



Our Hevruta

A Fourth Grade Multigenerational Torah Learning Circle



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Our *Hevruta*

What is “Our *Hevruta*”?

Our *Hevruta* is a new fourth grade program at Temple Isaiah. Our *Hevruta* is a multigenerational community, learning Torah together. Facilitators are members of our congregation trained by our clergy and/or educators to lead discussions over Torah.

Objective: **To understand how to explore Scripture.**
 To identify where our sacred texts intersect with our selves.

What is *Hevruta*?

חברותא

Hevruta is Aramaic for “friendship.” In Judaism, we use this word to refer to the special relationship we have when we study Torah together. *Hevruta* is a trusted learning partner, or better yet, a dear companion in the exploration of our tradition. It is with our *Hevruta* that we discover those shining places where the sacred story of our people intersects with our own personal lives. Where Eternity meets Moment.

What is *Torah*?

תורה

Torah can mean many things. Most basically, it is the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), the first part of the *Tanach*, or Hebrew Bible. It is the story of our people, and it contains law, commandments and values to live by. The Five Books of Moses are known as “The Written Torah.”

However, Torah is something more. The rabbis teach that at Mount Sinai, Moses received not only the Written Torah, but the “Oral Torah” as well. Oral Torah includes all the teachings and traditions that are passed down to us. Many of these teachings and traditions were spoken long ago by our rabbis and sages and have been recorded in a huge set of books called the Talmud. Talmud means “study.” It is a record of rabbinic discussions over a 600 year period (first century C.E. – seventh century C.E.). In that sense, Talmud is also Torah.

But Torah is even more than that! In the broadest sense, Torah means Judaism’s entire literary and legal tradition. The Oral Torah includes *Tanach*, post-Biblical law and lore like Mishna, Talmud, Midrash, medieval commentary, philosophy, poetry, mysticism, Hasidism, and modern scholars and teachers. Torah means everything Jews have thought about, struggled with, and created during our history. Torah is: Scripture, Rabbinic Literature and Jewish Thought.

In *Pirke Avot*, one of the 63 tractates of Talmud it is written, “Every Day a voice goes forth from Sinai.” When you study with your *hevruta*, that voice comes through YOU!

“It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it!” (Proverbs 3:18)

What is *Tanach*?

תנ"ך

Tanach is the Hebrew Bible. It is an acronym for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). Below is a list of the books that are included in each. The *Haftarah* comes from the section called *Nevi'im*.

TORAH: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

NEVI'IM: Joshua, Judges, Samuel I, Samuel II, Kings I, Kings II, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, (the following are called the “12 minor prophets”) Hoseah, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

KETUVIM: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles I, and Chronicles II

What is a *kushiya*?

קושיה

A *kushiya* is a challenging question. A difficulty. When studying Torah, we encounter a *kushiya* the way one would encounter a magical portal opening up before us. A *kushiya* is the way the Torah communicates with YOU! When a question arises in your mind, that is the Torah's way of tickling your mind, sending you an invitation to engage, wrestle, and ultimately discover something brand new, something not even Moses on Sinai had seen!

What is a *machlochet*?

מחלוקת

A *machlochet* is an argument. In Torah study, it refers to the healthy, invigorating debate between learners over the meaning of a text. Talmud talks about “*machlochet l'shem shamayim*” which means “argument for the sake of Heaven.” In other words, a debate in which people still respect one another's opinions. This is a reflection of the Talmud's practice of teaching several opinions on an issue, and not just the “correct” one. Preserving the argument is more important than preserving the answer!

What is *sharsheret Torah*?

שרשרת תורה

Sharsheret Torah is the “chain of Torah,” in which we are all links. A *sharsheret* is not unidirectional. In our *sharsheret*, children and adults become students and teachers of Torah together. Adults and children become conveyers and interpreters of Torah

wisdom to each other. Adults and children become confident in their ability to interpret and share text, as well as leading and facilitating discussion. In our *sharsheret*, children, adults, educators, clergy, our matriachs, our patriarchs, the Torah itself and God are all linked together.

What is *Mussar*?

מוסר

Mussar (moo-sar) is the inner work of the soul. It is a Jewish spiritual practice that helps us refine traits of our personality, like generosity, compassion, patience and responsibility. Alan Morinis wrote in his book [Everyday Holiness: The Spiritual Path of Mussar](#): “Mussar refers to a spiritual perspective and also to a discipline of transformative practices. The word *mussar* itself means ‘correction’ or ‘instruction’ and also serves as the simple modern Hebrew word for ‘ethics.’ But Mussar is most accurately described as a way of life. It shines light on the causes of suffering and shows us how to realize our highest spiritual potential, including an everyday experience infused with happiness, trust and love.” Each of our learning sessions will include a teaching on *mussar*. A *mussar* trait is also called a *middah*.

What is a *Middah*?

מדה

A *middah* is a virtue. A virtue is a characteristic of a good person. A *middah* is a uniquely Jewish virtue derived from Jewish tradition. *Middot* (plural for *middah*) are the building blocks of being a mensch!

What is a *Mitzvah*?

מצוה

A *mitzvah* is a commandment. Sometimes we understand a *mitzvah* to be a good deed, but it is more than that. It is perhaps better explained as “a good deed done from religious obligation.” There are different kinds of *mitzvot* (plural of *mitzvah*). There are ethical *mitzvot* like feeding the hungry and giving *tzedaka*. There are also ritual *mitzvot* like lighting Shabbat candles and fasting on Yom Kippur. The rabbis say that there are 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah. 265 are negative *mitzvot*, as in “Do not steal,” and 248 are positive *mitzvot*, as in “Honor your parents.” Many of the 613 *mitzvot* cannot be observed today because they are specific to the Temple in Jerusalem with its sacrifices and offerings.

Our *Hevruta* Set-Up and Schedule:

Participants will gather around a sparkly lantern into circles of five students and two adult facilitators. This is their *hevruta*. Each *hevruta* has a bell, and a bowl of treats.

1. “Sweet as Honey”
 - All participants are led in this blessing on page 6 over Torah study.
2. *Hevruta* introductions
 - Circles share names
3. The *Hevruta* explores one to three little texts relating to the Torah portion.
 - The goal is NOT to cover all the material. If the group is engaged in a rich conversation, and you have only read one word of text, hooray! The Torah is a mystical mirror to facilitate self-reflection. Facilitators read through the texts for the weekly Torah portion and choose one or two from either the summary, Gems of Torah, *middah*, or *mitzvah* section and uses them as springboards to ask and solicit lots of questions.
 - Students are praised when they ask a question.
 - If there is a particularly challenging *kushiya*, the *hevruta* rings the bell to invite a clergyperson or educator over to help explore it.
4. *Kaddish d’Rabanan*
 - All participants are led in the closing blessing on page 6 over learning together.

Sweet as Honey

Dan Nichols

Sweet as honey, sweet as honey, sweet as honey on our tongue (4x)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֹסֵק בְּדִבְרֵי-תוֹרָה.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu,
B'mitzvotav v'tzi-vanu, la-a-sok b'divrei Torah, la-a-sok b'divrei Torah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,
Who has sanctified us with commandments,
and commanded us to delve into words of Torah.

Kaddish D'Rabanan

Debbie Friedman

For our teachers, and their students,
And the students of their students,
We ask for peace and loving kindness,
And let us say: Amen.

Debbie Friedman's song comes from the additional paragraph in the traditional 'Rabbis' Kaddish, a blessing said at the end of a session of study, which reads: Upon Israel and its rabbis and their students and upon all their student's students and upon all those who engage in the Torah here and in all other places may they and you have much peace, grace, kindness, mercy, long life, plentiful nourishment, and salvation from their Creator in Heaven and Earth. Amen.

Torah portion: *Noah*

(Genesis 6:9 – 11:32)

Date:

Tuesday, November 1, 2016

Summary:

All life on earth had become corrupt, although Torah does not tell us exactly how. God asks Noah to build an ark and to bring onto the ark his wife, his three sons, a male and female of every kind of animal and bug, and seven of every kind of kosher animal. Some say it took Noah 120 years to build the ark! Noah was 600 years old when the flood started. After ark was sailing for almost a year, Noah sends a raven out of a window. The raven flies to and fro. Then Noah sends a dove. The dove returns. Noah sends a dove again, and this time, she returns with an olive branch. So Noah knows they can now leave the ark. God gives them a rainbow as a sign of God's promise not to destroy the world again. When Noah leaves the ark he plants a vineyard and drinks a lot. Many generations later, when all the people on earth spoke one language, they gathered together to build a tower to heaven. But God scattered them all over the earth and made them speak different languages. That's why we call it the Tower of "Babble"!

Gems of Torah:

Noah was a righteous man and perfect in his generation. (Genesis 6:9)

There are those of our rabbis who interpret this as a compliment, in that had he lived in a generation of righteous people he would have been even more righteous. And there are those who interpret it disparagingly, in that had he lived in Abraham's time he would not have been considered to be anyone special. – Rashi

Noah walked with God. (Genesis 6:9)

Why are we Jews not considered to be the descendants of Noah but rather of Abraham, while the rest of the world is referred to in our literature as "the children of Noah"? The explanation is that even though Noah was righteous and perfect in his actions, he was not the ideal righteous Jew. "Noah walked with God," not with people, he was not interested in humanity, in the environment. His righteousness was directed inward, to himself and his family. He was what is known in Yiddish as a *tzaddik in peltz* – a "righteous man in a fur coat." He was

commanded by God to build an ark – he built it board by board and nail by nail, for a hundred and twenty consecutive years, and it never crossed his mind that there might be a way to avert God’s decree and to save the world from destruction. – *Itturey Torah*

And it came to pass after the seven days, that the water of the flood were upon the earth. (Genesis 7:10)

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: Before bringing the flood, the Holy One grieved seven days over the world, as is said, “And God grieved in God’s heart.” – Genesis Raba

Make a light (tzohar) for the ark. (Genesis 6:16)

Rabbi Levi said: *Tzohar* means a pearl of purest rays. Throughout the year that Noah was on the ark, he had no need of the light of the sun by day, nor the moon by night. For he had a pearl which he hung up: while it was dim, he knew that it was day, and while it glowed, he knew that it was night. – Genesis Raba

I set my rainbow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. (Genesis 9:13)

How does the rainbow symbolize peace, unity and the continued existence of the world? It is because the rainbow is composed of a number of colors, shades and hues, and all of these unite into a single whole. The same is true with the differences between people, groups and nations. A life based on mutual understanding and tolerance, on harmony and peace, is the basis for the existence of the world. – Z. Hillel

The Talmud states that a special benediction should be recited when beholding a rainbow. The blessing is: ‘Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who remembers the covenant, is faithful to Your Covenant, and keeps Your promise.’

Like the appearance of the rainbow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain, such was the surrounding radiance. That was the appearance of the semblance of the Presence of the Lord. (Ezekiel 1:29)

Middah:

Compassion (*rachamim*): Feeling what others feel. A feeling of closeness. Being “touched” by someone’s story.

Compassion is an inner quality that grows within us out of the perception that we are not really separate from the other. – Everyday Holiness

The Hebrew term for compassion, *rachamim*, shares its linguistic root with the word *rechem*, which means “womb.” That compassion is somehow connected to motherhood has led many commentators to link this soul-trait to the emotional bond of mother and child. – Everyday Holiness

As a father has compassion for his children, so God has compassion. (Psalm 103:13)

You shall love the stranger, because you were strangers in Egypt. (Leviticus 19)

Mitzvah:

Feed your animals before you feed yourself when it is their mealtime.

Noah was commanded to feed all the animals in their proper times. As it says, “And you shall take for yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it in to you, and it shall be for you and for them to eat.” (Genesis 6:21)

How do we know to feed our animals before we feed ourselves? From the verse: “And I will give grass in your field for your livestock”—and only thereafter “and you will eat and be sated.” (Deuteronomy 11:15)

Other Mitzvot:

1. The Talmudic commandment to be kind to animals is called *Tzaar Baalei Chayim*.
2. Let your animals rest on Shabbat. (Exodus 20:8)
3. Do not yoke an ox with a donkey. (Deuteronomy 22:10)
4. Do not take a limb from a living animal. (Genesis 9:3-4)
5. Do not cook a kid goat in its mother’s milk. (Genesis 23:19 and 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21)
6. Do not take the mother bird along with the eggs. (Deuteronomy 22:6)

Torah portion: *Lech Lecha*

(Genesis 12:1 – 17:27)

Date:

Tuesday, November 8, 2016

Summary:

God commands Abram, “Go from your land, from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you.” There, God says, Abram will be made into a great nation. Abram and his wife, Sarai, and his nephew Lot, go to Canaan. A famine forces them to go to Egypt where Abram pretends Sarai is his sister because he’s afraid they will kill him if they know she’s his wife. Sarai is taken to Pharaoh’s palace. A plague prevents the Egyptian king from touching her, and convinces him to return her to Abram. When they return to Canaan, Lot separates from Abram and settles in the city of Sodom, where he falls captive to mighty armies. Abram defeats four kings to rescue his nephew. Sarai tells Abram to marry her maidservant Hagar because Sarai has not become pregnant. Hagar conceives, becomes disrespectful to Sarai, and then flees when Sarai treats her harshly. An angel talks to Hagar and tells her that her son will be the father of a big nation. Ishmael is born. God changes Abram’s name to Abraham and Sarai’s name to Sarah and promises that they will have a son whom they will call Isaac who will be the father of a great nation. Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and all the males of his household.

Gems of Torah:

Go for yourself... (Genesis 12:1)

For your essence. No Jew is required to do more than what he is capable of, but he is required to accomplish that of which he is capable. As Rabbi Zusha said, “When I come to the Heavens for my judgement, they will not ask me why I wasn’t like Moses, for I am not a Moses, but they will ask me if I achieved what Zusha was capable of.” – Rabbi A. Chen

Why did Abraham have to go forth to the world? At home he was like a flask of myrrh with a tight-fitting lid. Only when it is open can the fragrance be scattered to the winds. – Midrash

And I will bless them that bless you, and him that curses you, I will curse: and in you will all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:3)

A person should try with all their might to have many who like them and few who dislike them, because that is how the world can exist in harmony. We can

see this attribute in Abraham, for it states “them that bless you” in the plural, while “him that curses you” appears in the singular. – Ralbag

And Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. (Genesis 13:2)

The Hebrew word used for rich, *kaved*, also means heavy. This teaches us that his great wealth was a burden to Abraham, for to the righteous the temptation of wealth is greater than that of poverty. In fact, the Chasidic rabbi, Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz, would wash his hands after touching money. – *Tiferet Yehonatan*

And the king blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of the most high God, Maker of Heaven and Earth.” (Genesis 14:19)

It states “maker” rather than “the one who made” because God renews the world every moment and every instant. – Rabbi Yaakov Moses Charlap

And he brought him and said, “Look now toward the heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to number them.” And God said to him, “So will your seed be.” (Genesis 15:5)

Only when one is below do the stars appear to be small, but when one is above, they are truly gigantic. “So will your seed be” – the same is true for Israel: in the world they are small and lowly, but in the Heavens they are very important and great. – Rabbi Hayyim of Sanz

Even though you know in advance that you will be unable to count the stars, you nevertheless look to the heaven and attempt to do so. By the same token, “so will your seed be” – they will attempt with boldness to accomplish the impossible, beyond the realm of the natural, and will not measure their desire by their ability, but rather their ability by their desire. – Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin

How do we know no star controls the destiny of Israel? From the verse, “God took him outside.” – Rav Yehudah

Middah:

Loving-Kindness (*chesed*)

The cornerstone of Rabbi Nosson Zvi’s service of God was *chesed*. This, to him, meant being careful of another’s honor and dignity, helping others, having one’s heart overflow with love and kindness, utilizing every opportunity to benefit others. It meant that older students should learn with younger ones...Above all, it meant that one should greet his fellow with a pleasant countenance, because it makes the other feel good and binds people together in friendship. – Rabbi Chaim Zaitchik

Of the whopping 245 times this word appears in the Torah (telling you something right there), about two-thirds of these instances speak of God’s character and actions...

We might well wonder, if this world is actually so infused with divine loving-kindness, where is that quality to be found in the suffering and tears that plague our lives? Tradition answers that great loving-kindness is extended to us at every moment, though it may be hard to see. We are weak, and we all fumble, stumble, and fall. And yet why is it that we are not snuffed out like a feeble candle? We persist in breathing and our hearts go on beating because God sustains us...

In the Jewish view it is not enough to hold warm thoughts in our heart or to wish each other well. We are meant to offer real sustenance to one another, and the ways in which we can do that are innumerable...Action is the key to opening the heart...

True *chesed* involves offering without any expectation of return, even of gratitude...

People who free whales trapped in fishing nets, nurse injured birds back to health, or work to protect animal rights are not doing it because the bears and the beavers are going to send them a basket of cookies and a thank-you card. – Everyday Holiness

Surely goodness and *chesed* shall follow me all the days of my life. (Psalm 23:6)

He has told you, O man, what is good! What does God ask of you? That you do justice, love *chesed*, and walk humbly with God. (Micah 6:8)

A day should not pass without acts of loving-kindness, either with one's body, money, or soul. – Rabbi Yeshayahu Segal Horowitz

Mitzvah:

There are endless ways to do acts of *chesed*. Here are three that are listed in the Talmud:

1. Clothe the naked.
2. Visit the sick.
3. Comfort the sad.

Torah portion: *Vayeira*

(Genesis 18:1 – 22:24)

Date:

Tuesday, November 15

Summary:

God visits Abraham three days after his circumcision at age ninety-nine. Abraham rushes off to prepare a meal for three guests who appear in the desert heat. They are angels disguised as men. One of the three announces that, in exactly one year, the barren Sarah will give birth to a son. Sarah laughs! God tells Abraham that God is going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham pleads with God to spare the wicked cities. God agrees that if there are ten innocent people in the cities, the cities will be spared. However, ten are not found! Two of the three disguised angels arrive in the doomed city of Sodom, where Abraham's nephew Lot brings them into his house to protect them from a mob of evil men. The two guests reveal that they have come to destroy the cities, but they will save Lot and his family. When they are fleeing from the city, they are told, "Don't look back!" But Lot's wife looks back and she is turned into a pillar of salt! Abraham moves to Gerar, where once again, he pretends Sarai is his sister because he's afraid they will kill him if they know she's his wife. The Philistine king Abimelech takes Sarah to his palace. In a dream, God warns Abimelech that he will die unless he returns the woman to her husband. Abraham explains that he feared he would be killed over the beautiful Sarah. Sarah becomes pregnant, and she and Abraham have a son who is named Isaac (*Yitzchak* means "Laughter"). Isaac is circumcised at the age of eight days; Abraham is one hundred years old and Sarah ninety at their child's birth. After Isaac is born, Sarah sends Hagar and Ishmael from their home to wander in the desert. God hears the cry of Ishmael and saves his life by showing his mother a well. God tests Abraham's devotion by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. Isaac is bound and placed on the altar, and Abraham raises the knife. A voice from heaven calls to stop him. A ram, caught in the thicket by its horns, is offered in Isaac's place. Abraham receives the news of the birth of a daughter, Rebecca, to his nephew Bethuel.

Gems of Torah:

I am but dust and ashes. (Genesis 18:27)

Every person must have two pockets. In one of them he must carry a slip that says, "I am but dust and ashes." The secret, though, is knowing how to use each of them, in the right place and at the right time, for, unfortunately, many people use them in the reverse order of what is needed. – Rabbi Bunim of Pshischa

Will the Judge of all the earth not judge justly? (Genesis 18:23)

According to Rabbi Levi, the verse means that Abraham said: If You seek to have a world, strict judgement cannot be used. If You seek strict justice, there will be no world. You desire a world and You also desire justice? You can have only one of the two. If You do not show mercy a little, the world will not endure.
– Genesis Raba

It came to pass, after these things, that God tested Abraham. (Genesis 22:1)

Said Rabbi Jonathan: A potter does not examine defective vessels, because he cannot give them a single blow without breaking them. What then does he examine? Only the sound vessels, for he will not break them even with many blows. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, tests not the wicked but the righteous. – Midrash Rabbah

And behold, there was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. (Genesis 22:13)

The shofar reminds God of the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son, and the ram that took Isaac's place. – Rabbi Abahu

Middah:

Slow to Anger (*erech apayim*)

We are not asked to deny our feeling of anger. We need not assume that anger is necessarily always wrong, or that expressing anger is forbidden. Rather we are taught to be less reactive, to slow anger down. Raging, “flying off the handle,” “going ballistic,” bursting out with hurtful accusations or put-downs, exploding – those responses are inappropriate. Slow to anger means slow down, think about it, try to be patient, stretch out the reaction time.

God's slowness to anger is referred to throughout the Torah. But we also hear about another side, the God who “vents fury” and “pours out blazing wrath.” What do we do with this apparent contradiction? Is God truly slow to anger or does God rage now and then? Could there be divine attributes we are supposed to emulate, and also attributes we are to avoid?

Here's one thought: both restraint and fury are ascribed to God, but with important distinctions. Slowness to anger is a positive attribute, a quality that God has. It is a trait we indeed should try to emulate. The fury? Sometimes the Torah is descriptive, rather than prescriptive. That means the text describes what people are experiencing, what

they are feeling, what they perceive. The fury is their perception, not God's act; it is in them, not God. – Susan Freeman in Teaching Jewish Virtues

Adonai! Adonai! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving sin. – Exodus 34:6

Slowness to anger results in much understanding; impatience brings about folly. – Proverbs 14:17

Better to be slow to anger than mighty, to have self-control than to conquer a city. – Proverbs 16:32

"Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?" And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. – Numbers 20:10

For his explosive reaction, Moses is punished and is not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

If someone you are with is provoking you to anger, be silent; if you have to speak to that person, make it a point to speak in a low and gentle voice as this will keep anger from overcoming you. – Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulai

There are four types of temperaments: Easy to anger and easy to appease – the loss is canceled by the reward. Hard to anger and hard to appease – the reward is canceled by the loss. Easy to anger and hard to appease – a wicked person. Hard to anger and easy to appease – a saint. – *Pirkei Avot*

Mitzvah:

Welcoming Guests (*hachnassat orchim*)

And he sat in the tent door. (Genesis 18:1)

To see if there was anyone passing that he might be able to bring into his home.
– Rashi

Pass not away, I pray you, from your servant... 18:3

A rabbinic saying was based on the reading of this portion suggestion that Abraham excused himself from God's presence when he saw three men approaching in order to show them hospitality. Hence: Rabbi Judah said in the

name of Rav: "Hospitality to guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence"
– Shabbat 127)

When strangers appeared at Abraham's tent, he invited them to stay. He offered them bread and a little rest and then Abraham rushed to Sarah's tent and said "Hurry! Three measure of the finest flours! Knead it and make rolls!" The Torah uses verbs meaning "run" and "hurry" a total of four times in relating this brief story. Abraham didn't sit passively waiting for a chance to do good but charged after the opportunity to render kindness to others. – Everyday Holiness

The story opens by saying that God appeared to Abraham (Genesis 18:1), but when Abraham applies the vision to his own world he suddenly sees three men standing before him (18:2). Abraham is the religious man par excellence for he sees God in the human situation.

Once Rabbi Akiva Eiger had a guest at his table. The guest accidentally spilled some wine on the clean white tablecloth. Rabbi Akiva Eiger immediately knocked over his own cup of wine, and said, "It appears that the table is wobbly!"

Other *Mitzvot*:

Visiting the Sick

Why is the story of Abraham's circumcision (Genesis 17:10-14) followed by the visitation of God? God came to visit while Abraham was recuperating, to make clear the importance of the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick. – Talmud

Peace in the Home (*Shalom Bayit*)

Sarah laughed skeptically and said, "Am I to have enjoyment – with my husband so old?" (Genesis 18:12); but God, repeating this to Abraham, reported her as saying: "...as old as I am." God did this to safeguard Abraham's feelings and to preserve domestic peace. – Talmud

Torah portion: *Toldot*

(Genesis 25:19 – 28:9)

Date:

Tuesday, November 29

Summary:

Isaac and Rebecca's prayers are finally answered and Rebecca becomes pregnant! She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the "children struggle inside her." God tells her that "there are two nations in your womb." Esau emerges first, and Jacob is born clutching Esau's heel. Esau grows up to be hunter, while Jacob likes to hang out in the tents. Isaac favors Esau and Rebecca favors Jacob. Returning from a 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 pretends Rebecca is his sister, out of fear that he will be killed by someone because of 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 peace. Isaac grows old and blind, and wants to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca makes a plan. She dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins so he will feel like his hairy brother, prepares food, 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. Esau cries when he learns that his blessing was stolen and vows to kill Jacob after their father dies. Jacob leaves home for Haran to flee Esau's revenge and to find a wife. Esau marries a third wife—Machalath, the daughter of Ishmael.

Gems of Torah:

The children struggled within her. (Genesis 25:22)

Whenever she would pass a house of prayer or house of study, Jacob would struggle to come out...and when she passed a house of idol worship, Esau would struggle to come out. Also, they were struggling between themselves, fighting over the inheritance of the two worlds (i.e., the material world and the "world to come"). – Rashi

Isaac loved Esau, because he brought him venison to eat; and Rebecca loved Jacob. (Genesis 25:28)

The Torah has to give a reason why Isaac loved Esau, but it does not need a reason to explain Rebecca's love for Jacob. – *Oznayim La-Torah*

And it came to pass that Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see.
(Genesis 27:1)

Isaac was the opposite of Moses. Isaac was not permitted to leave the land of Israel, but lost his vision. Moses, on the other hand, was never permitted to enter the land of Israel, but we are told that until the very end of his life he was in perfect health. – *Mei Ha-Shilo'ah*

I am a smooth man. My father will perhaps feel me and I will be to him as a deceiver.
(Genesis 27:11-12)

Jacob begged his mother, "I am not sharp and cunning, and I will not be able to fulfill this task." Jacob indeed wanted to fail so that he would not receive the blessing through cunning. – Rabbi Avreh

As soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob had just left the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. (Genesis 27:30)

After the Sabbath a person must be extremely careful, because as the Sabbath departs and the weekday begins, the "other forces" of evil try to replace it. This is hinted at in the verse, that as soon as Jacob left, Esau arrived, where Jacob symbolizes holiness and Esau its opposite. – Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk

Middah:

Truthfulness (*emet*)

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Exodus 20:13)

True speech is forever, but a false tongue for a moment. – Proverbs 12:19

One shall not break one's word. (Numbers 30:3)

Those who deal deceitfully shall not live in My house; those who speak untruth shall not stand before my eyes. (Psalms 101:7)

There are seven types of thieves, but a "though thief" (one who deceives another) is the worst of all. – *Mechilta*

Teach your tongue to say, "I don't know," lest you be caught in a lie. – *Brachot*

Such is the punishment of the liar – even when speaking the truth, the person is not listened to by anyone. – Sanhedrin

With lies you can go far, but not back again. – Yiddish folk saying

Pure truthfulness does not exist in this world. One person is far from falsehood, and another still farther. But no one is altogether truthful. – The Kossover

To avoid insulting someone, you are allowed to tell a white lie. – *Sefer Hasidim*

A tricky example:

Among the many commandments that are religious obligations for Jews is the duty to praise a bride. The commandment is “to praise.” And there before us stands the bride: awkward, ungainly, unkempt. What can you possibly say that would qualify as praise? You can’t find a single quality that allows you to fulfill the commandment. Not with truth, anyway. So do you lie, or do you tell the bald truth about what you see before you?

This situation is the focus of an argument between Shammai and Hillel, two major characters who show up repeatedly in the Talmud. Shammai takes the position that a bride should be praised according to the positive qualities that she personally possesses. In other words, you are supposed to keep looking her over until you succeed in finding at least one praiseworthy quality, hard as that may be to do, and then to sing her praises for what you have found.

Hillel presents a different opinion. He states that *all* brides should be praised as being “beautiful and gracious.”

To that Shammai retorts: “What if a bride limps or is blind, should one praise her as being ‘beautiful and gracious?’ Has not the Torah told us ‘Keep your distance from falsehood?’”

...Hillel tells us that we should not be primarily concerned with how our words correspond to the verifiable reality, but rather for the impact our statement will have on another person. The bride may be very blemished – anyone with eyes can see that – but does that obligate us to speak that truth? His answer is no, not if a person will be hurt by our speech.

Mitzvah:

Honor your father and mother (*kibed av v'em*)

The Rabbis taught: there are three partners in the creation of a person. The Holy One, Blessed is He, his father and his mother. When a person honors his father and his mother, the Holy One Blessed be He says: I consider it as if I had lived among them and they had honored me. – *Kiddushin*

You shall not hate your brother in your heart... You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus 19:17-18)

There were once twin brothers who were identical in their appearance. One was appointed king while the other became a criminal and was hanged. When people passed by and saw the criminal hanging, they exclaimed 'The king is hanged.' – *Tannaim*

Did not He who made me in my mother's belly not make him? Did not One form us both in a womb? (Job 31:15)

Are you not unto Me as the Ethiopians O children of Israel? (Amos 9:7)

Torah portion: *Vayeitzei*

(Genesis 28:10 – 32:3)

Date:

Tuesday, December 6

Summary:

Jacob leaves his hometown of Beersheba and journeys to Haran. On the way, he stops at a place and uses a rock as a pillow. He dreams of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels going up and down and God at the top. God promises in the dream that the land upon which he lies will be given to his descendants. In the morning, Jacob says, "God was in this place and I did not know it!" He turns the stone that was his pillow into an altar to God. Jacob comes to a well with a big rock over it. The rock needs many shepherds to move it, however when Jacob sees Rachel coming toward the well with her sheep, he is filled with strength and moves the rock himself! Rachel's father Laban agrees to let Jacob and Rachel marry in return for seven years' labor. But on the wedding night, Laban tricks Jacob and gives him elder daughter, Leah, instead! Jacob marries Rachel, too, a week later, after agreeing to work another seven years for Laban. Leah gives birth to six sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun—and a daughter, Dinah, while Rachel remains barren. Rachel gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children, and two more sons, Dan and Naphtali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaid, Zilpah, who gives birth to Gad and Asher. Finally, Rachel's prayers are answered and she gives birth to Joseph. Jacob has now been in Haran for fourteen years, and wishes to return home. But Laban persuades him to remain, now offering him sheep in return for his labor. After six more years, Jacob sneaks out of Haran, fearing that Laban would prevent him from leaving. Laban pursues Jacob, but is warned by God in a dream not to harm him.

Gems of Torah:

He took of the stones of that place, and put them at his head. (Genesis 28:11)

The stones began to quarrel among themselves. This one said, "Let the righteous one rest his head on me," while the other said, "Let the righteous one rest his head on me." God then took all the stones and combined them into one, as it states, "He took the stone (verse 18) which he had put at his head" (Rashi). One can still ask: What did God accomplish by merging all the stones into one? After all, Jacob could still only rest his head on one small portion of the large stone, and the former stones could still squabble as to where Jacob should place his head. The answer, though, is that when there is unity there is no jealousy or argument. – Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter of Gur

He dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it...and behold the Lord stood above it. (Genesis 28:12-13)

Through a person's dreams, one can recognize a person, because a person's personality comes out in his dreams. Jacob saw a ladder "whose top reached to heaven," "and behold the Lord stood above it." Pharaoh, on the other hand, saw "seven cows." – Rabbi Meir of Premishlan

And your seed will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your seed will all the families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 28:14)

The Jewish people are compared to the stars, to sand, and to dust. With stars, each is separate from every other one, without their being any connection between them. With sand, one can place a pile of grains of sand together, but the grains are still separate from one another. Only dust clings together and forms a single block. God's blessing to Jacob was that if his children live in perfect harmony and cling to one another, like the dust, then "you will spread to the west..." – Ha-Derush Veba-Iyun

How awe-inspiring is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. (Genesis 28:17)

One can reach God anywhere. The difference is which gate one uses to approach God. If one goes through the gate of heaven, one finds God immediately. But if one uses other gates, one also finds other things along the way. – Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk

Leah was tender eyed, but Rachel was of beautiful form and beautiful appearance. (Genesis 29:17)

Leah was tender eyed for she believed that she was fated to marry Esau, and she cried; for all said, "Rebecca has two sons and Laban has two daughters. The older one to the older and the younger one to the younger." – Rashi

Middah:

Not Embarrassing Others (*Lo Levayesh*)

"Not embarrassing" is similar to one of the Ten Commandments, "Do not steal." When we embarrass, what is it we steal? It might be another's self-esteem, private information about them, or their dignity; it might be someone's confidence, their pride, their zest for living, or their willingness to take risks. – Susan Freeman

One who publicly shames a neighbor is as though that person shed blood...One who whitens a friend's face in public has no share in the world to come. – *Baba Metziah*

It once happened that while Rabbi Judah the Prince was delivering a lecture, he noticed a smell of garlic. Thereupon he said, "Let him who has eaten garlic go out." Hiyya arose and left; then all the other disciples rose and went out. – *Sanhedrin*

The destruction of Jerusalem resulted from the humiliation of Bar Kamtza. – *Gittin*

A certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, "Go and bring Kamtza." The man went and brought Bar Kamtza. When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamtza there he said, "See, you are my enemy; what are you doing here? Get out!" Said the other: "Since I am already here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink." Said the host: "Absolutely not." "Then let me give you half the cost of the party." The host refused. "Then let me pay for the whole party." Still the host refused, and took him by the hand and threw him out. Said Bar Kamtza, "Since the Rabbis were sitting there and did not stop him, this shows that they agreed with him. I will go and inform against them to the government."

Mitzvah:

Treat your workers fairly.

You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. (Leviticus 19:13)

You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 25:13-16)

A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is God's delight. (Proverbs 11:1)

Torah portion: *Vayishlach*

(Genesis 32:4 – 36:43)

Date:

Tuesday, December 13

Summary:

Jacob returns to Canaan, and sends messengers to his brother Esau in hope of a reconciliation, but his messengers report that his brother is bringing 400 men with him to meet Jacob! Jacob is worried that his brother is going to make war on him and sends Esau a large gift consisting of lots of cattle to appease him. That night, Jacob ferries his family and possessions across the Jabbok River while he remains behind and encounters someone with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob suffers a dislocated hip but is victorious. The one with whom he wrestled then gives Jacob the new name Israel which means “he who wrestles with man and divine beings and wins.” Jacob and Esau finally meet, embrace and kiss, and part ways. Jacob journeys on. Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, and is buried in a roadside grave near Bethlehem. Jacob arrives in Hebron, to his father Isaac, who later dies at age 180.

Gems of Torah:

Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother. (Genesis 32:4)

Rabbi Baruch said: “We find that when Jacob wanted to appease Esau, ‘Jacob sent messengers to Esau his brother,’ but the results were – nothing. “And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, ‘We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men with him’” (Genesis 32:7). In other words, war. Only when the two of them met, did they finally make peace. This proves that one must not rely on messengers, no matter who they are – even if they are actual angels. Rather, the person has to meet directly with his opponent. – Rabbi Ben Ya-ir

To my lord Esau...(Genesis 32:5)

Jacob humbles himself before Esau, although he did not do so before Laban. This shows how truly righteous Jacob was. Laban had pursued him without any reason, and that was why Jacob spoke to him harshly. However, in regard to Esau, Jacob felt himself somewhat guilty, because of the birthright and the blessing of the firstborn – and that was why he wanted to appease him. – Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. (Genesis 32:25)

The man who struggled with him was Esau's guardian angel. – Ba'al Shem Tov

Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for you have wrestled with God and with men, and have prevailed. (Genesis 32:29)

This blessing of Esau has been to our detriment to this very day. If a member of another nation sins, they will not blame his entire nation for it, but if someone of Israel sins, they will not say that so-and-so sinned, but that Israel sinned – the whole nation is to blame. – Devarim Ki-Khetavam

Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept. (Genesis 33:4)

Both of them cried. This teaches us that at that time Jacob felt love for Esau. And this is true in all generations. When Esau's descendants are stirred by a pure spirit to appreciate the greatness of Jacob's descendants, we too are moved to recognize that Esau is our brother. – *Ha-Amerk Berakhah*

Middah:

Repentance (*teshuva*): Seek forgiveness and make amends for your mistakes.

One who does *teshuva* is considered as if he went to Jerusalem, rebuilt the Temple, erected the altar, and offered all the sacrifices ordained by the Torah. For it is written, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit' (Psalm 51:19). – Leviticus *Rabbah*

God remains close, even when we become distant. – Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

A person who truly wants to purify himself receives assistance from heaven. – Talmud Shabbat

The Holy One, blessed be God, said to Israel: 'My children, present to me a single opening of repentance, small like the eye of a needle, and I will open for you entrances through which wagons and carriages can pass.' – *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*

To bring another to repentance, I go down all the steps until I reach his level. Then I bind the roots of my soul to the roots of his soul, and together our souls repent. – Rabbi Zusya of Anipol

Teshuva is something more than the accounting of the rights and wrongs in a person's

life. *Teshvua* is the expression of the world's existential yearning to come closer to God.
– Rabbi David Samson

The sins we commit, these are not the worst thing. After all, temptation is powerful, and man is weak. The great crime of man is that he could turn at any time, and does not. –
Rabbi Simcha Bunim Bonhart

To have found God is not an end but in itself a beginning. –Franz Rosenzweig

How noble and good everyone could be if, every evening before falling asleep, they were to recall to their minds the events of the whole day and consider exactly what had been good and bad. Then, without realizing it, you try to improve yourself at the start of each new day. Of course, you achieve quite a lot in the course of time. Anyone can do this. It costs nothing and is certainly very helpful. Whoever doesn't know it must learn and find by experience that: 'A quiet conscience makes one strong.' – Anne Frank

Mitzvah:

Do not hold a grudge.

Do not hate your brother in your heart. (Leviticus 19:17)

You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18)

Do not to eat the sinew of the thigh (*gid ha-nasheh*)

Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew of the thigh-vein which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, even in the sinew of the thigh-vein. (Genesis 32:32)

Torah portion: Vayechi

(Genesis 47:28 – 50:26)

Date:

Tuesday, January 10

Summary:

Jacob lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to promise that he will bury him in the Holy Land. Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, but switches his hands, putting his right hand on the younger son Ephraim and the left hand on the older Menasseh. Jacob blesses each of his sons. When Jacob dies, he is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron. Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his death, Joseph says to the Children of Israel: "God will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Gems of Torah:

אתה יוסף לזכך עך היום הזה עך אדמת מצרים
לפרעה לזמש רק אדמת הכהנים לבדם לא
היתה לפרעה וישב ישראל בארץ מצרים בארץ
גשן ויאחזו בה ויפרו וירבו מאד ויחזי יעקב בארץ
מצרים שבע עשרה שנה ויהי ימי יעקב שני חייו
שבע שנים וארבעים ומאת שנה ויקרבו ימי ישראל
למות ויקרא לבנו ליוסף ויאמר לו אם נא מצאתי
חן בעיניך שים נא ידך תחת ירכי ועשית עמדי
חסד ואמת אל נא תקברני במצרים וישכבתי עם
אבתי ונשאני ממצרים וקברתני בקברתם ויאמר
אנכי אעשה כדברך ויאמר השבעה לי וישבע לו
וישתחו ישראל עך ראש המטה
ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה ויאמר ליוסף הנה
אביך חלה ויקח את שני בניו עמו את מנשה ואת
אפרים ויגד ליעקב ויאמר הנה בנך יוסף בא אליך
ויתחזק ישראל וישב עך המטה ויאמר יעקב אל

Why is this portion “sealed” – with no real break in the Torah between the last portion and this one? It is because the entire portion is on the borderline between the past and the future. In the previous portion, Jacob was still alive, while in the following one, we begin with the first signs of the Jews’ deliverance. Here, the Jews were in a type of limbo, far away from the beginnings of their people and from their future redemption as well. There were thus no signs to indicate to them where they were going, and the uncertainty is reflected in the absence of a real break, in the “seal” between the two weekly portions. – Rabbi Meir Yehiel of Ostrovitz

Because when our father Jacob died, the eyes and hearts of Israel were sealed...The physical servitude did not begin until the last person had died, but the spiritual servitude began as soon as Jacob died. The Egyptian culture began to influence them, without them realizing it. The inner truth of the Jewish people’s belief was concealed. The eyes and hearts of Israel were sealed until the eyes no longer felt what was right and what was wrong, and that is the main feature of exile. – Sefat Emet

Deal kindly and truly with me. (Genesis 47:29)

The kindness which one performs for the dead is true kindness (Rashi). One can explain this as follows: Only in the case of a dead person do we know that a kindness is indeed a true kindness. In all other acts of kindness, one cannot be sure that it is such, because it is possible that the person who we thought was in need was not really in need.

And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Menasseh’s head; crossing his hands, for Menasseh was the firstborn. (Genesis 48:14)

One can explain that the reason for Jacob’s action was that as Ephraim was the younger, he therefore needed the greater support and guidance entailed in the use of the right hand. The younger generation must be given as much support as possible, and all of our attention must be devoted to educating it properly, for it is the future of our people. – *Likutei Amarim*

Middah:

Contentment with Your Lot (*samayach b’chelko*)

Ben Zoma taught: Who is rich? Those who are happy with their lot. As it is written, “When you eat from the labor of your hands, happy will you be and all will be well with you” (Psalms 128:2). – *Pirkei Avot*

Rabbi Akiva used to say: If people are satisfied with what is theirs, it is a good sign for them. If they are not satisfied with what is theirs, it is a bad sign for them. – *Tosafot Brachot*

A person who sees another learning should generate envy in the heart and say: “That person learns a whole day; I will do likewise.” The same applies to all *mitzvot* and good traits. Everyone should envy their neighbors and seize upon their good deeds. – *Orchot Tzaddikim*

Too many people are worried about their own stomachs and other people’s souls, when they should be worried about their own souls and other people’s stomachs. – Kotzker Rabbi

There are some people so foolish that when they see a friend in luck they begin to brood and are so upset and distressed that even the good things they themselves possess no longer afford them pleasure, such is the effect that their friend’s good fortune has on them. Of them the wise Solomon said: “Envy is the rottenness of the bones” (Proverbs 14:30).

Among all the things which God created in God’s universe, God created nothing that is useless. God created the snail as a cure for a wound, the fly as a cure for the sting of a wasp, the gnat as a cure for the bite of the serpent, the serpent as a cure for a sore, and the spider as a cure for the sting of a scorpion. – Talmud Shabbat

Mitzvah:

True act of Kindness (*chesed shel emet*)

Burying the dead (*kevura*) is a *mitzvah* that Jewish tradition calls a “true act of kindness.” It is a loving deed toward another without any kind of repayment of the favor. Helping with a funeral, mourning, and remembering a loved one are sacred acts of kindness which have no ulterior motives.

Comforting the bereaved (*nichum aveilim*)

Do you know someone who recently lost a person who was dear to them? Could you visit, or at least phone? Many people feel resistance to visiting a house of mourning because contact with death, even indirectly, can make people feel nervous or even frightened. Jewish tradition helps us deal with the resistance by giving us guidelines for comforting mourners. One is to enter the house of mourning quietly. The mourners are not hosts and so are not expected to greet the visitors, rise for them, offer them hospitality (like food or drink), or see them out. Most important, one who has come to comfort a mourner should sit close to them without speaking first. Our nervousness or our own needs can make us babble, but we are guided to let the mourners speak first, if they so desire. Bereavement arises from loss, and comfort is a great salve for all sorts of losses, not just death. Do you know someone who lost their job, or who had to move to a new house, or whose pet died or who suffered any other sort of loss, and can you find a way to offer your comfort to them? – Everyday Holiness

Torah portion: *Shemot*

(Exodus 1:1 – 6:1)

Date:

Tuesday, January 17

Summary:

The children of Israel multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their numbers, Pharaoh enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, to kill all male babies at birth. When they let the babies live, he commands his people to cast the Hebrew babies into the Nile. A child is born to Yocheved and her husband, Amram, and placed in a basket on the river, while the baby's sister, Miriam, stands watch from afar. Pharaoh's daughter discovers the boy, raises him as her son, and names him Moses. We don't know his original name. As a young man, Moses leaves the palace and discovers the hardship of his brethren. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and kills the Egyptian. The next day he sees two Jews fighting; when he admonishes them, they say, "Are you going to kill us like you killed that Egyptian?" Moses flees to Midian so that he is not caught and punished. There he marries Tzipporah, one of Jethro's daughters, and becomes a shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks. God appears to Moses in a burning bush and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand: "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." Moses' brother, Aaron, is appointed to serve as his spokesman. In Egypt, Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel to tell them that the time of their redemption has come. The people believe; but Pharaoh refuses to let them go, and even intensifies the suffering of Israel. Moses returns to God to protest: "Why have You done evil to this people?" God promises that the redemption is close at hand.

Gems of Torah:

Now these are the names of the Children of Israel, who came to Egypt; with Jacob every man and his household came. (Exodus 1:1)

The Torah words, translated literally, state "who come to Egypt." This is the fate of the Jewish people in the diaspora: they live in a place for an extended period of time, put down roots, build and create, and yet their neighbors consider them strangers and aliens, as if they had just arrived. – Hizkuni

And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls; and Joseph was in Egypt. (Exodus 1:5)

Even though Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, *Tzofnat Pa'aneah*, Joseph kept his Hebrew name. In Egypt, too, he remained Joseph. – Rabbi Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev

And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. (Exodus 2:1)

The reason the Torah does not mention either his name or her name, is to teach us that every proper Jewish home has the potential of giving birth to the redeemer of Israel. – *Sefer Yuhasin*

And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. (Exodus 2:4)

Miriam the prophet was certain that no harm would come to him, and that God would save him from any danger. She simply did not know how this would come about, and that was why she waited to see “what would be done to him.” – *Hafetz Hayyim*

And he said, “Do not draw near; take off your shoes from your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:5)

The world is always full of sharp objects and stone. When one wears shoes, he can easily step on the small stones lying on the way, almost without feeling them. However, when one walks barefoot, he feels every small thing lying on the ground, every thorn, every painful stone. God said to Moses, the leader of Israel, “Take off your shoes.” The leader of the generation must feel every obstacle and every impediment on the road. He must feel the pain of his people and realize what is bothering them. – *Olelot Ephraim*

Middah:

Humility (*anava*)

Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than anyone on earth. (Numbers 12:3)

Being humble doesn't mean being a nobody, it just means being no more of a somebody than you ought to be. After all, Moses, who is considered the greatest of all the prophets, is described in the Torah as “very humble, more than any other men who were upon the face of the earth.” If a leader as great as Moses was so humble, there is surely more to humility than the shrinking meekness we ordinarily associate with the term. – *Everyday Holiness*

Next time you sit on a bench, watch how much of it you occupy. There is no need to cringe on the edge because you're entitled to it. Yet there is also no justification for sprawling into a space that ought to accommodate someone else. Or when someone shares a piece of news with you, do you come right back with your own concerns, filling

the space they've opened, or do you make room to follow up what the other person has introduced?

It's important to clarify that we are not all meant to occupy the same amount of space. Some people appropriately occupy a lot of space, as would be the case for a leader -- think of Moses again. But if a leader laid claim to even more space than was appropriate, they would be Pharaoh...at the other end of the spectrum, it may be entirely appropriate for a more solitary person to occupy a less than average volume of space. The right amount of space is also situational. When police officers direct traffic, we accept that they are occupying a large public space. But when those same police officers go to their child's school for parent-teacher night, were they to try to occupy as "large" a space as they do on the street, they would appear arrogant and presumptuous. – Everyday Holiness

Abraham spoke up saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Eternal One, I who am but dust and ashes." (Genesis 18:27)

Take care lest you forget the Eternal your God. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, then your heart will grow haughty and you will forget the Eternal your God. And you will say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have won this wealth for me." Then you should remember the Eternal your God, for it is God who gives you the strength to amass wealth. (Deuteronomy 8:11-18)

Why were humans created on the sixth day? So that, if they become too proud, one can say to them, "The gnat was created before you!" – Sanhedrin

Here I am...I have come to stand before You for Your people Israel who have sent me, although I am unworthy and unqualified to do so. Please do not hold them to blame for my sins and do not find them guilty for my iniquities. May there be no stumbling block in my prayer. – High Holy Day Prayer

When humility brings about depression, it is defective; when it is genuine, it inspires joy, courage, and inner dignity. – Rav Kook

Mitzvah:

Do not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. (Exodus 22:21)

One may desecrate the Sabbath for the sake of a one day old baby, but not for a dead body, even of David, King of Israel. – Talmud Shabbat

Every individual should perceive the world as having been created for his/her own sake. – Sanhedrin

One may not speak to them other than in a tender manner. One must show them courtesy. One must not hurt them physically with hard toil, not wound their feelings with hard speech. One must take greater care of their property than of one's own. – Maimonides

God showed Moses all the treasures prepared in Heaven for the righteous. The most valuable treasure of all is reserved for those who bring up orphans. – Exodus Raba

Torah portion: *Va-eira*

(Exodus 6:2 – 9:35)

Date:

Tuesday, January 24

Summary:

God reveals Godself to Moses. God promises to take the children of Israel out of Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them, and acquire them as God's own chosen people at Mount Sinai; God will then bring them to the land God promised to the Patriarchs. Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of God, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron's staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers. God then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians. The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities; a pestilence kills the domestic animals; painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go."

Gems of Torah:

These are Aaron and Moses, to whom the Lord said: "Bring out the children..." (Exodus 6:26)

There are places where the Torah mentions Moses before Aaron and others where it mentions Aaron before Moses, to teach us that they were equivalent to one another. – Rashi

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, 'What is God's name?' What should I tell them?" (Exodus 3:13)

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob never asked for God's name. They were satisfied with what was revealed to them. But Moses was concerned with all of Israel and hence he needed to know the nature of God. – M. HaCohen

"I am that I am." *Ehiyeh asher ehiyeh.*

Why had the time come now to free Israel from bondage? Because God felt that they were becoming accustomed to their burdens. – Chasidic

God spoke to Moses: “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod, and stretch out your hand upon the waters of Egypt’” (Exodus 7:19)

The first three plagues—blood, frogs and lice—were brought on by Aaron. For God said to Moses: The waters which protected you when you were cast into the River, and the soil which protected you when you buried the Egyptian—it is not fitting that they should be afflicted by your hand. Therefore, I shall afflict them through Aaron. – *Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer*

God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them (Exodus 9:12)

When Moses’ prayer was answered, Pharaoh changed his mind. That is the way of the wicked: When in trouble, they cry to God; when they have relief they return to their evil ways. – Midrash

Following each of the first five plagues, it is written, “Pharaoh hardened his heart”; regarding the sixth plague it says, “God hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” When God saw that Pharaoh did not relent after the first five plagues, He said: Even if Pharaoh now wished to repent, I shall harden his heart, in order to exact full punishment from him. – *Midrash Raba*

So there was hail, and fire flaring up within the hail (Exodus 9:24)

Imagine two fierce legions who were always at war with one another, but when the king needed their services for his own battle, he made peace between them, so that both should carry out the orders of the king. Likewise, fire and water are hostile to each other, but when the time came to do war with Egypt, God made peace between them and both smote the Egyptians as “fire within the hail.” – *Midrash Raba*

The flax and the barley were destroyed, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they were still pliant (Exodus 9:31–32)

A person should always be pliant like a reed, and let him never be unyielding like the cedar. – Talmud, *Taanit*

Middah:

Responsibility (*achrayut*)

First a person should put his house together, then his town, then the world. – Rabbi Yisrael Salanter

The Hebrew word for conscience – *matzpun* – is from the same root as the word for “north,” no doubt because conscience sets the navigational compass for life.

Because we are able to foresee the future and we are wise to do so, the principle is established in the Mishnah that human beings are always responsible for the consequences of their actions, whether what occurred was the result of action that was voluntary or involuntary, deliberate or inadvertent.

To elevate your soul in the direction of holiness, you have to become more skilled at anticipating the consequences of your actions and taking responsibility for the details in all areas where you make choices, even in the most practical and mundane sorts of ways – or, more accurately, *specifically* in the practical and mundane matters you might tend to overlook or to consider other than spiritual. – Everyday Holiness

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? – Hillel

This is the reason why our ancestors occupied themselves as shepherds like Jacob, peace be upon him, and David. Moses our teacher was also a shepherd because he wanted to accustom himself to bear the burden even of the simple creatures and all the more so of fellow human beings. – Rabbi Simcha Zissel

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9)

Mitzvah:

Love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus 19:18)

The stranger who resides with you in your land shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:34)

Rabbi Hillel said; What is hateful to you do not do unto your fellow. – Shabbat

Treat your neighbor lovingly, for he is a human being like yourself, and therefore you know his quest for love. – Nechama Liebovitz

The correct translation of this phrase is, Love thy neighbor for he is like yourself. – Rabbi N.H. Weisel

The phrase “love thy neighbor as thyself” is not meant literally, since man cannot be expected to love his neighbor as his own self. Moreover, Rabbi Akiva has ruled that your life takes precedence over your fellow man’s. The Torah here

enjoins that we should wish upon our neighbor the same benefits that we wish upon ourselves...Indeed, sometimes a person may wish upon his neighbor certain benefits only, e.g., wealth, but not wisdom, and the like. But even if he wishes his cherished friends well in everything, e.g., wealth, honor, learning, and wisdom, he will not do so unstintingly, but will still insist on a larger share of the benefits. It was this shortcoming that the Torah condemned. Rather, a man should wish his fellow well in all things, just as he does in his own case, and place no limitations upon his love. Thus, in the case of Jonathan and David, it says that Jonathan loved him as his own soul, since he had removed all jealousy from his heart, declaring "And thou shalt rule over Israel." -- Nachmanides

Torah portion: *Bo*

(Exodus 10:1 – 13:16)

Date:

Tuesday, January 31

Summary:

The last three of the Ten Plagues are visited on Egypt: a swarm of locusts devours all the crops and greenery; a thick darkness envelops the land; and all the firstborn of Egypt are killed at the stroke of midnight. God commands the people of Israel to establish a calendar based on the monthly rebirth of the moon. The Israelites are also instructed to bring a “Passover offering” to God: a lamb is to be slaughtered, and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts of every Israelite home, so that God should pass over these homes when He comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn. The roasted meat of the offering is to be eaten that night together with matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs. The death of the firstborn finally breaks Pharaoh’s resistance, and he sends the children of Israel from his land. So hastily do they depart that there is no time for their dough to rise, and the only provisions they take along are unleavened. Before they go, they ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and garments—fulfilling the promise made to Abraham that his descendants would leave Egypt with great wealth. The children of Israel are commanded to consecrate all firstborn, and to observe the anniversary of the Exodus each year by removing all leaven from their possession for seven days, eating matzah, and telling the story of their redemption to their children. They are also commanded to wear *tefillin* on the arm and head as a reminder of the Exodus and their commitment to God.

Gems of Torah:

No person could see his brother. (Exodus 10:23)

The darkness was so dense that people could not see one another. That is the worst of all darkness: when people are unable to “see” their neighbors, that is, note their distress and help them. – Chasidic

When a person does not see others or want to see them, there is darkness in the world. – *Ketav Sofer*

There is no greater darkness than one in which “a man did not see his fellow” — in which a person becomes oblivious to the needs of his fellow man. When that happens, a person becomes stymied in his personal development as well—“nor did anyone get up from his place.” – *Chiddushei HaRim*

We will all go, young and old. (Exodus 10:9)

Why did Moses mention the young before the old? The young needed to go more urgently, for they were endangered by assimilation; they old were more secure in their tradition and their rescue therefore less urgent. – *Ketav Sofer*

Middah:

Rebuke (*tochecha*)

You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and incur no sin because of that person. (Leviticus 19:17)

One who rebukes another will in the end find more favor than one who flatters the person. (Proverbs 28:23)

To rebuke a wicked person for that person's blemish is to call down abuse on oneself. Do not rebuke a wicked person for that person will hate you. Rebuke a wise person, and that person will love you. (Proverbs 9:7-8)

Rabbi Jose ben Chanina said, "A love without rebuke is no love." Resh Lakish said, "Rebuke leads to peace; a peace where there has been no rebuke is no peace." – Genesis Rabbah

Abraham came forward and said [to God], "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?" (Genesis 18:23)

How often does a person rebuke sinners at the wrong time, or in the wrong place, so that they pay no attention to what is said! The rebuke is thus the cause of their becoming more confirmed in their wickedness, and of their desecrating the name of God by adding rebellion to sin. In a case of this kind, it is part of saintliness to remain silent. "As it is our duty to rebuke when we are likely to be heeded," say our sages, "so is it our duty to withhold from rebuking when we are not likely to be heeded." – Yebamot

If you see another person doing something ugly, meditate on the presence of that same ugliness in yourself. And know that it is one of God's mercies that God brought this sight before your eyes in order to remind you of that fault in you, so as to bring you back in repentance, and to save you. – *Seder ha-Dorot ha-Hadash*

Mitzvah:

Explaining to your Children the Exodus from Egypt

Whenever the Jewish people were in danger, the Baal Shem-Tov would go to a secret place in the woods, light a special fire, and say a special prayer. Then, without fail, his people would be saved from danger. Baal Shem-Tov passed on and his disciple, Magid of Mezritch, came to lead the people. Whenever he sensed his people were in danger, he would go to the secret place in the woods. "Dear God," he would say, "I don't know how to light the special fire, but I know the special prayer. Please let that be good enough." It was, and the people would once again be saved from danger. When Magid passed on, he was succeeded by Rabbi Moses-leib of Sasov, and whenever he heard that his people were in danger, he would go to the secret place in the woods. "Dear God," he would say, "I don't know how to make the special fire, I don't know how to say the special prayer, but I know this secret place in the woods. Please let that be good enough." It was. Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn succeeded Rabbi Moses, and whenever his people were in danger, he didn't even get out of his armchair. He could only bow his head and shrug his shoulders. "Dear God," he would pray, "I don't know how to make the special fire. I don't know how to say the special prayer. I don't even know the secret place in the woods. All I know is the story, and I'm hoping that's good enough." It was, and his people would be saved. - Elie Wiesel, *The Gates of the Forest*

Other *Mitzvot*:

Remember. (Exodus 13:3)

Create a calendar.

Eat unleavened bread on Passover. (Exodus 13:3)

Wear *tefillin* as a reminder of the Exodus.

And I will betroth you unto Me forever; and I will betroth you unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in compassion. And I will betroth you unto Me in faithfulness and you shall know The Lord. (Hosea 2:21-22)

A truth, in order to produce results, must be impressed upon the mind and heart repeatedly and emphatically. Merely to acknowledge the essential principles of righteousness and love, is not sufficient to actually build up such a life ... In addition thereto, symbolic words and actions are necessary so that they may become indelibly stamped upon the soul, and thus preserved for yourself and for others. – Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Torah portion: *Beshalach*

(Exodus 13:17 – 17:16)

Date:

Tuesday, February 7

Summary:

Soon after allowing the children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. God tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to God. In the desert the people suffer thirst and hunger, and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. God miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring out water from a rock by striking it with his staff. He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening. The children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations. In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

Gems of Torah:

The children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground. (Exodus 14:22)

Each tribe was unwilling to be the first to enter the sea. Then sprang forward Nachshon the son of Aminadav and descended first into the sea [and they all followed him]. – Talmud

Why does it say "The children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground"? If they went into the sea, then why does it say "on the dry ground"; and if they went on the dry ground, then why does it say that they went "into the midst of the sea"? This is to teach that the sea was divided only after Israel had stepped into it and the waters had reached their noses—only then did it become dry land. – Talmud *Sotah*

The daughters of Israel passed through the sea holding their children with their hands; and when these cried, they would stretch out their hands and pluck an apple or a pomegranate from the sea and give it to them. –*Midrash Raba*

The waters returned, and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them (Exodus 14:28)

In that hour the ministering angels wished to sing songs of praise before God, but He rebuked them, saying: "My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you wish to sing before Me?!" -- Talmud, Sanhedrin

This is my God. (Exodus 15:2)

At the time the Israelites ascended from the Red Sea the baby sat upon his mother's knee, and the suckling sucked at his mother's breast. When they beheld the Divine Presence, the baby raised his neck and the suckling released the nipple from his mouth, and they exclaimed: "This is my God!" Even the embryos in their mothers' wombs uttered a song. – Talmud, Sotah 30b

A servant girl saw at the sea what Isaiah, Ezekiel and all the other prophets did not behold. – *Mechilta*

Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dances. (Exodus 15:20)

How did the Israelites have tambourines in the desert? But the righteous women of that generation were certain that God would perform miracles for them, and they prepared tambourines and dances while still in Egypt. – Rashi

They could not drink the water because it was bitter. (Exodus 15:23)

Bitterness was not the actual condition of the water, rather, the Israelites felt bitter and, therefore, whatever they tasted was bitter to them. – *Itturei Torah*

I will rain down bread from heaven for you. (Exodus 16:4)

God put Israel to the test by giving them manna. How so? Being free from worry over bread they were now tempted to disregard God's laws. – Midrash

It was one of the miracles that manna tasted different to everyone. Whatever a man liked he found in the manna. – Midrash

Middah:

Moderation (*shevil ha'zahov*)

The path of the upright is one of moderation in every trait, so that each trait is equidistant from either extreme and not close to either. Therefore the early sages commanded that man should put his traits before him constantly and direct them to the middle road, so that he will be complete in his person. – Maimonides, The Laws of Behavior

The Talmud reports on a wedding celebration arranged by a great sage for his son. The host noticed that the rabbis were going overboard in enjoying themselves. He then took a very valuable glass cup and smashed it in front of them. They saw what he did, and they became serious. – Everyday Holiness

Most of us actually prefer a life of moderation. We don't want to sleep all day or go without sleep; we don't want to eat until we are going to burst, or starve; we don't want to work to exhaustion or be absolutely idle. – Everyday Holiness

We lose our way when we defy the natural level of desire that is healthy. – Everyday Holiness

We gain the benefits of a life of moderation only when we govern our desires instead of being governed by them. – Everyday Holiness

The luxuries we indulge in eventually come to seem to be necessities, as if we could not live without them. – Rabbi Israel Salanter

Even if God has been kind to a person and given him great wealth, he should not wear very expensive embroidered clothing since that will damage his soul because it brings a person to arrogance and also incites the Evil Inclination. In addition, it causes others, who do not have the means, to look at him and desire to emulate him. In the end, they will borrow and not repay their loans or rob and cheat. And because of these extravagances, the expenses in our times for clothing for weddings have increased to that many of our daughters are humiliated when it comes time for them to get married. Fathers and mothers cry and wail and no one can help them. – The Chafetz Chaim

In 1978 the Grand Rabbi of the Ger Chassidim issued a decree requiring his followers to limit the number of guests at their weddings to 120 people. A wealthy follower complained that he should be exempt from the decree because he was rich. The rebbe told him: "Then buy yourself a new rebbe."

Mitzvah:

Feeding the Hungry

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest...you shall leave them for the poor and stranger. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

Torah portion: *Yitro*

(Exodus 18:1 – 20:23)

Date:

Tuesday, February 14

Summary:

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, hears of the great miracles which God performed for the people of Israel, and comes from Midian to the Israelite camp, bringing with him Moses' wife and two sons. Jethro advises Moses to appoint judges to assist him in the task of governing and administering justice to the people. The children of Israel camp opposite Mount Sinai, where they are told that God has chosen them to be a "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation." The people respond by proclaiming, "All that God has spoken, we shall do." Seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai. God descends on the mountain amidst thunder, lightning, billows of smoke and the blast of the *shofar*, and summons Moses to ascend. God proclaims the Ten Commandments, commanding the people of Israel to believe in God, not to worship idols or take God's name in vain, to keep the Shabbat, honor their parents, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, and not to bear false witness or covet another's property. The people cry out to Moses that the revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from God and convey it to them.

Gems of Torah:

Each Israelite heard what was in his or her power to hear. – Midrash

The mountains quarreled with each other, each wanted God's Presence to rest on it. Each extolled its own height and distinction. God said, "My Presence will rest on Sinai, the smallest and most insignificant of all." In this, Sinai resembled the humility of Moses who did not want to accept the mantle of leadership. – Midrash

We will do and we will listen. (Exodus 24:7)

When the other nations were asked to accept the Torah they declined after learning that its commands contradicted their practices. But Israel accepted the Torah even before it had heard its full demands and said, "We will do and listen" – they promised to carry out God's will before they had learned its demands. – Midrash

Why was the Torah not given in the land of Israel? In order that the nations of the world should not have an excuse and say, "Because it was given in Israel's land, therefore we did not accept it." Another reason: To avoid causing conflict among the tribes. Else one might have said, "in my territory the Torah was given." And another might have said, "In my territory the Torah was given." Therefore the Torah was given in the desert, publicly and openly, in a place belonging to no one. – Midrash

No one can by himself observe all of the commandments, for some are addressed to priests, others to women, to owners of fields and houses, and so forth. Only all of Israel together can do God's will completely, hence "all the people answered as one" – Vilna Gaon

God created the world with the BEIT, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The opening word of the Torah *Breishit* starts with it. When the first letter ALEPH complained, God consoled it saying, "I will start the Decalogue with you (anochi). For I am One and you are 'one.'" – Midrash

Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the world-to-come. – Midrash

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things in space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world. – Abraham Joshua Heschel

Middah:

Order (seder)

Take time, be exact, unclutter the mind. – Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler provides three reasons why we should make an effort to bring order into our lives:

- 1) Knowing things are well arranged creates a feeling of inner satisfaction and confidence that everything is under control.
- 2) Order helps you find things when you need them and saves you the time you would lose looking for them.
- 3) Many things will function only if they are arranged correctly, like a machine that requires every one of its parts to be in good working order, often in a specific sequence, to run properly.

Torah stands on the principle of order. After all, only one moment separates Shabbat from the weekday. One hairbreadth is the difference between a kosher and an unfit slaughtering. A small volume of water can render a kosher mikveh unfit. Details are small, but they matter, often crucially.

The essential value of practicing order is that by voluntarily aligning ourselves with an orderly way of living, we draw ourselves closer to the divine way of being. When we are orderly, we emulate one of God's intrinsic characteristics, and that draws us closer to God.

Without order, you are bound to be wasting something – whether time, resources, things themselves that get lost, relationships, and so on. Not wasting is a Jewish ethical principle. – Everyday Holiness

Who is strong? He who controls his desires. – *Pirkei Avot*

Mitzvah:

I am the Lord your God.

Do not worship idols.

Do not take the name of God in vain.

Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother.

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not bear false witness.

Do not covet what is your neighbor's.

There are six things which, while providing some reward in this world, reach their real value in the World to Come: Hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick, meditation in prayer, rising early to attend the study hall, raising one's children in the study of Torah, and judging of one's neighbors charitably. – Talmud

Torah portion: *Teruma*

(Exodus 25:1 – 27:19)

Date:

Tuesday, February 28

Summary:

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute thirteen materials—gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems—out of which, God says to Moses, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them.” On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for God so that it could be readily dismantled, transported and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert. In the Sanctuary’s inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the ark containing the tablets of testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the ark’s cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched menorah, and the table upon which the “showbread” was arranged. The Sanctuary’s three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multicolored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat hair; (c) a covering of ram and *tachash* skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts. Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings, and reinforced by copper stakes.

Gems of Torah:

Speak to the children of Israel, that they should take to Me a *terumah* (“uplifting”).
(Exodus 25:2)

Every created entity has a spark of Godliness within it, a pinpoint of divinity that constitutes its “soul,” its spiritual function and design. When we utilize something to serve the Creator, we penetrate its shell of mundanity, revealing and realizing its divine essence. Thus we elevate these “sparks,” reuniting them with their Source. —Chassidic Masters

They shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within them. (Exodus 25:8)

The verse does not say “and I will dwell within it,” but “and I will dwell within them”—within each and every one of them. —*Shaloh*

There was once a king who had an only daughter, and one of the kings came and married her. When her husband wished to return to his country, her father said to him: "My daughter, whose hand I have given you, is my only child; I cannot part with her. Neither can I say to you, 'Do not take her,' for she is your wife. This one favor, however, I ask of you: wherever you go to live, prepare a chamber for me that I may dwell with you, for I cannot leave my daughter." In the same way, God said to Israel: "I have given you the Torah. I cannot part with her, and I also cannot tell you not to take her. But this I request of you: wherever you go, make for Me a house wherein I may dwell." – *Midrash Rabh*

You shall overlay [the ark] with pure gold, inside and outside. (Exodus 25:11)

Any Torah scholar whose interior is not like his exterior is no Torah scholar. – Talmud, *Yoma*

See that you make [the menorah and its parts] after their pattern, which is shown you on the mountain. (Exodus 25:40)

Moses had difficulty comprehending the construction of the menorah, until God showed him a menorah of fire. – Rashi

You shall make a covering of *tachash* skins above. (Exodus 26:14)

The *tachash* was a multicolored animal, which was created specifically for the Tabernacle and existed only at that time.

Rabbi Hoshaya taught that it was a one-horned animal. – Jerusalem Talmud

In truth, "Everything that God created, God created solely for God's glory" (Ethics of the Fathers 6:11). It is only that in our material world, a thing's exterior face often belies its intrinsic purpose. But there was one creature, the *tachash*, which existed only in the time and place it was needed for the making of a "dwelling for God." Thus the *tachash* expressed the true nature of every creation: that it exists to the sole end of serving and revealing the divine essence implicit within it. – Lubavitcher Rebbe

Middah:

Awe (*yirah*)

The beginning of wisdom is the *yirah* [fear/awe] of God. – Psalms

The word *Yirah* has many shades of meaning. Two definitions are "awe" and "reverence." *Yirah* is often translated as "fear" of God – and can include wonder, amazement, appreciation,

surprise, gratitude, humility, standing in mystery...maybe “Ah!” and “Aha!” and “Wow!” all mixed together. – Susan Freeman

Are there times when the pain, straightforward definition of *yirah* actually should be fear? Might being afraid of God have its place too? Such a concept is consistent with certain Jewish religious messages, particularly biblical ones. For one, fear of God can help us overcome fear of other people. In the first chapter of Exodus, the midwives Shifra and Puah are under orders by Pharaoh to drown all newborn Jewish males. They disobey, refusing to be intimidated by Pharaoh's edict. Rather, as Torah states, “They feared God.” The midwives knew that they should not fear a person, even a Pharaoh, over God. – Susan Freeman

Experience shows us that [fear and awe] can be two totally distinct inner qualities – you can be terrified of the bear, and in awe at the sunset. But experience also justifies linking them together. Imagine standing right at the lip of the Grand Canyon, looking down into the vast and rainbow-colored cavern. Fear and awe merge into one exuberant inner experience. – Everyday Holiness

How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven. (Genesis 28:17)

But I know that you and your courtiers do not yet fear God. (Exodus 9:30)

You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God. (Leviticus 19:14)

And now Israel, what does the Eternal your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Eternal your God, to walk only in God's paths, to love God, and to serve the Eternal your God with all your heart and soul, keeping the Eternal's commandments. (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

The beginning of wisdom is reverence of God. (Psalms 111:10)

It is good to look at the sky often, as this helps to develop awe of God. – Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulai

Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel the rush of the passing, the stillness of the eternal. – Abraham Joshua Heschel

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour. – William Blake

“The fear of Heaven has two aspects: the fear of tribulations and Divine retribution, and the awe of God's glory, majesty, and awesome power.” – *The Duties of the Heart*

Even though fear of punishment can be effective, especially in the short run, it is a faulty basis for spiritual endeavor compared to that other factor embedded in the notion of *yirah*, which is awe of divine majesty. – *Chofetz Chaim*

Fear of retribution comes first and must be cultivated first, as an unavoidable level through which we gain the ability to enter into awe of the divine and then to live according to this awareness. – Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer

The wise of heart have explained that it is impossible to immediately attain the exalted level of awe of heaven. Rather, one must first come to fear God's judgment, and only then ascend. – The Malbim

Fear is the deepest, oldest, and most intransigent aspect of our lower selves. We are wired to be fearful as a basic mechanism for survival. As a result, in the struggle to assert the dominion of higher self over lower, there is no way fear can simply be ignored or overpowered. The question is, since we are stuck with fear, can we put it to good use? – Everyday Holiness

Mitzvah:

Beautifying the commandment (*hiddur mitzvah*)

The sources delineate the minimum requirements of the *mitzvot* [commandments]. A sukkah must have certain dimensions and must be constructed in a particular manner. The cup for Kiddush must be large enough to hold a specified minimum amount of wine. While some may be satisfied with minimum standards, the Jewish tradition recognizes and encourages the addition of an aesthetic dimension. Beauty enhances the *mitzvot* by appealing to the senses. Beautiful sounds and agreeable fragrances, tastes, textures, colors, and artistry contribute to human enjoyment of religious acts, and beauty itself takes on a religious dimension. The principle of enhancing a mitzvah through aesthetics is called *Hiddur Mitzvah*. The concept of *Hiddur Mitzvah* is derived from Rabbi Ishmael's comment on the verse, "This is my God and I will glorify God" (Exodus 15:2): "Is it possible for a human being to add glory to his Creator? What this really means is: I shall glorify God in the way I perform *mitzvot*. I shall prepare before God a beautiful *lulav*, beautiful sukkah, beautiful fringes (*tsitsit*), and beautiful phylacteries (*tefilin*)." (*Midrash Mechilta, Shirata*) The Talmud adds to this list a beautiful Shofar and a beautiful Torah scroll which has been written by a skilled scribe with fine ink and fine pen and wrapped in beautiful silks. Jewish folklore is replete with stories about Jews of modest circumstances paying more than they could afford for the most beautiful *etrog* to enhance their observance of Sukkot, or for the most delectable foods to enhance their observance of Shabbat. – Gate of the Season

In keeping with the principle of *Hiddur Mitzvah* one should be willing to pay even one third more [than the normal price].” – Rabbi Zera

Other *Mitzvot*:

Make a sanctuary for God

Torah portion: *Tetzaveh*

(Exodus 27:20 – 30:10)

Date:

Tuesday, March 7

Summary:

God tells Moses to receive from the children of Israel pure olive oil to feed the “everlasting flame” of the menorah, which Aaron is to kindle each day, “from evening until morning.” The priestly garments, to be worn by the *kohanim* (priests) while serving in the Sanctuary, are described. They wore: 1) a full-length linen tunic; 2) linen breeches (the origin of pants!!!); 3) a linen turban; 4) a long sash wound above the waist. In addition, the *kohen gadol* (high priest, or “big kahuna”) wore: 5) an apron-like garment made of blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool, linen and gold thread; 6) a breastplate containing twelve precious stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; 7) a cloak of blue wool, with gold bells and decorative pomegranates on its hem; 8) and a golden plate worn on the forehead, bearing the inscription “Holy to God.” This portion also includes God’s detailed instructions for the seven-day initiation of Aaron and his four sons—Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar—into the priesthood, and for the making of the golden altar, on which the incense was burned.

Gems of Torah:

And you shall command... (Exodus 27:20)

Tetzaveh is the only *parshah* in the Torah since Moses’ birth in which Moses’ name does not appear (with the exception of the book of Deuteronomy, which consists mostly of a first-person narrative spoken by Moses). The reason for this is that [when the people of Israel sinned with the golden calf,] Moses said to God: “If You do not [forgive them], erase me from the book that You have written” (Exodus 32:31). This was realized in *Tetzaveh*, since the censure of a righteous person, even if made conditional on an unfulfilled stipulation, always has some effect. – *Baal HaTurim*

While Moses’ *name* does not appear in *Tetzaveh*, Moses himself is very much present: the entire *parshah* (portion) consists of God’s words to Moses! Indeed, the *parshah*’s first word is *ve’atah*, “and you”—the “you” being the person of Moses.

Indeed, the word “you” connotes its subject’s very self, while a person’s name is a more superficial “handle” on his personality. This means that Moses is *more* present in our *parshah*—that is, present in a deeper, more essential way—than any mention of his name could possibly express.

This is fully in keeping with the Baal HaTurim’s explanation (cited above). Because Moses was prepared to forgo mention of his name in the Torah for the sake of his people, he merited that his quintessential self—the level of self that cannot be captured by any name or designation—be eternalized by the Torah. It is this level of Moses’ self that is expressed by his “nameless” presence in *Tetzaveh*. – Lubavitcher Rebbe

Pure olive oil, crushed for the light. (Exodus 27:20)

Just as the olive yields light only when it is pounded, so are man’s greatest potentials realized only under the pressure. – Talmud

“Crushed for the light.” When one speaks crushing words of rebuke, it must be with the sole purpose of enlightening, illuminating and uplifting one’s fellow. Never, God forbid, to humiliate and break him. – Chassidic saying

The olive tree is a sign of hope that life can be restored. When the great flood began to subside, Noah set out a dove. “The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a leaf it had picked from an olive tree.” (Genesis 8:11) – Rabbi Adam Fisher

Rabbi Yehoshuah ben Levi said: “Why is Israel compared to an olive tree? Because just as the leaves of the olive tree do not fall off either in summer or in winter, the Jewish people shall not be cast off, either in this world or in the world-to-come” – *Menachot*

The rabbis in the Midrash note about olives and olive oil that what began as bitter ends as sweet – *Sefer HaShirim Rabbah*

Middah:

Enthusiasm (*zerizut*)

I hurried – did not delay – to keep Your commandments. – Psalm 119:60

Showing up is not enough.

Because we get drugged into unconsciousness by repetition, and lest they become dead acts, prayer and observance need to be regularly boosted with an infusion of enthusiasm. And what is true in your service to God is also true in your life in other ways. To live with spiritual integrity and authenticity requires that you break through the smothering curtain of routine. You'll do that by consciously ticking up your enthusiasm a notch. – Everyday Holiness

The trait of zeal is an ornament to all the other traits and it perfects all of them. –
Orchot Tzaddikim

Original meaning of the word “enthusiasm”: To be infused with God!

There are two different aspects of the trait of enthusiasm.

- 1) The first is to be quick to take action. Our role model here is Abraham, who the Torah tells us “rose early in the morning.” He did this three times: once to stand before God’s place; another time to expel Hagar and her son Ishmael from his household; and finally to fulfill the difficult commandment he had received to take his son Isaac to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed. His sense of service was so complete that he did not hesitate in the least to spring into action. When windows of opportunity open in your life, these may also be invitations from God. Are you quick to recognize and act on the ones that are for good?
- 2) The second aspect of enthusiasm involves finding and expressing the energy needed to complete a task. As important as it is to be quick off the mark, it is equally important to sustain energy throughout the whole enterprise. It’s so common for people to begin something with a tank full of enthusiasm, only to grind to a halt when they hit a delay or when some unforeseen obstruction arises, they get bored, or something else gets in the way. It takes enthusiasm not to bog down, wander off, or pull up midcourse but to press on to finish the good deed with vigor. With regard to this, the sages said, “A mitzvah is judged only upon its completion.” As much as we like to comfort ourselves otherwise, good intentions are not enough.

Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto [says that] the first major stumbling block...is laziness. When laziness rules the roost, not much else happens, except that we remain stuck in our present circumstances, arrested like a bud frozen on the limb.

Without even recognizing that it is happening, laziness carries us lower and lower until we ultimately become agents of evil: “The lazy man, though not actively evil, produces evil through his very inactivity.”

The pursuit of comforts and pleasures depletes spiritual energy simply because we have only so much energy in our lives.

Worrying and fretting can also deplete spiritual energy. In fact, anxiety is often what underlies other things we do that sap our enthusiasm. After all, isn't it our fears and worries that send us searching after shelter from the (real or imagined) storm?

Once the pattern has taken hold – a worried mind as opposed to a mind with worries – there is no end to subjects to fret over, real or imaginary.

How do we stoke the fires of enthusiasm?

...by awakening to the very many good things that the Holy One does for you moment by moment – in other words, practicing gratitude.

Living with awakened gratitude delivers fuel to make our actions more energetic.

Just as enthusiasm can *result* from an inner burning, so it can *create* one. That is, one who perceives a quickening of his outer movements in the performance of a mitzvah conditions himself to experience a flaming inner movement, through which longing and desire will continually grow. If, however, he is sluggish in the movement of his limbs, the movement of his spirit will die down and become extinguished. Experience testifies to this. – Rabbi Luzzatto

Mitzvah:

The Eternal Lamp (*ner tamid*)

In the ancient Temple, the Israelites were commanded to keep a fire burning perpetually upon the altar. Ultimately, the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed, and the synagogue came to replace it, as the gathering place where the Jewish people would pray in community. As time marched forward, some, though not all, of the key Temple ritual items came to be represented in synagogues. Among them was and remains the *Ner Tamid*. Of course, we do not offer burnt sacrifices; so our *Ner Tamid* does not function as it did in the Temple of old. Traditionally, it served as a reminder of what was, and of what our people hoped would be again. Even today, Orthodox Jews look to the day when the synagogue Eternal Light will be replaced by that perpetual flame on the one altar in Jerusalem. For us, though, the Eternal Light possesses a more symbolic meaning. It represents a light that always shines. The *Ner Tamid* reminds us of our everlasting obligation to keep our Jewish faith alive. Our ancestors passed through the flames, literally, to perpetuate our faith. Now, the torch has been passed to us. Observance of Judaism and fidelity to our God are a legacy which we cannot permit to be lost. The *Ner Tamid* represents the eternality of the Jewish people. The Eternal Light takes the form of the burning bush. That humble shrub caught Moses' eye because, even though it was aflame, the bush was still green. The *Ner Tamid* reminds us that our people has endured forces that sought to destroy us. Most importantly, the *Ner Tamid* is a symbol of God's abiding presence among us. – Rabbi Barry Block

Torah portion: *Ki Tisa*

(Exodus 30:11 – 34:35)

Date:

Tuesday, March 14

Summary:

The people of Israel are told to each contribute exactly half a shekel of silver to the Sanctuary. Instructions are also given to make of the Sanctuary's water basin out of the women's mirrors. "Wise-hearted" artists Betzalel and Aholiav are placed in charge of the Sanctuary's construction, and the people are once again commanded to keep the Shabbat. When Moses does not return when expected from Mount Sinai, the people make a golden calf and worship it. God proposes to destroy them, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. Moses descends from the mountain carrying the tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments; seeing the people dancing about their idol, he breaks the tablets, destroys the golden calf, and has the primary culprits put to death. He grinds up the calf into gold powder and makes the people drink it. He then returns to God to say: "If You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written." God forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. At first God proposes to send an angel along with them, but Moses insists that God Himself accompany God's people to the promised land. Moses prepares a new set of tablets and once more ascends the mountain, where God reinscribes the covenant on these second tablets. On the mountain, Moses is also granted a vision of God. So radiant is Moses' face upon his return, that he must cover it with a veil, which he removes only to speak with God and to teach God's laws to the people.

Gems of Torah:

This they shall give...half a shekel. (Exodus 30:13)

Why not a complete coin? To teach us that no man is a complete entity unto himself. Only by joining with another can a person become a "whole thing." – The Chassidic Masters

This they shall give... (Exodus 30:13)

God took a coin of fire from under His throne of glory and showed it to Moses, saying: "Such as this they shall give." – *Midrash Tanchuma*

Moses could not understand: How could a mere coin serve a person as "a ransom for his soul to God"? God answered him by showing him a "coin of fire."

God was saying: When a person performs even a modest act of charity with the fire of passion and enthusiasm, he is indeed giving a piece of his soul. – The Rebbe of Kotzk

Money is fire. Like fire it can destroy and annihilate, or illuminate and warm, depending on how it is used. – Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk

And on the seventh day God rested and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:17)

Resh Lakish said: On Shabbat eve God imparts an additional soul to the person, and at Shabbat's end He takes it away. – Talmud, Beitzah

God said to Moses: "Go down." (Exodus 32:7)

What is meant by "Go down"? Rabbi Elazar said: God said to Moses: "Moses, descend from your greatness. Have I given you greatness other than for the sake of Israel? And now Israel have sinned; then what do I want with you?" Immediately, Moses became powerless and had no strength to speak. But when God said, "Leave Me alone that I may destroy them," Moses said to himself: "This depends upon me," and he stood up and prayed vigorously and begged for mercy. It was like the case of a king who became angry with his son and began beating him severely. His friend was sitting before him, but was afraid to say a word, until the king said, "Were it not for my friend here who is sitting before me, I would kill you." Said the friend to himself, "This depends on me," and immediately he stood up and rescued him.

Rabbi Abbahu said: Were it not explicitly written, "Leave Me alone that I may destroy them," it would be impossible to say such a thing: this indicates that Moses took hold of God like a man who seizes his fellow by his garment, and said to Him: "Master of the Universe! I will not let You go until You forgive and pardon them." – Talmud, *Berachot*

God said to Moses: "Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first; and I will write upon these tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke." (Exodus 34:1)

Both the [second] tablets and the broken tablets were placed in the ark. – Talmud, Bava Batra

Middah:

Trust (*bitachon*)

Blessed be the one who trusts in the Lord and the Lord shall be his source of trust. (Jeremiah 17:7)

A person who tries to practice trust in God while leaving himself a backup plan is like a person who tries to learn how to swim but insists on keeping one foot on the ground. -- Rabbi Yosef Yozel Hurwitz

This world can appear so unpredictable sometimes. hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires, and other natural disasters can and do strike at any moment. Your life can suddenly be overturned by illness or accident or financial setback. And most of all, there is the unaccountable cruelty, incompetence, and stupidity of people. Yet the soul yearns to trust. No one wants to live with anxiety and worry. – Everyday Holiness

Faith and trust are two separate concepts. The latter is dependent on the former, while the former is independent of the latter. Faith precedes trust, and can exist in a believer's heart even when he lacks trust, for faith can exist without trust. Trust, however, denotes the existence of faith, for it is impossible for trust to precede it or to endure independently. -- Maimonides

Even assuming that you do have a sense of a relationship with HaShem, how could you possibly lean trustingly on a God who allows a million children to be killed in the Holocaust, who sweeps 150,000 people to their deaths in a tsunami, who permits AIDS and smallpox and ALS, who rains fire on the innocent and allows the guilty to die comfortable and secure in their beds? If this is what our omniscient, omnipotent divinity does, then it seems you'd have to be crazy to trust that God. And perhaps you'd conclude that the sum total of the suffering, evil, and madness in the world is just sure proof that there really is no God at all.

If you think that you are supposed to be the master of your life -- as if that were possible -- the terrible happenings that inevitably come your way in this imperfect world are defeats. They make happiness impossible. But the Jewish tradition actually gives us a different job description, one that fits much better with this world just as it is. It advises us not to seek happiness but to recognize instead that we are meant to be servants of God. As a servant of God, the challenges of life are just the stuff of a day's labor in the fields of the Lord.

Two forms of trust:

1. There is the trust that God will look out for you. This is the trust that says God will deliver the providence you want and need.
2. There is another more reasonable, less radical version of trust based on an attitude of acceptance. You don't expect that everything will turn out as you want, but instead accept whatever happens because you understand that there is reason and order behind the world -- that nothing takes place without a reason, even if the reason is not apparent to you at the moment. So you still don't worry whether you will get food tomorrow, not because you feel assured that food will come, but because you accept whatever lies in store for you.

This sort of trust doesn't entitle you to walk through a dangerous neighborhood at night with assurance that you won't get mugged. It doesn't mean you can drive fast with no fear or having an accident. That's not trust -- that's just unintelligent wishful thinking that actually runs counter to the guidance of tradition, which tells us that we have an obligation to guard ourselves from

potential harm. Exposing yourself to danger does not reflect trust in God, it reflects the trait of recklessness.

The *Chazon Ish* argued for trust based on acceptance, defining this soul-trait as "total belief that nothing in this world happens by chance -- HaShem determines all that will happen." This is not the trust that you will be safe, but rather that if you are hurt, there is real meaning and purpose to the pain. We are handicapped because we can only see part of the picture of life at any time, and often only a small part, and so we draw faulty conclusions about what something means.

Love presupposes trust. You cannot love those whom you cannot trust. Cultivating trust, love becomes possible.

Mitzvah:

Do not worship idols.

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God. (Exodus 20)

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. (Psalms 115:4-8)

Other *Mitzvot*:

Do not boil a kid-goat in its mother's milk.

Torah portion: *Vayakhel/Pekudei*

(Exodus 35:1 – 38-20/38:21-40:38)

Date:

Tuesday, March 21

Summary:

Moses assembles the people of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the Shabbat. He then conveys God's instructions regarding the making of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), including how to make the wash basin out of the copper mirrors of the women. The people donate the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones. They bring so much that Moses has to tell them to stop giving! The *Mishkan* is completed and all its components are brought to Moses, who anoints it with the holy anointing oil, and initiates Aaron and his four sons into the priesthood. A cloud appears over the *Mishkan*, signifying the Divine Presence that has come to dwell within it.

Gems of Torah:

Six days work shall be done; and the seventh day shall be holy. Every wise-hearted man among you shall come and make all that God has commanded. (Exodus 35:2, 10)

Why does the Torah place the commandment to cease work on Shabbat next to the work of the *Mishkan*? To teach us that a person is guilty of violating the Shabbat only if the work he does has a counterpart in the work of making the Sanctuary: they sowed (the herbs from which to make dyes for the tapestries); you too shall not sow [on Shabbat]. They harvested [the herbs]; you too shall not harvest. They loaded the boards from the ground onto the wagons; you too shall not bring an object from a public domain into a private domain. – Talmud and Rashi

What are the kinds of labor not to be done on the Sabbath? They are, according to the ancient rabbis, all those acts which were necessary for the construction and furnishing of the Sanctuary in the desert. The Sabbath itself is a sanctuary which we build, a sanctuary in time. – Abraham Joshua Heschel

He [Betzalel] made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of the dedicated women who congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. (Exodus 38:8)

Israelite women owned mirrors, which they would look into when they adorned themselves. Even these [mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the *Mishkan*, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts]. The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, "Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt." When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labor, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, "I am more beautiful than you." And in this way they aroused their husbands' desire and would be intimate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: "Under the apple tree I aroused you" (Song 8:5). This is [the meaning of] what is *bemar'ot hatzove'ot* [lit., the mirrors of those who set up legions]. From these [the mirrors], the washstand was made. – Rashi

Middah:

Generosity (*nedivut*)

"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking." (Genesis 24:18-19)

We have both straw and food enough and room to lodge in. (Genesis 24:25)

And the servant of Abraham brought forth objects of silver and gold, and garments for Rebekah, and he gave presents also to her brother and her mother. (Genesis 24:53)

A gift sent to my lord Esau, and Jacob himself is right behind us. (Genesis 32:14-20)

Take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for "the man" – some balm and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds. (Genesis 43:11)

The Eternal spoke to Moses saying: Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts from all whose hearts so move them...and let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. (Exodus 25: 1-8)

Giving gifts eases a person's way, and gives that person access to the great. (Proverbs 18:16)

The Holy Jew Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak of Pshischa said that people should train themselves to be good-hearted and giving. Start with something small. For example, accustom

yourself to giving others a little of your snuff tobacco. Then do a little more, like letting them enjoy the use of your pipe, and so on by degrees, until gradually you are in the habit of being generous. – *Niflaot ha-Yehudi*

The human heart is naturally inclined to give. Caring comes easily to that organ, but it is able to act on that inclination only when it is open. That isn't always the heart's condition. When our hearts are closed or walled off, we are suffering from a spiritual ailment that the Mussar teachers call *timtum ha'lev*, meaning a blocked or barricaded heart – literally, a stopped-up heart. Instead of being open, flowing, and generous, we are sluggish, constipated, and unwilling at our core. – Everyday Holiness

The Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism, taught: In hell, people sit around a great banquet table piled high with food. Each person is given a fork six feet in length, far too long for them to maneuver into their mouths. They are starving. In heaven, on the other hand, people sit around exactly the same banquet. But in heaven each feeds the person across the table, and in doing so, all are filled. – Everyday Holiness

A person who gives a thousand gold pieces on a thousand different occasions, each in its proper place is at a higher level than one who gives a thousand pieces at one time. For if one gives a thousand pieces at one time, it is because he was suddenly seized with a great impulse to give that afterward departed from him. – *Orchot Tzaddikim*

The virtues of character do not come to a person through the greatness of their deeds but according to the number of deeds. Virtues of character come with repetition of right action many times over. – Maimonides

[In Torah it is written:] "Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the Almighty." The question Rabbi Simcha Zissel asks is, "To what does 'it' refer?" He answers that this verse means that those who bring gifts should bring their hearts along with their offerings. It isn't enough just to give money or an object, even from the heart. God wants us to give our hearts themselves.

Mitzvah:

Bringing Gifts for Building the *Mishkan*

Rabbi Nathan Finkel lived towards the end of the 19th century and headed a yeshiva in Slobodka, a small town in Lithuania. On cold, dark winter mornings, it is said, the rabbi used to get up early, cross over the bridge and go into town. He would stop off in all the shtibelech, all the little prayer houses and places of study, one after another. And in each small, dark room, he would light a fire in the oven and stoke the flames before continuing on his rounds. 'Why did he do it?' his closest friends would ask. And he would say: If all the prayer houses and places of study are warm early in the morning, then coachmen, porters and all

kinds of poor people will come in to get warm - and then they will find themselves in a sacred place. – Norman Lamm, *The Good Society: Jewish Ethics in Action*

Tzedaka

The law says that even the poor person who received charity is obligated to give *tzedakah*. The logic here is that the poor should not be denied the joy and reward that derive from performing the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. – *Everyday Holiness*

Torah portion: *Vayikra*

(Leviticus 1:1 – 5:26)

Date:

Tuesday, March 28

Summary:

God calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, and communicates to him the laws of the *korbanot*, the animal and meal offerings brought in the Sanctuary. These include: The “ascending offering” that is wholly raised to God by the fire atop the altar; Five varieties of “meal offering” prepared with fine flour, olive oil and frankincense; The “peace offering” whose meat was eaten by the one bringing the offering, after parts are burned on the altar and parts are given to the priests; The different types of “sin offerings” brought to atone for transgressions committed erroneously by the high priest, the entire community, the king or the ordinary Jew; The “guilt offering” brought by one who has misappropriated property of the Sanctuary, who is in doubt as to whether he transgressed a divine prohibition, or who has committed a “betrayal against God” by bearing false witness and lying.

Gems of Torah:

וַיִּקְרָא אֵל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד
לֵאמֹר דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם
כִּי יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קֶרֶבֶן לַיהוָה מִן הַבְּהֵמָה מִן הַבֶּקָר

When God told Moses to write the word *Vayikra* “And He called”, Moses didn’t want to write that last *aleph*. It seemed to Moses that it gave him too much importance. How could he write that God called to him? Who was he, after all? A mere man. Moses would have preferred to write *Vayikar* — “And God happened (upon him).” In other words God just “came across” Moses, He didn’t “go out of His way” to appear to him. In spite of Moses’s protestations, God told him to write *Vayikra* — “And He called”. Moses put the *aleph* at the end of the word as God had commanded him — but he wrote it small.

What’s in a small *aleph*?

The *aleph* is the letter that represents the will, the ego. It is the first letter of the word for “I” — ‘*Ani*’. When a person sees himself as the Big A, the Big *Aleph*, Number One, he

is usurping the crown of God who is One. When a person sees himself as no more than a small *aleph*, then he makes room for the Divine Presence to dwell in him. His head is not swollen with the cotton candy of self-regard.

Moses was the humblest of all men. Moses made himself so little that he was barely in this world at all. He didn't even want to be a small *aleph*. He, as no man before or since, saw that there is only one *aleph* in all of Creation, only one Number One — God.

Moses made his own *aleph* — his ego — so small, that he merited that the Torah was given through him. — *Midrash Tanchuma*

A man who shall bring near of you an offering to God. (Leviticus 1:2)

The verse does not say “a man of you who shall bring near an offering,” but “a man who shall bring near of you an offering”—the offering must come from within the person. It is the animal within man that must be “brought near” and elevated by the Divine fire upon the altar. — Chassidic Masters

He shall rend it by its wings and the priest shall burn it on the altar. (Leviticus 1:17)

The wings, with the feathers, were burned with it. An ordinary being, should he smell the odor of burning feathers, is nauseated thereby...Why then all this? Just in order that the altar may be sated and glorified by the sacrifice of a pauper. — Rashi

A soul who shall offer a meal offering to God. (Leviticus 2:1)

Why is the meal offering distinguished in that the expression “soul” is used? Because God says: “Who is it that usually brings a meal offering? It is the poor man. I account it as though he had offered his own soul to Me.”

Why is the meal offering distinguished in that five kinds of oil dishes are stated in connection with it? This can be likened to the case of a human king for whom his friend had prepared a feast. The king knew that his friend was poor [and had only one food to offer him], so he said to him: “Prepare it for me in five kinds of dishes, so that I will derive pleasure from you.” — Talmud, *Menachot*

It is said of a large ox, “A fire offering, a sweet savor”; of a small bird, “A fire offering, a sweet savor”; and of a meal offering, “A fire offering, a sweet savor.” This is to teach you that it is the same whether a person offers much or little, so long as he directs his heart to heaven. — Talmud, *Menachot*

No leaven nor any honey in any offering of God. (Leviticus 2:11)

Ultra-sweet honey and ultra-sour leaven are opposite extremes; God does not like extremes. – The Rebbe of Kotzk

Middah:

Gratitude (*hakarat ha'tov*)

Leah became pregnant and gave birth to another son. She named him Judah, for she said, “Now I will thank the Lord!” (Genesis 29:35) Judah (*Yehuda*) means “I am grateful!”

Hakarat ha'tov literally means, “recognizing the good.” The good is already there. Practicing gratitude means being fully aware of the good that is already yours.

Most of us tend to focus so heavily on the deficiencies in our lives that we barely perceive the good that counterbalances them. This tendency is bolstered by advertisers who attempt to convince us of just how inadequate and lacking we really are, in the hope we will try to plug our wants and needs by buying some product or other.

In our lives, the Torah asks us to recite blessings for everything, from the most mundane activities, like eating, to the most extraordinary, like seeing a rainbow or the ocean, all of which help us focus on and appreciate that which we might otherwise take for granted.

No one has to look far to find someone who has more money, or is taller, healthier, or luckier in love. Comparing ourselves like this can create bitterness in the soul, as we poison ourselves with judgment, grasping, and self-recrimination. Cultivating gratitude counterbalances this tendency. – Everyday Holiness

Gratitude rejoices with her sister joy and is always ready to light a candle and have a party. Gratitude doesn't much like the old cronies of boredom, despair, and taking life for granted. – Rabbi Nachman of Braslav

There isn't a person alive who hasn't been given gifts, if only the gifts of life and hope. -- Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda

Once, Rabbi Akiva was walking along the way accompanied by a rooster, a donkey, and a lamp. He came to a certain place and looked for room at the inn, but he was turned away. When that happened, he said, “Whatever the All-Merciful does, He does for the good.” So he went with his rooster, donkey, and lamp and spent the night in an open field. The wind came and put out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the rooster, a lion came and ate the donkey. He said, “Whatever the All-Merciful does, He does for the good.” On that very night, a marauding troop came to that town and took into captivity everyone in the town. Rabbi Akiva was spared. Had his rooster crowed, had the donkey brayed, had the light glowed, he would have been discovered.

Gam zu l'tovah – “And that is also for the good.”

Here is the practice. When something apparently “good” happens to you, you offer the blessing, “And that is also for the good.” And if something “bad” happens to you, “And that is also for the good.”

Mitzvah:

Separating the Dough (*hafrashat challah*)

“It shall be that when you eat the bread of the land, you shall set aside a portion [of dough] for God.” (Numbers 15:17-21)

The mitzvah of challah requires a person to set aside a portion of the dough that is to be baked into bread. This portion of dough is given to the priests who served in the Temple. The Torah does not specify exactly how much dough must be separated, but our Sages have determined that someone who bakes bread at home must separate 1/24 of the dough, and a commercial baker is obligated to separate 1/48 of his dough. Today, since there is no priesthood, the portion is burned. That way the *mitzvah* is not forgotten.

The Torah commands us to separate a portion of the dough we have put so much effort into making, and to dedicate it to the Holy One Blessed be God. We must remember that it is more than just our talents and skills that have produced these challahs. God’s blessing and Divine Providence are present in everything we do, as well as in the challahs that we make. – Chabad

Torah portion: *Tzav*

(Leviticus 6:1 – 8:36)

Date:

Tuesday, April 4

Summary:

God instructs Moses to command Aaron and his sons regarding their duties and rights as *kohanim* (priests) who offer the *korbanot* (animal and meal offerings) in the Sanctuary. The fire on the altar must be kept burning at all times. The portion describes the various sacrifices. The priests eat the meat of the sin and guilt offerings, and the remainder of the meal offering. The peace offering is eaten by the one who brought it, except for specified portions given to the priest. The holy meat of the offerings must be eaten by ritually pure people, in their designated holy place and within their specified time. Aaron and his sons remain within the Sanctuary compound for seven days, during which Moses initiates them into the priesthood.

Gems of Torah:

The fire upon the altar shall be kept burning in it and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning (Leviticus 6:5)

There is a fire of love for God that burns within every soul. It is the task of the *kohen*—the spiritual leaders of the generation—to feed and preserve this fire. – Alshich

A constant fire shall burn upon the altar; it shall never go out. (Leviticus 6:6)

“It shall never go out—also not during the journeys.” Special care must be taken during the “journeys” of life—the times when a person ventures away from the home environment that fosters his character and integrity—so that the fire in his soul should not succumb to alien influences. – *Maayanah Shel Torah*

If he offers it in thanksgiving... (Leviticus 7:12)

There are four who are required to bring a thanksgiving offering: one who traverses the sea, one who crosses a desert, one who was ill and recovered, and one who was imprisoned and was released. – Talmud, *Berachot*

This is the law for the ascending offering... (Leviticus 7:37)

What is the significance of the verse “This is the law for the ascending offering, for the meal offering, for the sin offering, and for the guilt offering?” It teaches that whoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah, it is as though he were offering an ascending offering, a meal offering, a sin offering and a guilt offering... Whoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the sin offering, it is as though he were offering a sin offering; and whoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the guilt offering, it is as though he were offering a guilt offering. – Talmud, *Menachot*

Middah:

Study Torah

Rabbi Joshua said, “Woe is us that this has been destroyed, the place where atonement was made for the sins of Israel.” Rabbi Yohanan replied, “No, my son, do you not know that we have a means of making atonement that is like the Temple? And what is it? It is deeds of love, as it is said, ‘For I desire kindness and not sacrifice.’” (Hosea 6:6) – *Avot d’Rabbi Natan*

It is written that Rabbi Simeon asked Elijah: “What does the Holy One, blessed by God, study in the firmament?” He said to him: “God studies the sacrificial offerings.” – Talmud

Were I hungry, I would not tell you, for Mine is the world and all it holds. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of he-goats? Sacrifice a thank offering to God, and pay your vows to the Most High. – Psalm 50

When two people sit and words of Torah pass between them, the Divine Presence rests between them. – Rabbi Chananya ben Teradion Pirke Avot 3:3

Rising early to study Torah is the way we honor Torah, but when you welcome a guest it is tantamount to honoring God. For when one brings a guest into their home and honors him because he was created in the image of God, then it is as if they are honoring the Divine presence, which is greater than honoring the Torah. – Rabbi Yehuda Loew of Prague

A rabbi once offered the following analogy: “Every Jew is a letter in the Torah. But a letter may, at times, grow somewhat faded. It is our sacred duty to mend these faded letters and make God’s Torah whole again.”

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch heard this, and objected: “No, the identity of the Jew cannot be compared to erasable ink on parchment. Every Jew is indeed a letter in God’s Torah, but a letter carved in stone. At times, the dust and dirt may accumulate and distort—or even completely conceal—the letter’s true form; but underneath it all, the

letter remains whole. We need only sweep away the surface grime, and the letter, in all its perfection and beauty, will come to light.”

Mitzvah:

Studying Torah

Get yourself a teacher, find someone to study with, and judge everyone favorably. –
Rabbi Joshua ben Perachyah

To this day, for the observant Jew, the act of eating is a divine service: a benediction is recited before the meal and grace is said after it as reminders of the source of our food. The benediction is preceded by a ritual washing of the hands, reminiscent of the ritual of the Temple priests before they offered sacrifices. Salt is sprinkled on the bread to be eaten, just as it was poured on the sacrifice; the knife is covered during the recitation of the grace since it is a weapon of death and was not allowed upon the altar. And during the meal, conversation must include words of Torah in keeping with a divine service. As Rabbi Simeon said, “If three have eaten at a table and have spoken no words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten sacrifices to dead idols.’ Thus, the daily meal was transformed into a sacred ritual; the ordinary into the extraordinary; the profane sanctified; the animal appetite sublimated into an ethical discipline. – Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*

Torah portion: *Tazria/Metzora*

(Leviticus 12:1 – 13:59/14:1 – 15:33)

Date:

Tuesday, April 25

Summary:

This portion discusses ritual impurity and purity. A woman giving birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a *mikvah* (a ritual bath) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life. *Tzaraat* (often mistranslated as “leprosy”) is a plague which also can afflict garments. If white or pink patches appear on a person’s skin (dark red or green in garments), a priest is summoned. Sometimes the person afflicted must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he or she is healed. The afflicted area in a garment is removed; if the *tzaraat* spreads or recurs, the entire garment must be burned. Once the person recovers, he or she is purified by the priest with a special procedure involving two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet thread and a bundle of hyssop. A home can also be afflicted with *tzaraat* by the appearance of dark red or green patches on its walls. In a process lasting as long as nineteen days, a priest determines if the house can be purified, or whether it must be demolished.

Gems of Torah:

A person to whom shall occur in the skin of his flesh... the plague of *tzaraat*. (Leviticus 13:2)

The plague of *tzaraat* comes only as punishment for *lashon hara* (evil talk). – Rashi

Evil talk is like an arrow. A person who unsheathes a sword can regret his intention and return it to its sheath. But the arrow cannot be retrieved. – *Midrash Tehillim*

To what may the tongue be compared? To a dog tied with an iron chain and locked in a room within a room within a room, yet when he barks the entire populace is terrified of him. Imagine if he were loose outside! So the tongue: it is secured behind the teeth and behind the lips, yet it does no end of damage. Imagine if it were outside! – *Yalkut Shimoni*

Evil talk kills three people: the speaker, the listener, and the one who is spoken of. – Talmud

Two birds (Leviticus 14:4)

Because the plague of *tzaraat* comes in punishment for evil talk, which is an act of chattering, therefore birds are needed for his purification, because these chatter continuously with a twittering sound. – Rashi

Middah:

Taking Care of Your Body (*shmirat haguf*)

For in the image of God did God make humankind. (Genesis 9:6)

Once when the sage Hillel had finished a lesson with his students, he proceeded to walk along with them. “Master,” they asked, “where are you going?” “To perform a *mitzvah*.” “Which *mitzvah*?” they asked. He answered, “To bathe in the bath house.” “Is that a *mitzvah*?” He answered, “Yes! Somebody, appointed to scour and wash the statues of the king that stand in the theater and circuses, is paid for the work, and is even associated with the nobility. Since that is so, how much more should I, who am created in the image and likeness of God, scour and wash myself?” – Leviticus *Rabbah*

They shall not make gashes in their flesh. (Leviticus 21:5)

You shall not make any tattoo marks upon you. (Leviticus 19:28)

Take good care of yourselves. (Deuteronomy 2:4)

I praise You, for I am awesomely, wondrously made. Your work is wonderful; I know it very well. (Psalms 139:14)

If you find honey, eat only what you need. Otherwise, you’ll overdo it, and throw it up. (Proverbs 25:16)

Rav said to his son Hiyya: “Don’t get into the habit of taking drugs, don’t leap over a sewer, don’t have your teeth pulled, don’t provoke serpents.” – Talmud *Pesachim*

When injury is likely, one should not rely on a miracle. – Talmud *Kiddushin*

Mitzvah:

Supporting and Healing the Sick (*somaych noflim v’rofoy cholim*)

You saw how the Eternal your God carried you, as a parent carries a child, all the way that you traveled until you came to this place. (Deuteronomy 1:31)

When a person is singing and cannot lift his or her voice, and another comes and sings along, another who can lift his or her voice, then the first will be able to lift his or her voice too. That is the secret of the bond between spirit and spirit. – Rabbi Pinchas

Two are better than one...for should they fall, one can raise the other, but woe to the one who is alone and falls with no companion to raise that person up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

This question was asked of R Tanhum of Nevi: What is the law concerning extinguishing a lamp for a sick man on the Sabbath? He replied A lamp is called a lamp and a man's soul is also called a lamp. It is right that a man's lamp be extinguished for the sake of the Holy One's lamp? – Talmud *Shabbat*

Moses cried out to the Eternal saying, "God please heal her please!" (Numbers 12:13)

It is forbidden to live in a city where there is no doctor. – Palestinian Talmud *Kiddushin*

Torah portion: *Acharei Mot*

(Leviticus 16:1 – 18:30)

Date:

Tuesday, May 2

Summary:

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, God warns against unauthorized entry “into the holy.” Only one person, the *kohen gadol* (“high priest”), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred incense to God. Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats, to determine which should be offered to God and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness. This portion also warns against bringing *korbanot* (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and adultery.

Gems of Torah:

For on this day, God shall atone for you (16:30)

The sages say: Yom Kippur atones only for those who repent. Rabbi Judah HaNassi says: Yom Kippur atones whether one repents or one does not repent. – Talmud *Shavuot*

On Yom Kippur, the day itself atones as it is written, “For on this day, it shall atone for you.” – *Mishneh Torah*

Look in siddur

Middah:

Simplicity (*histapkut*)

The more possessions, the more worry. – Hillel

An American visitor was passing through the Polish town of Radin and stopped in to visit the Chafetz Chaim. Entering the great sage’s simple apartment, he was struck by how sparsely it was furnished. “Where is your furniture?” the man asked. “Where is yours?” replied the Chafetz Chaim. “Oh, I am only passing through,” answered the man. “I too am only passing through,” was the sage’s reply.

Insofar as man is a physical being – “dust from the ground” – his heart inclines to the material. Therefore, he desires to “eat, drink, and be merry.” He loves wealth and fortune, and longs for honor and dominion. He is full of self-importance and seeks to delight in bodily comforts. The problem is that the allure of the material is endless, and ultimately the craving is insatiable. – Rabbi Israel Salanter

No one leaves this world with even half his desires fulfilled. – Sages

Seek what you need and give up what you do not need. For in giving up what you do not need, you will learn what you really do need. -- Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol

Whoever seeks more than his needs hinders himself from enjoying what he has. -- Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol

A need is different from a desire. A need really is essential. A desire, on the other hand, is backed by an emotional force that turns it into a virtual demand: I have to have it. And it is our desires that create trouble for us. Desires can commandeer our lives on behalf of their fulfillment. And when they go unrealized, they deliver up anxiety, anger, frustration, and unethical behavior that we want to avoid.

One who has one hundred wants two hundred. – Jewish saying

He who grabs too much grabs nothing – Talmud

Simplified living sets joy free in the heart.

Simplicity brings you freedom: freedom from the bondage to possessions, freedom from insatiable desires, freedom from dwelling on the past and from making demands on the future. – Everyday Holiness

Mitzvah:

Practicing Self-Discipline and Setting Limits

Fasting on Yom Kippur

Why, when we fasted, did You not see? When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed? Because on your fast day you see to your business and oppress all your laborers! Because you fast in strife and contention, and you strike with a wicked fist! Your fasting today is not such as to make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day

when Adonai is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock the fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin. (Isaiah 58:3-7)

Torah portion: *Emor*

(Leviticus 21:1 – 24:23)

Date:

Tuesday, May 9

Summary:

This portion lists the annual Callings of Holiness—the festivals of the Jewish calendar: the weekly Shabbat; the bringing of the Passover offering; the seven-day Passover festival beginning; the bringing of the Omer offering from the first barley harvest on the second day of Passover, and the commencement, on that day, of the 49-day Counting of the Omer, culminating in the festival of Shavuot on the fiftieth day; a “remembrance of shofar blowing”; a solemn fast day; the Sukkot festival—during which we are to dwell in huts for seven days and take the “Four Kinds”; and the immediately following holiday of the “eighth day” of Sukkot. Next the Torah discusses the lighting of the menorah in the Temple, and the showbread placed weekly on the table there. The portion concludes with the incident of a man executed for blasphemy, and the penalties for murder (death) and for injuring one’s fellow or destroying his property (monetary compensation).

Gems of Torah:

These are the appointed times of God, callings of holiness, which you shall call in their appointed time (Leviticus 23:2)

The festivals are “callings of holiness” (*mikra’ei kodesh*), in the sense that each is a landmark in time at which we are empowered to call forth the particular holiness or spiritual quality embedded within it.

On the first Passover, for example, God granted us the gift of freedom. On the first Shavuot, He gave us the Torah; on Rosh Hashanah, God became king of the universe; on Yom Kippur, we received the gift of *teshuvah*; and so on. But freedom, wisdom, awe, joy, peace, and the other Divine gifts granted in the course of our history are constant needs of the soul; they are the spiritual nutrients that sustain her in her journey through life. God embedded these qualities within the very substance of time, and set “appointed times” at which they can be accessed. Each year, when we arrive at the juncture of time where a particular spiritual quality has been embedded, we are granted the ability to access it once again. The special *mitzvot* of each festival are the tools with which we “call forth the holiness” of the day: eating matzah on Passover unearths the gift of freedom, sounding the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah calls forth its quality of awe, and so on with all “the appointed times of God.” —Chassidic Masters

A king was traveling through the desert, and his son, the crown prince, thirsted for water. But instead of dispatching a horseman to fetch water from the nearest town, the king ordered a well to be dug at that very spot and to mark it with a signpost. "At the present time," explained the king to his son, "we have the means to obtain water far more quickly and easily. But perhaps one day, many years in the future, you will again be traveling this way. Perhaps you will be alone, without the power and privilege you now enjoy. Then the well we dug today will be here to quench your thirst. Even if the sands of time have filled it, you will be able to reopen it if you remember the spot and follow the signpost we have set." This is what God did for us by establishing the festivals at those points in time when He initially granted us the gift of freedom on Passover, joy on Sukkot, and so on. – *Mar'eh Yechezkel*

In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a day of rest, a memorial of blowing of horns, a calling of holiness. (Leviticus 23:24)

Rosh Hashana carries the momentous message that the human personality, the 'crown of creation,' possesses limitless capacities for renewal. – Rabbi Hayyim Herman Kieval

Cry aloud! Lift up your voice like a shofar! (Isaiah 58:1)

This is the meaning of the verse: See yourself as a shofar, an instrument of the Divine. Do not take pride in your virtue or the power of your deeds. With every *mitzvah* you do, every act of intellect, goodness and love, God's spirit breathes through you. – Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezeritch

Sarah asked Isaac, "Where have you been, my son?" after Isaac told her of his journey to Mount Moriah, his experience of being bound on the altar and saved at the last minute by the intervention of an angel, Sarah uttered six cries, corresponding to the six blasts of the shofar. Overcome by grief and shock, her soul left her and she died. – Leviticus *Raba*

On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: How many shall pass on, and how many shall be born. Who shall live, and who shall die; who in his time, and who before his time. Who by water, and who by fire; who by sword, and who by beast; who by hunger, and who by thirst; who by earthquake, and who by plague. Who shall rest, and who shall wander; who shall be impoverished, and who shall be enriched. Who shall fall and who shall rise. – Rosh Hashanah prayers

All of us are created twice. First, when we are born. Second, when we repent our past and find new courage to live in ways more acceptable to God. – Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk

You shall dwell in huts seven days (Leviticus 23:42)

Sukkah is the only mitzvah into which a person enters with his muddy boots. –
Chassidic saying

Middah:

Joy (*simcha*)

And Sarah laughed. (Genesis 18:12)

Then Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand and all the women went out after her with timbrels and in dance. (Exodus 15:20)

A joyful heart makes for good health; Despondency dries up the bones. (Proverbs 17:22)

Oh give me the kisses of your mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine. (Song of Songs 1:2)

The Torah is a tree of life to those who grasp it and all who uphold it are happy. Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace. (Proverbs 3:17-18)

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. (Psalm 126)

A season is set for everything...a time for weeping and a time for laughing, a time for wailing and a time for dancing. (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4)

Lovingly, Eternal our God, You have given us festivals for joy and holidays for happiness, among them this Festival of Matzot, season of our liberation...Festival of Shavuot, season of the giving of our Torah...Festival of Sukkot, season of our joy...each festival a day for sacred assembly recalling the Exodus from Egypt. – *siddur*

Three things restore a person's spirit: beautiful sounds, sights, and scents. Three things increase a person's self-esteem: a beautiful home, a beautiful friend, and beautiful clothes. – Talmud *Brachot*

We praise You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe who created joy and gladness, bride and groom, pleasure and song, delight and happiness, love and harmony, peace and companionship. May there always be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem voices of joy and gladness, bride and groom, the jubilant voices of those joined in marriage, the voices of your people feasting and singing. – Jewish wedding ceremony

Who is a pious fool? A person who sees a ripe fig and says, "Instead of enjoying it myself, I will give it to the first person I meet." – Palestinian Talmud *Sotah*

Chasidim sees the *niggun* (melody) as one of the branches of Divine service – as a way to show love of God, and to bind oneself to God with cords of love and joy. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav said: “Through dancing and the movements you make with your body, you awaken joy within yourself.” – Yitzchak Buxbaum

Mitzvah:

Leaving the Corners of your Field (*pe’ah*)

When you [plural] reap the harvest of your land, you [singular] shall not reap all the way to the corner of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger; I the Lord am your God. You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. (Leviticus 19:9-11)

You shouldn’t think that you are giving to the poor person from your own property, or that I have despised him by not giving bread to him as I have given to you. For he is also my child, just as you are, but his portion is in your produce.

It is for your merit that I have intended to give his/her portion from your hand. And this is the reason why the beginning of the verse ‘When you reap’ is plural, but the end ‘you shall not reap all the way’ is singular. At the beginning it uses the plural ‘the harvest of your [plural] land,’ [‘your’ meaning belonging to] the owner, the poor, and the stranger, for in truth, their portion is there [in the field].

One is to gain merit by accepting one’s responsibility to distribute a portion of the resources with which one has been entrusted. One does not even own one’s income until one has separated out the portion for the poor; one holds them briefly in trust for the poor. The challenge is to consider one’s tzedakah like the taxes that are withheld from income; it never really was yours anyway. – Rabbi Moses Alshikh

‘When you reap the harvest’ begins in the plural and concludes in the singular ‘you shall not reap all the way.’ This is intended to contradict the opinion of one who mistakenly says that since there is not enough for all of the poor, he does not have to give, like one who might say ‘Why should I give this [little corner] when there are a hundred [poor people] in front of me?’ For this reason, God commanded in the singular to say that even one individual has the obligation to give *pe’ah*.” – R. Hayyim Ibn Attar

One should not say, 'If the Holy Blessed One had given me a field, I would have given my charitable gifts from it, but now that I don't have a field, I won't give anything.' The Holy Blessed One said, 'See what I wrote in my Torah, "You are blessed in the city," (Deuteronomy 28:3) for those who live in the city; "you are blessed in the field" for those who have fields.' – *Midrash Tanchuma*

Torah portion: *Behar/Bechukotai*

(Leviticus 25:1 – 26:2/26:3 – 27:34)

Date:

Tuesday, May 16

Summary:

On the mountain of Sinai, God communicates to Moses the laws of the Sabbatical year: every seventh year, all work on the land should cease, and its produce becomes free for the taking for all, man and beast. Seven Sabbatical cycles are followed by a fiftieth year—the Jubilee year, on which work on the land ceases, all servants are set free, and all ancestral estates in the Holy Land that have been sold revert to their original owners. God promises that if the people of Israel will keep the commandments, they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell secure in their homeland. But God also delivers a harsh “rebuke,” warning of the exile, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant. Nevertheless, “Even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor will I ever abhor them, to destroy them and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God.” The portion concludes with the rules on how to calculate the values of different types of pledges made to God, and the mitzvah of tithing produce and livestock.

Gems of Torah:

If you walk in My statutes I will give your rain in due season (Leviticus 26:3)

Rabbi Jacob said: There is no reward for the *mitzvot* in this world . . .

[What is the proof for this?] In connection with the mitzvah of honoring one’s parents it is written, “In order that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you” (Deuteronomy 5:16) In reference to the mitzvah of “dismissal of the nest” (to chase away the mother bird before taking the young) it is written, “That it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days” (ibid. 22:7). Now, what if a person’s father says to him, “Ascend to the loft and bring me young birds,” and he ascends to the loft, dismisses the mother and takes the young, and on his return falls and is killed—where is this man’s wellbeing, and where is this man’s long days? But “in order that it may be well with you” means on the day that is wholly good; and “in order that thy days may be long,” on the day that is wholly long. Perhaps such things don’t happen? Rabbi Jacob saw an actual occurrence. – Talmud, *Kiddushin*

I will give peace in the land (Leviticus 26:6)

There may be food, there may be drink, but if there is no peace, there is nothing.
– Rashi

I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you walk upright. (Leviticus 26:13)

An animal walks with its face to the earth, for earthiness and materiality is all that it knows. Man walks upright, for man was born to gaze upon and aspire to the heavens. – Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch

He shall not exchange it nor substitute another for it. (Leviticus 27:33)

Every person was born to a mission in life that is distinctly, uniquely and exclusively their own. No one—not even the greatest of souls—can take his or her place. No person who ever lived or who ever will live can fulfill that particular aspect of God’s purpose in creation in his stead. – The Lubavitcher Rebbe

A wealthy businessman and his coachman arrived in a city one Friday afternoon. After the rich man was settled at the best hotel in town, the coachman went off to his humble lodgings.

Both washed and dressed for Shabbat, and then set out for the synagogue for the evening prayers. On his way to *shul*, the businessman came across a wagon which had swerved off the road and was stuck in a ditch. Rushing to help a fellow in need, he climbed down into the ditch and began pushing and pulling at the wagon together with its hapless driver. But for all his good intentions, the businessman was hopelessly out of his depth. After struggling for an hour in the knee-deep mud, he succeeded only in ruining his best suit of Shabbat clothes and getting the wagon even more hopelessly embedded in the mud. Finally, he dragged his bruised and aching body to the synagogue, arriving a scant minute before the start of Shabbat.

Meanwhile, the coachman arrived early to the synagogue and sat down to recite a few chapters of Psalms. At the synagogue he found a group of wandering paupers, and being blessed with a most generous nature, invited them *all* to share his meal. When the synagogue sexton approached the paupers to arrange meal placements at the town’s householders, as is customary in Jewish communities, he received the same reply from them all: “Thank you, but I have already been invited for the Shabbat meal.”

Unfortunately, however, the coachman’s means were unequal to his generous heart, and his dozen guests left his table with but a shadow of a meal in their hungry stomachs.

Thus the coachman, with his twenty years of experience in extracting wagons from mudholes, took it upon himself to feed a small army, while the wealthy businessman, whose Shabbat meal leftovers could easily have fed every hungry man within a ten-mile radius, floundered about in a ditch.

“Every soul,” said Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak in conclusion, “is entrusted with a mission unique to her alone, and is granted the specific aptitudes, talents and resources necessary to excel in her ordained role. One must take care not to become one of those ‘lost souls’ who wander through life trying their hand at every field of endeavor except for what is truly and inherently their own.” – Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn

Middah:

Caring for the Earth (*shmirat ha-teva*)

Nature is of the very essence of God. – Israel Baal Shem Tov

The Eternal One planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there Adam, whom God had formed...The Eternal One took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden to till it and tend it. (Genesis 2:8, 15)

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai used to say: if you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah. – *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*

How can a person of flesh and blood follow God? ... God, from the very beginning of creation, was occupied before all else with planting, as it is written, "And first of all [*mi-kedem*, usually translated as "in the East"], the Eternal God planted a Garden in Eden (Genesis 2:8) Therefore ... occupy yourselves first and foremost with planting. – Leviticus *Rabah*

And if you ask me of God, my God/'Where is God that in joy we may worship?'/Here on Earth too God lives, not in heaven alone/A striking fir, a rich furrow, in them you will find God's likeness, Divine image incarnate in every high mountain. Wherever the breath of life flows, you will find God embodied./And God's household? All being: the gazelle, the turtle, the shrub, the cloud pregnant with thunder/... God-in-Creation is God's eternal name. – Saul Tchernikovsky

Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass and all growing things, and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer. – Nachman of Bratzlav

On Tu B'shvat/when spring comes/An angel descends/ledger in hand/and enters each bud, each twig, each tree, and all our garden flowers./From town to town, from village to village/the angel makes a winged way/searching the valleys, inspecting the hills/flying over the desert/and returns to heaven./ And when the ledger will be full/of trees and blossoms and shrubs/when the desert is turned into a meadow/and all our land a watered garden/the Messiah will appear. – Shin Shalom

Mitzvah:

Do not waste or be destructive (*ba'al tashchit*)

We should not be destructive, but rather work to preserve the good and useful things of this world.

When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them? (Deuteronomy 20:19)

Other *Mitzvot*:

Do Not Take Interest from Those in Need

Tithing