

Torah Weekly

October 11-17, 2020
23-29 Tishrei, 5781

Torah reading:
Bereishit: Genesis 1:1 - 6:8
Haftarah: Samuel I 20:18-42

Parshat Bereishit

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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Let There Be Light

"And G-d said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light" (Genesis 1:3)

Light has always been the most favored metaphor for all forms of revelation. We speak of "G-dly light," "Divine light," the "new light" of the Redemption. We use expressions such as, "Do you still walk in darkness or have you seen the light?" As physical light brightens our path so we don't stumble over obstacles, so the light of G-dliness, our spiritual awareness, helps us avoid the pitfalls on the journey of life. Light represents truth, eternal values, the spiritual which transcends the mundane and the temporal. The story is told of a wealthy man who had three sons. As he was uncertain as to which son he should entrust with the management of his business, he devised a test. He took his three sons to a room which was absolutely empty and he said to each of them, "Fill this room as best as you are able." The first son got to work immediately. He called in bulldozers, earth-moving equipment, workmen with shovels and wheelbarrows and they got mightily busy. By the end of the day the room was filled, floor to ceiling, wall to wall, with earth. The room was cleared and the second son was given his chance. He was more of an accountant type, so he had no shortage of paper: boxes, files, archives and records that had been standing and accumulating dust for years and years suddenly found a new purpose. At any rate, it didn't take long and the room was absolutely filled from floor to ceiling, wall to wall, with paper. Again the room was cleared and the third son was given his turn. He seemed very

relaxed and didn't appear to be gathering or collecting anything at all with which to fill the room. He waited until nightfall and then invited his father and the family to join him at the room. Slowly, he opened the door. The room was absolutely pitch black, engulfed in darkness. He took something out of his pocket. It was a candle. He lit the candle and suddenly the room was filled with light.

He got the job. Some people fill their homes with earthiness — with lots of physical objects and possessions which clutter their closets but leave their homes empty. Our cars and clothes, our treasures and toys, all lose their attractiveness with time. If all we seek satisfaction from is the material, we are left with a gaping void in our lives. Others are into paper — money, stocks, bonds, and share portfolios — but there is little in the way of real relationships. Family doesn't exist or is relegated to third place at best. On paper, he might be a multi-millionaire, but is he happy? Is his life rich or poor? Is it filled with family and friends or is it a lonely life, bereft of true joy and contentment?

The truly wise son understands how to fill a vacuum. The intelligent man knows that the emptiness of life needs light. Torah is light. Shabbat candles illuminate and make Jewish homes radiant with light. G-dly truths and the eternal values of our heritage fill our homes and families with the guiding light to help us to our destinations safely and securely.

As we begin a new Jewish year, may we all be blessed to take the candle of G-d and with it fill our lives and illuminate our homes with that which is good,

kind, holy and honorable. Amen. By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Peeling the Fruit

If you had to pick one word that would describe all negativity in this world, a word that would capture the heart and soul of evil, which word would you choose?

These are some of the synonyms for the word "evil" suggested by the thesaurus: wicked, bad, wrong, immoral, sinful, foul, vile, dishonorable, corrupt, iniquitous, depraved, reprobate, villainous, nefarious, vicious, malicious. The word the Kabbalah uses to describe all negative energy, all unholiness in the universe is, surprisingly, a neutral word, a word that does not evoke a strong image of evil. The Kabbalah refers to all evil with the innocent-sounding word *kelipah*, the Hebrew word for "peel."

The metaphor of a peel captures all we need to know about unholiness: its origin, its purpose, the challenges it presents, and ultimately the way to deal with it.

Where does evil come from? There were many who believed that evil could not possibly come from G-d. Since G-d is good, they argued, all evil must therefore come from Satan, from a power independent from, and contradictory to, G-d. Judaism fiercely rejects this explanation. The most fundamental premise of Judaism is that *Hashem echad*, G-d is one, and there can be no force independent of G-d. Where, then, does evil and negativity come from?

The answer lies within the metaphor of the peel. (See Shalah 19b; Sefer Hamaamarim 5659, p. 176.) The peel serves a double function: it both

conceals and protects the fruit. When man

Removes the peel and consumes the flesh of the fruit, both the peel and the fruit have served their purpose.

The same is true for all cosmic energy. Everything G-d created, including evil, serves a purpose. Yet there is a distinction between good and evil: the purpose of good is intrinsic, while the purpose of evil is to benefit the good. The purpose of evil is to enable the human being to choose good from evil by removing the “peel” and consuming the “fruit.”

Within evil itself, there are generally two categories: the evil that must be rejected outright, and the evil that could become positive if used to serve that which is holy.

This sheds light onto one of the earliest dramas of the Bible, a story that has captured the imagination of humanity since the beginning of time: the story of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

What did this mysterious tree represent? And why was its fruit so enticing to Eve?

The Torah tells us that after a conversation with the serpent, Eve perceived the beauty of the fruit: “And the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to make one wise; so she took of its fruit, and she ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6.)

Eve perceived that there was beauty in the “peel,” and therefore she desired the “peel” for its own sake. Before Eve’s conversation with the serpent, the entire fruit, including the peel, was perceived as nothing more than a tool that served holiness. Until the sin, all material pleasures served as a vehicle for people to escape the confines of self, relate to other people, and connect to the Creator. The heart of the sin was that the human being now perceived material pleasure for its own sake, confusing the peel for the actual fruit, the means for the end. Each and every day, we face the allure. The choice is ours. We can live in the tranquility of paradise or be expelled into a world of tension and chaos.

We can desire materialism for its own sake, seeking the sensual with no higher purpose. We can choose the peel and reject the fruit. The result will be conflict with others, as selfish egos inevitably clash, and inner chaos, as the body struggles with the soul.

We can, however, perceive that all material blessing in our life must be enjoyed and used as a vehicle for spiritual life, thus bringing peace between people and within our own psyches. We can recreate paradise. *By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

Sunday, October 11, 2020 --- 23 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of R. Chanoch of Cordova (1014)

As a youngster (in c. 960), R. Chanoch was captured by pirates, along with his father R. Moshe and three other great Torah scholars. R. Moshe and his son were ransomed by the Jewish community of Cordova, Spain, where R. Moshe opened a yeshivah for Talmudic studies. When R. Moshe passed away, he was succeeded by his son.

These events marked a turning point in Jewish history. Until then, the primary centers of Torah scholarship were located in the great and ancient Jewish communities of Babylonia, and Jews throughout the Diaspora depended on their leaders for guidance. With the opening of the yeshivah of R. Moshe and R. Chanoch in Spain, Jewish leadership shifted westwards, and European Jewry slowly became independent of the Babylonian community. Thus began the golden age of Torah scholarship in Western Europe, where it flourished for the next five hundred years.

Monday, October 12, 2020 --- 24 Tishrei, 5781

Returning Exiles Commit to Follow the Torah (335 BCE)

The Jews who had returned to the Land of Israel with Ezra and Nehemiah gathered on this day and repented their misdeeds, signing a document in which they committed to trust in G-d and follow His ways. Among the mitzvot they specified were to refrain from intermarriage and from purchasing produce on Shabbat (Nehemiah 9:1–3; 10:1–32).

Passing of R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonye (1781)

R. Yaakov Yosef was one of the foremost disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. He was the first one to disseminate the teachings of Chassidut in print, publishing the work *Toldot Yaakov Yosef* in 1780.

Tuesday, October 13, 2020 --- 25 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1809)

Passing of the great Chassidic leader and advocate for the Jewish people, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809). Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was a close disciple of the second leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch. He is best known for his love for every Jew and his impassioned words of advocacy on their behalf before the Almighty.

Passing of Chatam Sofer (1839)

Tishrei 25th is the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg (1762-1839), known as "Chatam Sofer" after his work of Rabbinic responsa. Rabbi Moshe was an outstanding Halachic authority and community leader, and was at the forefront of the battle to preserve the integrity of traditional Judaism in the face of the various "reformist" movements of his time.

Thursday, October 15, 2020 --- 27 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of R. Yitzchak of Dampierre (335 BCE)

R. Yitzchak was a great-grandson of R. Shlomo Yitzchaki, the seminal Biblical and Talmudic commentator commonly known as Rashi. R. Yitzchak and his three uncles—R. Shmuel (Rashbam), R. Yaakov (Rabbeinu Tam), and R. Yitzchak (Rivam)—are among the earliest and most well-known Tosafists. Their comments and explanations, which appear on the outer margin of all classical prints of the Talmud, are vital to any serious student who wishes to properly understand the Talmud.

Friday, October 16, 2020 --- 28 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonye (1781)

R. DovBer of Lubavitch was arrested due to trumped-up charges fabricated by a jealous relative. Among his alleged “crimes” was that he was sending money to the Turkish sultan, who was at war with Russia at the time. R. DovBer was released six weeks later (see calendar entry for 10 Kislev).

Shabbat, October 17, 2020 --- 29 Tishrei, 5781

Passing of Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel (1508)

Today is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508), one of the leaders of Spanish Jewry at the time of the 1492 expulsion. A minister in the king's court (after having served as treasurer to the king of Portugal), he chose to join his brethren in their exile. He began writing his extensive and highly regarded commentary on the Torah in 1503 in Venice (where it was published in 1579).

Passing of Simeon the Righteous (Shimon HaTzadik) (313 BCE)

Simeon the Righteous was the spiritual and political leader of the Jewish nation during a turbulent time in history—when Alexander the Great conquered and dominated the entire civilized world. Known as “the righteous” due to his saintly character, Simeon was the last member of the Men of the Great Assembly (*Anshei Knesses Hagdolah*), a 120-member panel of prophets and sages who guided the Jews at the onset of the Second Temple era.