



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

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

5 - 11 May, 2019

30 Nissan -

6 Iyar, 5779

Torah:

Leviticus 19:1 - 20:27

Haftorah:

Ezekiel 20:2-20

■ CALENDARS

We have Jewish Calendars, if you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

■ FAMILY PROGRAMS

Do you have family on the outside who are struggling, please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

■ 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.

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SPIRITUAL VS. HOLY

In a Parshah where we read the golden rule of Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself and numerous other "social" mitzvot, I find it necessary to focus on another of our Parshah's commandments—one which in our own day seems to have been forgotten, much to our own detriment, I fear.

Under the general command to "Be Holy" (Leviticus 19:1), the Torah instructs us not to engage in sorcery, superstition and other related activities which were practiced by the heathen nations of old. Elsewhere in Deuteronomy the Torah proscribes other practices such as consulting the dead. Jews are told to be "sincere and wholehearted with G-d," to follow the Torah way of life and, when in doubt, to consult the prophet or the recognized spiritual leaders and Torah authorities of the day. Sorcery, dabbling in the occult and "crossing over" are serious infractions to be strenuously avoided.

A Jewish grandmother once took her grandson to a séance. After making her magic, the crystal ball lady claimed she had made contact with the woman's deceased husband, Chaim. Indeed, they heard a male voice saying how everything was well with him on the other side and he answered all their questions. Then, little Harry the grandson piped up and asked, "Zayde, may I ask you one more question please. When did you learn to speak English so well?"

Whether you believe that those who practice spiritualism are indeed making contact or not, makes little difference from the Jewish perspective. Imaginary or real, the Torah forbids it. Even if it is real that doesn't mean it is right. Not everything that can be done ought to be done.

Most people seem to be confused by this. They become convinced that if it really is able to happen then this legitimizes it. Often, it is those who have been bereaved, especially under tragic circumstances, who are anxiously seeking answers and grasping for comfort through these unholy sources.

Unholy, you ask? Yes. You see, there is a fundamental difference between spiritual and holy. Not everything spiritual is necessary holy, and not everything holy need be spiritual.

Balaam was a heathen prophet (Numbers 22-24). He was able to communicate with G-d. But he was very unholy. He tried to put a curse on the Jewish people which would allow their enemies to destroy them completely. They had done him no harm. He was a greedy, lustful anti-Semite—far from a holy man. But he was very, very spiritual. Clearly, not everything spiritual is holy.

Money is very, very physical. But if you use it for holy purposes like charity, it becomes holy. Clearly, not everything holy need be spiritual.

It may be possible to "cross over." But, in the process, we may be getting ourselves involved with unholy forces. There are forces of

darkness out there too. And if we are not dealing with Jewish prophets of old or bona fide holy mystics, we may, G-d forbid, get burned. And, who knows if our connections are not seen as interference. We may well be guilty of disturbing the dead, in which case we might actually be doing more harm than good.

My brother-in-law, Rabbi Shabsi Alpern, is the Chabad shliach in Brazil. Many such practices occur in his community. He once asked the Lubavitcher Rebbe what to tell people about this. The Rebbe answered to tell them that every Jew has a direct connection to G-d and we do not require a medium to connect. In fact, why take the circuitous route if you can go direct?

If we want to help the deceased, Judaism has many worthwhile suggestions. Kaddish, tzedakah, and any mitzvah in memory are all good deeds which have positive effects on the soul. Torah study, particularly Mishnah, is highly recommended.

By all means should we all deepen our spirituality. Study the esoteric side of Torah with reliable, trustworthy teachers to gain an appreciation into Jewish Mysticism. But be wholesome with G-d. Don't dabble in forbidden fields. Be holy—in the way our holy Torah tells us to be.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

"Resentment is an acid that damages its container."

From my perspective as a family therapist, the

greatest treasure in our Torah-inheritance is the instruction to free ourselves of anger and resentment, especially in dealing with close relationships. Literally hundreds of sources in Jewish writings over the ages warn us that sustained anger is forbidden, destructive and ultimately irrational. The Biblical injunction is found in Leviticus 19:17-19: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart... You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge."

The Talmud goes on to note that "anyone who foregoes revenge merits that G-d forgives all of his sins." (Tractate Yoma 22b-23a). It further advises (Tractate Pesachim 113b) that G-d loves a person "who does not get angry ... and who does not insist on his due measure." Maimonides goes further (Laws of De'ot 7:7), requiring a person to "wipe the wrong from his heart entirely, without remembering it at all." A contemporary psychologist will paraphrase this as "The challenge of relinquishing anger presents an incredible opportunity for personal growth."

Does this mean that we should be passive victims in the face of abuse? Absolutely not! The very same Biblical portion cited above tells us that we must verbally confront someone who has wronged us, in order to avoid hating him in our heart. We must do so directly and emphatically, but without hatred and without destroying the relationship. Similarly, we have an obligation to protect ourselves and not put ourselves in a vulnerable position where the offense may be repeated. At the same time, we need to do so without speaking hostilely or taking an action that goes beyond self-protection, without vengeance, or withdrawing into a cold, judgmental contempt, or prolonged silence.

Many counselors report a recurring tragic family scenario: Over the years, a man has maintained an angry distance from a relative (a parent, child or sibling). Suddenly, the relative dies, and the man's love, long masked by a veneer of anger, erupts into awareness and the man is racked by regret and guilt. "How could I have wasted these years, when I could have....?"

Traditional Jewish philosophy offers us some protection from such tragedy. Torah says: 1) Do not believe that you cannot forgive... it is always your task to achieve forgiveness; 2) understand that anger and resentment are sustained by irrational thoughts... if you deeply examine your anger, you will identify and correct these cognitive distortions; 3) there is a negative force in the world that seeks to destroy closeness... that force is the source of those irrational thoughts; 4) in personal relationships, underneath anger there is hurt, fear and most importantly, a need to love and be loved.

Consider reaching out to someone in a spirit of loving forgiveness. May it be that, in the merit of your doing so, G-d chooses to reach out to us with the ultimate gift, bringing in the era of Moshiach.

By Yisroel Susskind

LAG BAOMER

33rd day of Omer celebrates the end of the plague amongst Rabbi Akiva's students, and the ascent on high of the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The mourning practices of the Omer are suspended. Many visit the gravesite of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron, northern Israel.

In Jewish History

Sunday, 30 Nissan, 5779 - May 5, 2019

Passing of R. Chaim Vital (1620)

Nissan 30 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of the famed Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital (1542?-1620), author of the mystical work Eitz Chaim. Rabbi Chaim was the leading disciple of Rabbi Isaac Luria (the "Holy Ari," 1534-1572) and the transcriber of his teachings, which form the "Lurianic" Kabbalah.

Passing of R. Joseph Ibn Migash (1141)

As a young man, R. Joseph Ibn Migash studied under R. Yitzchak Alfasi for fourteen years. After the latter's death, he succeeded him as head of the Talmudic academy in Lucena, Spain. His halachic opinions were sought after from afar, and he taught numerous disciples, including R. Maimon, father of Maimonides. Although he did not study under him personally, Maimonides viewed R. Joseph as his own teacher and greatly praised his erudition.

Passing of R. Jacob Emden (1776)

R. Jacob Emden, son of R. Tzvi Ashkenazi—known by the acronym Yaavetz (Yaakov ben Tzvi)—was a great scholar and author who lived in Emden and then in Altona (Germany). He was known for his zealotry and his willingness to fight for what he felt was right, disregarding any opposition. Among his works is a prayer book with commentaries known as Siddur Yaavetz.

Monday, 1 Iyar, 5779 - May 6, 2019

Construction of 2nd Temple (370 BCE)

Fifty three years following the destruction of the First Holy Temple (see Jewish History for the 9th of Av), Zerubabel and Joshua the High Priest began construction of the Second Temple, with permission from King Cyrus of Persia.

The offering of sacrifices had actually commenced a few months earlier, on the vacant lot where the 1st Temple stood, however it was only after the construction started on the 1st of Iyar that the Levites began accompanying the service with song and music.

The construction was later halted after the hostile Samaritans supplied false slanderous information to Cyrus about the Jews' intentions. The construction was resumed many years later, and completed 21 years later under the reign of King Darius.

Passing of R. Menachem Mendel of Horodok (1788)

Chassidic master Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok (1730?-1788), also known as Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, was one of the leading disciples of the second leader of the Chassidic Movement, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch. Upon the latter's passing in 1772, R. Menachem Mendel was regarded by his colleagues as the leader of the Chassidic community in Russia, and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi considered him his rebbe and mentor. In 1777, R. Menachem Mendel led a group of 300 Chassidim to the Holy Land and established Chassidic communities in Safed and Teberias. Rabbi Menachem Mendel passed away on the 1st of Iyar of 1788, and is buried in Tiberias.