

Torah Weekly

ד"ב

PARSHAT MISHPATIM

25 Shevat -1 Adar 1 5784
4-10 February 2024

Torah: Exodus 21:1 – 24:18
Rosh Chodesh:
Numbers 28:19-15
Rosh Chodesh Haftorah:
Isaiah 66:1-24; Isaiah 66:23

Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

Psalms Daily

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain/Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

The Party at Sinai

When we think about spiritual experiences, we picture prayer, meditation, or perhaps a solitary walk in nature. Yet that is not how the Torah describes the Jewish people's experience at the greatest Divine revelation in history, the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

"... and they perceived the G-d of Israel, and beneath His feet was like the forming of a sapphire brick and like the appearance of the heavens for clarity. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand, and they perceived G-d, and they ate and drank." - Exodus 24:10-11

It seems almost inconceivable. "They perceived the G-d of Israel," and how did they respond? They ate and drank!

In explaining this incident, Biblical commentators are divided. Some maintain that eating and drinking was indeed a sin, evidenced by the words, "And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand." i.e., the nobles should have been punished for eating, but G-d refrained. Others, however, explain that it was not only permitted, but the right thing to do, since the food and drink were not a distraction from the Divine revelation, rather a celebration of it. Judaism teaches that our task is to heal the rift between physical and spiritual, to the point where the physical is sanctified by enhancing the spiritual experience. Chassidic philosophy explains that before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the divide between physical and spiritual was unbridgeable. At Sinai the separation was broken; G-d descended upon Mount Sinai, enabling us, for the first time in the history of the cosmos, to elevate the physical world and connect it to holiness.

There is, however, another point that requires exploration.

What is the meaning of the verse, "And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand"? To those who maintain that the Jews sinned by eating and drinking at the Revelation, the meaning is clear: although they were deserving of punishment, G-d refrained. But what is the meaning to those who believe that eating and drinking at Sinai (elevating the physical world we live in) was, in fact, the purpose of the entire spiritual experience?

The Hebrew word for "nobles", atzei, shares the same root as the word etzel, which means "near". The Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad, explains: "He did not lay His hand" means that G-d did not place paralyzing fear within their hearts. Many of the Jewish people at Sinai were overwhelmed by the intensity of the experience and were unable to eat. It was specifically the nobles, those close to G-d, who were not awe-stricken, and were able to engage in elevating the food and drink. The lesson, says the Alter Rebbe, is that the more we connect to the sacred, the more we are able to fulfill the task of elevating the physical world. This explains a Talmudic debate regarding the purpose of Shabbat. Some argue that Shabbat was given so that the Jewish people would have time to study Torah (since labor is prohibited), while others say that Shabbat was given for the Jewish people to enjoy food and drink (as there is an obligation to honor the Shabbat with delicacies). These two opinions do not contradict one another; they address two distinct situations: if we spend the six days of the week completely engaged in material business and we do not dedicate time to holiness, then Shabbat is the time to dedicate to spirituality.

If, however, we create moments of closeness to G-d during the week, then on Shabbat we enjoy the pleasures of food and drink, because the spiritual experiences empower us to be able to sanctify the food and drink. The more we connect to spirituality and holiness, the more we can elevate the material world.

By Menachem Feldman

The Two-Way Mirror

Does G-d care if I cheat on my taxes? Am I going to be a better husband/wife/parent if I keep kosher? Are these the same question? The 613 mitzvot ("commandments") of the Torah are commonly divided into two categories: 1) laws that govern the relationship "between man and G-d" (bein adam la-makom); and 2) laws that legislate the proper conduct "between man and his fellow" (bein adam la-chavero). Even the Ten Commandments were inscribed on two separate tablets, one containing commandments such as "I am G-d your G-d" and "Remember the day of Shabbat," and the other proclaiming laws like "Do not kill" and "Do not steal". But is this division a legitimate one? Let us examine the evidence. On

the one hand, we have the aforementioned two tablets (though one still needs to explain how "honor your father and your mother" ended up on the "between man and G-d" side). On the other hand, we have the famous story the Talmud tells about the prospective convert to Judaism who came to Hillel asking to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot. "What is hateful to yourself," said Hillel, "do not do to your fellow. This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary." (But how is putting on tefillin a commentary on "Love your fellow"?) There's also the statement by the Zohar that the divine instruction, "I am G-d your G-d... You shall have no other gods beside Me," is the essence of all 613 commandments and prohibitions of the Torah. (Meaning that helping my neighbor shovel his car out of a snowbank proclaims the oneness of G-d and disavows the existence of any other gods beside Him?) The masters of the mystical wisdom of the Kabbalah insist that, ultimately, there is no essential difference between the Torah's "civil" laws and its so-called "religious" laws. Each mitzvah, whether it's visiting the sick or waving a lulav on Sukkot, is a facilitator of the flow of desire and gratification between G-d and creation — a flow that sustains all of the created existence and fulfills the divine intent in creating it in the first place. So a crime against G-d (which causes a disruption in the flow) is a crime against all of His creations; and a crime against a fellow creature is also a crime against G-d (for the same reason). A kindness to a fellow is a kindness to G-d, as it contributes to the realization of His desire in creation; and a positive "personal" relationship with G-d has a positive effect on His relationship with creation as a whole and with each and every citizen of His world. So why did G-d deliver His Torah to us in two tablets? Maybe it's because He wants us to understand that there are two sides to life. Life is not an uninterrupted spiritual experience, nor is it exclusively a social exercise. Life means dealing with people, but also conversing with oneself; it means meditating and praying, as well as digging neighbors' cars out of snowbanks. G-d is the absolute oneness, and human life is the endeavor to express His oneness. But true oneness is not uniformity. True

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No One Forgotten.

oneness tolerates, indeed embraces, various and even opposite particulars. For there is no greater expression of oneness than the ability to see opposites reflected in each other. So G-d divided the divinely-ordained blueprint for life

into a "between man and G-d" column and a "between man and man" column. And then He granted us the ability to see each side reflected in the other. To see a fellow's needs peering out to us from the pages of our prayerbook. And to see

G-d's face smiling to us from a beggar's mumbled gratitude, from the wonder in a child's question, from a loved one's trusting eyes.

By Yanki Tauber

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RABBI YEHUDA HANASI (135 - 217)

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (the Prince) was born in the Land of Israel circa 3895, or 135 CE, on the day Rabbi Akiva, one of the great Jewish leaders at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple (circa 3830), was killed by the Romans. A direct descendant of King David, his ancestors had, for generations, served as the Nasi, leaders of worldwide Jewry and head of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Jewish law. He also developed a friendship with the ruling Roman Emperor, Antoninus Pius. The Talmud relates that Antoninus would often, secretly, consult Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi on matters of state, and to learn Torah with him.

Following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (circa 3830), at the ensuing destruction and displacement, study of, and knowledge in, Jewish law had significantly decreased. This especially affected the Oral Law (the companion laws, and explanation of, the Bible, which G-d had conveyed to Moses on Mount Sinai), which had

been passed down, by way of mouth, from generation to generation, and which was not allowed to be written down. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, seeing that the Oral Law was at risk being forgotten, decided that the Oral Law would have to be written down for its own sake. He compiled the Oral Law into the Mishnayot (lit. "Repetition"), which was organized into six categories, and each category divided into topic (i.e. category: Holidays; topic: Passover). In order to recognize the original prohibition against writing down the Oral Law, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi wrote the Mishnayot in a brief, concise manner, expecting that the Jews to be able to understand it. The Mishnah gained instant recognition within the Jewish community, and formed the basis of the Talmud, which served to help decipher the short hand text of the Mishnayot for later generations. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi passed away in around 3977, or 217 CE, and was buried in the north of the Land of Israel. He was succeeded as Nasi by his son, Gamliel.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, February 4, 2024-25 Shevat, 5784

R. Israel Salanter (1883)

Passing of Rabbi Israel Lipkin (1810-1883), known as "Rabbi Israel Salanter," founder of the "Mussar" (ethicist) movement.

Monday, February 5, 2024-26 Shevat, 5784

Passing of the Taz (1667)

Shevat 26 is the Yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi David ben Shmuel Halevi (1586-1667), a primary Halachic authority, known as Taz after his work *Turei Zahav* ("Rows of Gold") -- a commentary on Rabbi Yosef Caro's *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law)

Tuesday, February 6, 2024-27 Shevat, 5784

The "Simlah Chadashah" (1737)

Rabbi Alexander Sender Schorr was a direct descendant of Rabbi Yosef Bechor Schorr of Orleans, one of the most famous of the French Tosafists. At a young age he was appointed Chief Justice of the Rabbinic Court in the town of Hovniv which is directly outside of Lviv, Ukraine. He authored the classic work on the laws of ritual slaughter called *Simlah Chadashah*, as well as a deeper commentary on those laws called *Tevu'ot Shor*. The *Simlah Chadashah* has been reprinted more than one hundred times, and is the most widely used book to learn the laws of *Shechitah* (ritual slaughter). Rabbi Alexander Sender Schorr passed away in the town of Zhovkva on the 27th of Shevat in the year 5497 (1737).

Wednesday, February 7, 2024-28 Shevat, 5784

Hasmonean Holiday (2nd century BCE)

On Shevat 28 (134 BCE?), Antiochus V abandoned his siege of Jerusalem and his plans for the city's destruction. This day was observed as a holiday in Hasmonean times.

Thursday, February 8, 2024-29 Shevat, 5784

Columbia Tragedy; Israeli Astronaut Perishes (2003)

On the morning of February 1, 2003, the Columbia Space Shuttle, returning from its STS-107 mission, was destroyed upon re-entry, 16 minutes before its scheduled landing. All its crew members perished, including Ilan Ramon, a combat pilot in the Israeli Air Force, who was the first Israeli astronaut. Prior to his departing to space on Space Shuttle Columbia, he arranged to take kosher food as well as a Kiddush cup, a Torah Scroll, and a dollar from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of righteous memory

Shabbat, February 10, 2024-1 Adar I, 5784

Ezekiel Foretells Egypt's Downfall (421 BCE)

On this date, in the year following the Holy Temple's destruction, G-d tells Ezekiel to take up a lamentation for Pharaoh, king of Egypt, foretelling his downfall in the hands of the Babylonians.

Passing of Ibn Ezra (1164)

The highly regarded Biblical commentator, Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089?-1164CE), passed away on Adar 1, 4924.

Passing of Shach (circa 1663)

Adar 1 is the Yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of the great Halachist Rabbi Shabtai Hakohen Katz (1621-1663?), author of the *Sifte Cohen* commentary on Rabbi Yosef Caro's Code of Jewish Law. He is known as "Shach" - an acronym of the name of his work, which serves to this day as a primary source of Halachah (Jewish law).

Tosfot Yomtov Appointed Rabbi of Krakow (1644)

The first of Adar (I) is celebrated by the descendants of Rabbi Yomtov Lipman Heller (1579-1654) as a day of thanksgiving, for his liberation and restoration after his imprisonment in Vienna in 1629. Rabbi Yomtov Lipman was one of the important rabbinical figures of the early 17th

century. Known as the "Tosfos Yomtov" after his commentary on the Mishnah by that name, he also authored important commentaries on the Rosh and other rabbinical works. A disciple of the famed Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Yomtov Lipman was appointed, at the tender age of 18, to serve as a dayan (rabbinical judge) in that city. He subsequently filled a number of prestigious rabbinical positions, including rabbi of Nikolsburg and of Vienna. In 1627 he was recalled to Prague to serve as the city's chief rabbi.

That position earned him powerful enemies when he refused to follow the dictates of Prague's rich and influential citizens and strove to relieve the burden imposed on the poor by the suffocating "crown taxes" imposed on the Jews. His enemies informed on him to the government, falsely accusing him of treason. In 1629, Rabbi Yomtov Lipman was arrested, tried and sentenced to death. The Jewish communities of Bohemia succeeded in having the sentence commuted and reduced to a heavy fine, and raised the funds for the payment of the first installment that secured his release. However, his enemies obtained an imperial decision that he could not officiate as rabbi in any town of the empire, leaving him homeless and destitute. It took many years for him to pay off the balance of the fine and be restored to his former position. It was only in the winter of 1644, when he settled in Krakow after being appointed chief rabbi of the city, that he felt that that he could celebrate his release and restoration. Rosh Chodesh Adar (I)--the day that Rabbi Yomtov Lipman assumed the rabbinate of Krakow--was celebrated by him and his family as a day of thanksgiving to G-d. Rabbi Yomtov Lipman asked that future generations continue to mark the date, and the custom is upheld by his descendants to this day.