

PARSHAT BEHA'ALOTECHA

10-16 Sivan 5784
16-22 June 2024

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

Psalms Daily

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)

Pirkei Avot (2:4)

Hillel would say: Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place. Do not say something that ought not to be heard even in the strictest confidence, for ultimately it will be heard. And do not say "When I free myself of my concerns, I will study," for perhaps you will never free yourself.

Raise the Flame

Nearly a year after they arrived at Mount Sinai, the Jewish people began their journey toward the Promised Land. Before our portion describes the tumultuous journey, the Torah reiterates the commandment to light the Menorah: The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and say to him: 'When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast their light toward the face of the Menorah.'" The Menorah is a symbol of the mission statement of the Jewish people. Our task is to illuminate ourselves and the world around us with the warmth, enlightenment, and inspiration of the Torah. As we journey into the world to implement the teachings of the Torah, we are reminded that each of us is heir to the legacy of Aaron, who would kindle the lights of the Menorah, symbolizing Aaron's effort to inspire and illuminate each and every soul. The word the Torah uses to describe the lighting of the Menorah, Beha'alotecha, means "to lift up," which is an unusual word to describe kindling a flame. Rashi offers two explanations why this word is used: He is required to kindle the lamp until the flame rises by itself. Our sages further expounded from here that there was a step-in front of the Menorah, on which the kohen stood to prepare [the lamps]. These two explanations apply to the figurative kindling of the flames as well. The first interpretation explains that the word "rise up" is used because the flame rises up independently and no longer needs the influence of the candle that ignited it. This teaches us that when we seek to inspire others, be it a child, a student, or a friend, it is not enough to bring our flame close to theirs and allow them to be affected by our

excitement and passion. To "lift up" the flame is to "kindle the lamp until the flame rises by itself"—by sharing the fire until the recipient no longer needs the teacher, for the student is inspired and passionate on her own. The second interpretation explains that the words "when you rise up" refers, not to the flame, but to Aaron, because Aaron would rise up on a step in order to light the Menorah. This interpretation also contains a lesson for each of us: The surest path to elevate oneself is to seek to inspire others. While the natural tendency of someone who seeks to grow spiritually may be to seclude himself and focus inward, the Torah teaches us that by preparing to ignite someone else's flame, you too will rise up, you too will be inspired. This double message—that we must seek to others until they shine on their own, and that the surest way to grow is by inspiring others—is at the heart of what the Rebbe constantly taught us. Before Rabbi Yisrael and Rebbetzin Vivi Deren married and set out to establish Chabad in New England, they had a private audience with the Rebbe. In the words of Rabbi Deren, "The Rebbe told us something very powerful, which continues to guide us until today. The Rebbe said, 'You shall bring light and warmth to others, and G-d will bring light and warmth to you.' That blessing and assurance is what keeps us going until today.

By Menachem Feldman

20th of Sivan

The 20th of Sivan commemorates many tragedies that befell the Jewish people over the centuries. Some of them were so horrifying that a Jewish scholar wrote that "the newer tragedies make earlier ones be forgotten . . ."

The Martyrs of Blois: 1171

In the year 1171 in the French town of Blois, a local Christian

servant claimed to have seen a Jew throw the corpse of a child into the Loire River. Despite the fact that no child was ever reported missing, no corpse was found, and there was a lack of any corroborating witnesses, the Jews of the town were arrested and tortured.

Initially, the count of Blois, Theobald V, was willing to free them if they gave a large ransom. However, an Augustinian bishop intervened and validated the servant's testimony by ordeal (i.e., he "tested" if the servant was telling the truth by seeing if he would float on water), and the ransom negotiations collapsed.

The count then gave the prisoners the choice to either be baptized or burned alive. All of them chose to give up their lives rather than betray their faith. On May 26, the 20th of Sivan, in the year 1171 (4931 on the Jewish calendar), 312 Jews - including 17 women plus children - were tied up and burned at the stake. According to an eyewitness account, the fires weren't consuming their bodies, so the count had the Jews beaten to death, and they then threw their bodies into the fire. As they were being killed, the Jews sang "Aleinu Leshabei'ach", "It is incumbent upon us to praise the L-rd of all," which is usually recited at the conclusion of all daily prayers and includes praise to G-d that we are able to recognize His true unity.

As a result of this tragedy, the Jews of England, France and the Rhineland, together with Rabbeinu Yaakov ben Meir, known as Rabbeinu Tam (grandson of Rashi and the Jewish leader at the time), declared the 20th of Sivan to be a day of fasting and atonement. Perhaps due to the tragic news, Rabbeinu Yaakov Tam died on the 4th of Tammuz, just three weeks later.



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Although this was not the first blood libel, this was the first in which the government openly participated in it, and the first time that Jews were killed due to the libel. This was ultimately seen as the harbinger of many similar tragedies and the eventual expulsion of the Jews from France.

First Crusade: 1096

Even before the libel at Blois, which occurred between the Second and Third Crusades (1147–49 and 1189–1192, respectively), the month of Sivan was already considered a tragic time for the Jews of France and the Rhineland. During the Crusades, thousands of Jews were massacred. After the First Crusade, in which the Jewish communities around the Rhine River were destroyed by Crusaders, the rabbis composed a prayer called Av Harachamim (Father of Compassion), originally recited on the Shabbat before Shavuot, which is at the beginning of the month of Sivan. This prayer not only commemorates those who were killed sanctifying G-d's name, but also foretells that G-d will eventually avenge all the blood that was spilled.

As such, the 20th of Sivan became a general day that commemorated those killed during the Crusades.

Rintfleisch Massacres: 1298

Due to newer tragedies, the fast of the 20th of Sivan fell by the wayside until another tragedy struck at that time of the year.

In the year 1298, in the Franconian region of Germany, due to accusations that the Jews desecrated the Christians' holy bread, a certain Lord Rintfleisch (or "Rintfleisch") gathered a mob around him and convinced the masses to kill the Jews. The entire Rottingen Jewish community was destroyed. From there the mob spread to additional communities, where they pillaged and burned. In some

communities, they gave the choice for the Jews to either convert to Christianity or be burned. As such, entire families and communities were killed and burned, including many of the leading rabbis of the time. In all, over 145 communities in France, Germany and Austria were destroyed.

Following these massacres, the rabbis of the time reestablished the 20th of Sivan as a day of atonement, since many of these massacres occurred during this time of the year.

Chmielnicki Pogroms: 1648–49

Over the centuries, this fast again fell by the wayside and wasn't observed by the masses until a new tragedy struck.

In 1648, the Ukrainian Cossack leader Bogdan Chmielnicki incited a rebellion against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which ruled over the Ukrainian region at the time. The Cossack hordes swarmed throughout Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, destroying hundreds of Jewish communities in their wake.

Although the massacring continued to occur throughout the many years of the rebellion, the sudden destruction of many communities beginning in the spring of 1648 is considered the harshest time of all.

During these pogroms, thousands of Jews were burned, buried alive and/or cut to pieces, among other atrocities. The Cossacks' sheer cruelty and heinousness would only be rivaled later by the Nazis.

The events of this era are known as Tach VeTat, an acronym for the Hebrew years [5]408–[5]409, equivalent to the years 1648–1649.

Following the Chmielnicki pogroms, a group of Jewish leaders known as the Council of Four Lands (Vaad Arba Aratzot) reestablished the 20th of Sivan as a fast day for the entire community of Poland.

Why the 20th of Sivan?

The 20th of Sivan was also the day that thousands of Jews in Nemirov, Ukraine, one of the first cities to be attacked by the Cossacks, were massacred.

Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, known as the Tosafot Yom Tov, who actually had been the rabbi of Nemirov a mere five years before its destruction, decreed that the Selichot (penitential poems), originally composed for the martyrs of Blois, be recited on the 20th of Sivan to commemorate the Chmielnicki pogroms as well.

Rabbi Shabbatai HaKohen, known as the Shach (1621–1662), one of the leading rabbis of the time, writes that an additional factor in choosing this date was that it never falls on Shabbat.

20 Sivan Nowadays

Up until World War II, it was quite common for Jews in Poland to fast on the 20th of Sivan. Nowadays, however, it is primarily observed by certain Chassidic communities that originated from Hungary.

Between May and June of 1944, close to 500,000 Jews from Hungary were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, most to be killed in the gas chambers. After the war, Hungarian rabbis decided to commemorate the Holocaust and the destruction of the Jews of Hungary on the 20th of Sivan every year.

Although most don't fast on the 20th of Sivan, the sadness of the events of this month are felt in the recitation of the Av Harachamim prayer on the Shabbat when we bless the new month of Sivan (unlike other Shabbatot, when we do not recite the prayer when blessing the new month).

May we soon see the fulfillment of the conclusion of this prayer, the time when our nation will dwell in security and safety in the Holy Land.

By Yehuda Shurpin

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, June 16, 2024-10 Sivan, 5784

Wolf Wissotzky (1904)

Klonimus Wolf Wissotzky, the son of poor parents, established The Wissotzky Tea company in 1849 and became known as the "King of Russian Tea." He was a great Jewish philanthropist and called for the settlement of Jews in Israel, which initiated the move of Jews to Lod, Nablus and Gaza. In his will he left over a million rubles to charity. In 1936, Wissotzky Tea became the very first tea company in the Holy Land and has since been the leading tea company in Israel.

Wednesday, June 19, 2024-13 Sivan, 5784

Bombing in Cairo (1948)

Citizens in many Arab countries began harassing their Jewish co-citizens, often inflicting casualties and substantial property damage. The 5,000 Jews living in Cairo, Egypt were also repeatedly victimized. On the 13th of Sivan, 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.

Friday, June 21, 2024-15 Sivan, 5784

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, of the year 2196 from creation (1565 BCE). He passed away on the same date 119 years later, in Egypt.

6th Lubavitcher Rebbe arrested (1927)

Shortly after midnight of the 15th of Sivan of 1927, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), was arrested by agents of the GPU (Soviet Secret Police) and Yevsketzia ("Jewish section" of the Communist Party) for leading the underground network of rabbis, teachers and emissaries working to preserve and disseminate Jewish learning and observance throughout the Soviet Empire.