

Torah Weekly

ד'סב

PARSHAT VAYAK'HEL PARSHAT PARAH

16 - 22 Adar 5785
16 - 22 March 2025

Torah: Exodus 35:1 - 38:20
Parah: Numbers 19:1-22
HafTorah: Ezekiel 36:16-36

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)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 10 The Shema

We are commanded to
recite the Shema twice
daily: morning and
night.

Positive Mitzvah 5 Prayer

We are commanded
numerous times
throughout the Torah to
serve G-d. Although this
is a general
commandment, it does
contain a very specific
application: prayer,
service of the heart as
expressed through the
mouth.

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

CEDARS

When bushfires threaten rural communities, and residents are urged to abandon their houses in the face of danger, many people find themselves in the unenviable position of having to decide which of their possessions to abandon.

You can't take everything with you on an escape down the mountain; if it won't fit in the back seat of the car, you're probably going to have to leave it to the vagaries of fate and the mercies of the firefighters. Some people load up their family photo albums and copies of their insurance certificates; others chose to leave their paperwork behind, and concentrate on cramming their pets and livestock into the back of the van.

It's an invidious situation to be in. What would you reach for first in the panic? The choices you make as the firestorm heads your way say a lot about you as an individual. They demonstrate the relative importance you allocate to your material possessions compared to mementos of the past. And, while it's purely a reflection of personal priorities, this may be the truest test of value you may ever face.

Mementos from a Previous Life

The mourners at a funeral I recently conducted wrote a moving eulogy for their mother. I was stirred by their description of how the only heirlooms she brought with her on the long journey from the "old country" to her new home in Australia were her mother's Shabbat candlesticks. Battered and bent though they may have been, they represented her spiritual connection with her past, and now duly take pride of place as her legacy for her children.

By packing the Leichter (Shabbat candlesticks) and leaving more valuable possessions behind, she was making a value judgment for the ages: demonstrating that Judaism was not just an abandonable relic of Europe, but was to be a vital component of her new home.

This demonstration of intent mirrors a similar decision made by our forefather Jacob. As he and his family descended from Canaan to Egypt, Jacob brought cedar saplings, native to Israel, with him, and then subsequently replanted them in Egypt. Generations later, as his descendants readied themselves to finally flee from Egyptian slavery, they cut down those now mature trees and carried the wood with them on their travels through the desert. These giant planks were eventually fashioned into

the walls of the Mishkan, the traveling Tabernacle for G-dly worship.

It may seem an incredibly complicated way of procuring the necessary lumber. Yet Jacob's intention was clear: seeing the trees and remembering the promise of redemption that they represented would bolster the spirits of his descendants through even the darkest moments, and encourage them to look forward with hope to a better future.

Furthermore, by bringing specimens from Israel, Jacob was bridging the gap between the generations, and ensuring that no matter how far his children would sink into the bitterness and despair of slavery, they would always have a visceral link with their past to cling to, and a promise of future consolation with which to inspire themselves.

There are inevitable moments in life where we must take stock of our valuables, and decide for ourselves what to hold close and what we can safely abandon. As the fires of assimilation threaten, and the harsh winds of history blow towards us, there is a danger that we may mistakenly leave Judaism behind in exchange for a carload of worthless junk. However, by planning ahead during the periods of relative calm, and assessing the value of our real assets in advance, we ensure our personal safety and ensure our legacy for future generations.

*By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum
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THE PRINCESS AND THE MAIDSERVANT

The results were in.

Of all of the applicants, two master artisans had been chosen to oversee the awesome task of the Tabernacle's construction.

Moses said to the Children of Israel: "See, G-d has proclaimed by name, Bezael son of Uri son of Hur of the tribe of Judah...and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He imbued them with wisdom of the heart, to do every work of the craftsmen, and artist, and embroiderer...to do all the work for the labor of the Sanctuary."

Building the Tabernacle, G-d's terrestrial residence, must have been a most sought-after contract; it's safe to say that those who scored the job must have had, in addition to talent, considerable merit. What was it about Bezael and Oholiab that caused them to land this coveted assignment? And while the job was extensive, why did G-d prefer a merger over a sole supervisor; a move which

carries the potential to create differences and difficulties?

Rashi, the Bible's preeminent commentator, sheds light on the issue. Bothered by the Torah's inclusion of Bezael's grandfather while recording his lineage - usually the Torah suffices with mentioning an individual's father, as it does with Oholiab - Rashi remarks that "Hur was the son of Miriam." I.e., it is to note Bezael's pedigree, that his illustrious grandfather is mentioned.

But why does Rashi ascribe Hur's greatness to the fact that he was the son of Miriam? Hur had his own solid merits on which to stand!

Scripture makes two mentions of Hur being singled out for honor from amongst all of Israel. In one instance he stood alongside Moses, and in the other, next to Aaron.

Furthermore, Hur's devotion to G-d superseded even that of his uncle Aaron. When the Israelites sought to make the Golden Calf, Hur tried to obstruct them, and ended up getting killed for his efforts - while Aaron reacted more mildly, and though well intentioned, took part in making the idol.

So why not attribute the choice of Bezael to oversee the Tabernacle's construction to the fact that he was a grandson of Hur, who both lived and died to sanctify G-d's name? Why the need to mention that he was also the great-grandchild of Miriam?

Equal Opportunity

Let's break for a moment to discuss Oholiab, Bezael's partner.

While the verse elaborates on Bezael's ancestry, talk of Oholiab's lineage is kept to a minimum. Because, in reality, there is little about Oholiab's family-roots worth mentioning. "Oholiab was from the tribe of Dan, the lowest of all tribes, of the sons of the maidservants [his mother was Bilhah]."

But if Oholiab stemmed from ordinary stock, why was he chosen to partner with Bezael, whose family-tree could hardly be matched?

Herein lays the point: "The Omnipresent put him on the level of Bezael with regard to the work of the Tabernacle, who was of the greatest among the tribes, to fulfill that which it says, 'And the nobleman is not recognized ahead of the pauper.'"

In this moving display of sensitivity, G-d set a precedent for providing equal opportunity. His message was clear: "My home will be built by representatives of all My children without distinction. The privileged and the underprivileged, the sophisticated and the simple, the illustrious and the

plain, the rich and the poor, are all welcome to take part in this sacred building campaign."

Kings of flesh and blood show favoritism; not so the King of all kings.

(Perhaps this is also one of the reasons why when counting His children through their contributions, G-d commanded, "The wealthy shall not increase, and the destitute shall not decrease from half of the shekel." As if to say that each of them matters the same.

Not surprisingly, it was from this collection of half shekels that the sockets that formed the base of the Tabernacle were made. Both the literal and figurative foundation of G-d's home is to be built and predicated on the ideal of equality.)

The Maid and the Princess

In order to underscore the uniqueness of the partnership between Bezalel and Oholiab, Rashi mentions Hur's mother, Miriam. The woman who was the matriarch of the Davidic line of kings and leaders.

The picture is now complete. The descendant of a princess links arms with the descendant of a maidservant.

Attributing Bezalel's greatness to the fact that he was a grandson of Hur would only highlight the greatness of one individual ancestor; mentioning that he was the great-grandson of Miriam underscores the bloodline of a family of priests and leaders.

Thoroughbred

More than just promoting egalitarianism, G-d used this opportunity to make an important declaration. As our creator, He considers us all to have exemplary lineage. As His children, we all come from great stock.

A prominent businessman and longtime supporter of Chabad started a beginners' service at his congregation. He proudly reported on his initiative to the Rebbe. But when he told the Rebbe that he had arranged services for 130 Jews with no Jewish background, the Rebbe's smile vanished.

"What?" the Rebbe asked looking hurt, "No Jewish background?"

"Go back and tell them they have a background. They are the children of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah."

The Rebbe's smile then returned.

What's in It for Me?

We were all created equal, no one more equal than the next. We are all G-d's children. Let's work on seeing things the same way.

!A couple once sought the Rebbe's advice. Someone had suggested a young man as a match for their daughter, but they hesitated to go ahead with it because while they stemmed from very distinguishable lineage, the young man did not.

Was this a valid reservation or not, they asked.

The Rebbe responded: "You would surely not have refused to take Abraham as a son-in-law, even though his father, Terah, worshipped idols..."

You don't have to come from somebody to be somebody!

And what of one blessed to be born into privilege and status?

One Sunday, the mayor of Haifa passed by the Rebbe for "dollars." He mentioned that he was a descendant of illustrious Chassidim. The Rebbe responded with a smile, "It's not enough just to be a 'descendant'; one should strive to be a living example!"

*By Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson
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VAYAK'HEL IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Vayakhel," means "And he gathered" and it is found in Exodus 35:1.

Moses assembles the people of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the Shabbat. He then conveys G-d's instructions regarding the making of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). The people donate the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones. Moses has to tell them to stop giving.

A team of wise-hearted artisans make the Mishkan and its furnishings (as detailed in the previous Torah readings of Terumah, Tetzaveh and Ki Tisa): three layers of roof coverings; 48 gold-plated wall panels, and 100 silver foundation sockets; the parochet (veil) that separates between the Sanctuary's two chambers, and the masach (screen) that fronts it; the ark, and its cover with the cherubim; the table and its showbread; the seven-branched menorah with its specially prepared oil; the golden altar and the incense burned on it; the anointing oil; the outdoor altar for burnt offerings and all its implements; the hangings, posts and foundation sockets for the courtyard; and the basin and its pedestal, made out of copper mirrors.

PARAH IN A NUTSHELL

In preparation for the upcoming festival of Passover, when every Jew had to be in a state of ritual purity, the section of Parah is added to the weekly reading this week. Parah relates the laws of the Red Heifer with which a person contaminated by contact with a dead body was purified.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 16 Adar 5785 - 16 March 2025

Rebuilding of Jerusalem Wall Begun (c. 41 CE)

Agrippa I was the last Jewish King of Judea, from 3801-3804 (41-44 CE). Appointed by the Roman Emperor as a vassal king, he was pious and kind to his subjects. During his reign, the Jews began to prosper and live comfortably. The Sages of the time accorded him great respect.

Agrippa I started construction to repair, broaden and heighten the walls around Jerusalem. The Romans, wary of the Jews' rising prosperity, placed many obstacles in his way. Nonetheless, the wall was completed, though the finished product was not as magnificent as originally planned.

The 16th of Adar, the day when the construction commenced, was instituted to be a joyous day.

Tuesday, 18 Adar 5785 - 18 March 2025

Salvation of Yemenite Jewry (1722)

The Jews of Sana'a, Yemen, were saved from a decree plotted against them by the king's anti-Semitic ministers, in which they were accused of killing the grand prince. Yemenite Jewry celebrated this day each year with feasting and rejoicing.

Wednesday, 19 Adar 5785 - 19 March 2025

Passing of R. Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1932)

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, played a leading role in the Jewish community of British-Mandatory Jerusalem for

almost six decades. He authored the book of responsa Salmas Chaim. He passed away on 19 Adar 5692 (1932).

Thursday, 20 Adar 5785 - 20 March 2025

Choni HaMa'agel prays for rain (1st Century BCE)

"One year, most of Adar went by and it didn't rain. They sent for Choni HaMa'agel (the Circle Maker). He prayed and the rains didn't come. He drew a circle, stood in it and said: 'Master of The World! Your children have turned to me; I swear in Your great name that I won't move from here until You have pity on Your children.' The rains came down." - Talmud, Taanit 23a

Passing of "Bach" (1640)

20 Adar is the Yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Yoel Sirkes (circa 5320-5400, or 1560-1640), rabbi of Krakow and author of the Bayit Chadash ("Bach") commentary on the great Halachic work, the Arba'ah Turim.

Passing of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1995)

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was a renowned halachic authority who lived in Jerusalem. Many of his rulings pertain to modern technological advances as they apply to Jewish life. He passed away on 20 Adar 5755 (1995).

Friday, 21 Adar 5785 - 21 March 2025

Purim Narbonne (1236)

In the course of a fight with a Christian fisherman, a Jew dealt him a blow which led to his death. The infuriated Christians of Narbonne, France, started rioting and attacking the Jewish community.

The governor of Narbonne, Don Aymeric, quickly intervened, and dispatched a contingent of soldiers to protect the Jewish community. The riot was immediately halted and all the spoils stolen during the riots were returned to the Jews. The 21st of Adar 4996 (1236) was recorded as "Purim Narbonne," a day when the community annually celebrated this historic event.

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk (1786)

The great Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk (5477-5546, or 1717-1786) was one of the elite disciples of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch, and a colleague of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. He is also widely known as the No'am Elimelech, the title of the renowned chassidic work he authored. He passed away on 21 Adar 5546 (1786).

Shabbat, 22 Adar 5785 - 22 March 2025

Earthquake Saves Jews (1430)

The church and the government of Rome (current-day Italy) set Wednesday, 22 Adar 5190 (1430) as the day when all the Jews of Rome must convert or face death. On that day a great earthquake shook Rome and many of the archbishops and priests who conceived the decree were killed. Following the earthquake, Pope Martin V annulled the decree.