

Torah Weekly

בס"ד

August 13-19, 2023
26 Av - 2 Elul, 5783

Torah: Shoftim:
Deuteronomy 16:18 - 21:9
Haftarah: Isaiah 51:12 - 52:12

PARSHAT SHOFTIM

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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Do I Need to Be Perfect in Order to Repent?

Does G-d expect me to be perfect? It sure seems that way. Throughout life, 24/7, we are expected to do good and avoid evil, be righteous and not be wicked. No excuses!

What if we make a mistake? What if we get lazy and self-indulgent for a moment, a minute or a month?

Well then we need to "get perfect" in order to fix it.

The chassidic master Rabbi Zusia of Anipoli explains that the very word *teshuvah*, spelled תשובה (commonly translated as "repentance," but literally meaning "return") alludes to a sequential pattern that achieves a proper return and repairs broken relationships. Each of the five Hebrew letters of the word alludes to another step in the *teshuvah* process.

The first letter, the *tav* (ת), alludes to a verse which begins with a *tav*: *Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha* ("Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d"). *Tamim* commonly translates as "perfect" or "whole." We have seen the word *tamim* before: Noah is described as *tamim*,

Abraham is commanded to be *tamim*, and all offerings brought in the Temple must be *tamim*.

Simply put—you want to fix what you broke? The first step is to get *tamim*. (For elaboration of the next four steps in *teshuvah*, see [Hayom Yom, Tishrei 5-8](#).) Makes sense to me. If a student wants his tardiness overlooked, the teacher will demand

consistent punctuality: "Don't just tell me how remorseful you are and what you have resolved to do. Demonstrate excellent behavior, be there consistently before the bell rings, and then I'll erase your failure."

Here's a different angle, however, thanks to Rashi, the primary biblical commentator. He explains that the word *tamim* in this verse has a different meaning than the *tamim* used in other areas of the Torah. Replace "complete" with "wholehearted," "trusting" or "accepting." The context of this verse is the prohibition against employing witchcraft or necromancy in an effort to know the future, in the hope of allaying the fear of the unknown. There is debate whether these machinations have any value, yet the core compulsion to pursue these avenues is the desire to be in control, to get tomorrow's news today so that I can feel secure.

And G-d asks us to simply trust Him. Be *tamim*. Don't go looking elsewhere for security and peace of mind. Instead, calmly welcome whatever He brings our way, confident that it is for our personal good. Show your love for G-d by wholeheartedly accepting Him.

When I hold back love, trust and commitment "just in case," I damage the ability to forge a "perfect" relationship, with G-d, my spouse, sibling or friend. When I say that I accept you unconditionally, I am here to stay, committed without reservation, *tamim*, despite my propensity to mess up, that is a foundation—the

first letter—of return/repentance/repair. I'm here and I accept all that you bring, without an eye towards greener grass.

Once we get that clear, even before our behavior have been repaired, we have returned. We have started *teshuvah*.

By Rabbi Baruch Epstein

Holy Witnesses

Witnesses are an important part of every judicial system. Yet, as is often the case, Judaism presents a deeper dimension and perspective on the function and purpose of witnesses.

According to the Talmud, there are two categories of witnesses, "clarifying witnesses" and "establishing witnesses." Clarifying witnesses are witnesses in the conventional sense. They observe an event and later testify that the event indeed occurred; for example, witnesses can testify that a man borrowed one hundred dollars from his friend. The witnesses, however, have no part in the transaction; the borrower is morally obligated to repay the loan whether or not the witnesses testify. It is the loan that obligates him, not the witnesses.

The second category, "establishing witnesses," is entirely different. According to Jewish law, there are events that have no legal significance unless there are witnesses present. For example, the witnesses at a wedding ceremony not only attest that the wedding took place, but actually establish the marriage itself. Without proper witnesses, the marriage would have no legal significance.

In other words, the “clarifying witnesses” reveal the legal reality, and the “establishing witnesses” actively participate in creating a legal reality. But these two categories of witnesses are not just legal definitions; they’re relevant to the inner, spiritual dimension of the Torah.

The prophet Isaiah tells us: “‘You are My witnesses,’ says the L-rd.” We are the witnesses charged with the responsibility to “testify” and reveal the truth of G-d throughout the earth. Our spiritual task as witnesses contains both dimensions, clarifying and establishing. We serve as “clarifying witnesses” when we recognize the presence of [G-d](#) in the magnificent universe He created. When we remind ourselves and others of the good inherent in the world and within people.

Yet merely observing, appreciating and sharing does not capture the full potential and greatness of the Jew, for the Jew is a witness to a marriage, the marriage between Creator and creation, between the G-d and the Jewish people, between heaven and earth. As previously explained, the witnesses of a marriage are “establishing witnesses,” part of the creation and establishment of the marriage.

To be a witness to the marriage of heaven and earth, the Jew must do more than appreciate and focus on the inherent G-dliness found on earth. The Jew must partner with G-d in creation. The Jew actively improves and elevates the world around him. He transforms the mundane by imbuing it with meaning and holiness. The Jew doesn't just tell a story, the Jew seeks to actively create it.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

Sunday, August 13, 2023 --- 26 Av, 5783

Tzemach Tzedek Departs Petersburg (1843)

In 1843, the Interior Ministry of the Czarist government convened a rabbinical conference in the Russian capital of Petersburg, to the end of imposing changes in Jewish communal life and religious practice. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866, known as the "Tzemach Tzedek" after his Halachic works by that name) was invited; as a primary figure in the leadership of Russian Jewry, his compliance was required to lend legitimacy to the government's proposed "reforms". In the course of the conference, the Tzemach Tzedek was placed under arrest no less than 22 (!) times for his refusal to cooperate. When he finally departed Petersburg on the 26th of Av, he had successfully prevented the government's disruption of traditional Jewish life.

Passing of R. Yoel Teitelbaum (1979)

R. Yoel Teitelbaum was the founding rebbe of the Satmar chassidic dynasty, named after the town of Satmar (or Satu Mare) in what is today northwestern Romania. After World War II (see entry for 21 Kislev), he relocated to the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he continued to lead his thousands of followers. He passed away on 26 Menachem Av, 5739 (1979).

Monday, August 14, 2023 --- 27 Av, 5783

Passing of R. Yehoshua of Cracow (1648)

R. Yehoshua was one of the leading Polish scholars of his day, and was held in great reverence by his contemporaries. He led a Talmudic academy in Cracow which attracted many noteworthy disciples (such as [R. Shabtai HaKohen, the Shach](#)).

R. Yehoshua authored *Maginei Shlomo*, devoted to answering the difficulties raised by the [Tosafist scholars](#) against [Rashi](#) in his [Talmud](#) commentary. He also authored a collection of halachic responsa titled *Pnei Yehoshua* (not to be confused with the Talmudic commentary of the same name authored by his great-grandson, R. Yaakov Yehoshua).

Tuesday, August 15, 2023 --- 28 Av, 5783

Passing of R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin (1894)

R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (known by his acronym, the *Netziv*) led the famed Volozhin yeshiva for almost forty years. He authored numerous works, including *Ha'amek Davar*, *Ha'amek She'eilah*, *Meromei Sadeh*, and a collection of halachic responsa titled *Meishiv Davar*.

Wednesday, August 16, 2023 --- 29 Av, 5783

Flight from Liadi (1812)

On this date, [Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi](#), who supported and [aided](#) the Czar's army during the Napoleonic wars, was forced to flee his hometown from Napoleon's forces which were advancing through White Russia in their push toward Moscow. After five months of wanderings he arrived in the town of Pyena. There he fell ill and, weakened by the tribulations of his flight and the harsh Russian winter, passed away on the 24th of Tevet, 5573 (1812).

Passing of R. Eliezer Zusia Portugal, the Skulener Rebbe (1982)

R. Eliezer Zusia Portugal (1898–1982), the Skulener Rebbe, is best known for his superhuman efforts to rescue Jewish orphans and refugees in Eastern Europe before, during, and after World War II and his continuing support of them. He immigrated to the United States in 1960, after imprisonment in Rumania and international efforts to secure his release. He was renowned for his lengthy prayers and the beautiful tunes he composed.

Thursday, August 17, 2023 --- 30 Av, 5783

2nd Tablets Hewn (1313 BCE)

On the last day of Av of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), Moses carved, by G-d's command, two stone tablets -- each a cube measuring 6x6x3 *tefachim* (a *tefach*, "handbreadth", is approximately 3.2 inches) -- to replace the two divinely-made tablets, on which G-d had inscribed the Ten Commandments, which Moses had smashed 42 days earlier upon witnessing Israel's worship of the Golden Calf.

Friday, August 18, 2023 --- 1 Elul, 5783

Moses ascends Sinai for 3rd 40 days (1313 BCE)

On the early morning of the 1st of Elul of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE) Moses ascended Mount Sinai, taking with him the stone tablets he had hewn by divine command (see "Today in Jewish History" for yesterday, Av 30), for G-d to re-inscribe the Ten Commandments. On the mountain, G-d allowed Moses to "see My back, but not My face" (which Maimonides interprets as a perception of [G-d's reality](#) but not His essence) -- the closest any human being ever came to knowing G-d -- and taught him the secret of His "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy" (Exodus 33:18-34:8).

Prophecy of Haggai Encouraging Building of the Second Temple (353 BCE)

On this day, the prophet [Haggai](#) received a divine message to pass on to "[Zerubavel](#) son of She'altiel ruler of Judah and Joshua son of Jehozadak the High Priest" (Haggai 1:1), instructing them to continue their efforts to build the [Second Temple](#), whose construction had been halted some seventeen years prior.