

# Torah Weekly

ת"ב

November 27- December 3, 2022  
3-9 Kislev, 5783

Torah reading:  
Vayeitzei: Genesis 28:10 - 32:3  
Haftarah: Hosea 11:7-12:14

PARSHAT VAYEITZEI

## 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.

## Jacob's Ladder

While Jacob was on his way to Charan, fleeing his brother Esau, he went to sleep and dreamed of G-d's reassurance that he would eventually return to Israel in safety. His dream began with the famous vision of the ladder, as the verse states:

And he dreamed, and behold! a ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of G-d were ascending and descending upon it.

There are various interpretations of the symbolism of the ladder. Some say the ladder represents prayer. Jacob slept on the Temple Mount, the place where all Jewish prayers ascend to G-d, and G-d was showing Jacob the awesome power of prayer: its ability to connect heaven and earth.

Others explain that the ladder is a metaphor for Mount Sinai, the mountain on which the Torah was given, and the message to Jacob was that the Torah, the Divine will and wisdom, is the ladder that connects the person to heaven.

But why did Jacob need to see the image of the ladder specifically at this point in his life, on his way out of Israel, while fleeing to the morally debased Charan?

Rabbi Mordechai Hakohen, a 17th century kabbalist of Safed, Israel, explains that the ladder represents Jacob himself.

Jacob was leaving the comfort and holiness of the land of Israel and was heading to a land that was spiritually foreign to his way of life. On Jacob's way, G-d showed him the vision of a ladder in order to impart to him that he himself had the ability to connect the lowest parts of the earth to heaven. While his grandfather Abraham was commanded to leave Charan and migrate to Israel, Jacob would make the opposite journey.

Jacob's life's mission was not to flee the negativity but rather to face it and challenge it head on.

Jacob, like all his descendants, is compared to a ladder. No matter where he might be, no matter how foreign the environment might seem, he was capable of erecting a ladder that would connect heaven and earth, he was able to build a bridge that would allow the epitome of holiness to affect even the most distant of places.

There is another dimension to the comparison of Jacob and the ladder.

The Kabbalah explains that each of the three patriarchs embodied one of the three primary emotions: Abraham represented the attribute of love; Isaac the attribute of awe and reverence; and Jacob the attribute of compassion.

The attribute of compassion, even more than love, is the ultimate bridge-builder. Love is a very powerful emotion, yet its reach is limited to a specific audience. A person loves that which is attractive to him or her. A person does not love everybody and everything; love is selective, it is awakened and attracted to specific people or objects that, for whatever reason, touch the heart in a specific way.

Compassion, on the other hand, can reach anybody. It may be a person whom you never met, whose language you don't understand, yet the moment you sense that the person is suffering, something in your heart will connect to the person with empathy and compassion.

In fact, compassion has the power to unleash love. You may have known someone for many years and felt no connection to him or her. Yet as soon as tragedy strikes and you feel compassion for the person, suddenly, you begin to see how wonderful the person is. You begin to feel a feeling of closeness and love toward the person. How does that happen?

The love flows over the bridge created by compassion.

We each have a Jacob within ourselves, a Jacob that allows us to empathize with people who may seem very different from ourselves. The Jacob within us recognizes and connects to the soul within others, connecting heaven and earth.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

## Dealing with the World

A constant challenge for each individual, and also for the Jewish people as a whole, is how one balances the spiritual dimension of life with worldly, materialist activities. On the one hand there is prayer, Torah study, spiritual mitzvot like lighting candles for Shabbat and a contemplative approach to life. On the other, there are the humdrum practicalities, material pursuits and more earthy aspects of living in the daily world.

Another version of this divide is that between the Jewish people and other nations. This, too, represents a delicate balance. On the one hand, there is the need to preserve Jewish identity and the singular nature of Jewish values and culture; on the other, there is the wish to play a useful part in society as a whole.

A passage in this week's Torah reading, Vayeitzei, helps us understand the subtlety of these relationships.

Jacob was living in the home of his idolatrous uncle Laban. He married Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel, and worked for his uncle as a shepherd. Yet at every stage Laban tried to cheat him. As a result, Jacob and his wives determined to run away.

Laban and his men pursue Jacob. When they meet, they agree to create a clear border between them, and build a pile of stones to mark the boundary. Laban's territory will be to the east of the

pile of stones, and Jacob's to the west. They declare that neither they nor their descendants will ever cross that border for war. Rashi comments: "but they can cross it for business dealings."

In chassidic teachings, the border between Jacob and Laban is seen as the divide between the sacred and the profane. This distinction is important. One has to know clearly what represents the Jewish dimension of holiness, and what does not.

Yet here comes a subtlety. The Hebrew word for the pile of stones is *gal*. This word also means "reveal." There is a border, but sometimes, with care, one crosses the border. The purpose for doing so is in order to reveal and establish holiness in a realm which until now has been ordinary, non-holy, secular.

How can this be done? Through the mitzvahs of the Torah, which involve the practical world yet connect it with infinite G-dliness. One earns money—that is surely a worldly, mundane activity. Yet from the money one has earned, one donates a portion to charity. This is a mitzvah of the highest order of sanctity. Through this, *all* the money one earns is elevated to connect with the divine.

The laws of the Torah help one understand on which side of the pile of stones one should be. So too do Torah teachings, especially those which express the spiritual, inner dimension of Jewish teaching. Hence the word *gal*, a pile of stones, also has the numerical value (*gematria*) of 33, hinting at the 33rd day of the Omer, the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the famous author of the Zohar, the source-book of the Kabbalistic side of Judaism.

Knowledge of Torah teachings, and especially of their inner aspect, helps the person in his or her path through life, providing a sense of balance. One knows when to go forward, and when to withdraw; when Jacob must remain in his own territory, and when his or her task is to advance into that of Laban and reveal the latent holiness and goodness which is hidden in all existence.

For this is the true task of every Jew . . .

By Rabbi Eli Pink

## Reminder:

Please assist the Rabbi / Chaplain at your institution, work with them to ensure that you will be able to celebrate the holiday of Chanukah, by lighting the candles.

We at Aleph Institute have candles and candelabras for your institution at no charge.

**Sunday, November 27, 2022 --- 3 Kislev, 5783**

**Kamenitz-Podolsk Talmuds Saved (5518/1757)**

As a result of the libelous slander of the Frankists (followers of Sabbatai Zevi, the archbishop of Kamenitz decreed that all Hebrew books of the communities in his jurisdiction should be burned. On this day, he suffered a miraculous downfall and the decree was annulled. (*Imrei Pinchas*, 2003 ed., vol. 1, pp. 496–498)

**Pnei Yehoshua Saved (5463/1702)**

The explosion of some barrels of gunpowder that had been caught on fire resulted in the collapse of a number of nearby buildings, placing Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk in mortal danger. In distress, he pledged that if he would survive, he would commit himself to studying the Talmud and its commentaries. He was miraculously saved, and went on to author his classic Talmudic commentary, *Pnei Yehoshua*. (Introduction of the author to the above work)

**Temple Cleared in Chanukah Miracle (3622/-139)**

After overcoming the Greek forces, the Hasmoneans cleared the Temple from the idolatrous images that had been erected there. (*Megilat Taanit* ch. 9)

**Monday, November 28, 2022 --- 4 Kislev, 5783**

**Zechariah Foretold Messianic Era (3410/-352)**

A delegation from Babylonia put forth a query to the prophet Zechariah, asking whether the fast of the Ninth of Av was still in effect, now that the Second Temple had been built. In response, Zechariah transmitted G-d's message that it was not fasting that was most important, but to uphold justice, truth, kindness and compassion.

Zechariah also foretold what will occur to the fast days in the Messianic era: "So says the L-rd of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month [the seventeenth of Tammuz], the fast of the fifth month [the ninth of Av], the fast of the seventh month [the third of Tishrei], and the fast of the tenth month [the tenth of Teves] will be to the House of Judah for rejoicing, happiness, and festivals." (*Zechariah* 7–8)

**Purim Teveryah (5503/1743)**

After a three-month-long unsuccessful battle and siege waged by Suleiman Pasha, governor of Damascus, against the sheikh of Tiberias, the governor finally left the city. To mark their salvation and the numerous miracles that had occurred throughout the siege, the Jews of Tiberias, led by the venerable R. Chaim Abulafia (1660–1744), established this date as a yearly festival of rejoicing and praise to G-d. (*Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez*, *Esther* 9:28)

**Tuesday, November 29, 2022 --- 5 Kislev, 5783**

**Maharsha (1631)**

Kislev 5 is the yahrtzeit (date of the passing) of Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555-1631), known by the acronym "Maharsha". Rabbi Shmuel authored a highly regarded and widely used commentary on the Talmud and its primary commentaries, Rashi and Tosfot.

**Shabbat, December 3, 2022 --- 9 Kislev, 5783**

**Birth & Passing of R. Dovber of Lubavitch (1773; 1827)**

Kislev 9 is both the birthday and day of passing of Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, son of and successor to the founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Rabbi DovBer was known for his unique style of "broadening rivers" -- his teachings were the intellectual rivers to his father's wellspring, lending breadth and depth to the principles set down by Rabbi Schneur Zalman.

Born in Liozna, White Russia in 1773, Rabbi DovBer was named after Rabbi Schneur Zalman's mentor and teacher, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, who had passed away on Kislev 19 of the previous year. Rabbi DovBer assumed the leadership of Chabad upon his father's passing in 1812. In 1813 he settled in the town of Lubavitch, which was to serve as the movement's headquarters for the next 102 years. In 1826, he was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated.

Rabbi DovBer passed away on his 54th birthday in 1827, a day before the first anniversary of his liberation.