Torah Weekly

בס״ד

PARSHAT TOLDOT

8 – 14 November 2026
28 Cheshvan – 4 Kislev 5787

Parsha: **Toldot: Genesis 25:19 - 28:9**
***Haftarah*: Malachi 1:1 - 2:7**

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 Matzoh 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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DID JACOB NOT CARE FOR HIS MOTHER?

Three Jewish mothers were sitting on a bench discussing how much their sons love them.

"You know the Chagall painting hanging in my living room?" asked Betty. "My son Arnold bought that for my 75th birthday. What a good boy, he really loves his mother."

"You call that love?" scoffed Dorothy. "You know the BMW I just got for Mother's Day? That's from my son Bernie. What a doll!"

Whereupon Shirley countered, "That's nothing! You know my son Stanley? He pays tons of money for a session with a psychologist every week. And what does he talk about? Me!"

I was reminded of this old Jewish joke when reading this week's Torah portion. Rebecca overhears her blind and elderly husband, Isaac, telling their son Esau to bring him some food so that he may bless him before he dies. Rebecca instructs Jacob to impersonate his twin brother Esau, and gives him food that Isaac enjoys, so that he, rather than the wicked Esau, will receive the blessings.

But Jacob protests. "My brother Esau is a hairy person, and I am smooth-skinned. If my father feels me and realizes that I am an imposter, I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing."

"Let your curse be upon me, my son..." his mother offers.

And indeed, Rebecca gave Jacob the food and Esau's clothing to wear, and the rest is history. Isaac felt the hairy skins Jacob had placed on his arms and was confused, uttering the now-famous line, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

In the end, Jacob received the blessings, Esau was incensed and threatened to kill his brother, and Jacob was compelled to leave town.

But my question is: Didn't Jacob love his mother? He was afraid of incurring his father's wrath, but no sooner does his mother say, "Your curse be upon me, my son," and Jacob agrees to go along with the ruse! You don't want to be cursed, but you're happy for your mother to be?!

Is this behavior becoming of Jacob, one of the founding fathers of our faith?

One straightforward approach I have gathered from the commentaries is this:

When Jacob saw that his mother was prepared to take the fall, to risk the potentially lethal curse of Isaac, he realized that these were no ordinary blessings.

It wasn't a case of Fiddler on the Roof's "A blessing on your head, mazel tov, mazel tov."

These blessings would effectively designate the recipient as the next link in the chain of Jewish leadership and peoplehood. Whichever son received them would determine the very fate and destiny of the Jewish People.

Can you just imagine if in our prayers every day we intoned "the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and ... Esau"? Would our nation ever have become who we are if Esau, rather than Jacob, was the spiritual successor to Isaac?

If his mother was prepared to risk being cursed by the holy Isaac, this was proof enough to Jacob how absolutely critical it was for these blessings to be conferred upon him and not Esau. And so, then and there, Jacob agreed to his mother's request.

This also explains how the holy patriarch Jacob could engage in deception, impersonating his brother before his blind father. Every year in shul someone asks me the obvious question: How could Yaakov Avinu, Jacob our forefather, lie?! How could he tell his father he was Esau?

But to save a life, deception is justified. And to save the life and legacy of an entire nation it is certainly justified.

Indeed, when Isaac realizes what transpired, what does he say? He doesn't berate Jacob at all. Instead, he states "Indeed, [Jacob] shall remain blessed."

Jacob, like all Jewish boys, loved his mother. But he and his mother loved G-d and were fully aware of the sacred responsibility on their shoulders to be guardians of our faith and our people. This was not a game. This was no charade. Isaac, in his blindness, or for whatever reason, felt that Esau should receive the blessings. Rebecca, with her woman's intuition, knew better.

Both Jacob and Rebecca were fully cognizant of their mission to perpetuate Judaism and our glorious nation. And thanks to their courage, commitment, and preparedness for sacrifice, Jewish continuity was safe and assured for eternity.

By Yossy Goldman

WHY (AND HOW) DOES THE FIRSTBORN GET A DOUBLE INHERITANCE?

Question:

I recently had a conversation with a close friend of mine who just lost his father, and his siblings were working on dividing the inheritance. He mentioned that according to Torah law the firstborn gets a double portion of inheritance. Why is that? Also, does the firstborn always inherit double, or are there some limits to this clause?

Reply:

You've touched on quite a sensitive topic, so I would advise you to tread lightly with your friend when discussing inheritance.

The directive to give the firstborn a double portion is found in the Book of Deuteronomy: "He [the father] must acknowledge the firstborn . . . and give him a double share in all that he possesses, for he [the firstborn son] is the first fruits of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his."

Practically speaking, this means that if there are five sons, you first split the inheritance into six portions, and the firstborn son gets two portions while everyone else gets one.

What makes the firstborn so special that he receives a double portion? Many commentaries have offered explanations, but ultimately the halachah is derived from the verse itself. (As you'll see below, some of the reasons would apply equally to firstborn daughters, or to the mother's firstborn. Yet the halachic firstborn is the father's oldest son.)

"All firsts are beloved by G-d." Just as there is the mitzvah that the first fruits are brought as an offering to G-d (bikkurim), as is the first of the flock (bechor beheimah), so does G-d have a special love for the firstborns, and they are given a double portion.

It is the firstborn who stands in the father's stead, perpetuating his continued memory. It was his birth that made the father into a father,

revealing his latent power of parenthood.

Although further elaboration is beyond the scope of this article, this is one of the reasons given as to why it was generally only the sons who inherited, as in ancient times it was the sons who would carry on the family name. Property ownership was generally passed down through the males, and they in turn were obligated to support their unmarried sisters (that is, unless there were no sons, in which case the daughters inherited, as in the fascinating incident of the five righteous daughters of Tzelafchad). However, as we'll discuss later, there is a way to include the daughters in the inheritance as well.

Originally, the firstborns were supposed to dedicate their lives to the Divine service in the Temple. Due to their part in the sin of the Golden Calf, the Temple service was taken away from them and given to the Levites, who don't get a portion in the land. In their stead, the firstborns get a double portion, theirs and the Levites.

The first child born from the mother's womb paves the way for all subsequent children. The double portion is an expression of gratitude

As noted above, the laws of inheritance are derived from the verse itself. Thus, some of the law's nuances don't fully jibe with the above explanations.

Here is an outline of some of the basic laws regarding inheritance:

One can choose to distribute his assets so that one son receives a greater portion, as long as the firstborn still receives his double share. Trying to word the will so that the firstborn does not receive his double share is halachically prohibited. However, one is permitted to "gift" his assets before his passing, even if there is very little that remains for the firstborn's double share. (Gifts can be used to give daughters a share as well.)

Nevertheless, one should not gift all his assets, so that the Torah's rules of inheritance apply to at least a portion of the estate and are not entirely uprooted. In light of this, one should keep in mind that writing a will according to Jewish law is somewhat different than according to secular law, and it should be written with the help of a rabbi knowledgeable in these laws.

The oldest son must have been born naturally in order to receive a double share. If he was delivered through a cesarean section, neither he nor any subsequent children have firstborn status. However, unlike the requirement for pidyon haben, a previous miscarriage does not disqualify the firstborn from getting the double inheritance.

Additionally, the firstborn need not be the mother's firstborn son. As long as he is the father's firstborn son, born while the father was still alive, he is considered the firstborn with regard to the laws of inheritance.

The firstborn inherits double only from his father's estate, not his mother's. When it comes to inheriting the mother's estate, the firstborn is considered the same as all the other brothers.

On a practical level, this means that if the father and mother were joint owners of an estate, and the father passed away first, the firstborn would get a double portion only from the father's half of the estate, not the mother's.

The firstborn is entitled to a double share only of the assets that were muchzak, meaning actually "in holding" by the deceased at the time of his death. Assets that were only potentially in his possession (ra'uy) but not actually in holding (such as uncollected loans for which no collateral was taken) are distributed evenly among the heirs.

This last rule has vast implications for assets such as bank accounts and stocks. While the details are beyond the scope of this article, many authorities are of the opinion that due to the technical details of how bank accounts really work, most have the status of only being ra'uy—potentially in the father's possession, but not "in holding." Thus, in many instances, any money left in a bank account would be divided equally between all the heirs, without the firstborn getting a double share.

As you can see, the laws of inheritance can get complex, so it's important to consult with a qualified rabbi to ensure that all is done according to Jewish law.

Although this is an emotionally fraught time for the children of the deceased, it can also be an opportunity for the siblings to come closer together as they take care of their parents' legacy. There is no greater pleasure for the souls of the deceased parents than when they see their children living in peace and harmony together. And G-d's blessing rests where there is peace.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 29 Cheshvan, 5787 – 9 November, 2026

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, 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.

Tuesday, 30 Cheshvan, 5787 – 10 November, 2026

Passing of R. Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg (2006)

R. Eliezer Yehuda was a well-known contemporary halachic authority who resided in Jerusalem. His halachic decisions are held in high esteem, especially in the field of medical practice. Many of these decisions appear in his 22-volume set of responsa titled Tzitz Eliezer.

Wednesday, 1 Kislev, 5787 – 11 November, 2026

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.

Friday, 3 Kislev, 5787 – 13 November, 2026

Kamenitz-Podolsk Talmuds Saved (5518/1757)

As a result of the libelous slander of the Frankists (followers of Sabbatai Zevi, the archbishop of Kamenitz decreed that all Hebrew books of the communities in his jurisdiction should be burned. On this day, he suffered a miraculous downfall and the decree was annulled. (Imrei Pinchas, 2003 ed., vol. 1, pp. 496–498)

Pnei Yehoshua Saved (5463/1702)

The explosion of some barrels of gunpowder that had been caught on fire resulted in the collapse of a number of nearby buildings, placing Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk in mortal danger. In distress, he pledged that if he would survive, he would commit himself to studying the Talmud and its commentaries. He was miraculously saved, and went on to author his classic Talmudic commentary, Pnei Yehoshua. (Introduction of the author to the above work)

Temple Cleared in Chanukah Miracle (3622/-139)

After overcoming the Greek forces, the Hasmoneans cleared the Temple from the idolatrous images that had been erected there. (Megilat Taanit ch. 9)

Shabbat, 4 Kislev, 5787 – 14 November, 2026

Purim Teveryah (5503/1743)

After a three-month-long unsuccessful battle and siege waged by Suleiman Pasha, governor of Damascus, against the sheikh of Tiberias, the governor finally left the city. To mark their salvation and the numerous miracles that had occurred throughout the siege, the Jews of Tiberias, led by the venerable R. Chaim Abulafia (1660–1744), established this date as a yearly festival of rejoicing and praise to G-d. (Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez, Esther 9:28)