

Torah Weekly

October 4-10, 2020
16-22 Tishrei, 5781

Torah reading: Ha'azinu:
Deuteronomy 32:1-52
Haftarah: Hosea 14:2-10; Micah
7:18-20

Shemini Atzeret

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).

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.

Circular Logic

There are two types of people. The first sees tragedy; the other sees opportunity.

If his home goes up in flames, the first would reflect on the beautiful home that was; the second would contemplate the even more beautiful home that can soon be.

Replacing the Shattered Tablets

As we approach Simchat Torah, the culmination of the High Holidays, we reflect on the holiday season that just passed. The High Holiday season actually begins on the 17th of Tammuz, the day that marks the beginning of the destruction of the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

On this day we mourn the lost glory of our past, and yearn for the restoration of our Holy Temple. Acknowledging that our ancestors were exiled from our land for their sinful behavior, we strive, from this day onward, to mend our ways. The 17th of Tammuz also marks the day that Moses destroyed the first set of Tablets. Climbing down Mount Sinai, Moses beheld the terrible sight of his nation dancing around a golden calf. Swiftly concluding that they were no longer worthy of their divine mandate, he hurled the Tablets to the ground. This sin was the beginning of a long slide that culminated with the second tragedy marked on this day—the destruction of the Temple. Mindful of these two tragedies, we initiate a period of repentance that extends till Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the new year. On this day G-d sits in judgment, and we beseech Him to judge us favorably. Our fate remains uncertain till Yom Kippur, the day deemed by history as the

day of atonement. On this day G-d forgave our ancestors for the sin of the Golden Calf, and consented to provide Moses with a new set of Tablets. On this day, He forgives us too.

The circle closes. What began on the day the Tablets were shattered ends on the day the Tablets were replaced. What began as a drive for repentance ends with absolute atonement. This positive conclusion is a cause for celebration, and we do indeed rejoice. We launch into the holiday of Sukkot, a festive time of joy and celebration.

A Sudden Reversal

As we dance our way through the holiday, we revel in our newfound piety and enjoy our status as G-d's righteous people. Indeed, the festivities culminate on the last day with a celebration of G-d and Torah. We rejoice with G-d, and G-d rejoices with us. We celebrate with the Torah, and the Torah celebrates with us, the people who embraced it. It is fitting that we chant the final portion of the Torah on this festive day. The verses ring with praise for Moses and his people. An ode to our nation, to our strength and spirit. An ode to Moses, to his prophecy and leadership.

The last climactic words are finally chanted: "The awesome power that Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:12). "Chazak," we then declare, "We are strengthened." Wait. Just a moment. What were those last words again? What was the awesome power that Moses performed before our eyes? Our sages teach that this was the power with which Moses shattered the tablets. (See Rashi's commentary.) What? That again? I thought we were past that. That was the

beginning of the journey. This was supposed to be its culmination! Are we turning the clock back?

The Purpose of Sin

This goes to show that Torah is aligned with the second group. The one that views tragedy as potential opportunity, and a sinner as a potential penitent.

The Talmud teaches that our ancestors were compelled, by a divine force, to worship the Golden Calf. They were in a pious state after receiving the Ten Commandments, and would not have betrayed G-d had He not compelled them to. He did this to demonstrate the power of repentance. (*Talmud, Avodah Zarah 4b.*)

Lest we breach our relationship with G-d and despair of repenting, the sin of the Golden Calf demonstrates the potency of repentance. Repentance brought us back even from the brink of idolatry. Not only did it repair our bond, but it made it stronger than ever before.

Just as a rope is sturdiest where it broke and was knotted back together, so is a relationship strongest when it was betrayed and then repaired. The process of repentance began for our ancestors when Moses dropped the Tablets. The Torah does not see that as a moment of failure, but as the moment the healing began.

Simchat Torah

At the height of our celebration, when we are most confident in our own piety, we are reminded of the power of repentance. Lest we sin again, we are reminded to never despair. Sin closes one door, but opens another. It closes the door to piety, but opens the door to repentance. The latter is far larger than the former. Rather than perceive our sins as barriers, we are encouraged to

view them as opportunities for repentance.

The Circular Dance

This is why we dance in a circle on Simchat Torah. The scholar and the ignoramus, the pious and the not-so-pious, all in one equal circle. A circle has no beginning and no end, no high point and no low point; all are equal in a circle.

On this day we are reminded that the ignorant and the wicked are not sinners, but potential penitents. It is not a question of if, but rather of when. On that day they will not join the scholarly and pious ranks, but surpass them. (*Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Likkutei Sichot, vol. 9, p. 237.*) By Rabbi Lazer Gurkow

A Crown of Slippers One Simchat Torah, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem told his disciples:

On Simchat Torah everyone sleeps in a little, because of the hakafot and the festivities of the previous evening. The heavenly angels, however, don't say IChaim on Simchat Torah, and they arose for the morning prayers at the usual time. But the angels found themselves with nothing to do: as the Talmud tells us, the angels cannot sing G-d's praises in the heavens until Israel sings G-d's praises on earth. So they decided to do some cleaning up in heaven in the meantime.

They found heaven littered with strange objects: torn slippers and broken heels. The angels are accustomed to finding tzitzit, tefillin, and similar things up there, but they had never come across the likes of these. They decided to ask the angel Michael, the supernal advocate of the Jewish people, if he knew what this was all about.

"Yes," admitted Michael, "this is my merchandise. These are the remains of last night's hakafot, at which Jews danced with the Torah. Michael proceeded to sort the tattered shoes by community: these are from Kaminkeh, these are from Mezeritch, etc.

"The archangel Metat," boasted Michael, referring to the most prestigious angel in the heavenly court, "ties crowns for G-d out of Israel's prayers. Today, I shall fashion an even more glorious crown for the Almighty out of these torn shoes."

From the diary of the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn; translation/adaptation by Yanki Tauber.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, October 4, 2020 --- 16 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of R. Moshe Zacuto (1697)

R. Moshe, known by the acronym *Ramaz*, was an Italian rabbi and Kabbalist, well-known for his erudition and piety. A scion of Portuguese Marranos, he authored numerous works, many of them on Kabbalah, as well as a number of liturgical hymns.

Tuesday, October 6, 2020 --- 18 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1810)

Passing of the famed Chassidic rebbe, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Ukraine (1772-1810). A great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, he championed a unique path of divine service that entails simplicity, joy, and solitude. He left no successor, but his teachings remain influential more than 200 years after his passing.

Wednesday, October 7, 2020 --- 19 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of Vilna Gaon (1797)

Passing of the famed Talmudist and Kabbalist, Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna (now Vilnius), Lithuania (1720-1797), known as the "Vilna Gaon." Rabbi Eliyahu was the leading figure in the opposition to the Chassidic movement in its early years.

Thursday, October 8, 2020 --- 20 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of R. Heshel of Cracow (1663)

R. Heshel was a Polish scholar known for his sharpness and depth of knowledge. Although most of his writings are not extant, his influence is greatly felt until today, as many of the classic Halachists of his day were his students, such as R. Shabtai Katz (the Shach) and R. David HaLevi (the Taz). Many stories are told about his quick-wittedness even as a young child.

Friday, October 9, 2020 --- 21 Tishrei, 5781

Prophecy of Haggai Encouraging the Building of the Second Temple (353 BCE)

On this day, the prophet Haggai received a divine message to pass on to "Zerubavel son of She'altiel ruler of Judah, Joshua son of Jehozadak the High Priest, and the remnant of the nation" (Haggai 2:1). He was instructed to encourage them to continue their efforts to build the Second Temple, whose construction had been halted some seventeen years prior: "*Who among you is left, who saw this house [the First Temple] in its former glory? As you see it now, is it not as nothing in your eyes? Now, be strong, Zerubavel, says the L-rd; and be strong, Joshua the son of Jehozadak the High Priest; and be strong, all the people of the land....I will fill this House with glory, said the L-rd of Hosts...The glory of this last House shall be greater than the first one, said the L-rd of Hosts; and in this place I will grant peace*" (Haggai 2: 3-9).

Shabbat, October 10, 2020 --- 22 Tishrei, 5781

Lubavitcher Rebbe Suffers Heart Attack (1977)

While celebrating the joyous holiday *hakafot* with thousands of chassidim in the central Chabad-Lubavitch synagogue in Brooklyn, NY, the Rebbe suffered a massive heart attack. In spite of the tremendous pain, the Rebbe remained calm and insisted on continuing the *hakafot*, and only after they concluded did he depart the synagogue. On the following day, the Rebbe requested that the chassidim celebrate the Simchat Torah festivities with the same joy and fervor as all other years, and so it was. After the holiday ended, the Rebbe addressed and reassured the anxious chassidim from his office (which was hastily converted into a cutting-edge cardiac unit) via a public address system.

The Rebbe remained in his office in Lubavitch World Headquarters under medical supervision for several weeks. He returned home five weeks later on the 1st of Kislev, a day designated by chassidim for celebration and thanksgiving.

Nation Returns Home After Holy-Temple Dedication Festivities (827 BCE)

At the end of the 14-day dedication festivities celebrating the completion of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (see calendar entry for 8 Tishrei), "[King Solomon] sent off the people, and they blessed the king. They went to their homes, rejoicing and with glad hearts for all the good that the L-rd had wrought for David His servant and Israel His people" (I Kings 8:66).