

Torah Weekly

November 22-28, 2020
6-12 Kislev, 5781

Torah reading:
Vayeitzei: Genesis 28:10 - 32:3
Haftarah: Hosea 11:7 - 12:14

PARSHAT VAYEITZEI

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.

The Thanksgiving Jew

You may be surprised to hear that the word “Jew” does not appear in the Five Books of Moses. The Torah refers to our people as the Children of Israel, for we are the children of our patriarch Jacob, who was given the additional name “Israel.” Israel fathered twelve children, who became the twelve tribes of Israel. The name “Jew” comes from the name “Judah,” which means “thanksgiving.” Judah was the fourth son of Jacob and his wife Leah. As we read in this week’s Parshah, “And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, ‘This time, I will thank [*odeh*] the L-rd!’ Therefore, she named him Judah [Yehuda].” (Genesis 29:35.) Why, then, are all Jews called by the name of just one of the tribes, Judah? What is it about thanksgiving that captures the essence of the Children of Israel?

Thanksgiving is easier said than done.

We often look around and wonder why some of the people around us are so ungrateful. Why don’t our children appreciate all that we do for them? Why does our spouse not show gratitude? Why do our co-workers take us for granted?

To understand why the feeling of gratitude is so elusive, we must examine the Hebrew word for “gratitude,” *hodaah*, the root of the name Judah. *Hodaah* also means “to acknowledge,” as in acknowledging that another’s opinion is correct.

Why do these two seemingly distinct ideas, thanksgiving and acknowledgement, share the same word? What possible connection do they share?

The answer is that the key to being thankful is acknowledging the other’s perspective. To illustrate: a mother does so much for her child, yet does the child really appreciate it? The child may take the mother for granted,

thinking that she is just doing what she is supposed to do as a mother. After all, argues the child, isn’t this her job? The only way the child can genuinely feel grateful is if he adopts her perspective, if he appreciates all her sacrifices and all the time she lovingly dedicates to him.

The same is true of a spouse. We can say thank you for an act of kindness. But to truly feel grateful, we need to see the picture from the perspective of our spouse. We need to appreciate all the thought, feeling and energy that was invested in this one act. Only when we acknowledge and appreciate the other’s point of view—*hodaah*—can we say *todah*, “thank you.”

To be a Jew, then, is to possess the ability to see beyond the obvious, to acknowledge the other’s perspective. To be a Jew is to experience the pain of others, as well as rejoice in their happiness as if it were our own. To be a Jew is to acknowledge and accept the perspective of hope and joy even in the midst of great hardship.

There is an ongoing and long-standing dispute between the creation and the Creator. Our perspective is that our life, health and success is due to our independent efforts, and that the only one we need to thank is ourselves.

From G-d’s perspective, however, the entire Universe is being brought into existence every moment by the word of G-d. From His perspective, the only true reality is the G-dly vitality within every created being.

The Jew has the responsibility to see the world from G-d’s perspective, to cultivate the point of view that focuses on the spiritual rather than on the physical. The Jew possesses the gift of acknowledgement—and can therefore experience genuine thanksgiving.

(Adapted from Likkutei Torah, Devarim 1a.)

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

A Ladder to Heaven

So what’s the best way to get to heaven? Walk across a busy highway? Perform some amazing act of faith? Save a thousand lives? Well, a pretty good answer may be found in this week’s Parshah.

We read the story of Jacob’s dream and the famous ladder with its feet on the ground and head in the heavens. “And behold the angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it.”

Let me ask you what they might call in Yiddish, a *klotz kashe* (simplistic question). Do angels need a ladder? Everyone knows angels have wings, not feet. So, if you have wings, why would you need a ladder?

There is a beautiful message here.

In climbing heavenward one does not necessarily need wings. Dispense with the dramatic. Forget about fancy leaps and bounds. There is a ladder, a spiritual route clearly mapped out for us; a route that needs to be traversed step-by-step, one rung at a time. The pathway to Heaven is gradual, methodical and eminently manageable. Many people are discouraged from even beginning a spiritual journey because they think it needs that huge leap of faith. They cannot see themselves reaching a degree of religious commitment which to them seems otherworldly. And yet, with the gradual step-by-step approach, one finds that the journey can be embarked upon and that the destination aspired to is actually not in outer space.

When I was growing up in Brooklyn, I would pass a very big building on my way to school every morning. It was the King’s County Savings Bank. All these years later I still remember the Chinese proverb that was engraved over the large portals at the entrance to the bank. “A journey of a thousand miles begins with but

a single step." Now that's not only Chinese wisdom; we Jews agree. And it's not limited to starting a savings plan. It is a simple yet powerful idea that it need not be "all or nothing."

What do you think is a rabbi's fantasy? A guy walking into my office and saying, "Rabbi, I want to become 'frum' (fully observant), now tell me what I must do"? Is that what I lie awake dreaming of? And if it did happen, do you think I would throw the book at him and insist he did every single mitzvah from that moment on? Never! Why not? Because a commitment like that is usually here today and gone tomorrow. Like the popular saying goes, "Easy come, easy go." I'm afraid I haven't had such wonderful experiences with the "instant Jew" types. The correct and most successful method of achieving our Jewish objectives is the slow and steady approach. Gradual, yet consistent. As soon as one has become comfortable with one mitzvah, it is time to start on the next, and so on and so forth. Then, through constant growth, slowly but surely we become more knowledgeable, committed, fulfilled and happy in our faith.

When my father was in yeshiva, his teacher once asked the following question: "If two people are on a ladder, one at the top and one on the bottom, who is higher?" The class thought it was a pretty dumb question — until the wise teacher explained that they were not really capable of judging who was higher or lower until they first ascertained in which direction each was headed.

If the fellow on top was going down, but the guy on the bottom was going up, then conceptually, the one on the bottom was actually higher.

And so my friends, it doesn't really matter what your starting point is or where you are at on the ladder of religious life. As long as you are moving in the right direction, as long as you are going up, you will, please G-d, succeed in climbing the heavenly heights.

Wishing you a safe and successful journey.

By *Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

Monday, November 23, 2020 --- 7 Kislev, 5781

Jehoaikim Burnt Lamentations (3321/-440)

Jehoaikim, King of Judah, burnt a scroll dictated by the prophet Jeremiah and written by his disciple Baruch son of Neriah. This scroll was the book of Lamentations, and was written to forewarn the king of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. (*Jeremiah ch. 36. Megilat Taanit, perek ha'acharon*. It should be noted that other sources provide alternate dates— see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 580:1* and *Magen Avraham ad loc.*)

Death of King Herod (3760/-1)

Death of Herod, King of Judea. Herod seized the rule from the Hasmoneans, after killing them all. Fearing that the rabbis would challenge his authority, he killed them all, leaving only Bava ben Buta. Later, out of remorse for his cruelty, he had the Holy Temple completely renovated.

Wednesday, November 25, 2020 --- 9 Kislev, 5781

Birth & Passing of R. DovBer of Lubavitch (1773; 1827)

Kislev 9 is both the birthday and day of passing of Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, son of and successor to the founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Rabbi DovBer was known for his unique style of "broadening rivers" -- his teachings were the intellectual rivers to his father's wellspring, lending breadth and depth to the principles set down by Rabbi Schneur Zalman.

Born in Liozna, White Russia in 1773, Rabbi DovBer was named after Rabbi Schneur Zalman's mentor and teacher, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, who had passed away on Kislev 19 of the previous year. Rabbi DovBer assumed the leadership of Chabad upon his father's passing in 1812. In 1813 he settled in the town of Lubavitch, which was to serve as the movement's headquarters for the next 102 years. In 1826, he was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated.

Rabbi DovBer passed away on his 54th birthday in 1827, a day before the first anniversary of his liberation (see calendar entries for tomorrow, Kislev 10).

Thursday, November 26, 2020 --- 10 Kislev, 5781

Liberation of R. DovBer (1826)

In 1826, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch (see calendar entry for yesterday, Kislev 9) was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated. The date of his release, Kislev 10, is celebrated amongst Chabad Chassidim as a "festival of liberation." Tachnun (confession of sins) is omitted from the day's prayers, farbrengens are held, and Rabbi DovBer's teachings are studied.

Shabbat, November 28, 2020 --- 12 Kislev, 5781

Rabbi "YY" Kazen (1998)

Kislev 12 is the yahrtzeit (date of the passing) of Chabad.org's founding director, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Kazen ("YYK," 1954-1998), widely acclaimed as the "father of the Jewish internet."

Shabbat, November 28, 2020 --- 12 Kislev, 5781

Passing of R. Shlomo Luria (1573)

R. Shlomo Luria, known by his acronym Maharshal, was an eminent scholar in sixteenth-century Poland. He headed a yeshiva in Brisk and Lublin and wrote many works, including *Yam Shel Shlomo* and *Chachmas Shlomo*. An independent thinker, he did not hesitate to criticize his colleagues when he felt they had erred in their method of Talmudic study and halachic analysis. At the same time, he was an extremely humble person and was the teacher of many great Torah scholars of his generation.

It is related that one night, R. Shlomo sat down to study to the light of a small candle. Miraculously, the candle did not extinguish, allowing R. Shlomo to continue his studies for many hours (*Shem Hagedolim*).