Torah Weekly

בס״ד

PARSHAT VAYETZE
15 – 21 November 2026
5 – 11 Kislev, 5787
Torah Reading:
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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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone, No One Forgotten.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF JACOB'S LADDER? A TIMELESS METAPHOR

Innovation is a hallmark of the human spirit. Innovators, the pioneers of new ideas, challenge the status quo and aim to improve upon it. Each generation distinguishes itself through its introduction of new and improved innovations.

How many of us still use typewriters or cassette recorders? What were once amazing innovations fall out of fashion, eventually becoming obsolete. Such are the consequences of innovation.

Yet even in today's technological world, some things possess timeless staying power. Take, for example, the ladder—the subject of Jacob's dream in Parshat Vayeitzei. The Hebrew word for "ladder" is sulam. A permutation of the Hebrew letters of sulam uncovers a deep insight that explains the ladder's lasting significance. By rearranging the letters of sulam—samech, lamed, mem—we reveal another word, semel, which means "symbol."

What is the symbolism of the ladder? This simplistic device for climbing up or down has not undergone a conceptual alteration since its inception.

Metaphorically, the Torah expands the simple function of the ladder to include imagery that bridges the gap between heaven and earth. Through visual imagery, we can grasp the concept of a transition.

The Bridge Vs. the Ladder

Life presents us with various transitions that challenge the status quo of our comfort levels. We may find ourselves at a crossroads, recognizing the need for change but unsure of which road to take. We may feel unprepared and unequipped to navigate the unfamiliar journey we face ahead. How do we best transverse the liminal space between where we are and where we would like to be? What are the best means to help us reach our desired goals and destination? How do we combat the feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability that can confront us along the way, eclipsing the guiding light of faith?

When navigating an unknown terrain or transition, there are two choices: You can cross over it by bridging the gap from point A to point B or transcend it. Often, the image of a bridge is used to represent passing from one stage in life to the next. Yet while we are changing our place, we are not necessarily being changed or changing ourselves. While remaining at the same altitude, we cannot transcend our present state of being or perspective. In contrast, while ascending or descending on a ladder, rung by rung, we change our altitude incrementally. We are either moving up or down, never remaining static. Our vantage point either broadens as we ascend or constricts as we descend.

The Ladder Symbolizing the Rise and Fall of Nations

Jacob's simple ladder foreshadows the trajectory of human development. The Midrash describes how we are being foretold of the continuous rise and fall of various nations that will command the world's center stage for a time and then sink into oblivion. Israel's oppressors are among them, as we are forewarned of their prominence. Rashi brings out that the ascending angels represent those spiritual forces that accompany Jacob and the Jewish people while in our homeland, Eretz Yisrael. They must return heavenward when Jacob leaves the Holy land but are replaced by other angelic forces best suited to safeguard the Jewish nation when dwelling outside of the land. Rashi's explanation foretells our eventual merit to settle in the land of Israel.

The Ladder of Prayer: Transitioning Between Heaven and Earth

Jacob's ladder also widens our perspectives on the power of prayer as a vehicle for navigating the transition between Heaven and Earth. Meaningful prayer creates a spiritual imprint; such prayer leaves its impression upon the fabric of both physical time and spiritual eternity. Our prayers are activated only to the degree that we are mindful and sincere. In Jacob's dream, they are depicted as angelic forms rising. Our sages tell us that our prayers create accompanying angels or energies of varying strengths. The sincerity and sheer intent of each heart propels it to ascend the rungs of physicality. A prayer can pierce through the finite as it yearns and strives to reach the infinite realms.

The Ladder as a Spiritual GPS: Charting Spiritual Growth

The image of Jacob's ladder holds the potential to be utilized as a device to chart and measure the progress and course of spiritual growth and development. Each rung either ascending or descending is a visual image that indicates where one's spiritual altitude is at any given moment. As a mental cue, Jacob's ladder can provide powerful assistance in developing cognitive and spiritual muscle. As physical resistance stimulates the body to build muscle, spiritual resistance promotes the development of inner strength and resilience. "Raising the spiritual bar," symbolized by the rungs of Jacob's ladder, can give one a visual image of where they are holding in terms of thoughts and reactions towards life's daily challenges and provocations.

Does my choice of words in any given situation denigrate or elevate my place on the ladder? Am I ascending or descending through the way I have expressed myself to others? How do the relationships in my life affect the altitude of my attitude? Which way am I moving, up or down? Do my thoughts raise my altitude, thereby improving my attitude, or lower and diminish it?

Jacob's ladder holds the potential to be updated into a spiritual GPS, actually calibrating the direction of our thoughts and actions. It can serve to chart our path to keep us on course and to reach our ultimate destination. It's the oldest, yet the newest app that's out there. Ascending Jacob's ladder can represent a lifetime of spiritual journeying. From a macro to a micro level, this ancient vision remains an enduring symbol of timeless relevance and is a portal from the past to the present, and from the present to the future.

Making It Relevant

Visualize yourself climbing up or down a ladder. The ladder charts your personal growth. What rung do you see yourself on? Are you ascending or descending from the position you were on previously? Recognize that you are not static. You may be on a low rung but ascending, or on a high rung descending. Would you rather be descending from a high rung or ascending from a low rung? Also, remember that if you slip down a rung, you can climb back up ... or even go higher.

Throughout each day, assess where you are on your personal ladder, in regard to thinking positively rather than negatively.

Be mindful of your responses to provocation or challenge. Visualize your reactions and outward behaviors as occupying a rung on the ladder. In what direction are you moving? How can you alter your direction?

By Katia Bolotin

THE STRENGTH OF JACOB

Modern day society has sprouted all types of gurus. We have experts on childcare and healthy eating, education and entertainment. Self-help books top best-seller lists every year. Is there any place for a rabbi in a society that has specialists to advise us on every area of our life? Does Judaism truly have something to say about every aspect of our life, or are the rabbis who claim to have an opinion on everything simply intrusive and controlling? Should rabbis just stick to teaching Torah?

Over three thousand years ago, our forefather Jacob was on the run. His brother Esau had tried to kill him so he had taken shelter with his uncle Laban, tending his crops, marrying his daughters and earning himself a comfortable living. After suffering through Laban's continual machinations, Jacob heeded G-d's call that he go back home. He took his family and cattle and headed out for the Holy Land. Laban pursued Jacob and overtook him; only thanks to G-dly intervention was Jacob's life saved.

During their encounter, Laban challenged Jacob on leaving without his permission: "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle..."—Genesis 31:43

What was Laban saying? He had literally sold his daughters to Jacob, demanding that he work fourteen years for the privilege of marrying them. Jacob had worked another seven hard years for his herds of cattle. What demands could Laban have of him?

But Laban was arguing a finer point. "The children belong to me," says Laban. "You, Jacob, are fine the way you are: a man raised in the 'old country' whose natural habitat is the tents of Torah learning and prayer. But what do you want of the children? They belong to another generation, another world. They must be raised in the spirit of the times, equipped to earn a living and a place in society. Do you truly expect them to negotiate modern life with nothing but your ancient tomes? You are a good man Jacob, but leave the children to me...

"The cattle are my cattle, Jacob. I wouldn't dream of interfering with your spiritual life, Rabbi—I'll be the first to admit that I'm no authority on religion. By all means, consult your sacred books on how to keep the Shabbat or how to light your Chanukah candles. But when it comes to business affairs, do you think that the stock market conforms to the standards of the Code of Jewish Law? That you can retain both your competitive edge and your talmudic ethics? You'll be eaten alive out there. Reserve your piety for the synagogue and study hall, but do yourself a favor—leave the cattle to me, okay?"

Jacob refuted Laban then, as we must refute the Laban inside us and the Labans in society now. Judaism has something to say on every aspect of our lives, and its teachings must be as relevant to us as it was to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob thousands of years ago.

By Eli Pink

THE ULTIMATE MATCHMAKER

A matron asked Rabbi Yosi ben Chalafta: "In how many days did G-d create the world?" Said he to her: "In six days." Asked she: "And from then until now, what does He do?"

Said he: "He sits and matches up couples."

Said she: "And this is His artistry? I, too, can do that! How many servants and maids do I have! In a fleeting moment I can pair them."

Said he to her: "For you it may be easy. For G-d it is as difficult as the splitting of the sea." Rabbi Yosi ben Chalafta left her and went.

What did she do? She took a thousand slaves and a thousand slave-girls, lined them up in two rows, and announced: "You marry him, and you marry her." On the next morning they came before her — this one with a wound in his head, that one with a drooping eye, this one's arm dismantled and that one's leg broken. Said she to them: "What happened to you?" The one said, "I don't want him," and the other said, "I don't want her..." Immediately she sent for Rabbi Yosi ben Chalafta and said to him: "Rabbi, your Torah is true, beautiful and praiseworthy. Everything that you said was well said."

(Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 68)

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Tuesday, 7 Kislev, 5787 – 17 November, 2026

Jehoaikim Burnt Lamentations (3321/-440)

Jehoaikim, King of Judah, burnt a scroll dictated by the prophet Jeremiah and written by his disciple Baruch son of Neriah. This scroll was the book of Lamentations, and was written to forewarn the king of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. (Jeremiah ch. 36. Megilat Taanit, perek ha'acharon. It should be noted that other sources provide alternate dates—see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 580:1 and Magen Avraham ad loc.)

Death of King Herod (3760/-1)

Death of Herod, King of Judea. Herod seized the rule from the Hasmoneans, after killing them all. Fearing that the rabbis would challenge his authority, he killed them all, leaving only Bava ben Buta. Later, out of remorse for his cruelty, he had the Holy Temple completely renovated.

Thursday, 9 Kislev, 5787 – 19 November, 2026

Birth & Passing of R. Dovber of Lubavitch (1773; 1827)

Kislev 9 is both the birthday and day of passing of Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, son of and successor to the founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Rabbi DovBer was known for his unique style of "broadening rivers" -- his teachings were the intellectual rivers to his father's wellspring, lending breadth and depth to the principles set down by Rabbi Schneur Zalman.

Born in Liozna, White Russia in 1773, Rabbi DovBer was named after Rabbi Schneur Zalman's mentor and teacher, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, who had passed away on Kislev 19 of the previous year. Rabbi DovBer assumed the leadership of Chabad upon his father's passing in 1812. In 1813 he settled in the town of Lubavitch, which was to serve as the movement's headquarters for the next 102 years. In 1826, he was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated.

Rabbi DovBer passed away on his 54th birthday in 1827, a day before the first anniversary of his liberation.

Friday, 10 Kislev, 5787 – 20 November, 2026

Liberation of R. DovBer (1826)

In 1826, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch (see calendar entry for yesterday, Kislev 9) was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated. The date of his release, Kislev 10, is celebrated amongst Chabad Chassidim as a "festival of liberation." Tachnun (confession of sins) is omitted from the day's prayers, farbrengens are held, and Rabbi DovBer's teachings are studied.