

## PARSHAT CHUKAT

1-7 Tammuz 5784  
7-13 July 2024

*Torah:* Numbers 19:1-22:1  
*Haftorah:* Judges 11:1-33

## Hidden Good

The venom of the African black mamba snake is one of the deadliest poisons known to man. The bite feels at first like a slight sting, then a tingling. Within minutes the central nervous system begins to shut down, culminating in paralysis, convulsions, and a suffocating death. Researchers have recently discovered that this deadly venom also contains two potent painkillers, known as Mambalgins, which are as effective as morphine. Moreover, unlike morphine, Mambalgins do not lead to tolerance or addiction, and have no dangerous side effects. The same snake that causes horrible death also holds the key to incredible relief.

Similarly, in this week's Torah portion, when the Jewish people were struck by poisonous snakes, G-d told Moses to fashion a snake out of copper and display it in the camp. All those who looked upon the snake would be healed. (This is the source of the well-known medical sign of a snake on a pole.)

How does the agent of destruction become the agent of healing? Because there is no absolute evil. Every evil has hidden within it the potential for good. A prime example of this is that the Gematria (numerical value) of the Hebrew word for "snake," Nachash, is equivalent to the value of the word Moshiach (Messiah). Moshiach will bring an end to exile and repair the damage done to the world through the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which was caused by a snake. "That's nice," you may say, "but I don't see it. I

see a world filled with evil and pain. Why would G-d create evil just for the potential for good?" I could argue that suffering ennobles us, makes us more compassionate and sensitive to the suffering of others. I could contend that suffering provides the contrast which allows us to appreciate the good. I could maintain that we need to go down in order to go up. And I could even assert that suffering is actually a sublime, hidden form of good. But you wouldn't be satisfied. "G-d is the master of the universe," you'd say. "He designed this world and everything in it. He could have allowed us to achieve the ascent without the descent, the refinement without the suffering, the redemption without the exile. It was His choice to create evil, or at least that which we perceive as evil. He created the venom, and He created the antidote." And I could not answer you. When the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, discussed this concept during a Chassidic gathering, his voice choked up with tears: "Why must we have this distress . . . the Shechinah (divine presence in exile . . . Moshiach in exile . . . every single Jew in exile, with no end in sight?" The Rebbe concluded that we cannot understand pain because G-d does not want us to understand it. He does not want us in any way to accept, justify or rationalize it. He wants us to protest against it and work to put an end to it. And if we were to understand pain, even in the slightest way, it would reduce our motivation to eliminate it. It is written in the book of Isaiah that when Moshiach comes we will say, "Thank You, G-d, for

You have been angry with me." In other words, we will realize then that the painful events we have experienced, the manifestations of G-d's anger, were actually supreme good. But it is too early now for appreciation. As long as the suffering is ongoing, as long as there is any creature alive in pain or in exile, we are not ready to thank G-d for the pain. Only when the exile is over will we have the luxury to look back and thank G-d for all the hidden blessings. For now, we can only demand of G-d to fulfill His promise to "swallow up death forever and wipe away the tears off every face."

*By Chaya Shuchat*

## Spread the Love

I once overheard a discussion. One woman was complaining about her teenage son's aggravating behavior. "Sometimes, I could just kill him!" She vented. Unbeknownst to her, the other woman was in the middle of chemotherapy treatment for her own son to fight his life-threatening illness. I observed her tense up at the choice of words.

Calmly, she replied: "Kids will be kids. But beneath it all, we love them so much that we would do anything to keep them healthy—even with their irritating antics."

This week's Torah portion speaks of the death of Moses's brother, Aaron.

*"The entire Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days." - Numbers 20:29*  
The entire nation mourned Aaron's death because he was so beloved to them. The Midrash explains that he worked hard at restoring peace between quarrelling friends or

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)

Pirkei Avot (5:5)

*Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Holy Temple: No woman ever miscarried because of the smell of the holy meat. The holy meat never spoiled. Never was a fly seen in the slaughterhouse. Never did the High Priest become impure on Yom Kippur. The rains did not extinguish the wood-fire burning upon the altar. The wind did not prevail over the column of smoke [rising from the altar]. No disqualifying problem was ever discovered in the Omer offering, the Two Loaves or the Showbread. They stood crowded but had ample space in which to prostrate themselves. Never did a snake or scorpion cause injury in Jerusalem. And no man ever said to his fellow "My lodging in Jerusalem is too cramped for me."*

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spouses. Aaron would approach each of the disagreeing individuals separately and soften them by saying, "Your friend/spouse is utterly embarrassed by what he did to you! He wishes you would be reconciled." When the two would later meet, they would be ready to overlook their differences and re-establish their relationship. We are permitted to modify the truth for the sake of peace, but on face value, it seems like Aaron was actually saying a complete lie, which is

not permitted. How was Aaron able to do so? In truth, Aaron's words were not inherently false. To love our fellow is a cardinal mitzvah of the Torah, which we all want to fulfill. While on the outside, these friends or spouses were angry with each other, Aaron was able to help them dig a little deeper to expose their true feelings and wishes. There are times when circumstances create barriers between us. Due to the many pressures in our lives, we may sometimes act selfishly or

insensitively, or respond angrily or unkindly. But deep down, that's not really who we are or wish to be. Just as our love for our children is eternal, no matter what, our love for our fellow sometimes just needs to be uncovered. Loving our fellow means stripping away those external barriers that divide us to find the deepest bonds that connect us. Because, despite irritating antics or behaviors, that love is truly real.

*By Chana Weisberg*

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, July 7, 2024-1 Tammuz, 5784**

**Birth and Passing of Joseph (1562 and 1452 BCE)**

**Seville Jews Massacred (1391)**

On June 6, 1391, the first of Tammuz, a mob incited by the fanatical priest Ferrand Martinez killed 4000 Jews in Seville, a city in the Spanish kingdom of Castille. The violence soon spread throughout Castille and the neighboring regions, resulting in the murder, or forced conversion of tens of thousands of Jews.

**Tuesday, July 9, 2024-3 Tammuz, 5784**

**Joshua Stops the Sun (1273 BCE)**

On the third of Tammuz of the year 2488 from creation (1273 BCE), Joshua was leading the Jewish people in one of the battles to conquer the Land of Israel. Victory was imminent, but darkness was about to fall. "Sun," proclaimed Joshua, "be still at Giv'on; moon, at the Ayalon valley". The heavenly bodies acquiesced, halting their progress through the sky until Israel's armies brought the battle to its successful conclusion.

**R. Yosef Yitzchak Released from Prison (1927)**

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), who was arrested on Sivan 15 of 1927 by agents of the GPU (Soviet secret police) for his work to preserve and disseminate Jewish learning and observance throughout the Soviet Empire. Held in the notorious Spalerno prison in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), he was repeatedly interrogated and beaten. Initially sentenced to death, international pressure compelled the Soviet regime, first to commute the sentence to ten years hard labor in Siberia, and then to a three-year term of exile in Kostrama, a town in the interior of Russia. On the 3rd of Tammuz, 18 days after his arrest, he was released from prison and allowed six hours at home before reporting to the Leningrad train station to embark on his exile. Many gathered at the station to see him off.

**Rebbe's Yahrzeit (1994)**

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of righteous memory (b.

1902) passed away in the early morning hours of the 3rd of Tammuz, of the year 5754 from creation (1994).

**Wednesday, July 10, 2024-4 Tammuz, 5784**

**Passing of Rabbeinu Tam (1171)**

Rabbi Yaakov ben Meir of Ramerupt (1100?-1171), known as "Rabbeinu Tam", was a grandson of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105), and one of the primary authors of the Tosafot commentary on the Talmud; the Bet-Din (rabbinical court) he headed was regarded as the leading Torah authority of his generation.

**Maharam Imprisoned (1286)**

Rabbi Meir ben Baruch ("Maharam") of Rothenburg (1215?-1293), the great Talmudic commentator and leading Halachic authority for German Jewry, was imprisoned in the fortress at Ensisheim on 4 Tammuz 5046, or 1286. He died in captivity after seven years of imprisonment; he refused to allow his community to ransom him, fearing that it would encourage further imprisonment of rabbis for ransom.

**Passing of Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz (1805)**

Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz (1730-1805) was the rabbi of Frankfurt and the author of Sefer Hafla'ah and Sefer HaMikneh - commentaries on the Talmud - and Panim Yafot, a commentary on the Torah (Bible). Rabbi Pinchas and his brother Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg (Mikulov) were students of the Mezritcher Maggid, the second leader of the Chassidic movement. They were amongst the first adherents to the Chassidic movement to hold rabbinic posts in Western Europe.

**Passing of R. Mendel Futerfas (1995)**

As a young man, R. Mendel Futerfas (1906-1995) studied in the underground network of Yeshivat Tomchei Temimim in Soviet Russia. Subsequently, he was given the task of obtaining the funds necessary to maintain the network of secret classes, a mission fraught with danger of tremendous proportions. He later risked his life once again to oversee the clandestine escape of hundreds of Chabad Chassidim from the U.S.S.R. via Poland in 1946. As a result of these latter efforts, R. Mendel was caught and sent to

work in the Siberian gulags for eight years. After finishing his sentence, he was denied exit from Russia for an additional eight years, until his request was finally granted in 1963. He lived in London and then in Kfar Chabad, Israel, until his passing. Reb Mendel was a legend in his time. His dedication to the sixth and seventh Lubavitcher Rebbes, R. Yosef Yitzchak and R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, were unsurpassed, as were the lengths he was ready to go to assist a fellow Jew. He was known for his sharp wit and humor, and his well-attended farbrengens were interspersed with life-lessons creatively deduced from his experiences in Siberia.

**Thursday, July 11, 2024-5 Tammuz, 5784**

**Ezekiel's Vision of the "Chariot" (429 BCE)**

On the 5th of Tammuz of the year 3332 from creation (429 BCE), Ezekiel, among the only prophets to prophesy outside of the Holy Land, beheld a vision of the Divine "Chariot" representing the spiritual infrastructure of creation.

**Friday, July 12, 2024-6 Tammuz, 5784**

**Entebbe Rescue (1976)**

Over 100 Jewish hostages held by Arab terrorists at Entebbe Airport, in Uganda, were rescued by Israeli commando units in 1976. One soldier, Yonatan Netanyahu, was killed during the operation.

**Shabbat, July 13, 2024-7 Tammuz, 5784**

**Purim Ostroh (1792)**

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.