

# Torah Weekly

ד"ב

## PARSHAT NASO

3-9 Sivan 5784  
9-15 June 2024

*Torah:* Numbers 4:21-7:89  
*Haftorah:* Judges 13:2-25

Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

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)

Grape Juice & Matzah

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

## Individual & Community

Does the individual ever feel lost in relation to the broad needs of the community? Jewish law provides us with teachings concerning the detailed organization of our lives. There is no doubt that if properly carried out, these create a communal or even global atmosphere of great beauty and harmony. But what about me as an individual? Where am I?

The liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt had several goals. One was that they should receive the Torah on Mount Sinai; this took place seven weeks after the Exodus. Another was that they should build the Mishkan, or Sanctuary, the prototype of the Temple; this was carried out some time later under close instruction from Moses.

After months of work, finally the Mishkan was ready. On the first of Nissan, fifty weeks after leaving Egypt, the dedication of the Sanctuary began. It lasted twelve days, and every day was marked by a beautiful ceremony, conducted in turn by the Nasi ("prince") of each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. As described in the Torah (Numbers 7:12-83), each day the prince of one of the Tribes brought a magnificent gift to G-d, as a personal offering from his own

possessions. Every gift included a large silver platter, a silver bowl, a golden spoon filled with incense, and a number of cattle for offerings. In memory of the fact that these gifts were brought during the first twelve days of Nissan, in some communities the relevant passage in the Torah is recited each day.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson OBM, points out an interesting feature in this episode. Although each prince brought an identical gift, the Midrash explains that each one had a different intention in his choice. There was a symbolic meaning in the weights of the platter, the bowl, the spoon, and in the number of different kinds of cattle. But for each Prince, although the gift was exactly the same, the symbolic meaning was different. There is a teaching of the Sages that just as everyone's face is different, so our ideas and approach to life are different. Yet G-d demands what looks like a uniform contribution from all of us. Every Jew must keep all the 613 Commandments, every non-Jew must keep all the seven Noahide laws. Like that of the princes, our "gifts" to G-d seem identical.

At the same time, everyone has a unique contribution, without which the world would be lacking. The

specific meaning of the details, their inner dimension, is where this individual contribution is expressed. For example, when a person prays, he or she is saying the same words as everyone else, but each person's thoughts during the prayer are private and their own.

The episode of the princes teaches us that, in the global responsibility of Judaism, no individual need feel lost. Everyone is uniquely important; indeed, each person, man or woman, is crucial for the fulfillment of G-d's plan for the world.

By Tali Lowenthal

## Shavu'ot Schedule

**Wednesday, June 12, 2024/6**

**Sivan, 5784 – 1<sup>st</sup> day of Shavu'ot**

Torah Readings: Exodus 19:1-20:23; Numbers 28:26-31

Haftorah: Ezekiel 1:1-28; Ezekiel 3:12

**Thursday, June 13, 2024/7**

**Sivan, 5784 – 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Shavu'ot**

Torah Readings: Deuteronomy 15:19-16:17; Numbers 28:26-31

Haftorah: Habakkuk 2:20-3:19

Yizkor (remembrance prayer for departed parents) is recited on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Shavu'ot

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RABBI YISRAEL "BA"AL SHEM TOV" (1698-1760)

Eliezer and his wife Sarah lived a life of simple piety, serving G d with a pure heart. Although seemingly unlearned, Eliezer was actually a member of the fellowship of "hidden tzaddikim," a group of unusually gifted and devoted Jews who, disguised as simple people, dedicated their lives to improving the plight of their Jewish brethren both spiritually and materially.

In their old age, on the 18th of Elul, 5458 (1698), Eliezer and Sarah gave birth to their only child—Yisrael.

This child was destined to infuse vitality into a suffering, depressed people. His name, Yisrael – "Israel" – is also the name of the Jewish People. His birth would serve as a wake-up call for a nation deep in a spiritual slumber.

### Childhood

When Yisrael was five years old, both his mother and his father died. Before his death, Eliezer called his son Yisrael to his bedside and told him, "Fear no one but G-d. Love every Jew with all your heart and soul, no matter who he is." These two directives would serve as the basis for Yisrael's service of G d and future teachings.

The Jewish community of Tloste adopted the young orphan, providing him with his basic needs. Often, after the conclusion of his studies at the local cheder (Jewish school), Yisrael would wander into the fields and forests that surrounded the village. It was in this picturesque setting, secluded and removed from the



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bustle of everyday life, that Yisrael was able to meditate and recognize the wonders of G d's creation.

On one such excursion, some two years after his parents' passing, little Yisrael chanced upon a saintly man praying in the forest. After introducing himself, Yisrael and the elderly man sat quietly in the forest and studied the holy words of the Talmud. The man's scholarship, quality of character, and humility made it apparent that he was a hidden tzaddik. Yisrael joined him on his wanderings, and they meandered from village to village, town to town, Yisrael's mentor all the time posing as a simple peddler. Much of their time was spent in intense study and fervent prayer. Alas, Yisrael would never learn the identity of this mysterious man.

After three years of this nomadic lifestyle, Yisrael was brought by his mentor to the house of a man by the name of Rabbi Meir, who assumed guardianship of the still-young lad. Like Yisrael's first guardian, Rabbi Meir, too, was a hidden Tzaddik, and while the people of his town thought him to be a manual laborer, he was in fact a great Torah sage.

It was in Rabbi Meir's home that Yisrael was introduced, like his father before him, to the secret fellowship of hidden Tzaddikim. The great men would regularly convene in Rabbi Meir's house to study the mystical works of the Kabbalah and to pray together. Yisrael easily absorbed this knowledge, and he soon became the student of the leader of this fellowship, the revered Rabbi Adam Baal Shem. Rabbi Adam would serve as his longtime mentor, and his teachings laid the foundation for Yisrael's own work.

On Yisrael's sixteenth birthday, Elijah the Prophet appeared to him and described to him the great effects the prayers of simple folk had in heaven. Their pure intent and the unwavering faith with which they uttered the words of prayer, Elijah explained,

resonated in the "higher worlds" more than the scholarly achievements of great sages. Inspired by his conversation with the prophet, Yisrael made it his personal mission to engage simple Jews in conversation about mundane matters. By inquiring as to their wellbeing and their families' health or livelihood, Yisrael was able to elicit responses rich in words of praise to G d.

Yisrael as a Hidden Tzaddik

In 5478 (1718), Yisrael moved to the town of Brody, where he was, once again, hired as a teacher. In this capacity, Yisrael was asked to tutor a young orphan who had been adopted by the illustrious Rabbi Gershon of Kitov, renowned for the breadth of his knowledge in both Talmud and Kabbalah. This position eventually led to Yisrael marrying Rabbi Gershon's sister, Chana. The young couple soon gave birth to their daughter, Odl. Their son, Tzvi Hersh, would be born fifteen years later.

Yisrael's stay in Brody was short-lived; one of Yisrael's teachers from the fellowship of hidden tzadikim instructed him to move to a small town. And so, Yisrael and his wife left Brody and settled in a small village deep in the Carpathian Mountains to the east.

Yisrael spent most of his time there in secluded study and meditation. The young couple supported themselves by mining clay and lime, which Chana transported to neighboring villages using a horse and wagon that Rabbi Gershon had previously bought them. The breathtaking scenery and relative freedom from the demands of everyday life allowed Yisrael to concentrate on his studies and service of G d. The Baal Shem Tov would later remember the seven years in the Carpathian Mountains as being the most enjoyable period of his life.

In 5484 (1724), on Yisrael's 26th birthday, the ancient prophet Achiya Hashiloni – who had taught Torah to Elijah the Prophet some 2,500 years earlier – appeared to him. Achiya taught Yisrael the secrets of the entire Torah, starting that day with the first words

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, June 9, 2024-3 Sivan, 5784**

**Vespasian Captures Jericho (68 CE)**

In his advance towards the destruction of Jerusalem, Roman Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus ("Vespasian") captures Jericho and massacres all its inhabitants.

**Maimonides Arrives in Israel (1165)**

He establishes this date as a day of rejoicing, festivities, and gifts to the poor, to be kept by him and his descendants until the end of time.

**Monday, June 10, 2024-4 Sivan, 5784**

**Forced Conversion in Clermont (576)**

A mob, accompanied by the bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, France, razed the local synagogue to the ground. The bishop then informed the Jews that he, as bishop, could have but one flock, and unless they were willing to embrace Christianity, they must leave the city. Five hundred Jews were forced to be baptized and the remainder fled to Marseilles.

**Chmielnitzki Massacres (1648)**

The Cossack rebellion against Polish rule in Ukraine, under the leadership of Bogdan Chmielnitzki (may his name be blotted out) began on the 4th of Sivan of the year 5408 from creation (1648 CE). In their bloody march through present-day Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, Chmielnitzki's peasant army massacred between 100,000 and 300,000 Jews. Three hundred Jewish communities were destroyed.

**Tuesday, June 11, 2024-5 Sivan, 5784**

**Jews Accept Torah (1313 BCE)**

On this day, Moses made a covenant with the Jewish people at the foot of Mount Sinai at which the people declared, "All that G-d has spoken, we shall do and hear".

**Rabbis Burnt at Stake (1728)**

On this day, Rabbis Chayim and Yehoshua Reitzes were tortured and burned in Lvov, Poland after they were accused of having attempted to convince an apostate to return to Judaism.

**Wednesday, June 12, 2024-6 Sivan, 5784**

**Torah Given (1313 BCE)**

On the 6th Sivan of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), seven weeks after the Exodus, G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai. The entire people of Israel, as well as the souls of all future generations of Jews, heard G-d declare the first two of the Ten Commandments and witnessed G-d's communication of the other eight through Moses. Following the revelation, Moses ascended the mountain for 40 days, to receive the remainder of the Torah from G-d.

**Passing of King David (837 BCE)**

David, a descendent of Judah the son of Jacob as well as of Ruth, a Moabite convert to Judaism, was anointed King of Israel by the Prophet Shmuel (Samuel) in 878 BCE. All future legitimate kings of Israel were David's descendants, as will be Moshiach (the Messiah), who will "restore the kingdom of David to its glory of old".

David fought many wars, defeating Israel's enemies and securing and expanding its borders. He conquered Jerusalem, purchased the Temple Mount from its Yebusite owner, and prepared the foundation for the Holy Temple (which was built by his son, King Solomon). David served as the head of the Sanhedrin and the foremost Torah authority of his generation; he also composed the Book of Psalms that for 28 centuries has embodied the joys, sorrows and yearnings of the Jewish people. King David passed away on the 6th of Sivan of the year 837 BCE, at the age of 70.

**Cologne Jews Martyred (1096)**

During the first crusade, the Jews of Cologne, Germany chose to be killed rather than convert to Christianity.

**Passing of Baal Shem Tov (1760)**

Rabbi Yisrael "Ba'al Shem Tov", the founder of the Chassidic movement, passed away on the 6th of Sivan of 1760, and was succeeded (one year later, on the first anniversary of his passing) by his disciple, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch.

**Friday, June 14, 2024-8 Sivan, 5784**

**Rabbi Escapes Crusaders (1147)**

Rabbi Yaakov ben Meir Tam, known as the "Rabbenu Tam," was one of Rashi's illustrious grandsons. On the 8th of Sivan, Rabbenu Tam escaped Rameru, and the clutches of the Crusaders.