

PARSHAT NITZAVIM

VAYELECH

17-23 Elul 5787

19-25 September 2027

Nitzavim-Vayelech: Deuteronomy

29:9 - 31:30

Isaiah 61:10 - 63:9

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).

Sacred material please do not desecrate

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ALEPH INSTITUTE

No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

The Last Two Mitzvahs

There are 248 "do this" mitzvahs in the Torah (and 365 "don't do this" mitzvahs).

Counting in chronological order, number 247, the second-to-last mitzvah that Moses delivers to the Jewish people, is the mitzvah of Hakhel: Assemble the people once in seven years and relive the giving of the Torah. (Read about how that is done here.)

But why? What is it about this particular mitzvah that requires it be given on the last day of Moses' life?

Is it because it's a mitzvah you can only do in the Land of Israel?

There are plenty of agricultural mitzvahs that can only be performed in the Land of Israel. That didn't stop Moses from instructing the people in them long before.

Well, you'll say, this is different. It's a commemoration of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. As long as they are in the wilderness of Sinai, hearing Torah from Moses, removed from the mundane activities of seeding, harvesting and protecting their land, they don't need a commemoration. You don't sit down and look through your family vacation shots while you're still inside Disney World.

But now that Moses is handing things over to Joshua, who will take them soon into the promised land, now they need to be told, "Don't allow yourselves to forget this experience. Replay it once every seven years!"

Sounds good. But not very Moses-like.

In the wilderness, they were surrounded by the "clouds of glory" that protected them from sun and sandstorm. Moses told them that once they enter the promised land, they should celebrate the Festival of Sukkot. They were to dwell in temporary huts as a commemoration of the divine protection they had received in the wilderness. He told them that long before they were ready to leave, while those clouds still hovered over their heads.

And what about Passover? Even before they had actually left Egypt, as they were assembled in Ramses, Moses stood there, telling them, "You're about to leave for the promised land. When you get there, you're going to have children. They will never have witnessed this great miracle. So you will have to make a Passover Seder every year to tell them the story, and eat matzah for seven days, too."

So why doesn't Moses stick to form and right there and then at Mount Sinai tell the people, "Remember this day! Relive it with your children! Make an assembly once every seven years!"

Why is Hakhel the only commemorative mitzvah that has to wait until the eleventh hour, just as the experience it is commemorating is coming to an end?

A simple answer: Only now has it been established that Moses is not coming with us. As long as Moses is in the picture, the experience of receiving the Torah at the foot of Mount Sinai goes on and on. Even once farming the land, every year is guaranteed to be a Hakhel year.

But now it's official that Joshua is replacing Moses. Moses pleaded with G-d for an entry pass, but he was turned down. If so, a once-in-seven-years replay suddenly becomes vital.

That also explains the very last mitzvah that Moses transmitted, number 248: Everyone must write a Torah scroll for themselves. (Today, that mitzvah is fulfilled anytime you buy a Torah book for your home.)

With Moses around, who needs a book? If you're living by a water fountain, why buy bottled water?

Only without Moses on the scene do you need a hard copy, a tangible manifestation of the Torah he taught us.

So imagine now you're one of those people who came of age in the Sinai Peninsula, camping out day and night with Moses and 600,000 other Jews, many of whom held a vivid memory of the sights and sounds of G-d's voice booming on the sixth of Sivan of that year they left Egypt.

Every once in a short while, the trumpets sound and everyone rushes to hear what Moses will teach next—teachings delivered to him from the same divine voice everyone heard at Mount Sinai. For months following, the entire camp is buzzing with discussion and debate over this new divine teaching.

Could you imagine making a commemoration of all this in the future?

No way. This was an experience that could never end! If it would end, how could such a nation possibly continue to exist? How could anyone continue forging this 248-connection/365-parameter bond with the Infinite without the total awareness of "G-d is speaking to us right now" every day?

No, you would say, we're holding on to this for eternity. Moses can't leave us. Ever.

And now, G-d informs you through Moses that He has other plans. You and the rest of the nation are going to have to go it on your own. Not entirely on your own—you'll have Moses' prodigy, Joshua.

And Moses, too—as the rabbis said, "Moses never died. He just took over from a higher place." Just like he led you then, he leads you now. But visibly, with your very human eyes, it will be up to you to keep the inspiration alive.

So Moses says, "To do that, to hold onto a glimmer of this experience of Sinai, this is what you will need to do:"

"Once in seven years, relive Sinai. A representative of mine will stand there and read from this Torah I transcribed for you. And you, every one of you, men, women, children, the deaf and the blind, the learned and the illiterate, all as one, will hearken with awe, with trembling, so that love and fear will be planted in your hearts and grow with every mitzvah you do."

Until we are all together once again in the final, eternal Temple in the promised land.

By Tzvi Freeman

Daily Wisdom: Friday

Sixth Reading: Deuteronomy 31:14–19

G-d then summoned Moses to the entrance to the Tabernacle. G-d spoke to him from a pillar of cloud that appeared over the Tabernacle's entrance, informing him that He was going to dictate a poem to him that he should teach the Jewish people. The purpose of the poem was to inspire the Jewish people to remain loyal to G-d throughout any misfortunes that might befall them as a result of their misdeeds.

Interpreting Evil

הלא על כן אין אלקי בקרבי מצאוני הרעות האלה: (דברים לא:יז)

[G-d told Moses that the Jews would say during their misfortunes,]

“Is it not because our G-d is no longer among us that these evils have befallen us?” Deuteronomy 31:17

We are naturally disposed to overlook our own faults – or, if we do acknowledge them, to rationalize them. This verse teaches us that in order to show us our own faults, G-d shows them to us in other people. “Because my G-d is not within me,” i.e., “because I am not spiritually mature enough to be sensitive to my own shortcomings” – “this evil has befallen me,” i.e., “I have been forced to see my own evil reflected in my fellow Jew.”

Therefore, rather than focusing on others' faults, we should try to focus on their virtues and excuse their shortcomings. Not only should we focus on others' virtues in our own minds; we should praise them for their virtues, and praise them to other people. In this way, we foster mutual love and respect. Just as we are encouraged to inspire those around us to love G-d, so are we encouraged to inspire those around us to love every Jew, for loving our fellow Jew leads us to love G-d.

Daily Wisdom: Shabbat

Seventh Reading: Deuteronomy 31:20–30

Moses then instructed the Levites to place the Torah scroll that he would soon write in the Ark of the Covenant, together with the Tablets of the Covenant that he received at Mount Sinai.

Being United with the Torah

לקח את ספר התורה הזה ושמתם אתו מצד וגו': (דברים לא:כו)

[Moses told the Levites,] “Take this Torah scroll and place it alongside [the Tablets of Testimony].” Deuteronomy 31:26

Thus, the Ark in the Tabernacle contained the Torah both engraved in stone and written on parchment. The difference between engraved and written letters is that the engraved letters are part and parcel of the stone, whereas written letters are not part of the parchment but added to it. Thus, engraved letters express our intrinsic connection to the Torah, whereas written letters allude to how we preserve our connection to the Torah even during our mundane lives, when we think of ourselves as being separate from the Torah.

The presence of both the engraved Torah and the inscribed Torah within the Ark indicates that we must first experience our intrinsic connection with the Torah and then carry that experience with us into our mundane lives.

Translated and Adapted by Moshe Wisniefsky

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, September 12, 2027

10 Elul, 5787

Noah Dispatches Raven (2105 BCE)

On the 10th of Elul of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE), as the Great Flood neared its end, Noah opened the window of the Ark and dispatched a raven to determine if the flood waters had begun to recede (Genesis 8:1; Rashi). For a discussion of the deeper significance of this event, see The Window.

Monday, September 13, 2027

11 Elul, 5787

Completion of Beit Yosef (1542)

In 1522, Rabbi Yosef Caro started writing the Beit Yosef, his famous commentary on the Arba Turim, Yaakov Ben Asher's comprehensive Halachic code. He started writing this commentary in Adrianople, Turkey, and continued for the next twenty years, during which time he relocated to Safed, Israel. He completed the monumental work on the 11th of Elul. It took another ten years for the writings to be published.

Tuesday, September 14, 2027

12 Elul, 5787

Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe visits US (1929)

On the 12th of Elul (September 16) of 1929, two years after escaping a death sentence imposed upon him by the Russian Communist regime and his subsequent departure from that country, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, arrived in New York for a ten-month tour of the United States. In the course of his stay the Rebbe visited the Jewish communities in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, S. Louis, Boston and several other communities, and was received by President Hoover at the White House. The purpose of the Rebbe's visit was twofold: a) to bring the plight of Russian Jewry to the attention of the American Jewish community and raise funds for the Rebbe's efforts on its behalf; b) to improve the state of Yiddishkeit (Torah-true Judaism) in America and strengthen the ties of the American Chabad-Chassidic community with the Rebbe. The Rebbe also wished to explore the possibility of settling in the U.S. and establishing the headquarters of Chabad there; though he did not decide to do so at that time, his 1929 visit laid the foundations for his move to New York in 1940 and the revolutionary changes he wrought in American Jewish life.

Tuesday, September 14, 2027

12 Elul, 5787

Nachmanides Born (1194)

Birth of Nachmanides ("Ramban", Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) -- Torah scholar, Kabbalist, philosopher, physician and Jewish leader -- in Gerona, Spain, in the year 4954 from creation.

Wednesday, September 15, 2027

13 Elul, 5787

R. Yosef Yitzchak's marriage (1897)

Marriage of the 6th Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), to Rebbetzin Nechamah Dinah (1882-1971).

Friday, September 17, 2027

15 Elul, 5787

Tomchei Temimim founded (1897)

The Yeshivah "Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch", the first to integrate the "revealed" part of Torah (Talmud and Halachah) with the esoteric teachings of Chassidism in a formal study program, was on this date founded by the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn.