



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 יי, 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.

There are so many ways to explore Israel and develop a relationship with the land and the people. Rabbi Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, introduces us to some of the ancient and modern possibilities and how they complement each other. Here's a link if you'd like to learn more about this topic <https://forward.com/shma-now/chidush/?attribution=articles-article-listing-17-headline>

Watch Temple communications about Israel Independence day observances.

NiSh'ma



Leah Sarna: In 1908, Rav Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen Kook dreamt of a new Jewish culture springing from a Judaism rerooted in the land of Israel — a renewed Judaism, based on new circumstances.

Every generation of Jews finds itself faced with Rav Kook's question: How do we sanctify our new circumstances?

Deuteronomy instructs us: "Remember the days of old; consider the years long past." (32:7) We should not, in our innovative rush, lose touch with our history. Standing connected with our past *and* our future, we can become links in a timeless chain. For this reason, while I and the other students pursuing ordination at Yeshivat Maharat push for a future of female spiritual leadership within the Orthodox community, we also connect ourselves back to historical Jewish female figures. We draw on the courage and strength of women in the Bible and Talmud, as well as more recent figures, such as Asenath Barzani of Kurdistan and the Maiden of Ludmir, who led Jewish communities in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. In this same way, Rav Kook describes his new work "standing together" with the work of his predecessors, breathing new "light and life" into their efforts.

The *chidush* of a Torah scholar is not created out of whole cloth from the scholar's mind. It is a new reading of prior sages, without abandoning even a word of their wisdom, and only occasionally reinterpreting those words. It stands linked to the past, coming from within "the tent of Torah," in Rav Kook's words. Yet it plants that tent in a new reality, with a perspective that keeps pace with the times. And it testifies to a belief that the holiness of our heritage is proven through its ability to survive the tests of time and progress.

Leah Sarna is a student at Yeshivat Maharat, a Wexner Graduate Fellow, and a congregational intern at the Hebrew Institute of White Plains.

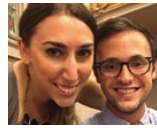


Bronwen Mullin: A few years ago, my Talmud teacher, Rabbi Jeffrey Fox, asked this question of a room of predominately secular Jewish women artists who had been funded to study for a year at the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education: "I've been offered the position of rosh yeshiva of the [Yeshivat] Maharat program, the first program ordaining women in Orthodoxy. Should I accept?" He asked us whether he should take a path not yet charted, a path requiring great courage to innovate, where the inherited tradition lays out no clear path to do so — the great courage to depart from our ancestors, while still loving them and remaining in ever-present dialogue with them nonetheless. We responded emphatically, "Yes, Reb Jeff. Yes."

I am struck by Leah Sarna's description of *chidush* as "a new reading of prior sages, without abandoning even a word of their wisdom, and only occasionally reinterpreting those words." In Conservative Judaism, the movement in which I am now studying to be a rabbi, we abide by a halakhic system thousands of years old. And yet, we sometimes reinterpret the words so radically that the original words are hardly recognizable.

We're not the first to do so. The rabbis who wrote *aggadot* and midrashim (fables, stories, interpretive arguments, exegeses) were just as radical millennia before us, putting into place complex and fragile systems of interpretation. For example, the talmudic Rabbi Eliezer teaches, "One who makes his prayers fixed (*"kevah"*) has not made supplication." (Berakhot 29b) And Rav Yosef, in the same passage, concludes that "*kevah*" refers to one who cannot innovate (*"Ichadesh"*) even a word or element in prayer. The necessity to individuate and still remain in relationship is pivotal to human maturity — no less so for spiritual maturity. *Chidush* has the potential to be both an act of individuation and the deepening of a relationship to tradition at the same time.

Bronwen Mullin is a playwright, composer, educator, and rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary. She currently serves as the rabbinic intern for Town & Village Synagogue, where she launched their Artists' Beit Midrash. To explore Jewish spirituality and push the boundaries of Jewish sacred texts through the arts, contact her at: bronwen@tandv.org.



Shanna Zell and Matt Green: Leah Sarna's assertion that Yeshivat Maharat is pushing the envelope today demonstrates precisely the essence of Rav Kook's aspiration for the old and new to work in concert with one another. To meet this challenge meaningfully, we should recognize that radical religious change is not necessary. A rising generation of American Jews continues to find meaning in the very same rituals of generations past. But it would help if rabbis and cantors would become curious fellow travelers, imbibing the culture of those they serve and curating experiences that reflect these patterns. For example, we might invite people for Shabbat dinner through a dating app, or serve flavors of the Old World as cocktails, or use the Jewishly inflected television show about a trans family, *Transparent*, as an entry point for discussing Jewish identity and memory.

When we return the Torah to the ark, we sing: "*Chadesh yameinu k'kedem*" (often translated as "Renew our days as of old"). The root of the word "*kedem*" — *kuf, dalet, mem* (קדם) — builds words such as "*kadmonim*" (ancestors), "*kodem*" (before), and "*kadimah*," (advance), a command we shout when we want children and friends to hurry up. Perhaps we should think of this verse as a prayer for creating "our days anew," recognizing that our pasts and our futures are intertwined.

Shanna Zell is a fifth-year cantorial student and Matt Green is a fourth-year rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. They both intern at Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn, where they are also the co-directors of Brooklyn Jews, a community of young Jewish seekers.

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אֵין כֹּל-חֲדָשׁ
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

"There is nothing new
under the sun."

— Ecclesiastes 1:9

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?