



The Torah's Take on Happiness

Rabbi Jan Uhrbach

Rabbi Jan Uhrbach brings a passion for prayer to the JTS community. Through her work as founding director of the Block / Kolker Center for Spiritual Arts, she develops and oversees programs and discussions, as well as prayer services on Shabbat and festivals, for the JTS community and the general public.

Rabbi Uhrbach loves being in the classroom at JTS, where she teaches courses on the meaning of liturgy, and a course she created titled "The Art of Leading Prayer." She is tasked also with developing curriculum and resources for professionals and lay people seeking to revitalize their leadership and experience of prayer.

In addition to her role at JTS, Rabbi Uhrbach serves as the founding rabbi of the Conservative Synagogue of the Hamptons in Bridgehampton, Long Island, enabling her to mentor many of JTS's rabbinical and cantorial students in a congregational setting. She has played a key role in the acclaimed Lev Shalem prayer book series as associate editor of Siddur Lev Shalem, the Shabbat and festival siddur published by the Rabbinical Assembly in 2016. She also served on the editorial committee for Machzor Lev Shalem.

A distinguished teacher of Torah, she is also a member of the Wexner Heritage faculty, and has taught and served as scholar-in-residence in many synagogues.

Rabbi Uhrbach was ordained at JTS, where she was a Wexner Graduate Fellow. A graduate of Yale University ('85) and Harvard Law School ('88), Rabbi Uhrbach served as Law Clerk to Federal District Judge Kimba M. Wood. She then joined the New York law firm of Satterlee Stephens Burke & Burke LLP, where she specialized in media litigation, becoming a partner of the firm in January 1996.

1. Gen. 30:12-13

וַתֵּלֶד זֶלְפָּה שְׁפָחַת לְאֵה בֶן שֵׁנִי לַיַּעֲקֹב: וַתֹּאמֶר לְאֵה בְּאִשְׁרֵי כִּי אֲשֵׁרֵנִי בְּנוֹת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אֲשֵׁר:

When Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, Leah declared, "What fortune!" meaning, "Women will deem me fortunate." So she named him Asher.

2. Num. 27:1-11

וַתִּקְרָבְנָה בְּנוֹת צֶלְפַּחַד בְּרִחְפָּר בֶּן־גִּלְעָד בֶּר־מְכִיר בֶּר־מְנַשֶּׁה לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מְנַשֶּׁה בֶּן־יֹוסֵף וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֹתָיו מִחֻלָּה נָעָה וְחֻגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה וְתַרְצָה: וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְפָנֵי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְפָנֵי הַנְּשִׂאִים וְכָל־הָעֵדָה פָּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: אָבִינוּ מָת בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהוּא לֹא־הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַנוֹעֲדִים עַל־יְהוָה בַּעֲדַת־קֹרַח כִּי־בִחְטָאוֹ מָת וּבָנִים לֹא־הָיוּ לוֹ: לָמָּה יִגְרַע שֵׁם־אָבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֶּן תְּנַהֲלֵנוּ אַחֲזָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אָבִינוּ: וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִשְׁפָּטוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

כֵּן בְּנוֹת צֶלְפַחַד דְּבַרְתֶּן וְתָן תִּתֵּן לָהֶם אַחֲזַת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אָבִיהֶם וְהִעֲבַרְתֶּן אֶת־נַחֲלַת אָבִיהֶן לָהֶן: וְאֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּדְבַּר לֵאמֹר אִישׁ כִּי־יָמוּת וּבֶן אֵין לוֹ וְהִעֲבַרְתֶּם אֶת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְבִתּוֹ: וְאִם־אֵין לוֹ בֵּת וַיָּנַחְתֶּם אֶת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְאָחִיו: וְאִם־אֵין לוֹ אָחִים וַיָּנַחְתֶּם אֶת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְאֶחָיו: וְאִם־אֵין לוֹ אָחִים וַיָּנַחְתֶּם אֶת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְשֹׂאֲרוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וַיִּרְשׁ אֹתָהּ וְהִיְתָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחֻקַּת מִשְׁפָּט כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

The daughters of Tzelophehad, of Manassite family - son of Hefer son of Gilad son of Mahir son of Manasseh son of Joseph -- came forward. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, No'ah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftans, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said, "Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah's faction, which banded together against Adonai, but died for his own sin; and he has left no sons. Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!" Moses brought their case before Adonai.

And Adonai said to Moses, "**The plea of Tzelophehad's daughters is just:** you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them.

"Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows: 'If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter. If he has no daughter, you shall assign his property....' This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites, in accordance with Adonai's command to Moses."¹

3. Rashi on Num. 27:7²

כן בנות צלפחד דברת - כתרגומו יאות כך כתובה פרשה זו לפני במרום מגיד שראתה עינן מה שלא ראתה עינו של משה:

כן בנות צלפחד דברת - יפה תבעו. אשרי אדם שהקב"ה מודה לדבריו:

"The daughters of Tzelophehad speak properly (*ken*).” As the Targum renders, “properly.” That is, “Thus is this passage written before Me on High.” This tells us that their eye saw that which Moses’ eye did not see.

"The daughters of Tzelophehad speak properly (*ken*).” They claimed correctly. Fortunate (*ashrei*) is the person whose words the Holy Blessed One confirms.

4. Rashi on Num. 27:5

ד"א ראוייה היתה פרשה זו להכתב על ידי משה אלא שזכו בנות צלפחד ונכתבה על ידן:

Alternatively, it was fitting that this passage be written through Moses, but the daughters of Tzelophehad were meritorious, and it was written through them.

5. Gittin 43a

אין אדם עומד על דברי תורה אלא אם כן נכשל בהן

One never stands firmly on the words of Torah unless one has stumbled over them.

1. Translations of Torah and Psalms from JPS Tanakh.

2. See also Sifrei 134 (Pinhas, Piska 3)

ויאמר ה' אל משה כן בנות צלפחד דוברות. יפה תבעו בנות צלפחד שכך כתוב' פרש' לפני במרום אשרי אדם שהמקום מודה לדבריו.

6. Psalm 1

Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent;

rather, the teaching of Adonai is his delight, and he studies that teaching day and night.

He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives.

Not so the wicked; rather they are like chaff that wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not survive judgment, nor will sinners, in the assembly of the righteous. For Adonai cherishes the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed.

(א) אֲשֶׁר־יֵאָמֵר אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִלֵּךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבַדֶּרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבַמּוֹשֵׁב לְצִדִּים לֹא יָשָׁב:

(ב) כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חִפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:

(ג) וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל פְּלִיגֵי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיּוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא יִבּוֹל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:

(ד) לֹא כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם כְּמֶזֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ:

(ה) עַל כֵּן לֹא יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בַּעֲדַת צְדִיקִים:

(ו) כִּי יוֹדֵעַ יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאֲבֹד:

7. Psalm 84:1-6, 13

For the leader; on the *gittit*. Of the Korahites. A psalm.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts.

I long, I yearn for the courts of Adonai; my body and soul shout for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself in which to set her young, near Your altar, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God. Happy are those who dwell in Your house; they forever praise You. *Selah*.

Happy is the man who finds refuge in You, whose mind is on the [pilgrim] highways....

O Lord of Hosts, happy is the man who trusts in You.

(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל הַגִּתִּית לְבְנֵי קָרַח מְזֻמּוֹר:

(ב) מַה יְדִידוֹת מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

(ג) נִכְסְפָה וְגַם כְּלִתָּה נַפְשִׁי לְחַצְרוֹת יְהוָה לִבִּי וּבִשְׂרִי יִרְנְנוּ אֶל אֵל חַי:

(ד) גַּם צְפוּר מְצֹאָה בֵּית וּדְרוֹר קִן לָהּ אֲשֶׁר שָׁתָה

אֶפְרָחֶיהָ אֶת מְזוֹבְחוֹתֶיךָ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מִלְּכִי וְאֱלֹהֵי:

(ה) אֲשֶׁר־יֹשְׁבֵי בֵּיתֶךָ עוֹד יִהְלְלוּךָ סֵלָה:

(ו) אֲשֶׁר־יֵאָדָם עוֹז לוֹ בְּדֶ מַסְלוֹת בְּלִבָּבָם...

(ז) יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר־יֵאָדָם בְּטַח בְּדֶ:

8. From the daily morning liturgy

How blessed we are: how goodly is our portion, how delightful our lot, how beautiful our inheritance!

How blessed are we that twice each day, morning and evening, as we awaken and as we end our day, we say:

Hear, O Israel, ADONAI is our God, ADONAI is one.

אֲשֶׁר־יֵנוּ מַה טוֹב חֶלְקֵנוּ וּמַה נְעִים גּוֹרְלֵנוּ וּמַה יִפָּה יִרְשָׁתֵנוּ:

אֲשֶׁר־יֵנוּ שְׁאֲנַחְנוּ מִשְׁכִּימִים וּמִעֲרִיבִים עָרֵב וּבִקְרַ וְאוֹמְרִים פְּעַמִּים בְּכָל יוֹם:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

9. Deut 33:29

אֲשֶׁר־יֵךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי כְמוֹךָ עִם נוֹשַׁע בִּיהוָה מְגוֹן עֲזָרְךָ וְאֲשֶׁר חָרַב גְּאוֹתֶךָ וַיִּכְחָשׁוּ אֵיבֹיֶיךָ לָךְ וְאַתָּה עַל בְּמוֹתֵימוֹ תִּדְרֹךְ:

O happy Israel! Who is like you, a people delivered by Adonai, your protecting Shield, your Sword triumphant!

Your enemies shall come cringing before you, and you shall tread on their backs.