

PARSHAT KI TEITZEI

16-22 August 2026

3-9 Elul 5786

Ki Teitzei: Deuteronomy 21:10 - 25:19

Isaiah 54:1-10

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).

FREE CHOICE, CAUSALITY AND THE PERSON WHO FELL OFF A ROOF

Susan, a new acquaintance, told me her surprising story. She decided to enter a raffle. "Why not? The money goes to a good cause," she thought. The first prize was a trip to Israel. Susan was certain that she wouldn't win and soon forgot about the whole thing. Of course, she won the trip, but the story doesn't end there.

While seated on the plane awaiting take-off, the passenger beside her asked if she would switch seats. Susan said, "Of course," but immediately wondered to herself, "Why did I just give up my aisle seat to sit in the middle?" She had no idea that this quick decision would bring about a positive change in her life. She could not have imagined that she was now sitting between her future husband and future sister-in-law.

How do some occurrences seem to connect? To what extent do Divine providence—free choice—and cause-and-effect intersect? Or do they?

While these are deep and complex questions, the unusual wording of a verse in this week's Torah portion sheds just a little bit of light on this fascinating topic. "When you build a new house, you must make¹ a guardrail (makeh) for your roof, so that the one who is falling will not come to fall from it (emphasis added)." 3.

What does "the one who is falling" mean? Is the Torah warning us of a future event? The Talmud explains that "the person who will fall was predestined to fall since the six days of creation." That's why the verse refers to him as "the one who is falling."

What roles do Divine Providence and free will play in this scenario? Freedom of choice and causality are two systems by which the world operates. The connection between them is explained in the Talmud: "Reward is brought about through those with merit, and punishment through the guilty."

In other words, an individual's act of free will can bring about a pre-ordained result or goal. In this situation, it is the free will of the homeowner who is negligent in erecting a guardrail that will lead to the punishment of the person who was predestined to fall.

Consider this example. You land a dream job starting in a month.

You've got it all planned out. You'll give your current boss the required two weeks' notice, then take two weeks off before the mandatory start date for your new job. But that night you end up in the ER with a painful kidney stone. The X-ray shows a mass and further testing reveals that you have Stage 1 kidney cancer. That's the bad news. The good news is that because it was discovered early, it can be removed safely and you won't need any further treatment. That painful kidney stone actually saved you. However, due to the six-week recovery period, you lose out on the new job. But on the day you were scheduled to have started that new job, your "former" boss calls and offers you a promotion at an even higher salary. Thank G-d!

Freedom of choice and causality work in tandem with Divine providence to bring G-d's plans to fruition. A goal can be achieved in different ways. G-d's desired end can be brought about through any of a variety of means. If a goal is not attained by one means, it will come about by another, but these distinctions may not be obvious to us.

The Talmud's statement that "reward is brought about through those with merit, and punishment through the guilty," might help us understand this. A person's act of free will can be the means to trigger a particular, pre-ordained, occurrence or goal. It may result in either a reward or a punishment. The free will of the homeowner who neglected to erect a guardrail ultimately brought about the punishment of the person who was predestined to fall. Rashi succinctly concludes that if someone falls off a roof, it's because (s)he was a "fallen one," deserving to fall. It is your duty and choice, however, to make sure that it's not your roof.

The Torah neither tells people to forego building houses nor forbids going on the roof. The commandment is simply to build a guardrail. The performance of a straightforward, common-sense mitzvah can prevent potential harm. Therefore, imagine the potential good that can result from going beyond one's comfort zone to help another.

Just ask my friend Susan!

Making It Relevant

In retrospect, how have specific occurrences and choices you have made coincided with surprising outcomes?

Strive to see G-d's providence in your life.

Establish clear boundaries ("guardrails") for yourself to ensure your physical and spiritual safety.

Don't be afraid to go beyond your comfort zone to help another. You never know what good might result from it.

By Katia Bolotin

THE REBBE'S TALKS

SEITZEI: A NEW HOME AND ITS GUARD-RAIL

In the Torah portion of Seitzet we learn: "When you build a new home, you must place a guard-rail around your roof." The purpose of the guard-rail — as the Torah itself goes on to say — is to keep people from falling off an unenclosed roof.

In a spiritual context, the meaning of this commandment is as follows:

Our Sages tell us that "One's wife is [considered as] one's [entire] home," so much so that Rabbi Yossi said: "I never called my spouse 'my wife'...but 'my home.'"

In this context, "when you build a new home," refers to the beginning of one's marriage. When a person marries and sets up a home, he must take upon himself the yoke of earning a livelihood. At such a time a person's spiritual status may easily plummet.

The Torah therefore reminds the individual that since he is beginning a new home and a new lifestyle, with a greater degree of immersion in physicality, he must build a guard-rail. Clearly his previous manner of spiritual service will not suffice, and he must take upon himself additional guard-rails so as not to take a spiritual tumble in thought, speech, or deed.

At times man's body is also referred to as his home. In terms of man's

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spiritual service, this alludes to the general service of birurim, wherein

man seeks to purify and elevate his body and his portion in the physical world. This manner of service is known as a “new home,” for prior to the soul’s descent into this world it had not the foggiest notion as to what the physical world and the spiritual service within it entails.

Furthermore, since the corporeal is infinitely distant from the spiritual, the service of purifying and uplifting this physical world is truly something new. When a Jew serves G-d in this manner, the world itself becomes an abode for G-d.

This concept of an abode for G-d is also something “new.” Prior to this manner of service, the degree of G-dliness that manifested itself in this lowly world was restricted. However, as a result of this manner of service, this physical world becomes an abode for G-d — G-d Himself is manifest within this world.

Understandably, building such important new edifices has a tremendous impact upon the builder. He, too, is refined and uplifted in a “new” and infinitely greater manner — to a point that his soul reaches an even higher state of existence than it enjoyed prior to its descent within a body.

The “vessel” that must serve as a receptacle to this new and lofty level of elevation is the act of self-nullification. For the only way one can attain a degree of infinite elevation is to totally nullify oneself before G-d, thereby freeing oneself from the limiting encumbrances of one’s previous level.

This, then, is the inner meaning of a guard-rail. The protective and preventive measures — the “guard-rail” — that the person undertakes in the course of his spiritual service are an expression of his self-abnegation and acceptance of the Heavenly Yoke. This enables him to be a fit vessel to the “new home.”

There is a practical lesson in this: A person should not shut himself off from the rest of the world; he must build a “home,” a dwelling place, for G-d in this nethermost world. For it is only through the descent within this world that the ultimate and truly new ascent is accomplished, Above as well as below.

On the other hand, one must know that in order to transform the physical into a vessel for G-dliness, a person must make a guard-rail — he must remain apart from the physical world’s grossness and corporeality. While it is true that he must busy himself with physical things, they should remain insignificant to him; he knows and feels that the only reason he occupies himself with corporeality is in order to fulfill the Divine intent of transforming this world into a home for G-d.

Based on Likkutei Sichos Vol. XIX, pp. 208-214.

PIRKEI AVOT

Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] would say: Which is the right path for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it, and harmonious for mankind.

Be as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards of the mitzvot. Consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards, and the rewards of a transgression against its cost.

Contemplate three things, and you will not come to the hands of transgression: Know what is above from you: a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all your deeds being inscribed in a book.

Regarding “an eye that sees,” a story is told of an unlearned coachman who was driving a great tzaddik. Enroute, they passed a beautiful orchard. The poor coachman’s appetite swelled and he said to his passenger, “I will go down and pick some fruit for myself, and you sit here and be on the lookout for me.” As he was about to pick an apple from the tree, he heard the rabbi scream, “Men zet, men zet” — “They see, they see.” Immediately he ran back to the coach, and after looking around, the frightened coachman said, “Who is looking? I do not see, anyone?!” The rabbi said with a soft smile, “Hashem above sees, and He was looking at what you were about to do.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 3 Elul, 5786 – 16 August, 2026

Rabbi A. I. Kook (1935)

Elul 3 is the yahrtzeit of the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi (in modern times) of the Religious Zionist Jewish community in the Holy Land, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who assumed his position upon the formation of the British Mandate in 1920. A leading philosopher and mystic, Rabbi Kook authored many books and letters, and is a founding father of the “Religious Zionist” movement.

Thursday, 7 Elul, 5786 – 20 August, 2026

Moses’ parents remarry (1394 BCE)

Amram and Jocheved had separated because of Pharaoh’s decree that all male Jewish babies be killed. Prompted by their six-year-old daughter Miriam’s rebuke (“Pharaoh decreed against the males; you decreed against the males and the females”) they remarried on the 7th of Elul of the year 2367 from creation (1394 BCE). Moses was born six months and one day later on Adar 7, 2368 (Talmud, Sotah 12b).

Spies die (1312 BCE)

The Spies who slandered the Land of Israel died in the desert (Talmud, Sotah 35a; see Numbers 13-14 and text and links for Av 9 and Av 15).

Friday, 8 Elul, 5786 – 21 August, 2026

Washington Responds to Newport Jews (1790)

The sexton of the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, wrote a heart warming letter to George Washington, on behalf of the Jewish community welcoming the President on his visit to Newport. In his letter, he expressed a vision of an American government that would permit all religions to live side by side in harmony, giving all its citizens the freedom to practice their religions.

On August 18, 1790, President Washington responded:

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

...May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid...

Shabbat, 9 Elul, 5786 - August 22, 2026

Nachmanides Renews Jerusalem community (1267)

Nachmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) arrived in Jerusalem, after being forced to flee his native Spain and renewed its Jewish community there. The synagogue he established is functional today, having been restored following the liberation of the Old City during the Six-Day War in 1967.

Birth of Dan (1566 BCE)

Dan, the son of Jacob and Bilhah, fifth of the Twelve Tribes, was born on 9 Elul in Haran. He lived to the age of 125. (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot, remez 162)

Passing of R. Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (1900)

R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin was one of the most famous chassidic leaders in the second half of the nineteenth century. An original thinker and prolific author, his many works span the gamut of Jewish literature and beyond, addressing topics as diverse as Jewish law, mysticism, chassidic thought, biblical interpretation, and even a collection of scholarly interpretations revealed to him in dreams.