

Torah Weekly

10-16 November, 2019
12-18 Cheshvan, 5780
Torah: Vayeira: Genesis 18:1-22:24
Haftorah: Kings II 4:1-37
PARSHAT VAYEIRA

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 Matzah 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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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

The Acid Test Last week we read how Abraham received his marching orders from G-d. “*Lecha lecha*—Go from your land, from your birthplace, from your father’s house, to the land I will show you.” G-d told him to leave all his familiar comfort zones and travel to an unknown destination. Eventually, it would become known as the Land of Israel, and Abraham as the one to whom it was originally promised. At the time, however, Abraham probably had no idea as to where he was going. But orders are orders, and so he went faithfully. In the end, Abraham’s great trek would be the fulfillment of his calling as the father of monotheism. He would take on the whole pagan world of the time, and succeed beyond his own wildest dreams. By the way, I think we take our biblical giants too much for granted. We fail to appreciate the enormity of Abraham’s contribution to civilization. What he did was nothing less than to singlehandedly change the mindset of the world! Believing in one, invisible Creator was culture shock to the idol-worshippers of the day. This achievement made Abraham not only the founding father of the Jewish people, but also the father of all the monotheistic faiths of the world. No wonder a recent study of history’s “100 Most Influential People” ranked Abraham way on top, far above other faith founders and even way ahead of Madonna, Britney, and the Bills—both Clinton and Gates. According to our sages, this journey to the unknown was the first of ten tests of faith the Almighty

would impose upon Abraham. Yet the final test, which we read about on Rosh Hashanah and again in this week’s Parshah, is considered the supreme test. The *akeidah*, the binding of Isaac, the near-sacrifice of the son he waited a century to have, generates far more coverage in Torah, in our prayers and in the writings of commentary. Why should this be the case? The first test of *lech lecha* had a universal impact, while the binding of Isaac was just between a father, his son and G-d. Somewhere on a secluded mountaintop, far removed from public scrutiny, a personal drama was played out. The journey of Abraham, on the other hand, had an almost global audience. Surely, this universal test should be considered much more important than the personal test of father and son. The answer is that before we can undertake a universal mission to humankind, we must first understand our personal relationship to G-d. Or, to put it simply, before you can change the world, you have to know who *you* are. If you don’t know yourself, if you don’t recognize your own personal spiritual mission, how can you hope to influence the broader society? The sages taught, “Perfect yourself before you seek to perfect others.” Obviously, this is not to say that we should not try and teach others until we are perfect ourselves. (Who is perfect?) What it does suggest is that if we hope to have an impact on others, our call must resonate as authentic and genuine. How can we make an impression on others, if we

are not credible individuals ourselves? A good salesperson believes in his product (even if he had to talk himself into believing it . . .) The legendary Hillel tells us in *Ethics of the Fathers*, “Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place (*makom*),” and an interesting alternative interpretation understands him to mean that in order to judge any person accurately, one should first establish what kind of reputation that individual enjoys in his own *makom*, in his own city and home. Is there not some truth in Jackie Mason’s jesting about the Jewish husband who is a big mover and shaker all over town, but who, as soon as he walks through the door of his own house, becomes a henpecked *shlemiel*? Years ago I came across a one-liner that had a profound impact on me personally: “Every rabbi has only one sermon—the way he lives his life.” It’s all too true. We can preach from today until next Yom Kippur, but if we don’t “walk the talk” and live the game we purport to play, we will leave our audiences unmoved. The most eloquent orators will fail to make an impression if their listeners know that their message is hollow and isn’t backed up by genuine personal commitment. So, while the story of Abraham’s journey and universal mission appears in the Torah and comes chronologically before the final test, in essence, the *akeidah* reigns supreme. Not only because it was the most difficult, but because our personal commitment and integrity always form the moral basis for our mission to the world. At the end of the

Day, only these validate the person and his or her message. And that is the acid test for all of us. *By Rabbi Yossy Goldman*

Why Angels Won't Multitask When I was in the first grade, just beginning to study the book of Genesis, I was fascinated by the stories, the personalities and the drama. But nothing captured my imagination more than the angels. There was something so mysterious about them. Disguised as ordinary people, they would show up in the right place at the right time, and solve some problem with their supernatural powers. And yet, I knew that however great the angels, they had a weakness. At the first mention of angels in the Torah, the commentators are quick to point out that the angels could not perform more than one action at a time. Why did three angels come to visit Abraham as he was sitting at the entrance of his tent, hoping to find people to invite? Because there were three items to be accomplished, and angels do not have the ability to multitask. As Rashi explains: "And behold, three men: One to bring the news [of Isaac's birth] to Sarah, and one to overturn Sodom, and one to heal Abraham, for one angel does not perform two errands." As a young child, I found this comforting. Maybe I couldn't fly like an angel, but at least I could do two things at once, like run and shout at the same time. Now, years later, I ask myself, why is it so important for Rashi to emphasize the angels' weakness? Why is it so important for every child studying Genesis to know that angels cannot perform two things at once? Perhaps because it's not a handicap. Perhaps it's the secret to the angels' power. Perhaps Rashi's comment is a critique of the human condition. The angel cannot do more than one thing at a time because the angel identifies with the task completely. The angel has no other dimension to his personality other than fulfilling G-d's mission—no personal name, no personal agenda, no personal ego to get in the way. At that moment, he is nothing but the task. As such, he cannot perform two acts simultaneously, as it's impossible to be, fully, in two places at once. A person, on the other hand, even when performing the will of G-d, never loses his own ego. A person always maintains the sense that he has an independent identity, an identity which happens to be engaged in the mission. As such, he can never become one with the mission, and therefore, some aspect of his identity will always be able to engage in something else. Rashi understood that the child reading the story is no angel. Yet Rashi is teaching us how to be more like an angel. How to be fully engaged in what we are doing, to the point that we forget about everything else. How to help someone else, and, while doing so, lose our own ego. How to speak to our children, carefully look them in the eyes, and listen. Listen as if, at that moment, we have nothing else in our life. Listen as if we have no e-mails, no deadlines, no one to meet, no place to go, no other interests. He is teaching us to be present—like an angel. *By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

November 10, 2019—12 Cheshvan, 5780

Passing of R. Zev Wolf Kitzes (1787)

R. Zev Wolf was one of the prominent disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. A great scholar in his own right, he accompanied his master on many of his travels and witnessed his miraculous accomplishments firsthand.

November 12, 2019—14 Cheshvan, 5780

Jews of Prague Saved (1620)

In May 1618, the Bohemian Revolt broke out in Prague, triggering the Thirty Years' War. In November 1620, King Ferdinand II suppressed the rebels in Prague in the Battle of White Mountain. Notwithstanding the widespread looting, the king gave orders that no Jew be harmed. To commemorate the miraculous turn of events, R. Yomtov Lipman Heller, rabbi of Prague, instituted penitential prayers to be said every year on the 14th of MarCheshvan, which he published in Prague later that year. (The above account was recorded by R. Yomtov in his introduction to the publication.)

November 13, 2019—15 Cheshvan, 5780

Passing of Mattityahu (139 BCE)

In the 2nd century before the common era, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks) who, with the collaboration of the Jewish Hellenists, introduced pagan idols into the Holy Temple and set about to forcefully Hellenize the people of Israel. Mattityahu, the son of the High Priest Yochanan, was already an old man when he picked up a sword and raised the flag of revolt in the village of Modiin in the Judean hills. Many rallied under his cry, "Who that is for G-d, come with me!" and resisted and battled the Greeks from their mountain hideouts. After heading the revolt for one year, Mattityahu died on the 15th of Cheshvan of the year 3622 from creation (139 BCE). His five sons -- the "Macabees" Judah, Yochanan, Shimon, Elazar and Yonatan -- carried on the battle to their eventual victory, celebrated each year since by Jews the world over with the festival of Chanukah.

November 14, 2019—16 Cheshvan, 5780

R. Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch Leaves the Town of Lubavitch (1915)

With the approach of the German army during World War I, R. Sholom DovBer and his family left Lubavitch, located in modern-day Belarus, for the city of Rostov. Lubavitch was the seat of the Chabad movement for 102 years, starting when R. DovBer, second Chabad Rebbe, settled there in 1813.

November 15, 2019—17 Cheshvan, 5780

Great Flood Begins (2105 BCE)

The rains began to fall on the 17th of Cheshvan of the year 1656 from creation (2105), flooding the earth and rising above the highest mountains. Only Noah and his family survived, in the ark built to that end by Divine command, and a pair of each animal species, who entered with him into the ark.