

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

May 2-8, 2021
20-26 Iyar, 5781

Torah Reading:
Behar-Bechukotai: Leviticus 25:1
- 27:34

Haftarah:
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).

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



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

IT IS His Business

This week's Torah reading talks of the prohibition against performing agricultural work during the Shemittah (Sabbatical) year.

If you shall say, "What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we will not sow, nor gather in our produce!" I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years. You will sow in the eighth year, while [still] eating from the old crops until the ninth year; until the arrival of its crop, you will eat the old [crop]. (Leviticus 25:20–22.)

Very few people can financially survive taking an unpaid leave of absence from work for an entire year. We can only imagine what a country would look like of entire segments of its population decided to take a year of vacation; it would take years for the economy to lift itself out of the ensuing shambles. Just think: strikes by small groups which last for mere days cause billions of dollars of damage to nations' economies.

Yet it actually happened. Regularly. Citizens of an agrarian nation dropped their plows and sickles and "sabbatealed" every seventh year, and survived and flourished! We speak often of miracles such as the splitting of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, of the ten plagues and Elijah's wonders, but we neglect to mention this awesome

miracle which occurred in the Land of Israel *every seventh year!* For centuries, every sixth year the crop would be so abundant that it lasted for three years for those who were committed to abstain from work on the seventh.

Perhaps it can be posited that greater than the miracle of the abundant crops is the trust the Jews demonstrated in G-d.

If society today is any indicator, people have a strong tendency to relegate G-d to the synagogue. Those who are more pious allow G-d into their personal lives as well. But fewer indeed are those who welcome Him into their businesses and pocketbooks. "I'll pray to G-d, I'll study Torah and do His mitzvot, but business is business..." The biblical law requiring ten percent of earnings to be given to charity and the prohibitions against lending with interest, cheating, deception, and working on Shabbat and holy days are swept under the rug in the interest of making ends meet.

Shemittah teaches us that we are not intrinsically weak; we do have the ability to trust in G-d. And He, in turn, has the ability to provide for those who do so. G-d pleads, "Is My hand too short to redeem, or do I have no strength to save? Behold, with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make rivers into a desert." (Isaiah 50:2.) Yes, the same G-d who split the Red Sea can even provide us and our families with a steady income.

This concept is as true today as it was in the Land of Israel millennia ago. *By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg* **Are People Inherently Good or Evil?** How do you view humanity? Are people born innately good or essentially evil? Do we have a basically good nature that is corrupted by society or a basically bad nature that is kept in check by society?

It's a fundamental question that has been debated endlessly.

A study conducted by Scientific American tested people's responses based on two mechanisms: intuition or reflection. "Intuition is automatic and effortless, leading to actions that occur without insight into the reasons behind them. Reflection, on the other hand, is all about conscious thought—identifying possible behaviors, weighing the costs and benefits, and rationally deciding on a course of action."

Based on these responses, the study suggested that people's first and intuitive impulse was to cooperate; only upon further reflection did they decide to be more selfish. The test concluded that people are instinctively willing to give for the good of the group, even at our own personal expense.

But does this mean that we are naturally cooperative, or that it has become instinctive because cooperation is rewarded by society?

Researchers at Yale University experimented on babies, who have the minimum of cultural influence. Basing their study on the fact that babies will reach for things they want or like—and will look longer at things that surprise them— their results suggested that even the youngest humans have an instinct of good over evil, friendly helpful motivations over malicious ones.

But if we're born good, why do parents have to devote major efforts to raise children to become good adults? Why don't we naturally express gratitude, and instead need to learn it? Why does every civilization require so many laws and consequences to control human behavior? And why has so much evil been perpetuated by humanity over the centuries?

Bechukotai begins with the verse: *If you walk in My statutes* (Lev. 26:3)

The Talmud explains that the word "if" is to be understood as a plea on the part of G-d: "If only you would follow My statutes . . ." But the word *chok* ("statute" or "decree") literally means "engraved."

A rabbi once remarked: "Every Jew is a letter in the Torah. But a letter may grow somewhat faded. It is our sacred duty to mend these faded letters and make G-d's Torah whole again."

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch objected: "No, the identity of the Jew cannot be compared to erasable ink on parchment. Every Jew is indeed a letter in G-d's Torah, but a letter engraved in stone. At times, the dust and dirt may accumulate and distort—or even completely conceal—the letter's true form; but underneath it all, the letter remains whole. We need only sweep away the surface grime, and the letter, in all its perfection and beauty, will come to light."

The person, just like the letter in its true form, is whole. *By Chana Weisberg*

Sunday, May 2, 2021 --- 20 Iyar, 5781

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.

Monday, May 3, 2021 --- 21 Iyar, 5781

Kfar Chabad Established (1949)

The Chabad-Lubavitch village in Israel, Kfar Chabad, was founded by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, on Iyar 21 of 1949. The first settlers were mostly recent immigrants from the Soviet Union, survivors of the terrors of World War II and Stalinist oppression. Kfar Chabad, which is located about five miles south of Tel Aviv and includes agricultural lands as well as numerous educational institutions, serves as the headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidic movement in the Holy Land.

Tuesday, May 4, 2021 --- 22 Iyar, 5781

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.

Wednesday, May 5, 2021 --- 23 Iyar, 5781

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.

Thursday, May 6, 2021 --- 24 Iyar, 5781

Germany Surrenders (1945)

In Rheims, France, the Chief-of-Staff of the German Armed Forces High Command signed the unconditional surrender documents for all German forces to the Allies, thus marking the official end of World War II in Europe. The surrender took place following a fierce seven days of battles and truces across Europe.

Friday, May 7, 2021 --- 25 Iyar, 5781

Passing of R. Yaakov Lorberbaum of Lissa (1832)

R. Yaakov Lorberbaum was a well-known halachic authority who served as rabbi in the Eastern European cities of Kalish, Lissa, and Stryi. Among the famous and widely-studied works of this prolific author are *Chavos Daas* and *Nesivos Hamishpat*, both in-depth commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law).

Shabbat, May 8, 2021 --- 26 Iyar, 5781

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).

Ramchal (1747)

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (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.