

Torah Weekly

October 30- November 5, 2022
5-11 Cheshvan, 5783

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).

Airport Story Every rabbi has an airport story. In fact, some rabbis tell so many incredible stories of providential encounters on airplanes and in airports that I sometimes wonder if it is physically possible for them to have traveled on as many airplanes as they have stories!

Why am I talking about airplanes? Because this is the week of the Torah reading of *Lech Lecha*, when our father Abraham was instructed by G-d to leave his birthplace and journey to a foreign land that would, one day, be promised to his children. Ever since then, the Jews have been a nation of wanderers. Our ancestors' travels shaped our future destiny. Their journeys became our journeys. And the geographical upheavals the Jewish people have been subjected to over the centuries are mirror images of the footsteps of our forebears.

Anyway, here is an airplane story of my own.

Some years back, I was traveling from Johannesburg to Cape Town to join then President Nelson Mandela at a Banquet honoring South Africa's late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris and also to deliver a few lectures there at various synagogues. They say "getting there is half the fun," but on this occasion nothing could have been further from the truth. First there was a system malfunction on the aircraft that caused a 30-minute delay. Then there was a missing passenger who delayed takeoff for a further three hours until he was discovered in the airport pub somewhat uncertain of where exactly he was going. Eventually, we landed after 10:00 pm and I missed the synagogue lecture that I was scheduled to give at 8:00 pm that evening.

And why might you be interested in my story? Because I found it fascinating to watch the reactions of the different passengers on the plane while we were waiting impatiently to take off. Some people got very angry. They were screaming and shouting and giving the poor flight attendants a very hard time. Others simply

sulked in silence.

I couldn't help thinking what a lesson this was on the subject of Divine Providence and who really runs the world. I had given myself ample time to get to my 8:00 pm lecture punctually. But clearly, G-d had other plans. So who actually is in control? The best laid plans of men don't necessarily get us to our destinations on time — even if we get to the airport early.

I could have become angry myself. I was very upset. It was quite a disappointment to have missed my lecture. Such a thing had never happened to me before. But my conscience was clear. I had left more than enough time to make it. The fact that I did not was not in my hands. I mean, who runs the world? The answer is, the One Above.

If, for some reason known only to Him, He wants me not to give the 8:00 o'clock lecture, then no amount of huffing and puffing on my part will make one bit of difference. While pondering on this philosophical perspective, I found myself becoming more relaxed and actually quite serene about the whole frustrating experience. Yes, we must do our part; we must give it our best shot. But beyond that, it's G-d's department.

If we can develop this attitude — and, believe me, I also need to develop it further — we will all be better able to cope with the disappointments we so often face in life, and even with real *tzorres* we may sadly encounter. It's all in His hands. If he decided the plane would be delayed then there must be a good reason.

So there really isn't any major drama in my airplane story. Did I bump into a Jewish passenger and change his life forever? Sorry to disappoint you, but I did not. What I did experience was a personal confirmation of something that I had, of course, always believed theologically. From my little episode on the airplane a basic premise of Jewish belief was reinforced in my own mind and heart.

So even if nothing amazing occurred, I became far more aware that G-d, and not I, is the controller of this universe. I may still have no idea why this delay was part of His vast eternal plan, but I do know that there was a reason. I may never discover what that reason was, but that there was a reason I am convinced.

When we understand this, we will have learned the art of acceptance. When we learn acceptance, we lead calmer, more tranquil lives, without all the unnecessary anxiety we create in our own minds. And I must admit it is a conviction which has helped me through many disappointments in my own life, from the small stuff to the more serious.

I think the famous Serenity Prayer is quite in keeping with Jewish tradition. *G-d, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference...*

May all your journeys be safe and successful and may you get to your destinations on time. And even if you don't, don't sweat. He is in charge.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

A Meeting of Two Souls

The other day something happened. An event that meant little when it occurred, but upon reflection came to mean a great deal.

I was entering the post office with a mountain of envelopes balanced precariously on my arms. Taking in the perilous state of my load, a girl of perhaps nine offered to help. Touched by her uncommon courtesy, I thanked her kindly, but demurred.

On my way out of the post office she asked if she could interest me in chocolate covered almonds. I realized at once that she was collecting for a cause and, though I had to refuse her non-kosher almonds, I made a donation. This time it was her turn to be taken aback and she thanked me for the kindness of my free gift.

In the car I felt a little guilty; I was not entitled to her compliment. My generosity

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



was the product of her thoughtfulness, not my kindness; I had given it out of gratitude. Had she not broken through my earlier reverie, I would not even have noticed her. Rather than regard her as a real person with hopes, dreams and aspirations, I would have viewed her request as a passing nuisance to be avoided. Rather than regard her as a girl so driven by a cause as to stand under the hot sun and solicit perfect strangers, I would have regarded her as just another person after my money.

To be fair, I think the shoe fit equally on the other foot. Had I not staggered under my load at that moment, she might not have regarded me as a real person with a pressing need to mail letters, but as just another mark, a potential consumer of her product.

Her thoughtfulness changed all that; it turned our causal encounter into a meaningful exchange. I realized that she was a real person and not just a passing prop on the stage of my life. She (hopefully) realized the same about me.

As I mulled over our interaction I realized that something even more dramatic had occurred. It was not only about us recognizing each other as real human beings; it was about expanding our respective horizons to include others. When I first emerged from my car, my only reason to enter the post office was to mail my envelopes. To her, the purpose of my entering the office was to present her with a potential consumer or donor. We were each wrapped up in our own little worlds. Our encounter helped us realize that the world is larger than the respective sagas of our individual lives.

There is a stage far grander than any one parochial need; on this stage sits a grand maestro, who conducts a symphony of events—each supporting the next, each intertwining with the next, and each fulfilling one more element of the Divine ultimate goal.

We each play a role in the fulfillment of this goal and for the purpose of that fulfillment we were both meant to meet. Our meeting was greater than our individual interests. In fact, so grand and transcendent was its purpose that neither of us knew its true meaning. It is like a musician who produces a melody so beautiful and moving that even he cannot discern its full magnitude.

Who knows, perhaps the purpose served by our encounter was to bring us to this very realization. Perhaps G-d intended to bring two strangers together who would have every reason to pass each other like ships in the night, but who paused long enough to realize that the stage on which our lives are played out is greater than ourselves. We exchanged not a single further word, but the impact of this meeting was deep.

Tearing the veil off our seemingly prosaic life to reveal the depth of purpose that lies beneath is the quintessence of Jewish living. Our *raison d'être* is to endow daily life with higher purpose. To channel our every encounter into our service of the Divine and to recognize that our shallow perception of life's purpose masks a depth of infinite meaning.

Removing this veil is the essence of circumcision, a mitzvah that is performed by removing the foreskin. Circumcision is not limited to the physical organ; the Torah also instructs us to engage in emotional circumcision by removing the foreskin of our hearts.

The heart's foreskin is the veil of narcissism that casts a selfish shadow on our lives. It is the false notion that the world revolves around us. My needs and goals are superior to all and must therefore command all available resources. With this attitude it is nearly impossible to serve G-d with a full heart. G-d becomes a mere resource that provides for my needs.

Removing the foreskin that covers our heart enables us to worship with a full heart. It enables us to discover that life is a grand stage set by the architect of creation. On this stage there are innumerable actors; each playing out a different script. Each thinks that their aspirations and needs are the sole reason for the entire stage. Yet when the heart's foreskin is removed and the truth is revealed each actor discovers that they and their needs are in fact subordinate to the highest cause of all—G-d's cause.

And by serving a cause greater than ourselves we in fact *become* greater than ourselves.

By Rabbi Lazer Gurkow

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, October 31, 2022 --- 6 Cheshvan, 5783

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.]).

Tuesday, November 1, 2022 --- 7 Cheshvan, 5783

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*.

Wednesday, November 2, 2022 --- 8 Cheshvan, 5783

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.

Thursday, November 3, 2022 --- 9 Cheshvan, 5783

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).

Friday, November 4, 2022 --- 10 Cheshvan, 5783

Birth of Gad

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

Shabbat, November 5, 2022 --- 11 Cheshvan, 5783

R. Nachum of Chernobyl (1797)

Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl was a disciple of the second leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, and the founder of the Chernobyl dynasty of Chassidic Rebbes.