

# Torah Weekly

22-28 September, 2019  
 22 Elul-28 Elul, 5779  
 Torah: Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20  
 Haftorah: Isaiah 61:10-63:9  
**PARSHAT NITZAVIM**

**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 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. (available to all prisons). We are also offering a free Lulav and Etrog to every institution to be sent a week before the Holiday of Sukkot. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll

**Finding Ourselves Through Others: The Meaning of Community** There is a story of a teenage boy who was suffering from typical teenage angst, and went to the Rebbe for advice. He was having a difficult time and kept slipping back into situations that he knew were not right for him. He asked the Rebbe: How come G-d didn't just create us as angels? If He had, we would be perfect, and we wouldn't make such mistakes and create such problems. The Rebbe explained to him that G-d doesn't want us to be perfect; He wants us to be unique individuals who grow and learn from our experiences and mistakes. He asked the boy if he understood the difference between a photograph and a portrait. When you want to capture a perfect replica of something you see, you take a picture. The picture can be beautiful, and is exactly what you witnessed with your eye. Yet the typical photograph costs pennies to reproduce. A portrait, on the other hand, is something that is always filled with inaccuracies. It can never be a perfect reproduction of something, like a photograph can. If anything, the better the portrait, the more creative license that went into it to bring out the meaning and color and beauty that does not always exist in the surface look. Unlike a photograph, the portrait can sell for millions. People pay for the portrait because it is a reflection not only of the subject, but of the artist as well. That person's creativity is part and parcel of the portrait. The Rebbe explained that the angels are G-d's photographs. We, however, are G-d's portraits. The Torah portion that we read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah, Nitzavim, begins: *Atem nitzavim hayom*

*kulchem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem*— "You are all standing this day before the L-rd, your G-d: the leaders of your tribes, your elders and your officers—every person of Israel."

The idea is that before we head into Rosh Hashanah, we gather together as a group, as a community. When we talk about a community, the word used in the written Torah for this is *kahal*. But the term used in the Oral Torah is *tzibbur* (spelled *tzaddik, beit, vav, reish*). Interestingly We head into Rosh Hashanah as a community enough, the meaning of *tzibbur*, when used in the Written Torah (*vayitzbor Yosef*, Genesis 41:49), refers to piling and amassing diverse objects, assembling together very different things. There is a beautiful quote from Elias Canetti, a Jewish writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981, that says: "Jews are different from other people, but in reality, they are most different from each other." (*Crowds and Power*) So this idea of a community is the throwing together, the assembling, of a lot of different and diverse parts. The 17th-century Kabbalist Rabbi Nathan Nata Shapiro of Krakow explains in his work *Megaleh Amukot* that the word for "community" should be understood as an acronym: **Tzaddik: Tzaddikim: Righteous- Intermediary- Beit: Beinoni: Vav: And Reish: Rasha: Not So Righteous.** What is interesting here is that all of these categories exist together, and they are bound by the letter *vav*. *Vav* means "hook," and hooks together, binds together, what comes before it with what comes after it. So it is not distinguishing between

the righteous and the intermediary, and then, down there, the *rasha*, the wicked one. But rather, it shows that they *all* must coexist to be considered a *tzibbur*, a community. It is easy to want to forget those who we don't feel are worthy of our respect, who we don't feel deserve to be included. Yet this is our reminder that everyone is part of our community, and no one can be left out or forgotten about. The numerical equivalent of the word *tzibbur* is equal to that for the word *rachamim* = 298. *Rachamim* is the term for empathy, and this shows us that empathy is required in order to connect to others. What does it mean to have empathy, as opposed to sympathy? Empathy is the ability to truly relate to and understand the other person as if what they are experiencing is also happening to you. It is the ability to connect on an internal level, not just an external one. This is why the root of *rachamim* is *rechem*, a womb. Only when we feel that the other is truly a part of ourselves do we have compassion and empathy. And when we feel that the other is a part of ourselves, then we are able to deal with the differences—and the things that need help. If you are told that the baby within your womb has a problem, it is not the baby's problem, it is *your* problem, and you love your baby and will do whatever you need to do to solve that problem. So to have a community, there needs to be a feeling of interinclusion; and to truly feel like we are one united group, we need to have empathy and feel that we are all a part of one another. But this is not as simple as deciding that I just need to work on connecting to my neighbor who is really obnoxious. Or that I need to reach out to that woman who is always so rude to me. It is far from that

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easy. Nor can we look at the levels of the community in the acronym, that of the righteous, the intermediary and the not-so-righteous, and start deciding where we or others belong. Perhaps I think that I am kind of in-between, vacillating between being righteous and not being so great, and you are really pretty perfect and that guy over there is just not so great. So the three of us should get together and go golfing, and we will have formed a nice little rectified community. It goes much deeper. It is not that you are righteous, you are the intermediary, and I am the wicked one. But rather, you are all three, he is all three, and I am all three. We are *all* righteous, intermediate and wicked—all in different ways and at different times—and what forms a community is when all of our different ways join together, with empathy for the other, and unify. When we can recognize this about ourselves and about others, then we can start to understand how we are all here to teach one another, and it is only through learning from others and teaching others that we can start to develop and grow. This is why we read this statement, of how we all stand together before our Creator, right before Rosh Hashanah. And He knows we are not angels, because He didn't create us to be perfect. But He did create us with the ability to connect with others and become better people. For, after all, a community is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, each with his or her own unique talents and abilities, and each an essential part of the whole. May we be blessed to enter this new year with the ability to reveal our potential and help others reveal theirs. May it be sweet, healthy and productive! *By Sara Esther Crisp*

**Choose Life** *I call today upon heaven and earth as witnesses for you. I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. And you shall choose life, so that you and your children may live.* (Deuteronomy 30:19) Do we really need the Torah to tell us to choose life? Which person of sound mind would choose death? One possible answer is that one must make a conscious decision to *live* and not just vegetate. And I don't mean to live it up by living life in the fast lane. To "choose life" means to choose to live a meaningful life, a life committed to values and a higher purpose. Did it make any difference at all in that I inhabited planet Earth for so many years? Will anyone really know the difference if I'm gone? Is my life productive, worthwhile? It is told that when the first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, wanted to bless Reb Yekutiel Liepler with wealth, he declined the offer, saying that he was afraid it would distract him from more spiritual pursuits. When the Rebbe then offered to bless him with longevity, Reb Yekutiel stipulated that it should not be "peasant's years, with eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear, where one neither sees nor senses G-dliness." Reb Yekutiel was rather fussy, it seems. The holy Rebbe is offering him an amazing blessing, and he is making conditions! Yes, he chose life, and he chose to live a life that would be purposeful and productive, and that really would make a tangible difference. He wasn't interested in a long life if, essentially, it would amount to an empty life. As we stand just before Rosh Hashanah, let us resolve to choose life. Let us live lives of Torah values and noble deeds. And may we be blessed with a good and sweet new year. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

**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 22, 2019 --22 Elul, 5779**

**Passing of R. Yaakov Moelin (the Maharil) (1427)**

R. Yaakov Moelin, known as the Maharil, was recognized as the supreme halachic authority for Ashkenazi Jewry in his day. His customs, collected in Minhagei Maharil (and cited often by R. Moshe Isserles in his comments to the Code of Jewish Law), are the basis for the conduct of Ashkenazi Jewry in many areas of Jewish life, especially in matters relating to prayer and synagogue procedure.

**September 23, 2019 --23 Elul, 5779**

**Dove brings Olive Leaf (2105 BCE)**

On the 301st day of the great Flood, Noah sent a dove for the 2nd time from the ark (see "Today in Jewish History" for Elul 17). This time, the dove stayed away all day; "the dove came in to him in the evening, and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off; and Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth" (Genesis 8:11).

**September 24, 2019-- 24 Elul, 5779**

**Preparations for Second Temple Construction Begin (353 BCE)**

Inspired by Haggai's prophecy on the first of Elul (see entry for that date), Zerubavel son of She'altiel, ruler of Judah, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the High Priest, began the preparations for the construction of the Second Temple (Haggai 1:15). The actual construction began exactly three months later, on Kislev 24 (see entry for that date).

**September 24, 2019-- 24 Elul, 5779**

**Passing of Chafetz Chaim (1933)**

Elul 24 is the yahrtzeit of the revered Torah scholar, pietist and Jewish leader Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933) of Radin (Poland), author of *Chafetz Chaim* (a work on the evils of gossip and slander and the guidelines of proper speech) and *Mishnah Berurah* (a codification of Torah law).

**September 25, 2019-- 25 Elul, 5779**

**Creation (3760 BCE)**

The 1st day of creation, on which G-d created existence, time, matter, darkness and light, was the 25th of Elul. (Rosh Hashanah, on which we mark "the beginning of Your works", is actually the 6th day of creation, on which the world attained the potential for the realization of its purpose, with the creation of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Rosh Hashanah is therefore the day from which the Jewish calendar begins to count the years of history; the 1st day of creation thus occurred on the 25th of Elul of what is termed -1 from creation.

**September 26, 2019-- 26 Elul, 5779**

**Creation of Skies (3760 BCE)**

Today is the second day of Creation, when G-d created the skies: G-d said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, and let it be a separation between water and water." G-d made the expanse, and it separated between the water below the expanse and the water above the expanse, and it was so. G-d called the expanse Heaven, and it was evening, and it was morning, a second day. (Genesis 1:6-8)

**September 27, 2019-- 27 Elul, 5779**

**Creation of Dry Land and Vegetation (3760 BCE)**

Today is the third day of Creation, when G-d exposed the dry land and created vegetation:

G-d said, "Let the water that is beneath the heavens gather into one place, and let the dry land appear," and it was so.... G-d saw that it was good. G-d said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, seed-yielding herbs and fruit trees producing fruit according to its kind in which its seed is found, on the earth," and it was so.... G-d saw that it was good. It was evening, and it was morning, a third day. (Genesis 1:9-13)