

PARSHAT BEHAALOTTECHA

12 - 18 Sivan 5785
8 - 14 June 2025

Torah: Numbers 8:1-12:16
Haftorah: Zachariah 2:14-4:7

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)

Negative Mitzvah 61 Violating Oaths

It is forbidden to violate an oath which one makes obligating himself to do or not to do a certain action (unless the fulfillment of the oath involves violating a religious precept).

Negative Mitzvah 194

Idoltrous Libations
It is forbidden to drink wine that was used as a libation for an idol.

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NO SUCH THING AS AN ANTISEMITE

The Torah relates how when the Children of Israel would break camp to embark on their travels through the desert, Moses would proclaim: "Arise, O G-d, scatter Your opponents, and make Your enemies flee from before You..."

The Roman emperor Hadrian was an incurable Jew-hater. Once, while walking in state, visiting his subjects, he observed a Jewish man among the crowd of well-wishers; "What, an accursed Jew insults my Majesty by greeting me in public? Take him away and crucify him!"

Word of Hadrian's despotic action quickly got around, and the next time Hadrian went touring, a Jew who was unlucky enough to be in the vicinity made sure to keep away from the crowd, utter no words of greeting, and remain crouched by the wayside in an attitude of total submission.

"What, an accursed Jew insults my Majesty by ignoring me in public? Crucify him!" cried the emperor.

When the emperor's counselors wondered about the blatant inconsistency of his actions, Hadrian replied, "Don't teach me how to deal with my enemies."

But were the Jews really his enemy? Could a mere people have elicited such bottomless hatred? It is significant that, in the above-cited verse, Moses does not call upon G-d to defend us against those who are hostile to us, but to "scatter Your opponents... Your enemies."

The age-old struggle between Jew and Jew-hater is a misnomer. I remember, visiting the Nazi death-camp Dachau, how infuriating it was to see at the crematoria the large placard dedicating the site "to those who died in the fight against Nazism." The memorial might be somewhat appropriate for the political opponents of the regime who suffered and died there, but my grandfather's uncle, cousins and thousands of other martyrs didn't die fighting anything. Far as they were concerned, they were happy to lead private lives before Hitler and his henchmen came looking for them. To term it a "struggle" between innocent victim and executioner is as inappropriate as describing modern-day society's effort to protect themselves from suicide bombers a "cycle of violence."

The struggle is not between our enemies and ourselves. Rather G-d's antagonists attack us as the pawns in their battle against righteousness and G-dliness. Jew-hatred is so engrained and pervasive that no logical or rational explanation for the phenomenon can possibly be attached, other than to define it as the wicked man's eternal struggle against Divinity.

If they're not fighting us but fighting G-d, our only viable response is to live and act like Jews no matter the provocation. When it becomes apparent that their hatred towards us is predicated on our special relationship with G-d, then it becomes G-d's responsibility to defend Himself from His opponents and enemies and come to our rescue, freeing us to resume our historic mission of representing G-dliness to the world.

*By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum
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A LONG POLE

Here's the problem: you're here, and you want to be there ("there" being someplace better, loftier, more spiritual than "here"). But you're not there, and won't be there for a good while, perhaps ever.

So, do you act as if you're already there? Or do you tell yourself that here's just fine, and who needs there anyway?

You can become a hypocrite, or you can come to terms with your limitations. But there's also a third way - the way of the Long Pole.

In the outer chamber of the Heichal (sanctuary) in the Holy Temple stood the Menorah - a five-foot-tall, seven-branched candelabra of pure gold. Every morning, a priest filled the menorah's seven lamps with the purest olive oil; in the afternoon, he would climb a three-step staircase to kindle the Menorah's lamps. The seven flames burned through the night, symbolizing the divine light which radiated from the Holy Temple to the world.

Actually, it did not have to be a priest (Kohen) who lit the menorah - the law states that an ordinary layman can also perform this mitzvah. But there is also a law that restricts entry into the sanctuary to priests only: ordinary Israelites could venture no further than the Azarah, the Temple courtyard.

These two laws create a legal paradox: a layman can light the Menorah; but the Menorah's designated place is inside the sanctuary, and a layman cannot enter the sanctuary.

Technically, there are solutions: a layman can light the Menorah by means of a long pole, or the Menorah can be carried out to him by a Kohen and then replaced in the sanctuary. But the inconsistency remains: if the Torah believes that an ordinary person should be able to light the Menorah, why doesn't it place the Menorah in a part of the Temple accessible to ordinary people? And if the sanctity of the Menorah is such that it requires the higher holiness of the sanctuary, why does the Torah permit someone who cannot attain this level to light it?

This paradox, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is intentionally set up by the Torah in order to convey to us a most profound lesson: the lesson of the long pole.

The lesson of the long pole says that we should aspire to spiritual heights that lie beyond our reach. Not that we should presume to be what we are not - that would be like an ordinary person entering the sanctuary - but neither should we desist from our efforts to reach that place. Even when we know that we ourselves will never be "there," we can still act upon that place, influence it, even illuminate it.

At times, this means that someone from that higher place reaches down to us. At times, it means that we contrive a way to reach beyond what we are at the present time. In either case, we are what Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch calls a "lamplighter": a person who carries a long pole with a flame at its end and goes from lamp to lamp to ignite them. No lamp is too lowly, and no lamp is too lofty, for the lamplighter and his pole.

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TRUMPETS OF WAR, & TRUMPETS OF PEACE

"America is no different!" declared the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe - Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, of

righteous memory - upon his arrival to America in 5700 (1940).

In Soviet Russia, the Rebbe (known as the Previous Rebbe) had galvanized his Chassidim to continue teaching and spreading Judaism in the face of resistance and persecution. He built Jewish underground schools, Mikvahs, and synagogues. Due to his heroic efforts, Judaism was kept alive even during the height of communist suppression.

Upon his arrival in the US, he declared that "America is no different." What did the Rebbe mean? While the Rebbe was grateful for religious freedom in America, he understood the upcoming trials of keeping Judaism alive in this new, free world. "Though we are no longer in a life-threatening situation," he urged his followers, "we must remain as vigilant as ever." Persecution and opposition have many negative consequences, but they can also be the fuel for the oppressed. In America though, the challenges would be different. The Previous Rebbe's declaration was the vision and inspiration to fuel Jewish growth in this new world of freedom.

The Torah portion of Behaalotecha hints to these two eras:

While in your land, if you go to war against an enemy that oppresses you, you should blow a long blast with the trumpets so as to be remembered before G-d, your G-d, and you will be saved from your enemies.

And on the days of your rejoicing ... You should blow the trumpets.

The first verse refers to time when the people of Israel are physically threatened, when the trumpet blasts inspire the warriors and ignite the fire of victory. The sounding of the trumpets before battle encourages the people to face the enemy and be victorious. The second verse refers to sounding the trumpets in times of peace.

One may ask, what is the purpose of blasting battle cries after the war?

After the battle of opposition there may be a new battle of complacency. The blasting of trumpets during a time of peace serves as a reminder to keep the competitive forces alive to contend with the challenges that arise from complacency.

Faced with American Jews who were susceptible to apathy, ignorance and indifference, the Previous Rebbe issued the call of "America is no different." Like the trumpets after the war, this was a clarion call to inspire the Jewish people to continue living a vibrant and meaningful Jewish life.

On a personal level, we are at times faced with doubts, insecurities, and opposition. To this, the first verse says, "Blast the trumpets of war," - ignite the competitive spirit of battle, change, and growth. For many, our proudest achievements come in the face of our greatest adversity.

Then, there's the postwar challenge, when we must overcome the complacency and comfort

that come from having achieved success. To this, the second verse says, "On the days of rejoicing ... blow on your trumpets." There is still more to accomplish. Rejoice in your victories, but don't stop sounding your trumpet of growth.

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BEHAALOTECHA IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Behaalotecha," means "When you raise" and it is found in Numbers 8:2. Aaron is commanded to raise light in the lamps of the menorah, and the tribe of Levi is initiated into the service in the Sanctuary.

A "Second Passover" is instituted in response to the petition "Why should we be deprived?" by a group of Jews who were unable to bring the Passover offering in its appointed time because they were ritually impure. G-d instructs Moses on the procedures for Israel's journeys and encampments in the desert, and the people journey in formation from Mount Sinai, where they had been camped for nearly a year.

The people are dissatisfied with their "bread from heaven" (the manna), and demand that Moses supply them with meat. Moses appoints 70 elders, to whom he imparts of his spirit, to assist him in the burden of governing the people. Miriam speaks negatively of Moses, and is punished with leprosy; Moses prays for her healing, and the entire community waits seven days for her recovery.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 13 Sivan 5785 - 9 June 2025

Moses Atop Mount Sinai (1313 BCE)

"Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain...for six days. On the seventh day G-d called to Moses from within the cloud... And Moses came within the cloud, and he went up to the top of the mountain, and Moses was upon the mountain forty days and forty nights" - Exodus 24:15-18

On the morrow of the giving of the Ten Commandments in 2448 (1313 BCE), Moses ascended Mount Sinai in order to receive from G-d the remainder of the Torah - the remaining commandments and the Oral Law. After being "cleansed" by the cloud for six days, he was ushered into the presence of G-d on the 13th of Sivan.

Bombing in Cairo (1948)

Following the Israeli War of Independence, citizens in many Arab countries began harassing their Jewish co-citizens, often-times inflicting casualties and substantial property damage.

The 5,000 Jews living in Cairo, Egypt were also repeatedly victimized. On the 13th of Sivan 5708 (1948), a bomb exploded in the Jewish quarter of Cairo, murdering 22 Jews and wounding more than 40 others.

The systematic persecution caused most Egyptian Jews to flee, many choosing to move to Israel. Today, there are virtually no Jews remaining in Egypt.

Wednesday, 15 Sivan 5785 - 11 June 2025

Birth and Passing of Judah (1565 and 1446 BCE)

Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, was born in Charan on the 15th of Sivan, 2196 (1565 BCE). He passed away on the same date 119 years later, in Egypt.

Judah took the leadership role both in selling Joseph into slavery and in the brothers' later attempts to find him and free him, and to protect Benjamin. On his deathbed, Jacob conferred the leadership of Israel upon Judah, proclaiming: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the legislator from between his feet, until Shiloh (the Moshiach) comes..." The royal house of David, as well as many of the great sages and leaders of Israel throughout the generations of Jewish history, trace their lineage to Judah.

Judah had five sons: Er and Onan, who died without children; Shelah; and his twins from Tamar, Peretz and Zerah. Their descendants formed the Tribe of Judah, the most populous and prestigious of the twelve tribes of Israel.

After the death of King Solomon in 2964 (797 BCE), the people of Israel split into two kingdoms: ten tribes formed the Kingdom of Israel in the north, with Shomron (Samaria) as the capital; only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Solomon's son, Rechavam, and formed the Kingdom of Judea in the south, in the areas surrounding the capital Jerusalem. Eventually, the

Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria and the ten tribes living there were exiled and lost to the Jewish people; the inhabitants of Judea were also exiled (to Babylonia) but subsequently returned to the Holy Land and rebuilt Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. Over time, the terms "Judean" and "Jew" - which originally referred to a member of the tribe of Judah - became synonymous with "Israelite" and was used to refer to the descendants of all of Jacob's twelve sons - i.e., the Jewish people.

Friday, 17 Sivan 5785 - 13 June 2025

Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat (2105 BCE)

Seven months after the beginning of the Great Flood, and 17 days after the waters covering the earth began to subside, the Ark sheltering Noah, his family, and members of all animal species came to rest on the (still submerged) summit of Mount Ararat on 17 Sivan 1656 (2105 BCE).

Hasmonean Victory (circa 140 BCE)

On 17 Sivan circa 3620 (140 BCE) Hasmonean fighters recaptured Migdal Tzur from the Greek enemy and proclaimed this day a holiday.

Shabbat, 18 Sivan 5785 - 14 June 2025

Spanish Expulsion Rescinded (1967)

The Spanish cabinet approved a bill which granted religious freedom to Spain's Jews as well as other religious minorities. Since 5252 (1492) it had been officially forbidden to practice Judaism in Spain - though this law had not been enforced for many years before its official abolishment.