

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

August 22-28 2021
14 Elul – 20 Elul, 5781

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

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 Matzoh 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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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Jewish and Joyless

Tzortes. Reproach. Dire predictions and horrifying forecasts of the curses and calamities we will encounter in our lives if and when we should stray from the good and G-dly path. The portion we read this Shabbat is known as the tochachah, or rebuke. It is always read in close proximity to Rosh Hashanah and is intended to sober us up to the realities of life so that we can do some soul-searching and introspection in order to improve our behavior before the coming Days of Judgment.

And in the middle of all these terrifying and ominous curses, there is a one-liner that seems to suggest the root cause of our problems. All this calamity will befall you “because you did not serve the L-rd, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant.”

The simple meaning of this verse is that we will experience these curses because we did not serve G-d in the “good times,” when we were enjoying prosperity and abundance. We became smug, complacent, and forgot our Maker and our higher calling—why we were put here in the first place.

Commentaries offer various other interpretations, including the idea that we simply did not serve G-d b’simchah, with joy. We may have done all the right things, but we did them with a heavy heart. We served G-d and observed His commandments reluctantly and without any feeling. There was no enthusiasm, no joy. Being Jewish had become a burden. We found our joy and satisfaction in other areas of life, perhaps even in the undesirable and unholy domains.

The Talmud tells us that the Jews at the time of the Purim story brought Haman’s terrible decree of a Final Solution upon themselves because “they took delight in the feast of that wicked man [King Ahasuerus].”²

According to many opinions, the food the king served the Jews at his royal banquet was in fact kosher. But the problem was that the Jews “took delight” in participating in this drunken orgy, where the sacred vessels of our Holy Temple were desecrated and used as party props for the evil king’s pleasure.

Where do we find our delight? Where is our enthusiasm and passion? Is it in leading good Jewish lives, or in partying with princes?

The story is told of a Jew in Russia of old who was doing some business with, the local Russian squire. The squire invited the Jew to a business lunch, where he offered him pork chops and non-kosher wine. When the Jew declined to partake, citing the Jewish dietary laws, the squire asked, “What if you were stranded in a desert and had nothing to eat but this? Would you not eat it to save your life?”

“Well, if it was matter of life and death, then I would be permitted to eat it,” replied the Jew.

Suddenly the squire jumped up from the table, pulled out a revolver and, pointing it at the Jew, shouted, “Drink the wine or I’ll shoot!”

Immediately, the Jew gulped down the wine.

The squire burst out laughing and said, “I was only joking.” Whereupon the Jew turned red with anger and glared furiously at the squire.

“Why are you so angry?” the squire asked.

“Why am I so angry? I’ll tell you why!” the Jew replied. “You couldn’t have forced me to eat the pork chops?!”

That Jew kept kosher, but was he doing it happily or begrudgingly? While keeping kosher, was he fantasizing about pork chops?

The 19th-century Russian czars tried to Russify young Jewish boys by drafting them into the army for a 25-year stretch. These children, known as cantonists, would be separated from their families, their people and their faith. Despite their extreme suffering, many maintained their allegiance to the G-d of Israel with total commitment and heroism. Indeed, too many paid with their lives.

The story is told of some of these young men who were forcibly conscripted and taken far away from their families. They wrote a letter to one of the leading rabbis of Russia, asking for his advice about what to do about kosher. Should they eat the non-kosher food, or allow themselves to suffer malnutrition and perhaps even starve to death?

The wise rabbi answered them as follows. “If, in order to stay alive, you have no choice but to eat treif, then so be it. But, please, I beg of you, don’t suck the marrow bones.”

It is not enough just to do the right thing. G-d wants our joy, our enthusiasm, our fervor and fire. As we approach Rosh Hashanah, let us resolve to do whatever it takes to find the inspiration we need to energize and invigorate our Jewish lives. Let us serve G-d. And let us serve Him with joy.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

It's Not What, but How, You Give

It's your birthday. Your young children let you sleep in. Stealthily, they sneak downstairs to prepare a card, hand-drawn, with clashing colors of crayons. They find a crumpled piece of gift wrap for a beaded necklace that they crafted. Finally and hesitatingly, they hand over their special present to you.

And, of course, more than the most expensive gift, their humble offering means the world to you.

Now, imagine these scenarios:

You gave a nice sum of money to a poor person who is down on his luck. You sat chatting with a home-bound, elderly neighbor to brighten his day. You brought over a home-cooked meal to a close friend who is bedridden. Or you read your child his favorite nighttime story—for the 15th time.

Terrific, right? You should feel pretty good about yourself.

But there's one ingredient that's essential to making it special and appreciated.

Your children's humble present meant so much to you because it was given with such love and joy. They offered what they could, and they did it with hearts that were overflowing.

If joy would be missing from any one of your offerings, the thoughtful gift would become ugly. That home-cooked meal—given with a sour, resentful face—just

wouldn't taste the same, just as the time spent in anger or irritation with your elderly neighbor or young child would become almost meaningless. The recipients might benefit somewhat from what you gave, but the act would be missing its soul.

At the end of this week's Torah portion, we learn why G-d sent us into exile.

Because you did not serve G-d with happiness and with gladness of heart, in abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies . . . (28:47-48)

Different explanations are given as to what this passage mean. Rashi suggests that we didn't serve G-d when He gave us an abundance of goodness, so we will serve our enemies in poverty.

But the words seem to imply that we were serving G-d, just not with happiness.

Maimonides explains: "Even though you served G-d, you did not serve Him with joy—that is the source of all afflictions."

Why such extreme punishment for simply lacking joy?

G-d didn't create us as perfect beings who can continuously do only good and escape from messing up. But if we serve G-d with joy—showing Him that we are happy and grateful to do His commandments—then our joy inspires G-d to overlook our shortcomings. (Likutei Torah 2:20c)

Like any parent, G-d doesn't expect the most glamorous and expensive "offerings" from us. He appreciates our humble deeds, such as when I held back from that juicy gossip or when I smiled when I felt like screaming. G-d understands how much effort even the smallest act of self-sacrifice or self-restraint requires of us.

As long as we do so with joy.

By Chana Weisberg

August 22-28 Elul 14-20

Sunday, August 22, 2021, 14 Elul, Passing of R. Boruch Mordechai Ettinger of Babruysk (1852)- R. Boruch Mordechai Ettinger was a follower of the first three Chabad Rebbes, R. Schneur Zalman (the Alter Rebbe), R. DovBer (the Mitteler Rebbe), and R. Menachem Mendel (the Tzemach Tzedek). He served as head of the Talmudic academy in Vilna (Vilnius) and then as rabbi in Babruysk, a post he filled for fifty years. Toward the end of his life he immigrated to Jerusalem, where he passed away. R. Boruch Mordechai was known for his witty sayings and remarks which reflected his sharp perception and deep wisdom.

Monday, August 23, 15 Elul, - 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 Schneersohn.

Tuesday, August 24, 16 Elul- Passing of Simon Weisenthal (2005) Elul 16 is the *yahrzeit* (day of passing) of the world-famous Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal.

Wednesday, August 25, 17 Elul- Noah Dispatches Dove (2105 BCE) Following the failed attempt to dispatch a raven from the ark (see "Today in Jewish History" for Elul 10), Noah sent a dove from the window of the ark to see if the great Flood that covered the earth had abated. "But the dove found no resting place for the sole of its foot" and returned to the ark; Noah waited seven days before making another attempt.

Outbreak of World War II (1939) On September 1, 1939, corresponding to the Hebrew date of 17 Elul, the Nazi Wehrmacht invaded Poland, launching World War II. The war would prove to be the deadliest conflict in history, resulting in the death of some 60 million people, including the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust as part of the Final Solution. weeks later.)

Thursday, August 26, 18 Elul (1698) – Birth of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov Rabbi Israel was born in a small town in Ukraine in 1698. His father, Rabbi Eliezer, passed away when young Israel was only five years old; his last words to his son were, "Fear nothing but G-d alone. Love every Jew with all your heart and all your soul."

Birth of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), founder of the "Chabad" branch of Chassidism, was born on Elul 18 of the year 5505 from creation -- the 47th birthday of his "spiritual grandfather", Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Schneur Zalman was the disciple of the Baal Shem Tov's disciple and successor, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch).

Ethiopian Jewish (Beta Israel) holiday marking the deaths of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.
Yahrzeit of the Maharal of Prague, 1609.

Friday August 27, 19 Elul-Passing of R. Chaim Benveniste (1673) R. Chaim Benveniste was a renowned scholar who served as rabbi in Tire, a town near Izmir, Turkey, and then in Izmir itself. His most famous work is *Kenesses Hagedolah*, a collection of halachic material arranged according to the order of the Code of Jewish Law. Other notable members of the Benveniste family include Don Joseph Benveniste and Dona Gracia Mendes-Nasi.
Anti-Semitic speech by Charles Lindbergh on the radio, 1941, marked the introduction of anti-Semitism as a political tool in America.

Shabbat, August 28, 20 Elul-Jewish Population of France expelled by order of Charles VI of France, 1394.
Ghetto of Mir was liquidated, 1942. On 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Within five days, the Germans reached Mir. By 20 Elul 1942, the entire Jewish population of Mir had been murdered in three waves of executions at shooting pits. On the night of 13 Elul, a few days before the final mass murder, 200 Jews managed to escape from Mir with the help of Oswald Rufeisen. They fled to the forests and joined the partisans.