Shema Yisrael Programme – Vayeitzei 5774

**Ritual Observance**

“This is what rituals are for. We do spiritual ceremonies as human beings in order to create a safe resting place for our most complicated feelings of joy or trauma, so that we don't have to haul those feelings around with us forever, weighing us down. We all need such places of ritual safekeeping. And I do believe that if your culture or tradition doesn't have the specific ritual you are craving, then you are absolutely permitted to make up a ceremony of your own devising, fixing your own broken-down emotional systems with all the do-it-yourself resourcefulness of a generous plumber/poet.”

**― Elizabeth Gilbert (American author, essayist, short story writer, biographer, novelist and memoirist) from her book, ‘Eat, Pray, Love’**

“The modern habit of doing ceremonial things unceremoniously is no proof of humility; rather it proves the offender's inability to forget himself in the rite, and his readiness to spoil for everyone else the proper pleasure of ritual.” **― C.S. Lewis**

Since the nature of people is bad, to become corrected they must be taught by teachers and to be orderly they must acquire ritual and moral principles.

**― Xun Zi (Chinese Confucian philosopher, d. 230 BCE)**

Religious ritual is a way of structuring time so that we, not employers, the market or the media, are in control. Life needs its pauses, its chapter breaks, if the soul is to have space to breathe. **― Lord Sacks**

Religion and ritual can be vehicles for entering stillness. It says in Psalm 46:10, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' But they are still just vehicles. The Buddha called his teaching a raft: You don't need to carry it around with you after you've crossed the river.

**― Eckhart Tolle (Internationally acclaimed author and spiritual teacher)**

Being a pop fan is a lot like Catholic devotion - lots of ritual, lots of ceremony... We touch the icon to enter the sacred space, genuflecting to reliquaries and ostentatoria that make something splendid of our most secret desires and agonies.

**― Rob Sheffield (American music journalist and author)**

Rituals, anthropologists will tell us, are about transformation. The rituals we use for marriage, baptism or inaugurating a president are as elaborate as they are because we associate the ritual with a major life passage, the crossing of a critical threshold, or in other words, with transformation.

**― Abraham Verghese (Professor for the Theory and Practice of Medicine at Stanford University Medical School)**

**“Can’t I just be a good person?”**

Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. ... The moral virtues, then, are produced in us neither by nature nor against nature. Nature, indeed, prepares in us the ground for their reception, but their complete formation is the product of habit.

**― Aristotle**

Two things awe me most, the starry sky above me and the moral law within me.

**― Immanuel Kant**

About morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.

**― Ernest Hemingway**

There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena.

**― Friedrich Nietzsche**

Goodness is about character - integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like. More than anything else, it is about how we treat other people.

**― Dennis Prager**

We are like chameleons, we take our hue and the color of our moral character, from those who are around us.

**― John Locke**

Moral indignation is jealousy with a halo.

**― H. G. Wells**

**Ritual Observance**

בראשית פרק כד

(סג) וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עָרֶב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה גְמַלִּים בָּאִים:

Genesis 24:63

And Isaac went out “*lasu’ach”* in the field towards evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching.

רש"י בראשית פרק כד פסוק סג

(סג) לשוח - לשון תפלה, כמו (תהלים קב א) ישפוך שיחו:

Rashi on Genesis 24:63

to pray: לָשׂוּחַ is an expression of prayer, as in (Ps. 102:1):“He pours out his prayer (שִׂיחוֹ).” - [Genesis Rabbah 60:14, Talmud Berachos 26b]

[Champions] simply put in more hours than anyone else. The magic number is 10,000 hours. That – roughly ten years of “deep practice” – is what it takes to reach the top in almost every field. ... People tend to think that what differentiates religious people from their secular counterparts is that they believe different things. But that is less than half the story. Religious people behave distinctively. They engage in ritual. They do certain things like praying, over and over again. Ritual is the religious equivalent of “deep practice.” All great achievement requires ritual.

**― Lord Sacks, ‘Letters to the next Generation II’, page 49-50.**

קהלת פרק יב

(יג) סוֹף דָּבָר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים יְרָא וְאֶת מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר כִּי זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם:

Ecclesiastes 12:13

The end of the matter, everything having been heard, fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the entire man.

רש"י קהלת פרק יב פסוק יג

(יג) סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא - מה שתוכל עשה ולבך לשמים: ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם - כי לדבר הזה נברא כל האדם:

Rashi on Ecclesiastes 12:13

The end of the matter, everything having been heard, fear God: What you can, do, and let your heart be to Heaven. and keep His commandments, for this is the entire man: Because, for this matter, the entire man was created.

**“Can’t I just be a good person?”**

Somehow, long ago, Jews were touched and transformed by a truth greater than themselves. They were the first to encounter God as a presence within yet beyond the universe. This changed everything, for if there is only one God and every human being is in His image, it means that every human being has non-negotiable dignity. It means that human life is sacred. It means that in some ultimate sense we are all equal. And if the universe is the free creation of the free God, then we, in His image, are also free. From this flowed the system we call morality and all it implies by way of personal and collective responsibility.

**― Lord Sacks, ‘Letters to the next Generation’, page 19.**

בראשית פרק ט

(ו) שֹׁפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם בָּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשָּׁפֵךְ כִּי בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם:

Genesis 9:6

Whoever sheds the blood of man through man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God He made man.

If someone is able to serve G‑d—pray fervently, eat kosher, observe all the festivals—but nevertheless doesn’t act kindly to others, then that is dysfunctional religion. If you really love G‑d, then surely you should also love His children! Such a person’s service is empty. But by the same token, one who is kind and caring but has no spiritual connection may be a very nice person, but lacks a vital element—the soul element. ... All Jewish rituals are means to become more sensitized to this soul-reality that unites us.

**― Rabbi Aron Moss**

טור אורח חיים סימן רעא

נוהגין להביאם לכתחלה קודם הקידוש ולפרוס מפה ולקדש ובירושלמי קאמר שלא יראה הפת בושתו פירוש שהוא מוקדם בפסוק והיה ראוי להקדימו בברכה ומקדימין בברכת היין.

Tur Orach Chaim 271

We have a tradition to spread a cover over the challah before Kiddush, and then recite Kiddush. The Yerushalmi explains that it is to avoid the embarrassment of the bread, which precedes [wine] in the verse and so it would be appropriate to make a blessing on it first, and yet we make the blessing over the wine [for Kiddush] first.