

# Torah Weekly

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## PARSHAT MATOT-MASSEI

22-28 Tammuz 5784  
28 July – 3 August 2024

*Torah:* Numbers 30:2-36:13  
*Haftarah:* Jeremiah 2:4-28; 4:1-2

### 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)

*Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say: Those who work for the community should do so for the sake of Heaven; for then the merit of their ancestors shall aid them, and their righteousness shall endure forever. And you, [says G-d,] I shall credit you with great reward as if you have achieved it.*

## A Timely Yahrtzeit

In the concluding portion of the Book Numbers, Moses chronicles the forty-two journeys that the Israelites traveled in the desert—while en route from Egypt to the Promised Land. For the most part the list is very concise – "They traveled from X and camped in Y; they traveled from Y and camped in Z..." – omitting the events that transpired in the areas where they camped. For example, the Sinai Desert stopover is mentioned without reference to the giving of the Torah that occurred there. There are, however, several exceptions, where the list is interrupted to point out an event that occurred at a particular location. One of these exceptions is the encampment at Mount Hor:

*"They journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. Aaron the High Priest ascended Mount Hor at G-d's behest and died there, on the first day of the fifth month, in the fortieth year of the Children of Israel's exodus from Egypt"*  
- Numbers 33:38.

Interestingly, this is the only time that the Torah mentions the exact date of a Yahrtzeit (anniversary of death). Also interesting is the fact that the section containing this Yahrtzeit is always read within a week of the Yahrtzeit—the first day (Rosh Chodesh) of Av. And some years, when Rosh Chodesh Av is on Shabbat, we read about Aaron's Yahrtzeit on the very date when it is observed!

This begs the obvious question: what is so remarkable about the timing of Aaron's Yahrtzeit that it merits explicit mention in the Torah?

Aaron's passing is also associated with another event. While the Israelites traveled

through the desert they were enshrouded and protected by Clouds of Glory from all sides. This special miracle was in the merit of Aaron's righteousness. With Aaron's passing, these clouds departed, leaving the Israelites vulnerable to the elements and to enemy strikes. And indeed, the King of Arad immediately took advantage of this development and mounted an attack.

On a deeper level:

Aaron was the ultimate peacemaker. Our Sages tell us that he was a "lover and pursuer of peace," who always sought to bring peace between rivals and quarreling spouses. His efforts were rewarded in kind, with the appearance of Clouds of Glory that served as a unifying force, molding the entire Israelite encampment into a cohesive unit. And as long as the Israelites were united, they were insulated against their enemies—for we are only vulnerable to outside attacks when discord reigns in our midst. When Aaron passed away, leaving the nation bereft of his peacemaking efforts, the clouds disappeared. There was a resulting lack of unity, and the enemy pounced.

The clouds did reappear for a short period (in Moses' merit), but soon after they disappeared for good. Ultimately, unity must come from within, stemming from a genuine respect for our fellows, not due to external influences such as a peacemaker or isolationism. Drawing on Aaron's inspiration, we must strive to make love for our fellows part and parcel of our character, one that does not depend on external factors.

Aaron passed away on the day that ushers in the saddest month on the Jewish calendar, the month when both Holy Temples were destroyed.

*"Why was the first Temple destroyed? Because of three sins - idolatry, sexual indiscretions and murder. The second Temple - when the people were involved in Torah, mitzvot and acts of kindness - why was it destroyed? Because they harbored baseless hatred towards each other!" - The Talmud.*

In order to rectify our lack of unity, we were dispatched on an exile which took us to all corners of the globe. We have never been more "out of the clouds" than today. Spread out all over and divided into different communities, affiliations and ancestries, our biggest challenge is to remain united despite all the differences in ethnicities, customs, ideologies, etc.

We have left the cloud, and now we must internalize Aaron's message of love and peace. This will immunize us against our enemies' designs and will hasten the day when we will all be returned to our land with joy, and these mournful days will be celebrated as festive holidays.

*By Naftali Silberberg*

## Flirting With Futility... Or Embracing Truth?

The Jewish calendar and the Parshah of the week are always deeply connected, and it is never coincidental that a particular portion is read at a particular time of the year.

The two Parshahs we read this week, Matot and Massei, are no exceptions. They are always read during the Three Weeks of mourning when we recall the destruction of our Holy Temple. I am not going to focus on these latent connections but prefer to look at the Haftarah and the message of the Prophet Jeremiah which is also especially chosen for this week.

One thing is certain: the prophets of old didn't mince

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their words. They were the original preachers who pounded their pulpits with fire and brimstone. Here, Jeremiah castigates the Jewish people:

*Listen to the word of G-d, O' House of Jacob ... What wrong did your fathers find in Me that they distanced themselves from Me and went after [gods of] emptiness and became empty themselves?*

They are guilty on two counts, laments the prophet:

*They have forsaken Me [G-d], the spring of living waters, [and furthermore, they did so] to dig for themselves wells, broken cisterns that hold no water.*

What is Jeremiah saying?

If they exchanged G-d and Torah for some other noble, exalted philosophy, or for another highly principled ideology, at least there might be some imagined justification. But for what have they exchanged the lofty moral truths of G-d and Torah? For futility, emptiness, and nothingness. A terrible double blow.

If we pursue emptiness, we risk becoming empty-headed ourselves. If we have no higher purpose in life, then our lives will be

filled with nothing more than empty materialism. People like Bill Gates and Warren Buffet are giving their billions away. Their single-minded focus on amassing wealth has been more than vindicated by their unprecedented philanthropy, which, I must say, is simply breathtaking. But materialism for its own sake, with no higher purpose whatsoever, is futile and empty and can only lead to becoming vacuous.

Some generations sinned by denying G-d. Philosophical and ideological rebels, they were atheists or agnostics who genuinely struggled with their faith. We believe that every Jew believes, but some never dig deeply enough into the recesses of their own souls to tap into their inner faith, and they may remain non-believing. We believe they are wrong, but, to their credit, they are searchers for truth. Jeremiah, however, wept for a generation that did not search for anything deeper at all. They had no appreciation of conceptual principles and ideals. It was a generation that worshipped nonsense and empty escapism.

Generations ago, Jewish parents cried bitter tears because they lost their children to

communism, socialism, hippie-ism, or other anti-establishment ideologies. The tragedy of our time is that we are losing our youth not to any form of political activism or social consciousness, but to emptiness and futility, to drugs and raves. At least the misguided rebels of old believed in a cause. Right or wrong, they were trying to build a better world. Today, it's 'to hell with the world, pass the beer!'

Jeremiah pleads with us to forsake this fling with futility and empty cisterns, and to embrace the eternal spring of living waters—the authentic truths of Torah and the way of G-d.

Today, thank G-d, we can also state with confidence that millions of our own generation have heard Jeremiah loud and clear. We are witnessing millions of genuine seekers of truth, particularly young people, who are embracing the authentic Jewish way of life. It is a global phenomenon, and it is nothing short of inspirational. May we all lead our children towards meaningful spirituality and sanctity.

*By Yossy Goldman*

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, July 28, 2024-22 Tammuz, 5784**  
**R. Shlomo of Karlin (1792)**

Rabbi Shlomo (1738-1792), a Chassidic Rebbe in the town of Karlin, Russia (near Pinsk), was killed in the pogroms which accompanied the Polish uprising against Russia.

**Monday, July 29, 2024-23 Tammuz, 5784**  
**R. Moshe Cordovero (1570)**

Passing of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522?-1570) of Safed, the Holy Land, known as the "Ramak", authoritative Kabbalist and author of Pardes Rimonim.

**Tuesday, July 30, 2024-24 Tammuz, 5784**  
**Jews of Jerusalem are set aflame (1099)**

When the crusaders captured Jerusalem during the First Crusade, the Jews of Jerusalem fled into a synagogue. The crusaders then set flame to the synagogue, burning alive all the Jewish men, women, and children who had taken refuge there. All Jews were barred from living in the city of Jerusalem for the following 88 years.

**Wednesday, July 31, 2024-25 Tammuz, 5784**

**Passing of Rabbi Aharon Berachia of Modina (1639)**

Rabbi Aharon Berachia ben Moshe of Modina (? - 1639) was an Italian Kabbalist

and a student of Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano. At the request of the Burial Society at Mantua, he instituted rites for them. The author of many Kabbalistic works, he is perhaps best known for his work Ma'abar Yabbok, which contains mystical dissertations on purity and holiness. He also wrote additional prayers to be offered for the sick and the dead, as well as a code of conduct for their treatment. Many of the prayers recited at the gravesites of the deceased were composed by him. Tradition has it that an angel called a "Naggid" would come and study with him.

**Friday, August 2, 2024-27 Tammuz, 5784**  
**Third Expulsion from France (1322)**

After having been allowed back into France in the year 1315 (after the expulsion in 1306 by Philip IV), the Jews were once again expelled from France by Charles IV, who thus broke the pledge made by his predecessors in 1315 that the Jews would be able to stay in France for at least 12 years.

**Shabbat, August 3, 2024-28 Tammuz, 5784**  
**Passing of "Yismach Moshe" (1841)**

Tammuz 28 is the Yahrzeit (date of passing) of Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1759-1841) of Uhely, Hungary, author of Yismach Moshe

and patriarch of the Hungarian Chassidic dynasties.

**Passing of Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1886)**

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1804-1886) was born in Uzhhorod (Ungvar) in the Carpathian region of the Habsburg Empire (now Ukraine). When he was eight years old, Shlomo's father, Rabbi Yosef, passed away, and Ungvar's chief rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Heller, assumed legal guardianship of Shlomo. In 1830, he abandoned his work as a wine merchant and accepted the position of Rabbi of Brezovica (Brezevitz). In 1849, he returned to Ungvar to serve as a rabbinical judge. Realizing that the average Jew required a basic knowledge of practical halachah, Rabbi Ganzfried compiled the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, an abbreviated digest of Jewish law. To this day, the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* remains a classic halachic work, and it has been translated into many languages. In addition to the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, he authored many works including *Kesset HaSofer*, a halachic primer for scribes, and *Pnei Shlomo*, a commentary on the Talmud.