

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

July 23-29, 2023
5-11 Av, 5783

Torah reading:
Va'etchanan: Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11
Haftarah: Isaiah 40:1-26

PARSHAT VA'ETCHANAN

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 Matzah 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.

Seeker of Wisdom

While Moses was barred from crossing the Jordan and entering the land promised to his forefathers, he did merit to lead the conquest and then the settlement of the lands east of the Jordan. Thus, he merited to begin the process of settling his beloved people in the Promised Land, concluding his life's mission.

Then, just a few weeks before his passing, Moses designated three cities of refuge in the lands east of the Jordan, to serve as a safe haven for anyone who killed another unintentionally:

Then Moses decided to separate three cities on the side of the Jordan towards the sunrise, so that a murderer might flee there, he who murders his fellow man unintentionally, but did not hate him in time past, that he may flee to one of these cities, and he will live.

Those last words "and he will live" teach us, says the Talmud, that we must not only provide a place for the unintentional murderer to flee, but that it must be a place that is conducive to and can support a life:

These cities of refuge . . . should be medium-size towns; they are to be established only in the vicinity of a water supply . . . they are to be established only where there are marketplaces. What is the verse [that teaches us these laws]? The verse states: "And he shall flee to one of these cities and live," which means—we must provide him with arrangements that will enable him to live.

This idea—that we must provide an environment that will enable the unintentional murderer to live—leads to another law. As Maimonides explains:

When a student is exiled to a city of refuge, his teacher is exiled together with him. This is derived from the verse which states: "He shall flee to one of these cities, and he shall

live." Implied is that everything necessary for his life must be provided for him. Therefore, a student must be provided with his teacher, for the life of one who possesses knowledge and seeks it without Torah study is considered to be death.

This law is astonishing. Granted, there are a select few for whom life without knowledge of Torah is like life without water—and perhaps we would be obliged to force their teachers to move into the city of refuge so that they would be able to "live"—but how can we apply this law to all students? Can we indeed say that every last student is a person who "possesses knowledge and seeks it" to the extent that a life without Torah "is considered to be death"?

The answer, of course, is a resounding yes.

We look at ourselves, we look at our children, we look at our students, and we sometimes tell ourselves that we are superficial beings. That we care about materialism more than wisdom and spiritual enlightenment. We look at a student making trouble in a classroom and we think, *this child will never make a good student*, or, *this child will never understand*. This attitude, says the Talmud, is a terrible mistake. The student making trouble, although he is not yet a "possessor of wisdom," is, at heart, a "seeker of wisdom." Deep down, he is a person to whom spiritual wisdom is not just an enjoyable luxury but an absolute necessity.

We are all teachers in life. When we come across a child—or a grownup who is spiritually still a child—it is our obligation to see "the seeker of wisdom" within this child. We must reveal the spark and essence within, helping the child discover the beauty of a life imbued with wisdom. Thus, the child himself will discover that he is a "seeker of wisdom."

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

Being Alive to the Full

Just before the first person is called up to the Torah a beautiful verse is sung in the synagogue: "And you who cleave to G-d, are all alive today" (Deuteronomy 4:4). This verse is from our Parshah, Vaetchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11). It focuses on an important Jewish concept: cleaving to G-d. Through this, says the verse, we "live" to the full.

G-d, the Creator of the Universe, is infinite. He is the source of all being, and is beyond all being. How then can we cleave to G-d? To "cleave" means to join together, to be one. How can this word apply to the relationship of a tiny human being and boundless, eternal G-d?

The Baal Shem Tov and other Chassidic leaders taught people about this concept. Although we are tiny, physically, we have within us a spark of the Divine. This inner flame yearns to join with G-d. How can it do so? Through Torah, prayer, and mitzvot (the divine commandments).

G-d puts Himself in the Torah: when we study Torah we are joining with Him. From this stems the special love that the Jewish people have for the teachings of the Torah, expressed in the sacred Torah Scroll and in the thousands of books which explain its meaning.

Prayer is another way of connecting with G-d. The simple meaning of prayer is that we are speaking to G-d, intimately from the depths of our heart, in any language. Further, the Baal Shem Tov taught that divine radiance is present in the Hebrew words of the prayers. When we pray with devotion, giving ourselves over to G-d, our souls join with that radiance. This makes prayer potentially a deeply inspiring experience: very private and intimate, a coming close with G-d.

The third level of connection,

which in some ways is the most powerful, is that of the [mitzvot](#), the laws of Judaism. The word *mitzvah* is usually translated as "command"; but it also means "connection" (relating to an Aramaic word *tzavta*, meaning "connection"). Carrying out a [mitzvah](#) means that we are connected to and bonded with G-d.

Why is this? Because the mitzvah is the will of G-d. When we do the mitzvah, at that moment, we became an expression of G-d's will. We can compare this to the way the will of a person is expressed though his or her own hand which writes, plays the piano or bakes a cake. Through the mitzvah we are joined to G-d, so to speak, as a hand is joined to the inner will and desire of a person.

The mitzvah might be a practical action: lighting candles for Shabbat, fixing a *mezuzah* on a doorpost, putting on *tefilin*, giving charity, making sure one's kitchen is kosher. Or it might be a law involving feeling, such as love of one's fellow. Yet this too is generally expressed in practical terms, such as doing something to help the person.

At that moment, through the action of the mitzvah, the person and G-d are joined together. So we come back to the verse in the Torah portion. Through cleaving to G-d by means of Torah, prayer and mitzvot, every aspect of our being is transformed: we really live!

By Tali Loewenthal

Sunday, July 23, 2023 --- 5 Av, 5783

Passing of "Ari" (1572)

Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, known as *Ari HaKadosh* ("The Holy Lion") passed away on the 5th of Av of the year 5332 from creation (1572 CE). Born in Jerusalem in 1534, he spent many years in secluded study near Cairo, Egypt. In 1570 he settled in Safed, where he lived for two years until his passing at age 38. During that brief period, the Ari revolutionized the study of Kabbalah, and came to be universally regarded as one of the most important figures in Jewish mysticism. It was he who proclaimed, "In these times, we are allowed and duty-bound to reveal this wisdom," opening the door to the integration of the teachings of Kabbalah--until then the province of a select few in each generation--into "mainstream" Judaism.

Tuesday, July 25, 2023--- 7 Av, 5783

First Temple Invaded (423 BCE)

After nearly a month of fierce fighting inside Jerusalem, the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia broke through into the Temple compound, where they feasted and vandalized until the afternoon of [Av 9](#), when they set the Holy Temple aflame.

Wednesday, July 26, 2023 --- 8 Av, 5783

Spies Return (1312 BCE)

The Spies dispatched 40 days earlier by Moses to tour the Promised Land return to Israel's encampment in the desert, bearing a huge cluster of grapes and other lush fruits. But even as they praise the land's fertility, they terrify the people with tales of mighty giant warriors dwelling there and assert that the land is unconquerable.

Civil War in Jerusalem (67 CE)

Fighting breaks out inside the besieged city of Jerusalem between Jewish factions divided on the question of whether or not to fight the Roman armies encircling the city from without. One group sets fire to the city's considerable food stores, consigning its population to starvation until the fall of Jerusalem three years later.

Thursday, July 27, 2023--- 9 Av, 5783

Exodus Generation Condemned to Die in Desert (1312 BCE)

On the Ninth of Av of the year 2449 from creation (1312 BCE), the generation of Jews who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership 16 months earlier were condemned to die in the desert and the entry into the Land of Israel was delayed for 40 years.

As related in Numbers 14, when the Spies that Moses sent to the Land of Canaan returned with their disheartening report (see "[Today in Jewish History](#)" for yesterday, Av 8), the people wept all night -- the night of Av 9th -- proclaiming that they'd rather return to Egypt than attempt to conquer and settle it; G-d decreed that the entire generation would wander in the desert for 40 years until the last of them died out, and that their children, under the leadership of Joshua, will enter the land He promised as Israel's heritage.

This is the first of five national tragedies that occurred on Av 9 listed by the Talmud (Taanit 4:6), due to which the day was designated as a fast day. The other four are: the destruction of the two Temples, the fall of Betar, and the plowing over of Jerusalem. (see below)

Holy Temples Destroyed (423 BCE and 69 CE)

Both the first and second Holy Temples which stood in Jerusalem were destroyed on Av 9: the First Temple by the Babylonians in the year 3338 from creation (423 BCE), and the second by the Romans in 3829 (69 CE).

The Temples' destruction represents the greatest tragedy in Jewish history, for it marks our descent into *Galut*--the state of physical exile and spiritual displacement in which we still find ourselves today. Thus the Destruction is mourned as a tragedy that affects our lives today, 2,000 years later, no less than the very generation that experienced it first hand.

Yet the Ninth of Av is also a day of hope. The Talmud relates that Moshiach ("anointed one"--the Messiah), was born at the very moment that the Temple was set aflame and the *Galut* began. [This is in keeping with the teachings of our sages that, "In every generation is born a descendent of Judah who is worthy to become Israel's Moshiach" (Bartinoro on Ruth); "When the time will come, G-d will reveal Himself to him and send him, and then the spirit of Moshiach, which is hidden and secreted on high, will be manifested in him" (Chattam Sofer).]

Fall of Betar (133 CE)

Betar, the last stronghold in the heroic Bar Kochba rebellion, fell to the Romans on the 9th of Av of the year 3893 (133 CE) after a three-year siege. 580,000 Jews died by starvation or the sword, including Bar Kochba, the leader of the rebellion.

Expulsion From England (1290)

On this date in 1290, King Edward I of England issued an Edict of Expulsion, ordering the expulsion of all Jews from his territory.

Spanish Expulsion (1492)

The Jews of Spain were expelled by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella on the 9th of Av of 1492, terminating many centuries of flourishing Jewish life in that country.

Friday, July 28, 2023 --- 10 Av, 5783

Holy Temple Burns (69)

The Romans set the Temple aflame on the afternoon of Av 9 (see yesterday's [Today in Jewish History](#) and it continued to burn through Av 10. For this reason, some of the mourning practices of the "Nine Days" are observed through the morning hours of Av 10.