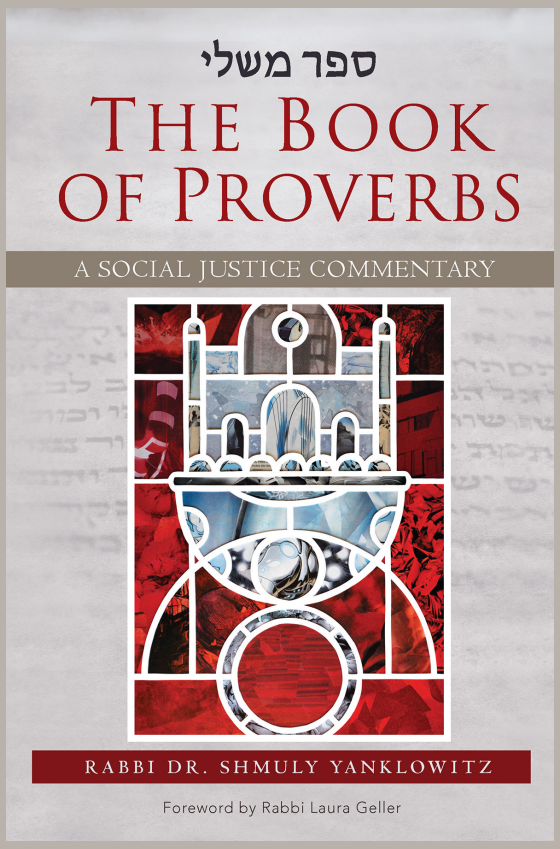

The Book of Proverbs

A Social Justice Commentary

Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz

Study and Discussion Guide by

Ada Luisa Sinacore

CCAR PRESS RABBINIC INTERN

Central Conference of American Rabbis

5782 NEW YORK 2022

Introduction

As Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz writes in *The Book of Proverbs: A Social Justice Commentary*, "The wisdom that is contained within the Book of Proverbs is timeless, and readers have much to gain by learning from its ancient precepts" (xvii). Bearing this in mind, the goal of this study and discussion guide is to help facilitate in-depth conversations about the Book of Proverbs and Rabbi Yanklowitz's interpretation of it by adding context from both ancient and contemporary Jewish thought and practice. In each 1.5- to 2-hour-long session, participants will have the opportunity to delve into the intersections between the Book of Proverbs, social justice work, and Jewish ethical and legal narratives. To facilitate such conversations, we have highlighted three major, overarching themes present in the book:

1. God's Place in *Tzedek* (Justice)
2. Our Responsibility to the "Other"
3. Our Souls, Ourselves

Each theme will be addressed at length in its designated session through reading- and discussion-based learning. The themes are divided into six subthemes, each containing a diverse group of quotations chosen to add context to the book and spark lively discussion. The curriculum is designed with an adult learner in mind; at the end of the Teacher's Guide, you will find a box with additional resources should you wish to adapt the class to a teen audience. We encourage you to engage in critical dialogue with your participants about the material, asking difficult questions and drawing on current events to enrich the discussion. This study guide is also designed to allow the facilitator to pick and choose material that speaks to them, as there may be more material than could reasonably be included in the allotted time frame. The curriculum is designed for a three-session class covering one theme per hour-long session. If using this guide for a book club, you are welcome to focus on a single theme or combine the sessions into one, selecting an excerpt from each of the three themes.

The facilitator is expected to have read both the Proverbs text and Rabbi Yanklowitz's commentary in *The Book of Proverbs: A Social Justice Commentary* prior to leading the curriculum. It is strongly encouraged that participants read assigned chapters (at the instructor's discretion) in Rabbi Yanklowitz's book prior to each session. Excerpted texts for discussion will be provided for participants in the printable handouts (see the end of the study guide).

Translations of Proverbs are from *The JPS Tanakh: Gender-Sensitive Edition*, printed in *The Book of Proverbs: A Social Justice Commentary.* Torah translations are from *The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Revised Edition* (CCAR Press). Talmud translations are adapted from *The William Davidson Talmud* (sefaria.org).

Teacher's Guide

Introduction (10 minutes)

In the first session, welcome everyone to the space, and introduce yourself to the group. Take time for each student to share about themselves and something they know or would like to learn about Proverbs. Following general introductions, take a moment to review the course with everyone. Explain the overall themes and goals and how it will be broken down into three sessions of discussion-based learning and *chavruta* opportunities. Also share course expectations for readings and desired objectives and outcomes.

In subsequent sessions, allow time for each student to share about their week and their reading. What have they learned that was interesting this week? What lessons from the previous session remained with them? Allot space for questions and student-led conversation at this time.

Initial Discussion (10 minutes)

If the group has read the book or chapters in advance of the class, allow time for the participants to react organically to what they have read. You do not need to facilitate this portion of the discussion. If the conversation is lagging, here are some questions which might encourage dialogue:

- Did you like the book? Why or why not?
- What were some themes in the book that resonated with you?
- What was something the author said that challenged you?
- How did the book affect your understanding of God?
- How does this book connect to your own understanding of social justice?
- How did this book help you connect with the Book of Proverbs?

If the group has not read the book, give everyone a chance to explain their interest in Proverbs and social justice. Here are some guiding questions:

- What do you hope to learn from this class?
- What do you know about Proverbs?
- Have you read Proverbs before? If so, what was your reaction?
- What does "social justice" mean to you?

This part of the class is meant to give a chance for everyone to warm up to the conversation (there are no right or wrong answers!). Allow time for deeper, more challenging questions further along in this lesson. Feel free to connect new content with that from previous sessions:

- How do these chapters add to our discussion from last week?
- Do the readings on [the self/the "other"] change your understanding of God?

Chavruta Learning (30 minutes)

Chavruta (literally translated as "fellowship") is a traditional style of Jewish learning in which a small group of individuals studies a passage of Jewish text together. At this point in the session, divide up the class into groups of two or three people. Give them each a collection of texts (e.g., "The Concept of Evil," "Belief in God") to analyze and discuss. Here are some guiding questions to help facilitate discussion:

- What is the text saying? How does it relate to Rabbi Yanklowitz's book?
- Do you agree/disagree with the text in question?
- What Jewish values do you see at play here? Do you agree with the values highlighted in the text?
- How does this text challenge you personally?
- How does our understanding of God/other/self shift how we "pursue justice"?
- Does a lack of faith in God change a Jewish person's responsibility for social justice?

After about 20 minutes, bring everyone back together, and have each group share their learning with one another. A larger discussion about the text and the assigned themes should ensue.

If you have sufficient time, you might consider doing this section of the lesson twice, with two different sets of texts. It is perfectly all right to have multiple groups reading the same texts at once so long as the participants know there may be overlap.

See handouts:

- Session 1: God's Place in *Tzedek* (Justice), p. 5
- Session 2: Our Responsibility to the "Other," p. 10
- Session 3: Our Souls, Ourselves, p. 17

Words in Action (5 minutes)

At this point in the session the students should ask themselves: Why is this learning important? What do I want to do with this information? Invite students to share their own social justice work. It is also a chance for those present to take a moment to think about what action they might want to take on in future, after reading this material.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

> "*More than providing answers, the Book of Proverbs inspires us to ask new questions.*"
>
> (Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 407)

At the end of the session, give everyone a chance to ask you (the facilitator) questions and provide feedback about the learning: What worked well? What would they like to learn more about? What was more difficult? Close the lesson with a chance for each learner to take a moment to think about what they would like to learn more about in the coming sessions.

For Teen Learners

Print out copies of each of the different pieces of text, and place them on different tables. Should any of the handout quotes feel too challenging, feel free to remove them from the pile. Have the teens select their favorite piece of text and sit by it. Once students are divided up into groups, have them answer the following questions:

1. What do you understand from this text?
2. Do you agree/disagree with what the author is saying?
3. How does this affect how you think about [insert topic]?
4. How does this affect how you think about social justice?

After about 10 minutes of discussion, have them switch tables by finding their second favorite piece of text (and so on).

When you bring them back to the larger group to close the session, give time for each of the students to talk about what they think about the topic or what they learned through their reading. Encourage each group to think about these texts in the contexts of their own lived experiences. You may also consider having the groups each build their own social justice project over the course of the three sessions that pertains to a verse or series of verses from the Book of Proverbs.

Session 1

God's Place in *Tzedek* (Justice)

Names of God

Proverbs 18:10

מִגְדַּל־עֹז שֵׁם יְהוָה בּוֹ־יָרוּץ צַדִּיק וְנִשְׂגָּב׃
The name of God is a tower of strength
To which the righteous man runs and is safe.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 120

According to this understanding, the most immediate meaning of the name *Ehyeh* is that God is present. God may not be the great intervener who saves us from future calamities, but God is next to us—holding our hand, crying with us—in times of pain and sorrow.

Exodus 3:13–14

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָא אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ־לִי
מַה־שְּׁמוֹ מָה אֹמַר אֲלֵהֶם׃

Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is [God's] name?' what shall I say to them?"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה
תֹאמַר לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם׃

And God said to Moses, "*Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*," continuing, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, '*Ehyeh* sent me to you.'"

The Concept of Evil

Proverbs 16:4

כֹּל פָּעַל יְהוָה לַמַּעֲנֵהוּ וְגַם־רָשָׁע לְיוֹם רָעָה׃
God made everything for a purpose,
Even the wicked for an evil day.

Proverbs 24:20

כִּי | לֹא־תִהְיֶה אַחֲרִית לָרָע נֵר רְשָׁעִים יִדְעָךְ׃
For there is no future for the evildoer;
The lamp of the wicked goes out.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 122

This presupposition leads to a theological dilemma: If God is the cause of everything and is within everything, is God also found within evil? How does one make sense of the notion that God is all good when evil is allowed not only to exist but even, at times, to flourish throughout the world?

Genesis 1:31

God then surveyed all that [God] had made, and look—it was very good! And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Babylonian Talmud, *M'gillah* 10b

Rabbi Y'hoshua ben Levi asked: **Does the Holy One, blessed be God,** in fact **rejoice over the downfall of the wicked? But it is written: "As they went out before the army, and say: Give thanks to the Eternal, for God's kindness endures forever"** (II Chronicles 20:21), **and Rabbi Yochanan said: For what** reason were the words **"for God is good" not stated in this** statement of **thanksgiving,** as the classic formulation is: "Give thanks to the Eternal; for God is good; for God's kindness endures forever" (I Chronicles 16:34)? **Because the Holy One, blessed be God, does not rejoice over the downfall of the wicked.** Since this song was sung in the aftermath of a military victory, which involved the downfall of the wicked, the name of God was not mentioned for the good.

God's Location

Proverbs 3:19–20

יְהוָ֤ה בְּחָכְמָ֨ה יָסַ֣ד־אָ֭רֶץ כּוֹנֵ֣ן שָׁמַ֑יִם בִּתְבוּנָֽה׃

God founded the earth by wisdom
And established the heavens by understanding;

בְּדַעְתּ֗וֹ תְּהוֹמ֥וֹת נִבְקָ֑עוּ וּ֝שְׁחָקִ֗ים יִרְעֲפ֥וּ־טָֽל׃

By God's knowledge the depths burst apart,
And the skies distilled dew.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 104

Each of us must find the rituals and spiritual practices that will help us find God. God is not hiding on some mountaintop or at the bottom of the sea. As the Torah tells us, "It [that is, God's message to humans] is not in the heavens. . . . Neither is it beyond the sea. . . . The thing is very close to you" (Deuteronomy 30:12–14). God is right here, but we always need tools to seek.

Dr. Robert Harris, "Why God Needs a Dwelling Place," *jtsa.edu*

Malbim, a nineteenth-century European exegete, takes a moralistic approach. Rather than contemplating an actual, physical place of worship, he suggests that "each one of us needs to build God a Tabernacle in the recesses of our hearts, by preparing oneself to become a Sanctuary for God and a place for the dwelling of God's glory."

God and Prayer

Proverbs 15:29

רָחֹוק יְהוָה מֵרְשָׁעִים וּתְפִלַּת צַדִּיקִים יִשְׁמָע׃

God is far from the wicked—
But hears the prayer of the righteous.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 228

In prayer too, we do not pull God closer to us. Rather, we pull ourselves closer to God.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 22

So focal is the concept of justice in Jewish learning and practice that it has become the dominant trope for the dialogue of prayers between humans and the Divine on the holiest days of the Jewish year. Jewish thought even presumes that the sense of justice that God demands of humans is inherently divine—that our sense of justice is a gift from God.

***Pirkei Avot* 2:18 (translated by Rabbi Yanklowitz, *Pirkei Avot: A Social Justice Commentary*)**

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, הֱוֵי זָהִיר בִּקְרִיאַת שְׁמַע וּבַתְּפִלָּה.
וּכְשֶׁאַתָּה מִתְפַּלֵּל, אַל תַּעַשׂ תְּפִלָּתְךָ קֶבַע, אֶלָּא
רַחֲמִים וְתַחֲנוּנִים לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם בָּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
(יואל ב) כִּי חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד
וְנִחָם עַל הָרָעָה. וְאַל תְּהִי רָשָׁע בְּפְנֵי עַצְמְךָ׃

Rabbi Shimon says: Be meticulous in reading the *Sh'ma* and in prayer. When you pray, do not make your prayer a set routine, but rather [meditate on] compassion and supplication before the Omnipresent, as it is said: "For God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and repents of the evil" (Joel 2:13). And do not judge yourself to be a wicked person.

Pastor Jim Kast-Keat, "9 Faith Leaders on 'Thoughts and Prayers'—and Action—after Tragedy," *Vox*

The "thoughts and prayers" approach feels lazy to me. People know they need to respond somehow but know that no words will ever do, so they "think" and "pray." I'd rather have people vote and act. Thoughts and prayers won't change the gun control laws in this country. Only actions and votes will.

Dr. Susannah Heschel, in "Lovingly Observant," *America Magazine*, p. 13

God, [Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel] once wrote, "is not only a power we depend on; He is a God who demands." God poses a challenge to go beyond ourselves—and it is precisely that going beyond, that awareness of challenge, that constitutes our being. We often forget this, so prayer comes as a reminder that over and above personal problems there is an objective challenge to overcome inequity, helplessness, suffering, carelessness and oppression.

Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar, *Amen: Seeking Presence with Prayer, Poetry, and Mindfulness Practice*, p. xvii

Prayer is an articulation of our highest desires, our yearnings, our dark places, a reflection of the light we hold within. It is a conversation with the invisible, an acknowledgment of the mystery, a query into the ineffable. When we pray, we reach for clarity, for strength beyond what we know. Praying at once is an intense self-examination and a dialogue with the sacred, representing the seam of a very fine fabric where the physical is joined to the metaphysical, and where, no matter our reason for praying, we touch a bit of heaven.

Belief in God

Proverbs 20:6

רַב־אָדָם יִקְרָא אִישׁ חַסְדּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֱמוּנִים מִי יִמְצָא׃

He calls many a man his loyal friend,
But who can find a faithful man?

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 103

One can be moral and effective in work to serve the vulnerable and not embrace God, just as one can be devout religiously and not create any serious impact through social action. As a guiding principle, however, embracing God offers us the opportunity to raise the bar we set for what we want to achieve and for how we must achieve it. God is the most powerful reality ever encountered, and like no other idea, embracing the Divine can inspire humankind to ideal goodness and transformative justice. To idolize our own human authority represents a failure to recognize the power and truth of our calling, destiny, and command; embracing the humility to acknowledge a power beyond us demands social protest, never submission.

Alden Solovy, *This Joyous Soul: A New Voice for Ancient Yearnings*, p. xvi

This is spiritual bravery: to have faith in a power that operates beyond our basic senses, to have faith that a unique force is created when the energy of human words and emotions is articulated in combination with the intention of reaching out to the Divine.

God and Justice

Proverbs 21:15

שִׂמְחָה לַצַּדִּיק עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וּמְחִתָּה לְפֹעֲלֵי אָוֶן׃

Justice done is a joy to the righteous,
To evildoers, ruination.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 291

In this age, spiritual seekers are interested in a God of pure love devoid of any judgment or in a God of energy devoid of personal relationship. This popular take on divinity is not the biblical concept of God as the God of light and justice, nor is it one that satiates our desire to gain more insight into the infinite mind of God. Yet, even if we simply spark some light,

we remind ourselves that nestled between every two atoms is an imprint of the Divine waiting to make its way through our retinas into our body and soul.

Rabbi Ariana Silverman, *Lights in the Forest: Rabbis Respond to Twelve Essential Jewish Questions*, p. 88

God inspires my pursuit of social justice. God is the power that makes me, in the words of one of my teachers, tremble with prophetic rage. . . . In the vein of predicate theology, regardless of whether an interventionist God heals the sick, healing the sick is godly. We elevate the sacred when we work toward *shalom*, toward wholeness.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Goldberg, Edwin C., and Elaine S. Zecher, eds. *Because My Soul Longs for You: Integrating Theology into Our Lives.* New York: CCAR Press, 2021.

Kaplan, Dana Evan, ed. *A Life of Meaning: Embracing Reform Judaism's Sacred Path.* New York: CCAR Press, 2018.

Session 2

Our Responsibility to the "Other"

The Parent-Child Relationship

Proverbs 1:8

שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוּסַר אָבִיךָ וְאַל־תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ׃

My son, heed the discipline of your father,
And do not forsake the instruction of your mother.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 13

The need to respect one's parents goes beyond obeying their commands or revering them. The bond between parents and children is potentially sacrosanct, and when tended to with the greatest love, it is akin to the highest levels of the Divine's love of the world.

Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* **30a–31a**

It is taught in a *baraita* that **Rabbi** Y'hudah HaNasi **says: It is revealed and known before the One who spoke and the world came into being that a son honors his mother more than** he honors **his father, because she persuades him with** many **statements** of encouragement and does not treat him harshly. **Therefore,** in the mitzvah of "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:11), **the Holy One, blessed be God, preceded** the mention of **the honor** due one's **father before** mentioning the **honor** due one's **mother.** The verse emphasizes the duty that does not come naturally. Similarly, **it is revealed and known before the One who spoke and the world came into being that a son fears his father more than his mother, because** his father **teaches him Torah,** and consequently he is strict with him. **Therefore,** in the verse "A man shall fear his mother and his father" (Leviticus 19:3), **the Holy One, blessed be God, preceded** the mention of **fear of the mother before** the mention of **fear of the father.**

Mark Greenspan, "Honoring One's Parents: How Far Should We Go?,"
Rabbinical Assembly

Occasionally when meeting with a family prior to a funeral I am confronted by a legacy of ambivalent feelings. Often enough there is anger, recriminations, and disappointment on the part of children as they speak of their parents. Of course I'm only hearing the child's side of the story. The parents are not present to speak for themselves so I can only wonder what they might say. Still the feelings that these children express are very real and painful. After listening with much sympathy and understanding I often explain to the family that we are not commanded to love our parents. We're not even commanded to like them. The Torah is very specific: we are obligated to honor and respect our parents.

Stephanie Fairyington, "Some L.G.B.T. Parents Reject the Names 'Mommy' and 'Daddy,'" *New York Times*

Ellen Kahn, the director of the Children, Youth & Families Program at the Human Rights Campaign, said the gender binary that underlies "mother" and "father" doesn't jibe with some parents' self-understanding and self-presentation: "For queer parents who don't think of themselves as gender conforming, 'mommy' and 'daddy' may be a little discordant with the way they think about themselves."

Rebuke

Proverbs 9:8

אַל־תּוֹכַח לֵץ פֶּן־יִשְׂנָאֶךָּ הוֹכַח לְחָכָם וְיֶאֱהָבֶךָּ׃

Do not rebuke scoffers, for they will hate you;
Reprove the wise, and they will love you.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 114

As the Talmud teaches, "Just as there is a mitzvah for a person to say words of rebuke that will be accepted, so too there is a mitzvah for a person not to say words of rebuke that will not be accepted" [Babylonian Talmud, *Y'vamot* 65b]. It's only a mitzvah when one suspects the other has the integrity and emotional intelligence to truly open their eyes to their blind spot and to correct the wrong that flows from that blindness. The goal of rebuke, according to this position, is not just to express righteous indignation, but to create change and stop a wrong or abuse that is occurring before our eyes.

Leviticus 19:17

לֹא־תִשְׂנָא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בִּלְבָבֶךָ הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ
אֶת־עֲמִיתֶךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֵטְא׃

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart.
Rebuke your kin but incur no guilt on their account.

Marjorie Ingall, "Where's My Apology?," *Tablet Magazine*

Part of the art of repair can indeed involve telling someone they need to apologize to you. Kula notes: "Sometimes we need to be rebuked in order to understand that we have to ask for forgiveness." Asking for an apology means telling the other person that they've cracked your vessel. "We all know the famous verse from the Book of Leviticus that says, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,'" Kula writes, "but few remember that this intuition begins with the following words: 'Rebuke, rebuke! Criticize your neighbor, but do not hold a grudge in your heart.'"

Justice

Proverbs 17:23

שֹׁחַד מֵחֵק רָשָׁע יִקָּח לְהַטּוֹת אָרְחוֹת מִשְׁפָּט׃

The wicked draw bribes out of their bosom
To pervert the course of justice.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 15

To ensure that justice is achieved in this world, we have to express outrage about actions that are morally wrong. Building off this axiom, the Rabbis teach, "Everyone who can protest a wrong in one's midst and does not [in public] is responsible for those people. [Someone who fails to protest the wrongs committed by] the people of his city is [held] responsible for the people of the city. For the whole world, one is responsible for the whole world"(Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 54b).

Deuteronomy 16:20

צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ׃

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and
occupy the land that the Eternal your God is giving you.

Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 32b

As it is taught in a *baraita*: When the verse states, **"Justice, justice, shall you follow," one** mention of "justice" is stated **with regard to judgment and one** is stated **with regard to compromise. How so?** Where there are **two boats traveling on the river and they encounter each other, if both of them** attempt to **pass, both of them sink,** as the river is not wide enough for both to pass. If they pass **one after the other, both of them pass. And similarly,** where there are **two camels who were ascending the ascent of Beit Choron,** where there is a narrow steep path, **and they encounter each other, if both of them** attempt to **ascend, both of them fall.** If they ascend **one after the other, both of them ascend.**

Religion

Proverbs 16:6

בְּחֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת יְכֻפַּר עָוֹן וּבְיִרְאַת יְהוָה סוּר מֵרָע׃

Iniquity is expiated by loyalty and faithfulness,
And evil is avoided through fear of God.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 209

We need to stop pretending that there are no serious moral problems within our traditions, and we need to stop offering false apologetics. We cannot afford to view any form of skepticism as an affront to the inerrable tenets of our faiths. Religious institutions must be honest about the countless problems inherent in their textual traditions and take responsibility for them. We should beware any school of thought that asserts that the Rabbis necessarily express the will of God.

"Haredi Knesset Member: Reform Jews Destroying Judaism, Working against Israel," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*

A haredi Orthodox Israeli lawmaker accused Reform Jews of destroying Judaism, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to address non-Orthodox denominations'

concerns in Israel. "They're not Jews because 80 percent of their kids are assimilators," Eichler said. "Whoever wants to uproot Jewish law to lead to heresy, to make the God of Israel something amorphous, to make the Torah of Israel into legends, that's not Judaism. That's the destruction of Judaism."

Rabbi Steve Roth, "Judaism in the 21st Century Has Its Own Set of Issues,"
Sun Sentinel

As Jews, we need to find a way to work together to find solutions to the problems we currently face, and to anticipate the future. If we continue to fracture what should be our common ground, I can only pray that God watch over us more now than ever before.

Morality and Torah

Proverbs 14:14–16

מִדְּרָכָיו יִשְׂבַּע סָוג לֵב וּמֵעָלָיו אִישׁ טוֹב׃

Those who are unprincipled reap the fruits of their ways;
A good man, of his deeds.

פֶּתִי יַאֲמִין לְכָל־דָּבָר וְעָרוּם יָבִין לַאֲשֻׁרוֹ׃

The simple believe anything;
The clever ponders their course.

חָכָם יָרֵא וְסָר מֵרָע וּכְסִיל מִתְעַבֵּר וּבוֹטֵחַ׃

A sage is diffident and shuns evil,
But a dullard rushes in confidently.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 201

Both the Jewish and modern Western traditions believe that corruption and brokenness occur in a world devoid of both moral standards and humble doubt and self-critique. In the Torah, the lack of standards and self-reflection leads to the horrific crimes of murder, rape, and oppressive regimes, such as at the end of the Book of Judges, a time when "there was no king in Israel" (Judges 21:25). However, the psychology of moral development suggests that we should restructure the way in which our rules are formed. A purely top-down, vertical system of laws and morals favors the powerful and the privileged, because laws favor the lawmaker. Instead of leaving power solely in the hands of the privileged, power—including legislative power—should be shared by all.

Isaiah 1:17

לִמְדוּ הֵיטֵב דִּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אַשְּׁרוּ חָמוֹץ
שִׁפְטוּ יָתוֹם רִיבוּ אַלְמָנָה׃

Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice;
aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan;
defend the cause of the widow.

Babylonian Talmud, *Eiruvin* 100b

Similarly, **Rabbi Yochanan said: Even if the Torah had not been given, we would nonetheless have learned modesty from the cat,** which covers its excrement, **and** that **stealing** is objectionable **from the ant,** which does not take grain from another ant, **and forbidden relations from the dove,** which is faithful to its partner, **and proper relations from the rooster, which** first **appeases** the hen **and then mates** with it.

Ayalon Eliach, "Why Should Jews Celebrate a Torah That Calls for Genocide and Homophobia?," *Haaretz*

Calls for genocide. Instructions for how to manage sex slaves captured in battle. Death penalty for homosexuals. When you read these words, what comes to mind? ISIS? Boko Haram? Al Shabaab? Keep thinking. Every year, Jews across the world gather weekly to read consecutive portions of the Torah, Judaism's holiest text, which features the morally repugnant list above as well as many other offensive passages (genocide: Deuteronomy 20:16–17; sex slavery: Deuteronomy 21:10–13; death penalty for homosexuals: Leviticus 20:13). The completion of this annual reading cycle is celebrated on a holiday called Simhat Torah, which begins next week. Is there any justification for Jews continuing to celebrate the completion of a book that reads in part like an instruction manual on how to be a terrible person? The answer depends on how we approach the text. The Talmud states that the Torah can be a "deadly poison" or an "elixir of life" depending on the mindset of the person who studies it (Ta'anit 7a). For those who approach the Torah unquestioningly as a guidebook, these passages can, quite literally, be "deadly." One need not look further than the past few months: The ultra-Orthodox murderer at this year's Gay Pride Parade in Jerusalem and the fundamentalist Jews who burned a Palestinian family alive are chilling examples of what happens when people blindly follow the words of a book that advocates homophobia and genocide.

Poverty

Proverbs 13:7

יֵשׁ מֵ֭תְעַשֵּׁר וְאֵ֣ין כֹּ֑ל מִ֝תְרוֹשֵׁ֗שׁ וְהוֹן־ רָֽב׃

Some pretend to be rich and have nothing;
Others profess to be poor and have much wealth.

Proverbs 14:31

עֹשֵׁ֣ק דָּ֭ל חֵרֵ֣ף עֹשֵׂ֑הוּ וּמְכַבְּדֹ֥ו חֹנֵ֖ן אֶבְיֽוֹן׃

One who withholds what is due to the poor affronts their Maker;
One who shows pity for the needy shows honor.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 179

A midrash explains that typically people in poverty should not live separately from the wealthy because extreme poverty has the potential to lead to violence. Those with extreme wealth, however, who use it to support a regressive treatment of those who have nothing, are violating Judaism's commitment to fairness and impartiality, making extreme wealth as dangerous as extreme poverty.

Leviticus 19:9–10

וּבְקֻצְרְכֶם֙ אֶת־קְצִ֣יר אַרְצְכֶ֔ם לֹ֥א תְכַלֶּ֖ה
פְּאַ֣ת שָׂדְךָ֑ לִקְצֹ֔ר וְלֶ֥קֶט קְצִירְךָ֖ לֹ֥א תְלַקֵּֽט׃

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.

וְכַרְמְךָ֖ לֹ֣א תְעוֹלֵ֑ל וּפֶ֥רֶט כַּרְמְךָ֖ לֹ֣א תְלַקֵּ֑ט
לֶעָנִ֥י וְלַגֵּ֖ר תַּעֲזֹ֣ב אֹתָ֑ם אֲנִ֖י יְהוָ֥ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶֽם׃

You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Eternal am your God.

Deuteronomy 8:10

וְאָכַלְתָּ֖ וְשָׂבָ֑עְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ֙ אֶת־יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ
עַל־הָאָ֥רֶץ הַטֹּבָ֖ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר נָתַן־לָֽךְ׃

When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Eternal your God for the good land given to you.

***Sh'mot Rabbah* 31:12–13**

There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty; it is the most terrible of all sufferings. Our Sages have said: If all troubles were assembled on one side and poverty on the other, [poverty would outweigh them all]. When a man is rich and has a poor relative, he does not acknowledge him; for when he sees his poor relation, he hides himself from him, being ashamed to speak to him, because he is poor.

***Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dei-ah* 250:1**

How much is it appropriate to give to the poor? "Sufficient for their needs in that which they lack." If they are hungry, one must feed them. If they need clothing, one must clothe them. If they lack housing utensils, one must provide them with housing utensils. . . . To each person according to what they need.

Jane Eisner, "Why We Don't Talk about Jewish Poverty—And Why We Should," *The Forward*

Jewish media largely reflect Jewish preoccupations—and for the establishment, that is Israel and rising anti-Semitism. It is not the poverty inflicting an elderly man afraid to leave his apartment, or a Haredi family whose lifestyle is dramatically different from the majority of American Jews, or a single mother who lost her job when Toys R Us closed. Acknowledging Jewish poverty forces us to acknowledge the fact that not all Jews are well-educated, economically successful, politically powerful, culturally assimilated and solidly middle class (or wealthier). "There is a perception that Jewish poverty is an oxymoron," a communal professional told me. "There is a tremendous sense of denial in the Jewish community about how many Jews truly need help."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Limmer, Seth M., and Jonah Dov Pesner, eds. *Moral Resistance and Spiritual Authority: Our Jewish Obligation to Social Justice.* New York: CCAR Press, 2019.

Schindler, Judith, and Judy Seldin-Cohen. *Recharging Judaism: How Civic Engagement Is Good for Synagogues, Jews and America.* New York: CCAR Press, 2018.

Session 3

Our Souls, Ourselves

Self-Awareness

Proverbs 24:14

כֵּן | דְּעֵה חָכְמָה לְנַפְשֶׁךָ אִם־מָצָאתָ
וְיֵשׁ אַחֲרִית וְתִקְוָתְךָ לֹא תִכָּרֵת׃

Know: such is wisdom for your soul;
If you attain it, there is a future;
Your hope will not be cut off.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. xxi

Proverbs is not about self-understanding, but rather instructs about wisdom beyond the self. "The fool does not desire understanding / But only to air their thoughts" (Proverbs 18:2). The self is not the center in this intellectual and spiritual quest. We must learn to listen to others instead of meditating and thinking in isolation: "To answer before listening / This is foolish and disgraceful" (18:13). The book notes, however, that we must learn to know our own soul as well (Proverbs 24:14).

Dr. Erica Brown, *In Narrow Places: Daily Inspiration for the Three Weeks*

Jeremiah's Jerusalem is not ravaged by enemies; it is brought low by the absence of integrity of its own inhabitants. God makes the residents of Jerusalem suffer so that they will look in the mirror, but they do not heed the divine moral signal. The wake-up alarm does not work. There is no self-awareness, just an intensification of sin until it inures people to the cause of their own misfortune. It is not coincidental that *Eikha* also offers this sage advice: "Let us search and try our ways, and turn back to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in the heavens" (Lamentations 3:40–41). The tender image of post-Temple sacrifice is to take one's own heart and offer it in one's hands.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek* (translated by David Z. Gordon, 2006)

From [both] the midst of a heritage which is compulsive and fateful and a terrible aloneness which are the source of the unity of the nation, issues forth the attribute of loving-kindness which summons and drives the fateful collective to imbue their unity with positive content by means of the constant participation in events, suffering, consciousness and acts of mutual assistance. The isolated Jew finds his solace in his active adhesion to the whole and by tearing down barriers of egotistical-separatist existence, and by joining his neighbors. The oppressive experience of fate finds its connection in the coalescing of individual personal experiences into the new entity called a nation. The obligation of love for another person emanates from the self-awareness of the people of fate, which is alone and perplexed by its uniqueness. For this was the Covenant of Egypt concluded.

When to Be Silent

Proverbs 10:19

בְּרֹב דְּבָרִים לֹא יֶחְדַּל־פָּשַׁע וְחוֹשֵׂךְ שְׂפָתָיו מַשְׂכִּיל׃

Where there is much talking, there is no lack of transgressing,
But one who curbs the tongue shows sense.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 203

Having the foresight to restrain oneself is an under-explored avenue of courageous behavior. The courage to seek our own truths calls upon us not only to speak up publicly, but also to be silent when the times call for silence. Not every situation requires our voice; not every pursuit needs our opinion. Knowing when to back off is as important, maybe even more so, than standing up.

Babylonian Talmud, *Y'vamot* 65b

The Gemara cites other statements made by Rabbi Il'a in the name of Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon. **And Rabbi Il'a said in the name of Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon: Just as it is a mitzvah for a person to say that which will be heeded, so is it a mitzvah for a person not to say that which will not be heeded.** One should not rebuke those who will be unreceptive to his message. **Rabbi Abba says:** It is **obligatory** for him to refrain from speaking, **as it is stated: "Do not reprove a scorner lest he hate you; reprove a wise man and he will love you"** (Proverbs 9:8).

David L. Evans, "Those Who Remain Silent," *New York Times*

As an African-American growing up in the rural South, I used to wonder how the party of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, and Hubert Humphrey could permit a minority of Southern racists like James Eastland, Herman Talmadge, Richard Russell, and Strom Thurmond to exert so much political influence in Washington. The majority of the Democratic Party at that time knew how wrong those Southerners were but chose to remain silent. That "silent majority" and its descendants now recognize—and admit—how terribly wrong its members were. Shouldn't today's Republicans who remain silent while their leader winks "at the racists and Nazis," as Mr. Blow puts it, and demeans women be reminded of the shameful behavior of those "silent" Democrats while Jim Crow reigned in nearly half of our country?

Introspection

Proverbs 28:11

חָכָם בֶּעֵינָיו אִישׁ עָשִׁיר וְדַל מֵבִין יַחְקְרֶנּוּ׃

A rich man is clever in his own eyes,
But a perceptive pauper can see through him.

Proverbs 28:13

מְכַסֶּה פְּשָׁעָיו לֹא יַצְלִיחַ וּמוֹדֶה וְעֹזֵב יְרֻחָם׃

No one who covers up his faults will succeed;
One who confesses and gives them up will find mercy.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 64

Religiosity has two crucial components: outward engagement with the world and spiritual introspection. The external component must be the dominant one: we are to observe, study, and learn intellectually from our texts, ritual, community, and social problems; but in addition to this outward element of religious practice, we must look inside ourselves, cultivate spirituality, and nurture our own reason and faith.

Each of us has to find our authentic calling. In the twenty-first century, the most crucial need for the Jewish people is to learn how to connect an outer religious life with an inner religious life more deeply. We can only do the messy work of the world if we have done the messy work inside ourselves. This work requires respect and nourishment for our natural morality—the potential that was placed within us at Creation. However, each of us also has to study the ways of Creation—of nature and its inherent morality and laws—itself.

Psalm 27:7–9

שְׁמַע־יְהוָה קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחָנֵּנִי וַעֲנֵנִי׃

Hear, Adonai, my voice—
I am crying out!
Be gracious to me, answer me!

לְךָ | אָמַר לִבִּי בַּקְּשׁוּ פָנָי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ׃

My heart has said to You: "Seek my face."
I am seeking Your face, Adonai—

אַל־תַּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ | מִמֶּנִּי אַל תַּט־בְּאַף עַבְדֶּךָ
עֶזְרָתִי הָיִיתָ אַל־תִּטְּשֵׁנִי וְאַל־תַּעַזְבֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעִי׃

Do not hide Your face from me.
Do not turn Your servant away in anger,
You have been my help—
Do not forsake me, do not abandon me,
God of my deliverance!

Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, "The Introspection of Elul," *New York Jewish Week*

This is the end of Elul, the last full week before Rosh Hashanah, and the time to ask what Rav Nachman of Breslov (1772–1810) calls the "final and ultimate" human question: *lamah li chayim*? What is the meaning of my life? What is the point of it all? What should drive us? No amount of empirical evidence can answer these questions; we generally avoid them. This week of introspection starts with Ki Tavo (When you enter the land), which chasidic tradition treats metaphorically: not the Land of Israel but the inner landscape of our souls, which we ought to enter in this final week of Elul. Only there will we find the secret of life's meaning. . . . The inner demons that get in our way are our unacknowledged fears: loss of love, failure, loneliness, sickness, aging, and so on. As Rav Nachman famously said, "The world is a narrow bridge: the main thing is not to be afraid." We conquer fears by *hitbod'dut*, a kind of serious solitude, in which we pour out the deepest yearnings of our heart to God—not in formal prayer, he warns, and not even in Hebrew, but in the vernacular, the language we naturally speak, and the only hope of finding words to match our inner state.

Personal Gain

Proverbs 1:19

כֵּן אָרְחוֹת כָּל־בֹּצֵעַ בֶּצַע אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ בְּעָלָיו יִקָּח׃

Such is the fate of all who pursue unjust gain;
It takes the life of its possessor.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 169

The Book of Proverbs reminds us of our responsibility to take care of the land and enjoy its beauty. Its exploitation for gain and profit is truly an affront to the ideal of Torah. It is our duty to use the Jewish tradition as a way to fight against human exploitation of other humans, the limitation of resources, and insufficient respect for our environment. While it will certainly not be easy, our deep engagement with the Jewish sources should serve as a springboard to inspire us to action and help us bear the metaphorical fruit from the textual soil we worked so hard to till.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Repentance"
(translated by Moses Hyamson, 1937–1949)

Whoever engages in the study of the Torah, in order that they may receive a reward or avoid calamities, is not studying the Torah for its own sake. Whoever occupies themself with the Torah, neither out of fear nor for the sake of recompense, but solely out of love for the Lord of the whole earth who enjoined us to do so, is occupied with the Torah for its own sake. The sages however said, "One should always engage in the study of the Torah, even if not for its own sake; for one who begins thus will end by studying it for its own sake." Hence, when instructing the young, women, or the illiterate generally, we teach them to serve God out of fear or for the sake of reward, till their knowledge increases and they have attained a large measure of wisdom. Then we reveal to them this mystic truth, little by little, and train them by easy stages till they have grasped and comprehended it, and serve God out of love.

***Midrash Tanchuma, Mishpatim* 2**

Now these are the ordinances (Exodus 21:1). Scripture says elsewhere: The king by justice establisheth the land, but the person who sets themself apart (*t'rumah*) overthrows it (**Proverbs 29:4**). The Torah's king rules through justice and thereby causes the earth to endure, but the person who sets themself apart (*t'rumah*) overthrows it. This implies that if a person acts as though they were a *t'rumah* (the portion separated, or set aside, for the priests) by secluding themself in the corner of their home and declaring, "What concern are the problems of the community to me? What does their judgment mean to me? Why should I listen to them? I will do well (without them)," this person helps to destroy the world. Hence *the person of separation* (t'rumah) *overthrows it*.

Babylonian Talmud, *B'rachot* 63b

Rabbi Yosei began to speak **in honor of the hosts, and taught:** It is said: **"You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land"** (Deuteronomy 23:8). **Isn't this an** *a fortiori* **inference:**

Just as the Egyptians, who only befriended Israel, even when they hosted them, **for their own benefit,** as Pharaoh said to Joseph, **as it is stated, "And if you know any able men among them, then make them rulers over my cattle"** (Genesis 47:6), are treated **this way, all the more so** should **one who hosts a Torah scholar in his home, providing him with food and drink and availing him of his possessions** without concern for personal gain, be treated this way.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, "The Importance of the Community (*Kehilla*) in Judaism,"
My Jewish Learning

It is no accident that the Jewish people call themselves "*Am Yisrael*"—"the people of Israel"—rather than "*Dat Yisrael*," or "the religion of Israel." A sense of peoplehood has long been the defining characteristic of the Jews. Accordingly, the central experience of Jewish history—the only event that demands an annual retelling—is the exodus from Egypt. Though wrapped up in an encounter with divinity, the exodus was primarily an experience of national liberation, rather than a moment of religious awakening. On the everyday level, this focus on peoplehood is translated into an emphasis on the community as the primary organizing structure of Jewish life.

Wisdom

Proverbs 18:4

מַ֤יִם עֲמֻקִּ֨ים ׀ דִּבְרֵי־פִ֗י אִ֫ישׁ נַ֥חַל נֹבֵ֑עַ מְק֖וֹר חָכְמָֽה׃

The words a person speaks are deep waters,
A flowing stream, a fountain of wisdom.

Proverbs 31:10–12

אֵ֣שֶׁת־חַ֭יִל מִ֣י יִמְצָ֑א וְרָחֹ֖ק מִפְּנִינִ֣ים מִכְרָֽהּ׃

How precious is a woman of substance!
Her worth is far beyond that of rubies.

בָּטַ֣ח בָּ֭הּ לֵ֣ב בַּעְלָ֑הּ וְשָׁלָ֥ל לֹא־יֶחְסָֽר׃

Her husband puts his confidence in her,
And lacks no good thing.

גְּמָלַ֥תְהוּ ט֝וֹב וְלֹא־רָ֗ע כֹּ֣ל יְמֵי־חַיֶּֽיהָ׃

She is good to him, never bad,
All the days of her life.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. xv

Jewish wisdom is not something one acquires lightly. It is a pursuit that takes a lifetime of rigorous study, guidance, perspicacity, and openheartedness. On the other hand, Jewish literature is not necessarily just a means to achieve intellectual glory—studying Jewish texts is a journey with infinite steps and no end in sight, a pleasurable pursuit for its own sake.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, pp. 403–4

The power of *Eishet Chayil* arises when we consider its subject: women. . . . By concluding a male-centric section of a male-centric book by concentrating on the allure and wisdom of the female, the Book of Proverbs ends on a provocative note. The choice serves as an intertextual critique of other biblical narratives: women are often mentioned in the Torah in a not-so-positive fashion.

D. M. Welton, "The Old Testament Wisdom (*Chokma*)," *Biblical World* 10, no. 3, pp. 183–89

The Hebrew word *chokma*, as used in the Old Testament, stands for wisdom, both divine (Prov. 3:19) and human (Dan. 1:17). As expressive of the latter it has both a general and a special meaning. Its general meaning is somewhat varied, a knowledge, e.g., of nature (I Kings 4:33), of human affairs (Isa. 19:11), the gift of poetic and sententious speech (I Kings 4:32), skill to foretell the future, to interpret dreams, and to conjure (Ex. 7:11; Dan. 5:11) being all comprehended under the term. Among the Hebrews the wise man (*chakam*) was the learned man in general (Jer. 8:9), whether in the character of judge (I Kings 3: 28), or ruler (Deut. 34:9), or artificer (Ex. 28:3; 31:6; Jer. 10:9), or cunning and subtle man (Job 5:13; *cf*. 2 Sam. 13:3; 20:16).

In the more special signification of the word, it denotes wisdom with a strong ethical quality, as rooting itself in the fear of the Lord, and applying the truths of divine revelation to the various relations and circumstances of life-wisdom, in a word, as inclusive of all virtue.

Claudia V. Camp, "Woman Wisdom: Bible,"
The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women

In some of the books of the Hebrew Bible, "wisdom" is personified as a female character. This character is shown not only in traditional roles of women as a mother and housekeeper, but also as a prophet and a source of counsel. Her portrayal often draws comparisons to goddesses outside of the Hebrew Bible, such as the Egyptian goddesses Ma'at and Isis, the Sumerian Inanna, and the Babylonian Ishtar. There is debate over whether Wisdom was worshipped as a goddess, and ultimately her presentation is ambiguous. Nevertheless, the stories of Woman Wisdom are significant for their use of a woman's voice in male books. . . . Notable in Proverbs and the Wisdom of Solomon (and to a lesser degree in Job and Sirach) is the personification of the concept of wisdom as a woman.

Death

Proverbs 5:11

וְנָהַמְתָּ בְאַחֲרִיתֶךָ בִּכְלוֹת בְּשָׂרְךָ וּשְׁאֵרֶךָ׃

And in the end you roar,
When your flesh and body are consumed

Rabbi Yanklowitz, p. 54

One of the cruel realties of being human is the foreknowledge that we will one day no longer exist in our physical form. Death is coming for all of us.

The Book of Proverbs does not shy away from this truth. We will all eventually die, and most of us will be forgotten. When we do not fully come to terms with this reality and we fail to be moved by the fact that we have no idea of what to expect after death, contemplating the end of life only invokes deep anxiety and fear. Yet, when we live in accordance with the truths revealed through the deepest embracing of this inevitable reality, we can discover a sublime joy and freedom that is liberating and refreshing.

Babylonian Talmud, *M'gillah* 3b

On the basis of these premises, **Rava raised a dilemma:** If one must choose between **reading the** *M'gillah* **and** tending to **a** *meit mitzvah*, **which of them** takes **precedence?** Does **reading the** *M'gillah* take **precedence due to** the value of **publicizing the miracle, or perhaps** burying **the** *meit mitzvah* takes **precedence due to** the value of preserving **human dignity? After he raised the dilemma,** Rava **then resolved it** on his own and ruled that attending to a *meit mitzvah* takes **precedence, as the Master said: Great is human dignity, as it overrides a prohibition in the Torah.** Consequently, it certainly overrides the duty to read the *M'gillah*, despite the fact that reading the *M'gillah* publicizes the miracle.

Caitlin Doughty, *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes and Other Lessons from the Crematory*, p. 113

Death might appear to destroy the meaning in our lives, but in fact it is the very source of our creativity. As Kafka said, "The meaning of life is that it ends." Death is the engine that keeps us running, giving us the motivation to achieve, learn, love, and create. Philosophers have proclaimed this for thousands of years just as vehemently as we insist upon ignoring it generation after generation.

Rabbi Paul Kipnes, "God Damn You, God! Taking God to Task in a Messed Up World" (2021, excerpt), *paulkipnes.com*

God damn You, God!

What's with the raging wildfires and destructive flooding, the mass shootings and mindless meanness all around? Why the antisemitism against us Jews, and the explosive hatred against Asian Americans, and against immigrants and trans people? Have You no shame allowing the self-proclaimed white supremacists a public stage, and giving climate change free reign? What about the loss of life in Afghanistan and the destruction in Haiti yet again?

Our Israelite ancestors suffered for four hundred generations in Egypt before You deigned to deliver us to freedom. How many more need to die to motivate Your mercy, to finally get You to act on our behalf? What the heck is going on with You, God?

It's Yom Kippur and we are here to confess our sins to You. However, I think this year, Holy One, it's You who ought to be doing the confessing. It's You who should seek forgiveness from us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Citrin, Paul, ed. *Lights in the Forest: Rabbis Respond to Twelve Essential Jewish Questions.* New York: CCAR Press, 2014.

Kedar, Karyn D. *Amen: Seeking Presence with Prayer, Poetry, and Mindfulness Practice.* New York: CCAR Press, 2020.