

Torah Weekly

June 19-25, 2022
Sivan 20-26, 5782

Torah Reading: Shlach
Numbers 13:1 - 15:41
Haftarah: Joshua 2:1-24
Parshat Shlach

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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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Mr. Self Sacrifice

Jonathan Roth was a man in despair. For as long as he could remember, things hadn't worked out for him. For starters, he was born into poverty, and not long after his twelfth birthday, his father succumbed to illness. After that, he fell in with the wrong crowd in an attempt to ease the financial burden at home.

But then came the big blow. He was caught selling drugs, and was sentenced to ten years in prison.

Life behind bars was difficult, to say the least. He couldn't bear not being able to make life's simple choices. Worst of all, he was weighed down by feelings of blame and resentment towards himself over his errors. Not a day went by without him mentally replaying his previous mistakes. He was nearing his wits' end, when he was unexpectedly given a new lease on life.

One weekend, an organization that services the needs of Jewish inmates organized an extended Torah study retreat in Crown Heights for Jews in federal prisons. The program included participation in the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *farbrengen* (public gathering) on a Shabbat afternoon.

Something about the Rebbe's manner intrigued him, and he listened carefully to the talk being given on the [Torah](#) portion of the week.

"There is something unfair about the punishment meted out to the supporters of the biblical spies sent by Moses to scout out the land of Canaan," the Rebbe was saying.

"Granted, they had sinned by expressing disinterest in ascending to [Canaan](#), and consequently were destined to die without setting foot there. But why weren't they brought to

the border of the desert to live out the rest of their lives in one location? Why were they made to travel for forty years, and live a taxing life of transience and upheaval?"

The Rebbe continued by quoting the Midrash that teaches that wherever the Israelites traveled, they converted the physical ground upon which they trod. Greenery and vegetation replaced the barren and arid Sinai terrain. Wherever they went, they made inroads of civilization in an otherwise uninhabitable wilderness.

"So, theirs was a trek of positive transformation, not just meaningless and unnecessary travel from one place to the next. Hence their extended journey wasn't only a punishment, but was also a privilege."

The Rebbe's next words grabbed him.

"How is this ancient story relevant today? A person can find himself stuck in a virtual desert, a place on the map or in his psyche that doesn't seem civilized, where he feels unable to be true to himself or to express himself freely. Why is he there—just because of bad luck or foolish errors?"

"Take, for example, the situation of a prisoner. Why is he behind bars? It can't be just because he committed a crime. After all, many free people commit the same crime! They weren't caught, you say? So why was *he* caught? Not only because he is a *shlemazel* . . .

"You see, if there is one place on earth that is most unG-dly, it is prison. In prison a person is stripped of that which makes him uniquely human: his freedom. For this reason, there is no punishment of jail in Jewish law.

"But there are certain souls which, because of their potency, were handpicked by Providence to enter the spiritual wilderness

that is incarceration, and transform it through meaning and spiritual creativity. Few people can achieve the inner freedom necessary to survive, and even thrive, in a prison environment.

"And it is these elevated souls that end up 'doing time.'

"Now, it's true that these people have committed crimes, and must be held accountable for their actions. But like the ancient spies, their mistakes only superficially account for their predicament. Besides, we have the right to wonder why certain people and not others are born into dire circumstances, or with immoral tendencies which lead them down destructive paths.

"But the idea here is that, ironically, immoral impulses allude to unique spiritual powers. In the words of the Talmud: 'The greater one is, the stronger is his evil inclination.' Another relevant Talmudic statement: 'G-d doesn't give his creations challenges they cannot overcome.'

"As it turns out, then, the people in jail are not the dregs of society, but have the potential to be its most far-reaching members!"

Needless to say, Jonathan's life turned around. For the first time in his life, rather than seeing himself as a victim, he began to see himself as someone who possessed a unique destiny few are chosen for. A fate which others naturally curse, he came to view as a source of blessing.

What's in it for me?

In the counterintuitive worldview of Judaism, moral and religious crises are an indicator not of weakness, but of strength.

And the script of life and history is a coauthorship between the divine and man, between the laser-precision of Providence

and the folly of human mistakes.

We are all on a journey through our personal deserts, each of us equipped with the tailor-made gear—circumstances, impulses, and talents—that enables us to make flowers out of sand, establish life where death once reigned, and bring meaning to the random and mundane.

By Rabbi Boruch Cohen

The Kabbalistic Spin on Rosh Hashanah In this week's parshah, Shelach, we read about the mitzvah of separating *challah*. When baking bread, we separate a part of the dough for G-d. This would be given to the Kohen. However, today we burn it. When discussing this [mitzvah](#), the Torah uses the word *tarimu* three times. The literal translation of *tarimu* is "you should lift up." Though men are also obligated to do this mitzvah, [challah](#) is considered as one of the special mitzvahs near and dear to Jewish women. This mitzvah is so holy that women use the time of separating challah to pour their tender hearts out to G-d.

What makes this mitzvah so special? Why does the [Torah](#) stress *tarimu*, you should lift up three times?

Bread is the most basic food, symbolic of our physical needs. It is what we toil and work for, to "make bread" and to "put bread" on the table. It is symbolic of everything physical in the world.

When you separate challah, you are taking the physical and lifting it up to a spiritual state. You are touching on the essence of Judaism, expressed in three uplifting steps:

First comes, *emunah*, belief in G-d. We recognize that all we have is from Him. One may think, "my smarts and abilities have made me all this wealth," which, in a way, is like saying that it is not from G-d. Separating challah to Hashem is recognition that everything we have is from Him.

Second, our purpose is to infuse the physical world with G-dliness. Even something as basic as food needs to be infused with spirituality and used for G-d.

Finally, the food that we feed our families is a holy endeavor; the future of the Jewish people is nourished by the hands of holy Jewish women.

You feed us *emunah*, you feed us essence, you feed us with a mitzvah. You feed us with love, you feed us with pride, and you feed us with tears. You are taking the physical and lifting it up to a spiritual state. The heart of a Jewish woman can do all that and more.

I am so grateful to all of you who have done the mitzvah of challah in my merit. Thank you for your prayers and tears.

By Yitzi Hurwitz

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, June 19, 2022 --- 20 Sivan, 5782

Martyrs of Blois (1171)

The 20th of Sivan is the anniversary of the first blood libel in France. On this date in 1171, tens of Jewish men and women were burned alive in the French town of Blois on the infamous accusation that Jews used to the blood of Christian children in the preparation of matzot for Passover.

Tuesday, June 21, 2022 --- 22 Sivan, 5782

Miriam Quarantined (1312 BCE)

Miriam, the elder sister of Moses and Aaron, was afflicted with tzaraat (leprosy) after speaking negatively of Moses, and was quarantined outside of the camp for seven days--as related in Numbers 12

Wednesday, June 22, 2022 --- 23 Sivan, 5782

Haman's Decree Counteracted (357 BCE)

Even after Haman was hanged on the [17th of Nissan](#) of 357 BCE, his evil decree "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, from young to old, infants and women, in one day, the 13th day of the 12th month (Adar)" remained in force. Queen Esther pleaded with King Achashverosh to annul the decree, but Achashverosh insisted that "a writ that has been written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal, cannot be returned." Instead, he suggested to Esther and Mordechai to "inscribe, regarding the Jews, as you please, and seal it with the king's seal." On the 23rd of Sivan, Mordechai drafted a royal decree giving the Jews the license to defend themselves and kill all who rise up against them to kill them, and dispatched it to all 127 provinces of Achashverosh's empire. (Book of Esther, chapter 8)

Passing of R. Yaakov Pollack (1525)

[R. Yaakov Pollack](#) served as rabbi first in Prague and then in Cracow. In Cracow he established a large yeshiva that attracted thousands of students. R. Yaakov devised a new method of [Talmudic study](#) known as *pilpul*, with the goal of stimulating the intellectual abilities of his students. Although many scholars of subsequent generations opposed this method, R. Yaakov succeeded in bringing about a renewal of Talmudic study in Poland, which became a major Torah center for the next four centuries.

Friday, June 24, 2022 --- 25 Sivan, 5782

Three of the "Ten Martyrs" Killed (2nd century CE)

Among the millions of Jews cruelly killed by the Romans were the "Ten Martyrs"--all great sages and leaders of Israel--memorialized in a special prayer recited on Yom Kippur. Three of them--Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha and Rabbi Chanina S'gan Hakohanim--were killed on Sivan 25.

Egyptians Sue Jews (4th Century BCE)

Egyptian representatives appeared in the court of Alexander the Great, demanding that the Jews pay restitution for all the Egyptian gold and silver they took along with them during the Exodus. Geviha the son of Pesisa, a simple but wise Jew, requested the sages' permission to present a defense on behalf of the Jews.

Geviha asked the Egyptians for evidence that the Jews absconded with their wealth. "The crime is clearly recorded in your Torah," the Egyptians gleefully responded.

"In that case," Geviha said, "the Torah also says that 600,000 Jews were unjustly enslaved by the Egyptians for many, many years. So first let us calculate how much you owe us..."

The court granted the Egyptians three days in which to prepare a response. When they were unable to do so they fled on the following day and never returned.

In Talmudic times, the day when the Egyptian delegation fled was celebrated as a mini-holiday. (According to some traditions, this event took place on Nissan 24.)