

# Torah Weekly

בס"ד

## PARSHAT VAYAKHEL PARSHAT SHEKALIM

23-29 Adar 1 5784  
3-9 March 2024

*Torah:* Exodus 35:11-38:20  
*Shekalim:* Exodus 30:11-16

*HafTORah:* Kings II 11:17-  
12:17; Samuel I 20:18, 20:42

### Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

### Psalms Daily

#### Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

*Psalm 117*

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.

2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

### Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain/Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

## Braveheart or Wiseheart?

I think Jack Benny was quoting Mark Twain when he said, "Age is mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." In Jewish thought, however, we seem to focus more on 'mind over heart' than 'mind over matter.' In 1812, Napoleon and his French army invaded Russia. Despite his promises of liberty and equality for the Jews, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was opposed to Napoleon, in contrast to many other Russian Jewish leaders at the time. He understood that Napoleon's way would lead to much assimilation, and, despite highly prevalent Czarist antisemitism, he supported the Russian campaign against France. He even sent one of his senior chassidim, Rabbi Moshe Meisels, to work as an interpreter at French military headquarters so he could pass on vital military secrets to the Russians. One day, Napoleon himself burst into the military command and spotted Meisels. Immediately, he accused him of being a spy and put his hand on his chest to see if his heart was beating furiously, which would reveal his fear and expose the truth. But Moshe Meisels remained completely calm and replied to Napoleon that he was simply serving as a translator since he was fluent in both Russian and French. The danger passed. Rabbi Moshe would later say that the fundamental Chassidic principle—the mind rules the heart—literally saved his life. In his foundational treatise, the Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman insists that all humans

have the innate natural capacity to control their feelings and desires if they make a genuine attempt. Indeed, this seems to be a fundamental principle of our faith, as we must believe that, ultimately, we will all face accountability for our decisions. But how can we be held accountable if we are overcome by the desire for wrongdoing? As hard as it may be in the moment, we always ultimately have the freedom to choose how we will respond. The mind has the strength to control the heart and its desires. This can help us understand a phrase repeated throughout this week's Torah reading. Concerning the instructions to build the Tabernacle, the very first House of G-d, we come across the phrase *chacham lev* – wise hearted. "Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything which G-d has commanded." We are also told that the wise-hearted women spun the goats' hair needed for the Sanctuary in their own uniquely talented way.<sup>4</sup> The phrase wise-hearted recurs again and again throughout the parshah. But wise-hearted sounds contradictory. Wisdom is a faculty of the rational mind, our intellect. The heart, on the other hand, is the seat of our emotions, which are often anything but rational. In life, mind and heart are often at loggerheads. G-d gave intellect to be able to discern good from bad, right from wrong. The heart, though, makes us creatures of habit, unable or unwilling to exercise rational judgment when making decisions. Aren't we all too familiar with our own constant inner

struggles between mind and heart? The heart pushes us to schmooze with our neighbor in shul. The mind interrupts and tells us the rabbi is speaking. The heart says, "That's a nice smartphone." The head says, "It's not yours." The heart says, "She's gorgeous." The mind tells us, "She's married." Isn't that why every Yom Kippur we klop "Al Chet" by beating our chests over our hearts when recounting and confessing our sins of the past year? We pound our hearts because it was most likely the heart that got us into trouble in the first place. Had we followed our rational minds instead, we would have been far less likely to make those mistakes and commit those very sins. So how are we to understand the paradoxical phrase, wise-hearted? In the context of our Biblical storyline, we are discussing the gracious and generous contributions of the people who helped build the Sanctuary. Whether by their material contributions or by their sheer hard work, they demonstrated their commitment to doing good by giving of themselves. They were truly wise-hearted people. We all know the famous "wise son" from the Pesach Seder night. He's the clever boy, the sharp one, the ever-favorite son. The world admires smart people. They are respected and revered in academia; they command hefty salaries in the corporate world. I remember reading how in the dark days of pre-glasnost Communist Russia, when there was no such thing as free enterprise, there was a completely different system of one-upmanship. How did



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ambitious people flaunt their achievements? How did they outdo their peers? Not with money, property portfolios, or stocks and bonds, but with university degrees and doctorates. He who has the most degrees, wins. But doctorates, degrees, dissertations, and scholarly papers don't guarantee that one is honest, decent, upright, or caring. For that we need, not a good brain, but a good heart! We need people who are not only clever, but kind. The wise ones must have heart too. The "wise son" may be very smart, but he can also be shrewd, spiteful,

manipulative, and downright dangerous. Do you really think Kim Jong Un is an idiot? He may look like a ridiculous cartoon character, but he's no fool. He is toying with presidents and prime ministers and controls an arsenal of military hardware threatening all the free world. Iran's Ayatollahs may look like pathetic relics of an ancient empire, but they may well be laughing all the way to nuclear power, G-d forbid. We need truly wise men and women, not mischievous 'wise guys.' The term wise-hearted is also used to describe Betzalel, the talented architect and designer of the Sanctuary.

Unlike other brilliant individuals from whom the world sees no benefit, Betzalel shared his wisdom. He taught his juniors the intricacies of the sacred projects and shared his knowledge liberally and generously. So, I would submit that wise-hearted is an exceptionally good turn of phrase after all. A mind without a heart may be cold, sterile, and even evil. And a heart needs a mind to guide and direct it correctly. The wise hearted have both intelligence and empathy, a truly admirable combination.

*By Yossy Goldman*

## PARSHAT SHEKALIM

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, each Jew contributed an annual half-shekel to the Temple. The 1st of Adar marked the beginning of the collection of the Shekalim. In commemoration, the Torah reading of the Shabbat that falls on or before Adar 1 is supplemented with the verses (Exodus 30:11-16) that relate G-d's

commandment to Moses regarding the first giving of the half-shekel.

"Parshat Shekalim" is the first of four special readings added during or immediately before the month of Adar (the other three being "Zachor", "Parah" and "Hachodesh").

## SHABBAT MEVARCHIM

This Shabbat is Shabbat Mevarchim ("the Shabbat that blesses" the new month): a special prayer is recited blessing the Rosh Chodesh ("Head of the Month") of the upcoming month of Adar II, which will take place on Sunday and Monday.

Prior to the blessing, we announce the precise time of the molad, the "birth" of the new moon. See molad times. It is a Chabad custom to recite the entire book of Psalms before morning prayers, and to conduct farbrengens (chassidic gatherings) in the course of the Shabbat.

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

### **Sunday, March 3, 2024-23 Adar I, 5784** **Passing of 1st Rebbe of Ger (1866)**

Chassidic Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Altar (1799-1866), author of Chiddushei Harim (a commentary on the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch), was a disciple of the Maggid of Koshnitz and Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, and the founder of the "Ger" (Gerer) Chassidic dynasty. All his 13 sons had died in his lifetime, and he was succeeded (in 1870) by his young grandson, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (the "Sefat Emmet")

### **Wednesday, March 6, 2024-26 Adar I, 5784**

#### **First Property Purchase (1677)**

In 1658, fifteen Jewish families emigrated from South America to (what was to become) the United States. These families

were of Sephardic lineage and settled together in Newport, Rhode Island, where they established a Jewish congregation. For many years they held weekly prayer services in private homes. When the need arose for a Jewish cemetery, the community purchased a piece of land on Wednesday, February 28, 1677. This was the very first piece of land in the colonies which was owned by a Jewish congregation. In this cemetery are buried many of the early members of this congregation, and it is still maintained by the Jewish community.

#### **Passing of Sarah Schenirer (1935)**

Viewing the dire lack of formal Jewish education provided to Jewish girls in her native Poland, Sarah Schenirer founded the first Bais Yaakov girls' school in Krakow in 1917. Despite some initial opposition, the

Bais Yaakov school network quickly expanded throughout Poland and beyond. Today, there are hundreds of Bais Yaakov schools worldwide, attended by tens of thousands of students.

### **Thursday, March 7, 2024-27 Adar I, 5784** **Rebbe Falls III (1992)**

On the 27th of Adar I, 5752 (Monday, March 2, 1992), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, suffered a disabling stroke while praying at the gravesite of the previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch. On the same date two years later, the Rebbe lost consciousness following another stroke; three months later, on the 3rd of Tammuz 5754 (June 12, 1994), the Rebbe's soul ascended on high, orphaning a generation.