

Torah Weekly

ט"ב

1- 7 September, 2019
1 Elul- 7 Elul, 5779
Torah: Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9
Haftarah: Isaiah 51:12-52:12)
PARSHAT SHOFTIM

Calendars

The 2019-20/ 5780 Jewish Calendars will be ready within the month. We will be sending them to every Chaplain and Prison. 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 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 &

We offer 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 (available to all prisons).

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Do I Need to Be Perfect In Order to Repent?

Does G-d expect me to be perfect? It sure seems that way. Throughout life, 24/7, we are expected to do good and avoid evil, be righteous and not be wicked. No excuses! What if we make a mistake? What if we get lazy and self-indulgent for a moment, a minute or a month? Well then we need to "get perfect" in order to fix it.

The chassidic master Rabbi Zusia of Anipoli explains that the very word *teshuvah*, spelled תשובה (commonly translated as "repentance," but literally meaning "return") alludes to a sequential pattern that achieves a proper return and repairs broken relationships. Each of the five Hebrew letters of the word alludes to another step in the *teshuvah* process. The first letter, the *tav* (ת), alludes to a verse (Deuteronomy 18:13) which begins with a *tav*. *Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha* ("Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d"). *Tamim* commonly translates as "perfect" or "whole." We have seen the word *tamim* before: Noah is described as *tamim*, Abraham is commanded to be *tamim*, and all offerings brought in the Temple must be *tamim*. Simply put—you want to fix what you broke? The first step is to get *tamim*. Makes sense to me. If a student wants his tardiness overlooked, the teacher will demand consistent punctuality: "Don't just tell me how remorseful you are and what you have resolved to do. Demonstrate

excellent behavior, be there consistently before the bell rings, and then I'll erase your failure." Here's a different angle, however, thanks to Rashi, the primary biblical commentator. He explains that the word *tamim* in this verse has a different meaning than the *tamim* used in other areas of the Torah. Replace "complete" with

"wholehearted," "trusting" or "accepting." The context of this verse is the prohibition against employing witchcraft or necromancy in an effort to know the future, in the hope of allaying the fear of the unknown. There is debate whether these machinations have any value, yet the core compulsion to pursue these avenues is the desire to be in control, to get tomorrow's news today so that I can feel secure.

And G-d asks us to simply trust Him. Be *tamim*. Don't go looking elsewhere for security and peace of mind. Instead, calmly welcome whatever He brings our way, confident that it is for our personal good. Show your love for G-d by wholeheartedly accepting Him.

When I hold back love, trust and commitment "just in case," I damage the ability to forge a "perfect" relationship, with G-d, my spouse, sibling or friend. When I say that I accept you unconditionally, I am here to stay, committed without reservation, *tamim*, despite my propensity to mess up, that is a foundation—the first letter—of return/repentance/repair. I'm here and I accept all that you bring, without an eye towards

greener grass.

Once we get that clear, even before our behavior have been repaired, we have returned. We have started *teshuvah*.

By Rabbi Baruch Epstein

Here Comes the Judge

Don't be judgmental. Unless, of course, you happen to be a judge. Then it's your job.

This week's Parshah, Shoftim (Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9), begins with the biblical command for judges to be appointed in every city and town to adjudicate and maintain a just, ordered, civil society. Interestingly, it occurs in the first week of Elul, the month in which we are to prepare in earnest for the Days of Judgment ahead, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are, however, some significant differences between earthly judges of flesh and blood and the heavenly judge. In the earthly court, if after a fair trial a defendant is found guilty, then there's really not much room for clemency on the part of the judge. The law is the law and must take its course. The accused may shed rivers of tears, but no human judge can be certain if his remorse is genuine. His feelings of regret are touching, but of limited legal consequence. After all, a human judge may only make a decision based on "what the eye can see." The misdeed was seen to have been committed. The remorse, who knows? Perhaps he's a good actor and is only acting contrite. The Supreme Judge, however, *does* know whether the accused genuinely

regrets his actions or is merely putting on an act. Therefore, He alone is able to forgive. That is why in heavenly judgments, *teshuvah* (repentance) is effective. The Maharal of Prague gave another reason. Only G-d is able to judge the whole person. Every one of us has good and bad to some extent. Even those who have sinned may have many other good deeds that outweigh the bad ones. Perhaps even one good deed was of such major significance that it alone could serve as a weighty counterbalance. The point is, only G-d knows. Only He can judge the individual in the context of his whole life and all his deeds, good and bad. Our goal is to emulate the heavenly court. We should try to look at the totality of the person. You think he is bad, but is he all bad? Does he have no redeeming virtues? Surely, he must have some good in him as well. Look at the whole person. A teacher once conducted an experiment. He held up a white plate and showed it to the class. In the center of the plate was a small black spot. He then asked the class to describe what they saw. One student said he saw a black spot. Another said it must be a target for shooting practice. A third suggested that the plate was dirty or damaged. Whereupon the teacher asked, "Doesn't anyone see a white plate?" There may have been a small black spot, but essentially it was a white plate. Why do we only see the dirt? Let us learn to find the good in others. Nobody is perfect, not even ourselves. Let's not be so judgmental and critical. Let's try to see the good in others. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

Reminder: The Jewish Holidays of *Rosh Hashana*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot* are approaching. *Rosh Hashanah* is the Jewish New Year. It is the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, and a day of judgment and coronation of G-d as king. *Yom Kippur* is the holiest day of the year—the day on which we are closest to G-d and to the quintessence of our own souls. The seven days of *Sukkot*—celebrated by dwelling in the sukkah, taking the Four Kinds, and rejoicing—is the holiday when we expose ourselves to the elements in covered huts, commemorating G-d's sheltering our ancestors as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land.

September 1, 2019- 1 Elul, 5779

Moses ascends Sinai for 3rd 40 days (1313 BCE)

On the early morning of the 1st of Elul of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE) Moses ascended Mount Sinai, taking with him the stone tablets he had hewn by divine command (see "Today in Jewish History" for yesterday, Av 30), for G-d to re-inscribe the Ten Commandments. On the mountain, G-d allowed Moses to "see My back, but not My face" (which Maimonides interprets as a perception of G-d's reality but not His essence) -- the closest any human being ever came to knowing G-d -- and taught him the secret of His "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy" (Exodus 33:18-34:8).

Moses remained on the mountain for 40 days, until the 10th of Tishrei (Yom Kippur), during which time He obtained G-d's whole-hearted forgiveness and reconciliation with the people of Israel following their betrayal of the covenant between them with their worship of the Golden Calf. This was the third of Moses' three 40-day periods on Mount Sinai in connection with the Giving of the Torah. Ever since, the month of Elul serves as the "month of Divine mercy and forgiveness."

September 1, 2019- 1 Elul, 5779

Moroccan Jewry Saved From Portuguese Conquest (1578)

In 1578, a Portuguese army led by King Sebastian I joined forces with the deposed Moroccan Sultan Abdallah Mohammed, who desired to regain the throne from his uncle, Abd al-Malik. Victory of the Portuguese king would inevitably lead to the infamous Inquisition taking hold in Morocco. On August 4, corresponding to 1 Elul, the Portuguese army was defeated in what is known as the Battle of the Three Kings. A number of Moroccan communities would commemorate this date each year as a day of celebration, thanking G-d for His salvation.

September 2, 2019- 2 Elul, 5779

Shulchan Aruch Completed (Orech Chaim) (1555)

The first section of the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) authored by Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488-1575) was completed in the Holy Land on this date in 1555.

September 6, 2019- 6 Elul, 5779

Passing of R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller, the "Tosfot Yom Tov" (1654)

R. Yom Tov was a preeminent Torah scholar who served as rabbi in many distinguished communities in Austria and Poland. He is most famous for his Mishnah commentary, called *Tosfot Yom Tov*, which appears in most large editions of the Mishnah and is an indispensable tool for obtaining a thorough understanding of the text. He authored numerous other works as well, including a commentary on the halachic work of R. Asher ben Yechiel (the Rosh), and *Tzurat Habayit*, clarifying the future layout of the third Holy Temple.

In his autobiographical work *Megilat Eivah*, R. Yom Tov describes how, when serving as rabbi of Prague, his enemies slandered him to the Austrian Emperor, resulting in his imprisonment and a death sentence. Thankfully, the verdict was later mitigated to a monetary fine and a prohibition against serving as rabbi in Prague (see entry for 30 Shevat).

September 7, 2019- 7 Elul, 5779

Moses' parents remarry (1394 BCE)

Amram and Jocheved had separated because of Pharaoh's decree that all male Jewish babies be killed. Prompted by their six-year-old daughter Miriam's rebuke ("Pharaoh decreed against the males; you decreed against the males and the females") they remarried on the 7th of Elul of the year 2367 from creation (1394 BCE). Moses was born six months and one day later on Adar 7, 2368 (Talmud, Sotah 12b).

September 7, 2019- 7 Elul, 5779

Spies die (1312 BCE)

The Spies who slandered the Land of Israel died in the desert (Talmud, Sotah 35a; see Numbers 13-14 and text and links for Av 9 and Av 15).