



Guide for Your Group

WELCOME

Ask each person to introduce themselves and to share with the group a part of their day or week they would like to bring with them as they begin this conversation, and/or a part of their day or week they would like to leave behind.

As we gather in our Sh'ma group, may we honor the values of our Jewish tradition. May we bring compassion, insight, and wisdom to our learning and conversation. May we recognize the Divine Image in one another, and let that awareness be reflected in our words and actions.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, חוֹיֵן הַדָּעַת

Baruch atah Adonai chonein ha'daat.

Blessed are You, Adonai,
who grants us wisdom and awareness.

Before we begin, let's review the brit—the covenant—that animates our time together:

- **Accountability:** I'll show up to our agreed upon times. I'll let the guide(s) know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone's time.
- **Presence:** When we're together, I'll be present and mindful. I will listen and share. Life (and our mobile devices) offers many distractions, but I will stay present and engaged.
- **Double Confidentiality:** I'll maintain complete confidentiality. What I hear and say stays here. It means that even when I see group members in another context, such as at Temple or in the neighborhood, I will not initiate a conversation on what has been shared.
- **Vulnerability:** I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as possible with my perspectives and experiences in order to create a safe environment that might encourage others to take risks as well.
- **Respect:** I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.

- **No Fixing, Advising, Saving or Setting Straight:**

I will give everybody the gift of true attention without trying to “solve their problem.” No advice unless it's asked.

- **Listening:** I understand that some of us are talkers, while some of us are quieter. I'll be aware not to dominate discussions and to balance how much I'm talking with how much I'm listening.

- **Curiosity:** Judaism is a religion of exploration; of big questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.

- **Ownership:** This is our Sh'ma Group. This is our community to create. While we have guidelines and suggestions, it is ours to shape and form. We will get out of it what we put into it.

ABOUT OUR LEARNING MATERIALS: NISH'MA

On the following page you will find three takes on a passage of *Mishnah* that teaches we are all descended from the same person, the original Adam. This page is constructed like the Talmud—the central text in the center and various commentary surrounding it. We have chosen this learning material (NiSh'ma) because it explores relevant topics, and because we hope it will generate meaningful dialogue where the different perspectives within your Sh'ma group can be heard and appreciated. NiSh'ma is a project of The Forward magazine. If you have any feedback or questions about NiSh'ma, please let us know at AHorn@tedallas.org.

As we make our way from Purim to Passover and then on to Shavuot we will experience joy, in all its complexity, in a variety of ways. This month's material helps us pay attention to this trajectory of the season and our emotions. (Rabbi David Jaffe was with us for Selichot weekend this year and if you didn't get to learn with him then and his insights inspire you, his sermon is available on the Temple website.) Here's a link if you'd like to learn more <https://forward.com/shma-now/simcha-joy/?attribution=articles-article-listing-25-headline>

Everything you need to celebrate Passover is at www.tedallas.org/passover and mark your calendar for Shavuot on June 8-9.

NiSh'ma



David Jaffe: A wedding is one of the greatest moments of joy in Jewish life. Two separate individuals — with different personalities and different histories— choose to join their lives together. According to Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, a late 20th-century teacher of *mussar* — the Jewish discipline of moral development and applied ethics — it is this very joining that creates joy. What is joyful about the act of connection? Living separate, isolated lives can leave us vulnerable to thinking that life is simply about our own ego gratification. On the other hand, when we experience deep connection with another person, we know life is greater than our own self. Expanding our heart and giving to others become joyful experiences. And though relationships lacking mutuality may cause pain, the opportunity for love and giving that comes with connection remains a possibility.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov's comment, "It is a great mitzvah to always be joyful," suggests that cultivating deep connectedness creates an underlying state of joy that is present even when one feels broken-hearted over a loss. Just as the sun remains shining behind the clouds, the reality of connection is always there, even when it is obscured by temporary feelings of emotional pain. We cannot avoid the pain that comes with loving, living, and losing. But cultivating and feeling connectedness gives us the strength to move through pain — to become resilient and find joy again.

Rabbi **David Jaffe** is an author, educator, and activist who focuses on the intersection of moral development and ethical action. His book, *Changing the World from the Inside Out* (Shambhala Publications) is forthcoming in September. Jaffe lives in Sharon, Mass. with his wife and two teenage sons.

liberation for oppressed and oppressor, now knowing we could be either. Our experience of liberation on Pesach gives us the Torah's most-repeated commandment: Do not oppress the stranger, because we have been strangers.

Finally, on Shavuot, we learn the story of Ruth, a Moabite — the definitive "other" who becomes the ancestor of David, *mashiach*, and our ultimate redemption. The joy of Shavuot, then, is the deepest of all. We are simultaneously ourselves and the one we thought we hated, the one we thought hated us.

On Purim, we test the possibilities of opposites, and joy emerges; on Pesach we act on that radical experience for liberation; and, finally, on Shavuot, the deepest joy emerges as these opposites collapse altogether and we know that we are one.

Rabbi **Emma Kippley-Ogman**, who serves as assistant rabbi of congregation Beth Jacob Congregation in Mendota Heights, Minn., is a teacher in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota.



Justin Goldstein: During the eighth to tenth centuries, our talmudic sages taught in *Avot DeRabbi Natan*, "Joy is referred to by ten names: rejoicing, joyousness, ecstasy, jubilation, enjoyment, exultation, cheerfulness, gladness, splendor, merriment." The text is not serving as a thesaurus; rather, it comments on the myriad ways a human being experiences emotion. Even in a brief moment, we are able to experience multiple, and even contradictory, emotions.

"Every joining of opposites produces joy... Every place where there is joy there is connection..."

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Aley Shur II* (1914 – 2005), the most significant *mussar* teacher of the late 20th century whose theory and practice are contained in this two-volume book.

sadness similar? To day and night...Just as the day is connected to night and night connected to day; so too is sadness connected to joy and joy to sadness..." The boundary between day and night is fluid; one moment it is daylight, then you blink and it is

night. Transforming sadness into joy is not a single moment either; it is a process. As Wolbe teaches, the "joining of opposites produces joy": Relationships are essential to that process of transformation — not because relationships are easy and inevitably produce joy, but because they offer us complexity and the opportunity to explore our own internal opposites. And through that process, we learn to find joy — in any of its ten names.



Ross Weissman: It seems that Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe is referring to the joining of lofty opposites — akin to God forming a figure from dust and then breathing into it "the breath of life." (*Bereshit 2:7*) Earth and breath joined together to create something new: "...then Adam became a human being." The creation of humanity is joyous, and it required a mixture of earth and spirit, form and flow, a coming together of opposites.

Rabbi Wolbe, however, seems to suggest that joy is present in the joining of more mundane opposites, too. He did, after all, write, "every joining of opposites produces joy." Is there joy when paper and pencil meet? When devouring a piece of chocolate that's bittersweet?

A delicate and attuned dance allows joy to emerge from the joining of opposites. True of earth and God's breath, this is also true of flesh and flesh — with friends, family, lovers, and intimate others. Joy emerges when opposites reveal their unexpected likeness in their synchronous step on the dance floor. Both sides must be flexible, responsive, and complementing of the other.

Ross Weissman works as a consultant for OneTable (onetable.org), an online and in-person hub that helps people in their 20s and 30s find and enjoy Shabbat dinners together. He is a teaching fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and an educator for Kevah (kevah.org), a nonprofit that empowers individuals and organizations to build Jewish learning communities across the country.

Perhaps Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, in his work *Aley Shur*, is suggesting that not only does the external joining of opposites produce joy, but when we become aware of our own *internal* opposites, we gain the potential to produce joy as well. Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist, in his *Sefer HaMeshalim* (*Book of Parables*), writes: "To what are joy and

sadness similar? To day and night...Just as the day is connected to night and night connected to day; so too is sadness connected to joy and joy to sadness..." The boundary between day and night is fluid; one moment it is daylight, then you blink and it is night. Transforming sadness into joy is not a single moment either; it is a process. As Wolbe teaches, the "joining of opposites produces joy": Relationships are essential to that process of transformation — not because relationships are easy and inevitably produce joy, but because they offer us complexity and the opportunity to explore our own internal opposites. And through that process, we learn to find joy — in any of its ten names.

Rabbi **Justin Goldstein** was ordained in 2011 by the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. In 2012-2013, he was a Rabbis Without Borders Fellow and, since 2014, he has served Congregation Beth Israel in Asheville, N.C.

Reflective Questions

1. What was your initial understanding of the central text? What did you understand differently after reading/discussing the commentaries?
2. Which passage in the commentaries resonated with you—and why? Which passage was most challenging to you, and why?
3. What experiences have you encountered that illustrate OR amplify OR contradict something taught on the page?