

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

October 8-14, 2023
23-29 Tishrei 5784

Torah: Bereishit
Genesis 1:1 - 6:8
Haftorah: Samuel I 20:18-42
PARSHAT BEREISHIT

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).

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.

The Joy of Getting It Right the Second Time

The creation story at the beginning of Genesis is dominated by key commands that brought the universe into existence: "Let there be light,"¹ "Let there be water,"² "Let there be luminaries,"³ and so on. The rabbis refer to these as "The 10 Utterances." Obviously, creation consists of many more than 10 components, so each of these utterances was broadly inclusive. Why, then, did there even need to be 10 utterances? Couldn't a single, even broader one have been sufficient?

This question is addressed in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers): The world was created with 10 utterances. What does this come to teach us, as it could have been created with a single utterance? However, this is in order to get pay-back from the wicked for destroying a world that was created with 10 utterances, and to reward the righteous for sustaining a world that was created with 10 utterances. In other words, to compound the guilt of the wicked and to increase the merit of the righteous, the world was deliberately created with a larger number of utterances.

It is understandable that the Almighty would create the world in a manner that would afford greater opportunity for reward to those who choose to do good. But why would He want to create the world in a manner that is specifically designed to generate greater punishment for those who do wrong? Surely G-d is the epitome of goodness and would not pursue a scheme to saddle a sinner with the maximum amount of punishment!

The Need for a Void:

The Rebbe offers a transformative approach to understanding this teaching. For five decades the Rebbe

expounded on the core concept of "dira betachtonim," the foundational notion⁵ that the purpose of creation is, in the words of the Midrash, "To make for the Blessed One (G-d) a dwelling place in the lower realms." The entire point of creation is so that there should be a place of relative spiritual darkness and Divine concealment, which we, through our good deeds, will transform into a place filled with goodness and G-dliness. Human beings are not created as angels and placed in a world of intense spirituality and revealed G-dliness. Rather, we are put into a reality in which there is temptation and sin, and where it is possible to forget about G-d and spiritual matters. The aim of the game is to see through all the distractions and recognize our Divine mission, which is to make the world a better place by fulfilling G-d's commandments.

Sinners' Advantage:

In the Torah we read about impressive miracles wrought by glittering figures such as Moses and Elijah, and we learn about the saintly lives of the great prophets and teachers. Through their exemplary lives, they brought immense holiness into the world. However, it is those who committed sins and then turned their lives around that have achieved the highest fulfillment of the purpose of creation. Those who acted improperly and then repented for their past misdeeds, they are the ones who have turned bad into good. While bad deeds subvert the purpose of creation by bringing more darkness into the universe, when a person eventually does true teshuvah (repentance) all their negative acts are transformed into positives.⁷ The greater the terribleness of the sins, the greater the grandeur of their atonement.

So, there is something that former sinners can achieve that the forever righteous cannot.

When a person had sinned in the past and now has chosen the path of good, all their "negative achievements" can be cashed in for positive ones. That is the ultimate converting darkness into light.

Dividends of Darkness:

Now we can understand what G-d gains from getting payback from the wicked. This does not refer to meting out punishment, but to the repentance of the sinners and the transformation of their bad deeds into good ones. We were all put on earth to fulfill the purpose of bringing light and sanctity into the world. But what happens when someone chooses to sin instead? They become indebted to their Creator for failing to contribute properly to the goal for which they were created. So, how does such a person repay their debt?

They pay back in the currency most favored by G-d: Repentance. On the one hand, the ideal path is to get it right the first time around – to not sin at all. But in a very real sense, it is the person who at first got it wrong and then corrected their ways who fulfills most fully what life on earth is supposed to accomplish. So keen is the Almighty to reap the benefits of the former sinner gone right, that He created the world using 10 utterances, even though He could just as well have created it with a single word.

Herein lies a hugely valuable lesson: We may make a mistake and do things wrong. Now we feel a failure and think that we have blotted our paper and it shall never be as good again. This is utterly untrue. When we recognize the power of repentance and change, we can not only fix the past but transform all the negative into positive, bringing tenfold light into the world and bringing delight to our Creator. By Yossi

Ives **Why My Rich Friend is Poor**

I have an old friend who, due to life's circumstances, floats in and out of my life. She's a special person with a great soul and a grand character, but there's always something that seems to be holding her back from growing in life. Something that won't let her feel or experience happiness. She calls me in tears, and I listen to the same speech over and over again. "I've ruined everything," she cries. "I've lost all my money," she sobs. "I'm alone. I'm miserable." I brace myself because I know what will come next. "I've ruined my life. What have I done? What do I have to live for? I just want to die!" She wails with drama. I have heard the rhetoric so many times, but I still gasp in disbelief at the last sentence. I know this woman. I know that she has her pain and her sorrow. Like everybody else on this planet, she's been through her fair share of tests. Difficulties, challenges—yes, she has them. Who doesn't? But over the years, I've seen the other side as well. I know that G-d gave her many skills and talents. I know that G-d gave her great material wealth. She loses money, yes, but she also makes it—in fact, much more than even she could possibly spend. She has family and people who love her, but there always seems to be the emphasis on "being alone, lacking, miserable." She also always seems to be repeating the same mistakes over and over again. "Why?" I ask myself. "Why is this woman always a prisoner to the past and to what she lacks?"

I listen to her, and then take a good long look at myself. How many times to I complain and cry, thinking about what I "did wrong," what I "don't have"? When I do this, am I happy? Am I growing? Of course not! I feel a sinking feeling of misery, isolation and negativity. When I get like this, I feel stuck. And L-rd G-d commanded man, saying to him: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, you must not eat thereof; for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die." (Beresheit 2: 16-17) Now the serpent was cunning beyond any beast of the field that L-rd G-d had made. He said to the woman: "Did perhaps, G-d say: 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden.' " (Beresheit 3:1)

Reading these lines from the Torah, do you know what jumps out at me? The way that cunning snake attacked the woman's very existence by making her see and focus on what she didn't (or shouldn't) have. G-d gave man and woman a garden full of trees with delicious abundance. They had bounty, plenty. One tree—only one single tree—they were forbidden to eat from (because this one tree wasn't good for them—eating from the tree, they were warned, would bring death). And so, the serpent—the symbol of evil, the symbol of destruction—put all of its energy into luring the woman away from the good G-d gave her and enticed her to sin with negativity. The woman fell into the snake's trap; she ate from the single prohibited tree, among all the permitted ones in the garden. She gave the prohibited fruit to man, and as a consequence, brought death to mankind. Pretty intense, no? She brought such destruction for getting off-track by eating a piece of fruit! Yes, that's what can happen when a person is focused on what went "wrong," what "they" lost, what they "don't" have. They can destroy. She brought such destruction by eating a piece of fruit! themselves (and others). When I feel bad about myself, it never pushes me forward. If anything, it pushes me backwards or makes me feel stuck. It wasn't just the fruit the woman ate from the one forbidden tree; she exhibited a lack of faith and trust in G-d as well.

King David tells us: "Turn away from evil, and do good." (Psalms 34:14) I once read a beautiful interpretation of the saying, "Turn away from seeing yourself as evil! So that then you can do good!" Turn away from the negative thoughts of what is missing or lacking and wrong. The very act of turning away will propel you forward, and give you the strength and desire to move on, to make positive changes, to learn from your experiences—and do good.

By Elana Mizrahi

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, October 8, 2023-23 Tishrei, 5784

Passing of R. Chanoch of Cordova (1014)

As a youngster (in c. 960), R. Chanoch was captured by pirates, along with his father R. Moshe and three other great Torah scholars. R. Moshe and his son were ransomed by the Jewish community of Cordova, Spain, where R. Moshe opened a yeshiva for Talmudic studies. When R. Moshe passed away, he was succeeded by his son. These events marked a turning point in Jewish history.

Monday, October 9, 2023-24 Tishrei, 5784

Returning Exiles Commit to Follow the Torah (335 BCE)

The Jews who had returned to the Land of Israel with Ezra and Nehemiah gathered on this day and repented their misdeeds, signing a document in which they committed to trust in G-d and follow His ways. Among the mitzvot they specified were to refrain from intermarriage and from purchasing produce on Shabbat (Nehemiah 9:1-3; 10:1-32).

Passing of R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonye (1781)

R. Yaakov Yosef was one of the foremost disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. He was the first one to disseminate the teachings of Chassidut in print, publishing the work Toldot Yaakov Yosef in 1780.

Passing of the Ribnitzer Rebbe (1995)

On this day in 5756 (1995), the Ribnitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Zanvil Abramowitz, passed away. For decades, with great self-sacrifice, he lived a full Chassidic lifestyle under Soviet rule before emigrating to Israel and then the U.S.

Tuesday, October 10, 2023-25 Tishrei 5784

Passing of R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1809)

Passing of the great Chassidic leader and advocate for the Jewish people, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809). Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was a close disciple of the second leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch. He is best known for his love for every Jew and his impassioned words of advocacy on their behalf before the Almighty.

Passing of Chatam Sofer (1839)

Tishrei 25th is the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg (1762-1839), known as "Chatam Sofer" after his work of Rabbinic responsa. Rabbi Moshe was an outstanding Halachic authority and community leader, and was at the forefront of the battle to preserve the integrity of traditional Judaism in the face of the various "reformist" movements of his time.

Wednesday, October 11, 2023-26 Tishrei, 5784

Passing of R. Yitzchak of Dampierre (C. 1190)

R. Yitzchak was a great-grandson of R. Shlomo Yitzchaki, the seminal Biblical and Talmudic commentator commonly known as Rashi. R. Yitzchak and his three uncles—R. Shmuel (Rashbam), R. Yaakov (Rabbeinu Tam), and R. Yitzchak (Rivam)—are among the earliest and most well-known Tosafists. Their comments and explanations, which appear on the outer margin of all classical prints of the Talmud, are vital to any serious student who wishes to properly understand the Talmud.

Friday, October 13, 2023-28 Tishrei, 5784

Arrest of R. DovBer of Lubavitch (1826)

R. DovBer of Lubavitch was arrested due to trumped-up charges fabricated by a jealous relative. Among his alleged "crimes" was that he was sending money to the Turkish sultan, who was at war with Russia at the time. R. DovBer was released six weeks later (see calendar entry for 10 Kislev)

Shabbat, October 14, 2023-29 Tishrei, 5784

Passing of Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel (1508)

Today is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508), one of the leaders of Spanish Jewry at the time of the 1492 expulsion. A minister in the king's court (after having served as treasurer to the king of Portugal), he chose to join his brethren in their exile. He began writing his extensive and highly regarded commentary on the Torah in 1503 in Venice (where it was published in 1579).

Passing of Simeon the Righteous (Shimon HaTzadik) (313 BCE)

Simeon the Righteous was the spiritual and political leader of the Jewish nation during a turbulent time in history—when Alexander the Great conquered and dominated the entire civilized world. Known as "the righteous" due to his saintly character, Simeon was the last member of the Men of the Great Assembly (Anshei Knesses Hagdolah), a 120-member panel of prophets and sages who guided the Jews at the onset of the Second Temple era