

## PARSHAT ACHAREI

20-26 Nissan 5784  
28 April-4 May 2024

Torah: Leviticus 16:1-18:30  
Haftorah: Amos 9:7-15

### Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

### 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)

### Psalms Daily

### Pirkei Avot (1:15)

*"Shammai would say: Make your Torah study a permanent fixture of your life; say little and do much; and receive everyone with a pleasant countenance."*

(Shammai was a great Jewish scholar who passed away in 30 CE)

## Renewable Energy in the Torah

It has long been recognized that relying on fossil fuels as a power source is not sustainable in the long run. The earth's natural resources are becoming depleted, and burning coal and gas contributes to pollution and global warming. Solar power is one of the best sources of renewable energy, especially in hot desert areas. There, the intense sunlight is a potent form of energy that in most cases merely bakes the earth but is not harnessed for productive ends. The world's largest solar power plant has recently opened in the Mojave Desert, consisting of rows upon rows of bright mirrors spread across nearly five square miles of the desert floor. The mirrors focus the desert's intense sunlight onto boilers, which heat water into steam. The steam then turns a turbine to generate energy. The plant produces enough energy to power 144,000 homes. The site of the power plant has virtually uninterrupted sunshine all year round, and is situated near power lines, making it an ideal setting for converting sunlight into usable energy.

No form of energy is of any use unless there is a way to channel and harness it. Otherwise, the energy simply dissipates. We find a similar concept in Jewish thought. There are certain times of the year when special spiritual energy is generated - such as on Shabbat, holidays, or Rosh Chodesh (the new month). We must find a way to capture the energy and use it to drive our continuing development as human beings, to energize us in the fulfillment of mitzvahs.

We find an example of poorly channeled energy in this week's Torah portion, when Nadav and Avihu, two sons of Aaron, entered the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and brought a "strange fire" to G-d. They were so enthusiastic about

the building of the Mishkan and the prospect of becoming close to G-d that they offered a sacrifice at a time that was not appropriate for them. As a result, their souls simply flew out of their bodies in an effort to cleave to G-d. Had they not been so overeager, they could have used this intense spiritual power to bring about real change and elevation in the world. However, their spiritual zeal was focused only on rising to G-d, but not on channeling the energy here on earth. Therefore, they did not survive.

Over the course of exile, we have been charged with the task of building "mirrors in the desert," harnessing the intense divine radiation that is beaming down upon us. The "mirrors" are our mitzvahs, and the "sunlight" is the divine light that is drawn down to the world through our actions. When Moshiach (the Messiah) comes, the construction project will be complete, and we will be able to derive the full benefit of the work we have done over so many generations. Then, G-d will "take the sun out of its shield," and the night will shine like the day.

*By Chaya Shuchat*

## Take Your Body Along

In this week's Torah reading, Aaron and all subsequent High Priests are warned to only enter the Temple's Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. This is preceded by the statement that this caution followed the deaths of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Avihu, who entered the Tabernacle and the Holy of Holies, "and drew close to G-d and died."

Death is the separation of soul and body. As such, on a deeper level we are being warned that coming close to G-d cannot involve the separation of body and soul.

Closeness to G-d cannot involve the separation of body and soul while praying or when involved in any other holy experience we feel uplifted, but only the soul makes the trip while the body remains behind,

we are making the same holy error as the children of Aaron.

Practically speaking this means that after the spiritual experience our bodies' desires and weaknesses should not remain the same. Our practical, everyday lives should be more virtuous and ethical than before our "drawing close to G-d." If this is not the case, then the whole experience is "dead"—it adds no life and holiness to our world as we live in it.

And the entire purpose of Judaism is to make the Divine a normative presence in the context of our ordinary, everyday, frames of reference.

*By Shlomo Yaffe*

## Do we love too much?

Apparently, we do. Many marriages fail for a dearth of love; an equal number are suffocated by an overabundance of the same. So desirous are we for connection, so hungry for communion with another human being, that we forget that for love to endure it must be complemented with an equal measure of restraint. So eager are we to give of ourselves to the one we love—be it a spouse, a child or a friend—that we often give without consideration of the needs and desires of the recipient of our love.

When passion is mitigated with a degree of inhibition, when intimacy is tempered with a modicum of reserve, love flourishes. But when all limits are betrayed, love burns out.

A love relationship can thus be compared to an electrical circuit. In a circuit, the attraction between the positive and negative charges creates a current of energy joining the two; the current meets with a certain degree of resistance as it passes through the circuit, delimiting its intensity. The natural tendency of this attraction is to seek the shortest possible route, carrying the highest possible current, to join the

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attracted charges. But should this tendency be indulged—should the “resistance” fall—the circuit will “short”: the current will escalate, ultimately causing the destruction of the circuit and the breakdown of the very connection which the current seeks to create. The book of Leviticus speaks of the tragic death of Aaron's two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu.

After many months of labor and anticipation, the Sanctuary had finally been set up in the Israelite camp, and the Divine Presence came to rest within it. Amidst the joyous dedication ceremonies, *“Nadav and Avihu each took his censer, and put fire in it, and put ketoret (incense) on it, and offered strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not. A fire went out from G-d, and consumed them, and they died before G-d”*. - Leviticus 10:1-2

In his commentary on the Torah, the great sage and mystic Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar explains that Nadav and Avihu died from an overdose of love.

Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the high priest would enter the innermost chamber of the Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, to offer ketoret to G-d. This occasion—on which the most spiritual human being performed the most sacred service in the holiest place in the world on the holiest day of the year—was the point of utmost intimacy with G-d attained by man. Nadav and Avihu were priests, but not high priests (though they would have been, had they lived to succeed their father in that office); it was a very special occasion, marked by special offerings to G-d, but it was not Yom Kippur. But their thirst for intimacy with G-d could not be satisfied by anything less than the ultimate.

They wanted to get closer yet, though “He commanded them not.”

Human life is a love affair between the soul and her G-d. Our passion for life is a craving for the “spark of G-dliness” implicit within every one of G-d's creations; ultimately, everything we do is motivated by our soul's desire to draw closer to our Source. So powerful is this desire that it can lead us to do things that are contrary to G-d's will—things that violate the bounds of our love and destroy it.

For our marriage to live and thrive, we must feed our passion for life; but we must also know when to hold back. As in every truly loving relationship, we must learn to love in the manner that our beloved needs and desires to be loved.

*By Yanki Tauber*

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, April 28, 2024-20 Nissan, 5784**

### **Pharaoh Corners Jews (1313 BCE)**

Pharaoh's pursuit of the Jews during the Exodus ended on this day, on the shores of the Red Sea. A terrified Jewish nation divided into several factions. Some advocated mass suicide, others wanted to surrender and return to Egypt, the bolder ones prepared to battle the Egyptians, while others advised the nation to pray. G-d thought otherwise. He instructed the Jews to simply proceed onwards - despite the sea which stood in their path. The Jews complied, and the entire following night they went through the parted waters of the Red Sea

### **Passing of Hai Gaon (1038)**

Hai Gaon was the last of the Geonim, the brilliant Talmudic scholars who headed the great schools of Babylonia during the five centuries following the compilation of the Talmud. Son of Sherira Gaon, Hai Gaon was one of the greatest authorities of his time, and his decisions and guidance were sought after by Jewish communities across the world. Hai Gaon served at his post as Gaon for forty years. He passed away on 20 Nissan 4798 (1038), at the age of 99.

**Monday, April 29, 2024-21 Nissan, 5784**

### **Moses Departs Midian (1314 BCE)**

After seven days of contention with G-d at the burning bush, Moses assumed the mission of taking the Children of Israel out of Egypt. Taking leave of his father-in-law, Jethro, he placed his wife and children on a donkey and set out for Egypt to demand of Pharaoh, "Let My people go!"

### **Red Sea Splits (1313 BCE)**

On the eve of the seventh day after the Exodus, the Children of Israel found themselves trapped between the Egyptian army and cavalry pursuing them from behind and the waters of the Red Sea

before them. G-d commanded Moses: "Speak to the Children of Israel, that they should move forward!" Nachshon ben Aminadav of the tribe of Judah was the first to jump into the sea; the water split, and "the children of Israel walked across on the dry land in the midst of the sea." All that night, a pillar of fire intervened between the Egyptians and the Israelites. When the Egyptians followed, the waters returned to their natural state and place and drowned them. The Children of Israel sang the "Song at the Sea" in praise and gratitude to G-d.

### **Moses Strikes (1274 BCE)**

After Miriam's passing, the miraculous well that supplied the Jews with water disappeared. The Jews complained to Moses, and G-d instructed Moses to speak to a rock in the desert, causing it to give forth water. Instead, Moses struck the rock. It was exclusively due to this error that Moses did not merit to enter the Holy Land. Other sources date this event as having occurred earlier in the month of Nissan.

**Tuesday, April 30, 2024-22 Nissan, 5784**

### **Isaac Circumcised (1713 BCE)**

Eight days following his birth on the 15th of Nissan, Isaac was circumcised, becoming the very first child to enter the covenant with G-d on the eighth day following his birth.

### **Encirclement of Jericho (1273 BCE)**

Shortly after crossing the Jordan River and entering the Land of Canaan, the Jews set their sights on conquering the walled and heavily fortified city of Jericho. Following Joshua's instructions, on the 22nd of Nissan the Israelites encircled Jericho. The Israelites marched around the city walls, led by the priests who carried the Holy Ark, and sounded the shofar (ram's horn).

This performance was repeated for seven days. On the seventh day, the walls of the city collapsed.

### **Poway Chabad Shooting (2019)**

A gunman walked into a Chabad-Lubavitch center outside San Diego during services on the last day of Passover 5779 (2019) and opened fire, killing Lori Kaye and injuring three.

**Wednesday, May 1, 2024-23 Nissan, 5784**

### **Crusade Mourned in Cologne (1147)**

The Jewish community of Cologne, Germany, designated the 23rd of Nissan as a day of fasting and mourning to commemorate the Jews of Cologne massacred in 1147 during the Second Crusade.

**Thursday, May 2, 2024-24 Nissan, 5784**

### **The First Shabbat Celebrated (1313 BCE)**

Two days after the Jews crossed the Red Sea (see Jewish History for the 21st of Nissan) they arrived in Marah. There they received several commandments; one of them was to observe the Shabbat. The first Shabbat was observed on the 24th of Nissan.

**Friday, May 3, 2024-25 Nissan, 5784**

### **Passing of R. Chaim Halberstam of Sanz (1876)**

R. Chaim Halberstam served as rabbi of Sanz, Poland, and was the founder of the Sanz Chassidic dynasty. His halachic responsa and Torah expositions were published under the name Divrei Chaim. He passed away on 25 Nissan in the year 5636 (1876).

**Shabbat, May 4, 2024-26 Nissan, 5784**

### **Passing of Joshua (1245 BCE)**

Joshua (1355-1245 BCE), who assumed the leadership of the people of Israel after Moses' passing, took them into the Holy Land passed away on Nissan 26. He passed away at the age of 110, in the 28th year of his leadership.