

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

28 July – 3 August, 2019
25 Tammuz – 2 Av, 5779
Torah:
Numbers 30:2 – 36:13
Haftarah:
Jeremiah 2:4-28; 4:1-2
PARSHAT MATOT-MASSEI

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 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 &

We offer 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 (available to all prisons).

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 No One Alone,
 No One Forgotten.

PROMISES, PROMISES

I have always been intrigued by the traditional way in which diamond merchants seal a deal. They shake hands and say “Mazel and Brocha” (“good fortune and blessing”). Once those few words have been said, the deal is done and it has all the power of a legal, contractual transaction.

It is a tribute to the diamond fraternity that in their industry, a word is a word. In some other industries, even a contract isn’t worth the paper it’s written on. Here, the spoken word is deemed to be binding and irrevocable. Interestingly, the “Mazel and Brocha” principle has been upheld in arbitration cases throughout the world.

This week’s Torah portion, Matot, opens with an injunction about the sanctity of our words: “And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes . . . if a man takes a vow . . . he shall not desecrate his word; whatever issues from his mouth he shall do . . .” (Numbers 30:2-3).

A word is a word. Promises are promises. And the words we utter are sacred and inviolate. If we disregard what we say, we have profaned and desecrated our words. That is why many people are careful to add the words bli neder—“without vowing”—whenever they say something that might be construed as a vow, so that, should they be prevented from fulfilling what they expressed their intention to do, this would not constitute the grave offense of violating a vow. This, of course, in no way diminishes the regard we hold for our words, and the need to carry out one’s promises even if one stipulated that it is not a vow.

The question is: Why was this commandment given to the “heads of the tribes”? Surely, it applies to each and every one of us. A simple answer is that since it is usually leaders who make the most promises, it is they who need the most cautioning.

Politicians are infamous for campaign promises, which—once they are elected—are rarely fulfilled. They tell about a candidate who promised to lower taxes if he were elected. As soon as he took office, he raised taxes. When he was challenged by the people about his unkept promise, he actually admitted that he had lied. The naïve electorate thought that was quite a genuine confession, and promptly decided that he was the most honest politician they had ever met. We are a gullible people indeed.

Many books have been published on the subject of business ethics. While there are a great many laws and nuances to this theme, at the end of the day, the acid test of business ethics is, “Did you keep your word?” Did you carry out your commitments, or did you duck and dive around them? It makes no difference how other companies are behaving. It matters little whether our competitors are corrupt. We must honor our promises, and that is the ultimate bottom line.

Whether in our business relationships or in the tzedakah pledges we make to the synagogue or to other charities, our word should be our bond. Even if we are worried about the immediate financial costs, we can be assured that, with the passage of time, the reputation we will acquire by speaking truthfully and keeping our word will more than compensate any short-term losses. Leave the

spin doctoring to the politicians. A Jew’s word should be sacred.

by Rabbi Yossy Goldman

FORGING AHEAD, LEADING THE WAY

Have you ever traveled to Marah, Etham or Elim? Perhaps Succoth, on the way to Rameses? Probably not; after all, these ancient pit stops have not been on anyone’s recent trekking itinerary.

Parshat Massei covers the years that the nation of Israel lived and traveled in the desert. In it, we hear details about the 40-year journey among the sand dunes and arid landscapes.

The details are plentiful. The Israelites traveled on the day following Passover, as they left auspiciously before the eyes of the Egyptians. From there, they camped at the edge of the desert. They camped at places where there were “12 springs of water and 70 palm trees,” and alternatively they lodged at places where there was no water to drink. They sojourned in many corners of the land—42 stops in all. Talk about a weary group of pilgrims! Under the leadership of Moses, these travelers confronted some tough conditions. Sometimes they were frustrated, often they complained, but they made it through. From this Parshah we come to understand that Moses’ leadership will end very soon. We see final preparations being made for this event, including listing the boundaries of the Land and setting up the rules for inheriting it. For 40 years, Moses was at the helm—inspiring, educating and schooling these wanderers. Soon, they will be on their own. So the questions remain: Did the nation of Israel transform? Have the people integrated

July 28, 2019 – 25 Tammuz, 5779

Passing of Rabbi Aharon Berachia of Modina (1639). Rabbi Aharon Berachia ben Moshe of Modina (? - 1639) was an Italian Kabbalist and a student of Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano. At the request of the Burial Society at Mantua, he instituted rites for them. The author of many Kabbalistic works, he is perhaps best known for his work *Ma'abar Yabbok*, which contains mystical dissertations on purity and holiness. He also wrote additional prayers to be offered for the sick and the dead, as well as a code of conduct for their treatment. Many of the prayers recited at the gravesites of the deceased were composed by him. Tradition has it that an angel called a "maggid" would come and study with him, similar to the angel that would visit Rabbi Yosef Caro.

July 30, 2019 – 27 Tammuz, 5779

Third Expulsion from France (1322). After having been allowed back into France in the year 1315 (after the expulsion in 1306 by Philip IV), the Jews were once again expelled from France by Charles IV, who thus broke the pledge made by his predecessors in 1315 that the Jews would be able to stay in France for at least 12 years.

July 31, 2019 – 28 Tammuz, 5779

Passing of "Yismach Moshe" (1841). Tammuz 28 is the *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1759-1841) of Uhely, Hungary, author of *Yismach Moshe* and patriarch of the Hungarian Chassidic dynasties.

Passing of Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1886). Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1804-1886) was born in Uzhhorod (Ungvar) in the Carpathian region of the Habsburg Empire (now Ukraine). When he was eight years old, Shlomo's father, Rabbi Yosef, passed way, and Ungvar's chief rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Heller, assumed legal guardianship of Shlomo. In 1830, he abandoned his work as a wine merchant and accepted the position of Rabbi of Brezovica (Brezevitz). In 1849, he returned to Ungvar to serve as a rabbinical judge. Realizing that the average Jew required a basic knowledge of practical halachah, Rabbi Ganzfried compiled the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, an abbreviated digest of Jewish law. work which has been translated into many languages.

August 1, 2019 – 29 Tammuz, 5779

Passing of Rashi (1105). Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known as "Rashi", passed away on the 29th of Tammuz of the year 4865 from creation (1105 CE). Rashi was born in Troyes, France, in 1040. His commentaries on the Torah, Prophets and Talmud are universally accepted as the most basic tool for the understanding of these texts for schoolchild and scholar alike. Numerous commentaries have been authored on his commentary. In his famed "Rashi talks", the Lubavitcher Rebbe repeatedly demonstrated how Rashi's "simple meaning of the text" style enfolds many layers of meaning, often resolving profound difficulties in the text and presenting new, innovative interpretations with a simple word choice or rephrasing of a Midrashic passage.

August 2, 2019 – 1 Av, 5779

Passing of Aaron (1274 BCE). Aaron the first High Priest, brother of Moses and Miriam, passed away at age 123 on the 1st of Av of the year 2487 from creation (1274 BCE). This is the only *yahrzeit* (date of passing) explicitly mentioned in the Torah (Numbers 33:38).

lessons learned? And are they ready to become independent, mature, individuated human beings, leading themselves through their life journeys?

Four decades in the desert was a powerful training ground. In Judaism, the number 40 means the completion of something. Once it is completed, it is left behind; in its place emerges something new. Thus, 40 represents the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one.

In this case, Moses led his flock through years and years of exhilarating highs and some painful lows. It took 40 days to receive the Torah, but it took 40 years to absorb, understand and internalize the depth of our blueprint for life. During this time, there were those many "stops" along our journey. We were passing through unknown territory, exposing ourselves to the desert elements. We were grasping, stretching ourselves as a nation and as individuals. We were shedding old skin and inhabiting a new one. All the while, our leader was there to support, instruct, and help peel off the sun-soaked layers.

But then he would leave us. And we would be on our own, with new skin in perhaps a new desert.

Every human being is on a journey. Often, especially in the beginning, we find ourselves connected to a guide or a leader. Whether it be a parent, teacher, sibling or friend, we are accompanied by those who have some experience and wisdom under their belts. They know full well that the "stops" we encounter—the different individual details of our journey—connect into a complete, unique picture.

Developmentally, there are times where we need to be guided and mentored: childhood, adolescence, when we are acquiring a new skill set, when we find ourselves lost.

On the other hand, there are times, when in order grow, we need to lead and position ourselves as advisors and pathfinders.

Interestingly, at age 40 (the time midlife emerges), we often find ourselves in this very position. Shedding that old skin; rebirthing; starting new endeavors; sojourning into unfamiliar, exciting lands and expanses. We have had many stops; we have transcended. Now, it's time for new skin.

Whether it takes a little more or a little less than 40 years, our journey through the desert of life is filled with pauses and cessations. We traverse our land and experience all the details that create the composite we inhabit. We are led by many mentors, but ultimately we are meant to take the lead, forging a path onward towards the future—and eternity. Parshat Massei gives us a glimpse into this process.

By Karen Wolfers-Rapaport

REMINDERS! Please remember to file the paperwork for the Fast of Av (August 10-11). Also, please begin working with your Rabbi/Chaplain to ensure the paperwork is being processed for Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah order forms are due by August 23rd