

# PARSHA DISCUSSIONS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Text by the Lookstein Center



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From the very beginning, Areyvut has been passionately committed to nurturing the core Jewish values of chesed, tzedakah and tikkun olam across all ages. Yet we know that the seeds of these values are most deeply planted when children are young. The earlier we introduce them to Torah, to kindness and to meaningful Jewish living, the more natural and lasting these commitments become.

In 5783, the Lookstein Center for Jewish Education at Bar-Ilan University developed this Parashat HaShavua content specifically for younger children. The aim was not only to make the weekly parsha accessible and engaging, but also to provide parents and educators with tools to create powerful early experiences—ones that children will carry with them as they grow.

Each week's material introduces a theme from the parsha in clear, age-appropriate language, with questions designed to spark genuine curiosity and conversation. By engaging with these ideas at a young age, children begin to see that Torah is not something distant or abstract, but something they can live, breathe and relate to meaningfully daily.

We are profoundly grateful to the Lookstein Center for creating this content, for granting permission to share it with you as we did weekly throughout the year when it was first released and again now in this booklet and to the countless parents and educators who bring it to life. Our hope is that the Torah values and conversations it inspires will shape the next generation—helping children grow up with a strong Jewish identity and a deep sense of responsibility to others.

As always, we thank our wonderful graphic designer, Rena Ray, for her care and creativity in making this material visually appealing and accessible for young learners. And we warmly welcome your feedback, which you can share with us at [info@areyvut.org](mailto:info@areyvut.org).

Daniel Rothner  
Founder & Director

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## Parshat Bereshit



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

What is a good apology? Has someone ever apologized to you and you felt it wasn't sincere? In Parshat Bereshit, Kayyin kills his brother, Hevel. Afterward, God punishes him (but does he really apologize?) and tells him that the land will be cursed and will not provide food easily and that he is banished to be a wanderer for all time. Kayyin then replied, (Bereshit 4:13-14): "Is my sin too great? I have been banished from you and from the land." Do you think he apologizes? What do you think makes a good and valid apology?

### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #2

Can you resist temptation? In Parashat Bereshit, we read about how the snake tempts Eve to eat from the forbidden tree. He asks her (Bereshit 3:1), "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?"

He tempts her with his words, and she is also tempted because the fruit looks good and she takes some to eat and gives some to Adam. Has someone ever tried to tempt you to do something that you knew was wrong? What kind of strategies did they use to try to convince you? When is it hard to avoid temptation? When is it easy?

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## Parshat Noach



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

"The devil made me do it!" After the Flood, God explains that He promises not to destroy the world again, because, (Bereshit 8:21) "A person's heart is evil from his youth" (or, from the time he is born, according to Rashi).

In other words, God has given man an evil inclination and a good inclination. Wouldn't it be easier if we didn't have this desire to do bad"? Wouldn't it be better if we didn't feel a strong temptation to do bad things? Is saying, "I couldn't help it" a good defense?

### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #2

Should you defend someone who did the wrong thing? In Parashat Noah, God tells Noah that He is about to destroy the world and tells him how to build an ark to save himself, his family, and some of the animals. (For FB: Should Noah have fought harder to save others beyond his own family, even if they were not good people?) Chazal (the rabbis) criticize Noah for not trying to ask God for mercy for the people (as Abraham does for Sodom when God tells him about their destruction and Moses does for the Jewish people)

Do you think it's important to defend someone, or ask for mercy when they have done something wrong? If they "did the crime" shouldn't they "pay the time"?

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## Parshat Lech Lecha



### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #1

When you're having an argument and you know you're right, do you ever compromise just to "keep the peace"? Is always preferable? When Abram returns to Canaan, he and his nephew Lot have a great deal of sheep and their shepherds begin to fight and can't seem to share the same land. The land has been promised by God to Abram, and he is older and should be respected by Lot. Yet, Abram approaches Lot and is very generous in offering him the first choice in where to live and graze his sheep. Did he do the right thing by offering this compromise?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 13:5-9): "Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together. And there was fighting between the men of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle— The Canaanites and Perizzites were then living in the land. Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no difficulty between you and me, between my men and yours, for we are family. Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate: if you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north."

### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #2

Is it ever OK to lie? When there is a famine in Canaan, Avram and his family go to Egypt (where there is enough food). Avram tells Sarai, his wife, to say that she is his sister and not his wife because he is afraid his life will be in danger and he will be killed and she will be taken by the king. Was it OK for Avram to lie in this situation?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 12:10-12): "There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to travel there, for the famine was severe in the land. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. If the Egyptians see you, and think, 'She is his wife,' they will kill me and let you live."

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## Parshat Vayera



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

If you have two different mitzvot to do at the same time, which one should you do first? What if one is bein adam l'makom (a mitzvah between man and God) and one is bein adam l'chaveiro (a mitzvah between man and his fellow)? What takes priority? Why? Did you ever experience such a conflict? How did you resolve it?

At the beginning of Parashat Vayera, God “appears” to Abraham, but nothing is written about what is said. Then, Abraham sees visitors and goes running to them. Chazal (the rabbis) use this example to illustrate the principle that “hospitality to a stranger is more important than receiving the Divine Presence.”

Look inside the text (Bereshit 18: 1-2): “God appeared to him in Alonei Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In last week's parasha, we posed a question about lying in order to save your life. In this week's parasha, we consider another angle of lying: is it OK to lie in order to “keep the peace” and not hurt someone's feelings? Is telling only part of the story considered a lie? Has this ever happened to you? When Sarah overhears that she will have a child she laughs and thinks that she and her husband are too old. But, when God reports this to Abraham, He says, “Why did Sarah laugh saying, I am too old?” not including that she mentioned Abraham also being too old. Rashi explains that God did this for the sake of peace.

Look inside the text (Bereshit 18: 12-13): “And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?” Then God said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying ‘How in truth can I have a child when I am so old?’”

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## Parshat Chayei Sara

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### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

How can you reconcile after having a fight or disagreement with someone who was once close to you or a family member? On the one hand, the last time we see Ishmael is when he is banished from Abraham's house and he almost dies of thirst. Yet, when their father dies, Isaac and Ishmael join together to bury him. Imagine and discuss the conversation that took place between them which enabled them to come together and bury their father.

Look inside the text (Bereshit 25:9): "His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

How long does it take for you to judge if someone really is a good person? If you could only ask them one question to help you judge, what would that be? Abraham's servant is given the task of finding a wife for Isaac. He asks her a key question to determine if she is a good person. How did this "test" prove the worthiness of the girl he was looking for?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 24:14): "Let the girl to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one who You have chosen for Your servant Isaac. From this, I will know that You have done kindness with my master."



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## Parshat Toldot



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Is new always better? Is it sometimes better to continue with the “old” ways? Is innovation always needed, or is there a value to maintaining tradition? When the Philistines fill up the wells dug by Abraham, Isaac does not dig new wells, but he digs up those same wells and even gives them the same names as his father did. In many ways, Isaac is not an innovator but follows the path of his father.

Look inside the text (Bereshit 26:18): “Isaac dug again the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham’s death, and he gave them the same names that his father had given them.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Is it ok to seize an opportunity even if it means not being kind? When Esau returns hungry and tired from the field, he finds Jacob preparing soup and asks for some. Jacob sees an opportunity to acquire the birthright (which he feels Esau does not deserve) and demands it as payment. It seems that Esau doesn’t even want the birthright. Should Jacob have taken advantage of this opportunity?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 25: 29-34): “Once when Yaakov was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, hungry And Esau said to Jacob, “Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, because I am hungry”—which is why he was named Edom. Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright. And Esau said, “I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?” But Jacob said, “Promise me first.” So he promised him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he got up and went away. In that way, Esau wasted his birthright.”

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## Parshat Vayetzei



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

How can you respond to someone who is complaining and blaming you? What if they are complaining about something that YOU did? Would you feel sympathetic or angry? When Rachel saw that she had not born any children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." How do you feel about how Jacob reacted to Rachel in this situation?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 30:2): He answers in anger, "Am I in the place of God who has not enabled you to have children?" (or, in other words, it's not my fault!)

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

How can one person impact a whole community? This week's parasha opens by telling us that Jacob left Beer Sheva and went to Haran. Isn't it enough to write that he went to Haran? Rashi explains that this is to teach us that when a righteous person leaves a city, it makes an impression. When he is there, he adds so much, he is their glory; and when he leaves his absence is felt. Do you know of anyone who made a big difference in your community?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 28:10): "Jacob left Beer Sheva, and set out for Haran."



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## Parshat Vayishlach



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Nowadays, so much information is shared on Instagram, Facebook, and other social media. If publicizing an event can cause pain and embarrassment, is it better to keep silent? How do you balance wanting to share news and also being sensitive?

In Parashat Vayishlach, we read about the death of Rebecca's nurse; the place she was buried was called "the tree of cries" (plural). The commentators were puzzled about the inclusion of this detail, and why there would be so much crying over the death of an elderly nursemaid. Rashi (and Rambam) cite a midrash that Rebecca also died at this time and the tears were for her. But the text did not mention it because people would have spoken badly of her as the mother of Esau.

Look inside the text (Bereshit 35:8): Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died, and was buried under the oak below Bet El; so it was named Alon Becut.."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

What is the power of a name? Are you called by different names, by your parents, friends, or teammates? What's the significance of these differences Before Jacob's fateful meeting with Esau, he battles with a man. Despite being injured, Jacob wins the battle and the man changes his name from Jacob to Israel. These names will be used interchangeably throughout the Torah, but each comes with its own meaning. What do you think the significance of these different names is?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 32:28-30): "He said to him, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob. He said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel. Jacob asked, "Please, tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he left him there."

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## Parshat Vayeshev

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### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

What happens when you are the one who did something wrong? How hard is it to accept responsibility? What if you know you can get away with it -can you admit you did the wrong thing? Tamar becomes pregnant and Judah condemns her to death. Rather than embarrass Judah, she presents the evidence of the identity of the father of her child. Judah publicly admits he was wrong (and he is the father).

Look inside the text (Bereshit 38: 25-26): "As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, "I am with child by the man to whom these belong." And she added, "Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these? Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more in the right than I am"

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

When you see someone doing something wrong, do you go tell the teacher (or person in authority?) How do you balance wanting to stay friends and doing the right thing when something bad should be stopped? In Parashat Vayeshev, we read that Joseph tattled on his brothers, which contributed to their problematic relationship. Has anyone ever tattled on you? How did you deal with it?

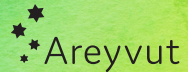
Look inside the text (Bereshit 37:2): "At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father."

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## Parshat Miketz



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Do you think students and teachers should eat together in the lunchroom? What are the reasons for and against? What does eating together symbolize? When Joseph orders food for his brothers, he eats separately from them because it was unacceptable for Egyptians to eat together with Hebrews. Do you think this same idea applies to students and their teachers?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 43:32): They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, since that would be inappropriate to the Egyptians.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

What happens when you are the person who was wronged? Do you talk to them and expect them to apologize? When Joseph is appointed second in command to Pharaoh, he is placed in charge of the distribution of grain during the years of famine that will be plaguing the area. His brothers come from Canaan to buy grain, he recognizes them, but they don't recognize him. He gives them a hard time, but also helps them. What do you think about how Joseph treated his brothers in this situation?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 42: 6-8): "Now Joseph was ruling the land; it was he who gave out food to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to get food. Even though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him."

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## Parshat Vayigash



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

If you're moving to a new country with a different culture and language, how can you best be sure to keep your Jewish identity? What are the most important Jewish institutions to build first? When the Jewish people go down to Egypt, Judah is sent ahead, "L'horot" (meaning, to show or to teach). Rashi cites a midrash which explains that he is sent ahead to set up schools for the study of Torah. Do you agree that a Jewish school should be the most important to set up first in a new place?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 46:28): "They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Should certain people receive special privileges above others? What about community leaders who do so much for others? In Parashat Vayigash, Joseph is the leader of the Egyptian economy. He buys the land from the people in exchange for food, but the priests are exempt and can keep their land. In Judaism, priests do not receive an inheritance of the land. Should priests be receiving these special privileges, in your opinion?

Look inside the text, (Bereshit 47:22): "Only the land of the priests he did not take over, for the priests had their own land from Pharaoh, and they lived off the land which Pharaoh had made to them; therefore they did not sell their land."

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## Parshat Vayechi



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

This parasha is called “Vayechi” – “and he lived” -but it begins with the death of Jacob and ends with the death of Joseph. The other parasha with “life” in its title – “Chaye Sara” begins with the death of Sarah and ends with the death of Abraham. But along with the stories of death, both parshiyot deal with the generations to come and the continuation of the tradition and values of the fathers and mothers.

In the Talmud (Taanit 5b), Rabbi Yochanan states that Jacob never died. His students reply that his death and burial were described in detail! He then quotes from the book of Jeremiah, (30:10) “Fear not, my servant Jacob... I will save you from afar and your children from the land of captivity” In other words, a person continues to live by way of the legacy he has given his children.

Is there a secret for immortality? For thousands of years, man has wondered and searched for a secret to immortality. Why do you think this is true? Does a person “live on” in his children and values?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

How do you deal with anger and angry people? Is it better just not to associate with angry people? In Parashat Vayehi, Jacob blesses all of his sons. In this process, he curses the anger of Simeon and Levi and does not want to be associated with them. Do you agree with this?

Look inside the text (Bereshit 49: 5-7): “Simeon and Levi are a pair; their weapons are tools of lawlessness. I would not want to be included in their community or be part of them. When they are angry, they kill men, and when they are pleased, they hurt oxen. Their strong anger and endless wrath should be cursed. I will divide them among the descendants of Jacob, scatter them throughout the land of Israel.”

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## Parshat Shemot



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

What should you do when you see two people arguing and it looks like someone is going to get hurt? Do you try to stop it? Do you keep on walking because you don't really know them? Do you run to get help? In Parashat Shemot, Moses sees two Jews arguing and one is ready to hit the other. He tries to stop them, but he doesn't receive the response he expected.

Look inside the text (Shemot 2:13-14): When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the attacker, "Why are you hitting your friend? He answered, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was scared, and thought: Then the matter is known!"

### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #2

What does it mean to be a responsible sibling or family member? Have you ever had to do something you found difficult in order to take care of a younger sibling? How did you feel while you were doing it? How did you feel afterward?

In Parashat Shemot, Miriam takes on a special role in watching over her baby brother. How do you think it felt for her to have that responsibility?

Look inside the text (Shemot 2:4, 7-8): "And his sister watched from a distance, to learn what would happen to him. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Should I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to nurse the child for you? And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother."



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## Parshat Vaera



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Do you think that someone who has a physical disability feels self-conscious? What can you do to make them feel more comfortable? God tells Moses to speak to Pharaoh. But Moses explains that he has a speech impediment and therefore believes that Pharaoh won't listen to him.

Look inside the text (Shemot 6:12): "But Moses spoke to God, saying, "The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh listen to me, a man with a speech impediment!"

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Vaerah, we see that although Moses begins most of the plagues, it is Aaron who hits the water to begin the plague of blood. The commentator Rashi explains that since the water protected Moses as a baby when he was set in the Nile, it would not be proper for him to punish the water. Do you think that it's important to show appreciation for nature? After all, what has nature done for us -isn't it there for us to use?

Look inside the text (Shemot 7:19): "And God said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Take your rod and hold out your arm over the waters of Egypt—its rivers, its canals, its ponds, all its bodies of water—that they may turn to blood; there will be blood throughout the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone."

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## Parshat Bo



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Everyone loves stories! Can it be a mitzvah to tell a story?

In Parashat Bo, we read about the importance of telling our children the story of the Exodus. Why do you think it's important to tell the story to the children? Why isn't it enough to read the story in the Torah reading in the synagogue? Do you think you'll remember your family story and be able to tell your children one day?

Look inside the text (Shemot 13:8): "And you will explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what God did for me when I went free from Egypt.'"

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Bo, we learn of the first mitzvah the Jewish people received as a nation – the commandment of Rosh Chodesh. The months would be counted according to the phases of the moon. As slaves in Egypt, their time was not their own and belonged to their masters. Now, as free people, they will declare when the month begins and will have the responsibility to use their time wisely. How can you best use your free time? Do you think you typically use your free time well? Why or why not?

Look inside the text (Shemot 12:2): "This month will mark for you the beginning of the months; it will be the first of the months of the year for you."

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## Parshat Beshalach



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

How do you establish trust? Think of somebody you trust and describe why you trust them. What makes YOU trustworthy? In Parashat Beshalach we begin to learn about some of the challenges the Jewish people face in the desert. They have no food and God sends them a miraculous kind of food, manna, every morning. But they are only allowed to take enough for the day, and must not leave any leftovers. They need to accept the rules Moses gave them and trust that Hashem will send manna every morning. Some people don't have the trust, and save some manna for the next day – but it becomes spoiled and wormy and Moses gets angry they disobeyed the rules.

Look inside the text (Shemot 16:20): “But they paid no attention to Moses; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank. And Moses was angry with them.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Beshalach, the Jewish people leave Egypt. After crossing the Red Sea, Moses leads the nation in song and Miriam leads the women with drums and tambourines. Commentators explain that Miriam was so confident that great miracles were about to occur that she told the women to be sure to bring their musical instruments! Imagine that you had to leave your home in a rush. You're not sure exactly where you'll be going, but you know you'll be going on a long journey. What items could you not leave behind? Why?

Look inside the text (Shemot 15:20): “Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with tambourines.”

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## Parshat Yitro



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Why are the ways things are designed important? When you look at the Aron Kodesh at your synagogue or school, how does it make you feel? What's so special about the way it looks? What do you think the designer or artist was thinking? What is important to include in such a design? At the end of Parashat Yitro, we are given instructions about how the mizbeach (the altar) was to be made. One important rule was that it be made of whole stones and no iron or metal tool can be used to cut the stone. Commentators explain that metal is used for war, and therefore cannot be used to make the mizbeach which was to be a symbol of peace.

Look inside the text (Shemot 20:22): "And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of metal stones."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Yitro, the Israelites receive the Ten Commandments. Many of these are important laws like not killing or stealing which are common to all nations. Some are special to the Jewish people like keeping Shabbat. Most are connected to deeds or belief in God. But the last commandment is connected to thoughts. We are commanded not to be jealous of the house and property of another. We are being given an important message that it's possible not to be jealous and that we can control our thoughts and feelings. It's not always easy, but it can be done!

How do you deal with jealousy? Do you ever feel bad when your brother or sister or friend gets a really special toy or game you wish you had? Does it make you feel jealous? Is it possible to control these bad feelings and thoughts?

Look inside the text (Shemot 20:14): "You should not be jealous of your neighbor's house: you should not be jealous of your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

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## Parshat Mishpatim

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### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

How do you know who is in the wrong in different situations? Imagine you're walking in the halls at school, and you trip and fall over someone's school bag which was left on the floor. You complain to them, "Why did you leave your school bag on the floor where someone could trip?" They respond, "Why didn't you watch where you were going?" Who is at fault? Why? Parashat Mishpatim is filled with laws about the relationships between people. Although it doesn't list school bags left on the floor, it does discuss someone who digs a hole and doesn't cover it. If an animal falls into the hole and dies, the person who dug the hole is responsible. Do you think it is similar?

Look inside the text, (Shemot 21:33-34): "When a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the one responsible for the pit must make up for it; he should pay the price to the owner of the animal."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Parashat Mishpatim has many laws about our relationships with each other. We read that if you find the ox or donkey of your enemy which is lost, you have to return it to him. How do you deal with lost or missing objects? What do you do when you find a watch someone has lost on the lunchroom table? What if you're in a hurry to go out to recess, and you think probably someone else will find it and deal with it? What do you do if you know it belongs to someone who has been mean to you?

Look inside the text (Shemot 23:4): "When you encounter your enemy's ox or donkey wandering, you must take it back to him."

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## Parshat Terumah



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

How can a place help bring holiness to a community? One would expect the verse to read, “Make me a sanctuary so that I may dwell with it!” The midrash (and the English translation) offer a beautiful idea. When you donate to building a sanctuary and it is done for the sake of God and it is part of your life, Hashem will bless you and you will feel His presence among you.

Nowadays our synagogues are a “small Temple” – a substitute for the sanctuary we once had. How does your synagogue bring Holiness to the community? During this past year of the pandemic, synagogues became active in many different types of “helping” and chesed in the community. What happened in your community? How can your family take part in it?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Terumah, we read about the plans for building the mishkan (tabernacle), everyone shared in bringing all the materials needed so they felt that it truly belonged to all of them. How do you divide up responsibilities in your class or your family? If your class was having an end-of-the-year party, Should one rich family provide all of the treats or should they be equally divided among all of the students? Which plan do you think would be more successful? Why?

Look inside the text, (Shemot 25:2): “Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him.”



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## Parshat Tezaveh



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Do you think it's important for people with certain jobs to have a uniform? Why? What kind of uniforms can you think of? In Parashat Tezaveh, we read about the special clothing the kohanim (priests) and kohen gadol (high priest) wore. There are many commentaries about the importance of each article of clothing. Why did they need to wear special clothes when they served in the mishkan (tabernacle)?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

There is one person who is in every single parasha from Shemot until the end of Devarim, except for this parasha! Can you guess who it is? Why is he missing? One reason is that this parasha deals with the clothes of the kohanim (priests) and their inauguration. Perhaps Moses, in his modesty, lets the kohanim (priests) have center stage. The midrash offers another reason. After the sin of the golden calf, Moses tells God, "If you don't forgive your people erase me from your book." The rabbis explain that the words of a righteous person are taken very seriously. Even though God did forgive the people, Moses's name was not included in Parashat Tezaveh. Can a person be careful about everything they say? How important is this?

Look inside the text, (Shemot 32:32): "If you don't forgive your people erase me from your book."

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## Parshat Ki Tisa



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Do you think it's better to be in a class where everyone is at the same level as you, or is it better to be in a class with kids at different levels? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? In Parashat Ki Tisa we read about the recipe for the incense which was burned on the golden mizbeach (altar). We would imagine that all the ingredients would have a nice smell. But one of the ingredients, galbanum, had a very bad smell! Rashi, a famous medieval commentator, explains that this comes to teach us an important lesson of unity. Everyone – good and bad – has a share in serving God.

Look inside the text (Shemot 30:34): “And God said to Moses: Take the herbs stacte, onycha, and galbanum—these herbs together with pure frankincense; let there be an equal part of each.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Is it harder to be good when everyone else is doing the wrong thing? Were you ever in a class where the teacher had to leave for a few minutes and then there was chaos? Did you join or wait quietly? How did the teacher react when he/she returned? Parashat Ki Tisa tells the story of how the Jewish people began to worship the golden calf when Moses did not return from Mt. Sinai when they expected. God wanted to punish them severely and Moses pleaded for them. One of his arguments was that God put them in a “bad neighborhood”, in Egypt for 210 years! It's not surprising that they were influenced by idol worship there. Therefore, God should forgive them.

Look inside the text (Shemot 32:11): “But Moses pleaded with God, saying, “Don't let Your anger, God, blaze against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.”

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## Parshat Vayakhel



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Can the design of an object teach an important lesson? In this parasha, we read about the making of the Tabernacle. The Ark had a special cover of gold which had two kruvim (cherubs) on it. The kruvim had wings that spread upwards and they faced each other on top of the Ark. There is a midrash that one had the face of a girl, and one of a boy. When the Jewish people were just and obeyed the laws of God, they faced each other. When the Jewish people sinned, they turned their heads away. The Ark was the holiest object in the Tabernacle. It had the Tablets inside and was kept in the Holy of Holies. Why would it be designed with the face of a girl and boy looking at each other? Is this the holiest image possible? What do you think is the connection between the cover of the Ark and what was inside?

Look inside the text (Shemot 37:9): “The kruvim had their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They faced each other; the faces of the kruvim were turned toward the cover.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

What does it mean to do something “with all your heart”? When you do something or make something for your parent or friend, do you do it with “all your heart”? What makes it special? In Parashat Vayakhel, we read about how the Jewish people were very enthusiastic about contributing to the building of the mishkan (tabernacle). So much so that they had to be told to stop bringing gifts because they were so generous. In these verses, the word for heart appears many times. Why do you think it’s repeated so many times?

Look inside the text (Shemot 36:5): “They and said to Moses, “The people are bringing more than is needed for the work needed in the work that God has commanded to be done.”

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## Parshat Pekudei



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Do you feel/act differently depending on what you're wearing on your head?

In Parashat Pekudei we read about the making of the clothing of the priests and the High Priest. The High Priest had a special gold band he wore on his head. What do you think it means to have to wear a band like that on your head? How might it affect you? Think of other items worn on a head – a yarmulke, tefillin (phylacteries), a crown, a clown's hat – How might what you wear on your head affect a person? Think of some other examples.

Look inside the text (Shemot 39:30): "The golden band he had to wear on his head was inscribed with the words, "Holy for God."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Why is it important to keep a record of everything? Imagine you are collecting money from all the members of your class to give a gift to your teacher. Is it important to keep a record of how much money you collected and how much money you paid? After all, you're an honest person! Why would a record of the money make a difference? Parashat Pekudei begins with an accounting of all the gold, silver, and copper brought for the building of the mishkan (Tabernacle). Even though Moses was the holiest of prophets and leaders and everyone trusted him, he set a role model for good and honest leadership in listing all the amounts given.

Look inside the text (Shemot 38:24-25): "All the gold that was used for the work, in all the work of the sanctuary—the elevation offering of gold—came to 29 talents and 730 shekels by the sanctuary weight. The silver of those of the community who were recorded came to 100 talents and 1,775 shekels by the sanctuary weight."

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## Parshat Vayikra



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Did you ever notice how a really good person doesn't need to call attention to himself/herself but can be recognized by some of the quiet things they do? Do you know anyone like this? Can you describe him or her?

The book of Vayikra begins with the words "And God called to Moses." But you will notice that the Aleph at the end of the Hebrew word "Vayikra" is written small and the word reads more like "Vayikar." Why would a letter be made small? "Vayikar" means that something happened just by chance. The midrash explains that this is an example of Moses's humility. He did not want it to seem that God was calling only for him because he is more important than anyone. The small Aleph reminds us of Moses's humility. Isn't it amazing what you can learn from the size of a letter?!

### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #2

The first parshiot of Vayikra describe the details of the mishkan (Tabernacle) and the korbanot (sacrifices). Korbanot are hard to understand today – but simply put, they were a way that people would bring gifts to God. Sometimes, these gifts would be a way to say, "I'm sorry, I made a mistake," or "thank you," or for other reasons. It was a way to feel closer to God.

Do you have to be rich to give a really good present? In Parashat Vayikra, we learn that all gifts were equal – whether you are rich or poor. A rich person would bring a cow as a gift and a poor person could bring a bird or even just fine flour. What's most important is that a person gives it with sincerity.

Did you ever give a person a gift that was small, but you gave it with all your heart? Describe what it was and how you felt? How was the gift received?

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## Parshat Tzav



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

If you were out playing and got yourself and your clothes really dirty, would it be important to change into different clothes to eat dinner? To go to school? To go to synagogue? Why? In this week's parasha, we read that even the priests had different clothes for different tasks.

Look inside the text (Vayikra 6:3-4): "The priests had one set of clothes which they used when they performed the service of the sacrifices, but when they needed to take out the ashes they first changed their clothes. It would not be fitting to serve God in the same clothes as they make dirty as they remove the ashes and take them outside."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Among the korbanot (sacrifices) in Parashat Tzav, we learn about the Korban Todah, the thanksgiving offering. This was a way people could say thank you to God for different important events in their life, for example, recovery from an illness, or arriving home safely after a difficult or dangerous trip. Nowadays, we still remember this korban (sacrifice) with a special prayer, called Birkat Ha'Gomel. In this manner, the Torah teaches us the importance of gratitude. Look around you and give a special thank you to someone. Think about what has happened recently that you would like to say thank you to God. How does saying "thank you" make you feel?

Look inside the text (Vayikra 7: 12): "If he offers it for thanksgiving, he shall offer together with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, well soaked."



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## Parshat Shemini



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Is it always OK to be spontaneous, or are there times when you have to be sure to obey the rules and laws? If you see a sign, "danger, don't cross or enter", but you're very curious, can you ignore the sign?

In Parshat Shmini, the inauguration of the Tabernacle, a day which the nation had anticipated with great excitement turned to tragedy. Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons were punished severely because they do something which God had not commanded. As priests, they had to be exacting in their performance of all their duties before the nation. There were very specific laws and procedures for service in the Tabernacle and to disobey it would be dangerous.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Shmini, we learn about which animals, fish, and birds are kosher. After the rules are started, the next verse explains that we are commanded to eat kosher food to be holy because God is holy.

How can eating become holy? Doesn't everyone just have to eat?  
Look inside the text (Vayikra 11:45): "For I the Lord am He who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall be holy, for I am holy."

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## Parshat Tazria



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

This parasha teaches us about a malady called "tzaraat". The Rabbis explain that this was a punishment for speaking badly about another person and spreading rumors. The Rabbis teach that harmful speech would hurt three people – the person saying it, the person being gossiped about, and the person who listened to the story. How can you be hurt just listening to someone saying bad things about another? What can you do if someone starts speaking badly about another?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Tazria, we learn about an unusual sickness called tzara'at. If someone was afflicted with this disease, they didn't go to the doctor and get medicine to help them feel better – instead, they went to the kohen (priest) who would diagnose them and instruct the sick person to leave their home, and live outside the camp or the city for a week. The rabbis explained that this was not a regular kind of sickness, but a punishment for lashon hara – speaking badly about others and hurting them or gossiping about them. This disease worked as a sort of "time out" – a person who was mean to others did not deserve to be together with others but was sent away to think about what he did and how to be a better person. Have you ever been hurt by something mean someone said about you? Were they punished? Did you ever have a "time out"? How did you feel about it?

Look inside the text (Vayikra 13: 2-3): "When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body: if the hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is tzara'at; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce him unclean."

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## Parshat Metzora



In Parashat Metzora, we continue reading about the disease of tzara'at and about what a person needed to do to be able to return home. There was a special korban (sacrifice) he had to bring and things he needed to do, and the kohen (priest) would check that he was really ready to return.

When a person hurts another by the things they say what do you think they can do to make amends and show they will not do it again?

Look inside the text (Vayikra 14:2): "This shall be the ritual for a person with tzara'at at the time that he is to be cleansed. When it has been reported to the priest."

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## Parshat Acharei Mot



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Does being in a bad environment influence you in a bad way? For example, if you are in a class with a substitute teacher and many of the students are shouting and throwing things and it's chaotic - are you tempted to join? When the Jewish people lived in Egypt they lived in a society where slavery was a way of life. When they came to the land of Canaan, idol worship and violence were a way of life. There was a danger that this would influence the type of society they would build. In this parasha, we are commanded not to learn from their behavior, and be loyal to the Torah.

Look inside the text: (Vayikra 18: 3,4): "You should not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you; nor should you follow their laws. My rules alone shall you observe, and faithfully follow My laws: I am your God."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Aharei Mot we read about the unique service in the mishkan (Tabernacle) and later in the Temple, and the laws of Yom Kippur. During the year, the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) would wear a magnificent uniform with a blue (tchelet) and gold. Yom Kippur was the only time he was permitted to enter the Kodesh Ha'Kedoshim (Holy of Holies), the holy place where the Aron Kodesh (Ark of the Covenant) was kept. Before entering he had to go to purify himself and change his clothes to plain white garments (This was done five times!)

Although the Temple was destroyed, we have many customs on Yom Kippur to remind us of the service then. We read about it in the Torah reading and also in the prayers of Yom Kippur and it's a custom to wear white on Yom Kippur. How do these customs help us get into the spirit of Yom Kippur? How do you feel when you look around the synagogue on Yom Kippur?

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## Parshat Kedoshim

★  
★  
★ Areyvut

Parashat Kedoshim is filled with many mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro (between man and his fellow), among them, we read: "You should love your fellow man as you love yourself." (Vayikra 19:18)

Can you really love another person as much as you love yourself? In the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva writes that this is a fundamental principle of Judaism. Hillel explained, "Don't do something which is hateful to you to another person." Nachmonides explains that it's impossible to love another person as oneself, but the intention is to be happy for another person's success and wish them all the good things you would want.

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## Parshat Emor



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Emor is the parasha about the holidays. But at the end of the description of the holiday of Shavuot, we read a law not connected to the holidays. Shavuot is a harvest holiday and a time for special family meals and celebrations. The Torah uses this opportunity to remind farmers that when they harvest their field they must leave crops for the poor to collect -the corners of their field and anything which drops to the ground. When someone has a lot of food and is enjoying it do you think it's easier or harder to remember to share with those less fortunate?

Look inside the text (Vayikra 23:22): "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you should leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am your God."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Emor, we read a review of the holidays. The list begins with Shabbat and continues with Passover. Then there is a description of the omer offering (the first barley harvest) and the verse we read before counting the omer every night between Passover and Shavuot. Can you think of an event for which you actively count the days until it happens? (your birthday? A special vacation? The end of school?) How does counting days help? How does it make you feel?

Look inside the text (Vayikra 23:15): "And from the day on which you bring the omer offering—the day after Shabbat—you should count off seven weeks. They must be complete."

We are commanded to count the seven weeks and days between Passover and Shavuot. This is unlike any other mitzvah we have – to count days and weeks with a blessing! Some explain that this is an expression of our excitement to receive the Torah.



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## Parshat Behar



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Parashat Behar teaches the laws of Shmitah. On the seventh year, the land is given Shabbat – a rest! The farmer is not supposed to work his land and anything that grows is free for anyone to use. Why should the land get a rest on the seventh year – it's not like a person who works hard and needs Shabbat to rest? Doesn't the land belong to the farmer to do with it whatever he wants? The rabbis explain that one of the important lessons of Shmitah is respect for the land and also the fact that the land belongs to God and the farmer uses the land and should recognize that the land (and everything) is a blessing from God.

Look inside the text (Vayikra 25:2-4): "Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a Shabbat to God. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year, the land shall have a Shabbat of complete rest, a Shabbat of God: you should not sow your field or prune your vineyard."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Behar, we have a source for the mitzvah of tzedakah (charity). It is interesting to note that a poor person is described as "your brother" and the mitzvah is to help him be able to live with you. Maimonides describes 10 different ways of giving tzedakah, and the best is to help someone be able to "stand on their own feet" and not need tzedakah. What are some ways to give tzedakah in your community? What do you think is a good way of giving tzedakah?

Look inside the text, Vayikra 25:35: "If your brother, being in trouble, reach out to help him, and if he comes to stay by you even though he is not a citizen, let him live by your side."

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## Parshat Bechukohtai

★ ★  
Areyvut

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

In Parashat Behukotai, we read about the rewards and punishments for keeping the mitzvot. About ten verses describe the rewards, and thirty describe the punishments which are called the tochacha, “rebuke.” When this section is read in the synagogue it is often read quickly in a quiet voice – as if we don’t want to really hear about the punishments and want it over as quickly as possible. Does knowing about a punishment help people do the right thing?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Parashat Behukotai discusses the rewards for obeying and then the punishments for disobeying. Do you think that the possibility of a reward encourages you to do the right thing? Does the possibility of punishment stop you from doing the wrong thing? Maybe you should do the right thing because you believe in it and not because of a possible reward or punishment? What do you think? Can you think of specific examples when the promise of a reward helped you, or the promise of a punishment stopped you?

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## Parshat Bamidbar

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★  
★ Areyvut

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Sefer Bemidbar begins with a census. Interestingly, the name of the book in English is “Numbers.” What kind of census will it be? Who will be counted? Men? Women? Children? Why are they counted now? God commanded a census to count the people as a symbol of His love. Can you think of something which is counted because of love?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 1:3): “You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years up, all those in Israel who are able to bear arms.”

### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #2

Parashat Bemidbar describes the way the Jewish people camped in the desert on their way to the land of Israel. The people were organized in a large square with the mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Levites in the middle. Each family camped with their tribe and each tribe had its own unique flag. The flags and their colors were influenced by the blessings that Jacob had given the tribes at the end of Sefer Bereshit. If you were to design a flag to represent your family, what picture would be on the flag?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 1:52): “The Israelites will encamp troop by troop, each man with his division and each under his standard.”

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## Parshat Naso



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Naso is the longest parasha in the Torah. One reason is the repetition of the gifts of the princes to the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Although each gift is the same, the details are repeated for each one of the twelve princes. The Torah, in general, is often so careful with its use of words. Why repeat the exact gift twelve times instead of just writing that all the princes each gave this gift one after another? Is there a message here?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 7:12-19): “The one who presented his offering on the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah. His offering: one silver bowl weighing 130 shekels and one silver basin of 70 shekels by the sanctuary weight, both filled with choice flour with oil mixed in, for a meal-offering; one gold ladle of 10 shekels, filled with incense; one bull of the herd, one ram, and one lamb in its first year, for a burnt offering; and for his sacrifice of well-being: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five yearling lambs. That was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab. On the second day, Nethanel son of Zuar, chieftain of Issachar, made his offering. He presented as his offering: one silver bowl weighing 130 shekels and one silver basin of 70 shekels by the sanctuary weight...”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Parashat Naso includes the very meaningful blessing of the Kohanim (priests) which is still recited today in synagogues today. It’s difficult to understand what it means that “God will shine His light on you.” What do you think it means? Can a person also “shine a light” on others? How? What does it feel like?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 6:24-26): “May God bless you and protect you. May God deal kindly and graciously with you. May God bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace.”

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## Parshat Behaalotcha



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

In this week's parasha, the people tire of the manna they have been receiving and demand meat. Moses needs help! He feels he can't lead the people alone, so God tells him to gather 70 elders and he will share his wisdom and Divine inspiration with them and they will help him. Will his leadership change because he is sharing it? Can you be a good leader and also share responsibilities with others? The medieval commentator Rashi describes this process – Moses sharing his leadership was like a menorah who can light other candles and share his light, while at the same time, his own light stays strong. Can you think of any leaders like this?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 11:16-17, 25): "Then God said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy of Israel's elders of whom you have experience as elders and officers of the people, and bring them to the Tent of Meeting and let them take their place there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and put it upon them; they shall share the burden of the people with you, and you shall not bear it alone."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Behaalotekha, the Jewish people celebrated their first (and only) Passover in the desert. Imagine the excitement now that they had a Mishkan (Tabernacle) and could bring a Passover sacrifice. BUT – some people were not able to participate because they were tamei (spiritually impure) and therefore couldn't bring the sacrifice. They approached Moses because they didn't want to be left out of the mitzvah and he didn't know the answer and consulted with God. God responded that they can have a second chance exactly one month later -the 14th of the month of Iyaar, which became known as Pesach Sheni (Second Passover). Nowadays many people eat a piece of matzah on this day to remember the occasion. Why do you think God gave the people a "second chance"? When do you think this is especially important? Do you remember a time when you were given a "second chance?"

Look inside the text, (Bemidbar 9: 7 – 11): "But there were some men who were spiritually impure and could not offer the Passover sacrifice on that day. Appearing that same day before Moses and Aaron, those men said to them, "Unclean though we are by reason of a corpse, why must we be stopped from presenting God's offering at its set time with the rest of the Israelites?" Moses said to them, "Stand by, and let me hear what instructions the God gives about you." And God spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the Israelite people, saying: When any of you or of your posterity who are defiled by a corpse or are on a long journey would offer a passover sacrifice to God, they shall offer it in the second month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs."

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## Parshat Shelach



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Did you ever have to move to a new place? Were you excited about the new possibilities or afraid of the challenges and everything which may go wrong? Parashat Shelach describes the journey of the meraglim, the spies who go to check out Israel. Although they begin their report with a good thing, most of their report is about all the dangers and frightening things and when the people hear this, they cry all night and don't want to go.

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 14: 1-3): "The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night. All the Israelites railed against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt," the whole community shouted at them, "or if only we might die in this wilderness! Why is God taking us to that land to fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be carried off!" "It would be better for us to go back to Egypt!"

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

At the end of Parashat Shelach, we read about the mitzvah of tzitzit (fringes) which is also recited every day as the final paragraph of Shema prayer. Our sages explain that one purpose of tzitzit is to remind one to do the mitzvot. A special blue string, called techelet, was attached to the tzitzit. This color is the color of the sea, and the sea is a reflection of the blue in the sky. This serves as a reminder of the throne of glory of God in heaven.

If there is something important you need to remember, do you write it down, or do you have some other special reminder? How can an article of clothing affect your behavior?



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## Parshat Korach



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Have you ever had an argument where someone else is accusing you of something which is not true? What can be done to resolve it? Parashat Korach describes the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against the leadership of Moses. When Moshe asks Datan and Abiram to come to him for a discussion, they answer in a very aggressive manner, even using the words describing the land of Israel, “the land flowing with milk and honey,” to describe Egypt, the land of their slavery! They accuse Moses of bringing them to the desert to die.

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 16:13-14): “Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us? Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out the eyes of those involved? We will not come!”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Korah, the leadership of Moses and Aaron is challenged by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. They claim that all the people are holy, and it’s not fair that only Moses and Aaron are the ones to lead. What do you think was unique about Moses and Aaron that they were chosen above others? What do you think are the qualities of a good leader of the Jewish people? Why are these important?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 16:3): “They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and God is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above God’s congregation?”

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## Parshat Chukat



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Has it ever happened to you that a trip you were taking took longer than expected and you became tired of the travels? Or a task took longer and was more complicated than expected? What helps you deal with this kind of frustration? Parashat Hukat describes the despair of the Israelites as their journey in the desert is made longer by the refusal of the King of Edom to pass through their land -now the journey will be longer! They begin to complain about the “man” they have received every day and Hashem punishes them.

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 21:4-6): “They set out from Mount Hor by way of the Sea of Reeds to skirt the land of Edom. But the people grew restive on the journey, and the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food.” God sent serpents against the people. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In this parasha, we learn about the sin and punishment of Moses. When there is no water to drink, the people complain bitterly to Moses, and God tells Moses to take his staff and speak to a rock, and water will flow from it. Instead, Moses speaks angrily to the people and hits the rock. As a consequence of this sin, Moses is told that he will not enter the Holy Land (the Land of Israel). Do we expect more of our leaders than we expect of average people? Should leaders be held to a higher standard? Why or why not?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 20:12): “But God said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them.”

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## Parshat Balak



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

In Parashat Balak we read about Bilaam who tried to curse the Jewish people but blessed them instead. One of the characters in the story is Bilaam's donkey who refuses to take him on his mission to the king. Bilaam beats him and the donkey speaks to him in a complaint. Do you think animals have language? Do you believe that Bilaam's donkey used words or another way to convey his message?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 22:28): "But God was incensed at his going; so a messenger of God took a position in his way as an adversary. He was riding on his donkey, with his two servants alongside."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In this parasha, Bilaam the magician is hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Jewish people because he is afraid of them. Bilaam agrees, but instead of cursing the Jews, he blesses them. Among his blessings are the words we say in our prayers every morning: He blesses the tents (homes) of the Jewish people! What do you think is a good blessing for a home -what makes it a good place to be?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 24:5): "How fair are your tents, Jacob, Your dwellings, Israel!"

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## Parshat Pinchas



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

In Parashat Pinhas we read about the request of the daughters of Zelophehad to inherit their father's land. Traditionally land was given only to men, but since they had no brothers, they felt they had a good case and made it in a very logical and respectful manner. They bravely speak to Moses, Elazar, and the elders, and although Moses does not know the answer, God gives his approval. Did you ever have to ask for something from someone very important? How did it feel? How did you formulate your request so you could get a positive answer?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 27: 1-7): "The daughters of Zelophehad, of Manassite family—son of Hephher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph—came forward. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said, "Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah's faction, which banded together against God, but died for his own sin; and he has left no sons. Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!" Moses brought their case before God. And God said to Moses, "The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Parashat Pinhas lists all the special korbanot (sacrifices) which were brought on Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and the holidays. Although we no longer bring sacrifices, this mitzvah is preserved in our Torah reading and our prayers. The korbanot were a way to express our gratitude to God and come closer. How do we make our holidays special today?

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## Parshat Matot



Parashat Matot begins with the law of nedarim, a solemn promise made before God. It is very important to keep your promises - especially when it is made in the form of a solemn promise, or neder. These types of promises are so serious that the very famous prayer of "Kol Nidrei" which is said at the beginning of the Yom Kippur holiday is all about solemn promises which a person did not keep during the year. Do you ever make a promise that you wanted to keep but couldn't? Is it better not to make a promise and just say "you'll try your best"?

In Parashat Matot, we read about the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan and build their homes there because they have a lot of sheep they see the land is good for grazing sheep. Moses angrily tells them they must help their brothers conquer the land. They respond that they'll build shelters for their sheep and then cities for their children. Why do you think the leaders of the tribes of Reuben and Gad said they would take care of their sheep first? Should the needs of children always come first?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 32:15, 24): Moses corrects them and tells them the children come first!

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## Parshat Maasei



In this parasha, we read about the cities of refuge. If a person killed someone by accident, he had to leave his home and live in one of these cities. Six refuge cities were spread out in the country -in the north, central, and south. The city of refuge was where he would be safe from revenge but also was a message to the person that since he killed another human being (even by accident), his life would not be the same anymore. Do you think a person should be punished if he does something by accident? Why or why not?

Parashat Masei describes the division of the land. The nation is commanded to set aside 48 cities throughout the country for the Levites to live in since they didn't have their own inheritance. In addition, they are commanded to leave space around their cities. Nowadays we call this type of space, "green space". Do you think you have enough "green space" in your city? Why is this important?

Look inside the text (Bemidbar 35:2): "Instruct the Israelite people to assign, out of the holdings apportioned to them, towns for the Levites to dwell in; you shall also assign to the Levites pasture land around their towns."



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## Parshat Devarim



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Sefer Devarim is comprised of Moses's last teachings to the Israelites before they enter the Land of Israel. He tells them about their wanderings in the desert and the important mitzvot to remember. This parasha ends with a summary of the battles they fought and encouragement for the battles they will need to fight in the land. Did you ever move to a new place? Or a new school or even a new summer camp? How did you feel? Excited? A little frightened? What type of conversation would help you feel more confident? How did this help them feel better?

Look inside the text (Devarim 3:22): God tells the people not to be afraid because He will fight for them.

### DISCUSSIONS QUESTION #2

Sefer Devarim is also called the "Mishneh Torah" because it is a review of key events and mitzvot (and some additional mitzvot). This is Moses's "Last Will and Testament" to the nation about to enter the promised land. According to the midrash, this took place over a period of only five weeks – from the first day of the month of Shvat until the seventh day of the month of Adar, when Moses dies.

When Moses was first chosen by God and speaks to God at the burning bush, Moses claimed that (Shemot 4:10) "I am not a man of words." Yet, he is the voice of Sefer Devarim! Do you think a job can change a person? Were you ever given something that was difficult and you felt different once you accomplished it?

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## Parshat Vaetchanan



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Did you ever need a special code in order to get into a house? Sometimes in movies, you'll see that you need the right knock or words in order to be let in. Does Judaism have a special code or phrase that shows you belong?

In Parshat Ve'et'hanan we read the famous words (Devarim 6:4): "Hear Israel, God is our God, God is One." During many difficult times in Jewish history, this phrase was used to demonstrate that a person is indeed Jewish. Why do you think these words became a "special "code"?"

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

The Ten Commandments are repeated in this section and we would expect to read exactly the same words as in Parashat Yitro. Yet, there are differences! The biggest difference is with the commandment of Shabbat – in this version, we are commanded to remember what it was like to be a slave in Egypt.

What is the connection between Shabbat and remembering that we were once slaves? Look inside the text: (Devarim 5: 14 - 15): "But the seventh day is a sabbath of your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

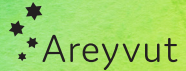
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## Parshat Ekev



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Throughout Sefer Devarim, Moses reminds the Israelites of how important it is to observe the commandments. What does God expect of the Jewish people? What do you think is the difference between doing something out of a feeling of fear (or awe), or doing something out of a feeling of love? Can you share some examples? (Think about how you might obey a policeman, a teacher, or a parent)

Look inside the text: (Devarim 10: 12): “And now, Israel, what does your God demand of you? Only this: to revere God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve God with all your heart and soul.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Moses tells the people how they received manna – a special miraculous food from God – during their journey in the desert and describes it as a test. Why would getting food from God almost every day (except Shabbat) be considered a “test”? How do you understand the statement that “man doesn’t live by bread alone”?

Look inside the text (Devarim 8:2-3): “Remember the long way that God has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years, that He might test you by hardships to learn what was in your hearts: whether you would keep His commandments or not. He subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your fathers had ever known, in order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that God decrees.”

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## Parshat Re'eh



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

In this week's parasha, God describes His relationship with us as a parent to a child. What does it mean when God calls us His children? What does this indicate about his relationship with us even when we don't obey the law? What is different between the relationship of a parent to a child and a teacher to a child?

Look inside the text (Devarim 14:1): "You are like sons to your God."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Re'eh we read about bringing sacrifices to the place that God chooses, which we understand to be the Temple to be built in the future in Jerusalem. There is an additional mitzvah that appears three times. Did you know that it is a mitzvah to be happy? What do you think is special about being happy with everything God has blessed you? Did you notice that happiness is to be shared with children, servants, and the Levites? Why do you think the Torah makes a point of sharing happiness (especially with this list)?

Look inside the text:

1. Devarim 12:7: "Together with your households, you shall feast there before God, happy in all the undertakings in which God has blessed you."
2. Devarim 12:12: "And you shall rejoice before God with your sons and daughters and with your male and female slaves, along with the Levite in your settlements, for he has no territorial allotment among you."
3. Devarim 12:18: "These you must consume before God in the place that God will choose—you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levite in your settlements—happy before God in all your undertakings."

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## Parshat Shoftim



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

In this week's parasha, we read about the laws of a judge and leader. How can money, and bribery make even a wise person blind? Can you think of an example?

Look inside the text (Devarim 16:19): "You should not judge unfairly: you should show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Parashat Shoftim teaches us about different types of leadership. Although very few countries have kings today, it was the most common form of rulership in much of the world for centuries. Kings would have absolute power, but the Torah demands a different kind of king. Among other rules, a king was not allowed to accumulate too much gold and silver or too many horses. Why is this an important rule? Can it ever be a bad thing to have too much money? The king is also commanded not to be arrogant and think he is better than others. What is the purpose of this rule? Have you ever known of someone who is in a position of authority and feels they are "better than anyone else"?

Look inside the text (Devarim 17:15-20): "You should be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by God. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your relative. Also, he should not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since God has warned you, "You must not go back that way again. And he should not have many wives so that his heart does not go astray; nor should he have too much silver and gold. When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to fear God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. So, he will not act in an arrogant way toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel."

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## Parshat Ki Tetzei



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Imagine your water bottle has spilled all over the floor! It was just an accident – do you have to clean it up? Why? Does the Torah teach us anything about this? In Biblical times (and hundreds of years afterward) houses were built with flat roofs. The roofs were used for sleeping sometimes and for other activities. The Torah commands the builder of a house to also build a fence around the roof so no one would accidentally fall off. We have the responsibility to make sure that the things we do (or build) are also safe for others!

Look inside the text (Devarim 22:8): “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone should fall from it.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In Parashat Ki Tetzei we learn about the mitzvah of hashavat aveida, returning a lost object. Why do you think the Torah gives an example of an ox or donkey which is lost? What would be a modern example? Notice that you should return any item which has been lost. Also notice that we’re told twice not to ignore the object. Have you ever lost something important which was returned by someone? How did you feel? Have you ever returned something that belonged to someone you didn’t know? Why do you think this was considered important enough to be included in the Torah?

Look inside the text (Devarim 22:1-3): “If you see your friend’s ox or sheep who had gotten lost, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your friend. If your friend does not live near you or you do not know who he is, you should bring it home and it should remain with you until your friend claims it; then you should give it back to him. You should do the same with his donkey; you should do the same with his clothing; and so too should you do with anything that your friend loses and you find: you must not remain indifferent.”



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## Parshat Ki Tavo



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Do you have grandparents or cousins who live in a different city? What is a more memorable experience -visiting together and seeing each other or just talking on the phone or computer? Why? In the Torah we read how important experiences were sometimes seen, sometimes heard, and sometimes both seen and heard. Our experience as slaves in Egypt and our redemption were seen (and felt) by the nation. Therefore, it is especially remembered. Why would this be so important for the people?

Look inside the text (Devarim 29:1): “Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: You have seen all that God did before your very eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his courtiers and to his whole country.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Parshat Ki Tavo begins with the mitzvah of Bikkurim, the offering of the first fruits. When a farmer harvests his fields and fruit trees, he is commanded to bring the first fruits to the priest in the Temple. Every farmer would say the same declaration. Each one would begin with the story of the Jews as slaves in Egypt and God taking us out of Egypt and bringing us to the land of milk and honey. Why would you have to tell the story of liberation from slavery in Egypt when you’re bringing your Bikkurim hundreds of years after that happened? Is it important to know your history and to tell the story? Why or why not?

Look inside the text (Devarim 26: 5-10): “You should then recite as follows before God: “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to God of our fathers, and God heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. God freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and miracles. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, God, have given me.” You shall leave it before God and bow low before God.”

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## Parshat Nitzavim



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Can people change? If someone did something wrong, how can it be fixed? Do you sometimes need help to fix something you did wrong? This week's parasha is usually read on the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the Shabbat is called Shabbat Shuva. This is a time we especially focus on doing Teshuvah, repentance – making amends for things we did wrong during the year. It's time to return to God. This is not easy to do, and in the parasha, we are assured that God will help us with the task if we just begin the process and want to do better.

Look inside the text (Devarim 30:1-3): When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which your God has banished you, and you return to your God and you and your children heed God's command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, then your God will restore your fortunes. [God] will bring you together again from all the peoples where your God has scattered you."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

At the end of his life, Moses gathers all of the Jewish people – young and old, men and women – everyone – to hear and accept the promise to keep the mitzvot and the obligations of the Jewish people. Why do you think it is important that even the children hear about the laws? Notice that everyone is called together, from the simple workers to the leaders and most important people in the community. Why is it important that everyone hears Moses and accepts the promise? Wouldn't it be enough for Moses to tell the leaders and they will let the people know? Does it make a difference if your parent tells you something very important which you need to do or your sister or brother tells you that your parent told them to tell you?

Look inside the text (Devarim 29: 9-12): "You stand this day, all of you, before God—your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer—to enter into the covenant of God, which God is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions; to the end that He may establish you this day as His people and be your God, as He promised you and as He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

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## Parshat Vayelech



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Do you sometimes have a school assembly when there is an important message to tell everybody or an important event to share? How does it make it extra special when you see everyone in the school gathered together? This is the commandment to gather together as a nation, every 7 years, to hear the Torah being read together, known as Hakhel. There was a special power to everyone being together and listening to the message.

Look inside the text (Devarim 31:10-12): “And Moses instructed them as follows: Every seventh year, the year set for remission, at the holiday of Sukkot, when all Israel comes to appear before your God in the place that [God] will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of all Israel. Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

We are almost at the end of Moses’s final words to the people before he dies. God commands him to write down the Torah and uses the word shira, a song or poem, and tells him to teach the people. What makes a song easier to remember than a regular text? How is the Torah like a song? Do you have a favorite song whose words you remember even though you learned it a long time ago?

Look inside the text (Devarim 31:19): “Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be My witness against the people of Israel.”

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## Parshat Haazinu



### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Much of this week's parasha is written as poetry. Often in poetry, pictures in words are used to convey a message. Think of the expression, "I'm as hungry as a bear" or someone is "slow as a turtle". Moses reminds the people of God's love and uses the image of the love of an eagle for its young. Why do you think Moses uses this image? What does this say about God's love for the Jewish nation? Can you think of an example of how you might use an image from nature to express a feeling of love?

Look inside the text (Devarim 32:11): "Like an eagle who rouses its nestlings, gliding down to its young, so did [God] spread wings and take them, bear them along on pinions."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Moses tells the people over and over again to be sure to obey the laws of the Torah. Talmudic sages play a word game with the puzzling phrase "it is not an empty thing for you" (Devarim 32:46-47). One interpretation is that er should know that the Torah is not empty for you, it will help you live a long life in the land you're about to inherit. Another interpretation is that the Torah is not empty teaching, and if you think it is, it's because of you – you didn't try hard enough to understand it. Has it ever happened to you that you studied something which you thought was too hard, but then you worked on it and were able to understand it and make it meaningful? Are your parents and teachers the only ones with a responsibility to teach? Do you also have a responsibility to work hard and understand?

Look inside the text (Devarim 32:46-47): "He said to them: Take to heart all the words with which I have warned you this day. Teach them to your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching. For this is not an empty thing for you: it is your very life; through it, you will long live on the land that you are to possess upon crossing the Jordan."

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## Parshat V'zot HaBracha <sup>★</sup><sup>★</sup> Areyvut

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

This is the last parasha in the entire Torah and we read about the death of Moses and how he was unique. How many different ways can you describe Moses as being the most special of Jewish leaders and prophets? What do you think the text means that Moses spoke to God “face to face” (after all God does not have a face!)?

Look inside the text (Devarim 34:10): “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom God singled out, face to face.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Moses ends the book of his speech by blessing the tribes. He doesn't only bless the people as a group but blesses each tribe according to their own qualities. What do you think would be a good blessing to give your friend? Your parent? What is a blessing which you would like to receive?

Look inside the text (Devarim 33:1): “This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, gave to the Israelites as a farewell before he died.”