



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

ת"וב

10 - 16 September, 2017
19 - 25 Elul, 5777

Torah:

Deuteronomy 29:9 - 31:30

Haftorah:

Isaiah 61:10 - 63:9

■ **GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH**

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

■ **ROSH HASHANA, YOM KIPPUR SUKKOT**

The high holidays are weeks away! Make the necessary arrangements with your Rabbi and institutional chaplain, to ensure you are able to celebrate.

We have pop-up Sukkot for the Rabbi to take into prison, it is not to late to make arrangements.

■ **CALENDARS**

We received out Jewish Calendars in this week, if you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send one to you.

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FIRM AND FORWARD

What's in a name? Well, that really depends. But when it comes to Torah and its timeless content, a name contains the very essence of the thing itself - whatever it may be. This is especially true when it comes to the names of the individual Torah portions. With enough in-depth study, the primary lesson and eternal message of each Torah portion can be discerned just from its name.

It gets a little more complicated, though, when it comes to the weeks of the year when we read the "double-Parsha," two consecutive Parshas combined to be read together. Each name has its own eternal message, but there must also be something to learn from the combination of the two titles together.

This week's double portion is "Nitzavim" and "Vayeilech." These two names not only have their own respective meanings, but they are even somewhat conflicting. The word "Nitzavim" means standing firmly, while "Vayeilech" stems from the Hebrew word for "going."

Standing still vs. moving.
Clearly opposites.

Our Chassidic masters offer an explanation in which the two do indeed represent opposing themes, and yet come

together to create a lesson pertinent to every person in every generation.

The concept of "Nitzavim," standing firmly, implies the imperative requirement for every one of us to stand strong in our beliefs, and not to be persuaded by the many wayward ways of the world around us.

At the same time, we have the concept of "Vayeilech," forward movement. This reminds us of the necessity to keep moving! A Jew, and for that matter every human being, no matter our current state, no matter what great things we've achieved thus far, may never become complacent. We must never be satisfied with what we've already accomplished, for there is, and always will be, room for growth and for greater achievement.

A person should always be ready to get going, adding to that which he has done until now.

Indeed, even great Tzadikim, the most righteous of people have been known to seek opportunities to increase their service of God. They look for ways to improve their already immaculate performance of Mitzvot.

The idea of Teshuva, often translated as repentance, does not apply only to the sinner. Everyone has the ability, and

therefore the responsibility to do Teshuva throughout life! It applies to anyone and everyone who is still capable of coming even a little bit closer to God and his Torah. Always and forever, standing firm on our beliefs yet constantly moving forward.

By Rabbi Nissan Friedman

TIGHTROPE OF LIFE

In the days of communism's fierce grip on the Soviet Union, there lived a chassidic Jew named Reb Mendel Futerfas. Reb Mendel repeatedly put his life at risk with his efforts to promote Jewish education behind the Iron Curtain, and for some 14 years was incarcerated in prisons and labor camps for his "crime" of teaching Torah. While in the Siberian gulag, he spent most of his free time studying and praying, but he also interacted and conversed with other prisoners—some Jewish, some not. Among these prisoners was a circus performer whose claim to fame was his incredible skill as a tightrope walker.

Reb Mendel would often engage this man in conversation. Having never been to a circus, Reb Mendel was totally baffled by the man's profession. How could a person risk his life walking on a rope several stories above ground? (This was in the days

before safety nets were standard practice.)

“To just go out there and walk on a rope?” Reb Mendel challenged incredulously.

The performer explained that due to his training and skill he did not need to be held up by any cables, and that for him it was no longer all that dangerous. Reb Mendel remained skeptical and intrigued.

After Stalin died, the prison authorities relaxed their rules somewhat, and the guards told the prisoners that they would be allowed to stage a makeshift circus on May Day. There was no doubt that the famous tightrope walker’s act would be the highlight of the show. The tightrope walker made sure that his friend, Reb Mendel, was in the audience.

Everyone watched with bated breath as the tightrope walker climbed the tall pole to the suspended rope. His first steps were timid and tentative (after all, it had been several years), but within a few seconds it all came back to him. With his hands twirling about, he virtually glided across the rope to the pole at the other end, and then, in a flash, made a fast turn, reversed his direction and proceeded back to the other side. Along the way, he performed several stunts. The crowd went wild.

When he was done, he slid down off the pole, took a bow and went running straight to Reb Mendel.

“So?” he said. “Did you see that I was not held up by any cables?”

A very impressed Reb Mendel replied, “Yes. You’re right. No cables.”

“Okay. You’re a smart man. Tell me, how did I do it? Was it my hands? Was it my feet?” the man asked.

Reb Mendel paused for a moment, closed his eyes and replayed the entire act back on his mind. Finally he said, “It’s all in your eyes. During the entire time, your eyes were completely focused and riveted on the opposite pole.”

“Exactly!” said the performer. “When you see your destination in front of you and you don’t take your eyes off of it, then your feet go where they need to go, and you don’t fall.”

The tightrope walker had one more question for Reb Mendel. “What would you say is the most difficult part of the act?”

Again Reb Mendel thought for a moment. “Most difficult was the turn, when you had to change direction.”

“Correct again!” said the acrobat. “During that split second, when you lose sight of that first pole, and the other pole has not yet come into view, there is some real danger there. But . . . if you don’t allow yourself to get confused and distracted during that transition, your eyes will find that pole, and your balance will be there.”

This week’s Torah reading, in which we learn about the events that transpired on the last day of Moses’ life on earth, is called “And Moses went” (*Vayeilech Moshe*). The commentaries point out that even on the last day of his life, Moses was on the move—walking forward, achieving, growing—making the most of every precious moment of life.

Moses’ message to us is that so long as we have a breath of life, there ought to be *vayeilech*—explorations of new horizons, journeys to new frontiers.

How do we walk this tightrope called “life” without stumbling? The answer is: by establishing clear and proper goals, and remaining focused on those goals like a laser beam. The Torah provides us with a roadmap to a meaningful and fulfilling way of life. It sets down goals, and defines purpose.

It is also noteworthy that this Torah reading is often read on the special Shabbat that serves as the bridge between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, referred to as “Shabbat Shuvah.” On that Shabbat we also read a haftorah in which we hear the words of the prophets exhorting us, pleading with us, beckoning us to improve the quality of our lives; to even change direction, if need be.

When you know what your purpose and destination is, and you do not take your eyes off that pole, then you know where to put your feet. Even when things turn, and we momentarily lose sight of the pole, we need not despair. Shabbat Shuvah teaches us that a change of direction ought not to send us plummeting. On the contrary, we can and should shift gracefully with changes of circumstances, catch our balance, and let the next pole come into view.

By Rabbi Moshe Bryski

In Jewish History

Thursday, 23 Elul, 5777 - September 14, 2017

Dove brings Olive Leaf (2105 BCE)

On the 301st day of the great Flood, Noah sent a dove for the 2nd time from the ark (see “Today in Jewish History” for Elul 17). This time, the dove stayed away all day; “the dove came in to him in the evening, and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off; and Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth” (Genesis 8:11).