

In memory of all those brutally murdered in the war on Israel,
including the fallen soldiers of the IDF

בס"ד

23 AUGUST 2025 | 29 AV 5785

VOLUME 38 | #50

DAF HASHAVUA

ראה | RE'EH

SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 8.58pm
Birmingham: 9.07pm
Bournemouth: 9.06pm
Cardiff: 9.12pm
Dublin: 9.28pm
Edinburgh: 9.28pm
Glasgow: 9.31pm
Hull: 9.11pm
Leeds: 9.11pm
Liverpool: 9.18pm
Manchester: 9.13pm
Nottingham: 9.10pm
Sheffield: 9.13pm
Southend: 8.53pm
Southport: 9.21pm
Jerusalem: 7.52pm

Shabbat Mevarechim

**Rosh Chodesh Elul is
on Sunday and Monday**

*"See, I am setting before
you today a blessing and
a curse..."*

(Devarim 11:26)



Sidra Summary

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – DEVARIM 11:26-12:10

Moshe (Moses) tells the nation to “see” that they have the choice between “a blessing and a curse”, which will be determined by whether or not they hearken to God’s commandments. After entering the Land, the nation will come to Mount Gerizim and to Mount Eival, where various blessings and curses (respectively) will be pronounced in the presence of the entire nation (see Devarim 21:11-26). Moshe instructs the Israelites to destroy the idols and altars that they will find in the Land.

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 12:11-28

Moshe relates the prohibition to erect and offer sacrifices on private altars. However, one may slaughter and eat kosher (unconsecrated) meat anywhere that one desires, though it is prohibited to consume the blood. Keeping to the general directives that Moshe has outlined will guarantee prosperity for generations to come.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 12:29-13:19

When the Israelites come into the Land, they must resist following the idolatrous practices of the Cana’anites. One is not allowed to add to nor subtract from any mitzvah, such as taking five (instead of four) species on Succot (Rashi). A false prophet who tries to turn the nation away from God should be rejected and is subject to capital punishment. The same applies to someone who tries secretly to entice others to worship idols. Moshe details the severe punishment for a city whose inhabitants turn to idolatry.

4TH ALIYA (REVI’I) – 14:1-21

There is a prohibition against cutting one’s skin or making a bald patch on one’s head as a sign of mourning over a lost relative, which was an ancient Emorite custom (Rashi). Some of the laws of kashrut are listed. Only an animal with completely split hooves and which chews the cud is kosher. Therefore, animals like the camel and pig, which have only one

of these characteristics, are forbidden. Fish are only kosher if they have both fins and scales. The Torah lists forbidden birds by name. It is prohibited to mix meat and milk.

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 14:22-29

There is a mitzvah to tithe produce grown in the Land of Israel, including *ma’aser sheni*, the ‘second tithe’, which is taken to Jerusalem to eat. However, one who is unable to carry the produce can redeem its value, add an extra fifth, then take the money to Jerusalem to purchase and consume food there.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 15:1-18

Every seventh year is *shemita* (the sabbatical year), whose agricultural laws were detailed in parashat Behar (Vayikra 25:1-24). Existing loans are cancelled, yet the Torah warns against withholding a loan from a pauper before the *shemita* year out of fear that it will not be paid back in time. A Jewish servant works for six years, after which he can go free. When he leaves, his master must give him significant farewell gifts.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI’I) – 15:19-16:17

One is not allowed to work a first born male animal from the flock or herd; rather it must be brought as an offering and its meat then consumed by its owner. The nation is to celebrate Pesach in the ‘spring month’. Some laws of the festival and the special Pesach offering are listed. Shavuot comes after the seven-week counting of the Omer. Succot is celebrated at the time of year when crops are gathered in from the threshing floors and vineyards. On each of these three festivals, one has to bring special festive offerings to the Temple.

Point to Consider: Which feature of the Jewish calendar ensures that Pesach will always be in the spring? (16:1)

HAFTARAH (ISAIAH 54:11-55:5)

Taken from the book of Yeshaya, this is the third of the seven ‘haftarot of consolation’ read after Tisha B’Av. Yeshaya prophesies about a messianic future in which “all of God’s children will be His students” and the Jews will be protected from any harm.



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United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

Produced by US Education & Events together with the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue

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You have a choice



**RABBI NATAN
FAGLEMAN**

Allerton Hebrew
Congregation

Psychologists who subscribe to a 'deterministic' world view argue that human behaviour is pre-determined, and in essence, therefore, we are no different to animals in this regard. They consider free will to be an illusion.

Judaism, however, argues vehemently against this theory. In fact, our entire concept of human accountability is based on the assumption that we humans are not at the mercy of our impulses; we indeed have the freedom to choose how we behave.

This idea headlines this week's parasha, *Re'eh*. After a lengthy sermon that has lasted for the first twelve chapters of the book of *Devarim*, Moshe (Moses) communicates to the people that they have a choice. "See, this day I set before you a blessing and a curse." The blessing is contingent on "listening to the commandments", whilst the curses are caused by "turning away from the path that God has commanded you" (*Devarim* 11:26-28).

The significance of this debate

is truly existential. It goes to the heart of the purpose for which Judaism believes we exist.

What is the allure of the theory of determinism? It enables people to believe that they are not responsible for their actions. If every move we make is simply the result of a predetermined set of natural rules, we certainly cannot be faulted for any wrongdoing. It therefore gives us licence to do as we please, without feeling guilty.

However, Judaism believes that humans are different to animals. Whilst animals cannot make moral choices, people can. No animal chooses between right and wrong; no animal battles to overcome its lower self and achieve a more spiritual state by means of its moral ideals. That is only a function of human free will, *bechira*.

"When we hear news of a shark attack, we don't blame the shark. We know it's just doing what comes naturally... But when a human being attacks, they are held responsible for their actions. (Nechemia Coopersmith, *Shmoaze*, Targum Press, p.83)

A society that believes in free will is likely to be a better place to live. "Free will guides people's choices toward being more moral and better performers.

It is adaptive for societies and individuals to hold a belief in free will, as it helps people adhere to cultural codes of conduct that portend healthy, wealthy and happy life outcomes." (Based on John Tierney, *Do You Have Free Will?*, New York Times, March 21, 2011)

In the words of Rabbi Dr Abraham Twerski (1930-2021), "Human beings are free creatures, and to take away our freedom is to rob us of our humanity. Humans are free when we have the capacity to make a free choice." (Abraham J. Twerski, MD, *The Spiritual Self*, Hazelden Publishers, pp.6-7)

And it is only if we believe in free choice that we can understand why we deserve reward or punishment for what we have done in this life. Through overcoming our base nature, we have earned our reward and therefore we will feel deserving of receiving the prize of the World to Come (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Path of the Just*, chapter 1).

"Human beings are free creatures, and to take away our freedom is to rob us of our humanity. Humans are free when we have the capacity to make a free choice."

— Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski

Elul – A month of reflection and reconnection



**MIRIAM
MARSON**

US Head of Heritage

"Have you been in 'our field' yet? If you haven't been there, go down into the field, read the old, half-obliterated inscriptions on the leaning tombstones, and you will find in them the story of a whole people... You will look upon this poor little town with its rich cemeteries and repeat the old verses: 'How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob; how good are your resting places, O Israel.'"
Favourite tales of Sholom Aleichem (1859-1916)

As Sholom Aleichem reflected, our cemeteries are not places of sadness alone. They are sites of dignity, memory and faith, where the story of the Jewish people lives on.



Willesden Jewish Cemetery

With the month of Elul approaching, the final month of the Hebrew calendar, tradition invites us into a time of reflection, reconnection and preparation. It is a moment to pause, to look inward, and to reach across generations, remembering those who came before us, as we prepare ourselves spiritually for the High Holy Days.

Visiting a cemetery during Elul is a time-honoured tradition, rooted in deep significance. It is a time to pray for the elevation of the souls of the deceased, to seek their intervention on our behalf before God, to inspire personal *Teshuvah*, repentance, and, where needed, to request forgiveness from them. At this time when God remembers the living and the dead, we strengthen the bond between the living and those who came before us, drawing on their merit and example as we look towards the year ahead.

Jewish cemeteries are often described as *Batei Chaim*, Houses of Life, a reminder that the legacy of those who come before us continue to live within us. Each headstone and inscription tells a story not only of individual lives but of whole communities. The month of Elul calls us to reconnect with these stories and, by visiting the graves of loved ones and others, we carry their lessons forward into the future. Elul reminds us that renewal is not

Our cemeteries are not places of sadness alone. They are sites of dignity, memory and faith, where the story of the Jewish people lives on.

only personal but communal. In honouring the past, we build strength for the future.

Willesden Jewish Cemetery will be open throughout Elul, welcoming all visitors. Our team will be on hand to assist with locating graves or researching your family. You can book free short, guided walks focusing on some of the cemetery's key figures, including four Chief Rabbis and other communal leaders. You are also warmly invited to visit the House of Life Heritage Centre, where refreshments will be available. Our knowledgeable volunteers will be on hand to answer any questions you may have about the cemetery.

Throughout the month of Elul, Bushey, Waltham Abbey and East Ham cemeteries will be open daily. Our other historic cemeteries will be open on set days. For full information, please visit theus.org.uk/cemeteryvisits2025.

Whether you are coming to visit loved ones, explore our shared heritage, or simply find a quiet space for reflection, we look forward to welcoming you.

Blessings for all occasions



**RABBI LUIS
HERSZAFT**

Community Rabbi,
Hampstead Garden
Suburb Synagogue

In this series, we focus on the meanings and relevance of our prayers and how they offer us opportunities to connect with God at any time, not just during formal services.

Last week, we explored the purpose and power of saying *berachot*, blessings, in our daily lives. This week, let's take a closer look at some of these blessings.

Rambam (1138-1204, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Berachot* 1:4) writes that all *berachot* fall into three categories:

- a) blessings for physical benefit (like food, drink or pleasant fragrances)
- b) blessings when doing *mitzvot*
- c) blessings of thanksgiving, which are a way of expressing praise, gratitude and requests

a) Blessings over physical benefit

There are many blessings in this category, but let's focus on *Hamotzi*, the *beracha* we say before eating bread.

In this *beracha*, we say that God "brings forth bread from

the earth." At first glance, this sounds odd. God does not pull loaves of bread out of the ground! Making bread requires a tremendous amount of human effort: ploughing, planting seeds, watering crops, harvesting wheat, grinding flour, kneading dough and finally baking it into bread.

Yet, when we say *Hamotzi*, we remind ourselves that, although we work hard, it is ultimately God who placed the potential in the earth and gave us the wisdom to turn wheat into bread. It is easy to think bread is purely our own achievement, but each time we recite *Hamotzi*, we acknowledge that all we accomplish is ultimately a gift from God. This idea is not just about bread; it is true for all the *berachot* we say over physical pleasures.

b) Blessings over *mitzvot*

Another category of *berachot* is the blessings we say when performing *mitzvot*, known as *Birkat HaMitzvah*. For example, before lighting Shabbat candles, shaking the *lulav* and *etrog*, putting on *tefillin*, or hearing the *shofar*, we say "...*asher kideshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu...* - ...who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us..."

Rabbi David Abudraham (14th century, Spain) explains that the word *kideshanu* (sanctified us) shares a root with *kiddushin*, meaning betrothal. The Jewish

people are likened to being 'married' to God. So *mitzvot* are not just rules; they are acts within a loving relationship. Each *Birkat HaMitzvah* is a chance to pause and remember that our actions connect us to God in a deeply personal way.

c) Blessings of praise and thanksgiving

Finally, there is a whole category of *berachot* that are not about eating or doing *mitzvot*. The Sages instituted blessings for moments of wonder, like seeing lightning or hearing thunder, spotting a rainbow or seeing royalty. There is also the beautiful series of morning blessings we say as we begin our day, thanking God for sight, clothing, standing upright and all that we have.

Rambam (*Hilchot Berachot* 1:3) writes: "Many *berachot* were instituted in the form of praise and thanks and in the form of request, so that one will always remember the Creator, even when he is not experiencing pleasure and is not doing a *mitzvah*." This reminds us that connection to God is not reserved only for moments of enjoyment or religious duty - it can fill every moment of our day with meaning.

Together, our *berachot* help ensure that every bite we eat, every *mitzvah* we perform, and every moment of wonder brings us closer to God.

The wicked King Menashe

Sefer Melachim (Kings) II: Chapter 21



**PNINA
SAVERY**

Ma'ayan and
US Educator

Menashe, son of the righteous King Chizkiyahu, becomes king at age 12 when his father dies. He reigns for 55 years. According to the account in our chapter, he is the most wicked king in *Sefer Melachim*. He worships pagan gods and brings idols into the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple). Menashe even practices witchcraft, sorcery and child sacrifice. We are told that “Menashe led [the people] astray to do more evil than the nations that God has destroyed” (*II Melachim* 21:9).

It is difficult for us to understand how Menashe could have undone the important work of his righteous father. Chizkiyahu reformed the nation, bringing them back to service of God, and removed most of the idolatry from the kingdom. How did it unravel so quickly? While we cannot excuse Menashe, it is important to understand the strong desire towards idolatry that existed at that time. Indeed, the Talmud recounts that the great sage Rav Ashi questions Menashe in a dream about this. Menashe

responds: “Had you been there, you would have lifted the hem of your robe and run after me”.¹

Another important consideration is the impact of the Assyrian superpower, to whom the southern kingdom of Yehuda (Judah) is now a vassal state. His acceptance of Assyrian rule allows Menashe to reign for an unprecedentedly long period, providing an element of stability. However, this has a very negative impact on the religious and cultural direction of the Jewish people.

Menashe is also accused of “shedding innocent blood” (*ibid.* v.16), indicating that he killed those who were religiously and politically opposed to his regime. The Talmud explains that he murdered the prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah), who was in fact his grandfather.² Most important of all, Menashe is described as committing all these sins “in order to anger God” (*ibid.* v.6). He does not act out of ignorance or being led astray; he is purposefully rebelling against God.

Due to his extreme wickedness, a decree of destruction is made upon Jerusalem and the Jewish people: “*God, Lord of Israel says: ‘I will bring such disaster*

on Judah and Jerusalem that the ears of everyone who hears about it will ring!... I will wipe out Jerusalem the way one wipes a dish clean... I will deliver them to their enemies...’” (see verses 11-15). Although destruction was threatened during previous reigns, it was only sealed as a punishment during the wicked reign of Menashe.

After Menashe’s death, his son Amon rules for two years and follows in his father’s wicked footsteps.

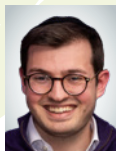
It is interesting to note that Menashe is portrayed differently in *Sefer Divrei HaYamim* (the Book of Chronicles). This book says that Menashe repents later in his life (see *II Divrei HaYamim* 33:10-18). One account states that Menashe was captured by the enemy army, who tortured him. He cried out to every possible pagan god until he remembered about the Jewish God. The angels tried to prevent the prayers of such a wicked sinner reaching God. However, God refused to let them intervene, stating that the prayers of any repentant sinner are beloved to Him.³ This teaches us about the power of repentance. Even after the worst of sins, God still desires us to return to Him.

¹ Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 102b.

² *ibid.* 103b.

³ Jerusalem Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 10a.

Your role matters more than you think



RABBI SAM KAUFMAN

Director of Youth Development, Mill Hill United Synagogue

Back in Year 6, our end-of-year play was none other than *Joseph and the Technicolour Dreamcoat*. The budding actor I believed myself to be, I auditioned with full gusto – Joseph, Jacob, even the Elvis-inspired Pharaoh. But alas, when the cast list went up, I was crushed to see I'd been given the role of... Dan.

Now, while Dan is an important character biblically, in Andrew Lloyd Webber's world he was nothing more than a background brother – a pure chorus role with not a single line. (Later, some parents complained, and the school generously gave two whole words for each brother.) Then came rehearsals. One day, a teacher took me aside and "politely"

suggested I mime my singing parts. Devastating.

I don't bring up this tale of theatrical injustice just to win your sympathy, dear reader. Rather, I think it can give us insight into the opening line of this week's parasha.

Moshe (Moses) gathers the entire nation to present them with a clear choice: blessings or curses, depending on how they follow the mitzvot. He opens with the words:

"Re'eh, anochi noten lifneichem hayom beracha uklala - See, I set before you today blessing and curse."

The word "*Re'eh*" – "see" – is in the **singular**, while "*lifneichem*" – "before you" – is in the **plural**. Why this strange grammatical switch? Why talk to everyone and yet also make it personal?

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz (known as the *Kli Yakar*, 1550-1619) gives a powerful answer quoting the Talmud (*Kiddushin* 40b): a

person should always see the world as being evenly balanced – 50% righteous, 50% wicked. And *your* next action can tip the entire world to the side of good or evil.

That means that every mitzvah you do – however small – might change everything.

But in a big crowd, it's easy to forget that. We look around and think, "Everyone else is so impressive. I'll just keep my head down, not rock the boat, and blend in. I don't really matter. I'm just here to make up the numbers."

That was me, miming in the background of the school play. Who would notice? Surely my parents would still *schep nachas* either way.

But that's exactly what Moshe was warning against. By using both singular and plural, he was saying: *Yes, I'm speaking to the crowd – but I'm really talking to you.*

Don't ever think your actions are too small to matter.

Parasha Wordsearch

Find these words in the grid. The words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

Bonus: The leftover letters reveal a powerful lesson from this week's parasha...

J	U	S	T	O	N	E	S	M	H
A	L	L	A	C	T	I	O	A	N
N	R	E	E	H	M	C	V	A	A
N	C	H	A	O	N	Z	G	E	D
T	H	E	S	E	T	N	T	I	R
M	E	H	C	I	E	N	F	I	L
E	E	W	M	S	E	S	R	U	C
O	K	L	I	Y	A	K	A	R	R
S	N	O	I	S	I	C	E	D	L
D	B	L	E	S	S	I	N	G	S

BLESSINGS
DECISIONS
CURSES
DAN
KLI YAKAR
LIFNEICHEM
MITZVAH
MOSHE
REEH





THE TRIBE SCRIBE

RE'EH: SAY, CAN YOU SEE?

OK, MATHS NOW - GAMING GLORY LATER!

HOMEWORK FIRST
SCREENS LATER

WE'VE GOT THIS
- EYES ON THE
PRIZE!

TECHNICALLY, WE SAID
NO SCREENS. WE
DIDN'T SAY NO NOSH.

ONE GUMMY LED TO ANOTHER...
AND ANOTHER! I'M BASICALLY A
JELLYBEAN NOW!

AND I AM A BIT LOW ON
BRAIN FUEL.

TALK ABOUT SUGAR POWERED
DECISION MAKING.

The next day...

MATHS
QUIZ

PLEASE TELL ME 'SLEEPY' IS A
VALID ANSWER.

WE SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER!

BUT SUGAR LOGIC SEEMED
LIKE THE ANSWER AT THE
TIME.

NOT EVERYTHING THAT
SPARKLES IS SNACK-WORTHY!!
THINK FIRST, BRAIN ON! CHOOSE
BEFORE YOU CHEWS!

TURNS OUT MY JELLYBEAN IQ
WASN'T SO SWEET!

SEE, I PRESENT BEFORE YOU
TODAY A BLESSING AND A
CURSE.

IN THIS WEEK'S PARASHA, MOSHE
(MOSES) BASICALLY SAYS, CHOOSE
CAREFULLY - DON'T LET
JELLYBEANS DO YOUR THINKING.

GOD GAVE US THREE TOOLS TO HELP
US MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES:
EYES TO SEE THINGS,
BRAINS TO KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT AND
HEARTS STRONG ENOUGH TO DO IT -
EVEN WHEN IT'S HARD

OUR RABBIS EXPLAIN THAT NOT ONLY
DO WE HAVE THE POWER TO SEE THE
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD,
BUT WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO ACTUALLY
CHOOSE BETWEEN THEM - EVEN WHEN
IT'S TRICKY! BEST OF ALL, WE CAN
ALWAYS PUT IT RIGHT THE NEXT TIME
IF WE MESS UP.

WE CHOOSE BRAINS AND SNACKS, IN
THAT ORDER!



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Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.