

PARSHAT EMOR

4-10 Iyar 5784
12-18 May 2024

Torah: Leviticus 21:1-24:23
Haftorah: Ezekiel 44:15-31

Psalms Daily

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 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)

Pirkei Avot (3:3)

"Rabbi Shimon would say: Three who eat at one table and do not speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten of idolatrous sacrifices; as is stated, "Indeed, all tables are filled with vomit and filth, devoid of [G-d's] Presence" - Isaiah 28:8.

But three who eat at one table and speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten at G-d's table, as is stated, "And he said to me: This is the table that is before G-d" - Ezekiel 41:22.

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No One Forgotten.

Numbers

Numbers are funny things. On the one hand, they seem utterly devoid of meaning: think of the sterility of bureaucracies ("Go to Window #14 and fill out form #3062") or the banality of an address like "25 20th Street." On the other hand, consider how numbers are used when we say things like, "Eighteen years' experience in the business"; "A \$450,000 home"; or "This is our child. She's three."

Counting something makes it real to us: only when we have assigned it a quantity can we understand what it means to us and how we can use it. Imagine that you are given a chest full of gold coins. You thank your benefactor and take it home. As soon as the door is securely bolted, what's the first thing you do? Count them, of course. Sure, it feels great to be able to say, "I'm a rich man." But if you want to do something with your riches, you have to know: How much?

"And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks they shall be; until the morrow of the seventh week, you shall count fifty days... And you shall proclaim that very day a holy festival" - Leviticus 23:15-21

The people of Israel departed Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, celebrated ever since as the first day of Passover. Seven weeks later, on the 6th of Sivan—marked on our calendar as the festival of Shavuot—we assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai and received the Torah from G-d.

Every year, we retrace this journey with a 49-day "Counting of the Omer." Beginning on the second night of Passover, we count the days and weeks. "Today is one day to the Omer," we proclaim on the first night of the count. "Today is two days to the Omer," "Today is seven days, which are one week to the Omer", "Today is twenty-six days, which are three weeks and five days day to the Omer," and so on, until: "Today is forty-nine

days, which are seven weeks to the Omer." The fiftieth day is Shavuot. The Kabbalists explain that we each possess seven powers of the heart—love, awe, beauty, ambition, humility, bonding and regality—and that each of these seven powers includes elements of all seven. These are represented by the seven weeks and forty-nine days of the Omer count.

Every Passover, we are granted a treasure chest containing the greatest gift ever given to man—the gift of freedom. It is also a completely useless gift. What is freedom? What can be done with it? Nothing, unless we open the treasure chest and count its contents.

So, on the second day of Passover, after we've taken home our treasure, we start counting. We count seven times seven, because the gift of freedom has been given to each of the seven powers and forty-nine dimensions of our soul. Indeed, what use is a capacity for love, if it is a slave to external influences and internal neurosis? Of what value is ambition, if we are its pawn rather than its master?

Each evening for the next seven weeks, we open our treasure chest and count another coin. We count our loving love, intimidating love, beautiful love, ambitious love, humble love, bonding love and regal love. We assign a number to the regality of our awe ("Today is fourteen days, which are two weeks to the Omer") and to the beauty of our humility ("Today is thirty-one days, which are four weeks and three days to the Omer").

We count them all—and then we present ourselves at Mount Sinai.

By Yanki Tauber

In Search of Balance

With so many demands tugging at us constantly, many of us are on a perpetual search for balance in our lives. We are looking to find that miraculous state of equilibrium and harmony that can draw the many facets of our lives inward.

"Six days work shall be done. But the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest,

a calling of holiness; you shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to G-d in all your dwellings" - Leviticus 23:3

The six days of the week, from Sunday until Friday, represent the six basic directions of the three-dimensional physical universe: north-south, east-west and up-down. They represent the fundamental modes of reaching out to the six directions of creation.

But these six outward-bound directions could not exist without a center point. The Shabbat is the center point that draws all six points together. It is the axis or focal point at the center of the six directions. It reflects an inward look, representing how we integrate spiritual illumination into ourselves.

All week long, in our struggle to gain spirituality, we operate in a masculine mode of conquest and assault, in a state of restlessness. Throughout these six days, we dominate and exert influence over our surroundings. We are in a constant state of conflict, choosing between those elements of our world that we are to embrace and develop and those that must be rejected and overpowered.

But every Shabbat, we enter afresh into a spiraling cycle of harmony, serenity, and peace. After having asserted ourselves and having accomplished our goals during the weekdays, we take a respite from our battles. On Shabbat, we refrain from the selection and suppression process altogether, as we enter into a feminine mode within ourselves and within creation, a state of harmony, peacefulness, restfulness, and receptivity. For this reason, Shabbat is referred to in the feminine, as in Shabbat Hamalkah, "the Shabbat Queen," or Kallah, "bride." Shabbat is the source of blessing for both the week that preceded it as well as the one that follows. Similarly, in Judaism, a woman is considered the source of blessing for her home. Our sages declared, "A man receives blessings only through the merit of his wife," and "Joy,

blessing, goodness, Torah blessing in your life, it isn't really yours until you are able to stop, appreciate, and absorb its goodness. On Shabbat, we can finally absorb the blessing of our previous week's toil, as well as invigorate ourselves to continue on the new journey of the oncoming week. We give meaning to the

past while we our energies for the coming workweek. The woman has been entrusted with lighting the candles to usher in this holy day which is so representative of the feminine mode. Even "if the husband wants to kindle the candles himself, his wife takes precedence." For the same reason, it is preferable for a man

to recite the Havdalah prayer at the conclusion of the Shabbat, ushering in the weekday work. With the many demands of modern life, we need the holy day of the Shabbat more than ever, to bring blessings, harmony, and balance into our lives.

By Chana Weisberg

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RABBI SHLOMO YITZCHAKI (RASHI)

(circa 1040 - 1105)

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (known by the acronym Rashi), revered by Jewish children and scholars alike, was a renowned Rabbi and commentator who lived around 900 years ago, in the eleventh century (4800 on the Hebrew calendar). Born in Troyes, France, he emerged from humble beginnings, his father a wine merchant. Despite limited resources, Rashi pursued Torah study, traveling to renowned centers of Jewish learning like Worms, Germany. His genius and dedication propelled him to become a highly sought-after scholar. He was appointed Rabbi of Troyes but remained humble, declining a salary, and maintaining his father's wine business. Rashi's true legacy, however, lies in his groundbreaking commentaries on the Tanach (Bible) and Talmud.

Recognizing the difficulty of these texts, Rashi embarked on a unique mission: to write commentaries in simple language accessible to everyone. He meticulously crafted his explanations, focusing on clarity and conciseness. Initially hesitant to unveil his work, Rashi anonymously left slips of commentary in various academies.

These "mysterious" parchments, praised for their illuminating approach, fueled Rashi's resolve. He continued writing, eventually tackling the entire Chumash (five books of Moses), Prophets, and various Talmud tractates. Once discovered, his authorship was met with universal acclaim, his name becoming synonymous with insightful Torah interpretation.

Rashi's impact remains unparalleled. His commentary is included in nearly every

printed Chumash and Talmud, serving as a cornerstone of Torah study for centuries. No other commentator has achieved such widespread acceptance and enduring relevance.

Never having had sons, Rashi's legacy shines through his daughters, who married prominent scholars, and his grandchildren, including the renowned Rabbenu Tam and Rashbam, who contributed significantly to Talmudic discourse.

Rashi's life wasn't without hardship. Witnessing, towards the end of his life, the horrors of the Crusades and persecution of Jews, he poured his anguish into poignant Piyutim (religious poems) still recited today. He passed away in Tammuz of 4865, or 1105.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, May 12, 2024-4 Iyar, 5784

Maimonides Saved (1165)

The 4th of Iyar was observed by Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204) as a personal day of fasting and prayer. He and his family were fleeing Islamic persecution from Fez, Morocco to the Holy Land, their ship was caught in a fierce storm at sea. He cried out to G-d in prayer and vowed to fast each year on this date if saved, and he kept to his commitment.

Tuesday, May 14, 2024-6 Iyar, 5784

Anti-Jewish Riots in Russia (1881)

Following the assassination, a month earlier, of Tzar Alexander II of Russia, and the subsequent rumors that the Jews were behind the assassination, anti-Jewish riots broke out on the 6th of Iyar. The riots and pogroms lasted for four years, during which tens thousands of Jewish homes and synagogues were destroyed, and countless Jews were injured and impoverished.

War of Independence (1948)

One day after the State of Israel was proclaimed, the surrounding Arab nations - Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq - declared war on the fledgling state, with the objective of "driving the Jews into the sea." Tel Aviv was bombed on that very first day of the War of Independence.

Wednesday, May 15, 2024-7 Iyar, 5784

Jerusalem Walls Dedicated (335 BCE)

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was celebrated with great jubilation nearly 88 years after they were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia.

Venetian Ghetto (1516)

On the 7th of Iyar, 1516, the Venetian City Council decreed that all Jews be segregated to a specific area of the city.

Venice's ghetto was surrounded by water, with a canal leading to its gates. At night the "Christian guards" patrolled the waters around the ghetto to ensure that the night curfew wasn't violated. At the same time of the establishment of this ghetto, numerous other degrading laws were enacted, including the requirement that all Jews wear yellow stars as identification.

Despite all these restrictions, the Jewish community blossomed and functioned normally. In 1797, the ghetto was abolished by Napoleon during the French Revolution. The site chosen to accommodate the Jews had once housed the city's foundries, ghettos in Italian -- and thus the eventual popularization throughout Europe of the word "ghetto" to describe the city sections where Jews were forced to reside.

Rindfleisch Massacres Begin (1298)

Taking advantage of the state of anarchy in Germany, the result of a civil war between two contenders to the throne, a mob led by a nobleman named Rindfleisch murdered the Jews of Rottingen on April 20, 1298 (7 Iyar, 5058). Over the next few years, hundreds of Jewish communities in Germany and Austria were destroyed. Among the tens of thousands of martyrs were R. Mordechai ben Hillel and his wife and five children.

Thursday, May 16, 2024-8 Iyar, 5784

1st Crusade Begins (1096)

In the early 1070s, the Muslim Turks commenced an offensive against the Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem. Pope Gregory VII offered his help to defend the Greek Christians, but the army he promised never materialized. In 1095, his successor, Urban II, began to call for a holy war to liberate the Christians in Jerusalem. By the next year, more than 100,000 men had rallied to his call, forming the First Crusade. Urban and the local clergymen in Europe felt that the Crusade had another purpose as well-to annihilate all non-Christians in Europe who refused to convert to Christianity. On their way to the Holy Land, the mobs of crusaders attacked many Jewish communities. On Shabbat, the 8th of Iyar, the Jews of Speyer (Rhineland-Palatinate), Germany were massacred. Many of the Jews of Worms, Germany were also massacred on this day; some of them took refuge in a local castle for a week before being slaughtered as they recited their morning prayers **Shabbat, May 18, 2024-10 Iyar, 5784**

Passing of Eli (891 BCE)

Eli the High Priest died upon learning that the Holy Ark containing the Tablets was captured by the Philistines, and that his two sons were killed in battle.

Passing of Rif (1103)

Rabbi Isaac Al-Fasi (1013-1103), known by the acronym "Rif," was one of the earliest codifiers of the Talmud. In 1088 he was forced to flee his hometown of Fez, Morocco, to Spain, whereupon he assumed the position of rabbi in Alusina (Lucene).