

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

June 28- July 4, 2020
6-12 Tammuz, 5780

Torah: Chukat-Balak:
Numbers 19:1 - 25:9

Haftarah: Micah 5:6 - 6:8

PARSHAT
CHUKAT - BALAK

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).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org



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The Teachings of Aaron

This week's Torah reading tells us of the passing of Aaron, brother of Moses and High Priest of the Jewish people for forty years. The Tanya (*The basic text of Chabad teaching, written more than 200 years ago by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.*) relates that when a *tzaddik*, a righteous person, passes from this world, all his or her spiritual achievements continue to have an effect in the realm of the living. They become a powerful source of blessing for all those "who follow in his way." This means that if we study what Aaron stood for and emulate him to the best of our ability, becoming his devoted disciples, we will benefit from Divine blessing in his merit. And a blessing from G-d is always a good thing... What was Aaron's teaching? We find this clearly expressed in the first chapter of Ethics of the Fathers: "Be amongst the disciples of Aaron—loving peace, pursuing peace, loving ordinary folk and bringing them near to Torah." The Sages tell us that Aaron devoted himself to carrying out the command "love your fellow" to the highest degree. The Midrash relates how he attracted people to the teachings of the Torah. He never got angry if people failed to meet the expectations of Jewish law. He would meet a person who was somewhat lacking in his observance of Judaism and greet him with a smile and a warm reception. On leaving, the man would think to himself: "If Aaron the High Priest greets me so warmly he must think I am a very worthy person. I must

improve myself!" In this way, simply through pleasantness and warmth, Aaron encouraged the Jews of his generation to feel close to the ideals of the Torah. The word used in Ethics of the Fathers for "ordinary folk" is *beriot*, meaning "creatures." This is explained as meaning that Aaron's example was to love everyone including "creatures," that means, people with very negative behaviour, as if their only redeeming feature is that he or she was created by G-d. Yet the path of Aaron is to find the hidden good that exists within all. (*See Tanya, Part 1, ch. 32, 41b.*) The Sages tell us that Aaron worked to bring peace between people in general, and especially between husband and wife. He found ways to patch up quarrels, sometimes by subterfuge: if A and B were in conflict, he would tell A how much B likes him, and tell B that he heard A singing his praises... We can imagine Aaron—a man of infinite sincerity, who stood for peace and love and succeeded in engendering these ideals in the lives of other people. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, whose *yahrtzeit*, the 3rd of Tammuz, is always observed in proximity to this week's Torah reading, had similar goals. Through his teachings and personal example he taught a path of recognizing the inherent potential for good in each person. The Rebbe taught that this wholesome perspective itself strengthens that person's power for good and for positive action. (*See Aryeh Solomon The Educational Teachings of Rabbi*

Menachem Schneerson (Jason Aronson, 2000) The Sages tell us it is through love of one's fellow that the Temple will be restored. By striving to be disciples of the Rebbe in our generation, and of the chain of Sages reaching back to Aaron and Moses in the past, we will bring the Redemption. *By Tali Loewenthal*

Who's Afraid of Big Bad Og?

Believe it or not, there was a time when Moses was afraid. Yes, the greatest leader of all time—the man who fought and vanquished Pharaoh, split the sea, challenged the angels on high for the rights to the Torah—this spiritual colossus was afraid. Who and what could possibly frighten Moses? At the end of the Torah portion of *Chukat* (Numbers 19:1–22:1) we read that G-d reassured Moses, "Do not fear him." Why did Moses need reassuring? The story is this. The Israelites were about to go into battle against Og, king of Bashan, a mighty warrior, a man who was literally a giant. And Moses was afraid to such an extent that the Almighty had to assuage his fears. Why did Og inspire such dread in the great prophet? Surely Moses had dealt with more formidable threats in his career. According to Rashi, the story goes back many years. Og (or, according to some commentaries, the ancestor of the current king) escaped from battle during the days of Abraham. This refugee then came to Abraham and informed him of his nephew Lot's capture in battle. Abraham immediately

went into action, fought the kings who had captured Lot, and successfully rescued him. Says Rashi: Moshe was afraid to do battle with Og, for the merit he had acquired when helping Abraham might stand him in good stead. In other words, the fact that Og had done a kindness to Abraham all those years ago might be considered of such special significance that he would be spiritually protected from harm in the merit of Abraham, the beneficiary of his good deed. But was it really such a good deed? The same Rashi (in his commentary on Genesis 14:13) informs us that Og's motives were not altogether altruistic. Apparently, by telling Abraham that his nephew Lot had been taken captive, Og was actually hoping that Abraham would attempt to rescue his nephew and be killed in battle, so that Og could then take Abraham's beautiful wife, Sarah, for himself. Hardly an act of magnanimous righteousness! Why would Moses be worried about the spiritual merit of conduct tainted by such ulterior motives? The answer, it would seem, is that although Og's motives were far from unselfish, the fact is that he had done Abraham a kindness. Abraham was grateful for the information and was, in fact, successful in saving Lot from his captors. So, although Og's reasons were less than noble, the end result of his deed was good, and Abraham considered it a favor. That's why Moses was afraid that Og's spiritual credits might protect him. And that is why the Almighty needed to put Moses' mind at ease: *Do not fear him, for into your hand have I given him, his entire people and his land.* It is an incredible lesson in the power of *chessed*, acts of loving kindness. That one good turn, performed so many years back and out of sinister motivation, could cause Moses himself so much anxiety is surely proof positive of the awesome and long-term positive effects of a single act of kindness. Clearly, from a spiritual point of view, deeds of goodness and kindness have the power to protect us from harm. Performing a single act of compassion, or helping someone in need, really does have the capacity to shield us. In the end, we are not only helping them, but helping ourselves. Let this story inspire us to be a little more considerate to each other, and a little more helpful to those around us. And may our benevolence protect us and our families from any harm.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Monday, June 29, 2020 --- 7 Tammuz, 5780

Passing of Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz (1805)

Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz of Nikelsburg (1730-1805) was the rabbi of Frankfurt and the author of *Sefer Hafla'ah* and *Sefer HaMikneh* -- commentaries on the Talmud -- and *Panim Yafot*, an exegesis on the Torah. Rabbi Pinchas and his brother Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke were students of the Mezritcher Maggid. They were amongst the first adherents to the Chassidic movement to hold rabbinic posts in Germany. The famed Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known as the Chatam Sofer, considered Rabbi Pinchas to be one of his main teachers.

Purim Ostroh (1792)

The Jewish community of Ostroh (in what is now western Ukraine) was miraculously spared when a Russian army led by General Suvorov attempted to breach its walls, claiming Polish insurgents were present inside. To commemorate the miracle, the day of 7 Tammuz was established as a local day of rejoicing, and a special scroll in which the story was inscribed was read each year on this date.

According to legend, two cannons that struck the great Maharsha synagogue caused no harm. The two cannons were thereupon displayed in the synagogue for all to see. (*Yalkut Volhynia*, issues 2-3)

Tuesday, June 30, 2020 --- 8 Tammuz, 5780

Spanish Inquisition Abolished (1834)

On July 15, 1834, the Office of the Spanish Inquisition was abolished by the Queen Mother Maria Christina, after nearly three and a half centuries. However, the right of public worship (including permission to mark places of worship and advertise religious services) was not granted to the Jews until 1967.

Wednesday, July 1, 2020 --- 9 Tammuz, 5780

Jerusalem Walls Breached (423 BCE)

The Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls of Jerusalem on the 9th of Tammuz in the year 3338 from creation (423 BCE); King Ziddikiah of Judah was captured and taken to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:5. A month later, the capture of Jerusalem was completed with the destruction of the Holy Temple and the exile of all but a small number of Jews to Babylon). Tammuz 9 was observed as a fast day until the second breaching of Jerusalem's walls (by the Romans) on the 17th of Tammuz, 3829 (69 CE), at which time the fast was moved to that date. (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah and Tur Orach Chaim 549)

Shabbat, July 4, 2020 --- 12 Tammuz, 5780

R. Yosef Yitzchak Born (1880)

Tammuz 12 is the birthday the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1880-1950). This is also the day on which he was liberated from exile to the Soviet gulag 47 years later (see below).

Liberation of R. Yosef Yitzchak (1927)

On the 12th of Tammuz of 1927, the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was officially granted release from his sentence of exile to Kastroma in the interior of Russia. Twenty-seven days earlier, the Rebbe had been arrested by agents of the GPU and the *Yevsektzia* ("Jewish Section" of the Communist Party) for his activities to preserve Judaism throughout the Soviet empire and sentenced to death, G-d forbid. International pressure forced the Soviets to commute the sentence to exile and, subsequently, to release him completely. The actual release took place on Tammuz 13, and Tammuz 12-13 is celebrated as a "festival of liberation" by the Chabad-Lubavitch community. Tammuz 12 is also Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's birthday (see above)

Passing of R. Jacob ben Asher (the Tur) (1348)

R. Jacob ben Asher, son of R. Asher ben Yechiel (the Rosh), was one of the most prominent Torah scholars in medieval Europe. His classic work on Jewish law, *Arba'ah Turim* (known also as *Tur*), covers every area of Jewish life (in the post-Temple era), presenting the various opinions of previous authorities along with the author's own decisions. A host of commentaries were written on this work, including one by R. Yosef Caro and another by R. Moshe Isserlis. These two commentaries formed the basis for the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law), the definitive guide to Jewish observance until today. R. Jacob also authored a popular commentary on the Torah, uncovering layers of hidden meaning in the text by way of gematria (and other close analysis of the texts).