

Torah Weekly

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15- 21 September, 2019
15 Elul-21 Elul, 5779
Torah:Deuteronomy 26:1-29.8
Haftorah: Isaiah 60:1-22
PARSHAT KI TAVO

Calendars

The 2019-20/ 5780 Jewish Calendars will be ready within the week. 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 & Matzah

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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Jewish And Joyless

Tzorres. Reproach. Dire predictions and horrifying forecasts of the curses and calamities we will encounter in our lives if and when we should stray from the good and G-dly path. The portion we read this Shabbat is known as the *tochachah*, or rebuke. It is always read in close proximity to Rosh Hashanah, and is intended to sober us up to the realities of life so that we can do some soul-searching and introspection in order to improve our behavior before the coming Days of Judgment. And in the middle of all these terrifying and ominous curses, there is a one-liner that seems to suggest the root cause of our problems. All this calamity will befall you "because you did not serve the L-rd, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant." Deuteronomy 28:47. The simple meaning of this verse is that we will experience these curses because we did not serve G-d in the "good times," when we were enjoying prosperity and abundance. We became smug, complacent, and forgot our Maker and our higher calling—why we were put here in the first place. Commentaries offer various other interpretations, including the idea that we simply did not serve G-d *b'simchah*, with joy. We may have done all the right things, but we did them with a heavy heart. We served G-d and observed His commandments reluctantly and without any feeling. There was no enthusiasm, no joy. Being Jewish had become a burden. We found our joy and satisfaction in other areas of life, perhaps even in the undesirable and unholy domains. The Talmud tells us that the Jews at the time of

the Purim story brought Haman's terrible decree of a Final Solution upon themselves because "they took delight in the feast of that wicked man [King Ahasuerus]." (Talmud, Megillah 12a.) According to many opinions, the food the king served the Jews at his royal banquet was in fact kosher. But the problem was that the Jews "took delight" in participating in this drunken orgy, where the sacred vessels of our Holy Temple were desecrated and used as party props for the evil king's pleasure. Where do we find our delight? Where is our enthusiasm and passion? Is it in leading good Jewish lives, or in partying with princes? The story is told of a Jew in Russia of old who was doing some business with the *poretz*, the local Russian squire. The squire invited the Jew to a business lunch, where he offered him pork chops and non-kosher wine. When the Jew declined to partake, citing the Jewish dietary laws, the squire asked, "What if you were stranded in a desert and had nothing to eat but this? Would you not eat it to save your life?" "Well, if it was matter of life and death, then I would be permitted to eat it," replied the Jew. Suddenly the squire jumped up from the table, pulled out a revolver and, pointing it at the Jew, shouted, "Drink the wine or I'll shoot!" Immediately, the Jew gulped down the wine. The squire burst out laughing and said, "I was only joking." Whereupon the Jew turned red with anger and glared furiously at the squire. "Why are you so angry?" the squire asked. "Why am I so angry? I'll tell you why!" the Jew replied. "You couldn't have forced me to eat the pork chops?!" That Jew kept kosher, but was he doing it happily or begrudgingly? While keeping

kosher, was he fantasizing about pork chops? The 19th-century Russian czars tried to Russify young Jewish boys by drafting them into the army for a 25-year stretch. These children, known as cantonists, would be separated from their families, their people and their faith. Despite their extreme suffering, many maintained their allegiance to the G-d of Israel with total commitment and heroism. Indeed, too many paid with their lives. The story is told of some of these young men who were forcibly conscripted and taken far away from their families. They wrote a letter to one of the leading rabbis of Russia, asking for his advice about what to do about kosher. Should they eat the non-kosher food, or allow themselves to suffer malnutrition and perhaps even starve to death? The wise rabbi answered them as follows. "If, in order to stay alive, you have no choice but to eat *treif*, then so be it. But, please, I beg of you, don't suck the marrow bones." Where is our enjoyment, our pleasure, our *geshmak*? Is there joy in our Judaism, or is it tedious and tired? It is not enough just to do the right thing. G-d wants our joy, our enthusiasm, our fervor and fire. As we approach Rosh Hashanah, let us resolve to do whatever it takes to find the inspiration we need to energize and invigorate our Jewish lives. Let us serve G-d. And let us serve Him with joy. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

Two Aspects of Thanksgiving

We are all familiar with the story of two people who decide to bring their

disagreement before the rabbi: The first person presents his case and the rabbi says, "You're right." The second person stands and pleads his case before the rabbi. The rabbi listens and then says to the man, "You're right." At which point the Rebbetzin interjects by asking, "How can they both be right?" To which the rabbi replies, "You're also right." The sages state regarding the disagreements (*machlokot*) within the realm of Torah learning, that "both these and those are the words of the living G-d"—we need to view both sides as presenting the words of G-d. Although legally only one opinion may dominate, we still, in a spiritual sense, take into consideration the second opinion. Such a disagreement is found regarding the opening verse of this week's Torah reading, which deals with the commandment to bring the first of one's fruits—known as *bikkurim*--to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. At what point does the nation of Israel become obligated to fulfill this mitzvah? The Torah says, "when you come into the land ... and you possess it and settle in it." The Jerusalem Talmud understands the words "when you possess it and settle in it" as obliging the bringing of first fruits only after the fourteen years of conquest and division of the land of Israel under the guidance of Joshua. The Midrash, however, emphasizes the first part of the verse and holds that the mitzvah takes effect immediately upon entering the land. The inner meaning of the mitzvah of *bikkurim* is to give praise and thanks to G-d on behalf of all of the goodness which He has bestowed. In a religious sense, this mitzvah of giving thanks is reflected in the thanksgiving that every Jew gives to G-d on a daily basis. This daily offering of thanks then can be fixed to two different time periods during the day, corresponding to the two opinions about the timing of the mitzvah of *bikkurim*. One type of thanksgiving parallels the idea of the first fruits being brought immediately upon the Jews' entry into the land. In our life, this refers to the very beginning of the day. When a Jew opens his eyes, he or she immediately gives thanks to G-d by reciting the prayer, "I give thanks ... that You have returned to me my soul." This is said even before the hands are washed, a time when one is actually forbidden to say words of Torah. It is a burst of thanks based on the simple and pure faith implanted in our hearts. The second time that we give thanks during the day corresponds to the second opinion—that *bikkurim* were brought only after the land was settled. This time of thanks comes with our morning prayers. Here, we meditate on G-d's greatness and the abundance of His kindness. As a result of this meditative experience, we are inspired with a sense of thanks toward G-d. This type of thanks does not blurt itself out, but rather comes as a result of deep thought and intellectual reflection. An advantage exists in each type of thanks over the other. The first reflects the depth of one's faith, but is likely to be a very abstract and amorphous response. The second, steeped in intellect, may lack the spontaneity and power of the first, but truly penetrates the entire personality of the individual. It is the fusion of these two approaches — "both these and those are the words of living G-d" — that creates a sense of wholeness and completeness. By Rabbi Shraga Sherman

Reminder: The Jewish Holidays of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot are approaching. Pop-up Sukkahs are available For the Holiday of Sukkot. Please have your Chaplain/ Rabbi contact us for more information

September 15, 2019- 15 Elul, 5779

Tomchei Temimim founded (1897)

The Yeshivah "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.

September 17, 2019- 17 Elul, 5779

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.

September 17, 2019- 17 Elul, 5779

Outbreak of World War II (1939)

On September 1, 1939, corresponding to the Hebrew date of 17 Elul, the Nazi Wehrmacht invaded Poland, launching World War II. The war would prove to be the deadliest conflict in history, resulting in the death of some 60 million people, including the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust as part of the Final Solution.

September 18, 2019- 18 Elul, 5779

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.

September 18, 2019- 18 Elul, 5779

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.