

Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot in Jewish Thought

JTHT 561
FALL 2010 semester
Hebrew College

Professor Polen

Please bring a bi-lingual Tanakh to every class. Other required texts include:

Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*
(HarperSanFrancisco, 1987)

Rachel Elijor, *The Three Temples* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2004)

Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale, 1980)

_____. *A Maimonides Reader* (you may already have this)

Introductory reading: Alexander Altmann and Gershom Scholem: "Mitzvot", in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Jewish Ideas and Concepts*. Jerusalem: Keter, 1977 (= *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol 5:783-791, s.v. "Commandments, Reasons for").

UNIT #I: THE COMMANDMENTS IN TANAKH. THE CENTRALITY OF MITZVAH.

(Be alert to the differences between reasons/ rationales/ consequences/ motivations/ promises of reward or punishment.)

- Gen. 2:16-17. Question: who was the first individual to suggest a *ta'am la-mitzvah*? What does this suggest about the enterprise of *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*?
- **Three covenantal signs:**
- The rainbow (Noahide covenant—prohibition of eating/spilling blood) Gen 9. Mitzvah and covenant/relationship with God. Gen. 9:1-17 (Noahide covenant).
- Circumcision (Abrahamic covenant) Gen. 17:-9-11. Gen. 18:19—"For I have known him, to the end that he may command...";
- Exodus 19:1-6; the Decalogue—Ex. 20.
- Shabbat as Israel's covenantal sign with God (Ex. 31:12-17); prefigured in Genesis 2:1-4—Seventh day as (rhythmic) rest—establishing the identity of time—days and week;
 - Reasons for Shabbat—Ex.20:11—imitatio dei in creation; Ex. 31:17—a sign of special relationship; Deut. 5:15—ethical/social.
 - Note that Shabbat in Decalogue is about blessing and sanctifying creation—bringing holiness and blessing into the world by means of sacred time. In Ex. 31:17, it's enacting the sacred temporal sign of relationship between God and Israel—Israel is brought into sacred proximity to God.; In Deuteronomy the primary emphasis is ethical, social, and historical.
 - These three modalities of understanding sacred time are echoed in other dimensions as well. Thus, in Ex. 25:8, the purpose of the mishkan is to bring God's presence into the world, to dwell with Israel (cf. Ex. 29:45-46). In much of Leviticus it's to sanctify Israel, to enjoin her to be holy, just as God is holy—requiring a degree of separation from the world—see Lev. 11:44-47; Lev. 18-24-30; Lev. 19:1; Lev.

20:22-27. But note Lev. 16:16—which stresses that the Presence abides within Israel’s impurity. And, by contrast, in Deuteronomy, the sanctuary—the residence of God’s **name**—is the destination for pilgrimage, the place to fulfill obligations, and to share with the Levite, the stranger, the orphan the widow—see, e.g., Deut. 12:5-6, 12, 18; Deut. 16:14.

- The Mishkan—Ex. 25:8; 25:22; 29:45-46.

The confluence of ethical and ritual holiness—Lev. 19. Question: What do the “I am the Lord” statements mean? Are they simply “Because I said so” statements? “Follow in His ways....”

- Exodus 19:4-6 and Deut. 4:1-8 both introduce the Decalogue; they are the statement of the essential meaning of the Covenant. Note the reasons given in Deut. 4:1-8--“so that you may live...”; “for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples . . .”—The commandments are a source of blessing, honor, distinction and admiration. The reasons are anthropocentric, centered on Israel. Now reread Exodus 19: 4-6—“I brought you unto Me; you will be My treasure...you will be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...”—the reasons are theocentric, focusing on the divine perspective, on God’s desire to have an intimate connection with Israel. Note that no mention is made here of the Land of Israel; cf. Ex. 29:45-46—“I will dwell among the Children of Israel...[I] brought them forth from the land of Egypt *so that I might dwell among them*]. Note also that both passages include the rest of the world, at least implicitly—in Exodus Israel is a kingdom of priests (presumably for the rest of the world), while in Deuteronomy it is the wisdom of the commandments which attracts the nations to Israel. Note that in Deut. 4:7 we are close to God when we call (=pray) to Him. (*kerovim eilav...kor’ einu eilav*); while in Exodus-Leviticus, the closeness (*karav*) is effected by *korban* (=sacrifice, offering).

→Compare Ex. 19: 1-7 with Deut. 26:16-19—YOU HAVE DISTINGUISHED HASHEM TODAY TO BE A GOD FOR YOU...AND TO MAKE YOU SUPREME OVER ALL THE NATIONS HE MADE.... and Ex. 24:1-8 with Deut. 27:1-9—the erection of large stones and an altar; the sacrifice of olot and shelamim, and the eating of the shelamim in joy; finally, YOU SHALL INSCRIBE ON THE STONES ALL THE WORDS OF THE TORAH, WELL CLARIFIED (BA’ER HEYTEV). Note that in Deut. 26:19, no mention is made of “a kingdom of priests”, rather SO THAT YOU WILL BE A HOLY PEOPLE TO HASHEM YOUR GOD, AS HE SPOKE.; and in Deut. 26, the people eat of the shelamim, but there is no mention of blood rites, specifically of the division of the blood and the sprinkling on God’s altar—the place-marker for God in the rite—and on the people, to bind them together. **In Deuteronomy the relationship is largely conceptual, based on fidelity to right ideas;** in the covenant rite of Exodus, is based—in addition to acceptance of the terms of the covenant—on affiliation of shared blood. Note the steps in Ex. 24 (Where does Moshe get this all from—He’s not told to do this!)

24:3—Moshe tells (va-yesaper) the people God’s words and laws, and the people answer Na’aseh

24:4—Moshe writes all God’s words, builds an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel

24:5—The youths of Israel bring olot and shelamim

24:6—Moshe divides the blood and sprinkles ½ on the altar

24:7—Moshe takes the book of the covenant and **reads** it to the people; the people say na’s eh ve-nishmah.

24:8—Moshe takes the blood and sprinkles it on the people and pronounces, BEHOLD THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT THAT HASHEM SEALED WITH YOU

CONCERNING ALL THESE MATTERS

→Note the centrality of the blood-application:

→Note the interleaving of the verbal portion—the telling, later the reading—with the blood rites

→All this is followed by the vision of God, and then by Moshe’s ascent to the top of the mountain.

→Note the parallel in Deuteronomy, where Moshe ascends Mount Nebo for his death-by-Divine-Kiss!!!

- Pesach—Ex. 12:27—We offer the Passover just as God passed over. . . . (Note that this is a kind of imitatio dei, and is not cited as an answer to any of the “four sons” in the Passover Haggadah—why not? Compare Ex. 13:1-10—memory of the month—focus on the season of departure and the eating of matzoh; what is the meaning of *ba-avur zeh*? Cf. Deut 16:3—“so that you may remember. . . .”; Note that both Ex. 23:15 and Ex. 34:18 stress [*ka-]asher tzivitikhah* for Pesach, much as the Decalogue of Deuteronomy does for Shabbat—Deut. 5:12-15—memory and obedience to commandment, in contrast to Ex. 20:11—imitatio dei.
- Deuteronomy generally provides practical, ethical, pedagogical motivations for observing the commandments. Note the emphasis on pedagogy. God *commanded* Moses, who *teaches* us (Deut. 4:1, 4:5). There is a constant focus on the Land as the fulfillment of the divine promises and oaths, and as the stage for Israel’s faithfulness to the covenant by fulfillment of the Mitzvot. Deut. 6:20-25—“When your son will ask. . . .”—Compare the reasons/motivations given here with Ex. 13:14-16. Note in Deut. 6:24-25 the emphasis on obedience to God’s command—for our good, our survival [*le-hayoteinu ka-yom hazeh*], our benefit. (Compare with the Passover Haggadah and Mekhilta!)

- Deut. 4:40—“that it may go well with you . . . that you may prolong your days on the land . . .”;

Categories of mitzvot—edot, hukkim, mishpatim—Deut 4:45, 6:20

- Deut. 5:16; 5:26—“O that they had such a heart . . .”;
- Deut. 5:30—“live and be well, prolong your days in the land. . . .”; 6:3; 6:4-10—“teach them to your children. . . .”; 6:18--“Do the right and the good”
- Rewards for observance of the commandments—Deut. 7:12-16; 8:1; 10:12-22—ethical motivations, love, gratitude; 11:13-25. “You are God’s children—14:1-2;
- Concern for the landless Levite—14:27-30; 15:10—“surely give the poor. . . .”;
- The centrality of memory—le-ma’an tizkor—Deut. 16:3,12; Memory and ethics--- Deut. 24:17-18.
- Reasons for constraints on the king—17:16-20; “Be wholehearted”—18:9-13.

Eglah Arufah—Deut. 21:1-9. Note the role of the kohen-*sherut*, not *avodah*; the *kapparah* comes from God directly (v. 8). Note the role of the leaders of the people—declaration of innocence and prayer for atonement (21:6-8; cf. Deut. 26:5-15). The voice of Scripture itself says the end of verse 8—“and the blood shall be forgiven them—*ve-nikaper lahem hadam*. Doing the right thing (v. 9) is what removes the taint of innocent blood having been spilled. Compare the Yom Kippur service in Lev. 16, esp. vv. 32-33. Compare also Num. 35: “the land will not be atoned, except by. . . .” with Deut. 19:10.

Also compare and contrast with the Parah Adumah—Num. 19. Note the initial similarities between parah adumah and eglah arufah—a cow/heifer; outside the camp; prompted by death/contact with the dead. Now note the differences—in the case of parah adumah, there is still a quasi-sacrificial quality—performed by Elozor, dedicatory sprinkling toward the tabernacle; and

the concern is with removal of lingering tume'ah—impurity, so that the tabernacle will not be contaminated. In contrast, the eglah arufah is concerned with the moral outrage—**nofel ba-sadeh**—lying [note the tense] fallen in the field... The concern is for the spilling of innocent blood, and the priests have little role except to stand witness and observe.

- The bird's nest—22:6-7; the parapet—22:8. Sha'atnez.
- Commandments as a mark of distinction, a privilege of relationship—Deut. 26:17.
- “That you may prosper”—Deut. 29:8; Choice of life or death—Deut. 30:15-20.

- Global explanations/goals for the mitzvot-- *asher ya'aseh ha-adam otam ve-hai bahem* (Lev. 18:5)
- *zizit*: Num.15:37-41; Sukkah: Lev. 23:43

Note the **personification of the land** in levitical texts-- Lev. 18:24-30; Lev. 20:22-26; Lev. 25:2 (note that it is the Land that pauses to rest!); 25:23 (the Land belongs to God); 26:34-35; 26:43 (the Land shall be satisfied with her Sabbaths...) Numbers 35:34 (do not pollute the Land—I am present [**shokhen**] there because you dwell [**yoshev**] there).

Love of mitzvot—Psalms 19, 111, 112, 119.

In Psalm 19, what is the significance of the juxtaposition of Torah and nature's regularity? Note the pattern of Creation-Revelation-Redemption. Verses 1-7—Creation (echoing perhaps Genesis 1?); vv. 8-14—Revelation (echoing perhaps deuteronomic sensibilities—wisdom, felicity, beneficence...); and verse 15 adding the final, psalmic note of interiority, personal spirituality, and Redemption

Isaiah 29:13—*mitzvat anashim melumadah*

UNIT #2: SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

The emergence of sects and a variety of approaches to Judaism. Pharisees, Saducees, Qumran; Philo. Reading: Rachel Eilior, *The Three Temples*.

Readings: David Winston, trans. and ed., *Philo of Alexandria* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 267-286.

Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book 1, Ch. 7; Book 2, Ch. 10; Book 2, Ch. 16 (end).

UNIT #3: RABBINIC LITERATURE.

Concern for order and structure: the emergence of modes of categorization and rank-ordering of mitzvot. Concern for the meaning of the mitzvah system, including the question of reward, spurred by historical circumstances, philosophical reflection and the challenge of other systems of thought (Hellenism, Christianity).

Key Rubrics:

- “*Bein adam la-haveiro/bein adam la-Makom*”
- “*Mitzvah kallah/mitzvah hamurah*”
- “*Mitzvat aseh/mitzvat lo-ta'aseh*”
- “*Hukkim/mishpatim*”

- Avot (Ethics of the Fathers; bring a copy to class) . Note that Avot continues and develops aspects of the biblical Wisdom tradition.
- Avot 1:3—concern over reward (*peras*); the concept of *seyag* (“protective fence”
- Avot 2:1—does *mitzvah kallah* mean “easy to fulfill” or “minor, less significant”?
Note the antonym of *mitzvah*—the term *aveirah*—is this biblical or rabbinic (note, e.g., Hosea 6:7)?—“Transgression” as the violation of a domain of permissibility, acceptability. Does this metaphoric usage relate to rabbinic constructions of sacred space? (Note that there are biblical terms not popular in the rabbinic literature—*het*, *avvon*, *pasha*.)
Note the term *sakhar*—“wages”
- Avot 2:21—“the reward of the righteous is in the Future to Come” (What historical circumstances may have prompted this statement? Compare with Deuteronomy on the one hand, and Job on the other....);
- Avot 4:2—the wages of *mitzvah* and sin; virtuous and vicious circles;
Avot 4:7—“do not make the Torah a spade”;
- 4:13—*mitzvah* personified as advocate;
Avot 4:22—the excellence of this-worldly virtue;
Avot 5:26—“No pain, no gain.”

Mishnah Kiddushin 1:10 (Whoever performs one *mizvah* . . .); Yoma 8:8-9; Keritot 1:1-2; Makkot 3: 16-17.

Special enumerations, listings and subsets of the commandments: the number 613; the seven Noahide Commandments; the Decalogue. Makkot 23b.
Makkot 24a—“The righteous shall live by his faith...”

Sifra Aharei Mot 13:10 (=b.Yoma 67b--*hukkim* and *mishpatim*; cf. Rashi on Lev. 18:4);
Sifra Lev. 20:26—a person should never say, I don’t like pork....

Unconditional acceptance of *mitzvot*—Shabbat 88a; --- Compare Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex. 19:17—*vayityatzvu be-tahit ha-har*, citing Deut. 4:11 on *va-tikrevun va-ta’amdun tahat ha-har* (lovingly snuggling in; ed. Lauterbach, vol. 2, p. 219.)

Shekhitah and other *mitzvot* to purify (*le-tzoref*) Israel—Genesis Rabbah 44:1;

- Berakhot 17a; 33b (on the bird's nest);
- Sanhedren 21b ("Why were the reasons of [some] biblical laws not revealed?");
- Makkot 23b-24a (R. Simlai . . .)
- Hullin 109b ("Yaltha once said to R. Nahman . . .");
- Menahot 43b ("whoever has tefillin . . .");
- Niddah 61b (*Mitzvot* will be cancelled in the Time to come).
- Kiddushin 31a (is voluntarism greater than obedience);
- Pesahim 50b ("A person should always occupy himself with Torah and *mizvot* even for ulterior motives. . . .")
- Rosh Hashanah 16a: A theurgic explanation of certain festival *mizvot*.
- Sukkah 37b-38a—“...*zot omeret: shi'yarei ha-mitzvah me'akvin et ha-puraniyot*... This implies that even the dispensable parts of a commandment prevent calamities; for the waving is obviously a dispensable part of the commandment, and yet it shuts out harmful winds and harmful dews...
- Berakhot 23a-b [the protective power of tefillin]—Rabba bar bar Hanna—When I would walk behind Rabbi Yohanan, when he wished to go the toilet, when he was holding a book of Aggadah in his hand, he would give it to us; but when he was carrying tefillin, he would not give it to us. He said, since the rabbis permitted one to hold the tefillin in one’s hand (and bring them in), the tefillin will protect me [Rashi—from evil spirits]

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 4 (on the red cow: ed. Braude-Kapstein, pp.59-60;82-83.)
Symbolic explanations of mizvot: VaYikra Rabba 30:9 (lulav and etrog)
“Behold thou art fair with mitzvot”—Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah on Song of Songs
4:1 (Soncino ed., p. 175).

Autonomy vs. heteronomy

- Yerushalmi Yoma 4:5--Bar Kappara taught: Had one mixed with the incense the smallest amount of honey, no one could have resisted the scent. Then why was no honey mixed with it? Because the Torah says: YOU SHALL PRESENT NO LEAVEN OR HONEY AS A FIRE-OFFERING TO THE LORD.

The emergence of Christianity. Paul. *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Ch. 7. *Epistle to the Galatians*.

UNIT #4. THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD.

Saadia Gaon; Bahya ibn Pakuda, *Hovot ha-Levavot*. Halevi, Kuzari 3:37—the power of performing mitzvot on the basis of accepting tradition.

Maimonides.

Commentary to Makkot 3:17--why are there so many commandments?

Sefer ha-Mizvot. Reading: Charles B. Chavel, trans., *The Commandments*, 2 vols. (London: Soncino, 1967), Foreword: Vol. 1, pp.vii-xvi; pp. 1-15; vol 2, pp. 329-331 (negative commandments #363-365)

Maimonides: *Mishneh Torah*. [Note colophon to *Mishneh Torah*]

Hilkhot Mezuzah, Ch. 5, par. 4 (Twersky, *Reader*, pp. 94-5); *ibid.*, par. 13;

Shevitat Yom Tov 6:17-19 (on the meaning of Simhas Yom Tov, and sharing the joy of Yom Tov with those less fortunate; cf. *Megillah* 2: 15)

Me'ilah Ch. 8, par. 8 (Twersky, *Reader*, pp.145-146); *Temurah*, end; *Tume'at Zara'at*, ch. 16, par. 10 (Twersky, *Reader*, pp. 152-153); *Mikva'ot*, Ch. 11, par. 12 (Twersky, *Reader*, p. 154);

Reading: Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale, 1980), pp. 373-459;

Once again, autonomy vs. heteronomy: *Shoftim* Ch. 8, par. 8-11 (Twersky, *Reader*, p. 221)—the disputed reading of *ela/ve-lo me-hakhameihem*.

Shemonah Perakim--The Eight Chapters, Chs. 4, 6; English translation in Isadore Twersky, ed., *A Maimonides Reader*, pp. 367-379.

Maimonides: *Guide of the Perplexed*, Part Two, Chapters 31, 40 (Twersky, pp. 290-294); Part Three, Chs. 26-32; 34-36; 51-54 (Twersky, *Reader*, pp. 310-358 [note especially page 345 on the goal of the commandments and inwardness]). *Guide*, 3:34—The Torah does not take exceptional circumstances into account; the details of mitzvot may not have a reason.

Nahmanides—Ramban. Introduction to Torah Commentary—Torah as Divine Names. Commentary on Ex. 13:16 (Chavel, Exodus, pp. 168-175)--Tefillin as sacred sign; the importance of miracles.

→Exodus 13:8--*Ba'avur zeh asah Hashem li*—See Nahmanides' discussion on

- Ex. 13:16—(Chavel, p. 170)--God gave us the commandments for His own Glory—*Ha'avodah Tzorekh Gavoha*—cf. below, on Exodus 29:46.
- Comm. on Ex. 20:8 (Chavel, Exodus, pp. 306-315)-- “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy”--Performative/prohibitive commandments
- Comm. on Ex. 25:1-3 (Chavel, Exodus, pp. 434-437) --The Tabernacle; Comm. on Ex. 31:2, “See I have called by name Bezalel...” (Chavel, Exodus, pp. 541-543).
- Comm. on Ex. 29:46 (Chavel, Exodus, pp. 506-507)--LESHOKHNI BE-TOKHOM (“. . . a great secret. . . For in the plain sense it would appear that the dwelling of the Divine Glory in Israel was to fulfil a want below, but it is not so. It fulfilled a want above [*tzorekh gavo-ah*]. . .”)—compare comm. on Deut. 22:6 (the bird’s nest).
- Comm. on Ex. 30:13 (Chavel, Exodus, pp. 518-520) The Shekel of Holiness; Hebrew as Holy Language.
- Comm. on Lev. 16:8. Yom Kippur, the Goat for *Azazel*. The scapegoat as conciliatory gesture to the Other Side. Chavel, Leviticus, pp. 217-222).
- Comm. on Lev. 18:4 (Chavel, Leviticus, pp. 244-246)--What the mizvot give the individual depends on one’s intention (*kavvanah*)—if you intend to get wealth and honor, you will; if you intend to get *olam ha-ba’*, you will...;
- Comm. on Lev. 19:2—“*Kedoshim Tihyu--Ye Shall Be Holy*” The danger of *naval bireshut ha-Torah* (Chavel, Leviticus, pp. 282-284).
- Comm. on Lev. 19:19--KILAYIM—mixing diverse kinds (Chavel, Leviticus, pp. 294-297)
- Comm. on Lev. 23:24. (Chavel, Leviticus, pp. 378-382) The letter and spirit of the law; broadening the meaning of Sabbath rest.
- Comm. on Lev. 23:40 (Chavel, Leviticus pp. 396-399) —the mitzvah of the Four Species (Lulav and Etrog). Comparing Maimonides and Nahmanides: cf. *Guide* 3:43.
- Comm. on Lev. 18:25 (Chavel, Leviticus, pp. 268-275) The mitzvot are meant primarily for the Land of Israel, diaspora performance is to keep in practice.
- Comm. on Numbers 7:21 (Chavel, Numbers, pp. 60-66)--The dedicatory offerings of the twelve Princes—the act was identical, but each individual’s intention was unique.
- Comm. on Numbers 19:2 (Chavel, Numbers, pp. 194-195) The *Parah Adumah* removes the spirit of impurity associated with death; *Tzaddikim* who have passed away do not generate impurity....
- Comm. on Deut. 6:18 (Chavel, Deuteronomy, pp. 87-88) “Do what is right and good (*yashar va-tov*)—Going beyond the letter of the law...
- Reading: David Novak, *The Theology of Nahmanides* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

Mizvot as pedagogy: *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*. Bilingual ed., trans. Charles Wengrov (Feldheim, 1984), Foreword, Vol 1, pp. 2-5; pp. 52-81; Mizvah #2, pp. 84-85; #3, pp.88-89; #7, pp.100-103; #16, pp. 118-121; #21, pp. 128-131; # 25, pp. 140-143; # 32, pp. 178-181; #33, pp. 181-183; # 73, pp. 282-287; # 92 , pp. 348-351 (meat and milk; note comment on Maimonides' reason!); #95, pp. 354-367.

Hasidei Ashkenaz: “*kefum tza'ara agra*”—the story of the man who tried to increase his reward.....

UNIT #5: HASIDISM AND THE MODERN PERIOD

R. Levi Yizhak of Berditchev, *Kedushat Levi* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 28-29 (Parashat Va-Yera, s.v. Va-Hashem Amar); pp. 15-16, s.v. *u-Malki-Zedek Melekh Shalem*: Mitzvah as straddling and linking the worlds of ayin and yesh, thus enabling the individual to channel blessing from the infinite to the finite.

R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya, Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, # 7 (pp. 425-430 of bilingual edition).

On the power of zedakah: *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, # 8.

R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, *The Light of the Eyes*, Arthur Green, ed. and trans. (New York: Paulist, 1982), pp. 71-9.

R. Judah Aryeh Leib of Ger, *Sefat Emet* vol 3, p. 206 (Parashat Be-Hukotai, s.v. "Be-Midrash, Hashavti Derakhai", 5638)

Sefat Emet 5:88c (p.176; Parashat Ha-azinu 5634, s.v. "be-Tur")-- On the importance of preparation for mitzvah

Sefat Emet V:25a-b (p. 49), Parashat Ekev 5656 (1896). The holiness of everyday life. Mitzvot to be found in every aspect of existence.

Reading: Arthur Green, *Devotion and Commandment* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1989).

Jonathan P. Slater, *Mindful Jewish Living: Compassionate Practice* (New York: Aviv Press, 2004), chapter 2: "Mindfulness, Torah and Commandment," pp. 23-49.

On the personal mitzvah which relates to the root of one's soul—see *Mei ha-Shiloah, Parashat Ki Tetzeh*, s.v. *Ki Yikare Kan Tzipor* (Bnei Brak 5755/1995), p.189; also *Parashat Va-Ethanan*, s.v. *Ve-Ahavta*, page 177.

Reading: Samuel Sperber, "The Notion of the Personal Mitzvah", *DAAT* 18 (1987);

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- (a) Class participation, based on reading and preparation (including pre-class study of primary sources)
- (b) An oral report. The report should focus on one mitzvah, and should explore the various ways in which the mitzvah has been understood and explained.
- (c) a take-home examination [which will cover, among other topics, keywords and phrases such as *hukkim*, *mishpatim*, *lishmah/lo li-shmah*, *ha-avodah tzorekh gavohah*; *naval birshut ha-torah*; *itaruta de-le'eylah ke-itaruta de-letatta*; *ha-adam nifal kefi pe'ulotav*; *kefum tza'ara agra...*]
- (d) a term paper on some aspect of *ta'amei ha-mizvot*. The paper may be an expanded version of your oral report. Papers will typically be about 15-20 pages in length; they should follow a consistent scholarly style for citations and notes; and should include a complete bibliography.

Maximum time for oral reports is ten minutes. Additional comments: An effective report will structure the material and provide perspective, demonstrating a grasp of the historical and other forces which had a role in shaping the material presented. You may wish to briefly touch upon the meaning of the mitzvah in your own life, but the main emphasis should be on texts and sources.

For both hukkim and mishpatim, there are challenges for your presentation. For the hukkim, the challenge is to find some mode of comprehension for the ostensibly puzzling character of the mitzvah. For the mishpatim, the challenge is to go beyond obvious platitudes and self-evident truisms, and to find the nuances which give the mitzvah its particular character as a mitzvah, and not just a "good idea." This involves sensitivity to the language of sources and awareness of the distinctive features which make each source unique.

General Bibliography & Research Aids

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- Altmann, Alexander, and Scholem, Gershom. "Mitzvot." in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Jewish Ideas and Concepts*. Jerusalem: Keter, 1977. (=EJ)
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- Eisenstein, J. D. *Ozar Yisrael*. [Hebrew]
Encyclopaedia Judaica.
- Ginzberg, Louis. *Legends of the Jews*.
- Hirsch, Samson Raphael. *Commentary on the Pentateuch*.
Jewish Encyclopedia.
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