

Shabbat Times

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London	21:07	22:26	Cambridge	21:05 22:41
Manchester	21:26	22:58	Leeds	20:00 22:52
Birmingham	21:16	22:54	Liverpool	21:25 23:06
Oxford	21:09	22:42	Jerusalem	19:13 20:31

Coming up...

- Israel Machane begins next week, on 5th July.
- Summer Machane is on 3rd-16th August, email Akiva on camps@bauk.org for more information

Shabbat Debate

Every week we will be writing weekly debates to discuss over Shabbat. The debates will then be continued on facebook, after Shabbat.

After Moshe hit the rock and was told he would not go into Egypt he prayed for Hashem to change His mind, can we change Hashem's mind?



SHABBAT

פרשת חקת

PARASHAT CHUKAT



תנועת בני אקבה
BNEI AKIVA UK

LASHEM

שבת לה'

The most widely distributed weekly Torah periodical written by our youth in the United Kingdom.

The Greatest Leaders

Hannah Sherrard

This week's parasha focuses on the theme of leadership. Very few parashiot are named after someone. The fact that Pinchas has a parasha named after him shows the significant role he played. His heroic and quick thinking regarding killing Cosbi and Zimri, put an end to the plague that killed more than 24000 Jews. Pinchas taught the generation about the effects of idolatry and adultery; enabling them to see the error of their ways. Hashem wanted to reward Pinchas in such an overt way that Bnei Yisrael would see and recognise his righteousness, therefore, G-d gave Pinchas's descendants priesthood. Rabbi Tandler explains how Pinchas was the grandson of Aharon, and he was not selected to be a Kohen. For the entire time in the desert, Pinchas lovingly accepted Hashem's decree that he and his children were not to be Kohanim. He was not a man of high stature, however he continued to function as a Levy serving beneath his Grandfather and uncles. In stark contrast to Pinchas, is Zimri, a man who was the Prince of the tribe of Shimon. However, unlike Pinchas, Zimri demonstrated no qualities of leadership. Through these two different characters, we are taught that there are no credentials to be a leader, only character traits, and its up to us how we use them.

Later on in the Parasha, Moshe (who is deemed by Aryeh Grossman as the greatest leader) displays the highest sign of leadership by choosing someone to take over from him. Moshe approached Hashem and asked him "May Hashem... appoint a man over the assembly... and let the people of Israel not be like sheep without a shepherd." Hashem stated that Yehoshua was to become his successor; he had such enthusiasm about Torah and Mitzvot, which are such amicable qualities in a leader. Yehoshua loved Israel as we learned about his favourable report on the land in Parshat Shelach, we also learn how he battled for the Jews against Amalek (Shemot 17:13). He was also Moshe's prime servant, waiting by Mount Sinai for Moshe to reappear. Yehoshua demonstrates key qualities needed to make a quality leader: patience, loyalty, truth, resilience and faith.

From these four key characters in this week's parasha, we learn how to act when the time comes for us to step up. When we are called upon to be leaders. In Bnei Akiva we are always taught leadership skills, and how to oversee either a sviva, or a tsevet. However, we must also understand that there is a time to step up and be a leader, and there also comes a time when we must be part of "the assembly." As Rav Ginzburg said, "If everyone's a leader, then who is being led?"

Hannah Sherrard is in Shevet Eitan



Torah Today

Am Yisrael is known as “the People of the Book”. We are the subject of the book-of-books – the Torah – and our tradition is so deeply linked to the study of that book, with volumes upon volumes of commentaries based upon it. Indeed, one of the unique *mitzvot* we have is Torah study. It is one of the outstanding and highly celebrated *mitzvot*, yet one which is often so misunderstood; it is upheld on a pedestal on its own in certain circles, yet often neglected in others. We are taught Torah in school, but are too often not guided to appreciate it beyond the curriculum. What is the relevance of Torah study, and its meaning to us in the 21st century?

Our *parasha* states (Bamidbar 19:14):

“This is the Torah: when a person dies in a tent...”

On face-value, the literal interpretation of this *pasuk* is a technical discussion regarding the laws of ritual impurity when a person finds themselves in an enclosed space with a corpse. But our sages (Berachot 63b) interpret it homilectically to mean that:

“Words of Torah are only retained in one who dies over them.”

This strange comment is cited by Rambam (Hil. Talmud Torah 3:12) and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De’ah 246:21). In fact, it is not the only source correlating Torah study with death; The Talmud (Shabbat 88b) teaches that with each one of the Ten Commandments, the Jewish People died and were resuscitated. What is this correlation made? Why must a person die over their Torah study?

In essence, what are we trying to achieve in Torah study? Learning Torah is not a mere intellectual pursuit, like any other discipline. When we study any subject in the world, we are seeking knowledge; but when we study Torah, we are seeking *will*. When we study Torah we contemplate what the Creator wants from His Creation – what Hashem wants from us. The deepest and most profound way to connect to another person, is to grasp what they *want* – what is their motivation, what are their goals and aspirations? Connecting to another person’s *will* is to connect to their *self*. Studying Torah is to know and internalize what Hashem wants from us, and from the world – it is to connect to the revelation of Hashem’s *essential self* in the most intimate of ways.

But there is a deeper point yet. Our relationship with Hashem is unlike our relationship with any person – in fact, any “thing”. Hashem is not “other” from us; Hashem is the ultimate reality, the source of existence who *wills* all into being. Hashem is our source, the soul of our soul, the self of our self. Thus, when we encounter Hashem in Torah study, we are in fact encountering ourselves. When we encounter Hashem’s will in the Torah, we are in fact encountering our own essential will.

The Talmud (Niddah 20b) teaches that the embryo studies Torah in the mother’s womb. What is the meaning of this imagery? The explanation is that the Torah is inbred in us, it is not foreign to us; it is our natural will (see Rambam Hil. Gerushin 2:20).

Torah study is an incredible exercise of self-discovery. This term is funny, why do people need to “discover” their “selves”? How does one “lose” themselves? Why do we need the Torah in order to learn about ourselves and what we want? The prophet teaches (Yeshayahu 59:2):

“Your iniquities have separated between you and your God...”

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The Week that Was...

- Our Israel machane madrichim have been busy preparing for Israel Machane at the bayit for Israel Machane which starts next week.

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It is as if there are barriers in our consciousness separating between us and our self. The prophet describes the result of sin as a screen, obstructing our view of what lies behind it; each sin adding an additional screen – an additional layer of thickness – further obstructing our view. These screens become our second-nature, they become part of us. In order to see beyond them – to see our true self and essential will – that part of us must die. In order to connect vividly and intimately with our essential will, we must clear-away all the screens that impede on this clear vision and perfect self-discovery. “Words of Torah are only retained in one who dies over them.”

We live in a confusing world, where it is increasing more complicated to self-identify. According to studies, the average Westerner sees hundreds – if not thousands – of advertisements every day; that’s hundreds of messages telling us what we *want*, hence what we *are* and who we want to be. Judaism provides us with opportunities to navigate our identity in this complicated world; we have unique exercises to clarify our values and our identity. Torah study is the study of our identity, it is learning about what we *want* and who we *are*. (Parenthetically, this connects to Tefilla: Torah is *learning* about what we want, and Tefilla is *wanting* what we want.)

Torah study mustn’t be taught as another subject in a curriculum. It is not just an intellectual pursuit, it is the study of will. We are not just learning about “Judaism” when studying Torah, we are not learning about God – some “other” being – we are learning about ourselves.