

SHEMINI ATZERET SIMCHAT TORAH PARSHAT BERESHIT

18-24 Tishrei 5785
20-26 October 2024

SUNDAY

Torah: Numbers 29:20-28

MONDAY

Torah: Numbers 29:23-31

TUESDAY

Torah: Numbers 29:26-31

HOSHA'ANA RABBAH

Torah: 29: 26-34

SHEMINI ATZERET

Torah: Deut. 14:22-16:17

Mafkir: Numbers 29:35-30:1

Haftorah: Kings I 8:54-66

SIMCHAT TORAH

Torah: Deut. 33:1-34:12;

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Mafkir: Numbers 29:35-30:1

Haftorah: Joshua 1:1-18

SHABBAT

Torah: Genesis 1:1 - 6:8

Haftorah: Isaiah 42:5-21

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 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)

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No One Alone,
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When G-d Begs Forgiveness

The Jewish world is reeling from the shocking attack and gearing up for a tough battle ahead. We can gain some insight from what we were reading in synagogues on Simchat Torah morning: The story of Genesis tells us that when G-d first created the luminaries, He made the sun and the moon equal in stature - two equal rulers. How did the moon become so small and dependent on the sun for light?

The Talmud fills in the details. The moon complained that two kings should not be made to share a single crown. G-d replied, "You are right. Go diminish yourself." The moon objected. "Should I be humbled just because I made a valid point?" To which G-d replied, "Bring an atonement for me, for I diminished the moon." Indeed, every Rosh Chodesh, on the first of the Hebrew month, an offering was brought in the Holy Temple in honor of the new moon. This, says the Talmud, was to atone for G-d diminishing the moon.

It is a strange story. If G-d agreed with the moon, why didn't He restore it to its original size and luminosity? Instead, He kept it small and dependent on the sun, and every month asks for atonement. G-d begs forgiveness. Why? He is G-d! Let Him go and fix it!

The answer, my dear friend, is that some tragedies can't be undone. They must happen as they do, but that doesn't ease the pain and trauma that they unleash. The moon had to be diminished, so G-d didn't change it. But the pain and loss could not be overlooked. It is so visceral, so deep, that G-d begs forgiveness. Surely, you have picked up by now that I am using the moon as a metaphor for a much broader discussion, a discussion I hesitate to have, for who am I to discuss such questions? But I will attempt it nonetheless. There are many tragedies that occur in the world. Each one can be prevented by G-d. Those that He does not prevent need to occur precisely as they do. But they are oh so painful.

The Horror in Israel

I write this article five days after the Hamas pogrom (massacre) of Jews in Israel. It is one of the most difficult articles I have ever written. We cry bitter tears over the more than eleven hundred beautiful, precious souls that were cruelly and inhumanely snuffed out. We are paralyzed by the sheer magnitude of the horror that our brethren experienced. We imagine their terror, the agony of knowing they

are about to die, the unbearable trauma of watching their loved ones tortured to death, and the sheer pain of their own death. We imagine, and we cringe. We wring our hands. We close our eyes, but the images remain.

We are in grief. We are in mourning. We are numb. And we are enraged. We want to rise up like lions and reverse this tragedy. We want to turn back the clock and erase it from the history books. But we can't. G-d can. But He won't. He alone knows why this had to happen, so He begs forgiveness. G-d cries with us, clutches our hands, and clings to us. Please, please, forgive me; atone for what I had to do. I diminished the moon. I diminished the nation. I allowed exquisite, magnificent souls to be heinously cut down.

We live in dread of tomorrow's news. What is the fate of those taken hostage? We hope, we pray because that is the Jewish way. What of G-d? What is He doing? He is crying bitter tears as His loved ones suffer. For reasons known only to Him, it had to happen this way. No one can explain it. No one can know why. But He does, and He doesn't like it. "Bring an offering for Me and atone for Me," G-d begs.

Born In the Concave

The Zohar (Jewish mystic) tells us that when the moon was diminished and began to wane, many souls were born within its concave - its dark side. These souls are fated to encounter darkness in life, in the form of suffering and cruelty. These are the victims of human cruelty, illness, tragedy, etc.

But, the Zohar tells us, these challenges touch only their external surfaces. Not their souls. Not their internal selves. Those remain whole, unmarred. Undiminished. Untouched. On the contrary, when the body suffers, the internal dimension, the inner core, shines powerfully.

You see, the moon is full when Earth is between the moon and the sun. This way, the side of the moon that faces the sun is visible to us. The moon disappears when it is between us and the sun. At this time, the side of the moon that faces the sun faces away from us, which makes it appear dark to us. This is why the Talmud declares that the sun never saw the concave of the moon. To the sun, the moon is always full.

Now, let us pause and consider: When the moon is full, it is furthest from the sun. When it disappears, it is closest to the sun. What does this mean for us?

The souls that experience trauma, abuse, rape, addiction, bullying, illness, disease, cruelty, torture, and even death emerged from G-d when the moon had waned. They were selected by G-d for these terrible fates even before they

were born. For reasons beyond our mortal understanding, each of these terrible experiences serves a powerful purpose that somehow elevates them and the world around them. Just as the moon is closest to the sun when it wanes and disappears, so are the heroes who suffer closest to G-d at the time of their suffering. Their souls are whole.

At that moment, when our brethren in Israel were murdered simply for being Jewish, they reached their highest spiritual state. When the enemy reached the height of its cruelty, our loved ones were closest to G-d. At that moment, they were face to face with G-d. Not just in that moment, but for the rest of eternity, for that moment is timeless. It stands still for each of us, indelibly etched upon our psyches forever.

Why these precious souls were chosen for this gruesome yet holy fate—to give their lives for G-d—is beyond our mortal comprehension. We hope to see the outcome of their sacrifice soon. We hope to see the downfall of the entire terror infrastructure. We hope it ushers in a prolonged period of calm, peace, stability, and unity for the entire region. Most importantly, we hope that this immense suffering, this stranglehold on life, will bring about the end-goal of all history—the coming of Moshiach (Messiah).

You see, the Jewish prophets taught us that history is not circular. It doesn't take us in tragic circles repeating the horrors and tragedies of yesteryear. History is linear. It is always marching toward a single goal. Sometimes, it feels like we are sliding backward, but like the waning moon, those are the times that bring us closest.

Our sages taught that when Jews are desperate for refuge when they wring their hands and ask, "Where is my refuge, where shall I go?" G-d replies, "Fear not, all that I have done, I have done for you—the time for your redemption has arrived." May this finally be that time. Our people have not experienced such horrors since the Holocaust. If ever there was a sacrifice worthy of Moshiach, this one is it. May it be so.

By Lazer Gurkow

Man & Woman

When G-d created Adam, at the moment Adam opened his eyes, what was his psychological profile? He had no Oedipus complex because he had no mother. He didn't have a birth trauma, because he wasn't born. He had no sibling rivalry... What was this

man like? What was the makeup of his psyche? Interestingly, Adam didn't have a survival instinct either. That's why, when G-d said, "The day you eat from this tree, you'll die," Adam wasn't impressed. "Oh, so I'll die." He had no survival instinct. So, what was going on in his mind?

Adam had a death wish. That was his psyche. He had a death wish because life felt so unnatural. In a sense, when G-d said, "From dust you are, and to dust you shall return," that described Adam's psyche. "I come from dust, I want to go back."

Back to what? Back to dust. Back to nothingness. Men, to this day, have this complex. If you strip away the externalities, the trappings - if you take away his car, and his money, and his blue suede shoes - there's nothing, there's dust. Every man is terrified that in the end, he will have amounted to nothing, regardless of his accomplishments. He can be the wealthiest, most powerful, and successful person, the most talented and the most admired. Deep down, inside he is afraid that it is all going to go away and he is going to remain a nothing, a non-entity, a zero.

Women don't have this. A woman does not have a fear or a suspicion of her own nothingness. It doesn't exist. Because Eve was not created from dust, she was created from Adam. So, where a man is afraid of being reduced back to nothing, a woman, if you take away all her accomplishments, all her achievements, will be reduced to a man.

When you take away a woman's being, she doesn't become a nothing, she becomes him. She loses herself in him. When you take away a man's being, he doesn't lose himself in her, he becomes nothing.

That's why a man needs to accomplish. He must accomplish, because he needs to deny this nothingness. Whereas a woman doesn't need to accomplish in order to exist - she needs to accomplish in order to be appreciated.

Because if you're a nothing and you have to become a something, then accomplishment is everything, and respect is what you need more than anything else. Respect means you are a something.

A woman, who is not afraid of becoming nothing, does not understand and can not tolerate when her somethingness is not appreciated. So, what a woman needs more than anything else is appreciation.

The Talmud says that a man should honor his wife and be very careful with her feelings. A man should be careful of his wife's honor because a woman is sensitive to injustice. This is not just an idle observation about women. At the core of a woman's being, it is the injustice that bothers her. She is being treated as if she was nothing, and that's not true. She is something, and that injustice hurts.

When a man is treated like nothing, it's not the injustice that hurts him - it is the truth that hurts. He is nothing, and he hates being reminded of it. His reaction is not as to an injustice, it is not a moral indignation, it's a personal hurt. Whereas with a woman, no matter how badly she is abused or devastated, it remains a moral injustice to her.

This explains why men are aggressive. A man is desperate to be recognized as a something, and so he needs to prove himself, he needs to achieve, he needs to acquire. This need to acquire is an aggression. Whereas a woman is determined to retain what is hers, to remain herself. No matter how intensely she pursues that, it is not aggression, because she's not out to acquire - she is trying to preserve.

When the lion goes hunting, he's aggressive. When the lioness goes hunting, she's trying to sustain her family. Though she may be more violent than the male, it is not aggression - it is maintenance. When you threaten a bear cub when its mother is around, you're in big trouble. You say, "Oh, this mother is aggressive." Yet she's not, she's totally passive. If you don't present a threat, she's fine, she's not out to get you. She doesn't want anything you have. She wants to maintain what she has, and that she'll do ferociously. But that's maintaining, so it's not aggression.

In contrast, the male lion wants what you have, and he's going to get it. So, even if he does it nicely, even if he does it gently, it's aggression. Even a very subtle and polite seduction is aggression because you are trying to get what isn't yours. You are out to get something, you're acquiring, you are a predator. You can be a nice predator, but that, too, is aggressive.

Men are called aggressive because they need something they don't have. Women are called passive, because they don't necessarily want what they don't have; they like what they do have. We are not talking about physical possessions, rather psychological, the psyche.

This helps us to understand the blessings men and women make before the Morning Prayer.

A man says, "Thank You for not making me a woman." A man is grateful for what he is not. Because he can't make a positive statement, he can't say, Thank You for what I am. He's never sure he is anything.

A woman says, "Thank You for making me as You want me to be." A woman can make a positive statement about herself, because she knows that she is. She is grateful for what she is.

By Manis Friedman

BERESHIT IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Bereishit," means "In the beginning" and it is found in Genesis 1:1.

G-d creates the world in six days. On the first day He makes darkness and light. On the second day He forms the heavens, dividing the "upper waters" from the "lower waters." On the third day He sets the boundaries of land and sea, and calls forth trees and greenery from the earth. On the fourth day He fixes the position of the sun, moon and stars as timekeepers and illuminators of the earth. Fish, birds and reptiles are created on the fifth day; land animals, and then the human being, on the sixth. G-d ceases work on the seventh day, and sanctifies it as a day of rest.

G-d forms the human body from the dust of the earth, and blows into his nostrils a "living soul." Originally Man is a single person, but, deciding that "it is not good that man be alone," G-d takes a "side" from the man, forms it into a woman, and marries them to each other.

Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden, and commanded not to eat from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." The serpent persuades Eve to violate the command, and she shares the forbidden fruit with her husband. Because of their sin, it is decreed that man will experience death, returning to the soil from which he was formed, and that all gain will come only through struggle and hardship. Man is banished from the Garden.

Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain quarrels with Abel and murders him, and becomes a rootless wanderer. A third son, Seth, is born to Adam; Seth's eighth-generation descendant, Noah, is the only righteous man in a corrupt world.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 18 Tishrei 5785 - 20 October 2024

Passing of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1810)

Passing of the famed Chassidic rebbe, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Ukraine (1772-1810). A great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, he championed a unique path of divine service that entails simplicity, joy, and solitude. He left no successor, but his teachings remain influential more than 200 years after his passing.

Thursday, 22 Tishrei 5785 - 24 October 2024

Lubavitcher Rebbe Suffers Heart Attack (1977)

While celebrating the joyous holiday Hakafot with thousands of Chassidim in the central Chabad-Lubavitch synagogue in Brooklyn, NY, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson OBM, suffered a massive heart attack. The Rebbe remained in his office in Lubavitch World

Headquarters under medical supervision for several weeks. He returned home five weeks later, on the 1st of Kislev, a day designated by Chassidim for celebration and thanksgiving.

Simchas Torah Massacre (2023)

On 22 Tishrei 5784 (7 October 2023), which in Israel is observed as Simchas Torah, thousands of Gazan terrorists, from Hamas, PIJ, other terror groups, and many with no terror affiliation, poured across the border into Israel, massacring over 1,100 Jewish men, women, and children, as well as many of their non-Jewish neighbors. They were burned alive, decapitated, dismembered, assaulted, and over 300 kidnapped to Gaza, where many of them were killed. During the ensuing war, hundreds of Israeli soldiers were killed defending their people.

Friday, 23 Tishrei 5785 - 25 October 2024

Passing of Rabbi Chanoch of Cordova (1014)

As a youngster (in c. 960), Rabbi Chanoch was captured by pirates, along with his father Rabbi Moshe and three other great Torah scholars. Rabbi Moshe and his son were ransomed by the Jewish community of Cordova, Spain, where Rabbi Moshe opened a Yeshiva for Talmudic studies. When Rabbi Moshe passed away, he was succeeded by his son. Rabbi Chanoch passed away on 23 Tishrei 4774 (1014 CE).

These events marked a turning point in Jewish history, with the center of Jewish learning gradually shifting from the ancient Jewish communities of Babylonia (Iraq) to western Europe.