

## PARSHAT KI TAVO

12-18 Elul 5784  
15-21 September 2024

*Torah:* Duet. 26:1-29:8  
*Hajtorah:* Isaiah 60:1-22

### Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

### Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

*Psalms 117*

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.  
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

### Psalms Daily

### Pirkei Avot (3:10)

“Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa would say: One whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures. But one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom does not endure.”

## Phishing for the Soul

An email popped up in my work inbox. “Please click here for an important voice message.” My heart leaped up in my chest. Had I been remiss in something? Was this a warning about my work performance? With great trepidation, I clicked on the link. An alert popped up: This email was a systems test to prevent hacking and phishing attacks. I had almost fallen into a trap.

The dangers of phishing cannot be overstated. Phishing is how hackers are able to penetrate the most secure systems - major chain stores, banks, hospitals and government agencies. All it takes is one employee to carelessly click on a link or enter their ID and password, and a hacker can gain entry into the entire system. The same way our inboxes get flooded with spam, our brains are spammed throughout the day with a bombardment of random thoughts, impulses and desires. Like our inboxes, our brains have filters that allow us to divert our attention from distractors in order to devote our full attention to the matter at hand. We can learn to ignore information that’s irrelevant or counterproductive. A phishing attack is different. Phishing attempts take advantage of the very mechanism that we rely on for filtering out spam: our conscientiousness; our desire to do the right thing. “Attention: You have an important message from work!” Uh oh. If my work is calling, I need to pay attention. I can’t ignore this. I’d better click on the link. What is phishing for the soul? We’ve grown to the point that the evil inclination has already learned that we’re going to ignore overt appeals to our baser instincts. The emails promising me romantic love or millions of dollars from my Nigerian uncle will go straight into the junk file. So, the evil inclination tugs at us in a different way. “I have an important message for you! You’re not doing a good enough job! You’re failing!” Here is how it works: The Torah portion of Ki Tavo enumerates the most

dreadful-sounding curses that will come upon the Jewish people if they fail to serve G-d properly. The section concludes with these words: “These will fall upon you because you did not serve G-d with joy and goodness of heart. Chassidic teachings explain that the emphasis is on the words “joy and goodness of heart.” The evil inclination does its best to rob us of our joy in serving G-d, thus leaving us vulnerable to the worst threats. How do we phish-proof ourselves? We need to stay alert to the tricks of the evil inclination. Even when it presents itself as the voice of our conscience, telling us that we’re not good enough and that we must be better, we need to stop and think: Is this thought really for my benefit? Is this thought going to uplift me or inspire me to do my work with a sense of joy? This precaution against spiritual phishing is especially important during the month of Elul, when we take stock of the past year and prepare for the new one. It’s a somber month that can easily lead to thoughts of anxiety and inadequacy. Therefore, we need to take every precaution not to allow ourselves to lapse into melancholy. The month of Elul is also a joyous time when G-d’s love and compassion predominates, when He graciously welcomes our every overture to return to Him. G-d isn’t looking for our sadness, our fear, or our sorrow. All He wants is to connect with us. He awaits even the smallest gesture on our part to open ourselves up to His overflowing blessings for a good and sweet year.

*By Chana Shuchat*

## It's Not What You Give, But How You Give

It’s your birthday. Your young children let you sleep in. Stealthily, they sneak downstairs to prepare a card, hand-drawn, with clashing colors of crayons. They find a crumpled piece of gift wrap for a beaded necklace that they crafted. Finally and hesitatingly, they hand over their special present to you. And, of course, more than the most expensive gift, their humble offering means the world to you.

Now, imagine these scenarios: You gave a nice sum of money to a poor person who is down on his luck. You sat chatting with a homebound, elderly neighbor to brighten his day. You brought over a home-cooked meal to a close friend who is bedridden. Or you read your child his favorite nighttime story—for the 15th time. Terrific, right? You should feel pretty good about yourself. But there’s one ingredient that’s essential to making it special and appreciated. Your children’s humble present meant so much to you because it was given with such love and joy. They offered what they could, and they did it with hearts that were overflowing. If joy would be missing from any one of your offerings, the thoughtful gift would become ugly. That home-cooked meal—given with a sour, resentful face—just wouldn’t taste the same, just as the time spent in anger or irritation with your elderly neighbor or young child would become almost meaningless. The recipients might benefit somewhat from what you gave, but the act would be missing its soul.

At the end of this week’s Torah portion, we learn why G-d sent us into exile.

*“Because you did not serve G-d with happiness and with gladness of heart, in abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies...” – Duet. 28:47-48*

Different explanations are given as to what this passage mean. Rashi (the preeminent Biblical commentator) suggests that we didn’t serve G-d when He gave us an abundance of goodness, so we will serve our enemies in poverty. But the words seem to imply that we were serving G-d, just not with happiness. Maimonides explains: “Even though you served G-d, you did not serve Him with joy—that is the source of all afflictions. Why such extreme punishment for simply lacking joy? G-d didn’t create us as perfect beings who can continuously do only good and escape from messing up. But if we serve G-d with joy—showing Him that we are happy and grateful to

### Aleph Institute

*Hyman & Martha Rogal Center*

5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111

Fax:412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org  
info@AlephNE.org



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do His commandments—then our joy inspires G-d to overlook our shortcomings. Like any parent, G-d doesn't expect the most glamorous and expensive "offerings" from us.

He appreciates our humble deeds, such as when I held back from that juicy gossip or when I smiled when I felt like screaming. G-d understands how much effort even the

smallest act of self-sacrifice or self-restraint requires of us. As long as we do so with joy.

*By Chana Weisberg*

## Rabbi Yehuda Loew – The Maharal of Prague

5285 - 5369 (1525-1609)

Rabbi Yehuda (Judah) ben Bezalel Loew was born about the year 5285, probably in Posen, Poland. He became famous as a great Talmudic scholar at an early age. In his late twenties, he was invited to become the Rabbi in Nikolsburg, Moravia, a position which he held for about twenty years. His greatest fame, however, came to him as the spiritual head of the Jewish community in Prague, then the main center of central European Jewry. In Prague, the Maharal established the great Talmudic Academy known as the Klaus. (The ancient building of the Klaus burned down about eighty years after his death and was subsequently rebuilt and named the Klaus Synagogue.) Among his famous disciples were, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller and Rabbi David Ganz, who were among the most Famous Talmudists of their age. The Maharal won the admiration of his great contemporaries - Rabbi Solomon Luria (Maharshal), Rabbi Meir (Maharam) of Lublin, and others - who called him affectionately "The iron pillar supporting Israel," "Our breath of life" and "The marvel of the age."

The Maharal also became famous among non-Jews for his great secular knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, and other sciences. He was a great friend of the astronomers Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler. These in turn introduced him to Emperor Rudolph II. According to many legends, the emperor paid him frequent visits during the night, to discuss with him both politics and science, and Rabbi Yehuda Loew made use of these excellent connections to the advantage of his community whenever it was threatened by attacks or oppression.

Rabbi Yehuda Loew wrote many works on rabbinic subjects, one of the most important of which is "Gur Aryeh," a commentary on Rashi on the Chumash. Some of his best works are on Jewish philosophy and ethics. In his writings and teachings, he laid stress on understanding the simple literal meaning of the passages studied, avoiding the complicated form of study known as pilpul. He insisted that children should have a thorough knowledge of the Bible and Mishnah before taking up the study of the Talmud. His writings, particularly his

commentary on Pirkei Avoth (the Talmud's "ethics of the Fathers") and the collection of his lectures such as Nezach Israel ("The Eternity of Israel"), Nethivoh Olam ("Ways of the World"), reflect his saintly character.

The Maharal of Prague must have also been a master of Kabbalah, for most of the legends concerning him speak of his knowledge of the divine creation and the hidden ways of G d. The Maharal was credited with being a miracle worker. The most famous story is that of the Golem which he created out of clay and which he brought to life by the use of G d's holy name. The Maharal averted many calamities and blood-libels through the Golem. Every Friday evening, he would remove the sacred amulet bearing the name of G d from the Golem, in order that it might not profane the Sabbath. When the Golem had performed his mission, the Maharal laid it away in the attic of the Prague Synagogue. In later years, a statue of Der Hohe Rabbi Uwe, created by a famous Czech sculptor, was placed before the new city hall of Prague.

Few among the great men of Jewish history have been the subject of so many popular legends as Rabbi Yehuda ben Bezalel of Prague. He was said to possess great powers. One legend tells of the Maharal's having shown the emperor his far-off castle by tele-vision. Another one tells of the Maharal having brought down the spirits of the twelve sons of Jacob in the presence of the emperor.

But the Maharal has not become so revered a figure amongst the Jewish people because of his supernatural powers. To us, he is the man who during one of the trying periods of Jewish history has done so much for his Jewish brethren, who was their spiritual leader and their spokesman, and who in his writings has left us a wealth of deep Jewish thought and moral teachings. We do not think of the Maharal as of the creator of the Golem, but rather of the light he has brought to Torah students and of the source of inspiration and faith contained in his ethical writings.

## T.N. JEWISH HISTORY

### **Sunday, September 15, 2024 - 12 Elul, 5784** **Nachmanides Born (1194)**

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

### **Monday, September 16, 2024 - 13 Elul, 5784**

#### **Passing of Ben Ish Chai (1909)**

Elul 13 is the Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (1835-1909), the renowned

Sephardic Halachic authority and Kabbalist, known as "Ben Ish Chai" after his work by that name.

### **Shabbat, September 21, 2024 - 18 Elul, 5784**

#### **Passing of Maharal (1609)**

Elul 18 is the Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yehuda Loewe, the "Maharal" of Prague (1525-1609), outstanding Torah scholar, philosopher, Kabbalist and Jewish leader. Popularly known for creating a "golem" (clay man) to

protect the Jewish community of Prague from the frequent threat of blood libels.

#### **Baal Shem Tov Born (1698)**

Elul 18 is the birthday of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism.

#### **Chassidic Movement Founded (1734)**

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov was instructed by his masters to reveal himself and begin to publicly disseminate his teachings. This he did on his 36th birthday, Elul 18, 5494 (1734).

#### **1st Chabad Rebbe Born (1745)**

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), founder of the "Chabad" branch of