

Torah Weekly

Peaceful Coexistence

E pluribus unum, "Out of many, one," the Seal of the United States proclaims, but as any politician can tell you, that's easier said than done. Unity between people of diverse cultures and backgrounds is hard to achieve. As idealistic as we may be, we all have unique needs and desires which can be difficult to forgo for the sake of the common good.

is the "uprooting" that the verse refers to—the uprooting of our selfish tendencies, our egotistical desires and motivations.

Yet there are two ways in which this uprooting can take place. It is possible to imagine the rise of a leader so powerful, with a vision so compelling, that the entire world becomes subservient to him. In such a world, everyone behaves in an exemplary fashion—there is no killing, no theft, no discrimination, no selfishness. But these tendencies have not really been uprooted; they've merely been suppressed. As long as these beliefs and values do not become integrated into our own psyche, our own worldview, the redemption is incomplete.

The leadership of Moshiach will be different. It will not be an imposition from outside, but the culmination of a process of refinement that has been going on since the beginning of exile. Over the centuries of exile, the Jewish people have not just been wandering from place to place. We have also been painstakingly laying the seeds for the future Redemption—by infusing holiness wherever we went, through our observance of Torah and mitzvahs.

When the world and all that is in it will perceive G-d of its own accord, when everyone will call out to G-d in their own voice, then there will be true Redemption. This is the key to true unity—when our individual experiences and talents all contribute to a common goal.

On a personal level, I sometimes encounter people whose views are so offensive, whose behavior is so frustrating, that I wish they would just disappear. But individuals who are truly beyond redemption are extremely rare. I could focus on our areas of disagreement and try to convince them to move toward my viewpoint, or worse, condemn them for their wrongness. But all this does is add to the general discord. A more effective approach would be to focus on our common ground and cultivate the good that is within others.

The leadership of Moshiach will be different. In 1991, in the aftermath of the Crown Heights riots, New York City mayor David Dinkins visited the Rebbe and requested a blessing for the people of "all our communities." The Rebbe responded, "... Forget that it is 'both sides.' It is one side, one people..."

Unity among nations is within our reach. It may take effort, but by looking beyond superficial differences, we can see the many ways that we are one. Redemption is not a far-off dream, but a fast-approaching reality.

By Chaya Shuchat

Chukat-Balak in a Nutshell

Numbers 19:1-25:9
The name of the Parshah, "Chukat," means "Statute [of the Torah]" and it is found in Numbers 19:2. The name of the Parshah, "Balak," refers to Balak, king of Moab, and it is found in Numbers 22:2.

Moses is taught the laws of the Red Heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body.

After 40 years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land.

Aaron dies at Hor Hahar and is succeeded in the High Priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet

PARSHAT CHUKAT-BALAK

21-27 June
6-12 Tammuz

Chukat-Balak: Numbers 19:1 - 25:9
Micah 5:6 - 6:8

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

So, how do we reach true unity?

This week's Torah portion sheds some light on this issue. In Parshat Balak, Bilaam, a gentile prophet, conveys a vision of the future Redemption: "A star will go forth from Jacob, and a staff will arise from Israel, which will crush the princes of Moab and uproot all the sons of Seth."

How do we reach true unity?

That sounds kind of extreme. Why would Moshiach, the leader of a peaceful and utopian era, start uprooting and destroying nations? A world that is peaceful only for the chosen few hardly seems like an ideal worth striving for.

And how are we to understand this prophecy in the context of other prophecies of redemption that describe the nations of the world serving G-d together? In the book of Zephaniah, for example, it is written, "For then I will convert the peoples to a pure language, that all of them will call in the name of the L-rd, to worship Him of one accord."

Furthermore, Bilaam's prophecy states that Moshiach will "uproot all the sons of Seth." Seth was the third son of Adam and Eve. Their first son, Abel, was murdered, and all of Cain's descendants were wiped out in the Great Flood. Thus, all of mankind descends from Seth. This verse cannot possibly be interpreted literally, because if Moshiach would eliminate all the sons of Seth, nobody would be left.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe offers this interpretation: When Moshiach comes, there will be an unprecedented revelation of G-dliness, leaving no room for evil or impurity. All people in the world will readily accept G-d's rule upon themselves, because His presence will be so obvious. And this

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another eruption of discontent in which the people "speak against G-d and Moses"; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert. Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel's passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

Balak, the King of Moab, summons the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. On the way, Balaam is berated by his donkey, who sees the angel that G-d sends to block their way before Balaam does. Three times, from three different vantage points, Balaam attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue instead. Balaam also prophesies on the end of days and the coming of Moshiach. The people fall prey to the charms of the daughters of Moab and are enticed to worship the idol Peor. When a high-ranking Israelite official publicly takes a Midianite princess into a tent, Pinchas kills them both, stopping the plague raging among the people.

Chukat Roundup

The Torah is not written in the order in which events happened, and this week's Parshah jumps to the end of the Jews' forty years in the desert, the 38th year, to be exact. We begin by learning about a special Mitzvah that enables a Jew who is tameh--impure to become pure again and thus be allowed in the Mishkan. This is the commandment of the Parah Adumah, the red cow, which was made with cedar wood, a branch of hyssop, and wool. If someone becomes impure because of contact with a dead body, the ashes of the parah adumah purify him.

When the People of Israel arrived in the desert of Zin, Miriam passed away, and the well of water that they had always had in her merit dried up. So the people had no water and complained to Moses. G-d told Moses to talk to the rock and tell it to bring forth water. But Moses instead hit the rock with his stick, and water gushed out. G-d then told Moses that because he did not follow his instructions exactly, he would not be able to go into the Land of Israel.

The Jews wanted to continue traveling towards Israel, so they sent messengers to the king of Edom asking him permission to pass through their land, which was next in their route. The king responded that they may not travel through his land, and if they tried to, he would come and kill everybody. The Jews said that they would not take any food or drink any water, they would just walk on the road so they could get to the other side, but the king still said, absolutely not. So the Jews had to take a longer route to get around the land of Edom.

G-d told Moses to take Aaron and his son Eliezer up a mountain called Mount Hor. There, Moses took Aaron's clothing and put it on Eliezer, and Aaron lay down and passed away. When the Jews saw Moses and Eliezer come down alone, they realized that Aaron had passed away, and everyone began to weep. They mourned for 30 days.

The extra long journey around the land of Edom discouraged the Jews, and they complained again to Moses. Poisonous snakes than attacked the camp, and G-d told Moses to put up a brass serpent high on a pole. Everyone who had bitten and then saw Moses' brass serpent was then healed.

The Jews sing a song of thanks to G-d for the well that provided them with water in the desert.

Now the Jews reach another land that they have to pass through. So they send a message to Sihon the king of the Amorites asking for permission to pass through his land. This time, Sihon did not just say no, he actually went out to war against the Jews. They fought back and won him and all his three lands. Then Og, the king of Bashan came out to fight and the Jews won him too and conquered his land

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, June 21, 2026

6 Tammuz, 5786

Entebbe Rescue (1976) 6 Tammuz

Jewish hostages held by Arab terrorists at Entebbe Airport, Uganda, were rescued by Israeli commando units in 1976.

Monday, June 22, 2026

7 Tammuz, 5786

Purim Ostroh (1792) 7 Tammuz

The Jewish community of Ostroh (in what is now western Ukraine) was miraculously spared when a Russian army led by General Suvorov attempted to breach its walls, claiming Polish insurgents were present inside. To commemorate the miracle, the day of 7 Tammuz was established as a local day of rejoicing, and a special scroll in which the story was inscribed was read each year on this date.

According to legend, two cannons that struck the great Maharsha synagogue caused no harm. The two cannons were thereupon displayed in the synagogue for all to see.

Tuesday, June 23, 2026

8 Tammuz, 5786

Spanish Inquisition Abolished (1834) 8 Tammuz

On July 15, 1834, the Office of the Spanish Inquisition was abolished by the Queen Mother Maria Christina, after nearly three and a half centuries. However, the right of public worship (including permission to mark places of worship and advertise religious services) was not granted to the Jews until 1967.

Tuesday, June 23, 2026

8 Tammuz, 5786

Jews expelled from Genoa (1567) 8 Tammuz

Having become a virtual vassal of Spain, the Republic of Genoa expelled the Jews at the behest of their Spanish overlords.

Wednesday, June 24, 2026

9 Tammuz, 5786

Jerusalem Walls Breached (423 BCE) 9 Tammuz

The Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls of Jerusalem on the 9th of Tammuz in the year 3338 from creation (423 BCE); King Ziddikiah of Judah was captured and taken to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:5). A month later, the capture of Jerusalem was completed with the destruction of the Holy Temple and the exile of all but a small number of Jews to Babylon. Tammuz 9 was observed as a fast day until the second breaching of Jerusalem's walls (by the Romans) on the 17th of Tammuz, 3829 (69 CE), at which time the fast was moved to that date. (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah and Tur Orach Chaim 549)

Wednesday, June 24, 2026

9 Tammuz, 5786

Talmud Burned in France (1244) 9 Tammuz

Twenty-four wagonloads of Talmudic volumes were publicly burned by Christian church officials in Paris. Many works of Jewish scholarship were forever lost as a result, and some fast on Friday in the week of Chukat to lament this tragedy.