

Torah Weekly

April 5-11, 2020
11-17 Nissan, 5780
Torah: Shemini: Leviticus 9:1
- 11:47
Haftorah: Ezekiel 37:1-14

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.

Earthen Vessels This week's Torah reading discusses the complex laws of ritual impurity and purity, *tum'ah* and *taharah*. The Torah tells us that "every earthen vessel into which any [impure creature shall] fall . . . shall be unclean." There is an interesting distinction made in Jewish law between different types of utensils. If a source of impurity comes within the inside space of a vessel which is made of earthenware, even if it doesn't touch the walls of the vessel, then the vessel becomes impure. However, if it did not enter the vessel, even if it touched the walls from outside, the vessel remains pure. With all other utensils, the opposite is the case: having a source of impurity placed within the space of a vessel does not make the vessel impure, whereas touching any part of the vessel does render it impure. Why is this? The value of a utensil made of wood or metal is contained not only within its function as a container. The material that it is made of has intrinsic value. On the other hand, a vessel made of earthenware, whose makeup is nothing more than mere earth, is of value only when used as a container; accordingly, its status of ritual purity is determined by what happens inside the vessel. The outside of the vessel, by itself, has no intrinsic value. There is a simple yet very beautiful lesson from these complex legalities. The Torah tells us

that "G-d formed man out of the dust of the earth, and He blew into his nostril a living soul." We humans are earthenware vessels! Ethics of the Fathers tells us, "Do not look at the vessel, but rather at its contents." Therefore we must remember that our worth lies not in our physical material exterior, but in the inner contents. That which is relevant to the inner self and to the soul is what defines a person, not the superficial exterior. *By Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg*

When Aaron Got Cold Feet

The nation waited with anxious anticipation. They knew what to expect; they'd seen the drill for seven days now. The Tabernacle's structure would be erected, its vessels put into place, and the sacrifices lifted onto the altar. But today, things would be different. Though Moses had practiced the procedures for seven days, only today, on the eighth day, would G-d's Presence finally descend, hugging the Tabernacle with the clouds of glory. Meanwhile, Moses and Aaron worked diligently to prepare the Tabernacle for operation. At last they were ready to perform the final step—the sacrificial offerings. The offering would be a culmination of all the collective efforts and contributions of the Jewish people, and would bring down the Divine Presence into the Tabernacle. At this

point, the Torah makes us privy to an unusual conversation between Moses and Aaron. "Approach the altar," says Moses, "and carry out your sin-offering and your burnt-offering ..." (Leviticus 9:7). Why did Moses instruct Aaron to "approach the altar"? Clearly, he'd have to approach the altar in order to offer the sacrifices. He'd been practicing for seven days; by now, his routine was smooth and precise. Why does Moses talk to him like a novice? Rashi cites a Midrash that explains the inner dialogue: "Because Aaron was embarrassed and afraid to approach [the altar]. Moses said to him: 'Why are you embarrassed? This is what you were chosen for!' " What made Aaron suddenly embarrassed? Aaron was 84 years old, a venerable sage and a dedicated leader. He'd been primed for his role as high priest and had rehearsed the sacrificial procedure for seven days. So, why the cold feet? But Aaron understood the impact of this final work—offering the sacrifices would elicit G-d's presence to dwell in the Tabernacle. He was overwhelmed with humility and trepidation. Sensing his paralysis, Moses says: "Approach the altar! Shift your focus. You didn't choose to be the high priest, G-d chose you! Fortify your mind and go do your service." Nachmanides, a 13th-century Spanish scholar and Kabbalist, gives another layer of

understanding with regards to Aaron's fear of approaching the altar. He cites a Midrash (Sifra ad loc) that explains that Aaron was a spectacular person and had no sin to speak of, except for one: his inadvertent involvement in the creation of the golden calf. And he didn't take his mistake lightly. In fact, he thought about it constantly. As he stood inside the Tabernacle, preparing to culminate his work, he turned to the altar and realized with horror that it had transformed into a calf. The corner peaks of the altar were the horns, and the body of the altar was the body of the calf. The Satan was messing with Aaron—now, at the climax of Aaron's career, on the day that he'd trigger the fusion of heaven and earth. How could Aaron approach the altar when he saw the image of a calf in place of the altar? How could he experience sanctity and influence while staring his ugliest moment in the face? Aaron stood paralyzed, Why is it that when I need my power most, I often feel the most inadequate? Moses understood. "Approach the altar! Aaron, you were chosen for this," he said. Strengthen your mind. Don't let the Satan's agenda deflate your confidence. It's all an illusion. This is not about you; it's about G-d. G-d chose you. He needs you! "And Aaron approached the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin-offering." Perhaps, in our own way, we've experienced the fear of Aaron—and always just at the wrong times. It's just when I sense a powerful opportunity that I feel paralysis seeping into my psyche. Sometimes, the resistance stems from humility, the sense of feeling small in light of the awesome opportunity before me. Other times, my skeletons emerge to haunt me, to drain my confidence. Why is it that when I need my power most, I often feel the most inadequate? Comes Moses and says: "Approach the altar! You were chosen for this." If G-d has given you this opportunity, then you're well-suited for the job. Your role is no longer about you; it's about something much greater than you. You are here to serve G-d; don't worry about Satan's illusions. Even if you don't think you're good enough for the job, G-d does! *(Based on a talk by the Rebbe, delivered on Shabbat Parshat Shemini 5732 (1972) By Rochel Holzkenner*

A Message from the Rabbi Vogel: This Passover comes to us in a very difficult time. The world is suffering from a plague, and prisons are all in lockdown, which makes the observance of Passover a little more challenging. It is imperative to remember what is important, and to remember the basics for us to eat and do on Passover. We sent a Haggadah to the Chaplains to be read on both the first and second night of Passover. Dietary will be sending Matzoh for your every meal, but it is imperative for the first and second night of Passover. As you observe the Seder, you will also receive Marror. (Parsley or lettuce) I have asked, and we have sent adequate grape Juice and Shemurah Matzah (handmade Matzah) There is enough for everyone to have a little. Of course, horseradish is important, and you can request it. Remember, we have to keep our heads high. As the last line of the Hagadah tells us, "Next year in Jerusalem." Next year we will be free to serve G-d in a most beautiful way, but for now, we will not be broken, and we will do the best we can, because that is what G-d wants of us and needs of us.

April 5, 2020 --- 11 Nissan, 5780

Passing of Nachmanides (1270)

11 Nissan marks the passing of Nachmanides ("Ramban", Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) -- Torah scholar, Kabbalist, philosopher, physician and Jewish leader -- in 1270.

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Lubavitcher Rebbe Born (1902)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, was born on this date in 1902.

April 5, 2020 --- 11 Nissan, 5780

Hezekiah Falls Ill (548 BCE)

On this day, King Hezekiah, the greatest of all the Judean kings, fell seriously ill, and was informed by the Prophet Isaiah that he would die, for G-d was displeased with the fact that Hezekiah had never married. Hezekiah had refused to get married because he had prophetically foreseen that his children would lead the Jewish people to sin. He erred, for it is man's job to heed the commandment of procreating, and the rest is in the hands of G-d. Hezekiah asked the prophet to pray on his behalf, but he refused, insisting that the Heavenly decree was final. The king asked the prophet to leave, saying that he had a tradition from his ancestors that one should never despair, even if a sharp sword is drawn across one's throat. The king prayed to G-d, and his prayer was accepted. G-d sent Isaiah to tell him that he would recover and that his life would be extended for fifteen years. Hezekiah recovered three days later, on the first day of Passover. The King later married Prophet Isaiah's daughter.

April 7, 2020 --- 13 Nissan, 5780

Haman's Decree (357 BCE)

In the 12th year of his reign (357 BCE), King Achashverosh of Persia endorsed Haman's plan "to destroy, kill and annihilate all Jews, from young to old, infants and women, on a single day, on the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar." On Nissan 13 (11 months before the date chosen for the massacre) proclamations of the decree were drafted and dispatched to all 127 countries of the Persian Empire. Mordechai told Esther to go before the king and plead for her people. Esther asked that a three-day fast be proclaimed (Nissan 14, 15 and 16--including the first two days of Passover) in which all Jews would repent and pray for the success of her mission.

Passing of Tzemach Tzeddek (1866)

The third Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1789-1866; known as the "Tzemach Tzeddek" after his Halachic work by that name), passed away on Nissan 13.

April 8, 2020 --- 14 Nissan, 5780

Maimonides Born (1135)

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Talmudist, Halachist, physician, philosopher and communal leader, known in the Jewish world by the acronym "Rambam" and to the world at large as "Maimonides," is one of the most important figures in the history of Torah scholarship; on his gravestone were inscribed the words, "From Moses to Moses, none arose as Moses." Today, many hospitals and schools across the globe are named after Maimonides; and to this day, students worldwide pore over his scholarly works.

April 9, 2020 --- 15 Nissan, 5780

Isaac Born (1713 BCE)

"G-d remembered Sarah as He had said; and G-d did to Sarah as He had spoken. And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which G-d had spoken to him... Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah declared: 'G-d has made laughter for me, so that all that hear will laugh ('yitzchak') with me'" (Genesis 21:1-6).

Angels Visit Abraham (1714 BCE)

On the 3rd day following his circumcision at age 99, three angels visited Abraham: Rephael healed him, and Michael informed Abraham and Sarah that, in exactly one year, a son will be born to them. (The third angel, Gabriel, proceeded to Sodom to destroy the wicked city).