

## PARSHAT EIKEV

14-20 Av 5784  
18-24 August 2024

*Torah:* Duet. 7:12 - 11:25  
*Haftorah:* Isaiah 49:14 - 51:3

## What Makes You Happy, and Why?

What do you do for fun? If you're looking for a surefire way to cheer up, a silver bullet that almost always works, what is it?

Do you have one?

For those who do, it's a lifesaver. In those moments when things are down, it's been a long day, or the coffee was burned (argh!), a reliable happy-place is extremely comforting.

But have you thought about the implications of that pick-me-up? What do the things you fall back on for cheer and good feelings say about you?

Are you happy about what you're happy about?

Let's give that a moment's thought.

### Recounting the Golden Calf:

As is the case with many Torah portions in the book of Deuteronomy, in this week's Torah portion Moses recounts the events of the previous 40 years in the desert. One of the unfortunate standouts is the sin of the Golden Calf.

Moses admonishes the people, reminding them of how they angered G-d to the point where their fate hung in the balance. He recalls smashing the Tablets and administering punishments to the idolaters, and thereafter trying to set things right between G-d and the Jewish people. In his recounting of the events, we discover that Moses was well aware of just how badly the people had sinned, so much so, that he was unsure his efforts to negotiate atonement from G-d would meet with success. Take a look at his words:

*"And I fell down before G-d as before, forty days and forty nights... For I was frightened of the wrath and the fury that G-d was angry with you to destroy you, and G-d hearkened to me also at that time."* - Duet. 9:18-19

We can appreciate this sentiment. The only problem here is the sequence of events. If you look at the prior verses, Moses tells the people of his fearful state of mind after descending the mountain and breaking the Tablets. To allay his fear that G-d might destroy the Jewish people, he went back up the mountain and spent an additional 40 days seeking atonement on their behalf.

But that's not how it happened! Back in the book of Exodus, when we read of the events in real time, we find that before he even descended the mountain with the Tablets, Moses already started begging G-d for forgiveness. In fact, already on the mountaintop, G-d had agreed not to destroy the nation! So why does Moses now claim that as he came down the mountain, he was gripped with fear?

Moreover, why did Moses suddenly decide to smash the Tablets when he came down the mountain? It's not like he didn't know what was going on down there; after all, G-d Himself had informed Moses of the golden calf and of the severity of the situation (including His plans to destroy the Jewish people, G-d forbid). Moses seems to have remained pretty level-headed about it, and—according to one account in the Talmud—even fought with G-d to keep the tablets intact. But somehow, not long thereafter, Moses abandons the fight and chooses to smash the tablets instead.

What changed? What did he observe now that he didn't know while still on the mountain?

### A New Low

When G-d initially informed Moses that the Jewish people had sinned, Moses maintained hope. After all, the Jewish nation comprises regular, imperfect people, and mistakes happen. All he had to do was get the people to sober up a little, let them see what they'd done, and begin to do teshuvah. That's why he fought with G-d for the Tablets. He knew that the current moment, in the immediate aftermath of the golden calf, might not be the right time to present the Jewish people with such a gift. But he couldn't let what he saw as a temporary, fixable problem cause the eternal loss. "I've got this," he said. "Soon things will calm down, they'll be deserving of the Tablets once more, and we'll put an end to this shameful saga."

Tablets in hand, Moses made his way down the mountain. But then he saw something that really made him shiver. As he approached the people, he caught sight of them not simply mulling around the golden calf or even bowing down to it, but dancing. He saw that they were really into this thing.

And that was cause for grave concern.

### Transcendental Joy

You see, Simchah - real joy or bliss - stems from a very deep place in the soul. A person's ecstasy over any given thing demonstrates that he or she is "all in." As explained in Chassidic thought, true joy comes from a place so deep and so potent that it cannot be

### 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 four types of people: One who says, "What is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine" is a boor. One who says "What is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours" - this is a median characteristic; others say that this is the character of a Sodomite. One who says, "What is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours" is a pious person. And one who says "What is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine" is wicked.

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contained. When you're happy, that's it. Whatever rational, sensible calculations you had in mind go out the window. It's why you see people writing out huge checks at family weddings, why winning politicians give out absurd gifts, and why you're (generally speaking) just a better person to be around when you're happy—even to those you usually dislike. It's because a deep part of your soul has been exposed, and that part is expansive, unlimited, and unrestrained by the usual contours of reason. So when Moses saw the people jumping for joy around their newfound god, he knew that they had passed a point of no return. They had gone all in, and their tablets were no longer salvageable. And so, he hurled them to the ground.

### **Pick Your Celebration**

Joy is a powerful thing. It is a G-d-given tool that enables us to express the deep recesses of the soul. Joy is also crucial to our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. In fact, joy is considered a must for true mitzvah observance, and we are encouraged to find ways to stay happy. So make sure you're happy about the right things. If you're excited about your nephew's bar mitzvah, your best friend's wedding, graduating from college, or selling your startup for \$300 million, that's great. Just remember this: make it a spiritual experience. How? Simple: Be joyful and appreciative of G-d's kindness. These wonderful things in your life are a result of His goodness, so channel it in a G-dly

direction, and dance the night away like you're 16 again. The Jews dancing for joy in front of the Golden Calf is a cautionary tale: be wary of the frivolity and cheap thrills that surround you. Try your best not to get too caught up in the externals of life. Baseball, politics, and a weekend out with friends are enjoyable and can even be healthy, just make sure you're not making them into a Golden Calf instead of the positive, G-dly thing it can be. When choosing your cultural preferences and the things you do "for fun," remember that what you truly enjoy is very important to who you are and has a far-reaching impact on the very core of your being. Choose wisely.

*By Aharon Loschak*

## **Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel**

*around 1250-1298*

Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel was born around the year 5010 (1250 CE) in Germany, to a family of great Torah scholars; Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel (the Rosh) was his relative. He studied under the great Rabbi Meir of Rotenberg, and later moved to Goslar, and then Nuremburg, in Germany. In Nuremburg, he opened a Yeshiva (Talmudic seminary) which attracted young scholars from across Europe, from Spain to Hungary. Rabbi Mordechai also compiled commentaries and Halachic opinions on the

Talmud; this work was printed by his students following his death and is now included in nearly every edition of the Talmud. The book, called "Mordechai" after its author, also served as one of the sources for the Shulchan Aruch, the preeminent decisor of Jewish law. Rabbi Mordechai was killed on 22 Av 5058 (1298 CE) by the antisemite Rindfleisch, along with his wife, five children, and over 600 other Jews, in Nuermburg.

## **IN JEWISH HISTORY**

### **Monday, August 19, 2024-15 Av, 5784 End of Dying in Desert (1274 BCE)**

In wake of the incident of the "Spies," in which the generation that came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership demonstrated their unpreparedness for the task of conquering and settling the Holy Land, G-d decreed that entire generation would die out in the desert. After 38 years of wandering through the wilderness the dying finally ended, and a new generation of Jews stood ready to enter the Holy Land. It was the 15th of Av of the year 2487 from creation (1274 BCE)

### **Betar Dead Buried (148 CE)**

The fortress of Betar was the last holdout of the Bar Kochba rebellion against Roman rule in the Land of Israel. When Betar fell on the 9th of Av, 3893 (133 CE), Bar

Kochba and many thousands of Jews were killed; the Romans massacred the survivors of the battle with great cruelty and would not even allow the Jews to bury their dead. For 15 years their remains were left scattered on the battlefield. When the dead of Betar were finally brought to burial on Av 15 of the year 3908 from creation an additional blessing (HaTov VehaMeitiv) was added to the "Grace After Meals" in commemoration.

### **Tuesday, August 20, 2024-16 Av, 5784**

#### **Sir Moses Montefiore (1885)**

Sir Moses Montefiore was a religious philanthropist who worked tirelessly on behalf of his brethren worldwide, and especially in the Land of Israel. He dispensed large sums toward charitable causes and founded numerous

establishments and institutions. Sir Montefiore traveled far and wide to visit Jewish communities and interceded on their behalf before rulers such as Queen Victoria, Czar Alexander the Second, the Ottoman Sultan, and the pope. He lived to the ripe old age of 100, passing away on 16 Menachem Av 5645 (1885).

### **Wednesday, August 21, 2024-17 Av, 5784 Hebron Massacre (1929)**

Sixty-seven Jewish men, women and children were slaughtered, and scores wounded, raped, and maimed, by their Arab neighbors in the city of Hebron, in the Land of Israel, who rioted for three days amid cries of "Slaughter the Jews." The survivors were forced to evacuate to Jerusalem, and the ancient Jewish community of Hebron, which had lived in