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**The Obligation to Love**

**and Care for Every Jew**

**By Daniel Keren**

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**Rabbi Meyer Yedid**

One of the featured speakers at the recent Flatbush Labor Day Hakhel Yarchei Kallah Event was Rabbi Meyer Yedid, Rav of Congregation Shaare Zion and Rosh Yeshiva of YDE (Yeshiva Darche Eretz.) The topic of his lecture was “Making this Year’s Teshuva Different!”

 Rabbi Yedid pointed out that the halacha (Jewish law) is that Rosh Hashanah while being a scary day [as one is concerned whether one will be indeed worthy to be written in the Book of Life for the coming year] is not a day for crying. Indeed, the Navi (the Prophet Ezra) told those Jews who returned from Bavel (Babylonia) to restore a community in the Holy Land after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh (the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, that Rosh Hashana, [the day he was speaking to them] was rather a day for giving gifts of cooked food for those who have nothing to eat.

**Viewing Every Jew as a Valued Person**

 The great Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) says that in every moment or in every place, whether it is a close family member or regarding a rav or someone else in your shul, one is obligated to love and care for that Jew (unless he is a rasha, a wicked individual\*) as a valued person, even if you are having a hard day and they don’t deserve it. It is not enough for a Jew to say that he is not hurting another person, if he has the chance to help that individual either materially or spiritually.

Regarding the designation of a rasha, Rabbi Yedid said that there are very few people who truly qualify for this undesirable title, as most Jews today are ignorant of the Torah and perhaps we can have an opportunity to turn them around for the good.

Tzaras (pain) is part of life. It could range, Rabbi Yedid said from something as simple as not finding a parking spot to something more serious [as G-d forbid a serious health issue.] When you are concerned for others, you are going against the world (the common culture.) But this what distinguishes a Jew, when he makes such a commitment to care for others.

**The Three Good Friends and the Florida Vacation**

A story has in recent years circulated about three very close friends from the Five Towns who had studied together in yeshiva. They got married at around the same time and had children. They used to vacation together with their wives and children. One year they chipped in to rent a house in Florida for a mid-winter break vacation. The wives went out to shop and the husbands were left to look after the children. Two of the husbands took the children to the swimming pool. Afterwards they returned into the house.

Only one of the boys notice that his 18-month-old brother was missing. He went back to the pool and to his horror saw his brother floating face down. He ran back into the house screaming. The third husband ran down and into pool where he jumped in. He was a trained Hatzalah emergency medical technician and he began doing procedures to get the toddler breathing again. Baruch Hashem, he got the boy to breathe and he was brought back to the hospital where he miraculously was given further treatments and came out with no serious long-lasting problems.

**The Surprising Story of the Hatzalah Member**

Back in New York, the families got together for a seudas hatodah (a festive meal to thank Hashem for the miracle.) One of the fathers spoke and noted that it was a miracle that one of the three adult men was a trained Hatzalah EMT. The Hatzalah member than asked to speak. He said that that year when told about the plans to go to Florida, he told one of his buddies that this year because of financial reverses in his business he simply couldn’t afford to come with his wife and children.

His buddy said that it wouldn’t be a vacation if he didn’t join them as they were friends going back to their childhoods. He was going to pay for his friend and his family. The Hatzalah member said that it was this friend whose toddler fell into the pool and the miracle was that he arranged for his own son to be saved by paying his friend and family to come to Florida for that mid-winter vacation.

**The Power of the Prayer Recalling King David’s Chesed**

Rabbi Yedid concluded by recalling how Shlomo Hamelech in the inauguration of the First Beis Hamikdosh was unable to open the gates. He made 24 different prayers (each emphasizing a different virtue) to Hakodesh Baruch Hu without success. Finally, he pleaded that Hashem should open the gates of the Holy Temple in the merit of his father – Dovid Hamelech’s chesed (kindness.) At that moment, Hashem allowed the gates to open.

We have to learn that our commitment to doing chesed to others is the key to our being worthy of a good year as we prepare in these precious days of Elul for Rosh Hashanah.

*Reprinted from the September 19, 2024 edition of the Flatbush Jewish Journal.*

**An Insight from the Baal Shem Tov**

It is obvious that punishment and suffering can arouse the heart to teshuva (repentance). But how can blessing do the same? The Baal Shem Tov offered an analogy of a subject who rebels against his king. What does the king do? Instead of punishing him he appoints him minister, allows him into the royal palace and gradually increases his rank until he is second in command. The greater the king's beneficence, the more the recipient is ashamed of having rebelled against such a merciful ruler. The king's loving-kindness thus leads him to a higher level of repentance than had he been punished.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Tavo 5761/2001 edition of L’Chaim*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Nitzavim-**

**Vayeilech 5784**



The Torah reading for this week is a fitting conclusion to the year that is about to depart from us. At the end of his long life and after decades of service to the Jewish people, Moshe renews the covenant between G-d and the people of Israel. He makes clear to the new generation of Jews standing before him, a generation that was not part of the experience of Egypt, nor present at the moment of revelation at Sinai, that the original covenant between G-d and the Jewish people remains in force. And he states that it will continue to be so throughout the Jewish future.

The covenant cannot be repealed, altered or ignored. It is the basis for all Jewish life and it is the leitmotif of all of Jewish history. Moshe admits that there will be events and occurrences in the story of the Jewish people that will be cruel, inexplicable and irrational. As he phrases it, there will be many “hidden, mysterious” events that the Jewish people will have to experience.

He offers no easy explanation to those events except to say that somehow they are related to the attempts of sections of the Jewish people to annul the covenant and its resultant consequences. The “hidden” part of the covenant belongs to G-d. The revealed part of the covenant – the obligations of Torah commandments and Jewish life – belongs to the Jewish people and are relevant in all their generations and locales. The Jewish people and the Jewish State will always be judged through its relationship to this eternal covenant.

The existence of the covenant has caused us much pain and angst throughout the centuries. The other nations of the world harbor resentment against us because of the uniqueness of our relationship to the Creator of all, as exemplified by this covenant. Many Jewish thinkers have attributed anti-Semitism, in all of its virulent and even more benign forms, to a jealousy over the existence of G-d’s covenant with the Jewish people.

The covenant has remained the rock of Jewish identity over all of the ages. Just the knowledge of its existence has created a stubborn Jewish people – with a resolve to maintain its faith and lifestyle though a very small minority in a world of many billions. The Torah itself is the very essence of this covenant. It details its terms and conditions, and its study helps formulate the life that Jews are expected to live. That is why the Torah demands that we study and are aware of this covenant morning and night, traveling, at home, in all times and places. There were, and unfortunately still are, those amongst us who wish to discard the covenant and its obligations and merely to blend in with the surrounding general society.

The L-rd, so to speak, has warned us many times that He would not allow this to occur. All of Jewish history teaches us regarding the strength and eternity of this great covenant. In the year that is now dawning upon us, we should all resolutely renew the covenant in our hearts, minds and actions, in order to be blessed with a year of health, success and serenity.

Shabbat shalom

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

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*Then the L-rd your G-d will turn your captivity* (Deut. 30:3)

Rashi notes this means that "[G-d] will literally take hold with His hand every person... as it states, 'You shall be gathered one by one, Children of Israel.' " As we know that the Redemption will come about through repentance, the Torah clearly promises that every single Jew will ultimately return to G-d in repentance, as it states, "For not even one will be banished." (Tanya)

*Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Tavo 5761/2001 edition of L’Chaim*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Why Jews Don’t Donate Their Bodies for Medical Research**

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**QUESTION:** Since we see that Hashem has encouraged progress in the field of medicine and that it was done by the use of donated bodies or organs for research, why doesn’t the Jewish nation permit the donation of bodies or organs?

**ANSWER:** And the answer is that when the President passes away nobody considers a proposal of taking his body for experiment. The President’s body is never taken for experiment; it’s buried in state. And that’s because of the reverence we have for a President. And we should have a reverence for a President – even for a dead President; even for a dead ex-President.

Now, where will you get bodies for scientific research? On the Bowery. They’re dropping dead every day on the Bowery. They are homeless people and there is nobody to claim their bodies, and so there’s no reason why they shouldn’t be used. Also, in India there are masses of people who die and their families are happy to sell their bodies for $25. And so, there is no lack of bodies on which to do experiments.

The Jewish nation has been accorded an especial status by Hashem. We are a *mamleches kohanim v’goy kadosh*. It’s not our fault. We didn’t choose that name – He gave it to us. What can we do? We are a holy people. And therefore, even more than the President, a Jewish body is inviolate. It’s sacred. We cannot do anything except to honor it and bury it without making the slightest use for no matter what purpose.

And so, you can have Orthodox Jewish doctors – if they’re not kohanim – and they can cut up bodies merrily and make their research. You can get plenty of bodies. It’s only a matter of a few dollars. But to make use of the Am Kadosh? No; that can’t be helped. We are in a different class. And it will take a long time for us to fully appreciate that.

It’s not that we Jews are proud or we Jews try to classify ourselves as superior. It’s a principle that the Torah has taught us. Hakadosh Baruch Hu told us that. We are superior, and it can’t be helped. And therefore our bodies are not for experiment.

*Reprinted from an email of Toras Avigdor (Tape #126 – June 1976)*

**The Homburg Transformation**



A young kollel fellow had fallen under the misconception that external appearances make the man. If someone does not appear distinguished, people will just look through him as if he does not exist. This, he felt, was the reason that hardly anyone gave him the time of day. People ignored him in the kollel; his wife took him for granted. Indeed, when he raised his hand to flag down a taxi, the driver kept on going – completely ignoring him.

He decided that, once and for all, he was going to change all that. He went to a prominent hat store in Bnei Brak and purchased a homburg. Now, people would notice him. He paid for the hat and left the store.

Immediately, he raised his hand to signal a monit, taxi, and three cabs pulled up. What a change in appearance can create, he mused to himself. He entered the kollel to a chorus of “good mornings,” shortly after which two distinguished members of the kollel came over to speak with him in learning. The final coup occurred when he returned home to a welcome from his wife to which he was no longer accustomed to.

The homburg had changed everything. He felt important, distinguished, chashuv, respected. He shared his new experience with his wife, explaining how a homburg that had cost a few hundred shekel had made him a new man.

His wife looked at him and asked, “Where is this ‘magic’ homburg?”

 “On my head – where else?” he replied.

She said, “I see no homburg – neither did you come home sporting a homburg.”

Suddenly, he realized that he had paid for the hat and left it in the store!

End of story. It was not the hat. It was he himself. He had changed his attitude

concerning himself. He thought that the hat had changed him, when, in fact, he had

changed himself. Self-esteem is self-generated. When one feels good about himself, he needs no external accouterments or public acclaim. The perceived homburg gave the Kollel man the added boost and self-confidence that he needed.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5784 edition of Peninim on the Torah, a parsha sheet of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland.*

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*You are standing this day all of you...every person of Israel* (Deut. 29:9)

The Torah uses many different words to refer to Jews; the name "Israel" is the highest of all these descriptions, connoting magnitude and significance. The verse teaches that all Jews are in this category, i.e., exalted and essentially worthy.

(Yismach Moshe)

*And it shall come to pass ("vehaya"), when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse* (Deut. 30:1)

Our Rabbis explain that the word "vehaya" is an expression of joy. A Jew must always strive to serve G-d joyfully, regardless of whether he encounters blessing in life or (G-d forbid) the opposite. As our Sages declared, "A person is obligated to bless G-d for [apparent] evil in the same way he blesses Him for good." (Ohr HaChaim)

*Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Tavo 5761/2001 edition of L’Chaim.*

**How a Jew Can Develop a Great Love for G-d and a Commitment**

**To Keep Torah More Easily**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



Toward the end of this week's Torah portion, Nitzavim, Moses summarizes his parting message to the Jewish people: "For this commandment, which I command you this day, is not concealed from you nor is it far off... But the thing is very close to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it." In other words, it is not too difficult to love G-d and observe His commandments; in fact, keeping Torah and mitzvot is "very close."

In truth, this is an astounding claim. How could anyone maintain that keeping the commandments is easy? According to human nature, a person's inclinations are physical and materialistic. How can these natural desires be transformed so simply into a spiritual love for G-d?

The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, offers an explanation in his seminal work of Chabad Chasidic philosophy, the Tanya. The key to this "closeness" is the fact that every single Jew already possesses a hidden love for G-d in his heart. Rather than creating something new, all that is necessary is to uncover and awaken this inherent love. As it already exists, it is literally quite "near," and can be revealed with only a modicum of effort.

However, while it may be relatively easy to achieve the emotion of love for G-d, what about the practicality of keeping the Torah's 613 commandments? Isn't this the very antithesis of "easy"?

The answer is found on the introductory page of the Tanya, where the Alter Rebbe writes that he "will explain, with the help of G-d, how it is indeed exceedingly close, in a long and short way."

On the one hand, an enormous amount of effort is required to contemplate G-d's greatness to reveal one's innate love for Him until it affects the daily conduct. However, although this may seem to be the "long" and circuitous route to achieving this goal, it is also ultimately the "shortest" and most reliable method. When a Jew meditates upon G-d's greatness, the love and awe he arouses are permanent and lasting, imbuing all of his Torah and mitzvot with vitality and enthusiasm.

Of course, a Jew may also take the "shorter" route, relying on his intrinsic but hidden love for G-d, without resorting to intellectual contemplation. However, such an approach will ultimately prove to be "longer" and more arduous if it remains an abstraction, removed and disconnected from his daily existence.

By studying Torah and contemplating G-d's greatness, a Jew acquires a deeper and more lasting understanding, enabling him to keep Torah and mitzvot more easily.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Tavo 5761/2001 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Vol. 34 of Likutei Sichot.*

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Hashem tells Moshe and Bnai Yisrael that after we enter Israel “You will have seen their (the nations in the land of Israel) abominable things, their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold… and some of you who will serve the GDs of these nations…” (29:16-17) If we thought that they were “abominable”, why would any Jew eventually worship it?

The Brisker Rav said that this is the result of familiarity. First you think it is abominable, then it’s an idol, then it seems like wood and stone, and ultimately you think it’s silver and gold!! Never think that you aren’t affected by your environment and by what you see!! (Rabbi Chaim Flom - Short Vorts)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5784 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s parsha sheet whY I Matter for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn.*

**What Is the Jewish Approach to the Apocrypha?**

**By Rabbi** [**Yehuda Shurpin**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15169/jewish/Shurpin-Yehuda.htm)



**Art by**[**Sefira Lightstone**](https://www.chabad.org/3159160)

The word “apocrypha” originates from the Greek and Latin words for “secret” or “non-canonical.” It is commonly used to refer to ancient, mostly Second Temple–era works that are “outside” of the Jewish Bible.1

The Apocrypha includes, but is not limited to, works such as Sirach (Ben Sira), Maccabees, Judith, the book of Enoch, Jubilees, the story of Susanna, and Baruch.

Some of these works were known to us all along, and others were recently discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Qumran Caves and in the Cairo Genizah, both of which had preserved ancient Jewish manuscripts.

**Divine Inspiration**

The 24 books of the Bible (Tanach) were canonized by the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah (“Men of the Great Assembly”), which included some of the greatest Jewish scholars and leaders of the time, such as Ezra the Scribe, and even the last of the prophets, namely Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. With the death of these prophets, the age of prophecy came to an end.2 Any later works are not considered Divinely inspired, and are therefore not included in the 24 books of the holy Scriptures.3

While none of the books of the Apocrypha are considered to be Divinely inspired and are therefore not included in Jewish scripture, the question of whether they have any value from a Jewish perspective is a bit more nuanced.

**Is the Apocrypha Kosher?**

On the one hand, we find statements in the Talmud that seem to prohibit one from even reading these works.4 On the other hand, the [Talmud](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2537389/jewish/Talmud.htm)5 and other Jewish works6 do on occasion cite specifics works of the Apocrypha.

Some commentators explain that the Talmud’s prohibition relates to giving these books a holy status and/or the same status as Scripture, but that one may read (some of) them.7 Others explain that the prohibition was especially in force in the earlier generations, closer to the time the Apocrypha was written. Since these works were written in the style of Scripture, there was a fear that some would mistakenly surmise that they were included in it.8

Even if we were to ascertain that a certain book would be “[kosher](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/113424/jewish/Kosher.htm),” the surviving versions of many of these works are translations from the Greek or Latin versions, which were themselves originally translated from Hebrew or Aramaic, with many additions and deletions along the way.

When discussing the Jewish view on the Apocrypha, it is helpful to split it up into three categories:

**1. Antithetical to Jewish Scripture**

Some of these books contain stories or ideas that contradict Scripture and/or Jewish thought. This category includes works such as the Story of Susanna (which, among other things, gives an erroneous portrayal of Jewish law, such as the laws of false witnesses), as well as the books of Enoch and Jubilees (in that they portray the dynamics between angels, G‑d and men in a way that is contrary to Judaism), as well as various other works.

**2. Historically Valuable Information**

Then there are the books that may not be sacred, but are useful in that they provide valuable information, not unlike history books. This category includes works such as 1 and 2 Maccabees (as opposed to 3 and 4 Macc., which would probably fit into the previous category), as well as Judith. Since these books are not Divinely inspired, there is no assurance that their contents are fully accurate, and they are given about the same weight as any other book of history.

**3. Sirach—Book of Ecclesiasticus**

Deserving a category of its own is the book of Sirach (Ben Sira), which the Talmud itself quotes a number of times. Also called the “Wisdom of Sirach,” it would seem that of all the books of the Apocrypha, this work got the closest to being included in the canon. We know when Ben Sira lived, since at the very end of the book9 he praises the high priest Shimon Hatzaddik, who was one of the last members of the Great Assembly.10

It should be noted, however, that some of the quotes found in the Talmud from Ben Sira aren’t found in the version of the work commonly included in the Apocrypha. That work is actually a Greek translation made by Ben Sira’s grandson in the 2nd century BCE. The original Hebrew version had been lost for many years, and has been found only in the last century (in the Cairo Genizah and among the Dead Sea Scrolls).

Why was it not included in [Tanach](https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/63255/jewish/Tanakh-The-Hebrew-Bible.htm)? Besides for the fact that it was written after the end of the age of prophecy,11 some of the teachings contained in the work were deemed not to be in sync with Jewish values. However, it appears that the rabbis considered at least some of the teachings to have value—if understood properly.12

**Bottom Line**

The Apocrypha isn’t Divinely inspired, and is therefore not part of the canon, and some of its works are even antithetical to Judaism. Other works may indeed contain some valuable information, but they aren’t given any more credence than any other book, and be aware that there have been various additions and deletions made throughout the ages.

**Footnotes**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a3671027) Note that depending on the Christian sect, different works may or may not be referred to as the “Apocrypha” (which they then give “quasi-biblical status” and print in the back of some of their Bibles), while others are referred to as Pseudepigrapha (Greek for “falsely attributed”), which they don’t include. Here, we are using the term “Apocrypha” to refer to all of these ancient works not included in the Jewish canon of the Bible.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef2a3671027) Talmud, Bava Batra 14b; Tosefta, Sotah 13:4.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef3a3671027) This is the implication of Avot d’Rabbi Nassan 1:4; Tosefta, Yadayim 2:5; Talmud, Bava Batra 14b–15a, and Rashi and other commentaries ad loc.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef4a3671027) See Talmud, Sanhedrin 100b.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef5a3671027) See, for example, Talmud, Bava Kama 92b.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef6a3671027) This is especially true with regard to the books of the Maccabees, since they are used as one of the main sources for the Chanukah story.

[7.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef7a3671027) See Ritva to Talmud, Bava Batra 98b.

[8.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef8a3671027) See Rabbi Reuven Margaliot, Margaliot Hayam on Talmud, Sanhedrin 100b.

[9.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef9a3671027) Ch. 50.

[10.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef10a3671027) See Ethics of the Fathers 1:2.

[11.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef11a3671027) Tosefta, Yadayim 2:5.

[12.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3671027/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-Approach-to-the-Apocrypha.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef12a3671027) See Talmud, Sanhedrin 100b, and Ritva to Talmud, Bava Batra 98b.

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