

# Torah Weekly

November 8-14, 2020  
21-27 Cheshvan, 5781

Torah reading:  
Chayei Sarah: Genesis 23:1 - 25:18  
Haftarah: Kings I 1:1-31

## PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

### 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.

### Chanukah Gelt

For those incarcerated with children (under 13), Aleph Institute send Chanukah Gelt, Please be sure to send us your children's info and where we can send those gifts.

### Chanukah Candles

Please work with your Rabbi and chaplains to make the necessary arrangements for the lighting of the Chanukah candles.

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center  
5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-421-0111  
Fax: 412-521-5948  
www.alephne.org  
info@alephne.org



**ALEPH INSTITUTE**  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

## Don't (Only) Rely on G-d

"G-d helps those who help themselves"

Is this statement heresy? Does it deny the hand of G-d in our successes? I recall a conversation with a self-proclaimed atheist who used the expression very cynically, suggesting that his considerable achievements were entirely his own and that G-d had nothing to do with it.

I beg to differ. To my mind, "G-d helps those who help themselves" is a perfectly religious statement. What it means is absolutely consistent with traditional Jewish thinking. G-d does indeed help us to accomplish things, but He requires us to help ourselves first. If we just sit back and wait for miracles to happen, we may be disappointed.

"G-d will bless you in all that you do," ([Deuteronomy 15:18](#)) makes it very clear. Our blessings come from G-d, but we must *do*. Of course, we believe in miracles—but we mustn't rely on them. The combination of our own hard work and efforts coupled with G-d's blessing is the ideal road to success.

The classic analogy is the farmer. He can plough and plant, sow and *shvitz* from today until tomorrow but if the rains don't come nothing will grow. Conversely, all the rains in the world will not cause anything to grow if the farmer hasn't planted first. After the farmer has done his work and the rains come from above, there will be a plentiful crop. And it's the same story whether we are farmers or shopkeepers, professionals or artisans, employers or employees.

ones—marriages were and are arranged, and the young lady (and sometimes the young man) has no say in this choice of her/his marriage partner. However, Torahlaw and Jewish

There are religious ideologies that frown upon medical intervention when someone is ill. They see it as a lack of faith in the great Healer of all Flesh. In fact, right now in my own community, there is a court case going on because a hospital gave a blood transfusion to a child who was critically ill, but it was against the wishes of the parents who objected on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Judaism maintains that while G-d is indeed the Supreme Healer, He chooses to work through the efforts of trustworthy medical practitioners.

This week's Parshah tells of Isaac taking Rebecca as his wife. "And Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother." Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains this to mean more than the obvious. When she entered the tent, it was as if she was Sarah, Isaac's mother. Because Sarah was of such saintly character, she was granted three special miracles. Her Shabbat candles burned the entire week, her dough was particularly blessed, and a heavenly cloud attached itself to her tent. When Sarah died, these blessings disappeared. When Rebecca arrived on the scene, they resumed immediately. In fact, this was a clear sign to Isaac that Rebecca was indeed his soul mate and that the *shidduch* was made in Heaven.

Each of those three miracles, however, required some form of human input first. A candle and fire had to be found, the dough had to be prepared and a tent had to be pitched before G-d would intervene and make those miracles happen. In other words, He does help us but we must help ourselves first. It's a little like the fellow who would make a fervent prayer to G-d every week that he win the lottery. After many months and no jackpot in sight, he lost his faith and patience. In anguished disappointment, he vented his frustration with the Almighty. "Oh, G-d! For months I've been praying to you. Why haven't you helped me win the lottery all this time?" Whereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying, "Because you haven't bought a ticket, dummy!"

I wish it were that simple to win lotteries. But the fact is that it is the same in all our endeavors. G-d helps those who help themselves. May we all do our part. Please G-d, He will do His. *By Rabbi Yossy Goldman*

## Arranged Marriages?

Question:

Is it true that traditionally, Jewish marriages were arranged marriages? I've also heard that this is still the practice amongst the more religious Jews. Does Judaism mandate or legitimize this practice?

Answer:

If arranged means coerced—no. It is true that in most ancient cultures—and many still-existing custom have always frowned upon this practice, even in ancient times.

In fact, the opposition to coerced marriages was prevalent in Abraham's family even before Judaism. We find in the [Torah's](#) account of Isaac's marriage (Genesis 24) that when Abraham's servant Eliezer proposes to

take Rebecca back to Canaan to marry Isaac, he is told by Rebecca's

family (Abraham's cousins who were not into his new religion): "Let us ask the maiden." From here our sages derive that no one may be married against their choice. This, indeed, has always been the practice within the Jewish community since its inception.

As far as how the prospective bride and groom are introduced so that they can decide whether they do indeed wish to marry each other, certainly the *shadchan* ("matchmaker") has always played a major role in Jewish marriages. (There are professional *shadchanim*, but usually it's a friend of the family who knows someone who knows a seemingly candidate, etc.)

The *shadchan* method has proven to be the most effective way to find a marriage partner. One starts off meeting someone who is at least somewhat compatible, rather than meeting people at random. As a matter of fact, many thoroughly modern Jewish singles have discovered that the random roll-the-dice approach isn't finding them a mate, and have returned to the traditional *shadchan* model.

By Rabbi Shlomo Yaffe

## The Tree of Life

With a name like "The Life of Sarah," this week's Torah portion sounds like a promising biography.

Too bad she dies in the second verse.

One of the fundamentals of our faith is that the Jewish way of life is everlasting. This is why the doing of good deeds is compared to planting a seed.

When a seed is planted, it disintegrates in the ground, losing its puny identity to the nourishing soil and creative potential of mother earth. A seedling sprouts, which will one day grow into a tall tree. In time, the tree will bear fruit, and seeds, which themselves might become an orchard, and ultimately, a vast forest.

Likewise, a good deed takes root and sprouts in a nourishing eternity of good deeds and Jewish values. These deeds and values give life to ourselves and our offspring, that we too might one day grow into tall fruitful trees; that our fruits might one day become orchards.

That's why the [Torah](#) is called the "Tree of Life."

This was the life of Sarah, and this, for more than three thousand years, has been the life of the Jew.

Sarah devoted her life to her only son, Isaac. She nourished him by teaching him good deeds and moral values. She raised him to be a giant fruit-bearing tree, that he should nourish the next generation.

Our Homes today are the orchard that sprouted from those fruits.

By Rabbi Boruch Cohen

**Sunday, October 24, 2021 --- 18 Cheshvan, 5782**

### Pittsburgh Tree of Life Massacre

On Shabbat morning, Cheshvan 18, 5779 (Oct. 27, 2018), Pittsburgh's peaceful Jewish enclave of Squirrel Hill (a few blocks from the Aleph Institute) was shattered by gunshots as a crazed anti-Semite attacked worshippers at the Tree of Life congregation, killing 11. It was the deadliest attack on Jews on American soil. Reeling from the pain, Pittsburghers struggled to make sense of the tragedy that had befallen their city, and people around the world responded with an outpouring of love, support, mitzvahs and faith.

**Tuesday, October 26, 2021 --- 20 Cheshvan, 5782**

### Birth of Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch (1860)

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn (known by the acronym "Rashab"), was born on the 20th of Cheshvan of the year 5621 from creation (1860).

After the passing of his father, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, in 1882, Rabbi Sholom DovBer assumed the leadership of the movement. Over the next 38 years, he wrote and delivered some 2,000 *maamarim* (discourses of Chassidic teaching) including the famed *hemshechim* (serialized discourses) which contain his profound analytical treatment of Chabad Chassidism. In 1897, he established the *Tomchei Temimim* yeshivah in Lubavitch, the first institution of Jewish learning to integrate the "body" (Talmudic and legal studies) and "soul" (philosophic and mystical) of Torah into a cohesive, living whole; it was this unique form of education and Torah study that produced the "Temimim" -- the army of learned, inspired and devoted torchbearers who, in the decades to come, would literally give their lives to keep Judaism alive under Soviet rule.

In 1915 Rabbi Sholom DovBer was forced to flee Lubavitch from the advancing WWI front and settled in Rostov-on-Don in southern Russia. In his final years, he began the heroic battle -- carried on under the leadership of his son and successor, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn -- against the new Communist regime's efforts to destroy the Jewish faith. Rabbi Sholom DovBer passed away in Rostov in 1920.

**Wednesday, October 27, 2021 --- 21 Cheshvan, 5782**

### Passing of R. David Ibn Zimra (1574)

R. David ibn Zimra, known by the acronym Radvaz, was a great rabbi and scholar who led the Jewish communities of Egypt and Safed for sixty years. Radvaz was held in high esteem by his contemporaries, and is the author of 3000 responsa, covering a vast array of topics. Among his more famous students are R. Isaac Luria (the Ari) and R. Betzalel Ashkenazi (author of *Shitah Mekubetztes*). It is said that Elijah the Prophet revealed himself to him.

**Shabbat, October 30, 2021 --- 24 Cheshvan, 5782**

### Passing of R. Avraham Azulai (1643)

R. Avraham was a famous kabbalist who resided in [Hebron](#), [Jerusalem](#), and Gaza. He authored *Chesed L'Avraham*, and was the great-grandfather of R. Chaim Yosef David Azulai (the Chida). R. Avraham's signature had the appearance of a ship, to commemorate the time when the ship he was traveling on capsized along with all his possessions, and he was miraculously saved (*Shem Hagedolim*).