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Jewish Literacy Programme

Year 6 Special Study Pack

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Part 1: Shabbos and Chagim

1. Shabbos

- Proper observance of Shabbos protects all other areas of Jewish practice. If we want to know if someone is an observant Jew we ask whether they are 'Shomer Shabbos.'
- On Shabbos we turn our minds away from weekday matters and concentrate instead on spiritual things, and on our purpose in life.
- We attend shul, learn Torah, and spend time with family. We wear special clothes, eat good food and sing Shabbos songs (zemirots).
- In these ways we enjoy the holiness of the day.
- 'K'vod Shabbos' = honour Shabbos, with special clothing;
- 'Oneg Shabbos' = delight in Shabbos / enjoy Shabbos, with fine food and wine.
- Shabbos candles: lit usually by women, at the beginning of Shabbos.
- Kiddush: to welcome and bless Shabbos, and to thank Hashem for giving it to us;
- Havdalah: when three medium stars are visible on Saturday night - to say farewell to Shabbos. It is made on wine, besamim (spices) and a flame (a candle with at least two wicks).
- Three meals are eaten on Shabbos:
 1. Friday night
 2. Shabbos day
 3. Shabbos afternoon (seudah Shlishis, the third meal)

Laws of Shabbos:

- 1) The 39 Melochos: these are 39 categories of creative activity that we must not perform on Shabbos. The Rabbis learnt these 39 Melochos from the activities that were performed in building and using the Mishkan (the temporary temple, first used in the desert, and then in Eretz Yisroel, until the permanent temple, the First Beis Hamikdash, was built in Jerusalem).
- 2) The Rabbis added prohibitions, to guard the holiness of Shabbos.
For example:
 - a. Muktze: one may not move an object that has no Shabbos use (e.g. a brick) or an object whose use is forbidden (e.g. a pen).
 - b. On Shabbos we should not speak about weekday topics, or talk about the coming week, or prepare for it (unless we are referring to a mitzvah, e.g. a Bris Milah or wedding)

2. The Festivals: Main Points

Some festivals are mentioned in the Torah (Chumash), others were established later by the Rabbis.

The Torah festivals are:

1) The Sholosh Regolim - Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot

Sholosh Regolim = 'Foot Festivals' - the Jewish People travelled on foot to Jerusalem at these times to bring offerings in the Beis Hamikdash

2) Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur (the Yomim Noro'im)

3) Rosh Chodesh

The Rabbinic festivals are:

Chanukah and Purim

The Torah Festivals:

- Pesach: 15th Nissan / marking Exodus from Egypt (Yetzias Mitzrayim) / Chometz and Matzah / the seder / counting the Omer from the second day, until Shavuot

- Shavuot: 6th & 7th Sivan / marking receiving the Torah / 49 days after leaving Egypt ~ i.e. 49 days after Pesach / day after the last day of the Omer / Tikkun Leyl Shavuot (staying up all night learning Torah) / minhag to eat milky foods

- Sukkot: 15th Tishrei / dwelling in a sukkah / Arbo'oh Minim: lulav, esrog, hadassim, aravot

- Rosh Hashonah: 1st & 2nd Tishrei / Shofar: Tekiah _____ / Shevarim _____ / Teruah _____ / apple and honey, for a sweet year / other symbolic foods, for a year of many blessings / Tashlich, first day, after mincha / 10 Days of Teshuvah between Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur

- Yom Kippur: 10th Tishrei / day of Teshuvah / 5 forbidden activities: eating, drinking, washing, putting skin creams and oils on skin / leather shoes.

The Torah festivals (except Rosh Chodesh) have Yom Tov days, on which melachah (creative work) is forbidden (similar to Shabbos). Melachah is not forbidden on the Rabbinic festivals.

The Rabbinic Festivals:

- Chanukah: 25th Kislev / 2 miracles -

a. the military victory ~ mentioned in Al Hanissim, in the Amidah and Birkas Hamazon /

b. the oil lasted for eight days instead of for one day ~ mitzvah of lighting the menorah (Chanukiah)

Minhagim: oily foods, dreidel, Chanukah gelt

- Purim:

14th Adar / we celebrate the failure of the plot by Homon, wicked advisor to King Achashveirosh, to destroy the Jews. Jews saved by Queen Esther and her cousin Mordechai / Hashem doesn't appear in the Megilloh

Mitzvos:

Read the Megilloh twice, evening and morning

Mishloach Monos: sending two items of ready to eat food to one friend

Matonos l'Evyonim: gifts to the poor /- tzedokoh to at least two poor people

Seudas Purim: Festive meal on Purim day.

Minhagim:

Hamantashen / dressing up

Part 2: Overview of Sefer Bereshis and Sefer Shemos

Bereshis

Creation / Noach / the Avos and Imahos / Yosef as viceroy / Yaakov and his family go down to Egypt

Shemos

B'nei Yisroel in Mitzrayim / Moshe's birth and growth to adulthood and greatness / Moshe and Aharon deliver warnings to Paroh / the ten Plagues / Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus from Egypt) / Matan Torah (giving of the Torah) at Har Sinai / laws between people (Parashas Mishpotim) / the Mishkon and the Bigdei Kehunoh (clothes of the Kohanim)

Question:

If the Torah is our law book, why is the whole of the first book, Bereshis, full of stories about our forefathers?

Answer:

We are told, "Ma'asei Avos siman lebonim," which means, "the stories (lives) of our fathers are signs (lessons) for the children (us)." Also, "Derech Eretz kadmoh leTorah," "proper behaviour comes before [the details of the laws in the] Torah."

Hashem wanted to first teach us the proper ways to live our lives and behave towards each other before giving us detailed laws. Obviously, many of His laws guide us in proper behaviour, but in Sefer Bereshis we are shown the ways our Avos lived their lives so that we may learn from their example. It would seem that directing our lives according to the ways of our Avos is the foundation Hashem requires of us as a preparation for learning and observing the rest of the Torah.

Part 3: Avrohom Avinu and Moshe Rabeinu

Avrohom Avinu

We call Avrohom, “Avrohom Avinu,” - “Avrohom, our father.”

Avrohom is best known for his middoh of chesed, kindness.

Avrohom discovered Hashem - he looked at the world and decided there must be a Creator.

Avrohom converted men to belief in one G-d, Hashem, and Sarah converted women.

Hashem chose Avrohom as the first Jew and the father of the Jewish nation.

Hashem tested Avrohom ten times.

The Akeidoh was the greatest test of Avrohom’s faith in Hashem.

He had entrances all around his tent in order to welcome guests from all directions.

Yishmael was born to Hagar, Yitzchok was born to Sarah.

Avrohom bought Me’aras Hamachpeilah from Efron, to bury Soroh.

Avrohom is the example of “say little, but do much;”

Efron is the example of “say (or, promise) much, but do little.”

Avrohom rescued Lot and his family from Sedom.

At first, he challenged Hashem not to destroy Sedom if some good people could be found there.

Note that the difference between Noach and Avrohom was that Noach ‘walked with Hashem,’ but Avrohom ‘walked before Hashem.’ Noach did what Hashem required of him, while Avrohom went beyond what was strictly required of him, even to the point of ‘arguing’ with Hashem, and trying to get Him to ‘change His mind.’

Moshe Rabeinu

We know Moshe as, ‘Moshe Rabeinu,’ - ‘Moshe, our teacher.’

He was the greatest novi, prophet: Moshe was the closest person to Hashem, speaking to Him ‘face to face.’

A great *leader*, he led the Jewish People out of Egypt;

A great *teacher*, he taught the Torah to the whole nation;

A great *judge*, he sat judging the people from morning ‘til night;

The Torah also tells us that he was “Anav mikol odom,” “more modest / humble than any man / person.”

Part 4: Tefilloh Summaries

The Shema

- The Shema consists of three paragraphs from the Torah.
- The first line means, "Listen, Israel: The L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one."
When we say this line we are accepting on ourselves 'the yoke of Hashem's kingship'
 - we are accepting Hashem as our King and committing ourselves to obey His laws.
- The first paragraph tells us that we must love Hashem and dedicate our lives to keeping the Torah. The mitzvos of tefillin and mezuzoh are contained in the first paragraph, as well as the mitzvoh to say Shema at night and in the morning.
- The second paragraph contains a promise that if we carry out Hashem's commands we will be a happy people in our land (Eretz Yisroel), but if we do not follow His Torah we will be sent out of our land. Tefilin and Mezuzoh are mentioned again in this paragraph.
- The third paragraph contains the mitzvoh (commandment) of tzitzis, and a reminder that Hashem brought us out of Egypt and made us His people.
- Shema is unlike other prayers. In most prayers we are speaking to Hashem - thanking Him, asking Him for things, apologising to Him. In Shema, Hashem is speaking to us - telling us what we should believe and how we should live our lives. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks)
- Here is one question that we can ask: in Shema, we are commanded to love Hashem, but how can we be commanded to love someone? Surely, either we love them or we do not!

The answer is as follows: if a stranger were to ask us to love him it would make no sense, but it would be different if the person were close to us. It is difficult to love someone we do not know, someone who has done nothing for us. However, those who care for us, like our parents, who have given us many things, taken care of us, been kind to us - it is easy to love them. We do not need to be asked to love our parents, because we know all they have done for us and we are so grateful to them.

Therefore, when Hashem commands us to love Him, what He is really telling us to do is recognise all He has done for us and continues to do for us - give us our health, our family, our very life! Once we think about all Hashem has done for us our love for Him will come naturally!

The Shemoneh Esrei

- Shemoneh Esrei is the central and most important prayer in every full tefilloh, every day of the year, Shacharis, Mincha, Maariv, Mussaf on Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and festivals, and Ne'iloh at the end of Yom Kippur.

- It is fourth in the Shacharis tefillos:

1. Birchos Hashachar (morning brochos)
2. Pesukei d'zimroh (verses of praise - from Baruch She'amar to Yishtabach)
3. Shema
4. Shemoneh Esrei

History

- Shemonei Esrei means 'eighteen' - originally it contained 18 brochos, then the 12th one was added later, in which we ask Hashem to ensure our enemies do not harm us.

- The Shemoneh Esrei dates all the way back to Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov. However, its final form, essentially how we have it today, was written by Ezra Hasofer (Ezra the Scribe) and the Men of the Great Assembly (Anshei Knesses Hagedoloh) after the destruction of the First Temple.

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The **Anshei Knesses Hagedoloh** were 120 great Rabbis who arranged the wording and the order of the brochos in the Shemoneh Esrei. Until that time there were many different versions of the Shemoneh Esrei being said. The Anshei Knesses Hagedoloh wanted all Jews to be saying the same brochos and holy prayers so that they would feel a sense of strength and unity with other Jews wherever they are in the world. (This is true until today - go to shul for a tefilloh when you are on holiday and you will feel how wonderful it is that the prayers are the same wherever you might be in the world - as long as it is your 'Nussach' - i.e. Ashkenazi / Sefardi).

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After the destruction of the Second Temple the Shemoneh Esrei again began to appear in different forms, and again the Rabbis fixed a new format, also adding the 12th brochoh, against traitors and enemies of Judaism.

Structure

- The Rabbis divided the Shemoneh Esrei into three sections:

- 1) The first three brochos: PRAISE - praising Hashem for His greatness and kindness;
- 2) The next 13 brochos: REQUESTS - asking Hashem for all the things we need;
- 3) The last three brochos: THANKING - thanking Hashem for all He has done and continues to do for us.

The Shemoneh Esrei begins, ‘G-d of Avrohom, G-d of Yitzchok, G-d of Yaakov,...’

We come to speak to Hashem not as strangers but as children of the Avos, our great, holy forefathers who were great tzaddikim and very close to Hashem and loved by Him. “Even if we are not worthy of Your blessings and kindness,” we say to Hashem, “please remember us for good in the merit of our holy Avos, from whom we are descended.”

Aleinu

- Aleinu is said at the end of all our daily tefillos - it is the concluding prayer for Shacharis, Mincha and Maariv every day, as well as for Shabbos and festival prayers and Ne'iloh at the end of Yom Kippur.
 - 'Aleinu Leshabei'ach' means, 'It is our duty to praise...'
 - The tefilloh begins:
"It is our duty to praise the Master of all things
To mention the greatness of He Who created in the beginning
Who has not made us like the nations of other lands
And has not placed us like the families of the Earth..."
 - At the end of the second paragraph we proclaim that Hashem will rule for ever, and that one day all nations will recognise and accept Him as the One, true G-d Who is King over all the world.
 - This is a very old tefilloh. Rav Hai Gaon* states that this prayer was composed by Yehoshuah as he led the Jewish People into Eretz Yisroel. When he was about to settle them in the Promised Land, Yehoshua used this tefilloh to remind the Jewish People that they were different from the Canaanites and other nations. The other nations worship their own gods, "but we kneel, worship and offer thanks before the Supreme King of kings, who created the heavens and laid the foundations of the Earth."
- * Rav Hai Gaon was the last major great rabbi of the Geonic Period. He lived 1003-1038, dying two years before Rashi was born in 1040. Rashi lived at the beginning of the period of the Rishonim - the Early Halachic Authorities.
- We can also see that this is a very old prayer from the fact that it does not mention the rebuilding of the Temple and our return to the Land of Israel. Had it been written after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh it would surely have included a prayer for our return to the Holy Land.
 - Aleinu was made part of the Mussaf service on Rosh Hashonoh and Yom Kippur; on those holy days it is recited in a very solemn (serious) manner, and both the chazzan and congregation kneel as they say (or sing) part of it.

- Aleinu is a very important prayer. Halachah (Jewish law) requires that when it is recited in the synagogue everyone should join in. This would even apply to a person who has already said it, or who has just walked in to shul as it is being said.
- All through the dark Middle Ages, when Jews were suffering terrible persecution and many were being burned at the stake, Jewish people would often recite Aleinu with their dying breaths, to proclaim their faith in Hashem, and their belief that one day all the nations of the world will recognise Him as the One, true G-d.

Tefilloh summaries mainly adapted from 'My Prayer,' by Nissan Mindel