

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

May 24-30, 2020

1-7 Sivan, 5780

Torah: Parshat Naso, 1st Portion
(Numbers 4:21-4:33)

Shavuot Day 1:

Exodus 19:1 - 20:23, Numbers 28:26-

31, Haftarah: Ezekiel 1:1-28;

Ezekiel 3:12

Shavuot Day 2:

Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17, Numbers

28:26-31, Haftarah: Habakkuk 2:20-

3:19

SHABBOS SHAVUOT

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 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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The Most Precious Gift

The question has been asked time and again: what exactly is the significance of the Sinai Event? Our Patriarchs studied and taught Torah centuries before the Torah was "given" to the Israelites on the holiday of Shavuot, and—according to Talmudic tradition—our forefathers observed all the mitzvot as well. Yet the "giving of the Torah" at Mount Sinai is considered perhaps the most decisive moment in the history of our nation, a nation whose storied history contains many seminal events. Actually, the key word is the *giving* of the Torah. Before that fateful sixth of Sivan, we were privy to the wisdom of the Torah, but it did not belong to us. We can compare the Torah to a magnificent palace: before the Sinai Event we were given unlimited access to tour its rooms and enjoy its beautiful architecture and artwork; at Sinai we were handed the deed and keys to the property. The Talmud relates a fascinating episode which powerfully illustrates this point. Rabbi Eliezer the Great disagreed with Rabbi Joshua and the other sages of that generation regarding the susceptibility to impurity of a certain type of stove. Rabbi Eliezer vigorously defended his position, but to no avail—the rabbis refused to accept his position. At one point, a Heavenly Voice reverberated in the study hall: "Why do you argue with Rabbi Eliezer? The *halachah* (final ruling) *always* follows his opinion!" Rabbi Joshua then

arose and exclaimed, "The Torah is not in Heaven!" The Torah was given to *us* at Sinai, and therein it is clearly stated that "the majority prevails." Since the majority of the earthly sages concurred with Rabbi Joshua's opinion, the opinion of supernal beings – indeed, the opinion of the Almighty Himself!—is immaterial. Amazingly, the *halachah* was established according to the majority opinion—and Rabbi Eliezer the Great was excommunicated for refusing to accept the ruling! This, however, does not completely explain the significance of Shavuot. Does this holiday boil down to bragging rights? Does it really matter who "owns" the title to Torah? As long as we are permitted to study Torah, would it be such a great cause of consternation if G-d actually had a say in determining the *halachah*?! King Solomon likens the revelation at Sinai to our wedding day—the day G-d chose us from amongst the nations and wedded us. On the occasion of His marriage, the groom, who was (and remains) madly in love with His bride, could find no greater dowry to give than the Torah, His most precious possession, His crown jewel, His joy and pride. Furthermore, He didn't suffice with making this treasure available for our use; He lovingly gave this gift completely and unconditionally. This is why Shavuot is so special. It commemorates the day when G-d gave us the most precious jewel in his treasure house. "Fortunate are the people whose lot is thus!" G-d's love for us drove Him to give us

his most precious possession. Now how do we reciprocate? We have the two days of Shavuot to contemplate the response to this question...
By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

Keep Your Balance

What is the definition of a well-balanced individual? One who has a chip on both shoulders! In Exodus we read the Ten Commandments. The great revelation at Sinai saw Moses come down the mountain bearing the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments engraved on them. As we know, the two tablets were divided into two columns—the mitzvahs between humankind and G-d, and the commandments governing our human relations. The one side was devoted to our responsibilities to G-d, such as faith and Shabbat, while the other side dealt with our interpersonal duties, e.g., no murder, adultery and thievery. The message that so many seem to forget is that both these areas are sacred, both come directly from G-d, and both form the core of Torah law and what being Jewish is all about. We must be well-balanced Jews. We may not take the liberty of emphasizing one tablet over the other. A healthy, all-around Jew lives a balanced, wholesome life, and is, as the Yiddish expression goes, *gut tzu G-tt un gut tzu leit*—good to G-d and good to people. If you focus on one side of the tablets to the detriment of the other, you walk around like a *hinke'dike*, a handicapped Jew with a bad limp. A good Jew is a well-balanced Jew. This means that it's not good enough to

be *frum* ("religious") on the ritual side of Judaism and free and easy on the *mentschlichkeit* side. You've got to be honest and decent and live with integrity so people will respect you, too. If you are "religious" towards G-d but not fair with people, you can become a fanatical fundamentalist blowing up people in the name of G-d! The same G-d who motivates and inspires us to be G-dly and adhere to a religious code also expects us to be a *mentsch*. There is no doubt whatsoever that it is, in fact, a mitzvah to be a *mentsch*. But neither can we neglect the right side of the tablets. A good Jew cannot simply be a democrat, a humanitarian. Otherwise, why did G-d need Jews altogether? It is not enough for a Jew to be a nice guy. Everyone must be nice. All of humankind is expected to behave honestly and honorably. To be good, moral, ethical and decent is the duty of every human being on the planet. A good Jew must be all of that and then some. He or she must be a good person—and also fulfill our specific Jewish responsibilities, the mitzvahs that are directed to Jews which are uniquely Jewish. I recently came across an interesting statistic on the Ten Commandments. The right-hand tablet, bearing the duties to G-d, consists of 146 words. The left-hand tablet, listing our human responsibilities, has only 26 words. Yet tradition has it that both tablets were filled with writing. There were no big, blank spaces. So how did 26 words equal the space of 146 words? Well, anybody who uses a computer or word processor knows the answer. You simply adjust the font size. You can type in 10-point size or 24-point size. Take your pick. So if we apply that same principle to the tablets, we have a simple solution. The 26 words on the left, reflecting our moral and ethical human responsibilities, were simply a bigger size than the 146 words on the right, reflecting our G-dly, religious responsibilities. So we must never underestimate the importance of the human-relations side of the Ten Commandments. Then again, just so we don't start limping, the very same G-d who said we should be nice also said we should have faith, keep Shabbat (yes, it is one of the Big Ten), kosher, *mikvah*, and the rest of it. In fact, when people say to me, "Rabbi, I'm not that religious, but I do keep the Ten Commandments," I often wonder whether they are actually aware that keeping Shabbat is Commandment No. 4. As we read the Ten Commandments this week, let us resolve to keep our Jewish balance, not to limp or become "one-armed bandits." Please G-d, we will live full, wholesome, rich and well-balanced Jewish lives. Amen. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

Sunday, May 24, 2020 --- 1 Sivan, 2020

Flood Waters Recede (2105 BCE)

150 days after the rains stopped falling in the Great Flood, the raging waters which covered the face of the earth calmed and began to subside at the rate of one cubit every four days (Genesis 8:3; Rashi, *ibid.*)

Tuesday, May 26, 2020 --- 3 Sivan, 2020

Maimonides Arrives in Israel (1165)

On 4 Iyar, 4925 (1165), Maimonides sets sail from Fez, Morocco, to escape Islamic persecution. The journey is fraught with danger, including a storm on 10 Iyar that threatens to capsize his ship. Finally, on 3 Sivan, Maimonides arrives safely in Acco, Israel. He establishes this date as a day of rejoicing, festivities, and gifts to the poor, to be kept by him and his descendants until the end of time (*Charedim* ch. 65 [5744 ed.]).

Wednesday, May 27, 2020 --- 4 Sivan, 2020

Moses Transcribes (first part of) Torah (1313 BCE)

On Sivan 4 of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE)--two days before the revelation at Mount Sinai--Moses wrote down the first 68 chapters of the Torah, from Genesis 1:1 ("In the Beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth") to the Giving of the Torah in Exodus 19 (Exodus 24:4; Rashi *ibid.*).

Friday, May 29, 2020 --- 6 Sivan, 2020

Torah Given (1313 BCE)

On the 6th Sivan of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), seven weeks after the Exodus, G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai. The entire people of Israel (600,000 heads of households and their families), as well as the souls of all future generations of Jews, heard G-d declare the first two of the Ten Commandments and witnessed G-d's communication of the other eight through Moses. Following the revelation, Moses ascended the mountain for 40 days, to receive the remainder of the Torah from G-d. At Sinai, G-d rescinded the "decree" and "divide" (*gezeirah*) that had been in force since the 2nd day of creation separating the spiritual and the physical into two hermetic worlds; from this point on, "the higher realms could descend into the lower realms, and the lower could ascend to the higher." Thus was born the "mitzvah" -- a physical deed that, by virtue of the fact that it is commanded by G-d, brings G-dliness into the physical world.

Passing of King David (837 BCE)

David, a descendent of Judah the son of Jacob as well as of Ruth, a Moabite convert to Judaism, was anointed King of Israel by Samuel in 878 BCE. All future legitimate kings of Israel were David's descendants, as will be Moshiach (the messiah), who will "restore the kingdom of David to its glory of old." David fought many wars, defeating Israel's enemies and securing and expanding its borders. He conquered Jerusalem, purchased the Temple Mount from its Yebusite owner, and prepared the foundation for the Holy Temple (which was built by his son, King Solomon). David served as the head of the *Sanhedrin* and the foremost Torah authority of his generation; he is also the "sweet singer of Israel" who composed the Book of Psalms that for 28 centuries has embodied the joys, sorrows and yearnings of the Jewish people. King David passed away on the 6th of Sivan of the year 837 BCE, age 70.

Passing of Baal Shem Tov (1760)

In 1734, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov ("BeSHT", 1698-1760), who up until that time had lived as a hidden tzaddik, began to publicly disseminate his teachings. While adding nothing "new" to Judaism, he re-emphasized truths and doctrines that had been buried under the hardships of exile: the immense love that G-d has for every Jew, the cosmic significance of every mitzvah a person performs, the divine meaningfulness that resides in every blade of grass, in every event, and in every thought in the universe. He spoke to the downtrodden masses and to the aloof scholars, giving meaning to their existence, and thus joy, and thus life. Many disciples came to imbibe the "inner soul" of Torah from him, and the new movement came to be known as "Chassidism." Rabbi Israel passed away on the 6th of Sivan of 1760, and was succeeded (one year later, on the first anniversary of his passing) by his disciple, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch.