

PARSHAT TOLDOT

25 Cheshvan - 2 Kislev 5786
16 - 22 November 2025

Torah: Genesis 25:19 - 28:9
Haftorah: Malachi 1:1 - 2:7

PSALMS DAILY

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)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Negative Mitzvah 251 Hurtful Words

It is forbidden to verbally distress or humiliate another.

Example: If a person has sinned in their youth and then repented, one may not tell him, "Thank G-d who has taken you away from that path to this good path!" or similar indirect references to his earlier faults that may cause him pain.

Do not enter a store and ask, "How much does this item cost?" when you have no intention to make a purchase.

Our Sages taught that hurtful words are, in fact, a graver sin than defrauding another of money.

THE SECRET OF JEWISH SURVIVAL

Survival Throughout History

Blaise Pascal, French theologian and philosopher, wrote at length about the marvel of Jewish survival. Powerful kings have tried to destroy us, yet we survived, whereas the nations of Greece, Italy, Athens and Rome have long perished. It is said that when King Louis XIV of France asked Pascal to give him proof of G-d's existence, he replied, "Why, the Jews, Your Majesty - the Jews."

Tolstoy, Churchill, Twain, Adams and others have all written with wonder about the phenomenon of Jewish survival. Yet, whereas the believer is quick to credit G-d with our nation's survival, the rationalist will ask, is it not also a product of Jewish tenacity, determination and sheer stubbornness?

Think about it. It is not the survival of our bodies that evokes wonder - it is our survival of spirit, culture and identity. How did a persecuted people, displaced and disheartened, manage to survive? There are no British Philistines today, nor are there Russian Moabites. You have never met a French Ammonite nor an Australian Amalekite, yet there are Russian Jews, British Jews, French Jews and Australian Jews. It is our survival as a people that evokes marvel and that, says the rationalist, is a testament to endurance.

Who is correct, the rationalist or the believer?

Abraham and Isaac

The Torah introduces the Patriarch Isaac in a curious fashion: "*These are the progeny of Isaac, son of Abraham, Abraham begot Isaac.*" Wondering about the apparent redundancy in the verse, the sages explained that the scoffers of the time doubted that Abraham (who was 100 years old at Isaac's birth) begot Isaac and charged that the Philistine king, Abimelech, who briefly abducted Sarah, was the real father. Therefore, G-d made Isaac in the spitting image of his father, so all would know that Abraham was Isaac's father. Isaac was the son of Abraham, and everyone knew it because their similarities testified that Abraham begot Isaac.

Many centuries later, Chassidic masters found a moral teaching in this verse. Abraham was an outgoing man filled with love for people and G-d. Isaac was quiet and disciplined; he worshipped G-d with reverence. The verse teaches us that despite the differences in their natural dispositions, each adopted strains of the other. On occasion, Abraham adopted a posture of reverence and Isaac, one of love. "Isaac was the son

of Abraham, Abraham begot Isaac." You could see strains of one in the other.

The Chassidic masters taught that it isn't sufficient to serve G-d with our inherent traits. To truly connect with G-d, we must serve Him with whatever trait necessary. Sometimes G-d requires us to be courageous, sometimes exuberant, sometimes restrained. And we must rise to the occasion. We must conjure up the necessary traits if we want to be true servants.

The traditional commentaries view this verse as an indication that G-d intervened to defend Abraham from his detractors. The Chassidic commentary views this verse as an indication that Abraham and Isaac routinely transcended their dispositions and limitations to serve G-d. But these two viewpoints are not contradictory; rather, they work hand in hand. When we determine to serve G-d with everything we have, overcoming our every limitation, G-d responds in kind and intervenes miraculously.

So to return to our original question, is our secret of survival divine intervention or human resolve? The answer is both. When we resolve to serve G-d with total devotion, rising to every occasion and giving Him everything we have, G-d responds in kind and ensures our survival miraculously.

Jewish Survival

A brief review of Jewish history will illustrate. Our ancestors were delivered miraculously from Egypt, the house of bondage. Yet, they wouldn't have been liberated if the Jewish women had obeyed their husbands and stopped giving birth. The Egyptians murdered Jewish babies, and rationally there was no reason to have babies that would soon be murdered. G-d saved these children miraculously, but not until Jewish women found the courage to keep having children and build the nation. At the Reed Sea, the Jews were in a quandary: Should they plunge into the sea or retreat to Egypt? G-d split the sea miraculously and the Jews passed through, but not before one Jew, Nachshon Ben Aminadav, plunged into the sea and risked his life to obey G-d's command.

In Persia, Jewish survival was in peril. Events came together in near miraculous fashion to undermine Haman and save the Jews. But not before Esther risked her life by entering the king's chambers unbidden and Mordechai staunchly refused to bow to Haman despite the king's explicit instructions. When

Jews outdid themselves in loyalty to G-d, G-d intervened and saved them.

In Israel, G-d saved our ancestors from oppression by the Syrian Greeks, who occupied our land. Yet, this salvation occurred only because the Maccabees, a brave band of five brothers and their father, stood up to the mighty Syrian Greek army and risked their lives to defend their faith. The survival of the nation after the fall of the Second Temple was nothing short of miraculous. They rebuilt their study halls, homes and community, but not before one brave Jew, Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai, risked his life to negotiate a promise of protection with Vespasian.

The Ukrainian bandit Chmielniki led pogroms across the Ukraine in 5408 (1648). Many Jews were massacred, yet there were miraculous stories of survival. One such story occurred to Rabbi Shabsi Cohen, who fled the Cossacks and survived. The astounding part is that he penned his magnum opus Sifsei Kohen, a vast and incisive analysis of Jewish law, under the most trying of circumstances. Today, no halachic analysis is possible without consulting Rabbi Kohen's works. But we wouldn't have access to Rabbi Kohen's halachic brilliance if he hadn't risen to the occasion and shown such miraculous courage under fire. My great-aunt grew up in the 5680s (1920s) in Soviet Russia, where it was dangerous for a Jewish child to skip school on Shabbat. Her paternal grandfather insisted that all his grandchildren observe Shabbat despite the risk. All her paternal cousins remained observant, a miraculous feat in the Soviet Union.

Survival Today

Jewish survival is no doubt a combination of our tenacity and miraculous intervention. It was true throughout history and it is true today. When talking to Jews living in Israel, you frequently hear them relate that the miraculous in Israel is a matter of course. As Ben-Gurion said, "Anyone who does not believe in miracles is not a realist."

How does Israel survive when, according to most polls, there are large populations within its borders bent on its destruction? How does Israel survive when its neighbors to the north and south lob rockets incessantly?

There is no question that Israel's superior army is responsible for much of this survival, but if this were the only buffer between Israel and destruction, Israel would long have disappeared. The Iron Dome catches most of the missiles headed its way, but who saves Israel from the missiles that slip through the dome and land safely nonetheless?

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The answer is as obvious to us as it was to Pascal. It is G-d who saves the Jews. But G-d saves us when we show our devotion to Him even when it is uncomfortable and even when it is dangerous. Let us resolve to stimulate more miracles by devoting ourselves to Him yet again. Let us resolve to observe a mitzvah we haven't yet observed or strengthen one we already do.

Let us do our part, and in return, let G-d do his.
*By Rabbi Lazer Gurkow
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ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Does every question have an answer? Does every tragedy have an explanation? How am I supposed to react to the beyond-tragic senseless murder of innocent men, women, and children? What shall I think when two courageous individuals, a young couple that selflessly left the comforts of their hometowns and communities and went to far-off India to help their Jewish brothers and sisters, are gunned down by agents of pure evil?

I echo the words of horrified angels, exclaimed upon witnessing the barbaric murders of the holy Ten Martyrs, haunting words repeated each year in the Yom Kippur liturgy: "This is Torah and this is its reward?! Look, look, G-d! See what the enemy is doing!"

In my youth, I merited to bask in the presence of the Rebbe. As a rule, the Rebbe radiated optimism, faith and joy. His enthusiasm was infectious and uplifting.

But I have one memory that will never escape me. It was the 9th of Adar I 5752 (February 13, 1992). It was the last day of Shiva (the week of mourning) for Mrs. Pasha Leah Lapine, a Crown Heights resident who was killed in cold blood by an assailant who broke into her home. That evening, the Rebbe addressed the crowd assembled in Lubavitch World Headquarters. I was stunned by the words - words uttered with such intense emotion and pain. The Rebbe was trembling, even his lecturer was shaking. The following is excerpted from the Rebbe's talk that night:

"What has occurred - an act of open martyrdom - is utterly incomprehensible!

"There is no one to whom to turn for an explanation. All those present, including myself, are equally confounded. So what do we gain by questioning? The question will remain...

"To die Al Kiddush Hashem (for the sanctification of G-d's name) is an incredible merit—as is demonstrated by this episode:

"The venerable Rabbi Yosef Karo reached such a high spiritual level that he was informed from Above that he had 'earned' the merit to die Al Kiddush Hashem. Later, because of his involvement in an incident that was not appropriate - considering his exalted spiritual level - he was denied this privilege.

"What happened afterwards? He lived many more fruitful years, and composed the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law. By authoring this universally accepted Code, Rabbi Karo, in effect, became the rabbi of all Jews until the end of times.

"Yet despite all his subsequent achievements, he was 'denied the privilege' of dying Al Kiddush Hashem; i.e., dying Al Kiddush Hashem would have been considered an even greater merit than being the rabbi of all Jews in all following generations.

"The greatness of dying Al Kiddush Hashem is amplified in this instance, for the victim was a young mother who left behind young children. Being taken from her children is a greater sacrifice than that of her own life. For this means that she must give over the upbringing and education of her children to others. This is the greatest sacrifice possible for a mother.

"For many years to come - if, G-d forbid, the fulfillment of the prophecy 'Those that lie in the dust will arise and sing' (i.e. the resurrection of the dead) will be delayed - these children will long for their mother. They will recount to their own children their intense longing for their mother; they will tell them that she merited to sanctify G-d's Name...

"Enough is enough! Have we not sufficed with all the martyrdom we have experienced until now?"

"And that which G-d derives nachas and pleasure from a Jew's self-sacrifice - it suffices the self-sacrifice of a Jew who is in exile, with the knowledge that this exile has lasted more than 1,900 years - and Moshiach has yet to come!

"Another day passes, another week passes, another moment passes... and Moshiach still has not come. We say and we think and cry out 'Ad Masai!', how long must we wait in exile? And yet what do we see happening? - The sanctification of G-d's Name; a Jewish soul is taken away; a mother is taken from her children.

"May there be no further need to discuss these matters for the Redemption will come immediately. 'Those that lie in the dust will arise and sing,' and those who died Al Kiddush

Hashem will merit to be resurrected first. And then this young woman will encounter her children and continue their education with a joyous heart.

"May this take place in the immediate future, without any delay whatsoever."

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg
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TOLDOT IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Toldot," means "Generations" and it is found in Genesis 25:19. Isaac and Rebecca endure twenty childless years, until their prayers are answered, and Rebecca conceives. She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the "children struggle inside her"; G-d tells her that "there are two nations in your womb," and that the younger will prevail over the elder.

Esau emerges first; Jacob is born clutching Esau's heel. Esau grows up to be "a cunning hunter, a man of the field"; Jacob is "a wholesome man," a dweller in the tents of learning. Isaac favors Esau; Rebecca loves Jacob. Returning exhausted and hungry from the hunt one day, Esau sells his birthright (his rights as the firstborn) to Jacob for a pot of red lentil stew.

In Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, Isaac presents Rebecca as his sister, out of fear that he will be killed by someone coveting her beauty. He farms the land, reopens the wells dug by his father Abraham, and digs a series of his own wells: over the first two there is strife with the Philistines, but the waters of the third well are enjoyed in tranquility.

Esau marries two Hittite women. Isaac grows old and blind, and expresses his desire to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father. Jacob receives his father's blessings for "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. When Esau returns and the deception is revealed, all Isaac can do for his weeping son is to predict that he will live by his sword, and that when Jacob falters, the younger brother will forfeit his supremacy over the elder.

Jacob leaves home for Charan to flee Esau's wrath and to find a wife in the family of his mother's brother, Laban. Esau marries a third wife—Machalath, the daughter of Ishmael.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Tuesday, 27 Cheshvan 5786 - 18 November 2025
Flood ends (2104 BCE)**

On the 27th of Cheshvan of the year 1657 from creation (2104 BCE) "the earth dried" (Genesis 8:14) completing the 365-day duration of the great flood that wiped out all life on earth save for the eight human beings and the animals (at least two of each species) in Noah's ark; on this day G-d commanded Noah to "Come out of the ark" and repopulate, settle and civilize the earth.

Thursday, 29 Cheshvan 5786 - 20 November 2025

Mumbai Terror Attacks (2008)

The city of Mumbai, India, was hit with a series of coordinated terror attacks, starting on Wednesday

evening, the 29th of Cheshvan 5769 (2008), which left close to 200 dead and scores more injured.

One of the terrorists' chosen targets was the local Chabad House, known as the "Nariman House," operated by Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries Rabbi Gavriel Noach (Gabi) and Rivkah (Rivki) Holtzberg.

In the subsequent standoff, which continued until Friday afternoon, Gabi and Rivki and several other Jews in the Chabad House - Rabbis Bentzion Chroman and Leibish Teitelbaum, Norma Schwartzblatt-Rabinowitz and Yocheved Orpaz - were killed in cold blood. May G-d avenge their murders.

Miraculously, the Holtzbergs' two-year-old child, Moshe, was saved by his nanny.

**Friday, 1 Kislev 5786 - 21 November 2025
Rebbe's Recovery (1977)**

For the first time since suffering a major heart attack five weeks earlier, on the eve of Shemini Atzeret, the Rebbe left his office in 770 Eastern Parkway and returned to his home, signaling his recovery. Chassidim all over rejoiced at the good news.

From that day on, the Rebbe redoubled his efforts on behalf of the Jewish nation and all of humanity, and for the dissemination of Torah and Chassidism. From then on, the first of Kislev is celebrated as a day of thanksgiving and rejoicing.