

Torah Weekly

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May 10-16, 2020
16-22 Iyar, 5780
Torah: Behar-Bechukotai:
Leviticus 25:1 - 27:34
Haftorah:
Jeremiah 16:19 - 17:14
**PARSHAT BEHAR-
BECHUKOTAI**

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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A Leader with Humility?

The two Parshahs of Behar (Leviticus 25) and Bechukotai (ibid. 26-27), which on many years are joined into a single Shabbat, share a very common theme, and actually reinforce each other. *Behar*, which means "on the mountain," refers to Mount Sinai, "known as the smallest of all mountains." It is interesting to note that the Torah describes Moses as "the most humble one on earth." As the 40-year leader of the Jewish nation, Moses obviously had many outstanding and stellar qualities, but his humility merited his receiving the Torah and transferring it to the Jewish people. How was Moses so humble? Wasn't he cognizant of his incredible status relative to the Jewish people and G-d? How could an individual as powerful and influential as he feel himself to be of lesser value than anyone else around? Being a leader of the entire Jewish nation requires forcefulness and a commanding nature—qualities seemingly incompatible with humility. The commentaries explain that Moses did recognize the great attributes that made him the intermediary who connected G-d with the Jewish people. However, he did not recognize them as his personal accomplishments; rather, he considered all of his

greatness to be a gift from G-d. Moreover, his humility did not contradict his ability to lead his people. On the contrary, as a result of his lack of arrogance and self-pride, he gave himself over to G-d and His mission. All that Moses did was a reflection of the divine will; he dedicated every ounce of energy to that purpose. This harmony between humility and strong conviction is hinted at in the names of this week's Parshahs.

The Paradox of the Low Mountain The Talmud tells us that when G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, there was a debate among the mountains, each one vying for the coveted spot from which the Torah would be given. Mount Sinai was chosen because it was smallest of all mountains. But if G-d wanted to emphasize humility, why did he give the Torah on a mountain? He should have given it in a valley, or on the plains. This teaches us about modesty and pride: A very strong personality can have an unassuming nature only by realizing that talents, genius and skill come directly from G-d. As the first paragraph in the Code of Jewish Law tells us, "Do not be embarrassed by those who mock you." We, as Jews, do not have the luxury of being like a valley or a plain—of having our height and pride sapped from us. We should

be like a mountain—and elevate ourselves with a strong identity. Still, we must retain a sense of humility: we must be a mountain, but a low mountain.

Like Letters in Stone This ties into the theme of the Parshah of Bechukotai. The Hebrew word *chukim*, from which the name of the portion is derived, is often translated as "statutes," referring to those commandments whose explanations defy mortal logic. Chassidic thought explains that the word is related to *chakikah*, which means "engraving." Our relationship to G-d's commandments cannot be like words that are written on parchment, as the parchment and ink are two separate entities. Our goal has to be to relate to G-d's will like letters etched in stone: the lettering and stone are one unified entity. When we sense this unity, and truly bond with G-d, we cannot help but be humbled. *By Rabbi Shraga Sherman*

Perspective A man once came to Rabbi DovBer, the famed "Maggid of Mezeritch," with a question.

"The Talmud tells us," asked the man, "that 'A person is supposed to bless G-d for the bad just as he blesses Him for the good.' How is this humanly possible? Had our sages said that one must accept without complaint or

bitterness whatever is ordained from Heaven—this I can understand. I can even accept that, ultimately, everything is for the good, and that we are to bless and thank G-d also for the seemingly negative developments in our lives. But how can a human being possibly react to what he experiences as bad in exactly the *same way* he responds to what he experiences as good? How can a person be as grateful for his troubles as he is for his joys?" Rabbi DovBer replied: "To find an answer to your question, you must go see my disciple, Reb Zusha of Anipoli. Only he can help you in this matter." Reb Zusha received his guest warmly, and invited him to make himself at home. The visitor decided to observe Reb Zusha's conduct before posing his question. Before long, he concluded that his host truly exemplified the Talmudic dictum which so puzzled him. He couldn't think of anyone who suffered more hardship in his life than did Reb Zusha: a frightful pauper, there was never enough to eat in Reb Zusha's home, and his family was beset with all sorts of afflictions and illnesses. Yet Reb Zusha was always good-humored and cheerful, and constantly expressing his gratitude to the Almighty for all His kindness. But what was his secret? How does he do it? The visitor finally decided to pose his question. So one day, he said to his host: "I wish to ask you something. In fact, this is the purpose of my visit to you—our Rebbe advised me that you can provide me with the answer."

"What is your question?" asked Reb Zusha. The visitor repeated what he had asked of the Maggid. "You raise a good point," said Reb Zusha, after thinking the matter through. "But why did our Rebbe send you to me? How would I know? He should have sent you to someone who has experienced suffering..." *From Once Upon A Chassid (Kehot, 1994), by Rabbi Yanki Tauber.*

Sunday: May 10, 2020 --- 16 Iyar, 5780

The Manna (1313 BCE)

Manna, the "bread from heaven" which sustained the Children of Israel during their 40 years of wandering through the desert, began to fall on the 16th of Iyar of the year 2448 from creation—one month after the Exodus.

Monday: May 11, 2020 --- 17 Iyar, 5780

Passing of "Noda B'Yehudah" (1793)

The 17th of Iyar marks the passing of Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713-1793), author of the Talmudic-Halachic work Noda B'Yehuda and Chief Rabbi of Prague. His famous "Letter of Peace" helped to heal the rift between the great sages Rabbi Yaakov Emden and Rabbi Yonasan Eibeshutz, which threatened to irreparably divide the Jewish people.

Tuesday: May 12, 2020 --- 18 Iyar, 5780

Plague among R. Akiva's Disciples Ends (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.

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."

Wednesday: May 13, 2020 --- 19 Iyar 5780

Passing of Maharam (1293)

Renowned Talmudist Rabbi Meir ("Maharam") of Rothenburg (1215?-1293) died in his cell in the Ensisheim fortress, where he had been imprisoned for ten years in an attempt to exact a huge ransom from the Jewish community. The money had been raised, but Rabbi Meir refused to have himself redeemed, lest this encourage the hostage taking of other Jewish leaders.

Thursday: May 14, 2020 --- 20 Iyar, 5780

Journey From Sinai (1312 BCE)

On the 20th of Iyar 2449 (1312 BCE)--nearly a year after the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai--the Children of Israel departed their encampment near the Mountain. They resumed their journey when the pillar of cloud rose for the first time from over the "Tabernacle--the divine sign that would signal the resumption of their travels throughout their encampments and journeys over the next 38 years, until they reached the eastern bank of the Jordan River on the eve of their entry into the Holy Land.

Shabbat: May 16, 2020 --- 22 Iyar, 5780

Shabbat Commanded (1313 BCE)

Following the descent of the manna (the miraculous "Bread from Heaven" that sustained the Israelites in the desert), G-d commanded the Children of Israel to keep the Shabbat. This Shabbat was the 22nd of Iyar, of the year 2448 from Creation (1313 BCE) On that Friday morning, enough manna fell for two days' worth of meals, as on the Shabbat it would be prohibited to gather the manna. The "Two Loaves" of challah bread (*Lechem Mishneh*) that form the foundation of our Shabbat meal are in commemoration of the double portion of manna.