

# Torah Weekly

ד"סב

## PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI

18-24 Iyar 5784  
26 May – 1 June 2024

*Torah:* Leviticus 26:3-27:34  
*Haftorah:* Jeremiah 16:19-17:14

### 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)

*There are seven things that characterize a boor, and seven that characterize a wise man. A wise man does not speak before one who is greater than him in wisdom or age; He does not interrupt his fellow's words; He does not hasten to answer; His questions are on the subject, and his answers to the point; He responds to first things first and to latter things later; Concerning what he did not hear, he says "I did not hear"; He concedes to the truth. With the boor, the reverse of all these is the case.*

### Aleph Institute

*Hyman & Martha Rogal Center*

5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111

Fax:412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org  
info@AlephNE.org



**ALEPH INSTITUTE**  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

## Louder!

One section stands out from the rest in this week's Parshah. It is known as the Tochachah, "The Rebuke." There we read a whole litany of disasters that will befall our people should we turn our backs on G-d and abandon His way of life. The tradition is that the Baal Korei (Torah reader) himself, without being called up, takes this Aliyah; and when he reaches the relevant section, he lowers his voice, to soften the blow of these terrible curses.

For 24 years, I produced and hosted South Africa's only Jewish radio show, The Jewish Sound. Once, my guest on the air was Rabbi Shlomo Riskin of Efrat, Israel. He told the story that as a child growing up in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, one Shabbat he went to daven in the shul of the Rebbe of Klausenberg, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam (1905–1994). Originally from Romania, the Klausenberger Rebbe was a spiritual giant of a man who had lost 11 children in the Holocaust, and never sat shivah because he was preoccupied with saving as many lives as he possibly could. After the war, he settled in America and developed a large following. He subsequently relocated to Israel and, among other things, established the Laniado Hospital in Netanya.

That Shabbat—Rabbi Riskin related—"The Rebuke" was being read. When it came to the part of the curses, the reader did what he always did. He lowered his voice and read in a softer tone. Suddenly, the Rebbe shouted in Yiddish, "Hecher!" ("Louder!"). The reader was confused; He was

simply following the tradition of generations. Perhaps he was not hearing right, so he continued reading in the softer tone. "Hecher! Hecher!" thundered the Klausenberger Rebbe. "Let the Almighty hear what is being read! All the curses have already been fulfilled. Now, there must be only blessings for our people . . ."

Many of our sages have described the Holocaust as the birth pangs of Moshiach (the Messiah) and the ultimate redemption. Never will there be a repeat of such calamities. We have endured more than enough of exile, wanderings, pogroms, and persecutions. The curses, in all their tragic, cataclysmic imagery, have actually materialized. Now there must be only goodness, happiness, warmth and blessing for the people of Israel. At the end of The Rebuke, G-d says: "I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember, and I will remember the Land . . ."

Not only will the Almighty remember us, the Jewish people; He will also remember His Holy Land, our Land of Israel. Perhaps we might interpret this as a message to the anti-Semites of the world who hide behind their anti-Zionist or anti-Israel rantings and ravings. "I will remember the Land"—a message also to the nations of the world who claim to be our friends, the shrewd manipulators who are expert in political backstabbing in Washington and London. "I will remember the Land"—a message to our own Jewish fantasizers who would undermine their own brothers with their hopeless attempts at

appeasing mortal enemies. To all of them, the G-d of Israel says: "I will remember the Land." I will never forsake My land or My people.

And as He remembers us, let us remember Him and our covenant. May we prepare for Shavuot and the giving of the Torah with earnestness and joy. May G-d and His people always remember each other. Amen.

*By Yossy Goldman*

## Earthly Rewards for Heavenly Service?

*"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 fit 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, 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 Naftali Silberberg*

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

*Sunday, May 26, 2024-18 Iyar, 5784*

**Plague among R. Akiva's Disciples Ends (circa 120 CE)**

In the weeks between Passover and Shavuot, a plague decimated 24,000 students of the great sage Rabbi Akiva--a result, says the Talmud, of the fact that they "did not respect one another." The plague's cessation on Iyar 18 - the 33rd day of the Omer Count or "Lag BaOmer" - is one of the reasons that the day is celebrated each year.

**Passing of Rama (circa 1573)**

Rabbi Moshe Iserles ("Rama") of Krakow (1525-1573?) authored the glosses ("hagga'ot") on R. Yosef Caro's the Code of Jewish Law and is regarded as the definitive Halachic authority for Ashkenazic (European) Jews.

**Ettingen Jews Acquitted (1690)**

Following a blood libel and the decree, if found guilty, to destroy the synagogue of Ettingen, Switzerland, the Jews were acquitted. The local Jews celebrated this day as a local "Purim" celebration-day of thanksgiving.

**Hurva Synagogue Destroyed (1948)**

The Hurva synagogue, located in the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, was captured and dynamited by the Arab Legion of Jordan during the battle for Old Jerusalem in 1948. The synagogue was built by the group of disciples of Rabbi Elijah (the "Vilna Gaon") who immigrated from Lithuania in 1864. The synagogue was built on the ruins of the synagogue built by Rabbi Judah Chassid (Segal) and his disciples in 1700, which was destroyed by Arab mobs in 1721. It was therefore named the "Hurvat Rabbi Judah HaChassid"—the ruins of Rabbi Judah the Chassid, or simply "The Hurva" - "The Ruin". In 2010, following several years of construction, the synagogue—built to resemble its Ottoman era form—was once again opened amid great fanfare.

*Monday, May 27, 2024-19 Iyar, 5784*

**Passing of Maharam (1293)**

Renowned Talmudist Rabbi Meir ("Maharam") of Rothenburg (1215?-1293) died in his cell in the Ensisheim fortress, in current-day France, where he had been imprisoned for ten years in an attempt to exact a huge ransom from the Jewish community. The money had been raised, but Rabbi Meir refused to have himself redeemed, lest it encourage the hostage-taking of other Jewish leaders.

**Goebbels Committed Suicide (1945)**

Paul Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Propaganda Minister under Adolf Hitler, was known for his zealous antisemitism. Following Hitler's death, he served as Chancellor for one day. A day later, he approved the murder of his own six children and committed suicide.

*Tuesday, May 28, 2024-20 Iyar, 5784*

**Journey From Sinai (1312 BCE)**

On the 20th of Iyar 2449 (1312 BCE)--nearly a year after the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai--the Children of Israel 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 20th of Iyar in 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.

*Wednesday, May 29, 2024-21 Iyar, 5784*

**Frank Hanged in Prague (1946)**

Karl Hermann Frank, the German Nazi official in Czechoslovakia during World War II, was hanged on this date in 1946.

Frank surrendered to the American Army on May 9, 1945 and was extradited and tried in a court in Prague. Following his conviction for war crimes, Frank was sentenced to death and hanged in the courtyard of the Pankrac prison in Prague as 5,000 onlookers witnessed his death.

*Thursday, May 30, 2024-22 Iyar, 5784*

**Jewish Books Confiscated By the Vatican Librarian (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 22nd Iyar in 1731. More confiscations would follow 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. The following day, Adolf Eichmann personally oversaw the start of the extermination process. Eight days later an estimated 100,000 had been murdered.

*Shabbat, June 1, 2024-24 Iyar, 5784*

**Germany Surrenders (1945)**

In Rheims, France, the German Armed Forces High Command signed the unconditional surrender documents for all German forces to the Allies, thus marking the official end of World War II in Europe. The surrender took place following a fierce seven days of battles and truces across Europe.