



28 October -
3 November, 2018
19 - 25 Iyar, 5778

Torah :
Genesis 23:1 - 25:18

Haftarah:
Kings 1 1:1-31

■ CALENDARS

We have Jewish Calendars, if you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

■ 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

G-D HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

Is this statement heresy? Does it deny the hand of G-d in our successes? I recall a conversation with a self-proclaimed atheist who used the expression very cynically, suggesting that his considerable achievements were entirely his own and that G-d had nothing to do with it.

I beg to differ. To my mind, "G-d helps those who help themselves" is a perfectly religious statement. What it means is absolutely consistent with traditional Jewish thinking. G-d does indeed help us to accomplish things, but He requires us to help ourselves first. If we just sit back and wait for miracles to happen, we may be disappointed.

"G-d will bless you in all that you do," (Deuteronomy 15:18) makes it very clear. Our blessings come from G-d, but we must do. Of course, we believe in miracles—but we mustn't rely on them. The combination of our own hard work and efforts coupled with G-d's blessing is the ideal road to success.

The classic analogy is the farmer. He can plough and plant, sow and shvitz from today until tomorrow but if the rains don't come nothing will grow. Conversely, all the rains in the world will not cause anything to grow if the farmer hasn't planted first. After the farmer has done his work and the rains come from above, there will be a plentiful crop. And it's the same story whether we are farmers or

shopkeepers, professionals or artisans, employers or employees.

There are religious ideologies that frown upon medical intervention when someone is ill. They see it as a lack of faith in the great Healer of all Flesh. In fact, right now in my own community, there is a court case going on because a hospital gave a blood transfusion to a child who was critically ill, but it was against the wishes of the parents who objected on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Judaism maintains that while G-d is indeed the Supreme Healer, He chooses to work through the efforts of trustworthy medical practitioners.

This week's Parshah tells of Isaac taking Rebecca as his wife. "And Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother." Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains this to mean more than the obvious. When she entered the tent, it was as if she was Sarah, Isaac's mother. Because Sarah was of such saintly character, she was granted three special miracles. Her Shabbat candles burned the entire week, her dough was particularly blessed, and a heavenly cloud attached itself to her tent. When Sarah died, these blessings disappeared. When Rebecca arrived on the scene, they resumed immediately. In fact, this was a clear sign to Isaac that Rebecca was indeed his soul mate and that the shidduch was made in Heaven.

Each of those three miracles, however, required some form of human input first. A candle and fire had to be found, the dough had to

be prepared and a tent had to be pitched before G-d would intervene and make those miracles happen. In other words, He does help us but we must help ourselves first.

It's a little like the fellow who would make a fervent prayer to G-d every week that he win the lottery. After many months and no jackpot in sight, he lost his faith and patience. In anguished disappointment, he vented his frustration with the Almighty. "Oh, G-d! For months I've been praying to you. Why haven't you helped me win the lottery all this time?" Whereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying, "Because you haven't bought a ticket, dummy!"

I wish it were that simple to win lotteries. But the fact is that it is the same in all our endeavors. G-d helps those who help themselves. May we all do our part. Please G-d, He will do His.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

MAKING THE COUNT OF OUR DAYS COUNT

Many years ago, a product came on the market called "Death Insurance." The problem was that no one wanted to buy a "death insurance" policy. It was a huge flop until someone had the bright idea to change the name from "Death Insurance" to "Life Insurance," a much happier and more optimistic name (even though it was the same thing). That little change, however, turned that product from a dud into a gazillion-dollar business.

Chayei Sarah begins with the death of our matriarch, Sarah. Chayei Sarah literally means, however, “the Life of Sarah.” So is this a switcheroo—a mere marketing gimmick to uplift us, or is it one of those paradoxical teaching moments?

The Talmud explains how those who are righteous, who fill their days in productive and positive ways, are considered alive when they are dead, while those who bring toxicity and negativity into this world are viewed as dead even while they are alive. So it is quite fitting that following the death of Sarah, we focus on the meaning and influence of her life—who she was and what she accomplished—even though she is no longer living.

Sarah died at the age of 127, and rather than simply tell us that she was 127 years old when she passed, the Torah describes her lifespan in a curious way: “Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years.” And so, a year is not a year is not a year. (Just think if two hours watching an engrossing show feels the same as two hours sitting through a boring lecture. In one case “time flies,” whereas in the other, “time stands still.”) Time is relative. It is defined more by its quality than its quantity.

Choosing Ultimate Reality

There is a mystical idea that our days on earth will ultimately be comprised of the garments that clothe our soul after we die. These garments are those of “thought,” “speech” and “action.” The quality of these garments will not be determined by the years of our life, but by the “life in our years.” In other words, we stitch together these holy garments from our good deeds (our mitzvot) and the moments we create that we endow with the quality of ultimate meaning, and therefore, infinite reality. For example, someone could live to a ripe old age, and yet, sadly, have lived a life of such little significance and substance that his or her soul could be naked or virtually naked in the next world.

Each day of our lives presents us with endless possibilities. We constantly stand at the crossroads of choice. How many times have I thought, “Sorry G-d, I have no time to pray. I am just so busy. Catch you later. Maybe tomorrow?” Thinking I am choosing “reality” (you know, “getting stuff done”), I fritter away many moments of time that at the end of the day evaporate like smoke. It’s like consuming empty-calorie junk food instead of nutrient-rich food filled with vitality. I think I am eating, but nutritionally, I’m not. It’s OK once in a while, but I certainly wouldn’t make a habit of it.

On the other hand, when we consciously embrace our lives moment by moment, cognizant of the power and significance of our choices, mindfully aware of our words and deeds, we can weave together holy garments that will wrap us like a hallowed shawl.

Close Versus Connected

The Hebrew word for sacrifice—namely, the sacrifices that were brought to the Holy Temple—is korban. The root of that word is karev, which means “close.” Hence, we are to understand that the purpose of bringing a sacrifice is to come closer to G-d, and we have opportunities every single moment to actively move towards where we want to be.

The holiest offering that was brought into the

Temple, however, was the ketoret, the incense offering. The word Make your moments endure by weaving them into a sacred reality itself means “to bond” or “to connect.” It represents the weaving together of different elements to form one unified entity that does not come undone. It is here that I recognize how I am inextricably linked and interconnected with G-d. While I do my part by “coming close” in my “thought,” “speech” and “action,” my soul is already there and bonded.

Leveraging Time

And in so doing—since the soul does not die—it’s as if we don’t truly die. Sarah physically died. That’s the truth. But the opposite was also true. As a woman whose life was alive with the fullness of her choices, Sarah also lived, as death only marked a new form of her life. Sarah embodies the idea that we must not merely count our days, but we must make our days count.

So make the most of every moment. Make your moments holy. By understanding the infinite power and potential of each moment, you can stitch together the fabric of your life so that your spiritual loveliness will be there to embrace and clothe your eternal soul. Happy weaving!

Internalize & Actualize:

Starting with the moment you wake up, list four small things you can incorporate into your day to infuse it with meaning and holiness. (Think morning, afternoon, evening and before bed. This could be a few minutes of meditation upon arising, giving gratitude for the food you are eating for breakfast, dedicated focus about those you love in your life, appreciation that you have a roof over your head, etc.) The goal is to stop, think and actively acknowledge these things.

Write down something you struggle with staying positive about. It can be physical or spiritual. Then, tapping into the garments of your soul, commit to shifting your thought, speech and action about that struggle in a practical way on a daily basis. Write down a small step you can take and then make sure to think it, say it out loud and do something towards being positive.

By Hana Perlberger

Chanukah December 3 - 10

Please make arrangements with your chaplain to schedule candle lighting and prayers.

In Jewish History

Thursday, 23 Cheshvan, 5779 -

November 1, 2018

Hasmonean Holiday (137 BCE)

In Talmudic times, Cheshvan 23 was commemorated as the day on which the stones of the altar which were defiled by the Greeks were removed from the Holy Temple.