

Torah Weekly

כ"ט

24-30 November, 2019

26 Cheshvan – 2 Kislev,
5780

Torah: Toldot: Genesis 25:19 -
28:9

Haftorah: Malachi 1:1 - 2:7
PARSHAT TOLDOT

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.

Beans and Birthrights In this week's *parshah* we read of the birth of twins to Isaac and Rebecca. Jacob and Esau are very different from the moment they leave the womb. As they grow older, their disparate personality traits become increasingly obvious. Jacob is the "dweller of tents," a diligent Torah scholar, while Esau is a "skilled hunter" and a man of violence. We also read how one day, when Esau returns from the hunt, exhausted and starving, he finds Jacob cooking a pot of lentils. Esau wants the beans; Jacob offers to give him the pottage in return for Esau's birthright. As the first-born twin, Esau would have been the one chosen to minister in G-d's temple. Esau accepts the offer and the deal is done. Fast-forward some 275 years. We're in the Book of Exodus now (4:22), and G-d is sending Moses to Pharaoh to redeem His people. He describes them as *b'ni bechori yisrael* — "My son, My first born, Israel." Rashi, quoting the Midrash, comments: "Here the Holy One Blessed is He affixed His seal to the sale of the birthright which Jacob purchased from Esau." Here? It took G-d so long to put His stamp of approval on a deal that was entered into hundreds of years earlier? Why only now? The late Israeli Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi M.Z. Neriya, offered this explanation: *You can sell your birthright for beans, but you can't buy a birthright for beans.* To throw away one's holy heritage is easy, but to claim it takes years of effort and much hard work. He used the analogy of a war hero who earned a row of medals for bravery and courage under fire. Sadly, in his old age he was forced to sell his medals in order to survive. So someone else walks into the pawnbroker's and finds these war medals for sale, buys them and pins them to his chest. He might walk down the street, proud as a peacock. But

does it have any meaning? We all know that this man is no hero. In fact, he is nothing more than a pathetic fool! To wear the badge of "My firstborn Israel," the Jewish people had to be worthy of the honor. It wasn't enough that their father Jacob had purchased the birthright from an unworthy but willing seller. The children of Jacob needed to demonstrate that they understood what it meant to be Children of Israel. When Jacob bought the birthright from Esau it was a legal deal. One wanted the beans, the other wanted the birthright. Fair and square. But did Jacob earn that hallowed title, or was he like the fellow who bought the war medals? Generations later, when his children had gone through the "smelting pit" of the Egyptian bondage and still, with amazing faith and tenacity, kept their heritage — then they were deemed worthy of the honor of the birthright. Now, after the trial by fire, after the blood, sweat and tears of slavery, the great Notary on High, the heavenly Commissioner of Oaths, takes out that ancient document, the yellowed deed of sale that had been waiting for generations, and puts His official stamp and the wax seal on that document, and says, "Now now you are worthy of the birthright. Today you are My Son, My Firstborn, Israel." There's a famous graffiti exchange that has much truth in it. Someone not too partial to our people had scrawled, "How odd of G-d, to choose the Jews." And one of our own responded, "Actually, the Jews chose G-d." Being Jewish is indeed the birthright of every Jew. But it's not enough that G-d chose us, we must choose G-d. We need to earn our birthright by living as Jews. Chosenness is not license to snicker or condescend to others. It is far more responsibility than privilege. It's not good enough that our parents and grandparents were good Jews, that my Zayde was a rabbi or a *schochet* and my Bobba

made the world's best blintzes. What are *we* doing to earn our stripes? Indeed, you can sell your birthright for beans. But you can't buy a birthright for beans. By *Yossy Goldman*

Different Yet Identical In introducing us to the patriarchal family of Isaac, son of Abraham, this week's Torah portion of Toldot begins: "And these are the offspring of Isaac, son of Abraham—Abraham begot Isaac." Since Torah is not given to redundancy, this opening passage raises the question: Once we're told that Isaac is the "son of Abraham," what is the point of then stating, "Abraham begot Isaac"? The Midrash explains that the statement "Abraham begot Isaac" represents divine testimony that Isaac was indeed the biological son of Abraham. That in the face of ridiculers and rumor-mongers who sought to claim that Isaac had been fathered by the Philistine king Abimelech, G-d formed the physical features of Isaac in striking resemblance to those of Abraham, so that there would be no room for doubt that "Abraham begot Isaac." Another Midrashic comment expands upon this point by saying that this physical resemblance between Abraham and Isaac was a reflection of their spiritual resemblance: the merits, the lofty pursuits, indeed the spiritual DNA, of father and son were likewise completely identical. Now this declaration of spiritual similarity—let alone resemblance—is most curious. We're taught that Abraham's primary mode of service was via the attribute of loving kindness (*chesed*). This was repeatedly and poignantly demonstrated by his incessant acts of hospitality, compassion and benevolence. He opened his home to hungry wayfarers. He reached out and taught others with delicate softness and patient

sensitivity. Isaac's primary service, on the other hand, was via the attribute of severity and restraint (*gevurah*). He was a much more demanding sort of fellow. This was demonstrated by his defiant and relentless digging of wells. Even as his enemies kept filling and destroying them, Isaac dug away the rocks and the dirt to uncover the waters beneath. With sharpness and strength, he dug away at the shmutz- the evil and the falseness that was seen

on the surface—so as to unearth the reservoirs of goodness and truth buried deep within. Indeed, everything we learn about Abraham and Isaac seems to cry out: *Different!* That if ever there were a father and son who seemed so unlike one another, it was these two highly individualized personalities. Yet the Midrash states that, in fact, Abraham and Isaac resembled one another—in every way! Within this paradox, seen at the inception of the family of Israel, lies the true beauty of our people. Different situations require different solutions. In the days of Abraham—during which unawareness of a divine presence was rampant—the world needed an Abraham-like personality. In the days of Isaac—especially with hostilities looming on the horizon—the world needed an Isaac-like personality. Yet, these very different individuals, firmly embarked on their very different missions with their very different methods and characteristics, are deemed spiritually (and essentially) identical, because their ultimate focus and goals were one and the same. Their core principles, values and underlying devotion to G-d were completely indistinguishable from one another. They blazed different trails, but both trails led to the same place: toward making their environment a more holy and moral place to live. The great chassidic master, Reb Zushe of Hanipoli, once remarked that when he thinks about the interrogation that might await him after his days on earth are done, he is not worried that he might be asked: “Zushe, why could you not attain the heights of an Abraham, a Moses or a King David?” Such concerns did not trouble him. His one and only source of trepidation was that the question would be posed: “Zushe, why were you not as great as Zushe?” You are expected to rise to the heights of your own very special and unique potential—no more, no less. Judaism, and the Torah way of life, celebrates individuality. We are each endowed with our own gifts and talents, our own passions and modes of expression. In terms of personality and character, none of us are truly alike. This is the way G-d created us, for it is only through the diverse expression of the multitudes that His true intent in creating this world can be realized. Each and every Jewish man, woman and child plays his or her own special instrument within the symphony that is Judaism. Within the context and framework of *halachah* and tradition are endless means and modes of service of the Almighty. From the intellectual to the emotional, from the ritualistic to the artistic, we are called upon to experience it all, even as we shine in some areas more than others. What inspires, stimulates and intrigues some may not do the same for others. Yet, at the pinnacle of it all, is that special place in which we are, and must remain, identical. Within the essential goals of living and being true to the principles of our holy Torah is where there is a beautiful resemblance among all of the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Let each instrument of the orchestra contribute its own special notes, with its own special sound and rhythm. Yet let us make certain that we are playing the same piece of music—as guided by that one and only Conductor—so that rather than a cacophony of disjointed noise, we have a beautiful symphony of harmonious diversity. *By Rabbi Moshe Bryski*

November 24, 2019---26 Cheshvan, 5780 Passing of R. Refael of Hamburg (1803)

R. Refael was the chief rabbi of the three sister cities of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek in Germany for twenty-three years. These three important Jewish centers were known as *AHU*, after their Hebrew abbreviations, and were the residence of many famous scholars and personalities, such as R. Jonathan Eibenschutz, R. Tzvi Ashkenazi, R. Jacob Emden, and Glueckel of Hameln.

November 25, 2019---27 Cheshvan, 5780 Flood ends (2104 BCE)

On the 27th of Cheshvan of the year 1657 from creation (2104 BCE) "the earth dried" (Genesis 8:14) completing the 365-day duration of the great flood that wiped out all life on earth save for the eight human beings and the animals (two of each species) in Noah's ark; on this day G-d commanded Noah to "Come out of the ark" and repopulate, settle and civilize the earth.

November 28, 2019---30 Cheshvan, 5780 Passing of R. Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg (2006)

R. Eliezer Yehuda was a well-known contemporary halachic authority who resided in Jerusalem. His halachic decisions are held in high esteem, especially in the field of medical practice. Many of these decisions appear in his 22-volume set of responsa titled *Tzitz Eliezer*.

November 29, 2019---1 Kislev, 5780 Rebbe's Recovery (1977)

For the first time since suffering a major heart attack five weeks earlier, on the eve of Shemini Atzeret, the Rebbe left his office in 770 Eastern Parkway and returned to his home, signaling his recovery. Chassidim all over rejoiced at the good news.

From that day on, the Rebbe redoubled his efforts on behalf of the Jewish nation and all of humanity, and for the dissemination of Torah and chassidism. From then on, the first of Kislev is celebrated as a day of thanksgiving and rejoicing.

November 29, 2019---1 Kislev, 5780 Winter

As per the Talmud, the month of Kislev marks the onset of the winter season in the Holy Land and is the third month of the "Season of the Rains."