

Torah Weekly

ת"סב

November 6-12, 2022
12-18 Cheshvan, 5782

Torah reading:
Vayeira: Genesis 18:1 - 22:24
Haftarah: Kings II 4:1-37

PARSHAT VAYEIRA

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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A Jew's Gotta Do

Is it a sin to argue with G-d? Is it sacrilegious to question the Divine? Well, Abraham did it. Not for himself, but on behalf of the people of Sodom, whom G-d had decided to destroy because of their wickedness. Abraham was the paragon of *chesed*, the personification of kindness and compassion. He grappled with the Almighty, attempting to negotiate a stay of execution for the inhabitants of the notorious cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?" he asks G-d. "Will the judge of all the earth not do justice?" "If there are 50 righteous men, will you spare them? 45? 40... 30... 20... 10?" In the end, Abraham cannot find even a *minyan* of righteous men in the cities and he gives up. And then the verse reads, *V'Avraham shov l'mkomo* — "And Abraham went back to his place." Having failed in his valiant attempt, he acknowledges defeat and retreats to his corner.

But there is also an alternative interpretation to those last words. *And Abraham went back to his place* can also be understood to mean that he went back to his ways, to his custom. And what custom is that? To defend the underdog, to look out for the needy and to help those in trouble, even if they are not the most righteous of people. Abraham refused to become disillusioned in defeat. He went right back to his ways, even though this particular attempt did not meet with success.

What happens when we lose? We hurt, we sulk, and we give up. It didn't work, it's no use. It's futile, why bother? Just throw in the towel.

Not Abraham. Abraham stuck to his principles. He may have experienced a setback, but he would still champion the cause of justice. He would still speak

out for those in peril. And he would still take his case to the highest authority in the universe, G-d Almighty Himself.

Abraham teaches us not to lose faith, not to deviate from our chosen path or our sincerely held convictions. If we believe it is the right thing to do, then it is right even if there is no reward in sight. If it is right, then stick to it, no matter the outcome.

One of my favorite cartoon characters is good old Charlie Brown in *Peanuts*. In one strip that sticks in my memory there is a storm raging outside and Charlie Brown is determined to go out to fly his kite. His friends tell him he must be crazy to attempt flying a kite in this weather, it'll be destroyed by the wind in no time. But in the last frame we see Charlie, resolutely marching out the door, his kite firmly tucked under his arm, and the caption reads, "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

Do we believe in our principles of faith because of expediency? Are we virtuous because we believe it is the way to the good life? Are we waiting for the big payoff for our good behavior? What happens when we don't see it? Do we become frustrated, disillusioned and angry at G-d?

Some people become religious for the wrong reasons. They are looking for some magical solution to their problems in life. And when the problems don't disappear as quickly or as magically as they expected, they give up their religious lifestyle. It didn't work; I'm outta here.

Virtue is its own reward. Sleeping better at night because our conscience is clear is also part of the deal. Or, in the words of the Sages, "the reward for a mitzvah is the mitzvah."

Our founding father reminds us that *a Jew's gotta do what a Jew's gotta do*, regardless of the outcome. Whether we see the fruits of our labors or not, if it's the right thing to do, then carry on doing it.

May we all be true children of Abraham.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Too Much Testing?

The life of Abraham, the first Jew, seems to be a series of tests; indeed, the Mishnah states: "With ten tests our father Abraham was tested, and he withstood them all." Abraham's tests culminated, at the conclusion of this week's Torah portion, with the binding of Isaac. As the Torah says:

And it came to pass after these things, that G-d tested Abraham, and He said to him, "Abraham," and he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and go away to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you."

Why was Abraham continuously tested?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of the word "test" is a means of testing, such as:

1. Something (such as a series of questions or exercises) for measuring the skill, knowledge, intelligence, capacities, or aptitudes of an individual or group
2. A procedure, reaction, or reagent used to identify or characterize a substance or constituent

A conventional test, then, is a means of learning something about the person or object being tested. Presumably, G-d, the Knower of all things, knew the magnitude of love and the depth of commitment in Abraham's heart. Why then did G-d need to test Abraham?

The answer lies within the multiple meanings of the Hebrew word *nes*, the root of the word *nisayon*, the Hebrew word for “test.” *Nes* also means a banner, as in the verse, “I will raise my banner.” A test, then, includes more than measuring the qualities of the subject of the test. A test is also “raising a banner,” displaying and showing the world the amazing qualities of the one being tested. Thus, G-d tested Abraham in order to display to all the world Abraham’s great commitment to G-d.

There is, however, another layer of depth to a test.

Nes also means “miracle.” What possible connection can there be between a test and a miracle?

There are two words for “test” in

Hebrew: *bechinah* and *nisayon*. *Bechinah* is used for tests such as those offered in school, where the test is designed to determine how much the student knows.

A *bechinah*, then, gives insight into the ability of the student. The purpose of a *nisayon*, on the other hand, is not to determine the ability of the person being tested, but rather to see if the test itself, the obstacle and struggle, could propel the person to grow beyond his or her natural ability. The test offers an opportunity for the person to perform a miracle, to achieve the impossible and to grow into something greater.

The test of Abraham was not merely a test to measure his commitment to G-d (*nisayon* as in “test”), and not only to demonstrate his commitment to G-d to the world (“raising a banner”) but, most importantly, it allowed Abraham to break out of his own personality constraints and become something he never thought possible (“miracle”).

The story of Abraham’s test is the story of the journey of each and every soul. The Kabbalists teach that the soul’s descent from the tranquility of heaven to the chaos here on earth is, first and foremost, a test for the soul. The descent is designed to test the soul, to see how strong its connection to G-d is, to see whether the soul remains true to itself in the face of tremendous challenge and temptation, to see whether or not the soul has what it takes to overcome the spiritual darkness of the world and transform it to light.

Yet, just as with the test of Abraham, the test of the soul is not merely for the purpose of discovering the existing properties of the soul. The descent into this world is the soul's opportunity to experience a miracle. This test “raises the banner” and demonstrates to the soul and to the world that by being presented with and then overcoming the obstacles and darkness of the world, one can achieve the miracle of exponential spiritual growth. On this earth, one can achieve a bond with G-d that is far greater, far deeper, and far more profound than is possible when the soul is in heaven.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, November 6, 2022 --- 12 Cheshvan, 5783

Yitzhak Rabin (1995)

Yitzhak Rabin, Commander-in-Chief of the IDF during the Six Day War and later Prime Minister of Israel, was assassinated on this date in 5756 (1995).

Passing of R. Zev Wolf Kitzes (1787)

R. Zev Wolf was one of the prominent disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. A great scholar in his own right, he accompanied his master on many of his travels and witnessed his miraculous accomplishments firsthand.

Monday, November 7, 2022 --- 13 Cheshvan, 5783

Burning of the Talmud in Venice (1553)

By order of the Pope, the Talmud was burned in Venice on the 13th and 14th of MarCheshvan, 1553 (*Minchah Belulah*, Deuteronomy 33:2). The reason given was that the Talmud contained statements heretical to the Christian faith. Venice boasted many famous Hebrew printing houses, including that of Daniel Bomberg, an Italian gentile who published the Talmud there during the years 1519–1523.

Tuesday, November 8, 2022 --- 14 Cheshvan, 5783

Jews of Prague Saved (1620)

In May 1618, the Bohemian Revolt broke out in Prague, triggering the Thirty Years’ War. In November 1620, King Ferdinand II suppressed the rebels in Prague in the Battle of White Mountain. Notwithstanding the widespread looting, the king gave orders that no Jew be harmed. To commemorate the miraculous turn of events, R. Yomtov Lipman Heller, rabbi of Prague, instituted penitential prayers to be said every year on the 14th of MarCheshvan, which he published in Prague later that year. (The above account was recorded by R. Yomtov in his introduction to the publication.)

Wednesday, November 9, 2022 --- 15 Cheshvan, 5783

Passing of Mattityahu (139 BCE)

In the 2nd century before the common era, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks) who, with the collaboration of the Jewish Hellenists, introduced pagan idols into the Holy Temple and set about to forcefully Hellenize the people of Israel. Mattityahu, the son of the High Priest Yochanan, was already an old man when he picked up a sword and raised the flag of revolt in the village of Modiin in the Judean hills. Many rallied under his cry, "Who that is for G-d, come with me!" and resisted and battled the Greeks from their mountain hideouts.

After heading the revolt for one year, Mattityahu died on the 15th of Cheshvan of the year 3622 from creation (139 BCE). His five sons -- the "Macabees" Judah, Yochanan, Shimon, Elazar and Yonatan -- carried on the battle to their eventual victory, celebrated each year since by Jews the world over with the festival of Chanukah.

Thursday, November 10, 2022 --- 16 Cheshvan, 5783

R. Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch Leaves the Town of Lubavitch (1915)

With the approach of the German army during World War I, R. Sholom DovBer and his family left Lubavitch, located in modern-day Russia near the border of Belarus, for the city of Rostov. Lubavitch was the seat of the Chabad movement for 102 years, starting when R. DovBer, second Chabad Rebbe, settled there in 1813.

Friday, November 11, 2022 --- 17 Cheshvan, 5783

Great Flood Begins (2105 BCE)

The rains began to fall on the 17th of Cheshvan of the year 1656 from creation (2105), flooding the earth and rising above the highest mountains. Only Noah and his family survived, in the ark built to that end by Divine command, and a pair of each animal species, who entered with him into the ark.