

Torah Weekly

29 September – 5 October, 2019
29 Elul-6 Tishrei, 5779-80
Torah:
Deuteronomy 31:1-30
Haftorah: Hosea 14:2-10;
Micah 7:18-20
PARSHAT VAYELECH

Calendars
Calendars have been shipped to Pennsylvania prisons. Please be in contact with your Chaplain to receive one.

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 Matzah 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.

Tightrope of Life In the days of communism's fierce grip on the Soviet Union, there lived a Chassidic Jew named Reb Mendel Futerfas. Reb Mendel repeatedly put his life at risk with his efforts to promote Jewish education behind the Iron Curtain, and for some 14 years was incarcerated in prisons and labor camps for his "crime" of teaching Torah. While in the Siberian gulag, he spent most of his free time studying and praying, but he also interacted and conversed with other prisoners—some Jewish, some not. Among these prisoners was a circus performer whose claim to fame was his incredible skill as a tightrope walker. Reb Mendel would often engage this man in conversation. Having never been to a circus, Reb Mendel was totally baffled by the man's profession. How could a person risk his life walking on a rope several stories above ground? (This was in the days before safety nets were standard practice.) "To just go out there and walk on a rope?" Reb Mendel challenged incredulously. The performer explained that due to his training and skill he did not need to be held up by any cables, and that for him it was no longer all that dangerous. Reb Mendel remained skeptical and intrigued. After Stalin died, the prison authorities relaxed their rules somewhat, and the guards told the prisoners that they would be allowed to stage a makeshift circus on May Day. There was no doubt that the famous tightrope walker's act would be the highlight of the show. The tightrope walker made sure that his friend, Reb Mendel, was in

the audience. Everyone watched with bated breath as the tightrope walker climbed the tall pole to the suspended rope. His first steps were timid and tentative (after all, it had been several years), but within a few seconds it all came back to him. With his hands twirling about, he virtually glided across the rope to the pole at the other end, and then, in a flash, made a fast turn, reversed his direction and proceeded back to the other side. Along the way, he performed several stunts. The crowd went wild. When he was done, he slid down off the pole, took a bow and went running straight to Reb Mendel. "So?" he said. "Did you see that I was not held up by any cables?" A very impressed Reb Mendel replied, "Yes. You're right. No cables." "Okay. You're a smart man. Tell me, how did I do it? Was it my hands? Was it my feet?" the man asked. Reb Mendel paused for a moment, closed his eyes and replayed the entire act back on his mind. Finally he said, "It's all in your eyes. During the entire time, your eyes were completely focused and riveted on the opposite pole." "Exactly!" said the performer. "When you see your destination in front of you and you don't take your eyes off of it, then your feet go where they need to go, and you don't fall." The tightrope walker had one more question for Reb Mendel. "What would you say is the most difficult part of the act?" Again Reb Mendel thought for a moment. "Most difficult was the turn, when you had to change direction." "Correct again!" said the acrobat. "During that split second, when you lose sight of that first pole,

and the other pole has not yet come into view, there is some real danger there. But . . . if you don't allow yourself to get confused and distracted during that transition, your eyes will find that pole, and your balance will be there" This week's Torah reading, in which we learn about the events that transpired on the last day of Moses' life on earth, is called "And Moses went" (Vayeilech Moshe). The commentaries point out that even on the last day of his life, Moses was on the move—walking forward, achieving, growing—making the most of every precious moment of life. Moses' message to us is that so long as we have a breath of life, there ought to be vayeilech—explorations of new horizons, journeys to new frontiers. How do we walk this tightrope called "life" without stumbling? The answer is: by establishing clear and proper goals, and remaining focused on those goals like a laser beam. The Torah provides us with a roadmap to a meaningful and fulfilling way of life. It sets down goals, and defines purpose. It is also noteworthy that this Torah reading is often read on the special Shabbat that serves as the bridge between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, referred to as "Shabbat Shuvah." On that Shabbat we also read a haftorah in which we hear the words of the prophets exhorting us, pleading with us, beckoning us to improve the quality of our lives; to even change direction, if need be. When you know what your purpose and destination is, and you do not take your eyes off that pole, then you know where to put your feet.

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Even when things turn, and we

momentarily lose sight of the pole, we need not despair. Shabbat Shuvah teaches us that a change of direction ought not to send us plummeting. On the contrary, we can and should shift gracefully with changes of circumstances, catch our balance, and let the next pole come into view. *By Rabbi Moshe Bryski*

The Song That Testifies

"And I will surely hide My face on that day . . . So now, write this song for yourself and teach it to the Children of Israel, place it in their mouth, so that this song shall be for Me as a witness regarding the Children of Israel" — Deuteronomy 31:18-19. We inhabit a world where nothing is as it superficially seems, where the consciousness of every entity is at odds with its essence and its *raison d'être*. The most basic concern of every species and every individual entity is its own preservation. Satisfying its needs and wants naturally trumps all other considerations. In truth, however, "All that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He created solely for His glory" (Ethics 6:11). Every creation is a cog G-d's master plan, whose objective is to bring glory to the Creator. The Torah and the Jew share a unique bond because they both are exceptions to a universal rule. We are here to serve G-d. But our instincts tell us that we are here to serve ourselves. The Torah and the Jew share a unique bond because they both are exceptions to this rule. The Torah is G-d's missive to this world; it has no personal selfish agenda. Its every word clearly expresses its purpose — serving the Creator. And the Jew? Thousands of years of anti-Semitism, humiliation, persecution and pogroms quickly dispel the notion that self-preservation is his primary motivation. Within the heart of every Jew blazes a divine soul which recognizes that serving G-d is its ultimate calling, and all personal needs, even life itself, is of secondary importance. This relationship between the Jew and Torah expresses itself in the deep love and respect the Jew has for Torah. We are now in the High Holiday season, when many Jews who don't step foot in a house of worship throughout the year pay a visit to their synagogue. Pay attention to these precious Jews as the Torah is taken out of the Ark and passes their way. Watch as they lovingly and reverently kiss its velvet cover. The past year's Saturdays spent on the golf course... the non-kosher restaurants... the non-Jewish spouse... None of these matter at this moment. Right now, the Jewish soul has found its holy counterpart, and lovingly acknowledges this truth. "And I will surely hide My face on that day." G-d told Moses that the day would come when He would hide His face, when His presence and providence would be utterly concealed. This is true in a global sense, but as is the case with every word of the Torah, it is true in a personal sense as well. There will come a time when G-d's face which is within every one of His children will be hidden; when skeptics will doubt the very existence of a Jewish soul. "So now, write this song for yourself . . . so that this song shall be for Me as a witness regarding the Children of Israel" Write a Torah scroll. See how the Jew naturally reveres it. The testimony is incontrovertible. The Jewish soul still burns bright within the hearts of the progeny of Abraham. "Teach it to the Children of Israel, place it in their mouth." Now that the Jew's relationship with G-d and Torah has been established, it is time to live accordingly. The adoration for Torah should not be relegated to the High Holidays. Study Torah and place it in your mouth. Your lifestyle will then be in harmony with your truest self. *By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg*

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.-d's a unique bond be

September 29, 2019- 29 Elul 5779

Tzemach Tzedek Born (1789)

The third Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1789-1866), was born on the 29th of Elul. Orphaned from his mother at age 3, he was raised by his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Rabbi Menachem Mendel assumed the leadership of Chabad in 1827, upon the passing of his father-in-law and uncle, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch. Extremely active in communal affairs, he established and funded Jewish farming colonies which provided a livelihood for thousands of families. He also stood at the forefront of the battle against the "Enlightenment Movement" which, with the support of the Czarist regime, sought to destroy traditional Jewish life - - a battle which earned him no less than 22 (!) imprisonments and arrests. In the course of his lifetime, Rabbi Menachem Mendel penned more than 48,000 pages of Chassidic teachings and Halachic exegesis. He is known as the "Tzemach Tzedek" ("a sprouting of righteousness") after his work of Halachic responsa by that name.

September 30, 2019- 1 Tishrei., 5780

Binding of Isaac; Sarah's Passing (1677 BCE)

Abraham's supreme test of faith -- his binding of Isaac in preparation to sacrifice him as per G-d's command -- occurred on the 1st of Tishrei of the year 2084 from creation (1677 BCE), and is recalled each Rosh Hashanah with the sounding of the shofar (ram's horn -- a ram was sacrificed in Isaac's stead when an angel revealed that the command to sacrifice Isaac was but a divine test); the Torah's account of the event is publicly read in the synagogue on the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah. On the day of Isaac's binding, his mother, Sarah, passed away at age 127, and was subsequently buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron.

October 1, 2019- 2 Tishrei., 5780

First Shabbat (3760 BCE)

Today marks the first Shabbat, when G-d rested after creating the world for six days (Genesis 2:2-3).

To commemorate this day, we are instructed to keep the day of Shabbat holy and rest from all work:. (Exodus 20:8-11).

October 2, 2019- 3 Tishrei., 5780

Assassination of Gedaliah (423 BCE)

Tishrei 3rd is a fast day mourning the assassination of the Jewish royal Gedaliah ben Achikam, governor of the Land of Israel for a short period following the destruction of the First Temple. Gedaliah's killing spelled the end of the small remnant of a Jewish community that remained in the Holy Land after the destruction. They soon fled to Egypt. (According to many opinions, the assassination of Gedaliah actually occurred on Rosh Hashanah, but the commemoration of the event is postponed to the day after the festival).

October 4, 2019- 5 Tishrei., 5780

Rabbi Akiva martyred (134)

The great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Akiva, was taken captive by the Romans on Tishrei 5 of the year 3894 from creation (134 CE). His subsequent torture and execution is recalled in the stirring *Eleh Ezkarah* poem of the Yom Kippur service.

October 5, 2019- 6 Tishrei., 5780

Rebbetzin Chana (1964)

The 6th of Tishrei is the yahrtzeit of Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson (1879-1964), mother of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.