



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

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

26 August -
1 September, 2018
15 - 21 Elul, 5778

Torah:
Deuteronomy 26:1 - 29:8
Haftorah:
Isaiah 60:1-22

■ 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.

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MANUFACTURING JOY

A follower of the great Maggid of Mezritch, Rabbi Dovber came to consult with him on a personal problem he was having. "I keep having negative thoughts. They keep entering my mind and I can't get rid of them," he said with a sigh. "They interfere with my service of God, and I can't seem to get them under control." The Maggid replied, "I know exactly to whom you need to speak." He instructed him to go to a certain city and talk to a famous Chassid living there. "He will show you the solution to your problem."

The man immediately set out for the town and arrived late that night. He looked around the town until he found the one home which still had light coming from its windows. Surely this must be the saintly Chassid's home," thought the man. He quietly approached the house and looked through the window. Sure enough, he saw the famed Chassid sitting at the table stooped over a large book, studying deeply by the light of several candles. Obediently, by the instructions of his Rebbe, the Maggid, the man knocked gently on the door.

No answer.
"Perhaps I didn't knock loud enough," he thought. He knocked again, this time a little louder. No answer. Again he knocked, again no answer. Being on a mission from his great master, he refused to leave. He was determined to speak to this man, however long it would take. All night long

he knocked. All night long he stood there, yet the door remained closed.

At daybreak, the door suddenly opened. The Chassid, who was on his way out for the morning prayers, greeted him warmly. "What was that??" cried the man. "Why did you refuse to let me in all night?" The Chassid, somewhat surprised, inquired as to the purpose of the man's visit. "The Maggid sent me to learn from you how to stop negative thoughts from disturbing my service of God." "Well, then," replied the Chassid frankly, "there you have your answer."

In this week's Torah Portion, Ki Tavo, Moses tells the people about the misfortunes which will befall them as a result of neglecting God's commandments. The verse reads, "because you did not serve The Lord, your God, with joy and with gladness of heart." Our sages tell us that the focus in those words is less on the "did not serve God," and more on the "with joy and with gladness of heart." They tell us that more than anything else, God needs us to be joyful.

But what is the meaning of such a commandment? Can you instruct someone to be happy, to be joyful? Is joy something which we can control, or is it a result of our surroundings and life's occurrences?

In a study done by James Douglas Laird in 1974 the effects that smiling has on ones mood were clearly discovered. The research reported that smiling releases endorphins, which are natural pain relievers, along with serotonin, which is also associated

Parshat Ki Tavo

with feel good properties. So the truth is, in fact, that the saying, "fake it till you make it" is all that far off. The more we learn to smile even in difficult or stressful situations, the happier we will naturally be.

The great nineteenth century essayist, lecturer, philosopher and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, may have said it best. He said, "For every one minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness."

Another great way to ensure one's happiness is to commit to a life of service. Altruism in its truest sense as humanly possible. The results of giving oneself over to the service of another entirely and with a full heart are immeasurable. This includes anyone and everyone, but especially one's spouse and especially God.

When my life's interests move from being self centered and instead are centered around the good and wellbeing - and happiness - of someone else, my own sense of fulfillment and satisfaction are all but guaranteed. And of course, it's got to be done with a smile! That is a joy that is worth living for.

STANDING SIDE BY SIDE

This week's Torah reading contains the command, "And you shall follow His ways." Our Sages explain the verse as follows: "Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called compassionate; so, too, you shall be compassionate. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called merciful;

so, too, you shall be merciful. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called generous; so, too, you shall be generous.”

Maimonides develops this idea further, explaining that the reason the Torah even takes the time to inform us about any particular Divine quality is so that we may emulate that quality. “To make known that these are good and just paths in which a person should conduct himself to emulate [God] according to [the person’s] potential.” The Torah’s purpose in describing God’s qualities is not to tell us Who He is, after all He is above and beyond the realm of definition, but instead, to teach us who we ought to be, what are the qualities we should strive to develop within ourselves.

A more careful look at the wording Maimonides uses indicates that he is telling us to emulate also the manner in which God manifests these qualities. For example, a person’s emotional expressions are a natural reaction, a spontaneous response. He sees something lovable and is moved to love. He sees something frightening and he recoils in fear.

The same cannot be said about God. He is by definition above having “natural reactions” or “instinctive reflexes” to what happens here on earth or even in the heavens. Instead, He reacts in a certain way because He chooses to, because He considers this reaction as appropriate. His divine emotional attributes are expressed only when they are called for.

This teaches us two things: Firstly, that we should try to react in a similar manner, expressing the qualities that He does in like situations. But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, that we should react as He does, not spontaneously and naturally, but with controlled thought. The mind rules over the heart, naturally. Often, we become emotionally excited. This prevents us from thinking clearly and knowing which emotional attribute to exercise at a given time. Just as God exercises His attributes at will and by choice, without being subject to “knee-jerk reactions,” so, too, we must learn to control our feelings, rather than respond to them.

By Rabbi Nissan Aizek

ELUL OBERSERVANCES

As the last month of the Jewish year, Elul is traditionally a time of introspection and stocktaking -- a time to review one’s deeds and spiritual progress over the past year and prepare for the upcoming “Days of Awe” of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

As the month of Divine Mercy and Forgiveness it is a most opportune time for teshuvah (“return” to G-d), prayer, charity, and increased Ahavat Yisrael (love for a fellow Jew) in the quest for self-improvement and coming closer to G-d. Chassidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi likens the month of Elul to a time when “the king is in the field” and, in contrast to when he is in the royal palace, “everyone who so desires is permitted to meet him, and he receives them all with a cheerful countenance and shows a smiling face to them all.”

In Jewish History

Sunday, 15 Elul, 5778 - August 26, 2018

Tomchei Temimim founded (1897)

The Yeshiva “Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch”, the first to integrate the “revealed” part of Torah (Talmud and Halachah) with the esoteric teachings of Chassidism in a formal study program, was on this date founded by the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn.

Tuesday, 17 Elul, 5778 - August 28, 2018

Noah Dispatches Dove (2105 BCE)

Following the failed attempt to dispatch a raven from the ark (see “Today in Jewish History” for Elul 10), Noah sent a dove from the window of the ark to see if the great Flood that covered the earth had abated. “But the dove found no resting place for the sole of its foot” and returned to the ark; Noah waited seven days before making another attempt.

R. Schneur Zalman’s parents marry (1743)

Wedding day of Rabbi Baruch and Rebbetzin Rivkah, the parents of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812 -- see entry for tomorrow, Elul 18), in 1743.

Wednesday, 18 Elul, 5778 - August 29, 2018

Passing of Maharal (1609)

Elul 18 is the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yehudah Loewe, the “Maharal” of Prague (1525-1609), outstanding Torah scholar, philosopher, Kabbalist and Jewish leader. Popularly known for creating a “golem” (clay man) to protect the Jewish community of Prague from the frequent threat of blood libels.

Baal Shem Tov Born (1698)

Elul 18 is the birthday of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism

Rabbi Israel was born in a small town in Ukraine in 1698. His father, Rabbi Eliezer, who was a member of the secret society of “hidden tzaddikim,” passed away when young Israel was only five years old; his last words to his son were, “Fear nothing but G-d alone. Love every Jew with all your heart and all your soul.”

The young orphan would spend much of his time wandering and meditating in the forests that surrounded his hometown; there, he one day met with one of his father’s compatriots, and eventually joined their society. For many years, he lived disguised as a simple innkeeper and clay-digger, his greatness known only to a very small circle of fellow mystics and disciples. But on his 36th birthday, he was instructed by his master to “reveal” himself and publicly disseminate his teachings.

Drawing from the mystical “soul of Torah,” the Baal Shem Tov (“Master of the Good Name,” as he came to be known) taught about the spark of G-dliness that is to be found in every creation, and about the great love that G-d has for each and every one of His children, scholars and simple folk alike. He emphasized the importance of joy and simple faith in serving G-d, rather than asceticism. Initially, his teachings encountered fierce opposition from the scholarly elite and established leadership of the Jewish community; but many of those very scholars and communal leaders ended up becoming his devoted disciples. When Rabbi Israel passed at age 62 on Shavuot of 1760, the movement he founded was well on the

way of becoming the most vital force in Jewish life.