

# Torah Weekly

3-9 November, 2019  
5-11 Cheshvan, 5780  
Torah: Genesis 12:1-17:27.8  
Haftorah: Isaiah 40:27-41:16  
**PARSHAT LECH-LECHA**

**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. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center  
5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-421-0111  
Fax: 412-521-5948  
www.alephne.org  
info@alephne.org



**ALEPH INSTITUTE**  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

## Our Lot in Life

It seems like the ultimate codependent relationship. In this week's Torah portion we are introduced to a shadowy character named Lot, Abraham's nephew. Through his relationship with Abraham, Lot grows wealthy and powerful, but that's what starts the rift between them. Abraham is always careful to muzzle his cattle when passing through the fields of others. Lot's shepherds let his animals graze wherever they please. Their argument is that G-d has promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham, and Abraham has no children, so it will all go to Lot. Therefore, they feel they are justified in letting Lot's animals loose in anyone's field. To Abraham, this is utterly unacceptable. Although G-d has promised the land to his descendants, he has not yet taken possession, and thus has no rights to his neighbors' fields. In any case, Lot is not the ultimate heir. To make matters worse, Lot resembles Abraham physically, (*Rashi on Genesis 13:8; Bereishit Rabbah 41:6*). so his behavior reflects negatively on Abraham as well. Finally, Abraham issues an ultimatum: "Please, let us go our separate ways. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left." (*Genesis 13:9*.) For Lot, this should have been an opportunity for self-reflection—to improve his ways and not lose his relationship with his revered Uncle Abraham. Instead, Lot agrees to part and sets up house among the most depraved people then in existence—the residents of Sodom. Not long afterward, four strong kings pick a battle with five weak kings, including the king of Sodom, and subdue the

population. After 12 years of subjugation, the five kings rebel. War breaks out, and Lot is taken prisoner. When Abraham hears the news, he immediately swings into action and personally goes into battle to rescue Lot. At this point, does Lot gratefully, meekly return to Abraham's court? He does not. He continues living with the corrupt Sodomites and even becomes a leader among them. Eventually, matters come to a head, and the evil of Sodom reaches the heavens. G-d comes to a verdict: The city of Sodom must be destroyed. G-d shares the news with his trusted servant Abraham, who proceeds to pray on behalf of the people of Sodom. He is unable to find a quorum of righteous people in whose merit the city should be saved. But Lot, at least, is spared the calamity. When the angels appear to rescue Lot, though, he is none too eager to join them. The angels drag him away, and he escapes with his life only moments before the city is destroyed. The final straw is when Lot's daughters awaken to the destruction around them and assume that they are the only ones left. They get their father drunk and become pregnant from him. News soon spreads of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters, and Abraham is forced to move away in shame. (*Genesis 20:1; see Rashi's commentary*.) The common thread in this saga is that Abraham is repeatedly disappointed and humiliated by the behavior of his nephew, yet he bails him out time and again. Abraham was a leader—a highly motivational person—and it must have pained him greatly not to be able to exert more influence on his nephew. But Lot was his own person who made his own decisions. Why did Abraham not simply

let him live with the consequences? Why did Abraham not make a clean break from Lot? Why did he keep swooping in to save Lot from himself? Was it classic codependency, or was there another dynamic at play? Perhaps Abraham saw potential in Lot and kept trying to bring it to the fore. Chassidic teachings explain that Lot represents the part of the mind that is uncouth, unrefined. (*Torah Ohr, Lech Lecha 22b*.) It's the part that behaves unpredictably, sometimes shamefully; the part that gets us into scrapes time and again; the part that can drag us to the most desolate, degraded places—our personal Sodom. We try to distance ourselves, but can never quite escape from our Lot. And perhaps, on some level, we don't want to. And this is something that Abraham bequeathed to us, his descendants: We will never give up on our Lot, whether it's a wayward child, an annoying neighbor—or ourselves. We don't give up because even the most unrefined and embarrassing person has potential waiting to be discovered. Lot's two daughters produced two sons, who grew into two mighty nations, Moab and Ammon. From Moab descended Ruth, the famous convert who became the great-grandmother of King David. From Ammon descended Naamah, wife of King Solomon, and mother of his firstborn son and heir, Rehoboam. Thus, the lineage of the dynasty of David, and by extension Moshiach, comes through Lot. Abraham foresaw that Lot would be a forebear of King David and Moshiach. On the verse in Psalms, "I have found my servant David," (*Psalms 89:21*.) the Midrash comments,

“Where did He find him? In

Sodom!” (*Bereishit Rabbah 41:4.*) The legacy of Lot is that no circumstance in life is so low or so depraved that no good can come from it. Abraham’s rescue of Lot empowers us to rescue ourselves and each other from the pits of Sodom—as many times as it takes—until we’ve refined our Lot to the utmost, and the world is finally ready for Moshiach. *By Chaya Shochet*

*Go Ahead, Ask for a Miracle!* Dear reader, Are you ever filled with such despair that you feel like your life is hopeless? In such moments, prayer is the opportunity that G-d offers us to communicate with Him, to turn to our Creator for comfort and salvation. And yet, during such challenging times, as you pray, do you ever hear yourself thinking: “Now, hold on, this is *too much* to be asking. There’s just *no way* that G-d is going to move heaven and earth to grant *me* this request. Maybe I should ask for something a little bit *more realistic*, a tad more *practical*.” In the beginning of this week’s Torah portion, G-d promises Abraham to make him “into a great nation.” Years later, after undergoing trials and tribulations, G-d reassures Abraham and tells him, “Fear not, Abram; I am your shield; your reward is exceedingly great.” Abraham responds, “Behold, You have given me no seed.” Of what purpose is all that You are blessing me with if I cannot have a child of my own to continue after me? At this point, “G-d took him outside and said, ‘Gaze now toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them!’ And G-d said to him, ‘So shall be your offspring!’” (Genesis 15:5) Rashi questions the need for bringing Abraham outdoors. Simply understood, G-d was taking Abraham out of his tent to see the stars outdoors, since his children would be as numerous as them. But on a deeper level, G-d was implying to Abraham that he needs to step outside the natural order and rely on G-d’s miracles. Abraham said: “Master of the universe, I have studied my astrological pattern, and it is clear that I will not sire a son.” G-d responded, “Go outside the sphere of the stars, because no stars control the destiny of Israel!” Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “How do we know that no star controls the destiny of Israel? From the verse “He took him outside.” (Talmud, Shabbos 156a) Abraham realized that according to the rules of nature, he was not destined to have a child. He realized that naturally Sarah would not have a child. But G-d was telling him: a Jew must go outside—he must leave the natural order, because his prayer has the power to reach his infinite G-d, who extends beyond the sphere of this world. Prayer can create the miraculous by elevating us beyond the natural order. Indeed, thirteen years later, when that miraculous son is born to Abraham and Sarah, he is called Yitzchak (Isaac), which means “laughter.” From this son of laughter descends the great nation of laughter with whom G-d establishes His special bond. Because the very essence of the Jew and his existence is forever a laughing, miraculous wonder—explainable only through our prayers and our deep bond with our Creator. *By Chana Weisberg*

**November 4, 2019- 6 Cheshvan, 5780**

**Maimonides Visits Jerusalem ((1165))**

After leaving Morocco and before settling in Egypt, Maimonides visited Jerusalem and prayed at the site of the Holy Temple. Three days later, on 9 MarCheshvan, he visited Hebron and prayed at the Cave of Machpelah. Maimonides resolved to keep these two days—6 and 9 MarCheshvan—as a personal holiday (*Charedim* ch. 65 [5744 ed.]).

**November 5, 2019- 7 Cheshvan, 5780**

**Last Jew comes home (2nd Temple Era)**

During the Second Temple Era (circa 230 BCE), Cheshvan 7 was the date on which the Jew most distant from the Holy Temple -- who resided on the banks of the Euphrates River, a 15-day journey's distance from Jerusalem -- arrived at his homestead upon returning from the Sukkot pilgrimage. All Jews would wait for this before beginning to pray for rain. Cheshvan 7 thus marked the return to everyday activities following the spirituality of the festival-rich month of Tishrei.

**November 5, 2019- 7 Cheshvan, 5780**

**Passing of R. Meir Shapiro (1933)**

Passing of Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, founder of the daily "page a day" regimen of Talmudic study known as *Daf Yomi*.

**November 8, 2019- 10 Cheshvan, 5780**

**Birth of Gad**

Gad, the son of Jacob and Zilpah, seventh of the Twelve Tribes, was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of MarCheshvan. He lived to be 125 years old. (*Yalkut Shimoni*, Shemot, *remez* 162)

**November 8, 2019- 10 Cheshvan, 5780**

**Passing of R. Jonah of Gerona (1263)**

R. Jonah was a thirteenth-century scholar who lived in Spain. Although originally opposed to Maimonides’ philosophical works (most notably, his *Guide for the Perplexed*), he later changed his views, and even vowed to travel to Maimonides’ gravesite to posthumously beg for forgiveness. (He indeed began the long journey, but passed away before completing it.) R. Jonah authored *Shaarei Teshuvah* (an ethical work on repentance), a commentary on R. Isaac Al-Fasi’s halachic compendium, and a commentary on *Ethics of the Fathers*, among other works.

Others date his passing as 1 or 28 MarCheshvan.

**November 9, 2019- 11 Cheshvan, 5780**

**Passing of Methuselah (2105 BCE)**

Methuselah, the longest-lived human being of all time, died at the age of 969 years on the 11th of Cheshvan of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE) -- exactly seven days before the beginning of the Great Flood. Methuselah was Adam's great-great-great-great-grandson and Noah's grandfather.

**November 9, 2019- 11 Cheshvan, 5780**

**Rachel (1553 BCE)**

The matriarch Rachel died in childbirth on the 11th of Cheshvan of the year 2208 from creation (1553 BCE) while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin. Rachel was born in Aram (Mesopotamia) approximately 1585 BCE. Her father was Laban, the brother of Jacob's mother, Rebecca. Jacob came to Laban's home in 1576 BCE, fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau. He fell in love with Rachel and worked for seven years tending Laban's sheep in return for her hand in marriage. But Laban deceived his nephew, and on the morning after the wedding Jacob discovered that he had married Rachel's elder sister, Leah. Laban agreed to give him Rachel as a wife as well in return for another seven years' labor. Rachel was childless for many years, while her elder sister and rival gave birth to six sons and a daughter in succession. Finally, in 1562 BCE, she gave birth to Joseph. Nine years later, while Jacob and his family were on the road to Jacob's ancestral home in Hebron (after a 22-year absence), she gave birth to a second son, but died in childbirth. Jacob buried her by the roadside, in Bethlehem; there, "Rachel weeps over her children, for they are gone [in exile]" (Jeremiah 31:14). Her tomb has served as a place of prayer for Jews for more than 35 centuries.