

# Torah Weekly

October 10-16, 2021  
4-10 Cheshvan, 5782

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 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).

## Leaving Home - For Good

The story is told of an encounter between two famous rabbis of yesteryear — Rabbi Elijah, the famed "Gaon" (prodigious scholar) of Vilna, and Rabbi Yaakov Krantz, known as the "Maggid" (preacher) of Dubne. Apparently the Maggid of Dubne once visited Vilna and went to pay a courtesy call on the great Gaon. The Gaon asked the Maggid to preach to him, as was his specialty. "Give me *mussar* (words of rebuke). Chastise me," said the Gaon. "G-d forbid that I should have the chutzpah to chastise the great Gaon of Vilna," replied the Maggid, quite horrified at the suggestion. "No matter, that is your forte and I want to hear *mussar* from you," insisted the Gaon.

So the Dubner Maggid thought a while and then most reluctantly acceded to the wishes of his illustrious host. Said the Maggid, "Is it a great achievement to be a Gaon sitting in Vilna in your little secluded *kloiz* (small study hall)? Go out into the world, mix with the people, and *then* let us see what kind of Gaon you will be."

Indeed, it is much easier to be scholarly and pious in a sequestered ghetto than it is outside in a world that is often oblivious, or even hostile, to Torah and its values.

This, in fact, was more or less the test of Abraham in this week's Parshah. "Go from your land, from your birthplace, from your father's house, to the land I will show you." And it was there — far from his natural environment and comfort zones — that Abraham accomplished his divine mission. He spread the truth of the One G-d to a pagan world and, in the process, his own name and reputation was established for eternity. It was only after leaving home that Abraham became the founding father of the Jewish people.

A hundred years ago, an entire generation of Yiddish-speaking, Torah-observant Jews migrated from Europe. They came to America, the golden land of opportunity, to escape pogroms and persecution. With blood, sweat and tears they raised themselves from rags to riches and soon came to personify the American dream — an amazing and inspiring success story. But the fact is that, for the most part, as their businesses succeeded their religious lives failed. Unquestionably, Judaism took a severe body blow. Most were unable to sustain

their old world values in new world America. The transition from shtetl to suburbia proved too formidable and children and grandchildren grew up ignorant of and alienated from their own sacred traditions.

Today, we see this phenomenon playing out on a lesser scale when families emigrate or move from city to city. Displaced from their spiritual support systems, they flounder. The bulk of their efforts are directed at just resettling and reorganizing their lives. Putting religious infrastructures in place often comes last — at great cost in the long run.

And on a more subtle level, a similar test of conscience faces us when we take our annual vacations. Away from home and our habitual norms of behavior, we are challenged to maintain the code of conduct we are committed to all year long.

It's like the story of the *shadchan* (matchmaker) who suggested a young lady to a fellow and absolutely raved about her. After their first date, the fellow calls up the *shadchan* and gives him a piece of his mind. "How dare you introduce me to such a girl, didn't you know she limps!" Quite unflustered, the *shadchan* retorts, "But, what's the problem, it's only when she walks."

It is when we walk away from our comfortable spiritual cocoons of home and community into the wider society that we may find ourselves limping somewhat, losing our Jewish equilibrium. It is then that our faith, our values, our morals and beliefs are truly challenged.

May G-d help that the children of Abraham will emulate their forefather, who left his land and remained strong in faith, going on to achieve remarkable success, both spiritually and materially.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

**Our Lot In Life** It seems like the ultimate codependent relationship.

In this week's Torah portion we are introduced to a shadowy character named Lot, Abraham's nephew. Through his relationship with Abraham, Lot grows wealthy and powerful, but that's what starts the rift between them. Abraham is always careful to muzzle his cattle when passing through the fields of others. Lot's shepherds let his animals graze wherever they please. Their argument is that G-d has promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham, and Abraham has no children, so it will all go to Lot. Therefore, they feel they are justified in letting Lot's animals loose in anyone's field.

To Abraham, this is utterly unacceptable. Although G-d has promised the land to his descendants, he has not yet taken possession, and thus has no rights to his neighbors' fields. In any case, Lot is not the ultimate heir. To make matters worse, Lot resembles Abraham physically, so his behavior reflects negatively on Abraham as well. Finally, Abraham issues an ultimatum: "Please, let us go our separate ways. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left."

For Lot, this should have been an opportunity for self-reflection—to improve his ways and not lose his relationship with his revered Uncle Abraham. Instead, Lot agrees to part and sets up house among the most depraved people then in existence—the residents of Sodom.

Not long afterward, four strong kings pick a battle with five weak kings, including the king of Sodom, and subdue the population. After 12 years of subjugation, the five kings rebel. War breaks out, and Lot is taken prisoner. When Abraham hears the news, he immediately swings into action and personally goes into battle to rescue Lot.

At this point, does Lot gratefully, meekly return to Abraham's court? He does not. He continues living with the corrupt Sodomites and even becomes a leader among them.

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Eventually, matters come to a head, and the evil of Sodom reaches the heavens. G-d comes to a verdict: The city of Sodom must be destroyed. G-d shares the news with his trusted servant Abraham, who proceeds to pray on behalf of the people of Sodom. He is unable to find a quorum of righteous people in whose merit the city should be saved. But Lot, at least, is spared the calamity.

When the angels appear to rescue Lot, though, he is none too eager to join them. The angels drag him away, and he escapes with his life only moments before the city is destroyed.

The final straw is when Lot's daughters awaken to the destruction around them and assume that they are the only ones left. They get their father drunk and become pregnant from him. News soon spreads of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters, and Abraham is forced to move away in shame.

The common thread in this saga is that Abraham is repeatedly disappointed and humiliated by the behavior of his nephew, yet he bails him out time and again.

Abraham was a leader—a highly motivational person—and it must have pained him greatly not to be able to exert more influence on his nephew. But Lot was his own person who made his own decisions. Why did Abraham not simply let him live with the consequences? Why did Abraham not make a clean break from Lot? Why did he keep swooping in to save Lot from himself? Was it classic codependency, or was there another dynamic at play?

Perhaps Abraham saw potential in Lot and kept trying to bring it to the fore.

Chassidic teachings explain that Lot represents the part of the mind that is uncouth, unrefined. It's the part that behaves unpredictably, sometimes shamefully; the part that gets us into scrapes time and again; the part that can drag us to the most desolate, degraded places—our personal Sodom. We try to distance ourselves but can never quite escape from our Lot. And perhaps, on some level, we don't want to.

And this is something that Abraham bequeathed to us, his descendants: We will never give up on our Lot, whether it's a wayward child, an annoying neighbor—or ourselves. We don't give up because even the most unrefined and embarrassing person has potential waiting to be discovered.

Lot's two daughters produced two sons, who grew into two mighty nations, Moab and Ammon. From [Moab](#) descended Ruth, the famous convert who became the great-grandmother of King David. From Ammon descended Naamah, wife of King Solomon, and mother of his firstborn son and heir, Rehoboam. Thus, the lineage of the dynasty of David, and by extension Mashiach, comes through Lot.

Abraham foresaw that Lot would be a forebear of King David and Mashiach. On the verse in Psalms, "I have found my servant David," the Midrash comments, "Where did He find him? In Sodom!"

The legacy of Lot is that no circumstance in life is so low or so depraved that no good can come from it. Abraham's rescue of Lot empowers us to rescue ourselves and each other from the pits of Sodom—as many times as it takes—until we've refined our Lot to the utmost, and the world is finally ready for Mashiach.

*By Chaya Shuchat*

**Sunday, October 10, 2021 --- 4 Cheshvan, 5782**

**"Purim Algiers" (1541)**

In 1541, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and ruler of Spain, led a fleet in an attempted attack against Algiers. Miraculously, a storm capsized many of the attacking boats, resulting in the expedition's failure and rescuing the city's Jewish community from Spanish anti-Semitic rule. In commemoration of the miracle, the local community marked 4 Mar-Cheshvan as a "minor Purim," omitting the penitential [Tachanun](#) prayers and partaking of festive meals (*Zeh Hashulchan* pp. 96–97).

**Tuesday, October 12, 2021 --- 6 Cheshvan, 5782**

**Maimonides Visits Jerusalem ((1165))**

After leaving Morocco and before settling in Egypt, Maimonides visited [Jerusalem](#) and prayed at the site of the Holy Temple. Three days later, on 9 MarCheshvan, he visited [Hebron](#) and prayed at the Cave of Machpelah. Maimonides resolved to keep these two days—6 and 9 MarCheshvan—as a personal holiday (*Charedim* ch. 65 [5744 ed.]).

**Wednesday, October 13, 2021 --- 7 Cheshvan, 5782**

**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.

**Passing of R. Meir Shapiro (1933)**

Passing of Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, founder of the daily "page a day" regimen of Talmudic study known as *Daf Yomi*.

**Thursday, October 14, 2021 --- 8 Cheshvan, 5782**

**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.

**Friday, October 15, 2021 --- 9 Cheshvan, 5782**

**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 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).

**Shabbat, October 16, 2021 --- 10 Cheshvan, 5782**

**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)