

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

1-7 December, 2019
3-9 Kislev, 5780
Torah: Genesis 28:10 - 32:3
Haftorah: Hosea 11:7 - 12:14
PARSHAT VAYEITZEI

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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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Feeling Stuck? Philosophers have long struggled with the great question of our freedom of choice on the one hand, and our belief in a higher destiny on the other. Is life determined by fate, or do we enjoy genuine freedom? Generally, Judaism would seem to subscribe to a personal freedom in matters of morality, faith and the ethical choices we make in life. But when it comes to things like life and death, and even health and wealth, much as we would like to think we are in the driver's seat, we do seem to be subject to forces beyond our control. Where we live, how long we will live, how comfortably we will live—these are all in G-d's hands. Where we can and must choose is what kind of life we will lead. Whether it will be a G-dly, righteous, upstanding, decent and honest life—this is up to us, and us alone. G-d steps back to grant us the freedom to determine how good, how kind and how Jewish we will, or will not, be. *And Jacob lifted his feet and went on his way* (Genesis 29:1). This verse from our Parshah tells of Jacob's journey in his escape from the wrath of Esau. He was en route to Haran, where he would eventually establish his family and lay the foundations for the Jewish people. But why the curious language, "And

Jacob lifted his feet"? Does the Torah really need to tell us that in order to move, we have to first lift our feet? Was he stuck in a swamp or something? So many of us look at our circumstances and shrug our shoulders, "Nu, what can you do?" If we were born into poverty or raised in a less-than-privileged environment, we resign ourselves to being doomed to failure. So many people have told me that they were part of the "lost generation" of Jews who had no Jewish education or upbringing. Their immigrant parents were so busy surviving in a new world that they had no time or headspace to raise their children with the Jewish value system they themselves had back in Europe. Tragically, these individuals felt that, Jewishly, they were lost forever. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom) tells the story of how, as a young philosophy student at Cambri-dge, he traveled the world visiting great leaders. When he came to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Rebbe asked him what he was doing for the Jewish students at Cambridge. He began by saying, "In the circumstances I currently find myself..." whereupon the Rebbe interrupted him and said, "No one 'finds himself' in circumstances. We create our own circumstances."

Of course, there are times when we will find ourselves in circumstances beyond our control; but throughout life, we will find ample scope and opportunities to improve our own circumstances. G-d gives each of us our own unique qualities, talents and potential, and it is up to us to use and develop these gifts. Life is full of inspiring examples of individuals who have overcome disabilities and disadvantages of one kind or another. In the Jewish world, many have risen to prominence from the humblest beginnings. The Torah is the birthright of every Jew. We just have to go out and claim it. The words of our Parshah are quite deliberate and well-chosen after all. "Jacob lifted his feet and went on his way." Some people follow their feet wherever they will take them. No matter the direction, they simply coast along, allowing their feet to lead them. Not so Jacob. He was master of his feet and master of his circumstances. He set his feet on the right road, and became master of his destiny. May we all be inspired to lift ourselves beyond our circumstances. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

The Strength of Jacob

Modern day society has sprouted all types of gurus. We have experts on childcare and healthy eating, education and

entertainment. Self-help books top best-seller lists every year. Is there any place for a rabbi in a society that has specialists to advise us on every area of our life? Does Judaism truly have something to say about every aspect of our life, or are the rabbis who claim to have an opinion on everything simply intrusive and controlling? Should rabbis just stick to teaching Torah?

Over three thousand years ago, our forefather Jacob was on the run. His brother Esau had tried to kill him so he had taken shelter with his uncle Laban, tending his crops, marrying his daughters and earning himself a comfortable living. After suffering through Laban's continual machinations, Jacob heeded G-d's call that he go back home. He took his family and cattle and headed out for the Holy Land. Laban pursued Jacob and overtook him; only thanks to G-d's intervention was Jacob's life saved. During their encounter, Laban challenged Jacob on leaving without his permission: "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle..."—(Genesis 31:43) What was Laban saying? He had literally sold his daughters to Jacob, demanding that he work fourteen years for the privilege of marrying them. Jacob had worked another seven hard years for his herds of cattle. What demands could Laban have of him? But Laban was arguing a finer point. "The children belong to me," says Laban. "You, Jacob, are fine the way you are: a man raised in the 'old country' whose natural habitat is the tents of Torah learning and prayer. But what do you want of the children? They belong to another generation, another world. They must be raised in the spirit of the times, equipped to earn a living and a place in society. Do you truly expect them to negotiate modern life with nothing but your ancient tomes? You are a good man Jacob, but leave the children to me..."

"The cattle are *my* cattle, Jacob. I wouldn't dream of interfering with your spiritual life, Rabbi—I'll be the first to admit that I'm no authority on religion. By all means, consult your sacred books on how to keep the Shabbat or how to light your Chanukah candles. But when it comes to business affairs, do you think that the stock market conforms to the standards of the Code of Jewish Law? That you can retain both your competitive edge and your talmudic ethics? You'll be eaten alive out there. Reserve your piety for the synagogue and study hall, but do yourself a favor—leave the cattle to me, okay?"

Jacob refuted Laban then, as we must refute the Laban inside us and the Labans in society now. Judaism has something to say on every aspect of our lives, and its teachings must be as relevant to us as it was to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob thousands of years ago.
By Rabbi Eli Pink

December 1, 2019---3 Kislev, 5780

Kamenitz-Podolsk Talmuds Saved (5518/1757)

As a result of the libelous slander of the Frankists (followers of Sabbatai Zevi, the archbishop of Kamenitz decreed that all Hebrew books of the communities in his jurisdiction should be burned. On this day, he suffered a miraculous downfall and the decree was annulled. (*Imrei Pinchas*, 2003 ed., vol. 1, pp. 496–498)

December 1, 2019---3 Kislev, 5780

Temple Cleared in Chanukah Miracle (3622/-139)

After overcoming the Greek forces, the Hasmoneans cleared the Temple from the idolatrous images that had been erected there. (*Megilat Taanit* ch. 9)

December 2, 2019---4 Kislev, 5780

Zechariah Foretold Messianic Era (3410/-352)

A delegation from Babylonia put forth a query to the prophet Zechariah, asking whether the fast of the Ninth of Av was still in effect, now that the Second Temple had been built. In response, Zechariah transmitted G-d's message that it was not fasting that was most important, but to uphold justice, truth, kindness and compassion. Zechariah also foretold what will occur to the fast days in the Messianic era: "So says the L-rd of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month [the seventeenth of Tammuz], the fast of the fifth month [the ninth of Av], the fast of the seventh month [the third of Tishrei], and the fast of the tenth month [the tenth of Teves] will be to the House of Judah for rejoicing, happiness, and festivals." (*Zechariah* 7–8)

December 5, 2019---7 Kislev, 5780

Maharsha (1631)

Kislev 5 is the yahrtzeit (date of the passing) of Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555-1631), known by the acronym "Maharsha". Rabbi Shmuel authored a highly regarded and widely used commentary on the Talmud and its primary commentaries, Rashi and Tosfot.

December 5, 2019---7 Kislev, 5780

Death of King Herod (3760/-1)

Death of Herod, King of Judea. Herod seized the rule from the Hasmoneans, after killing them all. Fearing that the rabbis would challenge his authority, he killed them all, leaving only Bava ben Buta. Later, out of remorse for his cruelty, he had the Holy Temple completely renovated.

December 7, 2019---9 Kislev, 5780

Birth & Passing of R. Dovber of Lubavitch (1773; 1827)

The 9th of Kislev is both the birthday and day of passing of Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, son of and successor to the founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Rabbi DovBer was known for his unique style of "broadening rivers" -- his teachings were the intellectual rivers to his father's wellspring, lending breadth and depth to the principles set down by Rabbi Schneur Zalman. Born in Liozna, White Russia in 1773, Rabbi DovBer was named after Rabbi Schneur Zalman's mentor and teacher, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, who had passed away on Kislev 19 of the previous year. Rabbi DovBer assumed the leadership of Chabad upon his father's passing in 1812. In 1813 he settled in the town of Lubavitch, which was to serve as the movement's headquarters for the next 102 years. In 1826, he was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated. Rabbi DovBer passed away on his 54th birthday in 1827, a day before the first anniversary of his liberation (see calendar entries for tomorrow, Kislev 10).