

Torah Weekly

11 – 17 August, 2019
10 Av – 16 Av, 5779
Torah:

Deuteronomy 3:23 - 7:11
Haftorah: Isaiah 40:1-26
PARSHAT VA'ETCHANAN

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 & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah 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.

THE NEVER ENDING VOICE

When the Ten Commandments are repeated in the Torah as part of Moses' review of the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness, Moses describes how G-d spoke those words in "a mighty voice that did not end" (Deuteronomy 5:19). One of the explanations offered by Rashi is that Moses is contrasting G-d's voice with human voices. The finite voice of a human being, even a Pavarotti, will fade and falter. It cannot go on forever. But the voice of the Almighty did not end, did not weaken. It remained strong throughout.

Is this all the great prophet had to teach us about the voice of G-d? That it was a powerful baritone? That it resonated? Is the greatness of the Infinite One that he didn't suffer from shortness of breath, that He didn't need a few puffs of Ventolin? Is this a meaningful motivation for the Jews to accept the Torah?

Moses was the greatest of all prophets. He foresaw what no other prophet could see. Perhaps he saw his people becoming caught up in the civilization of ancient Greece, in the beauty, culture, philosophy and art of the day. And they might question, is Torah still relevant?

Perhaps he foresaw Jews empowered by the Industrial Revolution, where they might have thought Torah to be somewhat backward. Or, maybe it was during the Russian Revolution that faith and religion were positively primitive. Perhaps Moses saw our own generation with its satellites and space shuttles, television and technology. And he saw young people questioning whether Torah still

speaks to them. And so Moses tells us that the voice that thundered from Sinai was no ordinary voice. The voice that proclaimed the Ten Commandments was a voice that was not only powerful at the time, but one that "did not end." It still rings out, it still resonates, it still speaks to each of us in every generation and in every part of the world.

Revolutions may come and go but revelation is eternal. The voice of Sinai continues to proclaim eternal truths that never become passé or irrelevant. Honor Your Parents, revere them, look after them in their old age instead of abandoning them to some decrepit old age home. Live moral lives; do not tamper with the sacred fiber of family life, be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. Dedicate one day every week and keep that day holy. Turn your back on the rat race and rediscover your humanity and your children. Don't be guilty of greed, envy, dishonesty or corruption.

Are these ideas and values dated? Are these commandments tired, stale or irrelevant? On the contrary. They speak to us now as perhaps never before. The G-dly voice has lost none of its strength, none of its majesty. The mortal voice of man declines and fades into oblivion. Politicians and spin-doctors come and go, but the heavenly sound reverberates down the ages. Torah is truth and truth is forever. The voice of G-d shall never be stilled.

by Rabbi Yossy Goldman

WHO'S GONNA KNOW?

There is a story in the Talmud about a rabbi who had purchased a donkey from an Arab and subsequently found a

large precious jewel in its saddlebag. Purportedly over objections of his students, the rabbi held fast to the Torah law of returning lost objects and brought the jewel back to the Arab, who effusively praised the rabbi for his integrity and honesty—and upon his G-d, who so commands it.

Once I was loading groceries into my car, and I realized that a case of water that I had put on the lower rack of my shopping cart hadn't been scanned and paid for. With me was a friend who had needed a ride to the market, and she suggested that I just keep the water. "Who's gonna know?" she reasoned. Remembering the story of the rabbi and the lost jewel, however, I returned to the supermarket, back to the same cashier who had checked me out, and explained what had happened. And then I waited. For the heaps of praise for me—and for my God, who instructs me to act with the utmost integrity and honesty. Instead, the cashier wordlessly and without so much as changing the expression on her face scanned the case of water and waited for me to slide my credit card. This wasn't exactly the reaction I was hoping for, but I had to laugh at myself. Wow, Hanna, you were expecting a congressional medal of honor ... for not stealing? And if this behavior made no impression on the cashier, who, after all, had nothing to gain by it, was it noted, I wondered, in the Heavenly annals above?

The Need for External Validation. While we hope that someone, somewhere, takes notice whenever we "do the right thing," as long as we are driven by the need for that

external recognition, we are vulnerable and can be inconsistent. For example, whenever possible, I try to make way for drivers who need to get in my lane or make turns, sometimes incurring the anger of drivers behind me as I hold up traffic momentarily. But when that driver then fails to acknowledge my "kindness" by so much as a wave of the hand, I feel "used." Such disappointments can lead to thoughts as silly as "I was nice for nothing" to shifting my behavior in relation to other people or external events. That's not a good thing.

The Case for Internal Validation. And so, returning a case of water to the supermarket shouldn't be about scoring brownie points in heaven or even getting any acknowledgment here on earth. The deepest answer to the question "Who's gonna know?" is me. I would have known that I had acted inappropriately. I would have known that my behavior was out of sync with my G-d-given values. And I would have known that I was making the world a tiny bit darker. In the Torah portion, Va'etchanan, Moses has only a few weeks left to teach and inspire the Jewish people, who were about to cross over to the Land of Israel, without him. Like a father imparting his last words of wisdom to a child who is about to journey away from home, so did Moses teach the Jewish people the deepest lesson of them all: "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One." And so should we strive to be. One with G-d. Inside and out. No matter what. And this applies to when we get what we want, and even, if not more so, when we don't. Keep in mind that Moses had wanted to enter the Land of Israel more than anything. But he accepted that it was not meant to be. And rather than being bitter or hurt, he focused on the need for unity among the Jewish people and the unity of the Jewish people with G-d. Unlike living in the miraculous and protected cocoon of the desert, where G-d overtly provided everything for the Jewish people, they were going to be living so-called "normal lives." They would be on the battlefield, in the marketplace and in the privacy of their own homes. Unlike being under the watchful eye of Moses, the Jewish people would find themselves in many situations where they could reasonably ask themselves, "Who's gonna know?" Moses wanted every individual to have the strength of inner conviction to be able to answer that question unwaveringly: "I will." And, of course, "G-d will."

Internalize & Actualize: What is something you have done or do that you hope others don't know about? If you were to get caught in the "act" of thinking, saying or doing this thing, how would it make you feel? What is something you have done or do that you do because it is inherently good, positive or helpful? How does it make you feel when you do this? Does it matter to you if others know that you are doing this? Commit to adding one positive action to your day that you do for another person with complete anonymity. You are doing this solely because it is positive and not for external recognition. What is it that you can begin doing immediately, and how will it help the other? Record over the course of the week how it makes you feel. (It can be small, like getting someone a coffee at work or making sure to say "good morning" to someone you don't always speak to ...). *By Hanna Perlberger*

REMINDERS! Please work with your Rabbi/Chaplain to ensure Rosh Hashanah order forms are processed by August 23rd

August 11, 2019 – 10 Av, 5779

Holy Temple Burns (69). The Romans set the Temple aflame on the afternoon of Av 9 (see yesterday's Today in Jewish History and it continued to burn through Av 10. For this reasons, some of the mourning practices of the "Nine Days" are observed through the morning hours of Av 10. Because of the holiness of Shabbat, the Fast of the Ninth of Av ("Tish'ah B'Av") is observed today, Av 10. The fast mourns the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel

August 12, 2019 – 11 Av, 5779

Passing of R. Hillel of Paritch (1864). R. Hillel of Paritch was one of the outstanding followers of the second and third Rebbes of Lubavitch, R. DovBer and R. Menachem Mendel Schneersohn. He was an exceptional scholar and served as rabbi of Paritch and then of Babroisk. Additionally, he would make a yearly visit on behalf of the Rebbe to the Jewish colonies in the Kherson region, teaching them Chassidut and inspiring their residents to increase in their observance of the mitzvot. R. Hillel was known for his scrupulous adherence to every detail of Jewish law. He authored Pelach Harimon, a collection of sermons on chassidic philosophy, and composed a number of heartfelt tunes sung often at farbrengens until today.

August 13, 2019 - 12 Av, 5779

Nachmanides' Disputation (1263). By order of King James I of Aragon (Spain), Nachmanides (Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, 1194-1270) was compelled to participate in a public debate, held in the king's presence, against the Jewish convert to Christianity, Pablo Christiani. His brilliant defense of Judaism and refutations of Christianity's claims served as the basis of many such future disputations through the generations. Because his victory was an insult to the king's religion, Nachmanides was forced to flee Spain. He came to Jerusalem, where he found just a handful of Jewish families living in abject poverty, and revived the Jewish community there. The synagogue he built in the Old City is in use today, and is perhaps the oldest standing synagogue in the world

August 14, 2019 - 13 Av, 5779

Passing of R. Nassan Nata Schapiro (1633). R. Nassan Nata Schapiro was a saintly scholar who was proficient in both Talmud and kabbalah. He served as rabbi of Cracow, and authored Megaleh Amukos, a kabbalistic Torah commentary.

August 16, 2019 - 15 Av, 5779

End of Dying in Desert (1274 BCE). In wake of the incident of the "Spies," in which the generation that came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership demonstrated their unpreparedness for the task of conquering and settling the Holy Land, G-d decreed that entire generation would die out in the desert. After 38 years of wandering through the wilderness the dying finally ended, and a new generation of Jews stood ready to enter the Holy Land. It was the 15th of Av of the year 2487 from creation (1274 BCE)