



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

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

25 June - 1 July, 2017

1 - 7 Tammuz, 5777

Numbers 19:1 -22:1

Haftorah: Judges 11:1-33

■ GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll; it is available to all prisons.

■ ALEPH LIBRARY

The Aleph Institute Library (6000 books!) is now available to you, through the institution library.

Please ask to see our catalog in the chapel in every institution.

You can then ask the librarian to order that book.

■ TORAH STUDIES

Aleph offers many Judaic topics for study. Aleph Institute will provide the material and courses. Please write for more information.

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WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF THE BAR MITZVAH

According to some, the first documented Bar Mitzvah celebration is referred to in the Torah: "And the child [Isaac] grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned" (Genesis 21:8). According to one opinion expressed in the Midrash, this was the day that Isaac turned thirteen; the day when he was "weaned" from his childish nature, and assumed the responsibilities of a Jewish adult. In Jewish literature, this verse is often used as a source for the celebration made in honor of a boy's acceptance of the mitzvot at age thirteen.

The Zohar (*Zohar Chadash, Genesis 10c; 15d.*) relates how on the day of his son's Bar Mitzvah, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai made a feast which was akin to a wedding celebration.

My research suggests that the celebratory Bar Mitzvah feast became a unanimously accepted Jewish custom some four hundred years ago.

As for the cause of the celebration, this is the day when a Jewish person is given the obligation and resulting privilege of observing G-d's commandments. One would be hard-pressed to think of a more joyous occasion to celebrate together with friends

and family!

Rabbi Shlomo Luria, noted 16th century Polish scholar, rules that the Bar Mitzvah feast is a seudat mitzvah, a "mitzvah repast," which means that participating in this meal is actually a mitzvah.

By Rabbi Boruch S. Davisson

CONDUCT UNBECOMING

A life sentence for jaywalking? Twenty years for chewing gum in public? Singapore notwithstanding, surely that's over the top!

Well, was it so different for Moses, who, in this week's Torah reading, is punished and denied entrance to the Promised Land for the seemingly minor infraction of hitting a rock instead of speaking to it?

The people are clamoring for water in the wilderness. G-d tells Moses to speak to a certain rock (he was meant to ask nicely) and promises that, miraculously, water will flow from the rock. Commentary enlightens us as to the behind-the-scenes reasons for Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it, but in the end the miracle happens anyway and the people's thirst is quenched.

If your average rabbi today would make a rock produce water, even if the rock

Parshat Chukat

needed more than mere gentle persuasion, surely it would be hailed as the greatest miracle of the century and the rabbi would win the Nobel Prize for chemistry. But for Moses it's a sin? Even if (as the Torah points out) it would have been a greater sanctification of the Divine had he only spoken to the rock, still, for such a minor infraction, such a severe penalty?

The answer, we are told, is that responsibility is commensurate with the individual. If a child messes up, it is entirely forgivable. For an adult who should know better, we are less likely to be as forgiving. Likewise, among adults, from a person of stature we expect more than from an ordinary fellow.

A blemish on a coarse garment is not nearly as bad as it is on a piece of fine material. A stain on a pair of denims is not only acceptable, it is absolutely desirable. In fact, some people pay a premium for pre-stained jeans. Put the same stain on a silk tie and it's simply unwearable.

Moses was like the finest silk and, therefore, even the smallest, subtle hint of sin was considered a serious breach of conduct and the repercussions were severe.

I recall reading, in one of Rabbi Dr. A. J. Twersky's early books, an exposition of the well-known Yiddish expression, "es past nit" --

“it is unbecoming.” When he was a child and his father would admonish him for doing the wrong thing, he would say “es past nit,” i.e., for you, this sort of behavior is unbecoming. Not only did such a rebuke not shatter the child’s self image, it reinforced it. A wise father was telling his child, “You are special, you are important, for someone like you this sort of conduct is unbecoming.” There are behavior patterns that are not necessarily criminal or sinful. Yet for someone from an esteemed family background, es past nit, it is unbecoming. This was the kind of criticism that could actually build a child’s self esteem.

How beautiful that even in chastisement one can find validation and praise.

As I write these lines, I think of the chupah ceremony when I officiate at a marriage. After reading the ketubah in the original Aramaic, I usually read an abstract in English. There in the text one finds the antiquated expression, “even as it beseemeth a Jewish husband to do.” The groom’s obligations to his bride are reflected in that old, quaint turn of phrase reminding him that he will be expected to conduct himself appropriately -- “as it beseems a Jewish husband to do.” Yes, we Jews do expect more from our husbands. There is a historical ethic and a sacred tradition we are all held to. No matter what the rest of the world may get up to, for a Jewish husband, es past nit.

Moses was the greatest prophet that ever lived. For him, the standard could be no higher. Luckily for us mere mortals, we will not be held to that exalted benchmark. But we will be held to our own standard. The standard of Jews who were called upon by G-d to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

THREE WEEKS:

JULY 11 is a fast day (Fast of Tammuz 17) [this fast is recognized by the DOC] it begins the three weeks of mourning. The Lubavitcher Rebbe of blessed and sainted memory, encouraged we study the laws of the Temple, as described by Maimonides.

Aleph Institute has a course to assist you with studying this course. Write to our office and you will receive the material via mail or through your Rabbi/Chaplain.

In Jewish History

Thursday, 12 Tammuz, 5777 - July 6, 2017

Joshua Stops the Sun (1273 BCE)

On the third of Tammuz of the year 2488 from creation (1273 BCE), Joshua was leading the Jewish people in one of the battles to conquer the Land of Israel. Victory was imminent, but darkness was about to fall. “Sun,” proclaimed Joshua, “be still at Giv’on; moon, at the Ayalon valley” (Joshua 10:12). The heavenly bodies acquiesced, halting their progress through the sky until Israel’s armies brought the battle to its successful conclusion.

Lubavitch Fire (1851)

A great fire destroyed much of the town of Lubavitch, including the home of the third Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (the “Tzemach Tzedek”, 1789-1866) and many invaluable manuscripts of Chassidic teaching.

R. Yosef Yitzchak Released from Prison (1927)

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), who was arrested on Sivan 15 of 1927 by agents of the GPU (soviet secret police) and the Yevsektzia (“Jewish section” of the Communist Party) for his work to preserve and disseminate Jewish learning and observance throughout the Soviet Empire. Held in the notorious Spalerno prison in Leningrad, he was repeatedly interrogated and beaten. Initially sentenced to death, international pressure compelled the Soviet regime to first commute the sentence to ten years hard labor in Siberia, and then to a three-year term of exile in Kostrama, a town in the interior of Russia.

On the 3rd of Tammuz, 18 days after his arrest, he was released from prison and allowed six hours at home before reporting to the Leningrad train station to embark on his exile. Many gathered at the station to see him off. Though he knew that there were GPU agents present, he spoke to the assembled crowd, encouraging all to persist in the very activities for which he had been arrested. “This,” he proclaimed “all the nations of the world must know: Only our bodies were sent into exile and subjugated to alien rule; our souls were not given over into captivity and foreign rule. We must proclaim openly and before all that any matter affecting the Jewish religion, Torah, and its mitzvot and customs is not subject to the coercion of others. No one can impose his belief upon us, nor coerce us to conduct ourselves contrary to our beliefs!”

(On the 12th of Tammuz, after serving only nine days of his three year term, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was informed that he was free to return home. Shortly thereafter, he was allowed to leave the Soviet Union and resettled in Riga, Latvia.)