

The Importance of Books

This year we are celebrating books – particularly the Sifrei Torah that have been refurbished and gifted to us, but also acts of reading more generally. The Torah is at the centre of our faith: we use it in services, and it is an object of reverence, without which no synagogue can function. Much has been written about the importance of these sacred texts and how we hold them dear. It is no exaggeration to call Jews ‘the people of the book’; but that doesn’t mean that we use books simply as instruction manuals that tell us how to conduct our daily lives, or that we interpret them in a purely literal fashion. Books are meant to be explained, discussed, argued over, but above all cherished for what they contribute to our lives. Literacy is at the heart of what makes us human, and we spend our whole lives reading: for pleasure, for work, for prayer, for consolation, for education, for personal development, for social interaction, and for deep contemplation.

Consider the following statements about books and reading:

- ‘To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.’ (Victor Hugo)
- ‘A book is a version of the world. If you do not like it, ignore it or offer your own version in return.’ (Salman Rushdie)
- ‘The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame.’ (Oscar Wilde)
- ‘I can’t imagine a person really enjoying a book and reading it only once.’ (C.S. Lewis)
- ‘People do not understand books until they have a certain amount of life, or at any rate no person understands a deep book, until he/she has seen and lived at least part of its contents.’ (Ezra Pound)
- ‘To read is to fly: it is to soar to a point of vantage which gives a view over wide terrains of history, human variety, ideas, shared experience and the fruits of many inquiries.’ (A.C. Grayling)
- ‘Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting.’ (Edmund Burke)
- ‘A person is known by the books he/she reads.’ (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
- ‘So please, oh PLEASE, we beg, we pray, go throw your TV set away. And in its place you can install, a lovely bookshelf on the wall.’ (Roald Dahl)
- ‘A truly great book should be read in youth, again in maturity and once more in old age, as a fine building should be seen by morning light, at noon and by moonlight.’ (Robertson Davies)
- ‘I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library.’ (Jorge Luis Borges)

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I would like you to write about one or more books that have been important to you, and have influenced your SPIRITUAL life. The reading material need not be specifically religious; but we are all affected (sometimes inspired, sometimes troubled) by what we read, and it would be interesting to share our experiences with other members of the community. Please write out your thoughts on the attached sheet. You can either use this form in hard copy, or you can email it to me, at leonlitvack@mac.com

Please take your time over this. Please be as honest as you can, and please use your own words.

NOTE: DISCRETION WILL BE ASSURED! I WILL NOT READ OUT ANY NAMES, AND WILL NOT ATTRIBUTE ANYTHING I RECEIVE TO ANY SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL!

You can email this form to leonlitvack@mac.com
or bring the hard copy with you to the synagogue on Monday 11 October (Kol Nidrei night)

We will hold a discussion about your answers on Tuesday 12 October, during the time for Yom Kippur Minchah (4:30 pm).

With best wishes for a shanah tovah,

Cantor Leon Litvack

