

# PARSHA DISCUSSIONS VOL. 2

As Areyvut continues into its 23rd year, I find myself reflecting with deep gratitude on how far this project—and the people who make it possible—have come. What began decades ago with Fred Claar’s vision of bringing the weekly Parsha to life through accessible, values-driven learning has grown into a living legacy that continues to inspire educators, parents and students alike.

The 5785 cycle during 2024-2025 builds upon the foundation laid last year by **Kayla Goldberger**, now **Kayla Goldberger Weiss**. We wish her mazal tov on her recent marriage and continued blessings and success. Her insightful reflections helped us navigate a time of heartbreak and resilience. Kayla’s ability to connect eternal Torah truths to the lived experiences of Am Yisrael—especially amid war, uncertainty and spiritual challenge—remains a source of strength and comfort. I am deeply grateful that she continued to develop new content this past year, once again demonstrating the timeless relevance of Torah and its power to speak to our modern struggles and hopes.

This material continues to reflect Areyvut’s mission: to make Jewish values tangible and actionable. Each Parsha offers both timeless lessons and practical ways to translate those ideas into daily life—at home, in school and throughout the commUNITY. As always, our goal is not only to learn but to live the Torah’s message with kindness, a sense of purpose and conviction.

My heartfelt thanks go to **Fred Claar** for his vision and generosity of spirit, to **Kayla Goldberger Weiss** for her depth, creativity and dedication and to **Rena Ray** for her elegant design and partnership in bringing these ideas to life visually.

As we move through 5786, we continue to pray for the safe return of all the hostages, for the protection of our chayalim and for true peace and unity for Am Yisrael. May these weekly reflections remind us that even in challenging times, Torah remains our guide, our anchor and our shared source of hope.

## **Am Yisrael Chai.**

Daniel Rothner  
Founder & Director  
November 2025, Kislev 5786

# PARSHAT BEREISHIT

This week's parsha, Bereishit, opens the Torah with the awe-inspiring account of creation. It begins with the words "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," setting the stage for the unfolding story of the world and humanity. The creation narrative introduces us to Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden, where they enjoy a harmonious existence, yet are confronted with a pivotal choice that will change everything.

At the heart of this parsha is the theme of choice and the power it holds. Adam and Chava are given the freedom to choose, exemplifying one of the most profound aspects of being human: the ability to make decisions that shape our lives and the world around us. The warning regarding the Tree of Knowledge highlights the potential consequences of our choices, reminding us that with freedom comes responsibility.

As they face temptation from the snake, we see a reflection of our own struggles with choice. Just as they were influenced by external forces, we too encounter distractions and pressures in our daily lives that can lead us away from our values and intentions. This serves as a powerful reminder to remain vigilant about the influences we allow into our lives and to strive for self-awareness in our decision-making.

The importance of a growth mindset—the belief that our abilities and intelligence can be worked upon and developed—is frequently spoken about in both religious and secular circles as a key to self-development. This idea resonates deeply with the lesson from Bereishit. Adam and Chava's choice was not merely about eating a forbidden fruit; it was a moment that reflected their understanding of themselves and their potential. Even when faced with challenges, embracing a growth mindset allows us to learn from our choices, both good and bad, and to continue moving forward.

Moreover, the creation story emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things. Each element of creation is pronounced "good," illustrating the beauty of diversity and the importance of harmony. We are reminded that our actions have ripple effects on the world and those around us. In our own lives, fostering a sense of community and connection can lead to a more supportive and enriching environment.

## DISCUSSION

Reflect on the concept of choice and its impact on your life. How do you navigate the influences around you in making decisions?

## QUESTIONS

- How can you cultivate self-awareness in your decision-making process?
- Think about a recent choice you made. What did you learn from the experience, and how can that knowledge guide your future decisions?
- In what ways can you contribute to creating a positive environment for those around you?

# PARSHAT NOACH

## In honor of Jacob Rothner's Bar Mitzvah

In this week's parsha, we encounter a world that has spiraled into chaos and corruption, leading God to decide to flood the earth and start anew. Amidst this turmoil, Noach emerges as the lone righteous figure, entrusted with the monumental task of building an ark to save himself, his family and the animals. After 40 days and nights of torrential rain, Noach receives a sign from a dove, signaling the end of the flood. God then makes a covenant with Noach, promising never to destroy the earth again, symbolized by the rainbow.

While the narrative may lead to feelings of despair, it also highlights the themes of responsibility and the potential for renewal. Noach is depicted as a man of righteousness, yet the Torah offers little insight into his efforts to influence his contemporaries. This raises an important question: Why didn't Noach attempt to save more people from the impending doom?

One interpretation suggests that Noach, despite his righteousness, may have felt overwhelmed by the evil around him. In our own lives, we may similarly face situations that seem beyond our control, prompting us to withdraw rather than engage. However, Noach's story also serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of taking action, to effect change.

This can be demonstrated through Noach's construction of the ark which served as a testament to his deep sense of faith and responsibility. He demonstrated that in the face of widespread corruption, even one person's efforts can lead to salvation. The ark itself is a symbol of hope and resilience, a safe haven amidst chaos. It teaches us that while we may not be able to change the world overnight, we can create spaces of safety and compassion in our lives.

In our own journeys, we many times have to navigate the challenge of feeling powerless in the face of injustice or negativity. Noach's example encourages us to find ways to make a difference in whatever capacity we can. Whether it is standing up for someone who is being wronged, lending a helping hand to those in need, or simply focusing on kindness in our daily interactions, each simple action contributes to building a more compassionate world.

## DISCUSSION

Reflect on a time when you felt overwhelmed by a situation and chose to take action. What motivated you? How did your actions impact those around you?

## QUESTIONS

- In what small ways can you contribute to creating positive change in your community?
- How can you remind yourself of the potential for renewal in difficult times?
- What actions can you take when you feel like withdrawing in the face of negativity?

# PARSHAT LECH LECHA

In this week's parsha, we find a critical moment that speaks to the balance of faith and doubt in Avraham's journey with God. God calls on Avraham and asks him to set out on a journey and promises him that he will be the father of a great nation, despite his and Sarah's advanced age and childlessness. Avraham receives these instructions and promises with tremendous faith, yet we soon see moments where doubt surfaces. When God tells Avraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars, Avraham believes Him fully. But later, Avraham expresses worry, asking, "How shall I know that I am to possess it?" (Genesis 15:8).

At first glance, Avraham's wavering seems surprising. If he trusted God enough to leave his homeland with no clear destination, why would he now question God's promise of descendants and land? But rather than seeing this moment as weakness, the Torah may be teaching us about the nature of faith itself: faith is not a one-time, blind decision. Rather, it is a continuous journey with both peaks and valleys.

Faith and doubt often coexist, and sometimes, it's questioning that deepens faith. Avraham's question, "How shall I know?" doesn't diminish his trust; it highlights his human need for reassurance and a deeper connection with God. This is further exemplified through God's response. God doesn't rebuke Avraham but instead establishes a covenant with him, giving him a tangible sign of His promise. This exchange illustrates that doubt, when faced with sincerity, can lead to a stronger, more resilient faith and connection.

In our lives, we also experience moments where our trust is tested. Like Avraham, we sometimes feel confident in our path, and at other times, doubt surfaces. Parshat Lech Lecha teaches us that it's okay to question and seek reassurance. True faith is not about suppressing our doubts but about working through them and seeking support when needed.

## DISCUSSION

Reflect on a time when you experienced doubt in a process or goal you cared about deeply. How did you seek reassurance, and how did it affect your path?

## QUESTIONS

- What are ways you can navigate feelings of doubt without giving up on goals?
- How can asking questions help us grow in our relationships with others and with God?
- Think of someone in your life who helped strengthen your faith, whether in yourself or in something larger. How did their reassurance impact you??

# PARSHAT VAYERA

Throughout our lives, we're constantly taught about the importance of commitment to our values, even in the face of great difficulty. In school, we learn to persevere through challenges, whether in academics, friendships or sports. We're encouraged to remain focused on our goals and not to give up when things get tough. This week's parsha presents one of the most powerful examples of commitment to a divine calling, even when it seems incomprehensible: the Akeidat Yitzchak, the binding of Isaac.

In this challenging story, God commands Avraham to take his beloved son Yitzchak and offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham had waited decades for this child, who was promised to be the future of his lineage. Yet, when God commands him, Avraham doesn't hesitate; he rises early in the morning and sets out to fulfill what seems like an impossible task. At the last moment, an angel of God calls out to stop him, providing a ram to offer instead. Avraham's willingness to go through with this command serves as a testament to his unparalleled faith, but it also teaches us something profound about commitment and resilience.

This story may feel distant from our everyday experiences, yet it resonates with a timeless lesson. Avraham's commitment to God's command, even when it defies logic, speaks to the strength we can find within ourselves to hold true to our values, even in challenging situations. His test teaches us that while challenges may appear insurmountable, there is often growth and meaning on the other side. Avraham's willingness to trust and persevere, despite the unimaginable request, leaves a legacy of unwavering commitment to one's beliefs.

This message is relevant to us today. In our own lives, we are often tested, though on a much smaller scale. We may face situations where staying true to our beliefs or commitments seems difficult or inconvenient. It's easy to look for reasons to back out or to let go of our goals when the path forward is challenging. However, Avraham's journey to the Akeidah reminds us that growth and fulfillment often lie in pushing through these challenges and trusting in the values we hold dear.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a goal you achieved that was challenging along the way. Discuss how you grew from that process and what allowed you to persevere.

## QUESTIONS

- What are three steps you can take toward staying true to your commitments, even when they are difficult?
- How can you remind yourself of the importance of your goals when the path feels challenging?
- How can you practice finding meaning in the journey, not just the destination, so that you can better endure life's tests?

# PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

In this week's parsha, we read about Avraham purchasing the Cave of Machpelah as a burial site for Sarah. This event marks the first piece of land in Israel that officially belongs to the Jewish people. The transaction between Avraham and Efron the Hittite is detailed extensively in the Torah, emphasizing Avraham's insistence on paying the full price for the land, even though Efron initially offers it for free.

Avraham's actions teach us a powerful lesson about resilience and foresight. After experiencing the loss of his beloved wife Sarah, Avraham does not allow his grief to paralyze him. Instead, he takes decisive steps to honor Sarah's memory by securing a permanent resting place for her and creating a legacy for future generations. The acquisition of the Cave of Machpelah is not just a practical action—it symbolizes Avraham's unwavering faith in God's promise that his descendants will inherit the land.

This story reminds us that in moments of difficulty, we can channel our pain into purposeful action. Rather than succumbing to despair, Avraham focuses on the future and ensures that Sarah's memory is preserved in a meaningful way. Similarly, in our own lives, we can find ways to turn challenging moments into opportunities for growth and resilience.

Another important lesson from this story is the value of taking responsibility for one's legacy. Avraham could have accepted Efron's offer to give the land for free, but he chooses instead to pay for it in full. By doing so, Avraham ensures that the land will belong to him and his descendants beyond any doubt. This teaches us the importance of integrity and clarity in our actions, especially when those actions will impact future generations.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you faced a challenge but were able to respond with purposeful action. How did that shape your perspective?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two ways you can work on responding to difficult situations with resilience and faith?
- What are some actions you can take to leave a positive legacy for future generations?

# PARSHAT TOLDOT

## Dedicated to the loving memory of Rabbi Zvi Kogan

In this week's parsha, we are introduced to Yitzchak and Rivka's twin sons, Yaakov and Esav. From the outset, the Torah tells us that these brothers were fundamentally different. Esav was a skilled hunter, a man of the field, while Yaakov was a "simple man, dwelling in tents," dedicating himself to study and spiritual pursuits. Their contrasting personalities led to different relationships with their parents—Yitzchak loved Esav for his physical strength and ability to provide, while Rivka favored Yaakov for his spiritual qualities.

At first glance, it might seem as though Yaakov's quieter, introspective nature made him "less than" compared to Esav's outgoing, action-oriented personality. But as the story unfolds, we see that Yaakov's unique traits were essential in fulfilling the mission of building the Jewish people. This highlights to us that God has a distinct purpose for everyone, and it is our job to embrace and develop our unique gifts.

In our modern lives, it's easy to compare ourselves to others—whether in school, at work, or even within our families. Social media can amplify these feelings, as we often see others showcasing their successes while overlooking our own strengths. The story of Yaakov and Esav reminds us that differences are not deficiencies. Each of us is created with a specific role and purpose in this world, and success comes from recognizing and leaning into our own unique talents, rather than trying to fit into someone else's mold.

Even Esav, despite his shortcomings, had qualities that made him a leader and a provider which led to Yitzchak favoring him. Though he ultimately chose a path that distanced him from God, his strength and energy were not inherently negative. Had he channeled them differently, they could have been a force for good.

## DISCUSSION

Think of someone whose talents are very different from yours. How can you learn to appreciate their contributions instead of comparing yourself to them?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two ways you embrace your unique strengths?
- How can you help others feel valued for who they are, especially if their strengths are less obvious?

# PARSHAT VAYETZEI

Life often leads us to unexpected places. We might have a clear plan, but circumstances arise that take us on unanticipated detours. Sometimes, these new paths are challenging or feel like setbacks, but they can also open doors to spiritual growth and self-discovery if we allow ourselves to embrace the journey.

In this week's parsha, Yaakov is fleeing from his brother Esav, leaving his family and everything familiar behind. On his way to Charan, he stops to rest and dreams of a ladder reaching toward the heavens, with angels ascending and descending upon it. In this profound moment, God speaks to Yaakov, promising him protection, blessings and the land of Israel for his descendants. When Yaakov awakens, he declares, "Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it!" (Genesis 28:16).

This moment teaches us a powerful lesson: God's presence is not limited to holy spaces or ideal circumstances. Yaakov did not expect to encounter God in an ordinary place, let alone during such a turbulent time in his life. Yet, it was precisely in this unexpected moment that he had one of the most profound spiritual experiences of his life.

This episode can serve as a reminder for us to open our hearts to the Divine, even in unexpected or challenging times. Often, we are so focused on getting to our next destination—whether it's a career milestone, a personal goal or a resolution to a difficult situation—that we forget to look for meaning and growth along the way. Yaakov's journey illustrates that every step, even the unplanned ones, has the potential for holiness if we are willing to pause and recognize it.

Moreover, the ladder in Yaakov's dream can be understood as a metaphor for life. It reminds us that growth is not always linear; there are times of ascent and times of descent. Both are integral parts of the journey. Just as the angels moved up and down, so too do we experience ups and downs. Our task is to stay connected to the "ladder"—our spiritual aspirations—and keep striving upward, even when the path feels uncertain.

## DISCUSSION

Think of a time when you found meaning or unexpected growth during a challenging period. What helped you stay open to those lessons?

## QUESTIONS

- How can Yaakov's realization, "Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it," inspire you to see the Divine in your own life?
- Are there moments when you've felt distant from your goals or faith but later realized their importance?
- How can you train yourself to be more present and open to finding meaning, even in life's detours?

# PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

How do we overcome challenges that feel insurmountable, especially those that stem from within? In this week's parsha, we encounter a profound story about Yaakov wrestling with a mysterious figure during the night. The Torah tells us that as Yaakov is left alone, he wrestles with "a man" until dawn. This figure, often understood as an angel or a representation of Yaakov's inner struggles, leaves him with a limp but also gives him a new name: Yisrael, meaning "one who struggles with God and men and prevails."

This encounter takes place just before Yaakov faces his brother Esav after years of separation. It is a pivotal moment, symbolizing Yaakov's journey not just outwardly but inwardly. He is forced to confront his fears, his guilt over past actions, and his identity as he prepares to meet Esav. Through this struggle, Yaakov emerges transformed—not unscathed, but stronger and more self-assured.

This story teaches us that some of the most important battles we face are the ones within ourselves. Like Yaakov, we may wrestle with doubts, regrets or fears about the future. These struggles can feel overwhelming, but they also have the power to shape us and help us grow. The limp Yaakov carries serves as a reminder that growth often comes with scars, but those scars are a testament to our strength and perseverance.

In our own lives, we might face situations where we doubt our abilities, question our choices, or feel burdened by guilt or fear. Yaakov's story encourages us to confront these challenges head-on, trusting that we can emerge from the struggle with greater clarity and resilience.

## DISCUSSION

Reflect on a time when you faced an inner struggle. How did you work through it, and how did it change you?

## QUESTIONS

- What does Yaakov's wrestling match teach us about perseverance in the face of inner challenges?
- How can we learn to embrace our "limps" or scars as part of our personal growth?
- When you're struggling with self-doubt or fear, what helps you regain strength and confidence?

# PARSHAT VAYEISHEV

How do we decide when to speak and when to remain silent? In Parshat Vayeishev, we encounter a powerful moment involving Yehuda and his brothers after they decide to sell Yosef. When the brothers initially plotted to kill Yosef, it was Reuven who suggested an alternative plan to throw him into a pit, intending to rescue him later. However, when Reuven is absent, Yehuda speaks up, proposing they sell Yosef instead of leaving him to die. The Torah records Yehuda's words: "What profit is there if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" (Bereishit 37:26).

Yehuda's intervention changes the course of Yosef's life and ultimately sets the stage for the future redemption of the family. But Yehuda's silence on the broader issue—the hatred and jealousy that led to this moment—remains notable. He doesn't challenge the brothers to reflect on their actions or reconsider their treatment of Yosef. This missed opportunity reminds us of the weight our words carry and the impact of the moments when we choose to remain silent.

In our own lives, we often face similar dilemmas. When we witness someone being mistreated or a situation spiraling out of control, we may feel uncertain about whether or how to intervene. Sometimes, like Yehuda, we focus on damage control rather than addressing the root causes of the problem. While there is wisdom in choosing our battles, this story challenges us to think critically about the times when speaking up—courageously and compassionately—can bring about meaningful change.

The power of speech is central to Judaism. Words can heal or harm, bring people together or tear them apart. At the same time, silence also has its place. It allows for reflection and can prevent escalation in moments of anger. The key is learning when to speak and when to listen, using both tools to improve both ourselves and others.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you felt you should have spoken up but didn't. What stopped you? How might you handle the situation differently next time?

## QUESTIONS

- What do you think Yehuda could have said to help his brothers see Yosef differently?
- How do you decide when to speak up versus staying silent in challenging situations?
- How can we use our words to build others up rather than tearing them down?

# PARSHAT MIKETZ

This week's parsha, highlights the transformative power of patience and faith in the face of adversity. After being sold into slavery and unjustly imprisoned, Yosef endures years of hardship. Yet, even in these difficult circumstances, Yosef never loses faith in God or the vision of his dreams.

When Pharaoh has troubling dreams that none of his advisors can interpret, Yosef is called upon to provide clarity. Drawing on wisdom gifted to him by God, Yosef explains the dreams' meaning and proposes a plan to save Egypt from famine. Pharaoh is so impressed by Yosef's insight and leadership that he elevates him to the position of viceroy, second only to Pharaoh himself. Overnight, Yosef's life changes dramatically—from a prisoner in a dungeon to one of the most powerful men in Egypt.

This story teaches us that even when life feels uncertain or unfair, patience and faith can carry us through challenging times. Yosef never gave up hope or abandoned his trust in God, even when his future seemed bleak. Because of his patience, resilience and unwavering faith, Yosef was ready to seize the opportunity when it came.

In our own lives, there are moments when we feel stuck or face obstacles that seem insurmountable. Yosef's story reminds us that perseverance, paired with faith, can lead to unexpected blessings. Often, the seeds of greatness are planted in the most challenging soil, and with time, they can bear incredible fruit.

## DISCUSSION

Reflect on a time in your life when patience or perseverance paid off. How did your faith or optimism help you during that time?

## QUESTIONS

- Have you ever faced a situation where waiting or being patient was difficult, but it turned out for the best?
- What can you do to maintain hope and faith when life feels challenging?
- How might Yosef's example inspire you to stay positive and proactive during difficult times?

# PARSHAT VAYIGASH

In this week's parsha, we witness one of the most emotional moments in the Torah: the dramatic reconciliation between Yosef and his brothers. After years of separation, Yosef finally reveals his identity to his brothers, and a profound moment of emotional intensity ensues. The brothers are shocked and overcome with guilt, fearing retribution for their past actions. Yet Yosef's response to their fear is remarkable. He tells them, "Now do not be distressed or reproach yourselves for having sold me here; for it was to be a provider that God sent me ahead of you" (Bereishit 45:5). Rather than harboring resentment, Yosef embraces forgiveness and offers reassurance.

What is striking about this scene is not only Yosef's forgiveness but the wisdom behind his understanding of the situation. He sees the events of his life, including the betrayal by his brothers, not as random occurrences or even as mere misfortunes, but as part of a divine plan. Yosef had suffered for years due to his brothers' actions, yet he was able to reconcile with his brothers and recognized that all that happened to him was ultimately for a greater purpose.

The story of Yosef's reconciliation offers us a profound lesson on the power of forgiveness and the importance of healing relationships. It is easy to hold onto grudges or to allow the hurts of the past to define our relationships. But Yosef teaches us that true strength lies in our ability to move beyond past wrongs, to let go of bitterness and to make room for healing and reconciliation. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or excusing the wrongdoing, but rather, it is a choice to release ourselves from the chains of anger and resentment, allowing us to move forward with a sense of peace.

Furthermore, Yosef's ability to forgive is a testament to his emotional maturity. He recognizes that holding onto anger and revenge only perpetuates pain, whereas reconciliation opens the door to healing and growth. It's important to remember that forgiveness does not only benefit the person being forgiven, but it also brings peace to the one who forgives.

In our own lives, we may encounter situations where we feel wronged or hurt by others. The challenge, as Yosef shows us, is not to become consumed by the pain or by the urge for revenge, but to find the strength to forgive. This doesn't mean that we need to forget the hurt or allow others to take advantage of us, but rather that we free ourselves from carrying the burden of anger and disappointment. Reconciliation, like in Yosef's story, can transform a painful experience into an opportunity for growth and healing.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a relationship in your life that could benefit from reconciliation. What is one step you could take to move toward forgiveness and healing?

## QUESTIONS

- Have you ever found it difficult to forgive someone? What did it take for you to move past that pain?
- What are some ways that you can practice forgiveness in your life, whether toward others or toward yourself?
- How can we create environments of reconciliation in our communities, where peace and healing are prioritized?

# PARSHAT VAYECHI

In this week's parsha, Yaakov makes a profound request of Yosef before his death: to ensure that he is buried in the Land of Israel, in the Cave of Machpelah with his ancestors. Despite spending the final 17 years of his life in Egypt, a land of comfort and abundance, Yaakov insists that his eternal resting place be in the land promised by God to his descendants.

This request holds deep significance. Yaakov's focus is not on his immediate surroundings or material comforts but on the long-term legacy of his family and their connection to the covenant with God. By choosing to be buried in Israel, Yaakov is reaffirming his family's destiny and their ultimate mission. His burial place becomes a symbol of continuity and identity, linking past generations to future ones.

This decision teaches us an important lesson about the choices we make and the priorities we set in our lives. While it is easy to get caught up in the comforts and challenges of the present, Yaakov reminds us to always keep our long-term values and goals in mind. He teaches us to prioritize what truly matters: our legacy, our identity, and the values we pass on to those who come after us.

In our own lives, we can draw inspiration from Yaakov's actions. It's important to ask ourselves: What legacy are we building? Are we prioritizing temporary comforts, or are we investing in relationships, values, and commitments that will endure? Like Yaakov, we should strive to align our daily choices with the bigger picture of who we want to be and how we want to be remembered.

## DISCUSSION

What are three important values to you that you want to impart on others? Why?

## QUESTIONS

- What is one way you can focus on your long-term goals rather than immediate distractions?
- How can you use your time or resources this week to create a positive impact that aligns with your values?

# PARSHAT SHEMOT

In Parshat Shemot, we are introduced to Moshe's journey from a prince of Egypt to the leader of the Jewish people. One of the most striking episodes in the parsha is the role played by the midwives, Shifra and Puah, in saving the Jewish babies from Pharaoh's decree.

Pharaoh commanded the midwives to kill all male Jewish infants at birth. However, the Torah tells us, "But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, but they enabled the boys to live" (Exodus 1:17). Their courageous decision to defy Pharaoh's orders, even at great personal risk, had a monumental impact on the survival of the Jewish people.

What's fascinating is that the Torah doesn't describe them as great warriors or influential leaders. They were ordinary individuals, midwives performing their daily tasks. Yet through their small but brave actions, they saved countless lives and altered the course of Jewish history.

This teaches us an important lesson: even small actions, when done with the right intentions, can have a profound impact. Shifra and Puah's decision was a moment of quiet resistance, but it demonstrated their deep faith and moral courage. They remind us that we don't need to be in positions of power to make a difference; even seemingly small choices can shape the world around us.

This idea is echoed later in the parsha when Moshe, as a shepherd in Midian, notices the burning bush. Instead of walking past it, he pauses to investigate. That moment of curiosity and mindfulness leads to his first encounter with God and sets him on the path to becoming the leader of the Jewish people. Again, a small action becomes the catalyst for something extraordinary.

## DISCUSSION

Reflect on a time when a small act of kindness or courage had a bigger impact than you expected.

## QUESTIONS

- What do we learn from the midwives' actions about the power of ordinary people?
- Think about a time when you made a seemingly small choice that ended up being very meaningful. What does this teach you about the importance of mindfulness in your actions?
- How can you make more of an effort in your daily life to ensure that even small actions reflect your values?

# PARSHAT VAERA

This week's parsha begins with God reassuring Moshe, reminding him of His promise to the forefathers to redeem the Jewish people. God tells Moshe that He has heard the cries of the Jewish people and is ready to take them out of Egypt, revealing the four famous expressions of redemption: "I will bring you out," "I will rescue you," "I will redeem you," and "I will take you to Me as a nation."

Later in the parsha, Moshe and Aharon carry out God's command to warn Pharaoh of the impending plagues. Yet, when Moshe first comes to the people with the message of redemption, they do not listen to him, as the Torah says, "They did not listen to Moshe because of their broken spirit and harsh labor" (Exodus 6:9).

This verse gives us a profound insight into human nature and the challenges of maintaining hope during times of difficulty. The Jewish people's inability to hear Moshe's message of freedom stemmed not from a lack of faith, but from the crushing burden of their circumstances. They were so overwhelmed by the harshness of their slavery and the immediacy of their suffering that they couldn't imagine a brighter future, even when it was promised directly by God.

This teaches us an important lesson about the power of perspective. Sometimes, when we're in a difficult situation, it can feel impossible to see beyond the pain and struggle of the present moment. Like the Jewish people, we might find it difficult to believe that things can get better. But Parshat Va'era reminds us that even when we can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, it doesn't mean it's not there. God's promise of redemption is a reminder to have faith that better times are ahead, even if we can't envision them right now.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you felt so overwhelmed by a challenge that you couldn't see a way forward. What helped you regain hope?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two ways you can maintain or help others maintain hope during difficult times?
- What does this story teach us about the importance of listening to others when they are struggling?

# PARSHAT BO

In this week's parsha, we witness the final three plagues—locusts, darkness and the death of the firstborn—leading to Pharaoh finally allowing the Jewish people to leave Egypt. The moment of redemption is near, and the Jewish people are commanded to prepare for their departure. One of the key mitzvot introduced in this parsha is the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh, the sanctification of the new moon. This mitzvah marks the beginning of the Jewish calendar and symbolizes renewal and transformation.

At first glance, it may seem strange that before leaving Egypt, the Jewish people are given a commandment about tracking time. Why was this mitzvah given at this particular moment? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to focus on commandments related to freedom, justice or faith in God?

One perspective is that the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh teaches us the power of new beginnings. The Jewish people had been enslaved for centuries, living under Egyptian rule with no control over their own lives. Their time was not their own—it belonged to their oppressors. By commanding them to sanctify the new moon, God was giving them control over time, symbolizing their transition from slavery to freedom. They were no longer passive participants in history; they were now active creators of their own destiny.

This idea of renewal is especially relevant in our own lives. Often, we feel trapped in our routines, past mistakes or struggles, believing that change is impossible. But just like the moon, which goes through phases of darkness before it shines again, we too can embrace new beginnings. Whether it's a fresh start in our relationships, our spiritual growth or our personal goals, the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh reminds us that we can always redefine ourselves.

## DISCUSSION

Discuss a time when you experienced a fresh start in your life. How did it impact you?

## QUESTIONS

- What is an area of your life where you'd like to embrace a fresh start?
- How can we apply the lesson of renewal to overcoming personal challenges?

# PARSHAT BESHALACH

In this week's Parsha, the Jewish people experience one of the greatest miracles in history—the splitting of the sea. After years of slavery and suffering, they finally escape Egypt, only to find themselves trapped between the Egyptian army and the sea. Just when it seems like there is no way out, God performs a miracle and the sea splits, allowing them to cross safely while their enemies are swallowed by the waters.

However, shortly after this incredible event, the Jewish people begin to complain. They find themselves in the desert without enough food and water and they start to question whether leaving Egypt was really the right choice. In response, God provides them with manna, a special food that falls from the heavens every day to sustain them. But there is a condition—they are only allowed to collect what they need for that day. If they try to take extra for the next day, it will spoil. Through this, God teaches them an important lesson in trust: they must rely on Him daily instead of worrying about the future.

This lesson is just as relevant to us today. Often, we stress about what will happen tomorrow, next week or next year. While it's important to plan ahead, sometimes our worries prevent us from fully living in the moment. The story of the manna reminds us that we should do our best each day while also trusting that things will work out as they should. When we learn to let go of unnecessary fear and focus on the present, we can live with more peace and gratitude.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you were really worried about the future. Did things end up working out differently than you expected? Looking back, do you think worrying helped or hurt the situation?

## QUESTIONS

- Is it difficult for you to focus on the present? Why or why not?
- How can we balance planning for the future while still living in the moment?
- What is one way you can practice trusting more and worrying less in your daily life?

# PARSHAT YITRO

We hear things all the time, but how often do we truly listen? Sometimes, we are distracted, uninterested or simply not ready to absorb the message. This week's parsha highlights the difference between hearing and listening through the story of Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law.

The parsha begins with the words "Vayishma Yitro"—"And Yitro heard" (Shemot 18:1). The Midrash (Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael) asks: What exactly did Yitro hear that made him come join the Jewish people? The Midrash provides several answers: he heard about Kriyat Yam Suf (the splitting of the sea) and the war against Amalek. But this raises an important question—Yitro was not the only one who heard these events. The entire world heard about these incredible miracles, yet Yitro was the one who acted upon what he heard.

This distinction teaches us something powerful: hearing is passive, but listening is active. Many people heard about the miracles God performed for the Jewish people, but Yitro was the one who allowed these events to impact him. Instead of treating them as distant news, he internalized their meaning and acted. He left his home, traveled to the desert, and joined the Jewish people. His story reminds us that true listening requires more than just hearing words, it demands reflection and a willingness to change.

In our own lives, we often hear valuable advice, words of Torah or meaningful lessons from others. But do we really listen? How often do we take these messages to heart and allow them to shape our choices? Whether it's guidance from a teacher, wisdom from a friend or even constructive criticism, Yitro's story encourages us to be receptive to what we hear. It is not enough to simply acknowledge information—we must ask ourselves, how can this impact my life? Growth happens when we take what we hear and turn it into action.

## DISCUSSION

Can you think of a time when you heard something important but didn't truly listen? What changed when you finally paid attention?

## QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Yitro was able to listen while others ignored the same events?
- What are some practical ways we can practice active listening in our daily lives?
- How can we make sure to act when we hear something meaningful?

# PARSHAT MISHPATIM

Sometimes, we think that small details don't matter. We focus on big, dramatic moments and overlook the significance of everyday actions. In this week's parsha, Parshat Mishpatim, the Torah shifts from the grand revelation at Har Sinai to detailed laws about daily life—laws about damages, business ethics, and interpersonal relationships. At first glance, these laws might seem less inspiring than the miracles of leaving Egypt or receiving the Torah. However, they teach us a profound lesson: true spirituality is found in the way we conduct ourselves in the details of life.

One powerful example is the Torah's command, "Midvar sheker tirchak"—"Distance yourself from falsehood" (Shemot 23:7). The Torah doesn't simply tell us not to lie; it instructs us to actively stay far from dishonesty. This teaches us that integrity is not just about avoiding outright lies—it's about ensuring that every action and word reflect truthfulness.

From this, we learn an important lesson: holiness is not only found in extraordinary moments but also in how we navigate everyday decisions. Whether in business, friendships, or conversations, small choices define who we are.

## DISCUSSION

Can you think of a time when a small decision you made had a big impact? How can we bring honesty and integrity into our daily interactions?

## QUESTIONS

- Why do you think the Torah places so much emphasis on laws of daily life immediately after Har Sinai?
- What are some ways we can ensure that we "distance" ourselves from dishonesty in our words and actions?
- How can focusing on small details help us grow spiritually?

# PARSHAT TERUMAH

In this week's parsha, God commands the Jewish people to build the Mishkan, saying: "And they shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them" (Shemot 25:8).

A careful reading of the verse presents a grammatical question: Shouldn't it say, "I will dwell in it"—referring to the Mishkan? Instead, the Torah says, "I will dwell among them," hinting that God's presence is not confined to a physical structure but rather resides within the people themselves.

This teaches a profound lesson: The Mishkan was not just about creating a holy space; it was about creating a holy people. The goal was not merely to build a physical sanctuary for serving God but to transform each person into a vessel for God's presence.

Today, we no longer have the Mishkan or the Beit HaMikdash, but the essence of this commandment remains relevant. Each of us can create a personal "Mishkan"—a life filled with holiness, kindness and purpose—where God's presence can dwell. The way we speak, act and interact with others determines whether we are building a space where God feels welcome.

At times, people think that holiness is only found in synagogues, Torah study or prayer. But this verse reminds us that holiness is meant to be inside us and between us—in our homes, our relationships and even in the way we go about our daily routines.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you felt connected to something greater than yourself. What were you doing and what made it feel meaningful?

## QUESTIONS

- What are small ways you can bring holiness into your daily life?
- How can we make our homes and communities feel like a place where God's presence dwells?

# PARSHAT TETZAVEH

In this week's parsha, God commands Moshe to appoint Aharon and his sons as Kohanim (priests) and describes in detail the special garments they must wear while serving in the Mishkan. These garments include the breastplate, robe, turban and other intricate clothing items, each carrying deep symbolism and significance.

One of the most striking pieces of the Kohen Gadol's (High Priest's) attire is the Tzitz, a golden headplate engraved with the words "Kodesh LaHashem"—"Holy to God." This Tzitz was worn on the Kohen Gadol's forehead and served as a sign of constant holiness and dedication to God. The Torah states that it was meant to atone for any impurity that may have entered the service in the Mishkan.

The Sefat Emet explains that the forehead represents a person's thoughts and mindset. The Tzitz teaches us that true holiness is not just about actions but about our intentions and inner focus. The Kohen Gadol's wearing of the Tzitz symbolizes the importance of keeping our thoughts directed toward holiness, ensuring that our mindset aligns with our higher values.

This idea applies to all of us. While we may not wear a physical Tzitz, we all can dedicate our minds to holiness and positive purpose. The world around us is filled with distractions, but the Tzitz reminds us to center our thoughts on what truly matters.

## DISCUSSION

Think about how our thoughts shape our actions. How can we work on maintaining a mindset that reflects our values?

## QUESTIONS

- What are ways to remind yourself of your greater purpose, even in day-to-day life?
- How can you shift your mindset when you find yourself distracted or focused on negativity?
- What are some things you can do to bring more holiness into your thoughts and intentions?

# PARSHAT KI TISA

In this week's parsha, we encounter a defining moment of leadership: Moshe's response to the sin of the Golden Calf. While Moshe is receiving the Torah from God on Mount Sinai, the people grow restless and demand that Aharon create a god for them. Aharon, rather than standing firm, gives in to their pressure and fashions the golden calf. When Moshe descends and sees what has transpired, he smashes the Tablets, destroys the idol and takes decisive action to restore order.

What stands out in this episode is the contrast between Moshe and Aharon as leaders. Aharon, perhaps out of fear or a desire to keep the peace, does not push back against the people's demands. Moshe, on the other hand, does not hesitate to confront the people and even challenges God by interceding on their behalf. Moshe shows that true leadership is not about doing what is easy or popular, but about standing up for what is right, even when it is difficult.

Leadership—whether in a community, workplace or even within a family—comes with responsibility. It requires making tough decisions, staying committed to values and sometimes being willing to take the blame or suffer consequences for the sake of others. Moshe could have left the people to their fate, but instead, he pleaded with God to forgive them. He even told God that if He would not forgive them, then He should erase Moshe's own name from His book (Shemot 32:32). This ultimate act of selflessness shows that real leaders put their people before themselves.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you had to take responsibility for something difficult. How did you handle it? Were you more like Aharon, trying to keep the peace, or Moshe, standing firm in your values?

## QUESTIONS

- What do you think makes someone a good leader?
- Can you think of a time when standing up for what was right was difficult? What did you do?
- How can you develop the courage to take responsibility in challenging situations?

# PARSHAT VAYAKEL

At the beginning of Parshat Vayakhel, before discussing the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), Moshe gathers the people and reminds them of the mitzvah of Shabbat. He tells them that even though building the Mishkan is an important and holy task, they must stop their work on the seventh day to observe Shabbat. This placement is significant—before the Torah details the grandeur of the Mishkan, it first emphasizes the importance of rest.

This teaches us a critical lesson about balance in life. While work, creativity, and productivity are valuable, rest is just as essential. In today's fast-paced world, there is constant pressure to keep going—to achieve more, accomplish more and stay busy. However, Judaism teaches that rest is not just a break from work; it is a sacred act itself. Shabbat is a time to pause, reflect and reconnect with our purpose. It reminds us that our worth is not only tied to what we produce but to who we are.

By placing the mitzvah of Shabbat before the Mishkan, the Torah teaches us that no matter how important or meaningful our work is, there must be a limit. Without designated moments to pause, we risk burnout and losing sight of what truly matters. The ability to step back and appreciate life is just as vital as the ability to build and create.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you felt overwhelmed with work or responsibilities. How did you find a way to step back and recharge? What impact did it have on your well-being

## QUESTIONS

- Why do you think the Torah emphasizes Shabbat before discussing the building of the Mishkan?
- In what ways can taking a break improve the quality of the work we do?
- How can you incorporate more moments of rest and reflection into your daily life?

# PARSHAT PEKUDEI

In this week's parsha, we read about the final completion of the Mishkan. After months of meticulous work, Moshe presents a full accounting of the materials used for its construction. Every detail is documented—how much gold, silver, and copper were collected, how it was allocated and how each piece was used.

At first glance, this level of detail might seem unnecessary. Why does the Torah, which is often so concise, spend so much time on accounting for these materials? The answer reveals a powerful lesson about integrity and leadership. The Torah goes out of its way to provide full transparency regarding the donations given for the Mishkan. It does this to set an example of honesty and integrity in conducting business. By giving an exact accounting, the Torah ensures that no one could ever suspect any misuse of the community's contributions.

This idea is incredibly relevant to us today. Whether in leadership positions or in our personal lives, the value of integrity is crucial. The Torah teaches us that trust is built through openness and accountability. Even when we know we are acting honestly, it is important to demonstrate that honesty to others.

In our daily lives, this lesson can guide the way we approach responsibilities—whether in school, work or our relationships. Do we make sure to follow through on our commitments? Do we communicate openly with others to avoid misunderstandings? By striving to act with integrity, we can strengthen our relationships and become people who are truly trustworthy.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when someone's transparency helped you trust them more. What impact did that have on your relationship?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two ways you can work on being more open and honest in your life?
- Can you think of a situation in which being open and honest makes a difference in your own life?
- How can we apply the lesson of integrity to our daily interactions?

# PARSHAT VAYIKRA

In this week's parsha, we are introduced to the intricate laws of the Korbanot (sacrifices) and the role they play in our connection to God. Among these offerings is the Korban Olah, a burnt offering that is completely consumed on the altar, signifying a total dedication to God. Unlike some other sacrifices that are partially eaten by the Kohanim or the person bringing the offering, the Olah is unique in that nothing is kept for personal use—it is wholly given over to God.

From this we can learn a powerful lesson about commitment and giving. In many aspects of life, we naturally look for personal benefit in the things we do. Whether in friendships, work or even acts of kindness, there is often an underlying expectation of something in return—recognition, appreciation or reciprocity. However, the Korban Olah teaches us the value of giving with no strings attached.

This idea is especially relevant in our relationships with others. True love, whether in friendships, family or community, often requires moments of selfless giving. Sometimes, we need to offer support, time or effort without expecting anything back. These acts of generosity strengthen our bonds and reflect the kind of giving that brings us closer to both God and others.

While giving without expecting in return can be challenging, it also allows us to develop deeper, more meaningful connections. The Korban Olah reminds us that sometimes the most powerful acts of devotion—both to God and to those around us—are the ones done purely for the sake of giving.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you gave something—time, effort or care—without expecting anything in return. How did that experience impact you? How do you think selfless giving strengthens relationships?

## QUESTIONS

- How do you balance giving to others and taking care of your own needs?
- Have you ever done something meaningful for someone without expecting anything in return? How did it feel?

# PARSHAT TZAV

This week's parsha continues the detailed instructions surrounding the Korbanot—the sacrifices—and introduces the seven-day inauguration of the Kohanim into their sacred service. One striking aspect of the parsha is Moshe's role during this process. Even though he is not a Kohen and will not be serving in the Mishkan permanently, Moshe is the one who leads the entire initiation process. He is the one who dresses Aharon and his sons, offers sacrifices and guides them through each step of their induction.

At first glance, this may seem like just another one of Moshe's many responsibilities. But if we look closer, we can uncover a powerful message about humility and leadership. Moshe, the greatest leader in Jewish history, was the one to guide his brother into a position that would ultimately surpass his own in ritual status. Yet there is no sign of jealousy or ego. He doesn't hesitate to elevate Aharon and his sons, despite knowing that his own role will be more behind-the-scenes once the Kohanim are fully inaugurated.

This teaches us a valuable lesson: true leadership isn't about holding onto power—it's about lifting others up, even if it means stepping aside. So often, we think leadership means being the center of attention, the one in charge, or the one giving the orders. But Moshe shows us a different model. He leads by serving. He elevates others. He acts, not out of self-interest, but out of dedication to the mission and the people.

We can all learn from Moshe's example. Whether we're in leadership roles in school, in our communities, or even just among our friends or family, the real strength of a leader is measured not by how many people follow them, but by how many people they empower.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time someone helped you, even if it meant they took a backseat. How did it make you feel?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two ways you can empower others in your life?
- How can you practice humility while still taking initiative and leading?
- Have you ever had to take a step back so someone else could grow? What was that experience like?

# PARSHAT SHEMINI

This week's parsha is filled with powerful moments. It begins with celebration—the Mishkan is finally complete, the Kohanim begin their service, and God's Presence appears before the people in fire and joy. But suddenly, the narrative takes a dark turn. Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, bring an "eish zarah"—a strange or unauthorized fire before God—and they are tragically consumed by a divine flame.

In just a few verses, joy turns into sorrow. The people go from experiencing spiritual elevation to mourning a loss they can hardly comprehend. Aharon, their father, remains silent.

What can we take from this moment of abrupt change and Aharon's powerful silence? Life often throws us into situations that we don't expect. One moment things are going according to plan, and the next, we're faced with challenges, confusion, or disappointment. It might be something small like plans falling through or a rough day at school. Or it might be something much deeper such as loss, a failure, a moment that shakes us.

Aharon's response teaches us that not everything has a clear answer. Sometimes, the most meaningful response is not in speaking, fixing or explaining, but in being present. In accepting that we don't always understand why things happen, but we still carry on. His silence was not weakness—it was strength, patience and trust.

This moment also shows us the importance of how we respond when the unexpected happens. Do we react with frustration, or do we pause? Do we try to learn something from the moment or do we push it away? Spirituality isn't just about feeling connected when things are going great. It's also about finding strength and meaning when things are difficult. Aharon's silence invites us to reflect, be present, and find resilience in uncertainty.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time something unexpected happened to you. How did you respond? How do you wish you had responded?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two strategies you can use to stay calm when things don't go as planned?
- Can you think of a time silence or pausing helped you process a situation?
- What does emotional strength mean to you and how can you build it?

# PARSHAT TAZRIAH

This week's parsha is filled with details about skin conditions, bodily appearances and physical signs. At first glance, the Torah seems to focus a lot on the external—discoloration of skin, blemishes and spots. But if we look deeper, we see that Tazria is encouraging us to move beyond appearances and recognize that what we see on the surface may not tell the full story.

One of the central ideas in the parsha is that a person with tzara'at must be examined by a kohen—not just once, but repeatedly. The kohen isn't a doctor, but a spiritual leader, someone trained to look not just at symptoms, but at the whole person. The kohen's role is not to diagnose in the medical sense, but to guide the process of purification, which includes time, introspection and often, isolation.

What this teaches us is that in Judaism, appearances are never the full picture. We don't make quick judgments. We observe, wait and reflect. Sometimes what looks "bad" on the outside is part of a process of healing or growth. Other times, something that seems fine might be hiding a deeper issue that needs attention.

In a world where we often judge people based on what they wear, how they act in one moment or what they post online, Tazria reminds us to slow down and look beneath the surface. People carry invisible stories—pain, joy, fear and resilience—that we may not see right away. Like the kohen, we are called to be thoughtful, patient, and compassionate observers—not rushing to label someone as "pure" or "impure" based on a single snapshot.

By learning to see past the surface, we can create a more understanding and supportive community, where people are given the space to grow, heal and be seen for who they really are.

## DISCUSSION

What does it mean to "look beneath the surface" when interacting with others? Can you think of a time someone did that for you?

## QUESTIONS

- What is one way you can be slower to judge someone this week?
- How can you train yourself to notice more than just appearances in your relationships or interactions?

# PARSHAT METZORA

In this week's parsha we continue to explore the consequences and healing process connected to tzara'at, but a fascinating shift occurs: the Torah describes how tzara'at cannot only appear on a person's body, but even on the walls of their home. When a person suspects discoloration in their house, they are required to call the kohen, who inspects the home and determines whether the marks are impure. If necessary, the house is quarantined and in some cases, parts of it—even the entire house—must be dismantled.

At first glance, this seems extreme. Why would a house suffer the consequences of someone's speech or spiritual condition?

Chazal, our sages, teach that this is not random. Just like harmful speech can cause internal damage to people and relationships, it can also seep into our environment, subtly shaping the atmosphere of the spaces we live in. A home filled with gossip, judgment or negativity may look normal on the outside, but the Torah teaches that even our walls "absorb" the energy of what happens within them.

But here's the hopeful part: just as the home can be affected, it can also be purified and rebuilt. The kohen plays a key role not only in identifying the issue but in guiding the healing of the space. This reflects a powerful idea in Judaism—our environment matters, and we can change it through our actions and our words.

This parsha reminds us that speech doesn't just affect individuals, it creates the culture of our homes, our classrooms and our communities. If we want to build spaces of trust, warmth and kindness, it begins with how we speak to and about one another.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a space in your life—your home, school, or community—that feels positive and welcoming. What kind of language and energy contribute to that feeling?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two ways you can use your words to make your home or community a more positive space?
- Why do you think the Torah connects our speech to the walls of our house? What message might that be sending about how deeply our words matter?

# PARSHAT ACHAREI MOT

This week's parsha outlines many laws, but one of the more striking sections is the prohibition against entering the Holy of Holies at any time other than Yom Kippur. God warns that even the Kohen Gadol, the holiest person in the nation, can only enter this holiest space on the holiest day and only if he follows a very specific process.

This concept—the idea that there are times and places where even the most spiritual people must pause and hold back—teaches us something powerful about the role of boundaries in Judaism. In a world that often celebrates complete openness or unrestricted access, the Torah reminds us that some things are sacred because they are protected.

Judaism views holiness not just as closeness to God, but as something that requires care, preparation and intention. The Holy of Holies wasn't just physically separated by a curtain; it represented a spiritual space that demanded the utmost respect. In that way, boundaries weren't about keeping people out—they were about raising awareness of the significance of what was within.

This idea translates well into our everyday lives. Whether it's respecting someone's personal space, choosing when and how to say something difficult or understanding when we need time to reflect before acting, boundaries help create meaning. Just like the Torah elevates certain places and times by putting limits around them, we too can elevate parts of our lives by setting intentional boundaries.

For example, Shabbat is made holy not by what we do, but by what we don't do—by separating it from the rest of the week. In relationships, trust and closeness often grow when we learn to communicate thoughtfully, not just freely. By learning when to step back and when to step forward, we live with greater awareness and purpose.

## DISCUSSION

How do boundaries help us live more meaningfully? Can restrictions ever be empowering?

## QUESTIONS

- Can you think of a time when saying “no” or holding back actually made a moment more meaningful?
- How can we use the idea of setting boundaries to bring more intention into our friendships, learning or spiritual growth?

# PARSHAT KEDOSHIM

Among the many mitzvot listed in this week's parsha, one stands out not just for its literal meaning, but for the deeper ethical message it conveys. The Torah commands: "Do not place a stumbling block before the blind" (Vayikra 19: 14). On the surface, this might seem like a very straightforward rule—don't trip someone who can't see. But the commentaries teach us that this commandment goes far beyond its literal interpretation.

The rabbis understand this mitzvah to mean that we must not lead someone astray or take advantage of their vulnerability. In other words, it's not only about physical stumbling, but also about moral stumbling as well. If someone doesn't know better, we cannot use their ignorance to manipulate or harm them. If someone is in a position of weakness—emotionally, intellectually or socially—we are obligated to protect them, not exploit them.

This idea speaks to a much larger value in Judaism: being aware of the power we hold in our relationships and using that power responsibly. Whether it's giving honest advice, offering help without hidden motives or refraining from teasing someone about something they don't understand, we are constantly given opportunities to live with empathy.

Think about how easy it is to take advantage of a situation where you know more than someone else. Maybe a younger sibling asks you a question and you're tempted to joke instead of giving a serious answer. Maybe a friend trusts you with something personal and you don't take it seriously. The Torah teaches us that true holiness—being "Kedoshim," as the parsha calls us to be—is reflected in how we treat people when we could easily act otherwise.

Holiness is not just about spiritual actions like praying or keeping kosher—it's about the small, daily decisions to act with integrity and kindness, even when no one else is watching.

## DISCUSSION

How can we become more aware of how our actions might influence others, even unintentionally? What are ways to practice ethical sensitivity?

## QUESTIONS

- Have you ever seen a situation where someone unknowingly led another person into a bad choice? How could that have been avoided?
- What's one way you can be more mindful this week of how your words or actions affect someone who may be in a vulnerable position?

# PARSHAT EMOR

In this week's parsha, we are introduced to a unique and powerful commandment involving the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). We are told that the Kohen Gadol is not allowed to come into contact with death, even for his closest relatives. Unlike regular priests, who may mourn close family members, the Kohen Gadol must always maintain a state of purity, even in the face of personal tragedy.

This commandment feels especially difficult. Imagine losing a parent, a sibling or even a child—and not being able to attend the funeral, participate in mourning rituals or even visibly express grief. For most people, this would be unthinkable. Yet the Kohen Gadol is held to a higher standard because he serves a unique role within the community: he represents spiritual continuity and must always be prepared to serve in the Temple on behalf of the entire nation.

What can we learn from this? Most of us are not Kohanim and certainly not the Kohen Gadol. However, this commandment teaches a broader lesson about responsibility and self-discipline. There are moments in life when we are called to rise above our own emotions, struggles or desires to serve something greater than ourselves. It doesn't mean we ignore our pain or act like we're unaffected. Rather, it teaches us that in certain roles—whether as leaders, role models or caregivers—we sometimes need to put others first, even when it's hard.

This message is especially relevant today. Whether you're part of a family, a team, a classroom or a community, we all have moments where we are called to lead, to support others and to show up even when we don't feel like it. That's not easy—but it's what helps society function with compassion and strength.

The Kohen Gadol reminds us that leadership isn't about privilege or status—it's about sacrifice and commitment. It's about choosing, again and again, to do what is right for others, even when it's difficult for ourselves.

## DISCUSSION

Can you think of a time when you had to put aside your own feelings or wants to help someone else? What did that feel like?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two areas in your life where you feel a sense of responsibility toward others?
- How can you build habits that help you show up for others, even when you're struggling?
- Do you think leaders should always be expected to put others first? Why or why not?

# PARSHAT BEHAR

What does it mean to uphold the dignity of others in a Jewish society? In Parshat Behar, alongside the laws of Shemita and Yovel, the Torah outlines specific commandments regarding how we are to treat those who fall into financial hardship. One of the central verses states: “If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter with you, you shall support him... so that he can live with you” (Vayikra 25:35).

The Torah continues to emphasize that we must not take interest or profit from lending to the poor, and that we must not enslave a fellow Jew with harsh labor, even if they sell themselves into servitude. These instructions are not only economic or legal in nature—they are deeply moral. They teach us that even when someone is struggling, we are not to see them as “less than” or as a burden, but rather as a brother or sister whose dignity must be preserved.

When taken together, these laws reflect a society that prioritizes not only economic fairness but human dignity. The Torah acknowledges that people may face hardship—but insists that poverty must never become a basis for shame or exploitation. The ideal is not just to give charity, but to create a community in which those in need are empowered and treated with respect.

This message feels especially relevant today. In modern economies, where value is often determined by productivity or wealth, it is easy to overlook the humanity of those who struggle financially. Parshat Behar calls on us to reject that mindset. It reminds us that the Torah’s vision for society is built not on efficiency or profit alone, but on compassion and responsibility.

Thinking more broadly, Parshat Behar encourages us to ask: What kind of commUNITY do we want to build? One that leaves people behind when they falter—or one that ensures everyone can live with dignity, no matter their circumstances?

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you saw someone going through a difficult period—emotionally, financially or otherwise. What helped them maintain their dignity? What could you or others have done differently?

## QUESTIONS

- What does the phrase “so that he can live with you” teach us about the Torah’s vision of community?
- Why do you think the Torah places such a strong emphasis on preserving dignity even in cases of servitude or poverty?
- How do these mitzvot challenge or support modern ideas of how we treat the poor in our society?

# PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI

In this week's parsha, Bechukotai, we read about a sweeping list of blessings that will be given to the Jewish people if they follow God's commandments—and a painful and lengthy list of curses (tochacha) that will befall them if they do not. The section of the curses is difficult to read: it includes warnings of famine, defeat in war, exile and fear. Yet, even amid these dire warnings, the Torah offers a quiet, but powerful promise: "But despite all this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them... to break My covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God" (Vayikra 26:44).

Even at the lowest point—when the people have turned away, when they are suffering the consequences of their choices—God reminds them that the covenant still stands. He doesn't abandon them. This verse shifts the entire tone of the tochacha and gives it deeper meaning: it's not just punishment, it's a pathway to return.

The message here is one of resilience. The Torah acknowledges that there will be times when the Jewish people fall short, when they stray from their mission. But embedded in that failure is always the possibility of return. Teshuva (repentance) is not just a theme of the High Holidays—it is a constant feature of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Even in exile, even when it seems everything is lost, God is still there, waiting for us to come back.

This is not just a national message, it's a personal one, too. We all go through periods where we feel disconnected, stuck, or even ashamed of mistakes we've made. Parshat Bechukotai teaches us that no matter how far we stray, the door is always open. Our lowest points do not define us—they are opportunities to rebuild and reconnect. What matters is not that we fall, but that we choose to rise again.

Thinking more broadly, the parsha calls on us to cultivate hope and perseverance—not just in our religious lives, but in all areas of growth. Just as God doesn't give up on us, we shouldn't give up on ourselves. Whether in relationships, goals, or personal development, the Torah's message is clear: every moment holds the potential for renewal.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you felt like you had made a big mistake or faced a major setback. What helped you keep going or start again? What role did other people play in helping you bounce back?

## QUESTIONS

- Why do you think the Torah includes a promise of hope right in the middle of the harsh tochacha?
- How can you apply the idea of resilience and return to a challenge in your own life right now?
- What is one small step you can take to come "back" to something meaningful that you may have moved away from?

# PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

This week's parsha, Bamidbar, opens the fourth book of the Torah and begins with something that might seem ordinary—a census. God commands Moshe to count the Jewish people, tribe by tribe, family by family. At first glance, this could seem like a logistical move—just figuring out the numbers for travel or battle preparation. But as we dig deeper, we realize that the act of counting carries a much deeper message about the value of every individual.

In the Torah, counting is never just about the numbers. The Hebrew word for “count” (lispor) also connects to the word for telling a story (sipur). When God asks Moshe to count the people, He's not treating them like numbers on a spreadsheet—He's treating each person as someone who matters. The census reminds us that each person is unique, with a role to play in the greater story of the Jewish people.

What's especially meaningful is that everyone is counted “by name, according to their family.” This personal attention shows that holiness comes not just from being part of the group, but from knowing your individual place within it. You're not just one of many—you are you, and that matters.

In a world where it's easy to feel lost in the crowd—whether in school, on social media or even in our own communities—this parsha reminds us that every person counts. Being part of a community doesn't mean giving up your identity; it means bringing your unique self to the table so the whole can be stronger.

This message also challenges us to look at others the same way. If God sees everyone as worthy of being counted, we should try to do the same. Whether it's trying to learn someone's name, noticing when someone is left out or reminding a friend that they matter—these small moments reflect a big Torah idea: every person has value.

## DISCUSSION

How can we make sure others feel “counted” in our communities and lives? What makes you feel seen and valued?

## QUESTIONS

- Can you think of a time when someone made you feel like you really mattered? What did they do?
- How can you help someone else this week feel like they “count”?

# PARSHAT NASO

This week's parsha is the longest in the Torah and includes a fascinating and somewhat mysterious ritual: the process of the Nazir. A Nazir is someone who takes a vow of separation—abstaining from wine, not cutting their hair and avoiding contact with the dead—for a certain period of time.

At first glance, the Nazir's choice seems admirable. They voluntarily strive for spiritual elevation, choosing discipline over indulgence. But surprisingly, the Torah refers to the Nazir as one who must bring a sin-offering at the end of their vow. Why would someone who has taken such a holy path be required to atone?

The answer lies in balance. While the Nazir's dedication is meaningful, Judaism ultimately embraces a world where holiness is found within the everyday. The Nazir separates from society and from pleasures that are not forbidden but are meant to be enjoyed in a mindful way. The sin-offering may be a reminder that cutting oneself off from the world entirely is not the ideal.

The Nazir teaches us a valuable lesson: Growth often comes not from extreme withdrawal, but from finding holiness within normal life—family, work, community and the small acts of kindness and gratitude we express each day.

In a world that often celebrates “all or nothing” mentalities, the Torah encourages a more grounded path. We don't need to isolate ourselves to be spiritual; we need to show up—with compassion, purpose and intention—right where we are.

In essence, the Nazir's story is not just about separation, but about the return: a return to the world with a renewed sense of self and a deeper understanding of how to live with balance and meaning.

## DISCUSSION

Do you think that striving for balance is more meaningful than striving for extremes? Why or why not?

## QUESTIONS

- In what ways can we find spiritual meaning in our everyday routines?
- How can we balance discipline and enjoyment in a healthy, mindful way?
- What practices help you stay grounded while still reaching for growth?

# PARSHAT BEHA'ALOTECHA

In this week's parsha, we read about the commandment that Aharon light the Menorah in the Mishkan each day. The Torah introduces this mitzvah immediately following the sacrifices brought by the leaders of each tribe during the dedication of the Mishkan. Rashi comments that Aharon felt disappointed that he was not included in these inaugural offerings, so God comforted him by giving him the special role of lighting the Menorah.

From this, we can learn a profound lesson about personal contribution and the uniqueness of each person's role. It is natural to sometimes compare ourselves to others, feeling that our accomplishments or positions are less significant than those around us. Aharon saw the leaders of the tribes offering their sacrifices and felt left out. However, God reminded him that his task was not lesser — in fact, it was a permanent, daily responsibility that brought light into the Mishkan, and by extension, into the lives of the entire nation.

This teaches us that everyone has their own unique way of contributing. The fact that someone else's role looks different doesn't mean ours is any less valuable. Like Aharon, we each have opportunities to bring "light" into the world — whether through kindness, leadership, teaching or simply being present for others. Rather than focusing on what others are doing, we should strive to appreciate the distinct mission that has been entrusted to us.

Furthermore, we also gain insight into how to manage feelings of inadequacy or comparison. Aharon could have allowed his disappointment to overwhelm him, but instead, he embraced the task God gave him. In doing so, he transformed what initially felt like a consolation into a deeply meaningful role. This is a reminder that even when we feel overshadowed, our unique contributions can have lasting and profound impact when we embrace them fully.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time you felt like your role or efforts were smaller compared to others. How did you find meaning or purpose in what you were doing?

## QUESTIONS

- What are some unique ways you bring "light" to the people around you?
- How can we remind ourselves not to compare our contributions to others, but instead focus on our personal mission?

# PARSHAT SHELACH

Words hold power. This week's parsha shows us how the way we speak — and what we choose to say — can deeply impact ourselves and those around us. When God tells Moshe to send scouts to explore the Land of Israel, twelve men are chosen, leaders of their tribes and sent off with specific instructions. They return after forty days and report to the people. While all twelve spies saw the same land, ten of them shared a negative report, using strong and frightening language to describe the inhabitants and the obstacles ahead. Their words cause widespread fear, despair and eventually, rebellion.

Because of what they said — and how they said it — the nation loses faith in themselves, in their leaders and even in God. The consequences are enormous: the entire generation is condemned to wander the desert for forty years and never enter the Promised Land.

The story teaches us just how powerful speech can be. The spies didn't act violently, nor did they force the people to give up — they simply spoke. But their words shaped reality. They created fear, discouraged hope and led an entire nation off course.

In contrast, Yehoshua and Caleb use their words to uplift. They describe the beauty and potential of the land, and they urge the people to trust in God and in themselves. While their message isn't immediately accepted, it is remembered — and they are ultimately the only two of that generation who merit to enter the land.

This reminds us that our words matter. The way we talk about situations — whether we spread negativity or hope, fear or confidence — can affect not just ourselves but the people around us. Especially in moments of uncertainty or challenge, how we speak can either pull people down or push them forward.

Each of us has the ability to use our speech as a tool — for building, encouraging, and inspiring. Like the spies, we often face situations where we must describe or interpret what we see. But like Caleb and Yehoshua, we can choose to speak with faith, clarity and hope.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when someone's words had a strong impact on you — positively or negatively. How did it make you feel? What lasting effect did it have?

## QUESTIONS

- What are ways you can become more mindful of how your words affect others?
- When facing a tough situation, how can you choose language that inspires courage rather than fear?

# PARSHAT KORACH

This week's parsha tells the dramatic story of Korach's rebellion — a public challenge to Moshe's leadership that shakes the entire Israelite camp. Korach, together with a group of followers, questions why leadership roles are reserved for a select few. His argument appeals to fairness and equality, asking: "Aren't we all holy?"

At first glance, Korach's message seems to resonate. After all, it's true that each person has value and the potential for holiness. But the Torah makes it clear that something deeper is going on. This isn't just about fairness — it's about ego. Korach doesn't seek unity or improvement. He's interested in power.

What turns this dispute into something so dangerous is not disagreement itself, but the motivation behind it. Jewish tradition has always welcomed debate and discussion — we see it in the way our sages argue and question one another. But those arguments were about seeking truth. Korach's rebellion is rooted in pride, not purpose.

The result is devastating. The ground literally opens up and swallows Korach and his followers. The image is more than dramatic — it's symbolic. A community built on jealousy and division, rather than shared values and humility, cannot stand. It collapses from within.

This story pushes us to think about the way we approach disagreement in our own lives. Disagreements are natural and often necessary. But are we arguing to build or to break down? Are we motivated by a desire to make things better — or to elevate ourselves?

Korach reminds us that conflict without sincere intentions can destroy even the strongest community. But when we approach disagreement with humility, care, and a focus on what truly matters, our conversations can strengthen relationships and help us grow.

## DISCUSSION

What makes a disagreement healthy versus harmful? Can conflict ever be productive?

## QUESTIONS

- How can we check our motivations before entering into an argument or criticism?
- What does Korach's story teach us about how to respond to leadership we may disagree with?
- How can we create spaces for disagreement that build community rather than tear it apart?

# PARSHAT CHUKAT

One of the most mysterious parts of this week's parsha is the law of the Parah Adumah - the red heifer. The Torah tells us that if someone becomes ritually impure from contact with a dead body, they can be purified through a special process involving the ashes of a red cow. But here's the strange part: while this ritual purifies the impure person, the people involved in preparing and applying the ashes become impure themselves.

How can one act cause purity for one person and impurity for another?

This contradiction is what makes the Parah Adumah the ultimate "chok" - a law that cannot be fully explained by human logic.

From this puzzling mitzvah, we gain a powerful insight into how we live with uncertainty and contradiction. Not everything in life can be fully explained or understood and that's okay. The Torah is teaching us that faith doesn't always mean having all the answers - it sometimes means doing the right thing even when we don't.

There are many times in life when we face confusing or even painful situations that seem unfair or contradictory - when doing the right thing doesn't feel like it brings immediate reward, or when we don't understand why things happen the way they do. The message of the Parah Adumah is that our role isn't always to understand everything - it's to trust the process and continue doing what is right.

Another important idea here is about the power of helping others. The Kohen who prepares the ashes becomes impure in the process of purifying someone else. That's a deep message about leadership and service: sometimes, lifting others up comes with a personal cost. Parents, teachers, friends - they often sacrifice their own comfort or ease in order to support someone else. That kind of quiet giving is one of the most powerful forms of love and leadership.

## DISCUSSION

Can you think of a time when you had to do something that didn't make sense at the time, but you did it out of trust or responsibility? How did it feel?

## QUESTIONS

- How do you respond when you're faced with something that doesn't seem fair or doesn't make sense?
- What does it mean to help others even when it costs you something personally? Can you think of someone in your life who does that?
- Do you think it's possible to have strong faith even when you have questions? Why or why not?

# PARSHAT BALAK

In this week's parsha, we read the unusual story of Balak and Bilaam — a section of the Torah that shifts its lens away from the journey of the Jewish people through the desert and instead focuses on the outside perspective of the surrounding nations. Balak, the king of Moav, fears the growing strength of the Jewish people and calls upon the prophet Bilaam to curse them.

As Bilaam travels to carry out this mission, an unusual event takes place: his donkey suddenly stops and refuses to move forward. Bilaam, frustrated, strikes the donkey, unaware that an angel stands in their path. Then something miraculous happens — the donkey begins to speak. It questions Bilaam, asking why he is hitting her when she has always been loyal. Only after this moment does Bilaam's eyes open and he finally sees the angel standing before him.

This moment offers a powerful insight: sometimes the truth is right in front of us, but we are too focused on our own agenda to see it.

How often do we, like Bilaam, miss the signs around us because we're so focused on what we want? Bilaam was so set on finding a way to curse the Jewish people — even though he claimed he would only speak the words God allowed — that he couldn't recognize what was happening right in front of him. His donkey, an animal he had relied on for years, saw what he couldn't. And only when it spoke did he begin to open his eyes.

There's a valuable lesson here: when we become too wrapped up in our own goals, pride or frustration, we can lose sight of what's really important. It sometimes takes a moment of humility — or a wake-up call from an unexpected source — to open our eyes to the truth.

As we go through our own lives, we can try to take a step back and notice what we might be missing. Are there signs we're ignoring? People we're not really listening to? Are we rushing ahead without pausing to reflect?

By learning from Bilaam's mistake, we can work to slow down, stay humble, and be more open to the voices around us — even the ones we least expect.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you were so focused on one goal or plan that you missed something important. What helped you finally notice?

## QUESTIONS

- What are ways we can slow down and pay attention to the signs around us?
- How do you respond when someone you didn't expect gives you feedback or advice?

# PARSHAT PINCHAS

In this week's parsha, God tells Moshe to choose a new leader for the Jewish people. Moshe knows that he will not be going into the Land of Israel, and he wants to make sure the people will still have someone to guide them. So, Moshe asks God to choose the right person. God tells Moshe to pick Yehoshua, his student, to take over as the new leader.

What's special about this moment is how Moshe acts. Even though he won't get to go into the land with everyone else, he doesn't get upset. He doesn't complain. Instead, he cares about the people and wants to make sure they have someone who will help and take care of them. Moshe shows us what it means to be a true leader - not someone who only thinks about themselves, but someone who always thinks about others first.

Yehoshua also teaches us something important. He had been learning from Moshe for a long time. He wasn't the loudest or the most famous person, but he was kind, loyal, and always willing to help. Because of that, God knew he would be a great leader.

This story teaches us that being a leader doesn't mean being the best at everything or being in charge all the time. Being a leader means caring about others, being a good listener, and doing what's right - even when it's difficult.

## DISCUSSION

Who is someone you look up to as a leader? What do they do that makes them a good example?

## QUESTIONS

- What is one way you can be a good friend or helper this week?
- How can you show kindness to someone who needs help?
- Can you think of one moment this week when you can be like Moshe and think about someone else before yourself?

# PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI

This week we read a double parsha—Matot and Masei. Parashat Matot begins with the laws about making vows and continues with the story of the war against Midian. Moshe sends 12,000 soldiers to battle and the Torah describes in detail the aftermath of the war, including how the spoils are divided and how purity is maintained. Later in the parsha, the tribes of Reuven and Gad ask to settle on the east side of the Jordan River. Initially, Moshe is upset by their request, but he agrees after they promise to help the rest of the nation conquer the land of Israel first.

Parashat Masei recounts the journey of the Jewish people through the desert, listing each of the 42 places they camped from the Exodus until they reached the edge of the Promised Land. The parsha also talks about how the land will be divided, the establishment of cities of refuge, and rules for justice and fairness in the new land.

One powerful theme that stands out in both parshiot is the idea of taking responsibility. When the tribes of Reuven and Gad ask to live outside of Israel, Moshe is concerned that they are abandoning their national duties. But instead of insisting on their own comfort, the tribes take responsibility by promising to join the rest of the nation in battle. They understand that being part of a community means sharing in its struggles—not just its rewards.

This idea is echoed in Parashat Masei, where the Torah describes the cities of refuge. These cities are places where someone who accidentally kills another person can go to live safely. But these cities are not just a form of escape—they are a way for the person to take responsibility for what happened. Even though the act was unintentional, the Torah still expects the person to respond, reflect, and make changes. Responsibility doesn't only come when we do something wrong on purpose—it also comes from recognizing the effects of our actions, even when they were accidental.

In our lives, we also face moments when we must choose whether to look out only for ourselves or step up and take responsibility for others. Whether it's helping a sibling with a chore, speaking up when someone is being treated unfairly, or admitting a mistake and working to fix it, these moments show our true character.

When we take responsibility, we grow into stronger, more caring people—and we help build a better world around us.

## DISCUSSION

Can you think of a time when you took responsibility for something, even though it wasn't completely your fault? What made you choose to do that?

## QUESTIONS

- Why do you think taking responsibility is sometimes difficult?
- How do you feel when someone else takes responsibility for something they did wrong?
- What's one small way you can take more responsibility in your life this week?

# PARSHAT DEVARIM

In this week's parsha, Devarim, Moshe begins his final speech to the Jewish people before they enter the Land of Israel. He recounts their journey through the desert, reminding them of the moments when they struggled and the times they succeeded. Early in the parsha, Moshe retells the story of how he appointed leaders to help him judge the people, saying, "How can I alone carry your troubles, your burdens, and your quarrels?" (Devarim 1:12).

This verse teaches us something powerful about leadership. Moshe, who had led the people for decades and had a close relationship with God, could have easily continued to lead alone. But instead, he chose to listen to the needs of the people and share responsibility with others. This shows us that great leaders are not the ones who try to do everything themselves—they are the ones who listen, empower others and recognize when they need help.

Listening is not always easy, especially when we feel like we already know what's best. But Moshe models the kind of leadership that includes humility and collaboration. He understood that leading people means truly hearing them and creating space for others to contribute.

Even more, by sharing his responsibilities with others, Moshe taught the people how to become leaders themselves. The system of judges and officials that he set up helped the community grow stronger and more independent.

## DISCUSSION

What does it mean to be a good listener, and how is that connected to being a good leader?

## QUESTIONS

- Can you think of a time when listening to someone else helped you make a better decision?
- What are two ways you can practice leadership in your own life, even if you're not in charge?
- Why do you think Moshe felt it was important to share leadership instead of doing everything himself?

# PARSHAT VA'ETCHANAN

In this week's parsha, Moshe continues his final address to the Jewish people. The parsha opens with a deeply personal moment: Moshe tells the people that he pleaded with God—va'etchanan el Hashem—to allow him to enter the Land of Israel. Despite his heartfelt prayer, God refuses, telling Moshe that he may view the land from a distance, but he will not cross the Jordan River with the people.

This moment can feel heartbreaking. After all that Moshe did—leading the people out of Egypt, receiving the Torah, guiding them through forty years in the desert—why wouldn't God grant him this one final request? But this interaction between Moshe and God holds powerful lessons about life, leadership, and the nature of prayer.

The word va'etchanan shares a root with the word chein, meaning "grace" or "favor." Rashi explains that even though Moshe had earned the right to make requests from God based on his merit, he chose instead to ask for a free, undeserved gift—an act of chein. This teaches us something crucial about prayer: even the most righteous among us don't pray with a sense of entitlement. We ask with humility, not because we deserve something, but because we hope for kindness.

God's answer to Moshe is "no"—but not because Moshe's prayer was wrong. Sometimes we can do everything right and still not get what we want. This can be frustrating, but it also reminds us that the purpose of prayer isn't always about changing the outcome. Sometimes prayer is about connection, reflection, and surrendering to a higher perspective we can't fully understand.

And although Moshe's request is denied, God allows him a final gift: He takes him up to the top of Mount Pisgah to see the land from afar. While Moshe won't enter, he gets to glimpse the future. He sees the legacy he helped build. That too is a form of blessing, even if it wasn't the one he originally asked for.

In our own lives, we all experience moments where the answer is "no." We don't get into the school we wanted, a friendship doesn't work out, a job opportunity falls through. When that happens, it's natural to feel disappointed—but we can also reflect on Moshe's experience. His story teaches us that unanswered prayers are still heard, still holy and still meaningful.

Sometimes, not getting what we want leads us toward growth, perspective, and even unexpected blessings. And like Moshe, we can learn to appreciate the view from the mountain, even if we don't reach the destination ourselves.

## DISCUSSION

Have you ever had a moment where you really hoped for something, but didn't get it? How did you respond?

## QUESTIONS

- What does this story teach us about how to handle disappointment?
- Can you think of a time when not getting what you wanted helped you in the long run?
- What does prayer mean to you? Is it about asking, connecting, reflecting—or something else?

# PARSHAT EIKEV

Have you ever been really excited about something — like getting a new toy, starting a new video game or going on a special trip — and then, after a while, you just got used to it? At first, you couldn't stop talking about it, but after a few days or weeks, it didn't feel so amazing anymore. This happens to everyone! Our brains get used to good things very quickly, and we often stop noticing how lucky we are to have them.

In Parshat Eikev, the Torah teaches us something that can help with this problem. The pasuk says: "And you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God..." (Devarim 8:10). This means that after we eat and feel full, we should thank God for the food. But isn't it more natural to thank before eating, when we're still hungry? Why would we be commanded to also thank after eating?

God is showing us an important lesson: it's easy to be grateful when we want something, but much harder to be grateful when we already have it. After a meal, when we're full and happy, we might forget to appreciate the food we just ate. That's exactly the moment God wants us to stop, think, and say "thank you."

This mitzvah is like a superpower for the soul — it helps us notice and appreciate all the blessings in our lives, even the ones we've gotten used to. Whether it's food, friends, family or even a sunny day, we can train ourselves to say "thank You" to God not only when we need something, but also when everything is already going great.

## DISCUSSION

Think about the last time you received a present. Did you still find the gift exciting after months of using it? Why or why not?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two steps you can take to be more grateful for the things you use every day?
- How can you remind yourself to approach life with more gratitude?

# PARSHAT RE'EH

In this week's parsha, Moshe tells the Jewish people, "See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse" (Devarim 11:26). The blessing will come if they listen to God's commandments and the curse if they do not. The Torah is reminding us that our choices matter and that every decision we make has consequences.

Interestingly, the word "see" is written in the singular (re'eh), even though Moshe is speaking to all of the Jewish people. This teaches us that while we are part of a larger community, each person must take individual responsibility to choose the right path.

Life often presents us with moments where the "right choice" is not the easiest or most popular. Sometimes following the Torah's way means standing out or going against the crowd. But Moshe's message is that every individual has the power — and the duty — to make choices that bring blessing into their own life and into the community.

As we approach Elul and the High Holidays, the sacred period in the Jewish calendar for introspection and repentance, Parshat Re'eh reminds us to pause and "see" — to truly look at our actions and decisions. Every day, we stand at our own crossroads between blessing and curse. The Torah encourages us to choose blessing, even in the small, everyday moments.

## DISCUSSION

Think about a time when you were making a tough decision. What led you to do the right thing?

## QUESTIONS

- What are two important factors you consider when making decisions?
- What motivates you to choose to do the right thing when other people around you might be doing something wrong?

# PARSHAT SHOFTIM

One of the well-known verses in this week's parsha is the command: "Tzedek, tzedek tirdof" — "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Devarim 16:20). The Torah could have simply said tzedek tirdof — "pursue justice." Why then is the word tzedek repeated twice?

The commentators offer many answers, but one powerful explanation is that the Torah is reminding us that both the ends and the means must be just. It is not enough to achieve a just outcome if the path to get there is filled with dishonesty or corruption. Justice in Judaism is not only about the final verdict, but about the integrity of the entire process.

This idea has deep implications for our daily lives. Often, we set goals that seem noble or beneficial, but the way we pursue them can become compromised. For example, we may want to succeed academically, professionally or socially — all good things — but if we cut corners, act dishonestly or hurt others along the way, then our "justice" is incomplete.

By repeating the word tzedek, the Torah emphasizes that true righteousness must be consistent at every stage. The pursuit of justice cannot contradict the values of justice.

This verse also pushes us to consider the kind of society we want to build. A society based only on results can excuse a lot of harm in the name of progress. But the Torah demands something higher: a society where the pursuit itself reflects honesty, compassion and fairness.

## DISCUSSION

Think about the phrase: "the ends justify the means." How does the Torah's teaching of tzedek, tzedek tirdof challenge that idea?

## QUESTIONS

- Can you think of a time when you had a good goal but were tempted to achieve it in a less-than-honest way?
- How can you make sure that your "means" reflect the same values as your "ends"?
- What might it look like for a commUNITY to pursue justice not just in outcomes but also in processes?

# PARSHAT KI TEITZEI

In this week's parsha, we encounter a wide range of mitzvot that address how we are meant to proactively live with integrity, kindness and responsibility. Among them is the commandment to return a lost object, known as Hashavat Aveidah. The Torah teaches: "You shall not see your brother's ox or sheep going astray and ignore them; you shall surely return them to your brother" (Devarim 22:1).

At first glance, this mitzvah may seem to be a straightforward law about property rights. But when we look closer, we find that it carries with it a powerful message about responsibility toward others and the importance of not turning away when we see someone in need.

The Torah does not simply say, "It is nice if you return it." Rather, it says *lo tuchal l'hitale'm*—you are not allowed to ignore. The wording is striking: it prohibits indifference. By commanding us to notice and act, the Torah teaches that apathy is not an option. When we encounter a situation where another person has suffered a loss—big or small—we are called to respond with care and effort.

This mitzvah also extends beyond physical objects. Just as we must return lost property, we can also think about how we might "return" to someone their lost sense of dignity, hope or connection. A kind word, a gesture of support, or even simply noticing another person can help restore something they are missing.

In our daily lives, this means training ourselves to be attentive rather than dismissive. It is often easier to walk by and assume someone else will help. But the Torah urges us to break out of that habit and instead ask, "What can I do to restore what is missing here?" In doing so, we not only fulfill a mitzvah but also strengthen the bonds of trust and responsibility that hold our communities together.

## DISCUSSION

Think of a time when someone stepped in to help you recover something you had lost—whether an item, an opportunity, or a sense of confidence. How did their effort impact you?

## QUESTIONS

- How can you train yourself to notice the "small losses" in other people's lives that you might normally overlook?
- What is one way this week you can "return" something non-material—like encouragement, attention or dignity—to someone in your life?

# PARSHAT KI TAVO

In this week's parsha, the Torah describes the mitzvah of bikkurim, bringing the first fruits to the Beit HaMikdash. But the highlight of the ritual isn't the fruit; it's the story the farmer must tell: "Arami oved avi...", a brief national history that moves from vulnerability to redemption, from wandering in the desert to arriving at a land flowing with milk and honey. The Torah invites everyone, standing with a basket in hand, to locate their personal blessing within the broader story of Am Yisrael.

Unlike the wilderness years, where God's Presence was seen through obvious miracles, life in the Land of Israel will look ordinary: plowing, sowing, harvesting. Precisely there, the Torah gives us a story that reframes success. The farmer does not say, "My strength and my brilliance made this crop." Instead, he rehearses the journey: the trials of our ancestors, the oppression in Egypt, the cry to God, the redemption and the gift of the Land. By narrating the past, he transforms the present from entitlement into gratitude and from private achievement into shared covenant.

Through this lens, Ki Tavo teaches a vital practice for our own lives: gratitude is sustained by memory and memory is sustained by speech. We don't merely feel thankful; we say thank you out loud, to others and to God. The ritual insists that blessing is safest when connected to a story.

This practice also clarifies the Torah's emphasis on joy: "V'samachta b'chol hatov" - "You shall rejoice in all the good." Joy here is not passive happiness; it's the ethical posture that flows from recognizing our place in a larger narrative. When a person remembers who carried their people through history, they see their harvest differently: as opportunity rather than ownership, responsibility rather than right. That is why the bikkurim are brought and shared with Kohen, Levi, and strangers, because true gratitude always spills over into the lives of others.

Ki Tavo places this story just before we disperse to our fields and routines. In doing so, the Torah trains us to tell the story first, then enjoy the fruit. In a world where our "harvests" may be degrees, careers, or relationships, the order still matters. Taking a moment to appreciate all that led you to the result is a crucial step to being able to truly celebrate and rejoice over our achievements.

## DISCUSSION

Think of a "first fruits" moment in your life such as a recent success or milestone. If you were to write your own story to tell about the process to achieving this milestone, what past struggles, helpers and unlikely turns would you include so that the blessing becomes part of a larger story?

## QUESTIONS

- What concrete ritual could you adopt to "bring your bikkurim" - to voice gratitude before enjoying a new blessing?
- When success tempts you to say "my strength," what line of your personal story helps you return to humility and joy?

# PARSHAT NITZAVIM

Moments of commitment define who we are. Whether in relationships, commUNITY or personal growth, the times when we pause, stand with intention and reaffirm our values help anchor us in a constantly shifting world.

In this week's parsha, the Jewish people are called to exactly that kind of moment. "Atem nitzavim hayom kulchem" - You are standing today, all of you" - before entering the Land of Israel, the Jewish people gather collectively to reaffirm their covenant with God. This gathering is not just a formality; it is a national moment of clarity, unity and recommitment to their purpose.

What makes this moment especially powerful is that the Torah emphasizes everyone is included: leaders, tribes, men, women, children and even the stranger living among them. The covenant is not for an elite group, nor only for those who feel spiritually prepared. It is for every individual, regardless of status, background or level of observance. This inclusive vision teaches that belonging to the Jewish people is not contingent on perfection. It is based on standing together and choosing to grow.

One of the key ideas the parsha introduces is that the commandments are not distant or inaccessible. "Lo bashamayim hi" - the Torah is not in the heavens, beyond reach. The path of mitzvot, meaning and connection is close to us, "in our mouths and in our hearts to do it."

This perspective shifts how we think about personal growth: the Torah does not expect dramatic leaps, but steady, accessible steps. Each small choice to speak kindly, act ethically, or recommit to our values is part of the larger covenantal journey that began with "Atem nitzavim."

Together, these themes teach a profound lesson. Standing with intention and making spiritually aligned choices is not a once-in-a-lifetime event; it is something we revisit constantly. And rather than requiring us to be perfect, the Torah invites us to simply keep showing up with honesty and effort.

## DISCUSSION

How does thinking of spiritual growth as close and attainable change the way we approach it?

## QUESTIONS

- What is one small, reachable action you can take this week that aligns with your values?
- How does the idea that "everyone stands together" influence how you think about commUNITY and belonging?
- In what ways can you create more intentional "Nitzavim moments"—times to pause, reflect and recommit?

# PARSHAT VAYELECH

Transitions are an inevitable part of life. Whether starting a new job, moving to a new home or entering a different stage of personal growth, transitions can feel both exciting and overwhelming. They require us to adapt, to find new rhythms and often to redefine our roles. In this week's parsha, we encounter one of the most significant transitions in Jewish history: Moshe's final day as leader. As he prepares to hand over the reins to Yehoshua, Moshe addresses the nation with encouragement and guidance for the future that awaits them in the Land of Israel.

One of the core messages Moshe emphasizes is the idea of strength and courage - "Chizku ve'imtzu." Moshe repeats these words to both the people and to Yehoshua himself. This repetition highlights that courage is not only for leaders; it is for every individual facing the uncertainties that come with change. Courage, in the Torah's view, is not an absence of fear. It is the willingness to move forward even when the path ahead is unclear.

Another central theme is the mitzvah of hakhel, the gathering of the entire nation every seven years to hear the Torah read publicly. What is remarkable about hakhel is its inclusivity: men, women, children and even strangers are all called to attend. The message is clear, during moments of transition, the strength of the commUNITY comes from its unity. Everyone belongs, everyone has a role and everyone meaningfully contributes to the continuity of Jewish life.

Taken together, these themes create a powerful framework for navigating change. Moshe models that even at the end of a chapter, there is space for purpose and contribution. He shows that transitions are not just endings, rather they are opportunities to reaffirm values, pass wisdom forward and build structures that will endure.

## DISCUSSION

Think about the phrase: "Chazak v'Ematz - Be strong and courageous." What does it mean to embody courage during moments of transition?

## QUESTIONS

- What transitions are you currently experiencing and how can the message of "strength and courage" support you?
- How can you bring "hakhel moments" into your life - times when you gather commUNITY or family to stay connected to what matters?
- What habits or values can you carry with you to maintain stability during times of change?

# PARSHAT HA'AZINU

In this week's parsha, Moshe delivers his final message to the Jewish people not as a speech, but as a song called Shirat Ha'azinu. This poetic, powerful song summarizes the history of the Jewish people, their relationship with God, their moments of faith and failure and the hope for return and renewal. Moshe understands that a song, more than a speech, can be remembered. It becomes a spiritual anchor that the nation can carry with them into the unknown.

One of the striking images in Ha'azinu is the description of God as an eagle caring for its young, hovering above the nest, gently lifting its offspring and teaching them to fly. This metaphor is a reminder that growth often involves both support and challenge. Just as a parent gradually teaches a child to become independent, the Torah teaches us that God guides us with a balance of closeness and distance, empowering us to rise on our own.

This duality of support and responsibility is at the heart of Ha'azinu. Moshe's song reminds the nation that even when they stumble, they are not abandoned. Their story includes mistakes, consequences and moments of distance, but it also includes return, compassion and renewal. This cycle is part of the human experience. Growth comes from recognizing where we have fallen and choosing to rise again.

Together, the themes of song, support and resilience teach us that meaning is not found only in perfection but in the journey itself. The memories we carry, the moments that shape us and the commitments we renew are what give our lives rhythm.

## DISCUSSION

Think about the metaphor of the eagle teaching its young to fly. What does it teach us about balancing independence with the comfort of support?

## QUESTIONS

- What "songs" or lessons, formal or informal, do you carry with you that help guide you through life's challenges?
- How do you find the balance between relying on support and stepping into independence?
- In what moments have you experienced growth by returning, reflecting and reconnecting with your values?

# PARSHAT V'ZOT HABERACHA

In this week's parsha, the final parsha of the Torah, Moshe blesses each of the tribes before his passing. After forty years of leading the nation through challenges, triumphs and transformations, Moshe chooses to end his life's mission not with instructions or warnings, but with blessings. This moment teaches us something profound: even at the end of a long and difficult journey, Moshe's focus is on uplifting others.

Each tribe's blessing is unique, tailored to its character, history and role within the nation. Moshe recognizes that no two tribes and no two people, are the same. Strength does not come from uniformity, but from diversity. Every individual has distinct gifts and the health of a community depends on each person bringing their strengths forward. The parsha reminds us that spiritual growth happens not when we try to be like everyone else, but when we embrace who we are.

Another deeply meaningful theme is that Moshe gives these blessings right before the nation enters the Land of Israel without him. Even though Moshe knows he will not be part of the next chapter, he invests his final energy in empowering those who will continue the journey. That act of choosing to give, to encourage and to bless even when he himself is stepping aside is one of the greatest demonstrations of leadership in the Torah.

This parsha encourages us to think about the legacy we create. Legacy is not just what we accomplish, but how we impact others, through kindness, encouragement and the blessings we offer with our presence.

## DISCUSSION

Reflect on the idea that every tribe receives a different blessing. What does this teach us about the value of individual strengths within a commUNITY?

## QUESTIONS

- What unique strengths do you bring to your commUNITY, family or friendships?
- How can you adopt Moshe's example by offering support or encouragement to others, even during your own transitions?