

# Torah Weekly

ד"בס

## PARSHAT TOLDOT

23 - 29 Cheshvan 5785  
24 - 30 November 2024

Torah: Genesis 25:19-28:9  
Haftorah: Samuel I 20:18-42

### 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)

Psalms Daily

Hayom Yom

The concept of Divine Providence is this: Not only are all particular movements of the various creatures directed by Providence, and not only is that Providence itself the life-force and maintained existence of every creature - but even more, the particular movement of any creature is in general terms related to the grand design of Creation. The aggregate of all individual acts brings to completion G-d's grand design in the mystery of all Creation.

## SWEET & SOUR ISAAC

The Torah portion of Toldot begins with a powerful message of hope and empowerment for the Jewish People throughout the ages:

*"And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac."*

Rashi explains: "Generations" refers to Jacob and Esau who are mentioned in this parshah.

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the story of the patriarchs knows that Jacob and Esau were Isaac's children. What, then, does Rashi convey with his seemingly elementary comment?

The Rebbe explains that these words actually teach us a profound lesson: "Esau" refers to our enemies throughout history. We may become overwhelmed and discouraged when we face threat after threat from our enemies, but this verse reminds us that both Jacob and Esau owe their very existence to the fact that they are "mentioned in the parshah." Esau exists because that is what the Torah dictates.

The Torah is G-d's blueprint for creation. Nothing exists outside of G-d, and everything is a part of His Divine plan. "Der Aibershter Firt Di Welt", "G-d runs the world." We need only to connect to His Torah, and we will have no reason to fear the Esaus of the world.

### Digging Wells

What distinguished the Divine service of our patriarch Isaac from that of his father, Abraham, and his son, Jacob? We can gain insight into this from the story of Isaac digging wells and the resulting conflict with the ancient Philistines.

Chassidic teachings, drawing from Kabbalah, delineate the unique modes of service of our forefathers. Abraham exemplified the attribute of Chesed, all-encompassing kindness, benevolence, and flow of good. Isaac embodied Gevurah, representing severity, contraction, or restriction. Jacob personified Tiferet, denoting beauty or harmony—the perfect balance of kindness and severity.

Abraham served G-d through his kindness and hospitality. Isaac, representing the attribute of severity, became a well-digger, symbolically serving G-d by digging and plumbing the depths of self and soul, striving to attain perfection.

Beyond the deep symbolism of Isaac's well-digging, there is a fundamental message for us, his descendants. Isaac's unwavering determination to extract inherent goodness from any situation empowers us to follow suit. When we go out into the world, we

must also dig, searching for the "water," the goodness that is always there. The question is only how deep we will need to dig. Sometimes, a little digging yields water, and goodness is easily discovered; other circumstances demand deeper excavation.

Even when the Philistines plug the wells we dig - when the forces of evil attempt to prevent or undo our spiritual achievements - we persist, digging again, forging onward, never giving up.

The act of digging, breaking through the ground, emanates from the attribute of Gevurah, signifying fierce strength. Isaac, embodying this attribute, believed he could bring out the inherent goodness in every person, even attempting to unearth the dormant good hidden deep within Esau.

### Goodness Within Esau?

Toward the end of our Torah portion, we read the riveting narrative of Jacob intercepting the blessings that were intended for Esau. Isaac instructs Esau: *"Go forth to the field and hunt game for me and make for me tasty foods as I like... and I will eat, in order that my soul will bless you before I die."*

What exactly is "tasty food"? Is it sweet? Is it sour? Is it a combination of sweet and sour? Could this be the first order of Chinese food recorded in Jewish history?

In Chapter 27 of Tanya, the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, explains:

There are two types of food that are delicacies: one is sweet, and the other is sharp, or sour. The latter is often unpleasant to eat as-is, but when properly prepared with the right spices and accompaniments, becomes a delicacy.

Likewise, explains the Alter Rebbe, there are two kinds of spiritual "delicacies" when it comes to combating the Sitra Achra (lit. "the other side," i.e., anything that does not overtly represent holiness) such as the evil inclination and our desire to sin.

The first "delicacy" is characterized by the complete eradication of the evil inclination, a process comparable to converting bitterness to sweetness and darkness to light. This can only be accomplished by the perfectly righteous person, the tzaddik, who no longer harbors even a desire to sin.

The second "delicacy" is when the evil inclination is not eliminated, but subdued. This is accomplished by the average person, the Beinoni (lit. "intermediate one"), who, through intense spiritual effort attains perfection in thought, speech and deed, despite an ongoing desire to sin. In other words, the Beinoni does not actually sin, even though the desire to do so is still there.

The Alter Rebbe explains that G-d loves this "sour" delicacy. G-d favors the repentance of the Baal Teshuva, the

penitent. It's the Baal Teshuva, the Beinoni, who takes sour elements and transforms them into the palatable, even the delightful.

That's what Isaac said to Esau: Prepare food for me the way I like it - take that which is sour and make it delicious. Take the negativity that you have and transform it into positivity. Do a Mitzvah! Repent! Engage in the transformational service of the Baal Teshuvah. Bring me some sweet and sour.

### Mending Shattered Vessels

In Kabbalah, the world we live in is called the world of Tikun, meaning "order" or "rectification." Before our world existed, though, there was another world, a higher, more spiritual realm known as the world of Tohu, "chaos." Tohu (not to be confused with tofu) earned its name because G-d's Divine energy, or light, was too great for the vessels and overwhelmed them, resulting in the "shattering" of that world.

Consequently, fragmented pieces of holiness "fell" into the lower worlds, ultimately reaching our world - the lowest one - and settling into its lowest places. "The higher you are, the lower you fall." Thus, these shards of holiness descended into our material world, into the lowest realms of negativity and even the forbidden.

Esau embodies these Divine fallen energies of Tohu. Isaac's intention was to elevate, redeem, and liberate these Esau energies by transforming him into a servant of G-d. Rooted in the Divine attribute of severity, Isaac believed that if he bestowed a tremendous blessing upon Esau, it would reveal his inherent goodness. He saw only the good—the Divine potential—in Esau.

### Don't See the Weeds

The late Rabbi Dovid Edelman, Shliach of the Rebbe and director of Lubavitch Yeshiva Academy in Springfield, Mass., for over six decades, was once interviewed alongside one of his supporters, Jeffrey Kimball.

Mr. Kimball related the following story: One day, he, his wife, and their young daughter visited the school building he helped fund. Upon arrival, Mr. Kimball noticed that the once-beautiful flowers at the front were now overrun with weeds. Turning to the rabbi, he expressed his disappointment that the garden was not properly looked after. "Why are the weeds overrunning the flowers?" he asked. "You must speak to the gardener! This place has to look good." Witnessing this exchange, Mr. Kimball's daughter, quite confused, ran to her mother in the car and asked, "Why is daddy yelling at the rabbi?"

## 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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Calming her down, his wife asked if she had seen the beautiful flowers and the weeds. Confirming that she had, the girl's mother then explained, "Daddy sees the weeds and wants them removed. But the rabbi only sees flowers, not the weeds. That's why Daddy got upset."

This is what the Rebbe wanted us all to do—to look at a person and see only the flowers, their positive traits, and not the weeds, their flaws.

When Isaac looked at Esau, he only saw the flowers. He didn't want to see the weeds. That is why he wished to bestow his blessing upon Esau. It turns out that G-d said, "No. Esau is not ready for that." Isaac's strength - even in the form of a blessing - would not elevate Esau, but would actually break him. Isaac's mission would have to be accomplished by Jacob, which is why Jacob ultimately received the blessing that Isaac had intended for Esau.

#### **Peace from Strength**

The coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption will usher in an era of peace and prosperity. Our sages say that at that time, Isaac will take a special place among the patriarchs, attributed to his contribution to ultimate peace.

Let us embrace these profound life lessons from our patriarch Isaac. Be relentless in your pursuit of

positivity. Keep digging wells; strive to uncover the inherent goodness in others, choosing to focus on the flowers amidst life's challenges, rather than getting bogged down by the weeds. May we remain steadfast and resolute in the face of any opposition we encounter - channeling Isaac's Gevura - and may we usher in the ultimate redemption, speedily in our days. Amen!

*By Rabbi Yehoshua B. Gordon*

### **TOLDOT IN A NUTSHELL**

The name of the Parshah, "Toldot," means "Generations" and it is found in Genesis 25:19.

Isaac and Rebecca endure twenty childless years, until their prayers are answered and Rebecca conceives. She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the "children struggle inside her"; G-d tells her that "there are two nations in your womb," and that the younger will prevail over the elder.

Esau emerges first; Jacob is born clutching Esau's heel. Esau grows up to be "a cunning hunter, a man of the field"; Jacob is "a wholesome man," a dweller in the tents of learning. Isaac favors Esau; Rebecca loves Jacob. Returning exhausted and hungry from the 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 presents Rebecca as his sister, out of fear that he will be killed by someone coveting 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 tranquility.

Esau marries two Hittite women. Isaac grows old and blind, and expresses his desire to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, 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. When Esau returns and the deception is revealed, all Isaac can do for his weeping son is to predict that he will live by his sword, and that when Jacob falters, the younger brother will forfeit his supremacy over the elder.

Jacob leaves home for Charan to flee Esau's wrath and to find a wife in the family of his mother's brother, Laban. Esau marries a third wife—Machalath, the daughter of Ishmael.

## **RABBI GAVRIEL NOACH & REBBETZIN RIVKY HOLTZBERG HY"D**

Rabbi Gavriel (Gabi) Holtzberg was born in Israel and moved with his family to the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, N.Y., when he was nine. He studied at yeshivahs in New York and Argentina, and as a rabbinical student, served Jewish communities in Thailand and China. He was 29 at the time of the attacks.

Rivky, Gavriel's 28-year-old wife, was born Rivkah Rosenberg in Afula, Israel.

The Holtzbergs married in 2002, and, abandoning the comfortable life they could have had in Israel or the U.S., the two moved to Mumbai a year after their marriage to serve as Chabad emissaries and open the first Chabad House (Jewish center) in Mumbai. They served the small local Jewish community, visiting businesspeople, and the numerous tourists, many of them Israeli, who annually travel to the seaside city.

Gabi and Rivky were no strangers to hardship. Their first child, Menachem Mendel, died from a congenital disease, and another son, Dovber, also suffered from the same disorder, and passed away a few weeks after his parents were killed.

Besides being a trained ritual circumciser and slaughterer, Gabi also conducted weddings for local Jewish couples, and taught numerous Torah classes at the Chabad House and other locations across the city.

Despite his young years, he left a legacy of selflessness, dedication and kindness that will be widely admired for many years to come.

Rivky forged close friendships with many members of the community in India and was always available for a heart-to-heart conversation with a traveler passing through. She was passionate about the classes she taught, and especially enjoyed explaining the beauty of the Jewish view of marriage and intimacy. A great source of pride for Rivky was the Mikvah (Jewish ritual bath) that the Holtzbergs had built for Jewish women in Mumbai.

Those who visited the Chabad House would speak of her endless hospitality and the warmth and comfort she emanated.

Rabbi Gabi & Rivky Holtzberg were killed by Pakistani terrorists at their Chabad House on 29 Cheshvan 5769, or 2008, together with four guests. May G-d avenge their blood. The Holtzbergs are survived by their son Moshe, two at the time, who was miraculously saved, carried out of the beleaguered Chabad House in the arms of his courageous nanny.



### **IN JEWISH HISTORY**

**Sunday, 23 Cheshvan 5785-24 November 2024**  
**Hasmonean Holiday (137 BCE)**

In Talmudic times, 23 Cheshvan was commemorated as the day on which the stones of the altar which were defiled by the Greeks were removed from the Holy Temple, in 3623 (137 BCE).

**Monday, 24 Cheshvan 5785-25 November 2024**  
**Passing of Rabbi Avraham Azulai (1643)**

Rabbi Avraham was a famous kabbalist who resided in Hebron, Jerusalem, and Gaza, in the Land of Israel. He authored Chesed L'Avraham and was the great-grandfather of Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (the Chida). He passed away on 24 Cheshvan 5403 (1643) and is buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron.

**Thursday, 27 Cheshvan 5785-28 November 2024**  
**Flood ends (2104 BCE)**

On the 27th of Cheshvan of the year 1657 (2104 BCE) "the earth dried" completing the 365-day duration of the great flood that wiped out all life on earth save for the eight human beings and the animals (at least two of each species) in Noah's ark; on this day G-d commanded Noah to "Come out of the ark" and repopulate, settle and civilize the earth.

**Shabbat, 29 Cheshvan 5785-30 November 2024**  
**Mumbai Terror Attacks (2008)**

The city of Mumbai, India, was hit with a series of coordinated terror attacks, starting on Wednesday

evening, the 29th of Cheshvan 5769, which left close to 200 dead and scores more injured.

One of the terrorists' chosen targets was the local Chabad House, known as the "Nariman House," operated by Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries Rabbi Gavriel Noach (Gabi) and Rivkah (Rivki) Holtzberg.

In the subsequent standoff, which continued until Friday afternoon, Gabi and Rivki and several other Jews in the Chabad House - Rabbis Bentzion Chroman and Leibish Teitelbaum, Norma Schwartzblatt-Rabinowitz and Yocheved Orpaz - were killed in cold blood. May G-d avenge their murders.

Miraculously, the Holtzbergs' two-year-old child, Moshe, was saved by his nanny.