

# Torah Weekly

כ"ב

3-9 December, 2023  
20-26 Kislev, 5784

Torah: Vayeishev:  
Genesis 37:1 - 40:23  
Chanukah 2: Numbers 7:18-23  
Chanukah - Shabbat 1:  
Haftorah: Zachariah 2:14 - 4:7  
PARSHAT VAYEISHEV/  
CHANUKAH

## 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).

### Reminder:

As the situation in the Holyland remains critical, our brethren risk their lives daily, we do our part, we pray and say Tehilim – Psalms.

## The Indomitable Flame of Chanukah

**Hide and Seek:** As a young child, Rabbi Avraham the Malach, son of Rabbi Dovber, the Mezritcher Maggid, burst into his father's study in tears. While playing hide-and-seek with his friends, he explained, he had hidden so well that nobody could find him. After some time, he reasoned that his friends' prolonged silence meant that he had won the game and he decided to come out of his hiding spot to reveal himself and claim his reward. As soon as he emerged, however, he noticed that they had all turned to playing other games and had given up trying to find him. He cried to his father at the thought of everyone having abandoned hope of him ever returning, thinking he had disappeared forever. In many ways, the young boy's pain is similar to our collective relationship with G-d throughout history. Shortly after their creation, Adam and Eve, the first humans, played hide-and-seek with G-d in the Garden of Eden. They first hid in shame and embarrassment of their new self-awareness; shortly thereafter, it was G-d's turn to hide. Sadly, He has hidden so well throughout our dark and difficult years of exile that,

over time, we began to forget His existence and ultimately stopped looking for Him. But, in truth, the connection has never been severed. Our Loyalty: We always read the puzzling narrative of the incident between Judah and Tamar in close proximity to the seemingly unrelated holiday of Chanukah. The Torah describes how Tamar, twice widowed from Judah's two sons, concealed her identity, dressed as a harlot, and had relations with her father-in-law, Judah. Before engaging in this act, she requested that he leave his ring, garment, and staff with her as collateral in lieu of payment for their brief encounter. Three months passed, and someone informed Judah that his daughter-in-law, Tamar, had become pregnant through harlotry. Ignorant to the fact that he was responsible for her pregnancy, Judah ordered that she be taken out and executed. Tamar then quickly revealed the security belonging to the one with whom she had relations. Judah immediately identified his belongings and took ownership for what he had done. Tamar merited to birth twin boys, one of whom gave lineage to the future Messiah. We are each crafted with a literal spark (or essence) of G-d buried within us,<sup>6</sup> and we can never lose our deep connection with our Source despite how we might behave at times. Rabbi Avraham Dovber of Avritch teaches that the same way that Judah accused Tamar of being immodest or unfaithful, G-d accuses us of betraying our relationship with Him. But when we kindle the

Chanukah lights three months after experiencing a heightened and intimate closeness with Him during the High Holidays, we point to our soul and cry out in protest, "The spark of Yourself that You left within us when You went into hiding three months ago is still there! We still believe in the potential for closeness between us and that we can rekindle it!" The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, took this one step further. He taught that symbolically, we are each a candle yearning to be kindled.<sup>8</sup> The candle's wax is analogous to the body, while its wick symbolizes the soul. Neither fuel nor wick, body or soul, serve any positive function unless joined with the other, with the common purpose of creating a flame. In truth, each of us has a small jug of oil buried deep within, still bearing the seal of the High Priest (more specifically, the seal of G-d) that the Syrian-Greeks (or any oppressor) can never access.<sup>9</sup> This is why, after re-entering the Holy Temple following the war with the Syrian-Greeks, the Jews insisted on searching for oils specifically bearing the seal of the High Priest,<sup>10</sup> and did not begin producing new oil from the onset even though it was indeed permitted to do so. **The Courage to Kindle Our Own Light:** We can debate whether the miracle of Chanukah centered on the war between the clashing Jewish and Hellenistic values (and armies) or whether it focused on the small jug of oil burning exceedingly

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center  
5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-421-0111  
Fax: 412-521-5948  
www.alephne.org  
info@alephne.org



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longer than expected. But perhaps the greatest miracle in this story is that during the darkest hour of the darkest month in the Jewish calendar, we have had the courage, year after year, to set that oil alight and brighten up the world around us. When all seems dark and lost, when our enemies – both external and internal – attack our personal Temple and desecrate our Holy of Holies, Chanukah empowers us to stand up and dispel that darkness with light. For no matter how bleak reality may seem, darkness cannot exist alongside light – even just the tiniest of flames. Each of us, without exception, has the strength buried within to ignite that spark. We need to be the light we want to see in this world, igniting our own souls and inspiring others to kindle theirs, as well. How many times do we have aspirations we keep dormant because we convince ourselves that we will ultimately fail? How many times do we give up on our dreams before even beginning to work toward them? We cannot pass up opportunities because we believe others will shine brighter or burn longer. We each bring a light for which the world has been waiting for so many years.

**Now is our time to shine!**

*By Jonah Muskat-Brown*

**Sunday, December 3, 2023-20 Kislev, 5784**

**Ezra's Address (347 BCE)**

Ezra, head of the Sanhedrin and the leader of the Jewish people at the time of the building of the Second Temple, made an historic address to a three-day assemblage of Jews in Jerusalem, exhorting them to adhere to the teachings of the Torah and to dissolve their interfaith marriages (the Jewish people were on the verge of complete assimilation at the time, following their 70-year exile in Babylonia).

**Tanya Published (1796)**

The first printing of the "bible of Chassidism", the Tanya, the magnum opus of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad.

**Monday, December 4, 2023-21 Kislev, 5784**

**Alexander in Jerusalem (313 BCE)**

On Kislev 21 of the year 3448 from creation (313 BCE), there occurred the historic meeting between Shimon HaTzaddik and Alexander ('the Great') of Macedonia. (Source: Megillat Taanit)

The Samaritans, bitter enemies of the Jews, had convinced Alexander that the Jews' refusal to place his image in their Temple was a sign of rebellion against his sovereignty, and that the Holy Temple should be destroyed. The Kohen Gadol ("High Priest") at the time was Shimon HaTzaddik, the last of the "Men of the Great Assembly" who rebuilt the Holy Temple and revitalized Judaism under Ezra. On the 21st of Kislev Alexander marched on Jerusalem at the head of his army; Shimon, garbed in the vestments of the High Priest and accompanied with a delegation of Jewish dignitaries, went forth to greet him. The two groups walked towards each other all night; at the crack of dawn they met. As Alexander beheld the visage of the High Priest, he dismounted his horse and bowed respectfully; to his men he explained that he often had visions of a similar-looking man leading him into battle. Shimon HaTzaddik brought the emperor to the Holy Temple and explained that Judaism prohibits the display of any graven image; he offered to name all the male children born to priests that year "Alexander" as a demonstration of loyalty to the emperor (which is how "Alexander" became a common Jewish name). The Samaritans plot was rebuffed, and Kislev 21 was declared a holiday.

**Satmar Rebbe Rescued (1944)**

In 1826, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch (see calendar entry for yesterday, Kislev 9) was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated. The date of his release, Kislev 10, is celebrated amongst Chabad Chassidim as a "festival of liberation." Tachnun (confession of sins) is omitted from the day's prayers, farbrengens are held, and Rabbi DovBer's teachings are studied.

**Tuesday, December 5, 2023-22 Kislev, 5784**

**Passing of Rabbi Eliezer ben Eliyahu Ashkenazi (1585)**

Rabbi Eliezer ben Eliyahu Ashkenazi (1512-1585) was a highly regarded Talmudist, as well as a physician. He authored various works, including Ma'ase ha-Shem -- a commentary on the historical portions of the Pentateuch, also including a commentary on the Passover Hagaddah -- and Yosef Lekach, dedicated and named after Don Yosef Nasi, the Duke of Naxos.

**Wednesday, December 6, 2023-23 Kislev, 5784**

**Jews Accused of Poisoning the Wells (1348)**

As the "Black Death" plague decimated Europe, Christians accused the Jews of causing the plague by poisoning the wells in an effort to wipe out the Gentile population. On the 23rd of Kislev 5109 (Nov. 15, 1348), Rudolph of Oron, bailiff of Lausanne, sent a letter to the mayor of Strasburg informing him that certain Jews of Lausanne had "confessed" under torture that they together with their coreligionists had poisoned all the wells in the Rhine valley. This resulted in the masses persecuting and killing tens of thousands of Jews throughout Europe.

**Thursday, December 7, 2023-24 Kislev, 5784**

**Construction of the Second Temple Resumes (353 BCE)**

In the first year of rule of Cyrus, the King of Persia, Jews were given permission to return to Israel and rebuild the Holy Temple. A group of Jews led by Zerubabel set out for Jerusalem and began working on the second Temple. However, the Cutheans falsely accused the Jews of plotting a rebellion against King Cyrus and were successful in halting the construction of the Holy Temple for the remainder of his reign and throughout the reign of Ahasuerus, his successor. Construction resumed in the second year of the reign of Darius, Ahasuerus's son, on the 24th of Kislev.

**Friday, December 8, 2023-25 Kislev, 5784**

**Cain Kills Abel (3720 BCE)**

The first murder in history occurred on the 25th of Kislev in the year 41 from creation (3720 BCE), when Adam and Eve's eldest son, Cain, killed his younger brother, Abel, as recounted in the 4th chapter of Genesis.

**Mishkan completed (1312 BCE)**

The vessels, tapestries, wall sections and other components of the Mishkan (the portable sanctuary or "Tabernacle" built under Moses' direction to house the Divine Presence during the Israelites' journeys through the desert) were completed on the 25th of Kislev in the year 2449 from creation (1312 BCE). The Mishkan was not assembled, however, until 3 months later, when, beginning on Adar 25 of that year, it was erected and taken down daily for a 7-day "training" period prior to its dedication on the 1st of Nissan. Our Sages tell us that the day of Kislev 25 was compensated 12 centuries later, when the Maccabees dedicated the Holy Temple on Kislev 25, 3622 (139 BCE -- see below).

**Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)**

On the 25th of Kislev in the year 3622 from creation, the Maccabees liberated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, after defeating the vastly more numerous and powerful armies of the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus IV, who had tried to forcefully uproot the beliefs and practices of Judaism from the people of Israel. The victorious Jews repaired, cleansed and rededicated the Temple to the service of G-d. But all the Temple's oil had been defiled by the pagan invaders; when the Jews sought to light the Temple's menorah (candelabra), they found only one small cruse of ritually pure olive oil. Miraculously, the one-day supply burned for eight days, until new, pure oil could be obtained. In commemoration, the Sages instituted the 8-day festival of Chanukah, on which lights are kindled nightly to recall and publicize the miracle.

**R. Chizkiah Medini (1904)**

Kislev 25 is the yahrtzeit (date of passing) of Rabbi Chaim Chizkiah Medini (1832-1904), author of the Halachic encyclopedia Sdei Chemed.

**Shabbat, December 9, 2023-26 Kislev, 5784**

2nd Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

On the 25th of Kislev in the year 3622 from creation, the Maccabees liberated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, after defeating the vastly more numerous and powerful armies of the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus IV, who had tried to forcefully uproot the beliefs and practices of Judaism from the people of Israel. The victorious Jews repaired, cleansed and rededicated the Temple to the service of G-d.

**Raavad's Passing (1198)**

Rabbi Avraham ben David of Posquieres (Provence), known by the acronym "Raavad", wrote the famed hogaot critical notations to Maimonides' Mishneh Torah.