

# YOUNG JUDAEA'S



## HIGH HOLIDAYS KIT PART I- 5771 (2011)

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**Created and Compiled By the Young Judaea Education Team:**  
Andrew Fretwell, Manager of Youth Leadership & Education

# Reflect and Renew

Shalom Chevre!

Another summer has gone by and with it another chance for us as Jews to reflect on the past year and renew our commitment to bettering our selves and our world in the upcoming year. One of the most powerful prayers of the High Holidays is said on Erev Yom Kippur, *Kol Nidre*. Regardless of what denomination, every shul recites the *Kol Nidre* prayer, in which we acknowledge our shortcomings as human beings, release ourselves from beating ourselves up too badly about that, and allows us to enter our most sacred day, having already granted ourselves a degree of forgiveness.

Throughout the upcoming year, the theme for our educational programming is "Tradition and Revolution." We, as Jews, are endowed with a great sense of history, imagination, ambition and responsibilities. Coming to the end of our calendar is a reminder of the cyclical nature, not only of life, but the cyclical nature of Judaism. Year in and year out, we cycle through the Torah, reading the same book and the same passages as every other year. However, with these cycles comes an incredibly rich perspective, with a new set of insights each time we pass through this cycle.

The word revolution comes from the world revolve, as in to come into a full circle. The revolutions we stage are never entirely new, they are the newest incarnations of questions and struggles we have been grasping at for generations. As we enter the season of the High Holidays, the activities included in this packet encourage exploring questions around some of the basic ideas and concepts that have constituted us as a People and are a constant challenge for us to constructively wrestle with as a People.

Activities included put a focus on the story of the Binding of Isaac, which has a special reading on Yom Kippur, and the ethical, moral and theological questions that have made it the controversial centerpiece of our collective story, the tradition of the sounding of the Shofar, which connects us retroactively to the Mount Sinai as well as ahead to the Messianic Age, and also looks at the importance of the ritual of fasting in Judaism.

This kit also includes a "popcorn peulah," featuring the movie "Crimes and Misdemeanors," which asks the essential question, "Why act morally if you don't believe in God?" in which Jewish Director Woody Allen, turns some of the basic of tenants of Judaism on their head and in conflict, and recommended readings from two of the most important American/Eastern European rabbis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Abraham Joshua Heschl and Mordechai Kaplan.

I hope this kit helps you and invite you to be in contact with me directly if you have any questions or comments, b'hatzlacha and shana tova!

Andrew Fretwell,  
Manager of Youth Leadership and Education

# The Binding of Isaac

## By Andrew Fretwell, September 2011

**Goal:** to examine the tension created between mitzvot and an inner personal sense of morality and how to navigate through that tension

**Time:** 1 hour and 15 minutes

**Age:** Bogrim (14-18)

**Jewish Values:** Limmud Torah, mitzvot

**Essential Question:** How do I balance my inner-moral compass with religious obligation?

**Materials:**

- “The Story of Isaac” by Leonard Cohen on an iPod with speakers or this [YouTube clip](#)
- [“Abraham and Isaac” by Rembrandt](#)
- [“Parable of the Old Men and the Young” by Wilfred Owen](#)
- Shai Held’s Article [Religion’s Most Urgent Problem](#)
- [Parshat Veiyera](#)
- News articles of different religiously inspired acts, including:
  - [No renting to Arabs – Racism from the Torah](#)
  - [Self-Sacrifice and Welcoming the Stranger](#)

**Introduction: Icebreakers and Name Game (10 minutes)**

**Step 1: Trigger (5 minutes)**

Chanichim will hear a police report of a local man accused of attempted murder of his son and discuss how Abraham’s actions by today are unacceptable. (attached)

**Step 2: Interpretative Sicha (10-15 minutes)**

Split three sub-groups. Each sub-group will look at one interpretation of the Akeidat Yitzchak, “Abraham and Isaac” by Rembrandt, “Parable of the Old Men and the Young” by Wilfred Owen, and “The Story of Isaac,” by Leonard Cohen. As part of the sicha, each group will give the following characters, a thumbs-up, thumbs down or neither: God/Angel, Abraham, Isaac. (See attached sichot for each interpretation in the appendix)

**Step 3: Sharing Character Ratings (10-15 minutes)**

The sub-groups will share and explain their groups’ character ratings

**Step 4: Sicha (20-25 minutes)**

In hevruta groups (2-3), chanichim will read excerpts from Shai Held’s “Religion’s Most Urgent Problem” (the entire article is also attached) and the Racism from the Torah and Hurricane Irene articles, and discuss (attached in appendix)

**Step 5: Final Outcomes (5-10 minutes)**

Chanichim regather. Sicha leaders should already have placed the three interpretations around the room. In larger group, chanichim will choose the interpretation of the Akeidat Yitzchak they speaks to them the most and will have the chance to explain why.

# Sounding the Shofar

Andrew Fretwell, September 2011

**Goal:** to deepen understanding of the tradition of sounding the shofar

**Time:** 1 hour

**Age of Chanichim:** All Ages

**Jewish Values:** Hiddur Mitzvah, Limmud Torah, Mitzvot

**Materials:** Sa'adia Gaon's Reasons and short explanations, each on a sheet of paper, scrap paper and writing utensils, laptop with internet (for youtube clip) and purchased kazu for sikkum

## **Step 1: Introduction Trigger – 10 minutes**

Play a name game in the circle so everyone is introduced to each other. Once that is done, explain that during this activity, we will be thinking about the tradition of sounding the shofar.

## **Step 2: Learning Why It's Important – 20-25 minutes**

Chanichim will walk around the room and sit at 10 different stations. At each station, there is one of Sa'adia Gaon's reasons for sounding the shofar (attached in appendix, taken from Rosh Hashanah Shofar Blowing, by Rivka C. Berman on [www.mazornet.com](http://www.mazornet.com)). Chanichim will sit and read the paper and the suggested discussion question for 2 minutes.

## **Step 3 – Prioritizing – 5 minutes**

Hand out paper and writing utensils. In groups, chanichim will rank the ten reasons based on their own opinions with 1 being the most important, and 10 being the least important. Chanichim can also cross out reasons if they disagree with them or write in their own.

## **Step 4: Sicha – 15-20 minutes**

Pair up chanichim and have them present their reasons list and explain why to each other. After 7-8 minutes, regather everyone and have them present to everyone.

Use some of the following questions to press chanichim:

- Does anyone think it's not important to hear the shofar (emphasize it's ok to say yes), why not?
- Could you have achieved any of these things (reasons) without sounding the shofar? Is the shofar the only way to do it or the best way? How else could it be done?
- What do you think about when you hear the shofar? Do you actually feel any fear or awe??
- Do any of these reasons seem outdated?
- Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead? For those of you who don't, does the 10<sup>th</sup> reason make you uncomfortable?

## **Sikkum – 5 Minutes**

Watch the ["Shofar and the Dog" YouTube Clip](#), (funny!) and hand out Kazus and lead the whole group in the Shofar Commands!

# Why Jews Fast

Andrew Fretwell, September 2011

**Goal:** To broadening understanding, specifically why and which days, of the Jewish tradition of fasting

**Time:** 1 hour

**Age of Chanichim:** 3-8<sup>th</sup> graders

**Group Size:** no more than 30

**Materials:** Jewish Holiday descriptions (attached), Four Reasons for Fasting and Corresponding Tasks (attached), English Translation of the Birkat Hamazon (not attached)

## **Step 1: Trigger – 10 minutes**

Play a name game in the circle so everyone is introduced to each other. Once that is done, explain that during this activity, we will be thinking about the tradition of fasting.

## **Step 2: Fasting Days – 5 minutes**

The sicha leader will lay out papers with a full explanation of all the Jewish Holidays (attached in appendix). Chanichim must figure out which are fast days. Each chanich should get a different colored marker and put a check on the sheet of paper of each holiday they believe is a fast day.

## **Step 3: Short Sichá – 15 minutes**

Review the Fasting days (Yom Kippur, 9 B'Av, 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, 13<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tishre) and then ask which of the chanichim do any fasting, ask them to explain why they fast.

## **Step 4: Reasons and Tasks - 15 minutes**

Explain that among other reasons, we are looking at four major reasons Jews fast. Split the chanichim into four groups (each group needs a sicha leader).

The sicha leader will explain the reason to everyone, make sure they understand it, do the task, and then debrief after the activity to show its relevance. Each group being assigned a reason and a corresponding task.

## **Step 5: Explanations and Sikkum – 15 minutes**

Regather for each group to explain their reason and task. Chanichim will then share with each other the reason they most like of why Jews fast.

# Popcorn Peulah: Crimes and Misdemeanors

## Crimes and Misdemeanors ([1989](#))

**PG-13** 104 min - [Comedy](#) | [Drama](#) - [13 October 1989 \(USA\)](#)

Ratings: **8.0**/10 from [21,982 users](#) Metascore: [77/100](#)

Reviews: [123 user](#) | [58 critic](#) | [10](#) from [Metacritic.com](#)

An ophthalmologist's mistress threatens to reveal their affair to his wife, while a married documentary filmmaker is infatuated by another woman.

**Director:** [Woody Allen](#)

**Writer:** [Woody Allen](#)

**Stars:** [Martin Landau](#), [Woody Allen](#) and [Bill Bernstein](#)



CRIMES

AND MISDEMEANORS

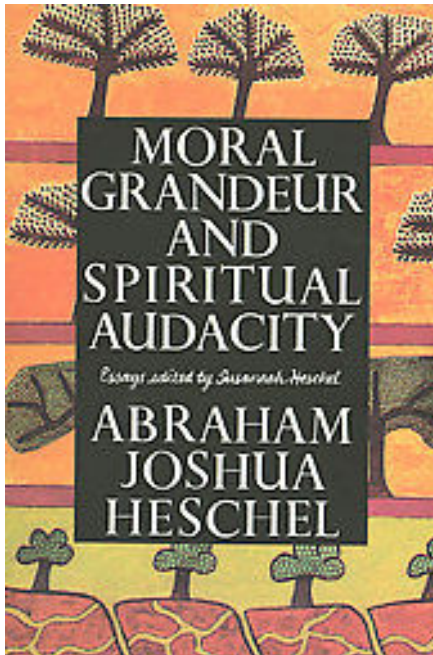
STORY BY: MARTIN LANDAU  
SCREENPLAY BY: MARTIN LANDAU  
CASTING BY: MARTIN LANDAU  
COSTUME DESIGNER: MARTIN LANDAU  
EDITORS: MARTIN LANDAU, JERRY WEINSTEIN  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER: MARTIN LANDAU  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: MARTIN LANDAU, JERRY WEINSTEIN  
PRODUCED BY: MARTIN LANDAU  
DIRECTED BY: MARTIN LANDAU

This movie, made by Woody Allen, asks a stunningly simple and profound question, "If you don't believe in God, why should you act 'morally'?" Highly acclaimed, this Woody Allen is one of his darker movies, that involves some of the deepest questions and cynicism of people, and even involves a scene in which Woody Allen relives a Passover Seder in which a family member denies the possibility of the existence of God because of the Holocaust.

Suggested Sicha Questions after watching:

- What do you think is the central question that Woody Allen is asking with this movie?
- What did you think of the Passover scene?
- Would you be more likely to side with his Aunt, who denies the existence of God, or his father who embraces faith as what makes life sacred?
- Does it feel wrong that Woody Allen's character, who is a good person, ends up not being happy, and the ophthalmologist gets away with murder, quite literally.
- Did it feel like it ended wrong? Was that the point of the whole movie?
- Do you think morality is relevant even if you don't believe in God?

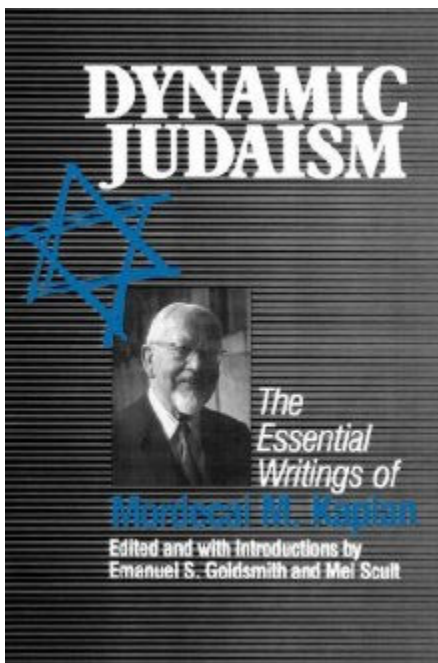
## Good Reads: Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity and Dynamic Judaism



### **Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel**

This book is a compilation of the late Rabbi's prose essays that range topics from activism in the civil rights movement and his anti-Vietnam war to celebrating the Jewish spiritual scene that he brought with him from Eastern Europe to the United States, including his thoughts on how prayer should be transformed and reinvigorated in American Jewish life. This book also contains a forward written by his daughter, Susannah Heschel.

From Google Books: This first collection of Heschel's essays - compiled, edited and with an introduction by his daughter Susannah Heschel, is a stunning reminder of the virtuosity of one of the most well respected minds in Judaic studies.



### **Dynamic Judaism: The Essential Writings of Rabbi Mordechai M. Kaplan**

This simple readers covers the most important writings of Rabbi Mordechai M Kaplan. Kaplan was a conservative Rabbi who ended up as the spiritual inspiration for the formation of Reconstructionist Judaism. Much of the platform of Reconstructionist Judaism and its interpretation of Jewish practice today, can be traced back to Kaplan's writings.

His essays in this reader include his thoughts on Jewish Peoplehood (a term that was not fully embraced by the Jewish community until after his death), Jewish ethics, interpreting Torah and the Rabbinic tradition and ideas for how to reinvigorate prayer and Jewish communal organizing in the United States.

# Appendix 1: Binding of Isaac Materials

Police Report: September 15, 2011

A local man of Middle Eastern origin, who police refuse to name, was arrested yesterday after several witnesses claim they saw him attempt to murder his only son. Several eyewitnesses say they saw the man lead his son away from a road up a secluded hill top carrying a large knife, ax and chopped wood. When bystanders called the police to report the suspicious activity, police reported to the scene immediately.

Police found the accused holding a bloodied knife, a mutilated animal, and nearby his son, physically unharmed, tied to chopped wood, which appeared prepared to be burnt. The alleged attempted murderer's wife told police that she nothing of her husband's plans that afternoon with their soon, but shortly after being notified about the arrest went into cardiac arrest and is still in unstable, critical condition.

The local man claims that God spoke to him and instructed him to sacrifice his son, but an angel prevented him from doing so and instead he slaughtered a nearby animal. He has been placed in jail and is awaiting his trial for attempted murder.

Sicha:

- Who knows what this is a modern parody of?
- Does he deserve to be arrested and convicted?
- If Abraham's actions are so unacceptable, why is it such an important part of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, hailing Abraham's faithfulness? *Don't answer this question now, but think about it through the rest of the peulah.*

## INTERPRETATIONS SICHOT

### **Abraham and Isaac, Rembrandt – Sicha**

What is the importance that Abraham is covering Isaac's face (which is not in the story)?

*Three things are important about that. One, shortly before Rembrandt painted this, his infant son died, which gives a special understanding of the pain of a father to lose a son. Rembrandt may be implying that had Abraham looked his son in the face, he would have been unable to sacrifice him.*

*A second important interpretation is Isaac's relative purity and blindness. He has according to this interpretation allowed his father to blind him so that he may be slaughtered.*

*A third interesting note is that while Abraham uses his left hand to cover the eyes of his son, the angel uses his/her left hand to gesture to Abraham, i.e. to visually get his attention, creating an interesting dichotomy between the enlightenment Abraham is receiving from God, and the awareness he is withholding from Isaac.*

Look at the use of light and darkness. While Abraham's face is light the rest of him, including his hands, are dark. Important or no?

*Yes, important. Abraham is at once light and dark, with his face, which is looking at an angel, is white and therefore holy, while he is clothed in dark colors, representing his grieving for the imminent loss of his son, and the darkness of his hands, which are about to kill his son.*

What about Isaac, he is nearly naked and so light that he is basically illuminated; only partially covered by shadow? What is Rembrandt saying with that?

*Between his covered face and his near nakedness, Rembrandt places a great emphasis on Isaac's purity and helplessness. The fact that the bright whiteness of his skin, also evokes a sense of hope as Isaac is Abraham's only son (not counting Ishmael) and the partial shadow covering representing the looming threat to him.*

### **Parable of the Old Man and the Young - Sicha**

Introduction to this parable: This poem was written by Wilfred Owen, who was an English Poet and World War I Veteran. This poem was published first in 1920 as a protest to European governments in the wake of World War I.

What are the main differences between this poem and the story from the Torah?

Obvious Answer: Abraham rejects the angel and completes the task of killing Isaac.

Other differences: Abraham does not answer Isaac's question and proceeds to sacrifice him?

If this poem is a metaphor for World War I, who does Abraham represent?

*Abraham represents the European governments, on both sides, who rejected finding peaceful solutions to their challenges, and instead settled on sacrificing hundreds of thousands of their sons in war.*

What does the "Ram of Pride" mean?

*The ram of pride was a way of fulfilling the task and a sort of creative middle ground "Well I won't sacrifice my son, but at least I'll do this." For the leaders of Europe, Owen implies that the leaders of*

*Europe could have avoided mass casualties if they were willing to swallow their pride and find a compromise-creative solution to their issues.*

Does this poem give us any insights into Isaac and who he is? Who is he in the metaphor?

*Isaac is the millions of young men who fought in World War I, many of whom were injured or died (9 million combatants were killed in World War I), without an honest explanation from Abraham/their governments of why they were being unnecessarily sacrificed.*

What about the angel?

*An important interpretation from this is that Owen believes that not even a messenger of God can stop man from committing atrocities in the name of pride and greed, and therefore degrades the power of divine intervention in human affairs.*

### **The Story of Isaac – Sicha**

Introduction – this song was written and performed by Leonard Cohen, a popular folk singer from the 1960s to today. Cohen is one of the most well known folk singers and also an Orthodox Jew. His most famous song you may know, though you probably know a different version, is *Hallelujah*. This song is from the perspective of Isaac and moves on to a modern commentary.

What does Isaac think of his father Abraham?

*Clearly, while he doesn't seem to feel necessarily close to his father, he respects him, (he mentions his blue eyes that were shining and he seems to accept his father at his word that he is a man of god.)*

What can we make of Isaac in this song?

*An interesting observation is how Isaac seems to understand how momentous and uncertain the situation is. He talks about how tall the mountain is (trees got much smaller, the lake a lady's mirror, then he threw the bottle over, broke a minute later).*

What about his father's hand trembling with the beauty of the word? What does that imply?

*This reinforces a respect for his father's respect for God. The "beauty of the word" is interesting as it shows that Isaac believes that his father did tremble at the moment of sacrifice, not though for grief over his son or relief in not killing him, but in awe of God.*

What about the vulture or eagle comment?

*Isaac's inability to figure out whether the bird he saw was a vulture or an eagle can imply that he is still uncertain if the attempted sacrifice was a moment of glory (eagle) or a low-point for humanity (vulture) and even now is conflicted by what happened.*

*It's also possible since there is not mention of an eagle or vulture in the story, that Isaac actually sees the angel and cannot recognize it.*

## HEVRUTA SICHA (DISTRIBUTE TO EACH HEVRUTA GROUP)

*First, read the following article by Shai Held before the sicha.*

- Did Abraham display a sense of inner morality in this story? Does his direct communication pardon him of acting on an inner morality? Is it important that at the time, child sacrifice was common?
- Has Judaism been important to your understanding of right and wrong?

*Now read the article labeled “Rabbis: Racism is from the Torah,” and the article about Hurricane Irene.*

- Do you consciously think about Judaism or the Torah to act ethically or is it more intuitive?
- What are some stories you’ve seen on the news about people doing what we think is immoral, in the name of religion?
- Have you ever felt Judaism has put you in a position where you feel moral conflicted?
- If both the “racism from the Torah” and the Hurricane Irene articles come from the Torah, how would you selectively use the Torah to do good?

## Parable of the Old Man and the Young Wilfred Owen

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
and builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.  
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

## The Story of Isaac - Leonard Cohen

The door it opened slowly,  
my father he came in, I was nine years old.  
And he stood so tall above me,  
his blue eyes they were shining  
and his voice was very cold.  
He said, "I've had a vision  
and you know I'm strong and holy,  
I must do what I've been told."  
So he started up the mountain,  
I was running, he was walking,  
and his axe was made of gold.

Well, the trees they got much smaller,  
the lake a lady's mirror,  
we stopped to drink some wine.  
Then he threw the bottle over.  
Broke a minute later  
and he put his hand on mine.  
Thought I saw an eagle  
but it might have been a vulture,  
I never could decide.  
Then my father built an altar,  
he looked once behind his shoulder,  
he knew I would not hide.

You who build these altars now  
to sacrifice these children,  
you must not do it anymore.  
A scheme is not a vision  
and you never have been tempted  
by a demon or a god.  
You who stand above them now,  
your hatchets blunt and bloody,  
you were not there before,  
when I lay upon a mountain  
and my father's hand was trembling  
with the beauty of the word.

And if you call me brother now,  
forgive me if I inquire,  
"Just according to whose plan?"  
When it all comes down to dust  
I will kill you if I must,  
I will help you if I can.  
When it all comes down to dust  
I will help you if I must,  
I will kill you if I can.  
And mercy on our uniform,

man of peace or man of war,

the peacock spreads his fan.

**Abraham and Isaac – Rembrandt, 1643**



## EXCERPTS FROM SHAI HELD'S "RELIGION'S MOST URGENT PROBLEM"

Scholar Moshe Hellinger has described Unna's vision of Judaism as a two-tiered structure in which the universal-humanistic is the first floor, while the national-Jewish is the second. Unna insisted that the second floor must be interpreted in light of the first - that is, that Torah must be understood through the lens of a fundamental commitment to the human, and not merely the Jewish.

Unna concluded his talk with a courageous declaration: He advocated for a "Jewish humanism learned from our Torah," and then added: "It is crucial to emphasize the word 'humanism.' It is not enough simply to say 'according to the Torah,' because from the Torah many different things can be learned. 'The Torah has 70 faces,' and one can even learn from it the obligation to commit acts of terrorism ... The word 'humanism,' therefore, comes to explain and clarify which values from among those values found in our literature we seek to internalize in our educational system."

...

"It is forbidden," Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook writes, "for the fear of heaven [yirat shamayim] to push aside the human being's natural morality, for then it would no longer be pure fear of heaven." Kook argues that every human being has an internal - we might say, God-given - moral compass, and that religious passion must never override its teachings. Piety is pure when it deepens our concern for others, impure when it dilutes our sense of ethics, or even gives us license to behave in ways we would have found unconscionable had we not been religious. (Many of Rabbi Kook's presumed spiritual heirs would no doubt benefit from an intensive review of his words.)

In light of Rabbi Kook's words, I would remind religious leaders around the world: If your religious commitments render you less moral than you would otherwise have been, then your religion is impure and idolatrous. Each of us, all of us, must ask: How do we build religious lives in which our care for others is intensified rather than attenuated? There is no more urgent religious question.

# Top rabbis move to forbid renting homes to Arabs, say 'racism originated in the Torah'

*Dozens of Israel's municipal chief rabbis signed on to the ruling, which comes just months after the chief rabbi of Safed initiated a call urging Jews to refrain from renting or selling apartments to non-Jews.*

By Chaim Levinson

A number of leading rabbis who signed on to a religious ruling to forbid renting homes to gentiles – a move particularly aimed against Arabs – defended their decision on Tuesday with the declaration that the land of Israel belongs to the Jews.

Dozens of Israel's municipal chief rabbis signed on to the ruling, which comes just months after the chief rabbi of Safed initiated a call urging Jews to refrain from renting or selling apartments to non-Jews.

Signatories include the chief rabbis of Ramat Hasharon, Ashdod, Kiryat Gat, Rishon Letzion, Carmiel, Gadera, Afula, Nahariya, Herzliya, Nahariya and Pardes Hannah, among a number of other cities.

"We don't need to help Arabs set down roots in Israel," Rabbi Shlomo Aviner of the Beit El settlement, said on Tuesday. Aviner explained that he supported the move for two reasons: one, a Jew looking for an apartment should get preference over a gentile; and two, to keep the growing Arab population from settling too deeply.

"Racism originated in the Torah," said Rabbi Yosef Scheinen, who heads the Ashdod Yeshiva. "The land of Israel is designated for the people of Israel. This is what the Holy One Blessed Be He intended and that is what the [sage] Rashi interpreted."

He added that he did not see the move as racist so much as segregationist. "The world is so big and the State of Israel is small, that God intended it for the people of Israel and the whole world covets it. That is the injustice."

Upon news of the religious ruling, Meretz faction whip Ilan Ghilon immediately asked the attorney general to dismiss each of the rabbis who had signed their names.

"We are witnessing an epidemic of racism and xenophobia and we must act firmly," he said.

Deputy Knesset chairman MK Ahmed Tibi decried the letter as a "mass crime [committed] by a group of racist rabbis who should be given intensive course in Jewish history."

The entire group should be tried for "incitement to racism," added Tibi, "Muslim clerics have recently been tried or fired from their jobs for much less but the rabbis are able to pursue their unruly behavior without concern.

Haifa Mayor Yonah Yahav termed the ruling the "real desecration of God's name. It is bringing hatred against those with whom we have chosen to live our lives."

Nazareth Mayor Ramiz Jaraisy also decried the moving, declaring that "whoever thinks it damages one side is mistaken. We are all children of the land. Both nations must search for common ground and not bring about escalation."

In their ruling, the rabbis called on the religious community to voice support for Safed Chief Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, who could face trial for incitement against Arabs for initiating the move against renting to gentiles.

Minority Affairs Minister Avishay Braverman has also asked Justice Minister Yaakov Neeman to begin the process of suspending Eliyahu immediately from his post as municipal rabbi.

Politicos from the national religious sector believe that the mass of prominent figures who signed on to the ruling – all of whose salaries are paid by public funds – will send a message to the attorney general to take Eliyahu's position seriously.

The rabbis' letter prompted by Eliyahu, which was first published months ago and reprinted in October, urges Jewish owners of apartments to reconsider renting their properties to Arabs since it would deflate the value of their homes as well as those in the neighborhood.

"Their way of life is different than that of Jews," the letter stated. "Among [the gentiles] are those who are bitter and hateful toward us and who meddle into our lives to the point where they are a danger."

The rabbis also urge neighbors of anyone renting or selling property to Arabs to caution that person. After delivering the warning, the neighbor is then encouraged to issue notices to the general public and inform the community.

"The neighbors and acquaintances [of a Jew who sells or rents to an Arab] must distance themselves from the Jew, refrain from doing business with him, deny him the right to read from the Torah, and similarly [ostracize] him until he goes back on this harmful deed," the letter reads.

## Hurricane Irene takes toll on Jewish community with 3 deaths

by Dan Klein, JTA

For some in the Jewish community, Hurricane Irene was a soggy inconvenience.

But for others, it became a moment to extend a helping hand — in at least two cases, tragically.

David Reichenberg, a 50-year-old Orthodox Jewish father of four from Spring Valley, N.Y., died saving a father and his 6-year-old son from a downed power line. Reichenberg came into contact with the live wire and was electrocuted. He was one of at least three Jews who were reported killed in the storm.

Michael Kenwood, 39, also died while attempting to help others. A volunteer first aid worker from Princeton, N.J., Kenwood was checking a submerged car that rescuers thought was occupied when he became untethered and slipped. Kenwood was swept away by the current and later was pulled unconscious from the waters. He died later that night, reported the Trenton Times. The car was found to be abandoned.

Rozalia Gluck, 82, of Brooklyn, N.Y., was trapped in a Catskills motel that was swept away by flood waters during the storm. Authorities recovered her body late on Aug. 28. Isaac Abraham, a leader in the Brooklyn Chasidic community, told the New York Daily News that Gluck was a Holocaust survivor originally from Russia.

“She survived Hitler,” Abraham said, “but she couldn’t survive Irene.” By late afternoon Aug. 30, 40 deaths in 11 states were attributed to Hurricane Irene and the tropical storm that followed it, CNN reported.

When the cleanup effort began on Aug. 29, many areas of the East Coast were still without public transportation, reliable roads, electric power or telephone lines. The major denominational synagogue groups were still trying to contact constituent congregations in those areas in which staff members couldn’t get to work.

Except for power outages and some minor flooding, no synagogues reported much damage. Torah scrolls and historical documents were moved to safe buildings on high ground, said Rabbi Elliott Kleinman, chief program director for the Union for Reform Judaism.

Even before the storm struck, the Jewish community attempted to prepare for the worst. Some New York neighborhoods that are home to large Jewish communities were evacuated by order of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, including Brighton Beach and portions of Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn and Far Rockaway in Queens.

In Baltimore, the Rosenbloom Jewish Community Center opened its doors to 395 foreign workers, mostly Eastern European college students who had been evacuated from Ocean City, Md., the Baltimore Jewish Times reported. Although the JCC, located in the Baltimore suburb of Owings Mills, Md., had been designated an emergency evacuation center before, this was the first time the building had been used for that purpose.

“As a Jewish organization, the JCC has the privilege of stepping up to uphold the Jewish value of Hachnasat Orchim — welcoming of guests into one’s homes,” the JCC’s leadership wrote in an email, according to the report.

Before the storm, Jewish officials offered both practical and religious counsel in preparation for the hurricane. The URJ issued hurricane preparation guides.

## Religion's most urgent problem

*These words of a now sadly forgotten religious Zionist figure have everything to do with the 10th anniversary of 9/11.*

By **Shai Held**

Speaking in 1945, Orthodox Zionist leader Moshe Unna made an impassioned case for what he called "Jewish humanism." Unna was calling not for humanism in the sense of putting human beings rather than God at the center of the universe - a view no religious thinker could embrace - but rather humanism in the sense of an uncompromising commitment to universal human well-being and mutual responsibility. Humanistic ideals, Unna emphasized, are inherently universalistic; they are, he said, "moral and cultural values that generate a commitment to the world and to humanity."

Scholar Moshe Hellinger has described Unna's vision of Judaism as a two-tiered structure in which the universal-humanistic is the first floor, while the national-Jewish is the second. Unna insisted that the second floor must be interpreted in light of the first - that is, that Torah must be understood through the lens of a fundamental commitment to the human, and not merely the Jewish.

Unna concluded his talk with a courageous declaration: He advocated for a "Jewish humanism learned from our Torah," and then added: "It is crucial to emphasize the word 'humanism.' It is not enough simply to say 'according to the Torah,' because from the Torah many different things can be learned. 'The Torah has 70 faces,' and one can even learn from it the obligation to commit acts of terrorism ... The word 'humanism,' therefore, comes to explain and clarify which values from among those values found in our literature we seek to internalize in our educational system."

What Unna was saying is that we cannot pretend to derive our values from a simple, straightforward reading of Torah, since Torah contains multitudes, and can be read as advocating universal humanism, on the one hand, and radically particularistic chauvinism, on the other - and, of course, anything and everything in between. We need a principle of interpretation in light of which we read everything else. For Unna, that principle is "Jewish humanism."

Although it may not be obvious at first glance, these words of a now sadly forgotten religious Zionist figure have everything to do with the 10th anniversary of 9/11. Unna's remarks are in many ways more pertinent now than ever, and not just for Jews. What Unna demands of us is relentless honesty about what guides our reading of religious traditions, about what values ultimately animate us.

The world is not divided between those who read selectively and those who don't. It is more accurate to say that the real division is between those who acknowledge that they read selectively, and those who do not - or who, given their assumptions, simply cannot. If contemporary Jews want to accentuate those voices in Torah that stand for the ontological superiority of Jews over Gentiles, voices that often end up demeaning the other, we can do so. If, on the other hand, we want to focus on those sources that insist upon the shared dignity of every human being created in the image of God, and upon God's concern with the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, we can do that, too. If we want to be responsible heirs of Torah, we will have to decide - either explicitly or implicitly, either consciously or unconsciously - what to read in light of what.

All religious traditions contain the raw material to generate and cultivate lives of enormous beauty and moral sensitivity, and the raw material to generate and cultivate unspeakable ugliness and moral obtuseness. In this regard, Judaism is no exception.

People often ask whether religion leads to violence. To be honest, I find this question baffling. Of course

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religion leads to violence. History is littered with the victims of humanity's seemingly insatiable hunger for crusades and holy wars. But religion also leads to goodness, and kindness, and acts of love that boggle the imagination. History is filled with countless examples of compassion and self-sacrifice in the service of a God who summons human beings to care for the vulnerable. To ask whether religion engenders violence, then, is to ask the wrong question. A better question, I think, is this: Given that religion has the capacity to inspire both wanton brutality and immense generosity, how do we become responsible heirs of tradition? How do we raise children whose religious passion leads them down the path of loving-kindness rather than the path of callous indifference or even murderous hate?

"It is forbidden," Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook writes, "for the fear of heaven [yirat shamayim] to push aside the human being's natural morality, for then it would no longer be pure fear of heaven." Kook argues that every human being has an internal - we might say, God-given - moral compass, and that religious passion must never override its teachings. Piety is pure when it deepens our concern for others, impure when it dilutes our sense of ethics, or even gives us license to behave in ways we would have found unconscionable had we not been religious. (Many of Rabbi Kook's presumed spiritual heirs would no doubt benefit from an intensive review of his words. )

In light of Rabbi Kook's words, I would remind religious leaders around the world: If your religious commitments render you less moral than you would otherwise have been, then your religion is impure and idolatrous. Each of us, all of us, must ask: How do we build religious lives in which our care for others is intensified rather than attenuated? There is no more urgent religious question.

Rabbi Shai Held is co-founder and dean of Mechon Hadar in New York City.

# **Appendix 2: Sounding the Shofar Materials**

## **1. Because Rosh HaShanah Marks the Beginning of Creation**

*Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the creation of humankind or the world's birthday. The presence of Adam and Eve gave God subjects who could then look God as Sovereign, and a shofar is blown as a symbol of God's coronation. A reigning God is an image evoked frequently in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy. There are many reasons for this symbolism and one of the main reasons is because life and death decisions are ultimately in God's hands.*

## **2. To Announce the Start of the Ten Days of Repentance**

*Like a starting gun at the beginning of a race, the shofar blast marks the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance from Rosh Hashanah (1 Tishrei) to Yom Kippur (10 Tishrei).*

### **3. To Remind us of Standing at Mount Sinai when the Shofar was Sounded**

*At Mt. Sinai a shofar sound was heard: "And then the voice of the shofar sounded louder and louder" (Exodus 19:19). On Rosh Hashanah we renew our allegiance to the Torah as guide to a good and meaningful life.*

## 4. To remind us the words of the prophets

*Prophets used the shofar to call the people together to repent and to demand that they change their immoral behaviors. Hearing the shofar in the synagogue should have the same effect on us.*

## 5. To remind us of the Destruction of the Temple

*The mournful sound is a cry of mourning for the Temple that once stood in Jerusalem. Long ago, the entire Jewish nation would gather at the sound of the shofar. Now the Jewish people are scattered and divided. Hearing the shofar in this context reminds listeners to work and pray for Redemption and unity.*

## 6. To remind us of the Binding of Isaac

*Abraham followed God's orders and was prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, but thanks to heavenly last-minute intervention, he offered a ram instead. Shofars are horns from rams or similar animals and are meant to recall this episode.*

*What the "Binding of Isaac" is supposed to mean to us is subject to a wide, conflicting variety of interpretations. Abraham's absolute faith can be seen as an incredibly worthy quality. He was willing to sacrifice the son he waited for, for so long, just because God said so. The magnitude of his faith is even greater when Abraham's kind nature is weighed against the brutality of the act he was asked to do. Abraham's pure faith is to inspire greatness within his descendants.*

*From another viewpoint, God was trying to teach Abraham not to act without thinking. Not to lose his personal judgement even before God. Abraham blindly followed God's word, even though this meant contradicting the kindness that was Abraham's hallmark. God wanted Abraham to seize responsibility for his own deeds, to deeply internalize morality until it could not be shaken, even by Divine command.*

## 7. When we hear the sound of the shofar we feel fear and awe

*“Shall a shofar be sounded in the city and the people not be afraid?” (Amos 2:6) In direct translations of the Hebrew, yirah, the emotion that the shofar is supposed to create, is translated as fear. But it should not be confused with fear of the dark or the boogiemer under the bed; a better translation would be “awe.” A shofar sound, the powerful throaty blast from a horn brings about a feeling of awe, lofty majesty. Mere mortals stand humbled before this representation of God’s might.*

## 8. To remind us of the Day of Judgment

*It is prophesied that the Messianic Era and the commencement of Judgment will begin with the blast of the Shofar from Jerusalem. Therefore, we hear the Shofar to remember that someday the Messiah will arrive and all the world will find itself in a day of judgment.*

## 9. To remind us of the gathering of the dispersed of Israel

*The Jewish idea of the Messiah or in a better transliteration of the Hebrew, Moshiach, includes a phase for the ingathering of Jews from all over the world to Israel. This phase will be announced by another sounding of the shofar. Given the hurtful divisions between Jews, between people of all races and religions, the shofar's sound can motivate prayer for the understanding that leads to unity.*

## 10. To remind us of the resurrection of the dead

*Phase three of Moshiach(Messianic Age) will feature the resurrection of the dead. Once again a shofar will be blown to announce this miraculous event. Even before this era arrives, this aspect of the shofar can remind us that life and death are in God's "Hands."*

## *Rosh Hashanah — The Jewish New Year*

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According to oral tradition, Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish new year, day of memorial and the day of judgment, in which [God](#) judges each person individually according to their deeds, and makes a decree for the following year. The holiday is characterized by the special [mitzvah](#) of blowing the [shofar](#). According to the Torah, this is the first day of the seventh month of the calendar year that marks the beginning of a ten day count to Yom Kippur.

## *Yom Kippur — Day of Atonement*

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[Yom Kippur](#) is the holiest day of the year for most Jews. Its central theme is [atonement](#) and [reconciliation](#).

## Sukkot — Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles)

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[Sukkot](#) is a 7 day [festival](#), also known as the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Tabernacles, or just Tabernacles. It is one of the three pilgrimage festivals mentioned in the Bible. Sukkot commemorates the years that the Jews spent in the desert on their way to the Promised Land, and celebrates the way in which God protected them under difficult desert conditions. The word *sukkot* is the plural of the [Hebrew](#) word *sukkah*, meaning booth. Jews are commanded to "dwell" in booths during the holiday. This generally means taking meals, but some sleep in the *sukkah* as well.

There are specific rules for constructing a *sukkah*.

## Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

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[Simchat Torah](#) "rejoicing with the [Torah](#)". It actually refers to a special ceremony which takes place on the holiday of [Shemini Atzeret](#). This holiday immediately follows the conclusion of the holiday of [Sukkot](#). In [Israel](#), Shemini Atzeret is one day long and includes the celebration of Simchat Torah. Outside Israel, Shemini Atzeret is two days long and Simchat Torah is observed on the second day, which is often referred to by the name of the ceremony. The last portion of the [Torah](#) is read, completing the annual cycle, followed by the first chapter of [Genesis](#). Services are especially joyous, and all attendees, young and old, are involved.

## Hanukkah — Festival of Lights

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The story of [Hanukkah](#) is preserved in the books of the [First](#) and [Second Maccabees](#). These books are not part of the [Tanakh](#) (Hebrew Bible), they are [apocryphal](#) books instead. The miracle of the one-day supply of oil miraculously lasting eight days is first described in the [Talmud](#).

Hanukkah marks the defeat of [Seleucid Empire](#) forces that had tried to prevent the people of [Israel](#) from practicing Judaism. [Judah Maccabee](#) and his brothers destroyed overwhelming forces, and rededicated the [Temple in Jerusalem](#). The eight-day festival is marked by the kindling of lights — one on the first night, two on the second, and so on — using a special candle holder called a [Chanukkiyah](#), or a *Hanukkah menorah*.

## Tenth of Tevet

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This day marks the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem as outlined in [2 Kings](#) 25:1

And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about.

A Torah reading and Haftarah reading, and a special prayer in the [Amidah](#), are added at both [Shacharit](#) and [Mincha](#) services.

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## Tu Bishvat — New Year of the Trees

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[Tu Bishvat](#) is the new year for trees. According to the [Mishnah](#), it marks the day from which fruit [tithes](#) are counted each year, and marks the point from which the Biblical prohibition on eating the first three years of fruit and the requirement to bring the [fourth year fruit](#) to the [Temple in Jerusalem](#) were counted. In modern times, it is celebrated by eating various fruits and nuts associated with the [Land of Israel](#). Traditionally, trees are planted on this day. Many children collect funds leading up to this day to plant trees in Israel. Trees are usually planted locally as well.

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## 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar

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The 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar commemorates the fast Esther made shortly before the royal banquet in which she revealed Haman as traitorous and consequently saved the Jews of Shoushan.

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## Purim — Festival of Lots

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[Purim](#) commemorates the events that took place in the Book of [Esther](#). It is celebrated by reading or acting out the story of Esther, and by making disparaging noises at every mention of [Haman](#)'s name. In Purim it is a tradition to masquerade around in costumes and to give *Mishloakh Manot* (care packages, i.e. gifts of food and drink) to the poor and the needy. In Israel it is also a tradition to arrange festive parades, known as *Ad-D'lo-Yada*, in the town's main street. Sometimes the children dress up and act out the story of Esther for their parents.

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## Pesach — Passover

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Passover commemorates the liberation of the Israelite [slaves](#) from [Egypt](#). No [leavened](#) food is eaten during the week of Pesach, in commemoration of the fact that the Jews left Egypt so quickly that their bread did not have enough time to rise. The first [seder](#) begins at sundown on the 15th of Nisan, and the second seder is held on the night of the 16th of Nisan. On the second night, Jews start counting the [omer](#).

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## Lag Ba'omer

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**Lag Ba'omer** is the 33rd day in the Omer count. The mourning restrictions on joyous activities during the Omer period are lifted on Lag Ba'Omer and there are often celebrations with [picnics](#), bonfires and bow and arrow play by children. In Israel, youth can be seen gathering materials for bonfires.

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## Shavuot — Feast of Weeks — Yom HaBikurim

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[Shavuot](#), The Feast of Weeks is one of the [three pilgrim festivals](#) (*Shalosh regalim*) ordained in the [Torah](#), Shavuot marks the end of the counting of the *Omer*, the period between Passover and Shavuot. According to Rabbinic tradition, the [Ten Commandments](#) were given on this day. During this holiday the [Torah](#) portion containing the Ten Commandments is read in the synagogue, and the biblical [Book of Ruth](#) is read as well. It is traditional to eat dairy meals during Shavuot.

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## Seventeenth of Tammuz

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The 17th of [Tammuz](#) traditionally marks the first breach in the walls of the [Second Temple](#) during the Roman occupation. A Torah reading and Haftorah reading, and a special prayer in the [Amidah](#), are added at both [Shacharit and Mincha](#) services.

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## Tisha B'av — Ninth of Av

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[Tisha B'Av](#) commemorates two of the saddest events in Jewish history that both occurred on the ninth of Av — the destruction in [586 BCE](#) of the [First Temple](#), originally built by King [Solomon](#), and destruction of the [Second Temple](#) in [70 CE](#). Other calamities throughout Jewish history are said to have taken place on Tisha B'Av, including King [Edward I](#)'s edict compelling the Jews to leave [England](#) (1290) and the [Jewish expulsion](#) from [Spain](#) in 1492.

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## 13<sup>th</sup> of Nisan

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On this day we remember the slain first born of Egypt that was killed as the tenth and final plague that persuaded pharaoh to let the Israelites be free.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tishre

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On this day we mourn the assassination of Gedaliah, who was a governor of Judah in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, which marked the final act of the dispersion of the Jews by Bablyon.

### **Reason 1: To show self-discipline and mastery over our bodies**

***By not eating, we show that we are in fact in control of our bodies, unlike animals that are entirely controlled by the needs of their bodies.***

**Task:** chanichim will be given a bag of M& M's, with chanichim assigned certain colors they can eat. Chanichim will sort out the M&M's.

Post-task sicha question: Does anyone here have a dog? Can dogs sort food and understand on their own when it's ok to eat without being told? Is that something that makes people special as opposed to animals?

### **Reason 2: To focus our mind on the spiritual**

***By not eating, we give ourselves the time and focus to put our minds and hearts on praying and reflecting, instead of cooking or eating.***

**Task:** Split into two smaller teams. Each team must race to build a house out of random materials provided (use your imagination and creativity for this). Whoever builds the house first wins. Both teams are given a bag of M&M's, but one team must eat the M&M's while they build the structure and the other team can only eat the M&M's afterwards.

Post-task sicha question: Was it easier for the group that wasn't allowed to eat until afterwards to focus on building their house? Did the group that had to eat during find it distracting?

### **Reason 3: To awaken God's compassion for us**

***By not eating and feeling a degree of suffering, we make God remember that we are at his mercy and need his compassion.***

**Task:** chanichim will read the English translation of the *Birkat Hamazon* and find sections that thank or ask God for compassion.

Post-task sicha question: Why do we pray after we eat?

### **Reason 4: To awaken our own compassion for others**

***By not eating, we temporarily understand what it means to be hungry and experience what millions of others go through every day of their lives.***

**Task:** chanichim will read the English translation of the *Birkat Hamazon* and find sections that invoke our concern for other human beings

Post-task sicha question: What does it show that in our prayer thanking God for food, that we pray for the well being of other people?