



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

Parshat Behar-Bechukotai

14 -20 May, 2017

18 - 24 Iyyar, 5777

Leviticus 25:1 - 27:34

Omer: 33 - 39

Haftarah:

Jeremiah 16:19-17:14

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Don't Tread on Me

Every word counts. Every word – and indeed every letter - in Torah has a purpose and a meaning. The same must certainly be said regarding the names selected for the individual weekly Torah portions. Their names are not merely convenient words, located somewhere near the portion's beginning. They are handpicked by G-d and His sages to capture the essential meaning of each portion in its entirety. One of the Torah Portions read this week is referred to by the name "Behar" which means "on the mountain," referring of course to Mt. Sinai.

"The Ethics of the Fathers," part of the Mishna which is traditionally learnt during the weeks between Pesach and Shavuot (or until Rosh Hashanah per Chabad custom), begins with the order in which the Torah was transmitted from G-d to the Jewish people. "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua transmitted it to the elders, etc."

Mt. Sinai seems to hold a rather prominent spot in this chain of events. Now, of course Sinai is where it all began, but shouldn't the Mishna have credited G-d Himself as the original giver of the Torah? Why is Mt. Sinai given the status of being the Torah's source or origin?

Looking beneath the surface, the word "Torah" in Hebrew, stems from the word "Ho-ra'ah" which translates as "a directive or lesson". This implies that Moshe not only "received the Torah on Mt. Sinai," but he also "took a lesson from Mt. Sinai." The well-known attribute given to Sinai is the humbleness of the fact that Mt. Sinai was the smallest of the regions mountains, encouraging and empowering us all to take heed and stay humble. However, the question arises, if G-d wanted to teach the people about humility, why give the Torah on a mountain at all? Why not choose something truly unassuming, like the flat plains or even a valley? The truth is that this itself stands as an important lesson and value by which we can all live. Yes, Mount Sinai was "humble" for not being the largest of its kind, but nonetheless it was a mountain, which doesn't allow for itself to be easily stepped on or belittled.

G-d Himself attests in the Torah to Moshe's humility. "And Moses was extremely humble, more so than any man upon the face of the earth." Does this mean that Moshe, perhaps the greatest Jewish leader of all times, would deny the greatness of his achievements? Would he downplay the greatness of being G-d's personal ambassador to His people, and to Pharaoh on their behalf?

And what of the enormity of splitting the sea for the Jewish People to pass through on dry land? Or effectively leading millions of men, women and children through wilderness and wars for forty years? Would he suggest that these are not, in fact, great accomplishments? Of course not! Moshe's humility lay in the fact that were someone to ask him about the great things he had done in his life, perhaps he would insist that had anyone else been put in his position by G-d, he or she would have done a better job.

At the same time, when G-d was challenged by the people time and time again, Moshe didn't budge an inch. He stood his ground like a mighty mountain, proudly defending G-d's Name as well as defending the people no matter the cost. And the same was true any time his faith his mission was tested. He would not be dissuaded.

This is the message of "receiving the Torah from Sinai." A Jew - and by the same token, any person – must of course stay humble, not trying to stand out unnecessarily or making a big deal of him or herself. At the same time, we must also not allow ourselves to be stepped on or belittled, ridiculed for what we stand for or shamed into concealing our beliefs. A mountain remains standing tall and firm no matter what. Even the most humble of mountains.

By Rabbi Moishe Mayir Vogel

FATHERLY

There once lived a pious man, a leader in his community and a renowned scholar. He had the custom of collecting money for those in need of supplies for the upcoming holidays and would distribute an allotted sum to anyone who came to his door.

One fellow, in an effort to procure a little more than the allotted amount, mentioned to the rabbi that they were related through some very vague family ties.

The rabbi understood the man's intentions, shrugged his shoulders and smiled, "Oh well, just distant relatives." With that he dismissed him with only the original amount.

The man left the room, disappointed. He so badly wanted to get that extra money. With a little thought, and a pinch of chutzpah, he devised a witty plan to get the rabbi to rethink his dismissal of this "distant relative."

Soon the rabbi joined the community to lead the afternoon prayers. When he began the repetition of the Amidah, with the words "God of our fathers, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob..." the fellow called out from the back of the room, "Oh well, just distant relatives!"

The room went silent. The Rabbi smiled slightly, and then continued the prayers.

Afterwards he summoned the man back into his study and handed him an additional sum of money. At this the man chided, "So, I was right? There's no such thing as 'just distant relatives,' right?"

"No. You were not right," responded the rabbi gently. "There certainly are those who are 'just distant relatives.' But our fathers? A father is never distant."

This week we read the Tochecha, the curses which G-d tells us will be set upon the Jewish people if we fail to follow His commandments. However, we read these curses with the knowledge that they are not simply punishments. G-d is all merciful and kind, not vindictive and vengeful. What He does is always for the best. It is we who are ignorant of His ways, and may perceive things as negative. This is similar to the feeling a child might experience when a parent denies him something he desires. "No more candies today," or "No you may not play with that knife," or even the occasional fatherly consequence can be perceived by the childish mind as mean or oppressive!

But of course, it is the duty of a parent and certainly in a child's best interest, to ensure that there are consequences to his actions. As much as a child might resent it, it's what molds children into healthy adults.

Likewise, in the times of the ultimate redemption, we will be granted the understanding to perceive God's actions as they are. Until then, we stay humble and recognize the fact that, although we may not understand, G-d is good. We hope and pray that the day come soon when we will finally see all things for what they truly are.

By Rabbi Moishe Mayir Vogel

In Jewish History

Sunday, 18 Iyar, 5777 - May 14, 2017

Plague among R. Akiva's Disciples End (circa 120 CE)

In the weeks between Passover and Shavuot, a plague decimated 24,000 students of the great sage Rabbi Akiva--a result, says the Talmud, of the fact that they "did not respect one another." The plague's cessation on Iyar 18--the 33rd day of the Omer Count or "Lag BaOmer"--is one of the reasons that the day is celebrated each year (see "Laws and Customs" below).

Passing of R. Shimon bar Yochai (2nd century CE)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai ("Rashbi"), was a leading disciple of Rabbi Akiva and one of the most important tana'im whose teachings of Torah law are collected in the Mishnah. He was also the first to publicly teach the mystical dimension of the Torah known as the "Kabbalah", and is the author of the basic work of Kabbalah, the Zohar. For 13 years Rabbi Shimon hid in a cave to escape the wrath of the Romans whose government he criticized. On the day of his passing--Iyar 18, the 33rd day of the Omer Count--Rabbi Shimon gathered his disciples and revealed many of the deepest secrets of the divine wisdom, and instructed them to mark the date as "the day of my joy."

Passing of Rama (1573?)

Rabbi Moshe Iserles ("Rama") of Cracow (1525-1573?) authored the glosses ("hagga'ot") on R. Yosef Caro's the Code of Jewish Law and is regarded as the definitive Halachic authority for Ashkenazic Jews.

Ettingen Jews Acquitted (1690)

Following a blood libel and the decree, if found guilty, to destroy the synagogue of Ettingen, Switzerland, the Jews were acquitted. The local Jews celebrated this day as a local "Purim" celebration-day of thanksgiving.

IDF Created (1948)

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was created on Lag BaOmer of 1948. The IDF comprises the Israeli army, Israeli air force and Israeli navy. It was formed to defend the existence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state of Israel and combat all forms of terrorism which threaten the daily lives of its inhabitants.

Hurva Synagogue Destroyed (1948)

The Hurva synagogue, located in the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, was captured and dynamited by the Arab Legion of Jordan during the battle for Old Jerusalem in 1948.