

## PARSHAT BEHAR- BECHUKOTAI

20 - 26 Iyar 5785  
18 - 24 May 2025

*Torah:* Leviticus 25:1-27:34  
*Haftorah:* Jeremiah 16:19-17:14

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 219

#### The Slandering Husband

In the event that a man slanders his newly married virgin wife, falsely accusing her of infidelity, we are commanded to follow the pertinent laws detailed in the Torah. This includes lashes for the husband, and his obligation to remain married to this wife [if she so desires].

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## EARTHLY REWARDS?

*"If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, I will give your rains in their time, the Land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give forth its fruit..." - Leviticus 26:3-4*

Reward and incentive must be appropriate for their recipients. When a child cleans his room, he is awarded a candy or toy, and when the electrician rewires a home, he is compensated with a (rather handsome...) check for his efforts. You would be hard pressed to find a competent electrician willing to do any job for, say, three candies an hour! Similarly, the spiritual person views material wealth with disdain. In his eyes, this world and all its luxuries are merely a means towards an end, with the service of his Creator, and the spiritual heights and rewards achieved by their means, as the ultimate prize. Why, then, does the Torah inundate us with assurances of material prosperity as compensation for our good deeds? Where are the promises of supernal pleasures in a spiritual paradise? Or better yet, shouldn't the Torah describe the greatness of service which stems from a deep love for G-d, without any thoughts of reward or compensation?

This week's Torah portion is always read in proximity to Lag BaOmer, the day when we celebrate the life and teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (2<sup>nd</sup> century), author of the Zohar, and the first one to reveal the deepest teachings of Kabbalah, Nishmata D'oraita, the "soul" of the Torah. The soul, which is not perceptible to the naked eye, animates the body of every living creature. So, too, the teachings of Kabbalah infuse life within the "body" of the Torah, revealing the spiritual implications inherent - but hidden - within every word and law mentioned in the Scriptures, Mishnah or Talmud.

The world, too, is comprised of body and soul. The body consists of physical mass, as well as the more spiritual elements of creation, such as logic, emotions, pleasure, etc. G-d's Ten Utterances are the soul which constantly provides existence,

life and sustenance to all created beings. Just as the soul is the driving force of every function of the body, so, too, Creation is completely dependent on its spiritual soul.

Studying the soul of Torah reveals the soul of Creation. The teachings of Kabbalah, especially as explained by the Chassidic masters, shed light upon the true nature of Creation, unlocking its inner dimension, and allowing every person to intellectually perceive the G-dly essence of all that exists.

The spiritual rewards which result from serving G-d are to be expected - logically, spiritual service spawns spiritual benefits. It is unnecessary for the Torah to state the obvious. In truth, however, the physical and spiritual are one body and are entirely interdependent, so the Torah's rewards must "trickle down" into the physical realm as well. If the rewards were limited to the spiritual arena, that would demonstrate the existence of a schism between the two seemingly opposite entities. The physical rewards mentioned in the Torah are thus an expression of the unity and harmony between Creation and its Creator.

So treat your soul to a class on the soul of the Torah, and your eyes will then be opened to the soul of creation. The bodies too will gain from this experience: your understanding and appreciation of the "body" of Torah will increase, you will make the "body" of the world into a holier place, and G-d's blessing will be showered upon your body as well!

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg  
Editor, Jewish Learning Institute*

## CAPITALIST OR COMMUNIST?

Karl Marx may have been the pioneer, but many other Jews were also involved in the struggle for communism, particularly in the early days of the Russian revolution. Personally, I don't think that we have any apologies to make for this phenomenon. Having suffered unbearably under successive oppressive regimes, many of those political activists genuinely thought communism would be better for the people than czarist corruption. Their sense of idealism fueled hopes for a

better life and a more equitable future for all. On paper, communism was a good idea. The fact that it failed - and that the new leaders outdid their predecessors' oppression - may reflect the personalities involved as much as the system they promoted. What is Judaism's economic system? Is there one? I would describe it as "capitalism with a conscience." In promoting free enterprise, the Torah is clearly capitalistic. But it is a conditional capitalism, and certainly a compassionate capitalism.

Winston Churchill once said, "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent vice of communism is the equal sharing of miseries." So, Judaism introduced an open market system, where the sharing of blessings was not left to chance or wishful thinking, but was made mandatory. Our Parshah gives us a classic example.

Shemittah, the Sabbatical year, was designed to allow the land to rest and regenerate. Six years the land would be worked, but in the seventh year it would rest and lie fallow. The agricultural cycle in the Holy Land imposed strict rules and regulations on the owner of the land. No planting, no pruning, no agricultural work whatsoever in the seventh year - and whatever grew by itself would be "ownerless" and there for the taking for all. The owner could take some, but so could his workers, friends, and neighbors. The landowner, in his own land, would have no more right than the stranger. For six years you own the property, but in the seventh you enjoy no special claims.

This is but one of many examples of Judaism's "capitalism with a conscience." There are many other legislated obligations to the poor - not optional extras, not even pious recommendations, but clear mandatory contributions to the less fortunate. The ten percent tithes, as well as the obligation to leave to the poor the unharvested corners of one's field, the gleanings, and the forgotten sheaves are all part of the system of compassionate capitalism. Judaism thus presents an economic system which boasts the best of both worlds - the advantages of an unfettered free market, allowing

personal expression and success relative to hard work, without the drawbacks of corporate greed. If the land belongs to G-d, then we have no exclusive ownership over it. G-d bestows His blessings upon us, but clearly, the deal is that we must share. Without Torah law, capitalism fails. Unbridled ambition and the lust for money and power lead to monopolies and conglomerates that leave no room for the next guy and widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The Sabbatical year is one of

many checks and balances that keep our capitalism kosher and kind. Some people are too businesslike. Everything is measured and exact. Business is business. If I invited you for Shabbat, then I won't repeat the invitation until you reciprocate first. If you gave my son \$50 for his bar mitzvah, then that is exactly what I will give your son. We should be softer, more flexible, not so hard, tough and businesslike. By all means, be a capitalist, but be a kosher capitalist. What a person is "worth"

financially should be irrelevant to the respect you accord to him. Retain the traditional Jewish characteristics of kindness, compassion, Tzedakah and Chesed, generosity of spirit, heart - and pocket.

May you make lots of money and encourage G-d to keep showering you with His blessings by sharing it generously with others.

*By Rabbi Yossy Goldman  
President, South African Rabbinical  
Association*

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, 20 Iyar 5785 - 18 May 2025**

### **Journey From Sinai (1312 BCE)**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of Iyar 2449 (1312 BCE) - nearly a year after the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai - the Jewish people departed their encampment near the Mountain. They resumed their journey when the pillar of cloud rose for the first time from over the Tabernacle - the divine sign that would signal the resumption of their travels throughout their encampments and journeys over the next 38 years, until they reached the eastern bank of the Jordan River on the eve of their entry into the Holy Land.

### **Troyes Jews Burned at Stake (1288)**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of Iyar 5048 (1288), thirteen Jews in Troyes, France, were burned at the stake by the Inquisition. They were accused, in a blood libel, of the supposed murder of a Christian child. The thirteen Jews were chosen from among the richer members of the community.

Jews were also killed in a blood libel in Neuchatel, Switzerland, on this date.

### **Venice Jews Forbidden to Practice Law (1637)**

The Jews of Venice, Italy, were forbidden to practice law or to act as advocates in the Courts of Venice on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Iyar 5397 (1637).

### **Pregnant Women Sentenced to Death (1942)**

In the ghetto of Kovno, the Nazis decreed the execution of all pregnant Jewish women on this date in 5702 (1942).

**Monday, 21 Iyar 5785 - 19 May 2025**

### **Kfar Chabad Established (1949)**

The Chabad-Lubavitch village in Israel, Kfar Chabad, was founded by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, on 21 Iyar 5709 (1949). The first residents were mostly recent immigrants from the Soviet Union, survivors of the terrors of World War II and Stalinist oppression. Kfar Chabad, which is located about five miles south of Tel Aviv and includes agricultural lands as well as numerous educational institutions, serves as the headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidic movement in the Holy Land.

**Tuesday, 22 Iyar 5785 - 20 May 2025**

### **Shabbat Commanded (1313 BCE)**

Following the descent of the manna (the miraculous "Bread from Heaven" that sustained the Israelites in the desert), G-d commanded the Jewish people to keep the Shabbat. This Shabbat was the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Iyar, 2448 (1313 BCE).

On that Friday morning, enough manna fell for two days' worth of meals, as on the Shabbat it would be prohibited to gather the manna. The "Two Loaves" of challah bread (Lechem Mishneh) that form the foundation of our Shabbat meal are in commemoration of the double portion of manna.

### **Jewish Books Confiscated (1731)**

Giovanni Antonio Costanzi, the Vatican librarian and author of a catalogue of the Vatican's Hebrew manuscripts, directed searches in all the Jewish quarters throughout the Papal States to confiscate Jewish holy books. The confiscation begun on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Iyar in 5491 (1731). More confiscations continued over the next twenty years.

### **Hungarian Jews Deported (1944)**

Two months after the Nazi occupation of Hungary, where the Jewish population prior to WWII was 725,000, the Nazis began deportation of the Jews to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Eichmann personally oversaw the following day the start of the extermination process. Eight days later an estimated 100,000 had been murdered.

**Wednesday, 23 Iyar 5785 - 21 May 2025**

### **Water from a Rock at Rephidim (1313 BCE)**

The Children of Israel arrived at Rephidim on the 23rd of Iyar, 2448 (1313 BCE) - 38 days after their exodus from Egypt.

Rephidim was desert land and waterless, the people grumbled that they and their flocks were in danger of dying of thirst. G-d commanded Moses to take the elders of the people to a rock which he was to hit with his staff. Moses hit the rock and from the dry stone, a well sprang forth.

**Friday, 25 Iyar 5785 - May 23 2025**

### **Cologne Jews Saved (1096)**

On this day in 4856 (1096), during the First Crusade, the crusaders were locked out of Cologne, Germany and the local Jews saved, following the orders of the local bishop to close the gates to the city.

In several local provinces, where the local bishop tried to avert the masses from harming the Jews, the Bishop would have to escape for his own safety.

### **Toledo Massacre (1355)**

1,200 Jews were massacred by a Christian and Muslim mob attack on the Jewish section of Toledo, Spain, on this date in 5115 (1355).

### **Passing of Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum (1832)**

Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum was a well-known halachic authority who served as rabbi in the

Eastern European cities of Kalish, Lissa, and Stryi. Among the famous and widely studied works of this prolific author are Chavos Daas and Nesivos Hamishpat, both in-depth commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law). He passed away on 25 Iyar 5592 (1832).

**Shabbat, 26 Iyar 5785 - 24 May 2025**

### **R. Saadia Gaon (942)**

26 Iyar is the Yahrzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Saadia Gaon (4652-4702, or 892-942), author of Emunot V'deot, one of the earliest works of Jewish philosophy. ("Gaon" was the title given to the leading Sages of Babylonia in the post-Talmudic period).

### **Passing of Ramchal (1747)**

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (known by the acronym "Ramchal"), philosopher, kabbalist and ethicist, was born in Padua, Italy, in 5467 (1707). He is best known for his work Mesilas Yesharim. He passed away on Iyar 26, 5507 (1747), at the age of 39, and was buried in Tiberias, Israel, next to the tomb of Rabbi Akiva.

### **Six-Day War (1967)**

In the spring of 5727 (1967), the Arab capitals paraded their arms and openly spoke of overrunning Israel and casting its inhabitants into the sea. The international media was almost unanimous in its belief that the small Jewish state, outflanked and outgunned by its enemies, stood little chance of survival. It seemed that, for the second time in a generation, the world was going to stand by and allow the enemies of the Jewish people to slaughter them in the millions.

On 26 Iyar 5727 (5 June, 1967), Israel launched preemptive strikes on its southern and northern frontiers. In just six days, the Jewish army defeated five Arab armies on three fronts and liberated territories of its promised homeland amounting to an area twice greater than its own size, including the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. The openly miraculous nature of Israel's victory spawned a global awakening of the Jewish soul, fueling the already present and growing Teshuvah movement of return to G-d and Jewish traditions. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, called it a moment of biblical proportions, an "opportunity the likes of which has not been granted for thousands of years." Many thousands of Jews flocked to put on tefillin and pray at the newly liberated Western Wall of the Temple Mount.