

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

September 20-26, 2023
3-9 Elul, 5783

Torah: Ki Teitzei:
Deuteronomy 21:10 - 25:19
Haftorah: Isaiah 54:1-10

PARSHAT KI TEITZEI

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars for 2023-2024. 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).

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.

Weighty Matters?

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1848-1932), the wise and saintly Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, was visiting a disciple's home on Shabbat. He happened to see one of the children doing something to desecrate Shabbat, so he instinctively gave a shout, "Oy, it's Shabbat!"

The boy's father pushed back, "Hey! He's only a child, go easy on him! He doesn't yet know the value of Shabbat and its laws."

A little while later, the same child took an expensive crystal piece, a family heirloom, from the china closet. This time, the father jumped up, and yelled, "Careful, don't touch that! That's not a toy!"

The Rav turned to the father and asked, "Why are you yelling? Is he not just a child?" With a twinkle in his eye, he concluded, "It's all about what's important to you: Shabbat or a dish."

So, let me ask you, what are your values?

Just Weights

Our parshah contains a lot of mitzvot, 74 to be exact (the most of any parshah in the Torah). Among them is a law about maintaining honest weights. In ancient times, before the invention of digital scales, the way a typical shopkeeper would weigh a pound of cheese, for example, would be to place a standard one-pound stone on one side of a scale. He would then place a hunk (or two) of cheese on the other side, adding or subtracting until the scale hung evenly balanced.

For this system to work fairly, the standard measuring stones

needed to be perfectly accurate. And so, the Torah warns:

You shall not keep in your pouch two different weights, one large and one small.¹

If you thought this law was some sort of minor detail with little consequence, the Torah quickly dispels that notion:

For whoever does these things, whoever perpetrates such injustice, is an abomination to the L-rd, your G-d.²

Apparently, messing around with weighing stones is a very big deal.

But why? I can understand that it's dishonest, but there are far worse things enumerated in the Torah that don't earn the moniker of "abomination." What's with all the drama?

Another question: The very next thing we read in the Torah is the story of Amalek, the perennial thorn in our ancestors' side, who attacked them in the desert just as they left Sinai. The parshah concludes with the mitzvah to never forget Amalek's crimes. What's the significance of this juxtaposition? What does the Torah want to tell us by placing this shop-keeping crime alongside a historically evil bad guy like Amalek?

Amalek the Bad Guy

Let's take a look under the hood at Amalek to get a better picture.

The Israelites faced many foes throughout their sojourn in the desert, and as time has marched on, the list of enemies just keeps on growing. But Amalek still holds a special place on our enemy list.

Why?

Let's put Amalek's actions into context. The Israelites had

just been freed from Egypt with mind-boggling miracles. The sea then split for them, impressing the entire world. Thereafter, they stood at Sinai, a landmark event during which the entire world came to a standstill.

They were on a ridiculous hot streak. No one would dare mess with them.

But then came Amalek. They said, "Eh! You think they're so untouchable? Not so fast! We'll show the world that these guys aren't as hot as they think." So they attacked, and were it not for some miraculous stunts, the story would've ended pretty badly.

In other words, Amalek is the prototype of cooling convictions, the sour guy in the room who's always deflating any sense of excitement, reverence, or commitment. He's the party pooper who says, "Eh, you don't really mean it. Is eating non-kosher food really so bad? Are you going to be struck by lightning if you turn on the TV on Shabbat? Will your boss really fire you if you shave off a couple dollars for yourself while doing the bookkeeping? Come one, nothing's untouchable or sacred. Just get your feet wet, try it on for size, and you'll see that the lighting won't come."

And that's why we're so wary of him. He really is a bad guy unlike any other.³

Calibrate Your Values

So how do you ensure you don't end up making such pernicious calculations? How do you avoid being in Amalek's crosshairs?

Remember: the mitzvah just prior to Amalek in the Torah is

maintaining just weights.

You know why?

Because the surest way of keeping your commitment going, of not flaming out as a lackluster non-believer, is as uncomplicated as it is difficult: having the right values. Giving proper “weight” to the matters that deserve that weight, and not, G-d forbid, shaving off weight from the important values and adding it to the more trivial ones.

It’s really very simple—whatever you truly value, whatever you really care about, that’s where you’ll end up investing your time, money, and belief. Everything else will eventually get thrown under the bus.

Have you ever met someone who cries poverty all the time, yet somehow, has money to go to the movies, eat out, or buy the latest smartphone every year? What happened? Did they all of a sudden rob a bank? Did they find buried treasure in their backyard?

The answer is simple. It’s all about values. Some people deeply value the experience of dining out with a friend, or simply cannot imagine life without the best phone, so they find the money for it.

What you care about, you invest in. It may sound too simple to be true, but that’s how it works.

So, if you’re finding yourself in an Amalek-like zone, doubting whether or not it’s really worth your time to go to shul every week (or every day!), to invest so much money in Jewish education, or be nice to every person on your block, then it’s time to haul out your measuring stones and see if they’re “honest.”

Remind yourself of what truly matters, which things in life contain real value and which matters are more transient. Calibrate your scale and scrutinize whether you may have, over the years, placed a little too much weight on something undeserving.

Ask yourself: Do I value Shabbat or the crystal dish?

Keep your weights honest, and that lackluster Amalek voice nipping at your commitments will automatically dissipate.

By Rabbi Aaron Lochak

If you are a member of Aleph Institute and have not received your 5784 Calendar yet, please write us.

Sunday, August 20, 2023 --- 3 Elul, 5783

Rabbi A. I. Kook (1935)

Elul 3 is the yahrtzeit of the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi (in modern times) of the Religious Zionist Jewish community in the Holy Land, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who assumed his position upon the formation of the British Mandate in 1920. A leading philosopher and mystic, Rabbi Kook authored many books and letters, and is a founding father of the "Religious Zionist" movement.

Monday, August 21, 2023 --- 4 Elul, 5783

Passing of R. Meir Simchah Hakohen (1926)

R. Meir Simchah Hakohen served as rabbi of Dvinsk (now Daugavpils), Latvia, for nearly forty years. He authored Or Same'ach, on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, and Meshech Chachmah, on the Pentateuch. Passing of R. Pinchas Schapiro of Koretz (1791)

Tuesday, August 22, 2023 --- 5 Elul, 5783

First Chassidic Aliyah (1777)

The first Chassidic aliyah ("ascent" - immigration to the Holy Land), led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk and Rabbi Yisroel of Polotzk, reached the Holy Land on Elul 5 of the year 5537 from creation (1777 CE). They were all disciples of the 2nd leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer, the "Maggid of Mezeritch" (who had passed away five years earlier) and colleagues of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad. Initially, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was part of the group; but when the caravan reached the city of Moholiev on the Dnester River, Rabbi Menachem Mendel -- whom Rabbi Schneur Zalman regarded as his teacher and mentor after the Maggid's passing -- instructed him to remain behind to serve as the leader of the Chassidic community in White Russia and Lithuania. Rabbi Schneur Zalman retained close ties with the settlers in the Land of Israel and labored to raise funds for their support.

Wednesday, August 23, 2023 --- 6 Elul, 5783

Passing of R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller, the "Tosfot Yom Tov" (1654)

R. Yom Tov was a preeminent Torah scholar who served as rabbi in many distinguished communities in Austria and Poland. He is most famous for his Mishnah commentary, called Tosfot Yom Tov, which appears in most large editions of the Mishnah and is an indispensable tool for obtaining a thorough understanding of the text. He authored numerous other works as well, including a commentary on the halachic work of R. Asher ben Yechiel (the Rosh), and Tzurat Habayit, clarifying the future layout of the third Holy Temple.

In his autobiographical work Megilat Eivah, R. Yom Tov describes how, when serving as rabbi of Prague, his enemies slandered him to the Austrian Emperor, resulting in his imprisonment and a death sentence. Thankfully, the verdict was later mitigated to a monetary fine and a prohibition against serving as rabbi in Prague.

Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe visits US (1929)

On the 12th of Elul (September 16) of 1929, two years after escaping a [death sentence](#) imposed upon him by the Russian Communist regime and his subsequent departure from that country, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, [Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn](#), arrived in New York for a ten-month tour of the United States.

Friday, August 24, 2023 --- 7 Elul, 5783

Moses' parents remarry (1394 BCE)

Amram and Jocheved had separated because of Pharaoh's decree that all male Jewish babies be killed. Prompted by their six-year-old daughter Miriam's rebuke ("Pharaoh decreed against the males; you decreed against the males and the females") they remarried on the 7th of Elul of the year 2367 from creation (1394 BCE). Moses was born six months and one day later on Adar 7, 2368 (Talmud, Sotah 12b).

Spies die (1312 BCE)

The Spies who slandered the Land of Israel died in the desert (Talmud, Sotah 35a; see Numbers 13-14 and text and links for Av 9 and Av 15).

Shabbat, August 26, 2023 --- 9 Elul, 5783

Nachmanides Renews Jerusalem community (1267)

Nachmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) arrived in Jerusalem, after being forced to flee his native Spain (see "On This Date" for Av 12) and renewed its Jewish community there. The synagogue he established is functional today, having been restored following the liberation of the Old City during the Six-Day War in 1967.

Birth of Dan (1566 BCE)

Dan, the son of Jacob and Bilhah, fifth of the Twelve Tribes, was born on 9 Elul in Haran. He lived to the age of 125. (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot, remez 162)