



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

5 - 11 August, 2018
24 - 30 Av, 5778

Torah:

Deuteronomy

11:26 - 16:17

Haftorah:

Isaiah 66:1-24; Isaiah
66:23; Samuel I 20:18;
Samuel I 20:42

■ TORAH STUDIES

We have many Judaic topics for you to study. We will provide the material and courses. Please write to us for more information.

■ FAMILY PROGRAMS

Do you have family on the outside who are struggling, please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

■ GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

ALEPH INSTITUTE

Hyman & Martha Rogal
Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org

INDISCRIMINATE KINDNESS

In this week's Torah Portion, amongst other laws, God lays out the laws of kosher. The Torah tells us how to identify which animals, fish and birds are or are not kosher. When it comes to land animals and fish, God gives us certain criteria - fins and scales are what it takes for fish to be kosher and animals must chew their cud and have completely split hooves. With birds though, God simply lists the twenty four species or families of fowl which are not kosher.

One of those on the list is a bird called the "chassidah," a name that stems from the Hebrew word "chesed," which means kindness. In his commentary on this verse Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, the foremost commentator on the Torah, also known by his acronym, Rashi, explains why this particular species of bird is known as the kind one. "It is called 'chassidah'" he says, "because it performs kindness with its piers."

In general, birds with an aggressive or violent nature are the non-kosher ones.

This begs the question, if this bird is of such fine character that its name even indicates its predisposition to being kind to its mates, why isn't it kosher? The chassidic masters explain a fundamental lesson which we can learn from all this. The words themselves which Rashi uses tell us why this bird's kindness is insufficient and lacking. Indeed, "It performs acts of kindness," but

that is only "with its piers." This is what we all need to take to heart. True kindness is not meant only for those who we consider our friends, our piers. True kindness must be indiscriminately available for anyone and everyone who needs it, regardless of our own personal feelings towards the person.

If we were to reserve our kindness and generosity only for our friends, that would not be kosher. In fact that would not even be true kindness by definition. If an act of generosity is fueled by our own feelings about it, it detracts from the genuineness of the act itself. If I am only kind to those I like and get along with then my kindness is really satisfying my own sense of gratification. "I'll be kind to you because I like you," means that the kindness is about me, not about you.

The only way to know if I am truly kind and that my kindness is truly selfless is if I am really willing to provide it even to those who I wouldn't necessarily call my friends.

If the phrase, "You are what you eat" is true, then by keeping to the laws of Kosher we can refine our own character flaws, even as subtly as be kind correctly.

GIVE EXISTENCE, GET LIFE

One of the subjects discussed in this week's Torah Portion is the obligation to give a tenth of all of one's earnings to charity. In gene-

Parshat Re'eh

ral, the concept of charity, or Tzedaka, is a recurring theme in Torah and in Jewish life in general. What is it about the Mitzvah of charity that makes it so central to our culture? For one, the common practice to translate the word Tzedaka as charity isn't completely accurate. The word Tzedaka stems from the Hebrew word Tzedek, which means justice. In other words, Torah does not look at Tzedaka as a matter of pure kindness and generosity, but rather considers it a natural duty and a matter of simple justice. If I have enough to help someone who does not, it is my moral and just obligation to contribute in any way that I possibly can. But is there a deeper significance of the Mitzvah? What does it mean beneath the surface?

The express reward for fulfilling the Mitzvah of Tzedaka is life. Give charity, get life. But what does that mean on a more sublime level?

To better understand this, let's first explore the definition of life. Ever heard the question, "What is the purpose of life?" Well, the question itself is misguided. The proper question should be, "What is the purpose of existence?" And the proper answer to that question is, "Life."

When God created the world, he first brought everything into existence and only then gave it life. Existence is the mere state of being, taking up space, while life is defined as the purpose for which each and every creation does exist.

Take, for example, the well known slogan, "Am

Yisrael Chai - the Jewish Nation is ALIVE!" What is that celebrating? That we haven't died? That we are still breathing? The fact of the matter is, if you take a good look at our long and painful history we really shouldn't be around anymore!

As Mark Twain commented, "Other nations came and made a vast noise, and now they are lost in the backwaters of history - but the Jew is still here, showing no signs of infirmity." The Romans strived to build an empire which would last forever. The sun would never set on the Roman Empire. But they are gone. The Egyptian empire, the Assyrian Greek empire, the Nazi Regime. Everyone who attempted to create a strong existence, no longer exists.

But the Jewish nation was told from the get-go, even before they entered the land of Israel for the first time, that their existence was going to be minimal. "You will be expelled from your land, enslaved to other nations. You will be forced to escape from every land in which you settle, your existence is going to be a lousy one." (Paraphrasing.)

What kept us going through all the trials and tribulations? What kept us alive against all odds? We just kept busy living. Comfortable existence is not on the table? Okay, no problem! We'll stay focused on living. A painful existence full of purpose is far better than a comfortable one with no meaning. And, if history is any proof, the more energy one puts into existing, the less energy he has for living.

When existence is propped up higher, living becomes more of a challenge. All of the major empires throughout history spent all of their time and energy trying so hard to exist that they failed to live. And existence can only ever be temporary.

So, when we take some of our hard earned money, money which constitutes existence, and give it to someone else to help make their existence easier, what we receive in return is life. By diminishing our own existence for noble purposes we are reinforcing life.

"The more you give, the more you get." It may or may not come back to you in the form of money, but you can bet your bottom dollar it'll come back as a more meaningful and fulfilling life.

By Rabbi Nissan Aizek

Rosh Chodesh Observances

Shabbat (8/11/2018) is the first of the two days of Rosh Chodesh ("Head of the Month") for the month of Elul (when a month has 30 days, both the last day of the month and the first day of the following month serve as the following month's Rosh Chodesh).

Special portions are added to the daily prayers:

Hallel (Psalms 113-118) is recited—in its "partial" form—following the Shacharit morning prayer, and the Yaaleh Veyavo prayer is added to the Amidah and to Grace After Meals; the additional Musaf prayer is said (when Rosh Chodesh is Shabbat, special additions are made to the Shabbat Musaf). Tachanun (confession of sins) and similar prayers are omitted.

Many have the custom to mark Rosh Chodesh with a festive meal and reduced work activity. The latter custom is prevalent amongst women, who have a special affinity

with Rosh Chodesh—the month being the feminine aspect of the Jewish calendar.

L'David Hashem Ori

Beginning Shabbat (8/11/2018), the psalm L'David Hashem Ori (Psalm 27) is recited at the end of the morning and afternoon prayers. This special addition is recited throughout the month of Elul and the High Holiday season, until Hoshanah Rabbah (Tishrei 21) - a total of 50 days.

Rosh Hashanah 9/10 & 9/11

In Jewish History

Sunday, 24 Av, 5778 - August 5, 2018 ***Hasmonean Holiday (circa 100 BCE)***

The Hasmoneans reinstated the rule of Jewish civil law, replacing Hellenist secular law, and declared this day a holiday.

Tuesday, 26 Av, 5778 - August 7, 2018 ***Tzemach Tzedek Departs Petersburg (1843)***

In 1843, the Interior Ministry of the Czarist government convened a rabbinical conference in the Russian capital of Petersburg, to the end of imposing changes in Jewish communal life and religious practice. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866, known as the "Tzemach Tzedek" after his Halachic works by that name) was invited; as a primary figure in the leadership of Russian Jewry, his compliance was required to lend legitimacy to the government's proposed "reforms". In the course of the conference, the Tzemach Tzedek was placed under arrest no less than 22 (!) times for his refusal to cooperate. When he finally departed Petersburg on the 26th of Av, he had successfully prevented the government's disruption of traditional Jewish life.

Friday, 29 Av, 5778 - August 10, 2018 ***Flight from Liadi (1812)***

On this date, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, who supported and aided the Czar's army during the Napoleonic wars, was forced to flee his hometown from Napoleon's forces which were advancing through White Russia in their push toward Moscow. After five months of wanderings he arrived in the town of Pyena. There he fell ill and, weakened by the tribulations of his flight and the harsh Russian winter, passed away on the 24th of Tevet, 5573 (1812).

Shabbat, 30 Av, 5778 - August 11, 2018 ***2nd Tablets Hewn (1313 BCE)***

On the last day of Av of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), Moses carved, by G-d's command, two stone tablets -- each a cube measuring 6x6x3 tefachim (a tefach, "handbreadth", is approximately 3.2 inches) -- to replace the two divinely-made tablets, on which G-d had inscribed the Ten Commandments, which Moses had smashed 42 days earlier upon witnessing Israel's worship of the Golden Calf.