.

R'eh Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17

You can choose. You are at a fork in the road. Before you lie two paths. They look almost the same. Yet one fork leads to pain, sin and a curse upon you. And the other path leads to life, love and blessings. Do you know in your heart which is which? Or can't you tell? You can ask God for help. God would like you to choose the path of life and blessing. Ask God to show you the way. Now see yourself taking the first step toward blessing. You take more steps. It becomes clearer: this is the way of peace of mind, happiness and virtue. Choose the blessing.

Notes

This parshah begins with the words, "See, this day I set before you blessing and curse. (Deuteronomy 11:26)" God gives us choices and yet we know from Pirkei Avot that the choice is already foreseen by God:

Everything is foreseen but free will is given and the world is judged with goodness and everything [in God's judgment] is in accordance with the majority of a one's deed[s]. (Pirkei Avot 3:15)

This is one of the great conundrums of life. We are free to choose and, as the Torah underscores, it is within our power to make the choice. Yet, God knows, already, what choice we will make. But our choice is still important...a part of God's divine plan.

Shoftim Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot. (Deuteronomy 19:21). An angry word for an angry word. A feeling of hatred for being hated. These strategies only lead to more violence and sadness. Here is where you can make a miracle come true. See yourself in a present or past conflict. Now imagine that you get up and walk in the opposite direction the next time the person or the topic comes up...or better still, that you go up and greet them cordially. Now you would be able to put down that load of anger you were carrying. See how light it is without carrying these sadnesses? Light...Spreading light even into the darkest parts of our hearts.

Notes

The law “an eye for an eye” is called *lex taliones*. In its first incarnation, it was actually a moderating law. In other words, someone might knock out your eye and then you would go and kill him in revenge. So this law was designed to limit vengeance: only the exact wound would serve as the punishment. In rabbinic literature this concept is expressed in the phrase *midah k'neged midah*, “measure for measure”. God is kind in making sure that we receive an exact measure for measure for the evil deeds we do but that we receive 500 times the good we do in any single act. (M. Sotah 1:9)

This meditation urges people to forego retribution and return negative energy with positive energy. When we do this we can, in a sense, control the kind of energy that is directed toward us.

Ki Teitsei Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

There is evil in the world. (Take a moment to think of evil you have encountered.) There is evil in each of us, too. (Take a moment to think of evil you have encountered within yourself.) Know evil when you see it. Evil hates life. Evil has no pity. Evil will not go away on its own. We must drive evil out of our hearts and our world.

We would like to think that the world has no evil in it. And there is so very much delight and goodness in the life God gave us. And we accept that as our due. But God tells us that evil exists and that we must force it out of the world.

Notes

In this parshah, we are urged to remember what Amalek did to us in the wilderness (Exodus 17:8-16). Amalek attacked us from behind and hurt the stragglers, that is, the weakest part of the community. We are to totally crush Amalek who represents radical evil; an evil beyond a reasonable mind's ability to grasp it. And we will have to do this in each generation (Exodus 17:16). Every generation must face its Amalek or be crushed. These are harsh words and thoughts...and yet we know how harsh the deeds of Amalek can be.

Ki Tavo Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8

Look back at your family history. Can you see your parents? Your grandparents? Your great-grandparents? Now, use your imagination to see the generations that came before you. Remember Rashi and Rambam, Hillel and Shammai, Moses, Miriam and Aaron, Joseph in his coat and his envious brothers. Remember Jacob, Rachel and Leah. Remember Isaac and Rebecca. Now remember Abraham and Sarah. They are the parents of us all. Every time you feel lost, just grab on to this rope of generations, bound together, and you will be able to find your way back to yourself. Remember: Abraham, Miriam and all the rest are your kin. You are connected. You are never alone.

Notes

This parshah contains the well-known capsule history of being a Jew which begins, "An Aramean astray my ancestor. (Deuteronomy 26:5, Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses)" It tells how the Jews went down to Egypt and then were brought safely to the Land. In return for God's kindness, people would bring the first fruits of their gardens and orchards each year at Shavuot and present them to the priest while making this declaration. It is not enough to make the gift. We must also tell the story of how we came to be. We must remember our roots before we can launch our newest dreams into the world.

Nitsavim Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20

Sometimes we feel as if our inner thoughts and feelings are disconnected from our outward behavior. Yet what we feel in our hearts is real. Impulses that arise in our minds can quickly become reality. Just a thought...an idea...can result in good deeds or sins. There is a place, though, where our inner selves and our outer selves become one. Then, just as God is one...a wholly integrated entity...we become one in ourselves and at one with God. One...complete wholeness and integrity...One...One.

Notes

This parshah states that, “Concealed acts concern the Lord our God but [as for] revealed acts it is for us and for our children eternally to do all of the worlds of this Torah.

(Deuteronomy 29:28). Sometimes, people assert that Judaism is a faith of deed, not creed. Nothing could be farther from the truth. One’s inner intentions are all-important in Judaism. For example, if you see a pinecone and think of it as a bunch of bird seed, then it’s a bunch of bird seed. But if you look at a pinecone and see food for human consumption, then it is treated as food for human consumption.

The entire Torah emphasizes that God is one and that we are to imitate God. That means, among other things, that we must continually strive to have our inner thoughts match our outer actions. This is what is generally called “integrity”. It is an elusive but valuable goal.

Vayeileich Deuteronomy 31:1-31:30

Death comes to us all. Do you see death as a monster out to steal your life away from you? An enemy to be overcome for as long as possible? Is death a friend you’ve long awaited? Or is death just one more transition in a life marked by constant change? None of us choose the hour of our birth or our death. These bodies of ours, which die, fall away and our souls fly free. Imagine death as just another door to open...as if you had just bought a new house and were taking possession of it for the first time. Death is an end and a beginning. Death is an end...and a beginning.

Notes

In this parshah God tells Moses he is about to die (31:14, 16). Midrash Rabbah (Vayeileich 9:3) notes that no one can send his/her slave to go out and die for them nor

does the Angel of Death tarry for a person who says, “Let me put my house and accounts in order.” In Pirkei Avot 4:22 we learn a similar lesson: “The born are destined to die, the dead to be brought to life and the living to be judged. Therefore we must know and make it known, that God is the One who created us, formed us and knows us. For without our will were we fashioned, without our will we were born, without our will we live and without our will we will die.

Ha’azinu Deuteronomy 32:1-52

Remember a time when you read a book review and then, when you read the book, it wasn’t as good as you thought it would be. The review, in fact, was better than the book. Remember any time like this...when the expectation was better than the consummation: a job you thought would be great is filled with hassles. Or a relationship you thought would bring you joy does not. Sometimes it is enough to just glimpse your dreams from afar rather than tangling with them up close. Be at peace with the roads you saw but did not take. God is with you on your path.

Notes

In this parshah, God tells Moses that he may see the Promised Land from a distance but that he cannot enter it (Deuteronomy 32:50). Usually, we think of this as a punishment. But, perhaps, it was a reward. Maybe the dream surpassed the reality. Moses had lived with the sometimes brutal, always heavy, burden of leading the Israelites from slavery to freedom; from Egypt to the Promised Land. Perhaps simply seeing the land and not having to deal with it was a blessing, not a curse.

V’Zot Habrachah Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12

The circle is unbroken. Someday, you will go to a new family, a better life than even the most wonderful life on earth. A life of peace and harmony. A life without pain. A life wherein you are at one with God. There is no need to fear death. You will not be alone. Angels will keep you company and God will greet you on the other shore. The circle is unbroken...unbroken forevermore.

Notes

In this parshah, Moses finally dies. The details of his death are outlined in Midrash Rabbah V'zot Habrachah 11:10. The angels Michael, Gabriel and Zagzagel come and attend to Moses as he dies, wrapping him gently in a shroud and telling him to close his eyes, put his hands over his chest and his feet together. When he was in a state of perfect repose God came and took his soul. He dies in full physical vigor: he was not weak or blind (Deuteronomy 34:7). Moses was a role model for us...even teaching us how to die well. Life eventually slips from our grasp and it is up to us to live a life worthy of reward and a burial attended by angels. And what is that next life like? Here is how it is described in the Talmud:

The World to Come is not like this world. In the World to Come there is no eating nor drinking nor propagation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the Divine Presence." (B. Berachot 17a)

Healing Meditations

Imagine you are the tablets. The first ones. There's nothing wrong with you. You are broken for someone else's reasons. It's not your fault. You were the first, the perfect container of God's words. They keep you in the ark but you are broken, forever. And you don't know why. And it's not fair and you are mad as hell. And those other tablets, beside you, unbroken, don't know what this is like. Can never know what this is like. Some tablets are broken. And some tablets are whole. And it's angry-making, not fair and there's no explaining it. And there is really no explaining to unbroken tablets why you are not whole. They think you deserve it somehow. But you don't. You don't.

Notes

When Moses went up to Mount Sinai he wrote down the law on two stone tablets. When he came down from the mountain and saw the people worshipping the golden calf he smashed the tablets to the ground, symbolically breaking the covenant between God and Israel which the tablets contained. Numbers Rabbah 4:20 states that these shattered pieces of the tablets, which were still holy and were, indeed, the tablets chosen by God for this covenant, were placed in the ark beside the second set of tablets Moses wrote.

A Technique for Relaxing and Reassuring Your Soul and Your Self Before, or During, Uncomfortable Procedures, Surgeries, Waiting Rooms, etc.

Do justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly.

Do justly.

Love mercy.

Walk humbly.

Do justly.

Love mercy.

Walk humbly.

Do justly.

Love mercy.

Walk humbly.

The 23rd Psalm

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;

He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,
For Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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