

Torah Weekly

May 17-23, 2020
23-29 Iyar, 5780
Torah: Bamidbar: Numbers
1:1 - 4:20
Haftorah: Hosea 2:1-22
PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

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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Wisdom From the Wilderness

“Numbers” may be the name by which the fourth of the Five Books of Moses is commonly called, but in the Hebrew original it is known as Bamidbar, or “In the Wilderness.” It is interesting to note that this Parshah is always read immediately before the festival of Shavuot, “the season of the giving of the Torah.” What is the connection? The Sages teach that it is not enough for G-d to give us the Torah; we have to be ready to receive the Torah. What makes us worthy recipients of this most precious and infinite gift from G-d? This is where the “wilderness” idea comes in. A wilderness is a no-man’s land. It is ownerless and barren. Just as a desert is empty and desolate, so does a student of Torah need to know that he is but an “empty vessel.” Humility is a vital prerequisite if we are to successfully absorb divine wisdom. As long as we are full of ourselves and our preconceived notions, we will not be able to assimilate and integrate Torah into our being. Even if are already somewhat accomplished in our Torah studies, we still need to remember—as the Kotzker Rebbe put it—that “as much as you know, you are still an undeveloped wilderness.” Then there is the idea that an ownerless wilderness is there for anyone to stake his claim. No person or group of people has a monopoly on Torah. It belongs to each and every single Jew, not just the rabbis or the *yeshivah* students, or the religiously observant.

“The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the entire Congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4). While we acknowledge that there is much hard work ahead of us if we are to acquire the Torah and make it ours, we also know that with diligence and effort we can succeed. Indeed, some of our finest Torah scholars throughout the generations have hailed from the simple, ordinary folk—tailors, cobblers and the like. Maimonides, in his *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of Torah Study 3:1), states: “With three crowns was Israel adorned—the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of royalty. The priesthood was the privilege of Aaron . . . royalty was the privilege of King David . . . the crown of Torah is there ready and waiting for all of Israel . . . and it is the greatest crown of all.” However, while Torah may be “free for all” as a desert wilderness, we must surrender ourselves to it, emptying ourselves of our ego and our preconceptions, rather than attempting to adjust it to our own circumstances and lifestyles. And then, like the empty and uninhabited wilderness, the Torah personality may well find himself alone and isolated. We might express our strongly held values and beliefs, only to discover that we stand alone. We might display the courage of our convictions and find ourselves, like Abraham, “on the other side” of the whole world. Our principles may well prove unpopular, especially should they step on toes or upset apple carts. No matter. Being true to G-d and

His Torah means standing by it, under any and every circumstance. May the literal title of our Parshah of Bamidbar, and the many lessons it conveys, serve as a fitting prelude for the beautiful festival of Shavuot. May we receive the Torah with joy and earnestness, so that this important festival will be both memorable and meaningful. *By Rabbi Yossy Goldman Covered For the Journey* If the book of Numbers describes the Jewish journey through the wilderness, surely it must also contain a message pertinent to the journey each and every Jew traverses. Through the journey of life, we too must overcome the challenges of the wilderness in order to reach our goal, fulfill our purpose and arrive at our destination. The book of Numbers begins with the Israelites camped at Sinai Desert, and concludes with the people camped at the bank of the Jordan River, opposite Jericho, ready to cross over into the promised land. It begins in an orderly fashion, but turns chaotic very quickly, as time and again the people reject Moses’ leadership, lose their faith in G-d and fail to keep sight of their goal. Only at the end of the book, almost 40 years after the chaos erupts, do the people triumph over the obstacles and reach their destination, the entrance to the promised land. When the Israelites camped in the desert, the Tabernacle was always in the center, surrounded by four camps of three tribes. When it was time to travel, the Levites would deconstruct the Tabernacle, cover the ark and the other

vessels, and the entire group would travel in the same formation in which they camped. During its journey, the ark was to be covered with no less than three coverings: *When the camp is about to travel, Aaron and his sons shall come and take down the dividing screen; with it they shall cover the Ark of the Testimony. They shall place upon it a covering of tachash skin, and on top of that they shall spread a cloth of pure blue wool. Then they shall put its poles in place.* (Numbers 4:5–6.) Like our ancestors in the desert, our lives can be divided into two periods. There are times when we are “camped.” We are tranquil and rested, free of inner turmoil and struggle. At those times, our figurative temple is constructed and our ark is revealed; we experience spiritual clarity and we feel connected to the Divine wisdom of the Torah. And then there are moments when we “journey,” moving through the wilderness of our lives, ark covered, searching for clarity, understanding and the embrace of the Divine. In those moments we ask ourselves, why? Why the darkness? Why the challenge? Why isn’t the Divine goodness obvious to us? The book of Numbers provides clarity. When the Jews were camped, life was peaceful and spiritually fulfilling. The wisdom of the Torah represented by the ark was accessible. Yet the people were stationary. They did not grow. They were not forced to journey towards their goal. The Torah teaches that in order for the people to journey, the ark must be covered. For a person to truly grow, he must be challenged to reach his hidden potential; he must learn to forge ahead even when his ark is covered and when his inner inspiration is asleep. The same way as the ark required three coverings in order to travel, G-d covers the soul with three layers: it is wrapped in a human body, surrounded by the evil inclination, and placed in a culture foreign to its spiritual source. When the soul is in heaven, it is like an angel, surrounded by the light of G-d, its ark revealed. But G-d wants more. He wants the soul to grow, to be transformed from a “stationary” to a “traveling” soul. Only when the soul manages to prevail over the concealment of its inner evil inclination and the outside forces of darkness does it “journey.” Only then does the soul break free of its limitation and touch the infinity of the Divine. *Based on the teachings of the Rebbe, Likkutei Sichot, vol. 8, pp. 8ff. By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

Sunday, May 17, 2020 --- 23 Iyar, 5780

Water from a Rock at Rephidim (1313 BCE)

The Children of Israel arrived at Rephidim on the 23rd of Iyar, 1313 BCE -- 38 days after their exodus from Egypt. Rephidim was desert land and waterless, the people grumbled that they and their flocks were in danger of dying of thirst. G-d commanded Moses to take the elders of the people to a rock which he was to hit with his staff. Moses hit the rock and from the dry stone, a well sprang forth.

Wednesday, May 20, 2020 --- 26 Iyar, 5780

R. Saadia Gaon (942)

Iyar 26 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Saadia Gaon (892?-942), author of *Emunot V'deot*, one of the earliest works of Jewish philosophy. ("Gaon" was the title given to the leading Sages of Babylonia in the post-Talmudic period)

Wednesday, May 20, 2020 --- 26 Iyar, 5780

Ramchal (1747)

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (known by the acronym "Ramchal"), philosopher, kabbalist and ethicist, was born in Padua, Italy, in 1707. At a very early age, he began to study Kabbalah under the tutelage of Rabbi Moshe Zacuto, one of the foremost Kabbalists of his generation. While still in his twenties, he authored numerous works of Torah scholarship, including *Derech Hashem* ("The way of G-d"), a systematic exposition of the fundamentals of Judaism. In 1735, Luzzatto left his native Italy and, avoiding public life, set up shop as a gem cutter in Amsterdam. His fame nevertheless caught up with him, and in 1740, (at the turn of the Jewish century 5500), he published his most famous work, *Mesilat Yesharim* ("Path of the Just"). Like many other great men of his age, Luzzatto longed for the Holy Land, and in 1743 he settled in Acco. He was not to enjoy a long stay there, however, and on Iyar 26, 5507 (1747), at the age of 39, he and his entire family died in a plague. According to most traditions, he was buried in Tiberias, next to the tomb of Rabbi Akiva.

Friday, May 22, 2020 --- 28 Iyar, 5780

Passing of Samuel (877 BCE)

The prophet Samuel (931-877 BCE) was one of the most important figures in Jewish history; our sages describe him as the equivalent of "Moses and Aaron combined." Samuel was the last of the *Shoftim* ("Judges") who led the people of Israel in the four centuries between the passing of Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy, and the author of the biblical books of "Judges", "Samuel" and "Ruth" Samuel was born in the year 2830 from creation (931 BCE) after his barren mother, Chanah (Hannah), prayed for a child at the Sanctuary at Shiloh and pledged, "O L-rd of hosts... If You will give Your maidservant a man child, I shall dedicate him to G-d all the days of his life..." (I Samuel 1:11). At age two, his mother brought him to Shiloh in fulfillment of her vow, where he was raised by Eli the High Priest; shortly thereafter, Samuel had his first prophetic communication (described in I Samuel 3). In 890 BCE, Samuel succeeded Eli as leader of the Jewish people. After ten years under Samuel's guidance, the people approached him with the request, "Appoint for us a king... like all the nations around us." Samuel disapproved of their request, believing that the people of Israel should be subject only to G-d and not to any mortal king; but G-d instructed him to do as the people ask. Samuel then anointed (879 BCE) Saul as the first king of Israel. When Saul disobeyed G-d during the war on Amalek, Samuel proclaimed David the legitimate king in Saul's stead. Shortly thereafter, Samuel passed away in his birthplace, Ramah, in the hills of Judah, on the 28th of Iyar of the year 2884 from creation (877 BCE).

Shabbat, May 23, 2020 --- 29 Iyar, 5780

Passing of R. Meir of Premishlan (1850)

R. Meir of Premishlan was a famous chassidic master and a noted miracle worker. Although he lived in poverty, he exerted himself tirelessly for the needy and the suffering. His divine inspiration and his ready wit have become legendary.