

# Torah Weekly

כ"ב

October 25-31, 2020  
7-13 Cheshvan, 5781

Torah reading: Lech-Lecha:  
Genesis 12:1 - 17:27  
Haftarah: Isaiah 40:27 - 41:16

Parshat Lech-Lecha

## 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.

**Give Me the Soul!** The weekly Parshah is enlivened these days with the arrival of Abraham on the biblical scene. Our founding father brings new life to the world, as he spreads the message of monotheism in a hitherto pagan society. He also shows his prowess as a fearless fighter for justice, putting his own life on the line to save his nephew Lot, when Lot is taken captive in the world war of the day. It was after Abraham rescued his nephew that the King of Sodom thanked Abraham for liberating the other prisoners of war—the king's soldiers and citizens—at the same time. The king offers Abraham the spoils of war, and asks only to have his men back. *Ten li hanefesh*, he says. "Give me the people, and take the possessions for yourself." Twenty-five years ago, I heard a powerful and passionate call by my saintly mentor, the Rebbe of blessed memory. It was Simchat Torah, the *yom tov* (festival) when we celebrate the gift of Torah in a spirit of boundless joy. He had appealed for charity to be given in the same heightened spirit, i.e., beyond normal limitations or the usual budgetary considerations. Later, he explained his call to have been one of *ten li hanefesh*, which, literally, means "give me the soul." It was a special moment, and what he was demanding of his followers was a genuine outpouring of soul, a sincere act of pure faith, beyond reason or issues of affordability. The Rebbe had called for a total, unconditional commitment. The call, "Give me the soul," still reverberates. And it applies to everything we do. We are all composites of body and soul. But more often than not, our physical selves get all the attention while our spiritual side is neglected. How many times do we hear Jews, especially young Jews, complaining that Judaism lacks spirituality; that their synagogues and temples are devoid of any real feeling or atmosphere of sanctity? And then we bemoan them trekking off to the Himalayas to find purpose, depth, and all the things we never gave them. How many bar mitzvahs and weddings have been reduced to empty shells

of materialistic one-upmanship, with friends and neighbors compelled to outdo each other in garish extravagances, which miss the whole point of what the celebration is about? And G-d calls out, *Give me the soul!* Give me back what is mine. Put some spirit back into Judaism. Enough with the Mickey Mouse routines and rituals, the song-and-dance gimmicks. Get beyond the external and the plastic. Give me some soul! When our faith is superficial, we look as foolish as the pathetic thief described in the Talmud. "The thief, at the mouth of the tunnel, calls out to G-d." Here is a *goniff*, a lowly criminal, about to enter the tunnel he has dug to rob a bank, but before he goes in, he prays to G-d for success. What a chutzpah! He is about to violate G-d's express command not to steal, and has the audacity to still ask G-d to help him do the job?! But such is the effect of superficiality. He has faith, our Talmudic thief. It just hasn't penetrated. Because this shallow pseudo-religiosity hasn't permeated his inner being, he is blissfully unaware of the hypocrisy of his actions. So what's wrong with stealing and praying at the same time? The truth is that we all believe, even the thieves among us. The challenge is for the penny to drop; for that faith to reach into our core, to touch our souls. Let us heed the call, *Ten li hanefesh*—"Give me the soul." Let us move beyond superficial Judaism to something deeper, profound and real, which will touch our own souls and inspire our children. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

## The Three Altars of Love

Each and every event that is recorded in the Torah about the lives of our forefathers and foremothers is relevant to the story of every single Jew. That is why there are some key events in their stories that are not recorded in the Torah (like Abraham discovering G-d at an early age and debating with the people of his native land, which is recorded only in Midrash), and why some seemingly trivial details are recorded. The Torah records only those events that are relevant

to us, that will recur, in some form or another, in the life of every Jew. Who was Abraham? What did he stand for? What does he teach us? Chassidic philosophy teaches that Abraham embodied the quality of loving-kindness, love for his fellow human beings and for his Creator. If there is one theme that runs through many of the stories about Abraham, it is the theme of love—for G-d, as well as for people who were not necessarily deserving of love, such as his nephew Lot, his elder son, Ishmael, and the wicked people of Sodom. The story of Abraham's journeys is the story of a journey toward achieving true love. This week's Parshah begins with G-d commanding Abraham to "go forth" and begin a new journey: And the L-rd said to Abram, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1.) Abraham followed G-d's instructions and travelled to what would later become the Promised Land. There he built an altar to G-d: And the L-rd appeared to Abram, and He said, "To your seed I will give this land," and there he built an altar to the L-rd, who had appeared to him. (Genesis 12:7.) Why did Abraham decide to build an altar to G-d precisely at this time and place? Rashi explains that Abraham built the altar to thank G-d for His two promises: the promise that he would have children and the promise that he would be given the land. As Rashi puts it: And there he built an altar: [in thanksgiving] for the good tidings concerning his descendants and the good tidings concerning the Land of Israel. (Rashi, *ad loc.*) In the next verse we read of Abraham's journey to the next stop in his travels, to a place near Ai where, once again, he built an altar to G-d: And he moved from there to the mountain, east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent; Bethel was to the west and Ai was to the east, and there he built an altar to the L-rd, and he called in the name of the L-rd. (Genesis 12:8.) Why did Abraham decide to build this second altar? Rashi explains: And there he built an altar: He

prophesied that his sons were destined to stumble there because of the iniquity of Achan, and he prayed there for them. (Rashi, *ad loc.*) The story of Abraham's journeying continues. Abraham and his wife, Sarah (at that point called Sarai), were forced to move to Egypt because of a famine. Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's palace, and then released. Abraham and Sarah returned to Canaan, Abraham and his nephew Lot parted ways, and Abraham then reached the city of Hebron, where he built his third and final altar: And Abram pitched his tents, and he came, and he dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the L-rd. (Genesis 13:18.) Why did Abraham decide to build the third altar? We would expect that Rashi, having explained why Abraham built the first two, would explain the rationale for the third one. And yet Rashi is mysteriously silent. To understand the reason for this silence, we need to read the story through the lense of chassidic teachings. If we look at Abraham's journey as a journey toward love, we will understand why Abraham built the third altar, and we will understand why Rashi does not give a reason for its construction. In general, there are three stages of love. These three levels are represented by the three altars that Abraham built. The first stage is love that is motivated by a benefit received. We fall in love because of what we receive from the relationship, because of what the relationship does for us. We like the way the relationship makes us feel. The second stage is more complicated. We fall in love, and then we grow apart. Eventually, a distance springs up between us and the recipient of our love. This distance is painful. However, this is when the second stage of love comes into play. This love is motivated by returning to the original feelings of love after the experience of separation. The second stage of love is fueled by the pain experienced from being distant from our beloved. Finally, there is a third stage of love. This love is not motivated by what we receive from the love, nor is it motivated by the pain felt by the lack of connection. The third level of love is all about connecting to the object of our love for its own sake. We are drawn to connect because there is no other way; we sense that deep down we are one. The first altar that Abraham built, the first stage of Abraham's love for G-d, was about the benefit that Abraham would receive. As Rashi explains, Abraham built the altar because he understood that the relationship with G-d was beneficial to him. He had just been promised the blessing of children and the gift of the Land of Israel. When Abraham came to Ai, he sensed that his descendants would sin at this very location. In building an altar there, he was teaching his children that the disconnect of sin can itself be a reason to connect to G-d. Estrangement is in fact key to another, deeper, stage of love. Abraham was demonstrating that love intensifies when it overcomes the pain of separation. Finally, Abraham reached the city of Hebron. The word Hebron comes from the Hebrew word *chibur*, which means "connection." In Hebron, Abraham reached third and ultimate stage of love. Why did Abraham build an altar here? Rashi's silence communicates a deep truth. There is no reason for this altar, no reason for this relationship. This stage of love is not based on reason; it is not based on receiving something. Abraham built the altar for no reason other than to be connected to G-d—not for any personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise, but for the sake of the bond itself. Abraham is the father of each and every Jew. We read about his journeys not merely for historical information, but to glean a lesson about our relationships, about our bond with G-d. Abraham's story inspires us to reach for the final stage of love. As Maimonides writes: One who serves [G-d] out of love occupies himself in the Torah and the mitzvahs and walks in the paths of wisdom for no ulterior motive: not because of fear that evil will occur, nor in order to acquire benefit. Rather, he does what is true because it is true... This is a very high level, which is not merited by every wise man. It is the level of our patriarch, Abraham, whom G-d described as, "he who loved Me," for his service was only motivated by love. (Maimonides, Laws of Repentance, chapter 10.)

*Inspired by the teachings of the Rebbe, Likutei Sichot, Lech Lecha, vol. 30, Sichah By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

**Sunday, October 25, 2020 --- 7 Cheshvan, 5781**

**Last Jew comes home (2nd Temple Era)**

During the Second Temple Era (circa 230 BCE), Cheshvan 7 was the date on which the Jew most distant from the Holy Temple -- who resided on the banks of the Euphrates River, a 15-day journey's distance from Jerusalem -- arrived at his homestead upon returning from the Sukkot pilgrimage. All Jews would wait for this before beginning to pray for rain. Cheshvan 7 thus marked the return to everyday activities following the spirituality of the festival-rich month of Tishrei.

**Monday, October 26, 2020 --- 8 Cheshvan, 5781**

**Passing of R. Jonah of Gerona (1263)**

R. Jonah was a thirteenth-century scholar who lived in Spain. Although originally opposed to Maimonides' philosophical works (most notably, his *Guide for the Perplexed*), he later changed his views, and even vowed to travel to Maimonides' gravesite to posthumously beg for forgiveness. (He indeed began the long journey, but passed away before completing it.)

R. Jonah authored *Shaarei Teshuvah* (an ethical work on repentance), a commentary on R. Isaac Al-Fasi's halachic compendium, and a commentary on *Ethics of the Fathers*, among other works.

Others date his passing as 1 or 28 MarCheshvan.

**Tuesday, October 27, 2020 --- 9 Cheshvan, 5781**

**Passing of Rosh (1327)**

The life and influence of Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel, known by the acronym "Rosh", straddled the two great spheres of the Jewish diaspora of his time, the Ashkenazic (Franco-German) and the Sephardic (Spanish-Mediterranean) communities. Born approximately 1250 in Western Germany, Rabbi Asher studied under the famed Tosaphist Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, fathered eight sons, and authored one of the earliest codifications of Jewish law. In mid-life he fled the persecutions of medieval Christian Europe, settling in Spain where Jews prospered materially and Jewish learning flourished in the Spanish Golden Age.

Though a penniless exile and newcomer, Rabbi Asher's genius and erudition quickly earned him a position of prestige and influence. In 1304 he was invited to to serve as the spiritual leader of the Jews of Toledo, where he established a Talmudic academy and transplanted the Ashkenazic Tosaphists' system of Talmudic interpretation and analysis. He also introduced the traditionalism and piety of the early Ashkenazic "Chassidim" (reversing the secularist trends in certain segments of Sephardic Jewry).

Rabbi Asher passed away in Toledo on Cheshvan 9 of the year 5088 from creation (1327 of the Common Era).

**Wednesday, October 28, 2020 --- 10 Cheshvan, 5781**

**Birth of Gad** Gad, the son of Jacob and Zilpah, seventh of the Twelve Tribes, was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of MarCheshvan. He lived to be 125 years old. (*Yalkut Shimoni*, Shemot, *remez* 162)

**Thursday, October 29, 2020 --- 11 Cheshvan, 5781**

**Passing of Methuselah (2105 BCE)** Methuselah, the longest-lived human being of all time, died at the age of 969 years on the 11th of Cheshvan of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE) -- exactly seven days before the beginning of the Great Flood. Methuselah was Adam's great-great-great-great-great-grandson and Noah's grandfather.

**Rachel (1553 BCE)** The matriarch Rachel died in childbirth on the 11th of Cheshvan of the year 2208 from creation (1553 BCE) while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin. Rachel was born in Aram (Mesopotamia) approximately 1585 BCE. Her father was Laban, the brother of Jacob's mother, Rebecca. Jacob came to Laban's home in 1576 BCE, fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau. He fell in love with Rachel and worked for seven years tending Laban's sheep in return for her hand in marriage. But Laban deceived his nephew, and on the morning after the wedding Jacob discovered that he had married Rachel's elder sister, Leah. Laban agreed to give him Rachel as a wife as well in return for another seven years' labor. Rachel was childless for many years, while her elder sister and rival gave birth to six sons and a daughter in succession. Finally, in 1562 BCE, she gave birth to Joseph. Nine years later, while Jacob and his family were on the road to Jacob's ancestral home in Hebron (after a 22-year absence), she gave birth to a second son, but died in childbirth. Jacob buried her by the roadside, in Bethlehem; there, "Rachel weeps over her children, for they are gone [in exile]" (Jeremiah 31:14). Her tomb has served as a place of prayer for Jews for more than 35 centuries.