

PARSHAT VAYELECH ROSH HASHANAH

28 Elul 5785 - 5 Tishrei 5786
21 - 27 September 2025

1ST DAY OF ROSH HASHANAH

Torah: Genesis 21:1-34
Maftir: Numbers 29:1-6
Haftorah: Samuel I 1:1-2:10

2ND DAY OF ROSH HASHANAH

Torah: Genesis 22:1-24
Maftir: Numbers 29:1-6
Haftorah: Jeremiah 31:1-19

PARSHAT VAYELECH

Torah: Deuteronomy 31:1-30
Haftorah: Hosea 14:2-10; Micah 7:18-20

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 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)

Positive Mitzvah 112 Proclaiming Impurity

We are commanded to make a Metzora (a ritually impure person) recognizable so that people should stay away from them (and thus avoid contracting ritual impurity themselves).

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A VERY STRANGE COMMANDMENT

They shake their heads and fume: How could Abraham have been so eager to obey G-d's command to kill his own son in cold blood? Taking a human life is an absolute no-no. So what if G-d commanded him - that's no excuse! We cannot allow religion to trump life. Murder is murder.

Mr. Abraham may deserve a Nobel Prize for extreme philanthropy and hospitality under the most trying circumstances. He may deserve applause for the brave rescue of innocents from the expansionistic aggression of a tyrannical empire. For his legendary honesty, charity, and his undying campaign against immorality and idolatry, Abraham is a commendable fellow, indeed. But none of this excuses his willingness to obey to G-d's instruction to kill his son!

So goes their argument. Are they missing something?

If our utmost goal is the preservation of human life, even at the expense of disobeying an explicit and personal command from our Creator, then who or what are we worshiping? The human being, of course! Our absolute obedience has been sworn to ourselves, our mind and emotions. If we ignore G-d's direct instruction because we decide that His command is unacceptable, then our own decisions rule.

Now, perhaps that doesn't sound too bad. But ideas are given to evolving and devolving. What happens when our reason dictates that in certain places it would be the height of compassion, to an individual or the rest of society, to end a human's life? Euthanasia, capital punishment, abortion, "assisted suicide." Should we look to G-d's instructions or should we obey our own inner gods? Let's say we chose the latter. Our own feelings are now deciding who should live and who should die, when taking a life is unforgivable murder and when it is just and compassionate. What's wrong with that?

Well, what if we decide or are convinced that it is just and necessary to take the lives of every Gypsy, Jew, and dark-skinned person in our universe? Not too long ago, a few million rational, educated, cultured and scientific minds took

only a few years to reach that conclusion.

Possibly a few million minds currently entertain the concept that our planet must be rid of infidels. Are they being unreasonable or barbaric? They don't think so. Their reasoning tells them they are acting in the interest of mankind.

In short, we cannot rely on our own rationale or emotions to guarantee the correct decisions in such matters. For that very reason, our Creator told the first humans, and reiterated at Mount Sinai: "I made you, and My instructions are in your best interest. I know, 'cause I read the Manual for the Successful Inhabitation of Planet Earth. In fact, I wrote that manual!"

G-d gave mankind seven universal laws which guarantee our survival and success. They involve interactions between us and Him, each other, and our environment. The prohibitions against thievery, murder, and adultery all introduce a respect for human life and property. The prohibition of cruelty to animals implies care for all of G-d's creatures. Establishment of court systems and enforcement agencies provide that these basic laws and their ramifications are encouraged and enforced, preventing the collapse of society.

To ensure that these laws are not modified by ever-rational and ever-compassionate, yet ever-changing, minds, we are told to believe in one G-d Who commanded all seven laws, rendering them unchangeable. One G-d created everything, knows what is best for all He created, and has no rival to challenge His wisdom. The prohibition of blaspheming G-d instills a respect for Him and His seven basic laws.

Much as we love human life, we do not worship it. Our G-d-given gifts of intellect and emotion bow before their Creator. So, as Abraham weaned ancient peoples off thievery and thuggery, he explained that these actions were not only an offense to mankind; they were an offense to G-d. Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son in obedience to the only G-d seemingly flew in the face of his entire life's efforts to eradicate human sacrifice, cruelty and idolatry. In truth, however, it actually highlighted the underlying and indispensable backbone of all of the seven laws and

all of Abraham's teachings—the absolute obedience to G-d's command, regardless of its compatibility with human logic and feeling. Sure, it was a "strange" request (to say the least), but if G-d can be ignored in one area, He can be ignored in others areas too, and the world eventually reverts to chaos.

And what was the end of the story? "*G-d said: Do not lay a hand on the lad; do not harm him at all! For now I know that you are a G-d fearing person*" - *Genesis 22:12*. Not only was this a grand G-dly denunciation of sacrificing or harming the innocent, but it was an eternal demonstration of the necessity of "irrational" obedience.

In return, the descendants of Abraham and Isaac - who apart from receiving an expanded package of commandments and deals, were also charged at Sinai to continue spreading this legacy to all of mankind - are able to recite the portion from Genesis that recounts the story of Isaac's binding in their daily morning prayers, and add: "Sovereign of the universe! Just as Abraham our father suppressed his compassion for his only son to do Your will with his whole heart, so may Your compassion suppress Your wrath against us; and may Your mercy prevail over Your attribute of stern justice."

We say to G-d: Maybe we're not matching up to Your expectations, but we're trying. Submitting to a higher authority doesn't always come easy to us thinking and feeling human beings, Y'know. So please occasionally ignore Your "logic" and "feelings" too and help us nonetheless!

By Yaakov Paley

VEYELECH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Vayelech," means "And [Moses] went," and it is found in Deuteronomy 31:1.

The Parshah of Vayelech ("and he went") recounts the events of Moses' last day of earthly life. "I am one hundred and twenty years old today," he says to the people, "and I can no longer go forth and come in." He transfers the leadership to Joshua, and writes (or concludes

writing) the Torah in a scroll which he entrusts to the Levites for safekeeping in the Ark of the Covenant.

The Mitzvah of Hak'hel ("gather") is given: every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot of the first year of the Shemittah cycle, the entire people of Israel—men, women and children—should gather at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where the king should read to them from the Torah.

Vayelech concludes with the prediction that the people of Israel will turn away from their covenant with G-d, causing Him to hide His face from them, but also with the promise that

the words of the Torah "shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their descendants."

ROSH HASHANAH TORAH READINGS IN A NUTSHELL

Day 1:

G-d remembers Sarah, and gives her and Abraham a son, who is named Isaac (Yitzchak), meaning "will laugh"; Abraham is then one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety. Isaac is circumcised at the age of eight days.

Hagar and Ishmael are banished from Abraham's home and wander in the desert; G-d

hears the cry of the dying lad, and saves his life by showing his mother a well. The Philistine king Abimelech makes a treaty with Abraham at Be'er Sheba (in southern Israel).

Day 2:

G-d commands Abraham to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem. Isaac is bound and placed on the altar, and Abraham raises the knife to slaughter his son. A voice from heaven calls to stop him, saying that it was a test; a ram, caught in the undergrowth by its horns, is offered in Isaac's place.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 28 Elul 5785 - 21 September 2025

Creation of Celestial Bodies (3761 BCE)

Today is the fourth day of Creation, when G-d created the sun, moon, and stars:

"G-d said, 'Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens, to separate between the day and night....' and it was so. G-d made the two large luminaries: the large luminary to rule by day and the small luminary to rule at night, and the stars.... G-d saw that it was good. It was evening, and it was morning, a fourth day." - Genesis 1:14-19

Monday, 29 Elul 5785 - 22 September 2025

Creation of Creatures and Birds (3761 BCE)

Today is the fifth day of Creation, when G-d created the animals of the sea and the birds:

"G-d said, 'Let the waters swarm a swarming of living creatures, and let birds fly over the earth, across the expanse of the heavens.' ...G-d saw that it was good. G-d blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds multiply upon the earth.' It was evening, and it was morning, a fifth day." - Genesis 1:20-23

Tzemach Tzedek Born (1789)

The 3rd Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch (5549-5626, or 1789-1866), was born on the 29th of Elul. Orphaned from his mother at age 3, he was raised by his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Chabad Rebbe. Rabbi Menachem Mendel assumed the leadership of Chabad in 5587 (1827), upon the passing of his father-in-law and uncle, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch. Extremely active in communal affairs, he established and funded Jewish farming colonies which provided a livelihood for thousands of families. He also stood at the forefront of the battle against the "Enlightenment Movement" which, with the support of the Czarist regime, sought to destroy traditional Jewish life -- a battle which earned him no less than 22 (!) imprisonments and arrests. In the course of his lifetime, Rabbi Menachem Mendel penned more than 48,000 pages of Chassidic teachings and Halachic exegesis. He is known as the "Tzemach Tzedek" (lit. "a sprouting of righteousness") after his work of Halachic responsa by that name.

Tuesday, 1 Tishrei 5786 - 23 September 2025

Adam & Eve (3761 BCE)

On Tishrei 1 - the sixth day of creation - "G-d said: 'Let us make Man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,

and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth...'" (Genesis 1:26). "G-d formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (ibid., 2:7). "And G-d took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to keep it" (2:15). "And G-d said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helpmeet opposite him' ... G-d caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his sides, and closed up the flesh in its place. And G-d built the side which He had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. And the man said: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother, and cleaves to his wife; and they become one flesh" (2:18-24)

Dove's 3rd Mission (2105 BCE)

On the 1st of Tishrei 1656 (2105 BCE), on the 307th day of the Great Flood, Noah dispatched a dove from the ark, for the third time. When the dove did not return, Noah knew that the Flood's waters had completely drained from the earth. On that day, Noah removed the roof of the ark; but Noah and his family, and all the animals, remained in the ark for another 57 days - until the 27th of Cheshvan - when the surface of the earth was completely dry and G-d commanded them to leave the ark and resettle and repopulate the earth.

Binding of Isaac; Sarah's Passing (1677 BCE)

Abraham's supreme test of faith - his binding of Isaac in preparation to sacrifice him as per G-d's command - occurred on the 1st of Tishrei 2084 (1677 BCE), and is recalled each Rosh Hashanah with the sounding of the shofar (ram's horn - a ram was sacrificed in Isaac's stead when an angel revealed that the command to sacrifice Isaac was but a divine test); the Torah's account of the event is publicly read in the synagogue on the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah. On the day of Isaac's binding, his mother, Sarah, passed away at age 127, and was subsequently buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron.

Daf Yomi (1923)

The "Daf Yomi" daily regimen of Talmud study (in which the participant studies one folio a day to complete the entire Talmud in seven years) initiated by Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, was launched on Rosh Hashanah of 5683 (1923).

Wednesday, 2 Tishrei 5786 - 24 September 2025

First Shabbat (3761 BCE)

Today marks the first Shabbat, when G-d rested after creating the world for six days:

"G-d completed on the seventh day His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for then He rested from all His work that G-d created to do" - Genesis 2:2-3

To commemorate this day, we are instructed to keep the day of Shabbat holy and rest from all work:

"Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it. For six days you shall work and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is Shabbat to the L-rd your G-d; you shall not perform any labor...For [in] six days the L-rd made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is within them, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the L-rd blessed the day of Shabbat and sanctified it" - Exodus 20:8-11

Thursday, 3 Tishrei 5786 - 25 September 2025

Assassination of Gedaliah (423 BCE)

The 3rd of Tishrei is a fast day mourning the assassination of the Jewish royal Gedaliah ben Achikam, governor of the Land of Israel for a short period following the destruction of the First Temple. Gedaliah's killing spelled the end of the small remnant of a Jewish community that remained in the Holy Land after the destruction. They soon fled to Egypt. (According to many opinions, the assassination of Gedaliah actually occurred on Rosh Hashanah, but the commemoration of the event is postponed to the day after the festival).

Passing of Rebbetzin Devorah Leah (1792)

Rebbetzin Devorah Leah, daughter of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi and mother of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (the "Tzemach Tzedek"), passed away on this date in 5552 (1792), just three days after her young son's third birthday.

Shabbat, 5 Tishrei 5786 - 27 September 2025

Birth of Naftali

Naftali, the son of Jacob and Bilhah, sixth of the Twelve Tribes, was born on the 5th of Tishrei. He lived to be 133 years old.

Rabbi Akiva Martyred (134 CE)

The great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Akiva, was taken captive by the Romans on 5 Tishrei of the year 3894 (134 CE). His subsequent torture and execution is recalled in the stirring Eleh Ezkarah poem of the Yom Kippur service.