

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

17-23 November, 2019
19-25 Cheshvan, 5780
Torah: Genesis 23:1 - 25:18
Haftorah: Kings 1:1-31
PARSHAT CHAYEI-SARA

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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Don't (Only) Rely on G-d

"G-d helps those who help themselves" Is this statement heresy? Does it deny the hand of G-d in our successes? I recall a conversation with a self-proclaimed atheist who used the expression very cynically, suggesting that his considerable achievements were entirely his own and that G-d had nothing to do with it. I beg to differ. To my mind, "G-d helps those who help themselves" is a perfectly religious statement. What it means is absolutely consistent with traditional Jewish thinking. G-d does indeed help us to accomplish things, but He requires us to help ourselves first. If we just sit back and wait for miracles to happen, we may be disappointed. *"G-d will bless you in all that you do,"* (Deuteronomy 15:18) makes it very clear. Our blessings come from G-d, but we must *do*. Of course, we believe in miracles—but we mustn't rely on them. The combination of our own hard work and efforts coupled with G-d's blessing is the ideal road to success. The classic analogy is the farmer. He can plough and plant, sow and *shvitz* from today until tomorrow but if the rains don't come nothing will grow. Conversely, all the rains in the world will not cause anything to grow if the farmer hasn't planted first. After the farmer has done his work and the rains come from above, there will be a plentiful crop. And it's the same story whether we are farmers or shopkeepers, professionals or artisans, employers or employees. There are religious ideologies that frown upon medical intervention when someone is

ill. They see it as a lack of faith in the great Healer of all Flesh. In fact, right now in my own community, there is a court case going on because a hospital gave a blood transfusion to a child who was critically ill, but it was against the wishes of the parents who objected on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Judaism maintains that while G-d is indeed the Supreme Healer, He chooses to work through the efforts of trustworthy medical practitioners.

This week's Parshah tells of Isaac taking Rebecca as his wife. *"And Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother."* Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains this to mean more than the obvious. When she entered the tent, it was as if she was Sarah, Isaac's mother. Because Sarah was of such saintly character, she was granted three special miracles.

Her Shabbat candles burned the entire week, her dough was particularly blessed, and a heavenly cloud attached itself to her tent. When Sarah died, these blessings disappeared. When Rebecca arrived on the scene, they resumed immediately. In fact, this was a clear sign to Isaac that Rebecca was indeed his soul mate and that the *shidduch* was made in Heaven. Each of those three miracles, however, required some form of human input first. A candle and fire had to be found, the dough had to be prepared and a tent had to be pitched before G-d would intervene and make those miracles happen. In other words, He does help us but we must help ourselves first. It's a little like the fellow who

would make a fervent prayer to G-d every week that he win the lottery. After many months and no jackpot in sight, he lost his faith and patience. In anguished disappointment, he vented his frustration with the Almighty. "Oh, G-d! For months I've been praying to you. Why haven't you helped me win the lottery all this time?" Whereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying, "Because you haven't bought a ticket, dummy!" I wish it were that simple to win lotteries. But the fact is that it is the same in all our endeavors. G-d helps those who help themselves. May we all do our part. Please G-d, He will do His. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

G-d of Heaven and Earth

Abraham is undoubtedly one of the most successful people in history. He began with an idea that pitted him against the entire world, but now, three millennia later, his ideas are mainstream. Abraham was called *Ivri*, "the Hebrew," which literally means "from the other side," not just because he arrived in Canaan from the other side of the river, but because, figuratively, he was "on the other side" of society's belief system. While society was pagan, Abraham the Hebrew was the outcast, the one who believed in one G-d. And today, the majority of the world's population, more than 3.8 billion people, consider themselves adherents to an Abrahamic religion. How did Abraham view his achievements during his lifetime? What did he see as his mission? And how did he evaluate his own accomplishments? In this week's Torah portion, we

read about Abraham dispatching his servant Eliezer to Charan to find a wife for his son Isaac. While instructing Eliezer about the details of his mission, Abraham assures Eliezer that G-d will help him succeed in finding a proper match for Isaac. Abraham says: The L-rd, G-d of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and Who spoke about me, and Who swore to me, saying, "To your seed will I give this land," He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. (Genesis 24:7.) Rashi, the classic commentator on the Torah, is intrigued by Abraham's description of G-d. In this verse, Abraham refers to G-d only as the "G-d of heavens." Yet, in an earlier verse, Abraham refers to G-d as the "the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth." Why the change? Rashi explains that Abraham was telling Eliezer the following: Now He is the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth, because I have made Him familiar in the mouths of the people, but when He took me from my father's house, He was the G-d of the heavens but not the G-d of the earth, because mankind did not acknowledge Him, and His name was not familiar on the earth. Rashi, (Genesis 24:7) When Abraham first heeded G-d's calling, leaving his father's home and journeying to what would become the Land of Israel, G-d was only the G-d of the heavens. Now, Abraham was saying, after decades of work, G-d is not only the G-d of heaven, but He is also the G-d of the earth. He is at home in both realms. This is Abraham's achievement. Abraham is not satisfied with a G-d in heaven; Abraham wants G-d to be felt right here on earth. Each of our lives is made up of "heaven" and "earth." There are moments when we are connected to spirituality, prayer, acts of kindness, and Torah study, moments when we sense the Divine. Then, there are the "earth" moments. Moments when we feel that our existence is mundane. We may be at work, eating lunch, running errands, sitting in traffic; the list goes on. Abraham teaches us that the core of Judaism is to bridge the gap between heaven and earth. The message of Judaism is that G-d wants to feel at home not only in heaven, but also on earth, that we can and should infuse our earthly activities with spirituality and meaning.

To be a Jew is to experience that G-d is "G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth." (*Based on the teachings of the Rebbe, Shabbat Chayei Sarah, 5739*). By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

November 18, 2019—20 Cheshvan, 5780

Birth of Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch (1860)

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn (known by the acronym "Rashab"), was born on the 20th of Cheshvan of the year 5621 from creation (1860). After the passing of his father, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, in 1882, Rabbi Sholom DovBer assumed the leadership of the movement. Over the next 38 years, he wrote and delivered some 2,000 *maamarim* (discourses of Chassidic teaching) including the famed *hemshechim* (serialized discourses) which contain his profound analytical treatment of Chabad Chassidism. In 1897, he established the *Tomchei Temimim* yeshivah in Lubavitch, the first institution of Jewish learning to integrate the "body" (Talmudic and legal studies) and "soul" (philosophic and mystical) of Torah into a cohesive, living whole; it was this unique form of education and Torah study that produced the "Temimim" -- the army of learned, inspired and devoted torchbearers who, in the decades to come, would literally give their lives to keep Judaism alive under Soviet rule. In 1915 Rabbi Sholom DovBer was forced to flee Lubavitch from the advancing WWI front and settled in Rostov-on-Don in southern Russia. In his final years, he began the heroic battle -- carried on under the leadership of his son and successor, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn -- against the new Communist regime's efforts to destroy the Jewish faith. Rabbi Sholom DovBer passed away in Rostov in 1920.

November 19, 2019—21 Cheshvan, 5780

Passing of R. David Ibn Zimra (1574)

R. David ibn Zimra, known by the acronym Radvaz, was a great rabbi and scholar who led the Jewish communities of Egypt and Safed for sixty years. Radvaz was held in high esteem by his contemporaries, and is the author of 3000 responsa, covering a vast array of topics. Among his more famous students are R. Isaac Luria (the Ari) and R. Betzalel Ashkenazi (author of *Shitah Mekubetzes*). It is said that Elijah the Prophet revealed himself to him.

November 21, 2019—23 Cheshvan, 5780

Hasmonean Holiday (137 BCE)

In Talmudic times, Cheshvan 23 was commemorated as the day on which the stones of the altar which were defiled by the Greeks were removed from the Holy Temple.

November 22, 2019—24 Cheshvan, 5780

Passing of R. Avraham Azulai (1643)

R. Avraham was a famous kabbalist who resided in Hebron, Jerusalem, and Gaza. He authored *Chesed L'Avraham*, and was the great-grandfather of R. Chaim Yosef David Azulai (the Chida). R. Avraham's signature had the appearance of a ship, to commemorate the time when the ship he was traveling on capsized along with all his possessions, and he was miraculously saved (*Shem Hagedolim*).