

# Torah Weekly

August 30- September 5,  
2020  
10-16 Elul, 5780

Torah: Ki Tavo:  
Deuteronomy 26:1 - 29:8  
Haftorah: Isaiah 60:1-22

## PARSHAT KI TAVO

### 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).

## Fruit in the Basket

Standing on the bank of the Jordan River just days before his passing, Moses spoke to his beloved people, instructing them that they were about to reaffirm the covenant they had made with G-d 40 years ago at Sinai:

These are the words of the covenant, which the L-rd commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which he made with them in Horeb. (Deuteronomy 28:69.)

Although the covenant is the main theme of this week's Parshah, it begins with Bikkurim—the obligation of the Jewish farmer to bring his first fruit to Jerusalem as a gift to G-d. What is the connection?

It is safe to assume that in addition to its conventional meaning, the commandment to take the "first fruit," place it in a "basket," and bring it to "the place that G-d will choose," is also a general mystical lesson for the way we are to live.

The Torah tells us:

And it will be, when you come into the land which the L-rd, your G-d, gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it and settle in it, that you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you will bring from your land, which the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you. And you shall put [them] into a basket and go to the place which the L-rd, your G-d, will choose to have His Name dwell there. (Deuteronomy 26:12.)

Eretz, the Hebrew word for "land," is related to the

Hebrew word *ratzon*, "will." Both land and will are related to the Hebrew word for running, for such is the nature of strong will—it compels us to get up and run toward that which we desire.

The Kabbalists explain that *ratzon*, will and desire, is the most powerful force within the human being. The will has the power to control the other faculties and unleash the dormant potential. Awakening the desire to feel or to understand, will, in fact, awaken the heart and mind, [which is why the most effective teachers are not the ones who understand the subject matter best, nor the ones who can articulate and explain the best, but the ones who are gifted with the ability to instill a love for the subject, which will inspire the student to *want* to grasp the material].

Like the farmer who tills the earth to plant, sow, irrigate, and reap fruit, a Jew must also seek to cultivate the "first fruit." The first and most important thing a Jew should cultivate is *ratzon*, a longing to transcend the confines of the material and reconnect to the source of all—the infinite light of G-d.

Yet the desire to "run," to escape the mundane, transcend the physical, and cleave to the source of life, is only the first step.

Judaism demands far more. Judaism teaches that we need to capture the desire, the urge to run, and direct it to a "vessel" that will be able to contain and preserve that inspiration in daily life:

Take the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you will bring from your land, which

the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you. And you shall put [them] into a basket. (Deuteronomy 26:2.)

Placing the fruit in the basket means applying the inspiration, the desire to transcend, and investing it into our daily activities.

And, as the Torah continues, the purpose of placing the fruit in the basket is to "go to the place which the L-rd, your G-d, will choose to have His Name dwell there." Where is that "place"? Well, the answer is different for everyone, for G-d places each of us in a unique place where it is our mission to "have His Name dwell there," i.e., to fill that place with the inspiration, kindness, and joy of Judaism. This is the heart of the covenant, and indeed, all of Torah.

*(Adapted from Hayom Yom, Elul 18, based on the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement, whose birthday is Elul 18.)*

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

## G-d in the Fast Lane

Can one plan to be blessed? Obviously, we believe that when we live life as G-d intended us to, we will find or lives blessed in many ways. Even if we do not always see the results tangibly or immediately, we certainly are aware of many blessings that come with the territory of leading a G-dly life. But there is a verse in our Parshah, which promises us blessings we never even dreamed of.

*If you will listen to the voice of G-d... and observe the*

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*commandments... All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you...* (Deuteronomy 28:2)

What does it mean that blessings will *overtake* you? Rabbi Ovadia Sforno, one of the classic Biblical commentators, suggests that it means you will be blessed even when you made no effort to seek those blessings. It will come out of the blue, an unexpected windfall.

The story is told of the saintly Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev that he once saw a young man running down the street. The Chassidic master stopped him and asked, "Where are you running?" The fellow answered, "To make a living, rabbi." To which the Berditchever responded, "So how do you know that your living lies in that direction and you're running after it? Perhaps your livelihood is to be found in the opposite direction, and you're running away from it?"

Do we ever know for sure? How often do the best laid plans of mice and men come to naught? Haven't we all had the experience of trying our hardest to do a deal, and yet with all the planning and strategizing nothing whatsoever materialized? And on the other hand, there may have been times when we put no work into it at all and suddenly from nowhere we landed the deal of the year? The truth is we don't know where the blessing of our livelihood lies.

And so it is with spiritual blessings. There are times when we make the effort and remain uninspired and there are times when we become inspired effortlessly. According to the Baal Shem Tov, our unconscious soul may hear something on a higher plane and it filters down to our conscious soul and we are touched, moved or inspired.

We live in an era of much confusion. Many are lost, floundering about in spiritual wildernesses. But many are finding themselves too. There have been many who didn't necessarily go looking for G-d but G-d found them. "How did you get inspired?" "To tell you the truth, I'm not really sure. I was minding my own business and I bumped into this Rabbi." Or, "I was sitting next to this fellow on the plane Or, "I was just a tourist at the Western Wall but something moved me." Everybody has a story. In some stories we went looking for G-d, in others He came looking for us. So if you feel the spirit overtaking you, don't speed up. Slow down. Let it catch up with you. May the blessings of G-d overtake you and transform your life. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

**Sunday, August 30, 2020 --- 10 Elul, 5780**

**Noah Dispatches Raven (2105 BCE)**

On the 10th of Elul of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE), as the Great Flood neared its end, Noah opened the window of the Ark and dispatched a raven to determine if the flood waters had begun to recede (Genesis 8:1; Rashi).

**Passing of R. Pinchas Schapiro of Koretz (1791)**

R. Pinchas Schapiro of Koretz (1726–1791) was one of the greatest disciples of the Baal Shem Tov, and a colleague of R. Dovber, the Maggid of Mezeritch. His teachings were published posthumously in various books, such as *Likkutei Shoshanim* and *Midrash Pinchas*.

R. Pinchas' son, R. Moshe, and grandsons, R. Shmuel Abba and R. Pinchas, managed the famed printing press in Slavuta.

**Monday, August 31, 2020 --- 11 Elul, 5780**

**Completion of Beit Yosef (1542)**

In 1522, Rabbi Yosef Caro started writing the *Beit Yosef*, his famous commentary on the *Arba Turim*, Yaakov Ben Asher's comprehensive Halachic code. He started writing this commentary in Adrianople, Turkey, and continued for the next twenty years, during which time he relocated to Safed, Israel. He completed the monumental work on the 11th of Elul. It took another ten years for the writings to be published.

**Rashab's marriage (1875)**

Marriage of the fifth Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneerson ("Rashab", 1860-1920), to Rebbetzin Shтерна Sarah Schneerson (1860-1942).

**Tuesday, September 1, 2020 --- 12 Elul, 5780**

**Nachmanides Born (1194)**

Birth of Nachmanides ("Ramban", Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) -- Torah scholar, Kabbalist, philosopher, physician and Jewish leader -- in Gerona, Spain, in the year 4954 from creation.

**Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe visits US (1929)**

On the 12th of Elul (September 16) of 1929, two years after escaping a death sentence imposed upon him by the Russian Communist regime and his subsequent departure from that country, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, arrived in New York for a ten-month tour of the United States. In the course of his stay the Rebbe visited the Jewish communities in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, S. Louis, Boston and several other communities, and was received by President Hoover at the White House. The purpose of the Rebbe's visit was twofold: a) to bring the plight of Russian Jewry to the attention of the American Jewish community and raise funds for the Rebbe's efforts on its behalf; b) to improve the state of *Yiddishkeit* (Torah-true Judaism) in America and strengthen the ties of the American Chabad-Chassidic community with the Rebbe. The Rebbe also wished to explore the possibility of settling in the U.S. and establishing the headquarters of Chabad there; though he did not decide to do so at that time, his 1929 visit laid the foundations for his move to New York in 1940 and the revolutionary changes he wrought in American Jewish life.

**Passing of R. Simcha Bunim of Peshis'cha (1827)**

R. Simcha Bunim of Peshis'cha (1765–1827) was a disciple of R. Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the "Seer of Lublin", and of R. Yaakov Yitzchak, the "Holy Jew" of Peshis'cha, whom he succeeded as rebbe. His major disciples included R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk and the first Rebbe of Ger, R. Yitzchak Meir Alter.

**Wednesday, September 2, 2020 --- 13 Elul, 5780**

**R. Yosef Yitzchak's marriage (1897)**

Marriage of the 6th Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950), to Rebbetzin Nechamah Dinah (1882-1971).

**Passing of Ben Ish Chai (1909)**

Elul 13 is the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (1835-1909), the renowned Sephardic Halachic authority and Kabbalist, known as "Ben Ish Chai" after his work by that name.

**Friday, September 4, 2020 --- 15 Elul, 5780**

**Tomchei Temimim founded (1897)**

The Yeshivah "Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch", the first to integrate the "revealed" part of Torah (Talmud and Halachah) with the esoteric teachings of Chassidism in a formal study program, was on this date founded by the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneerson.