

# Torah Weekly

ת"ב

June 25 – July 1, 2023  
6 - 12 Tammuz, 5783

Torah Reading:  
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 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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No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

## Conduct Unbecoming

A life sentence for jaywalking? Twenty years for chewing gum in public? Singapore notwithstanding, surely that's over the top!

Well, was it so different for Moses, who, in this week's Torah reading, is punished and denied entrance to the Promised Land for the seemingly minor infraction of hitting a rock instead of speaking to it?

The people are clamoring for water in the wilderness. G-d tells Moses to speak to a certain rock (he was meant to ask nicely) and promises that, miraculously, water will flow from the rock. Commentary enlightens us as to the behind-the-scenes reasons for Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it, but in the end the miracle happens anyway and the people's thirst is quenched.

If your average rabbi today would make a rock produce water, even if the rock needed more than mere gentle persuasion, surely it would be hailed as the greatest miracle of the century and the rabbi would win the Nobel Prize for chemistry. But for Moses it's a sin? Even if (as the [Torah](#) points out) it would have been a greater sanctification of the Divine had he only spoken to the rock, still, for such a minor infraction, such a severe penalty?

The answer, we are told, is that responsibility is commensurate with the individual. If a child messes up, it is entirely forgivable. For an adult who should know better, we are less likely to be as forgiving. Likewise, among adults, from a person of stature we expect more than from an ordinary fellow.

A blemish on a coarse garment is not nearly as bad as it is on a piece of fine material. A stain on a pair of denims is not only acceptable, it is absolutely desirable. In fact, some people pay a premium for pre-stained jeans. Put the same stain on a silk tie and it's simply unwearable.

Moses was like the finest silk and, therefore, even the smallest, subtle hint of sin was considered a serious breach of conduct and the repercussions were severe.

I recall reading, in one of Rabbi Dr. A. J. Twersky's early books, an exposition of the well-known Yiddish expression, "*es past nit*" — "it is unbecoming." When he was a child and his father would admonish him for doing the wrong thing, he would say "*es past nit*," i.e., for you, this sort of behavior is unbecoming. Not only did such a rebuke not shatter the child's self image, it reinforced it. A wise father was telling his child, "You are special, you are important, for someone like *you* this sort of conduct is unbecoming." There are behavior patterns that are not necessarily criminal or sinful. Yet for someone from an esteemed family background, *es past nit*, it is unbecoming. This was the kind of criticism that could actually build a child's self esteem.

How beautiful that even in chastisement one can find validation and praise.

As I write these lines, I think of the *chupah* ceremony when I officiate at a marriage. After reading the *ketubah* in the original Aramaic, I usually read an abstract in English. There in the text one finds the antiquated expression, "even as it beseebeth a Jewish husband to do." The groom's obligations to

his bride are reflected in that old, quaint turn of phrase reminding him that he will be expected to conduct himself appropriately — "as it beseeems a Jewish husband to do." Yes, we Jews do expect more from our husbands. There is a historical ethic and a sacred tradition we are all held to. No matter what the rest of the world may get up to, for a Jewish husband, *es past nit*.

Moses was the greatest prophet that ever lived. For him, the standard could be no higher. Luckily for us mere mortals, we will not be held to that exalted benchmark. But we will be held to our own standard. The standard of Jews who were called upon by [G-d](#) to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

By Yossy Goldman

## Privacy and Modesty

Near the beginning of the prayerbook there is a passage from this week's Torah reading.

The [Torah](#) tells how Balaam, a non-Jew with spiritual power, tried to curse the Jewish people. Each time, G-d forced him to give a blessing instead.

This happened twice. The third time was different. Balaam, standing on a hilltop overlooking the camp of the Jews, underwent a temporary change of heart. He himself was moved to give them a blessing: "How good are your tents, Jacob . . . they are like gardens by the river, like fragrant herbs planted by [G-d](#) . . ."

Rashi's commentary tells us why Balaam was so moved by the sight of the tents of the Jewish people. From the way they were pitched, he could

sense an atmosphere of modesty and privacy. From the entrance of one tent you could not peep inside the entrance of any other. It was clear to Balaam that in this nation, the Jewish people, there was great respect for the integrity of family life and for the sanctity of the person.

The opening words of Balaam's blessing entered the prayerbook, and have been repeated daily for thousands of years by Jews all over the world. The values expressed in these words have contributed, together with many other aspects of Judaism, to the comparatively high level of stability in Jewish family life.

The ideal of modesty applies to both men and women. It relates to clothes, behavior, speech and thought. Why is modesty considered so important in Jewish life?

A basic human perception is the idea that something holy is also something special, kept apart, reserved, even hidden. For example, due to the holiness of the Temple, one could not always go there, and certain areas were restricted to *kohanim*, the priests. The Holy of Holies could be entered only once a year, on Yom Kippur, and then only by the high priest. Similarly, a Torah scroll is generally kept hidden. It is kept wrapped in its mantle or silver case in the ark, unless it is actually being read in the synagogue. If for some reason it has to be taken from one location to another, it is usually wrapped in a *tallit*. These images suggest ways in which one might respect the sanctity of the human body, created in the divine image, with the task to make the world a dwelling for the divine. By contrast, today we live in an epoch of communication. This is a very positive aspect of our society. Yet communication needs to have limits. The idea that one can reveal everything and say anything can be of great value in appropriate situations. Yet, used unwisely, it can also be harmful to the basic sanctity of the human being and the world. It is a simple fact of life that modesty is particularly at risk when one is in a "tent," when traveling, on holiday, in a relaxed and less guarded mode. Yet it was the modesty expressed by the *Tents* of Jacob which impressed Balaam, and transformed his desire to curse into the desire to give a blessing. Our role as Jews is to be an example. The Torah describes us, thousands of years ago, as expressing the virtues of modesty and privacy. Through affirming these values now, we can help make a world in which every detail of life is illuminated by the radiance of the divine. *By Tali Loewenthal*

### Sunday, June 25, 2023 --- 6 Tammuz, 5783

#### Entebbe Rescue (1976)

Jewish hostages held by Arab terrorists at Entebbe Airport, Uganda, were rescued by Israeli commando units in 1976.

### Monday, June 26, 2023 --- 7 Tammuz, 5783

#### 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.

### Tuesday, June 27, 2023 --- 8 Tammuz, 5783

#### 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, June 28, 2023 --- 9 Tammuz, 5783

#### 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)

### Friday, June 30, 2023 --- 11 Tammuz, 5783

#### Purim Tammuz (Algiers) (1775)

In 1775, the Spanish General O'Reilly attacked the city of Algiers and was successfully repulsed by the Dey of Algiers, Mohammed ibn Uman. Tradition has it that flames came out of the graves of the great Rabbis Isaac ben Sheshet and Solomon ben Simon Duran and contributed to the Spanish defeat. To celebrate the miracle of having escaped Spanish rule, the Jews of Algiers instituted a "Purim" on the 11th of Tammuz.

#### Passing of R. Elchanan Wasserman (1941)

R. Elchanan Bunem Wasserman headed a famous [yeshivah](#) in Baranovitch (in what is now Belarus), attracting many bright students. At the outbreak of World War II, he fled with the yeshivah to Lithuania. In 1941, when the Nazis broke their pact with the Soviets and overran Lithuania, he was one of the thousands of Jews who met their deaths, [sanctifying G-d's name](#).

R. Elchanan authored *Kovetz Shiurim*, a collection of Talmudic classes he delivered at the yeshivah.

### Shabbat, July 1, 2023 --- 12 Tammuz, 5783

#### 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.