

# Ha Shavuah B' Sha'arey Israel

June 25 – July 2, 2009

3 Tammuz – 10 Tammuz 5769



Candle lighting time 8:29 pm  
Friday June 26

Friday Evening Kabbalat Shabbat Services begin at 6:15 pm  
Saturday morning Shabbat Services begin at 9:30 am

## PARASHAT KORAH (Commentary on Page 2)

Annual: Numbers 16:1 – 18:32 (Etz Hayim, p. 860)

Triennial: Numbers 16:20 – 17:24 (Etz Hayim, p. 863)

Haftarah: I Samuel 11:14 – 12:22 (Etz Hayim, p. 877)

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### **Mazel Tov!**

To Brenda Turetsky on the birth of her grandson, Charles Joseph Turetsky, and to proud parents Sam & Manda Turetsky, great uncle Steve Chanin and great aunt Carol Kaplan.

### **We wish a Happy Birthday this week to:**

Irit Ullman, Larry Solanch, Joan Kent, Diane Jahr, Robert Chanin, Jacob Elkon, Laura Carter Piers, and Jennifer Bernstein

### **And Happy Anniversary to:**

Pam & Dan Toland and Deborah & Paul Adler

### **This week we remember the Yahrzeit of:**

Simon Moore, William Estroff, Robert Zarks, Avrom Roobin, Florence E. Schwartz, Jacob Turner, Sara Zeldin, Samuel Egdal, Esther Pessie Mendel, Eleanor Winer, Solomon Avrunin, Leslie Baum, Miriam Turner Deitch, Sarah Mendel Koplin

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To make any changes for the 2009-2010 Directory you must call Beth Cohen at 474-1221 by July 13.

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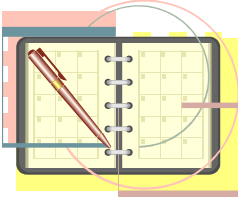
We are missing quite a few books from the Library.



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and then please return them. Thank you!!



**Please continue to send in your surveys, and remember  
each adult member of the congregation can send one in.**



**Mark your calendars ~  
Tisha B'Av Service  
Wednesday - July 29 – 8:00 PM**



**Parashat Korah**

*This week's commentary is by Rabbi Marc Wolf who is the assistant vice-chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary*

**The Ultimate Self-Help Guide** - Amidst seemingly mundane laws, valuable lessons emerge.

A colleague and friend who shares my fascination with golf as well as my plague of performing poorly, recently gifted me with a book entitled, *Golf is Not a Game of Perfect*.

It is another one of the ever-expanding genre of self-help books in sheep's clothing in which the subject, in this case, golf, is viewed as a microcosm of life. Accordingly, the sport is given a philosophical reach that outdistances any drive from the tee. It is filled with pithy moral teachings such as "Golfers must learn to love the challenge when they hit a ball into the rough ... the alternatives--anger, fear, whining, and cheating--do no good." Through tangible advice on the game, it subtly links such challenges as hitting a 40-foot putt to reaching for personal and professional goals. Books like this one and others of this ilk by sports personalities like George Forman and Michael Jordan tend to see an ecumenical relevance in seemingly mundane activities.

Our culture is filled with such moral tomes. And while I am sure I can learn a lot from George Forman's lesson of picking yourself up off the canvas when you're down, the aisles of Barnes

and Noble are not necessarily the first place we should go in search of ethical teachings. There is much our own tradition teaches us about living life morally, beyond our expected ritual obligations.

The gift of Judaism is that within the nuanced discussions of ritual obligations, moral lessons emerge. They are, in fact, inextricably connected and should be viewed as a whole--each dependent on and enhancing the other. In the latter half of our *parashah* this week, after the famous earthly consumption of Korah and his followers, the focus shifts to the laws, rights, and obligations of the priestly class. Their ritual obligation is to perform the sacrifices and engage in holy activities of the Temple--work that is replete with measurement and detail, and seemingly devoid of moral lesson.

However, we read in Number 18:7, "I make your service a service of a gift ... " This gift can be given either by the priests to God or by God to the priests. The giver and receiver are ambiguous. Reading ritual obligations as a gift to God seems itself a bit contradictory, and many medieval commentators attempted to rectify this seeming contradiction. For example, Rashi and Ramban, in an unusual instance of concurrence, define the gift that God has given to the Jewish people as the priesthood. This view is also expressed by the commentators Ibn Ezra and Sforno.

This is not the case, however, when we reach the commentary of the *Zaddik* Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev (circa:1740-1810). In his commentary, *Kedushat Levi* (p. 311 *Mesamchei Lev* ed.), he states, "When we serve God, it is not a gift, because it is our obligation. However, when we work to return the Divine sparks to God, this is the gift we give to God. Applying a concept that originated with gnostics in the early part of this century and continued with some early kabbalists, Levi Yitzhak believed that there was a service we could perform in addition to ritual responsibilities, which would return the fragments of God in exile in our world to the Godly realm. Continuing, he says this higher service is our responsibility to act ethically in business. His definition of the verse as a gift we give to God extends ritual law to include a moral dimension. Thus, *avodah*, service of God, can be simple ritual observance without any moral dimension, or, when the ethical dimension is included, our service becomes a gift to God.

This concept is supported by Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch (Germany, 1808-1888) in his *Nineteen Letters*. In letter 14, (p.88: Feldheim trans.), Hirsch defines *avodah* as "striving to regain the eternal values of life if we should have lost sight of them through the deceptions, errors, conflicts and temptations of living." He adds, "Our sages call true devotion *avodat ha-lev*--the service of the heart; that is, the fulfillment of God's will toward our own inner person by purifying and ennobling our character."

Rabbi Hirsch's service is truly more than ritual observance and contains elements that are consonant with *tikkun olam*, repair of the world, also incorporated in Levi Yitzhak's definition.

Maimonides, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, (3:32) talks about the deeper meaning of sacrifices and asserts that if the ritual detail is of paramount importance to the *avodah*, then there would be more leniency about where they can be held instead of restricting them to the Temple. Thus, there must be a more profound meaning imparted to the sacrifices. Moreover, he adds, the prophets--the champions of ethics and morality--frequently spoke out against observing ritual law that does not include a corresponding moral code.

All this is to say that rather than consult the self-help aisles of the local book store, our religion can serve as a moral and ethical compass. Our commentators bring law and ritual to life and instill it with a meaning relevant to our daily lives. Looking within our tradition for inherent moral structure will provide guidance with context and depth that is relevant to us as Jews--it just may be a little more challenging to find our moral guidance here than in a book by Michael Jordan.

Our challenge, then, is to approach our tradition and discover the morals behind what may appear to be outdated and irrelevant ritual detail. To quote a popular statement from *Pirkei Avot*, "turn it over and over, everything is contained within it."

Our tradition is living and evolving, the challenge of relevance is yours, and the next time you're playing golf, remember sometimes a sand trap is just a sand trap.

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**For other commentaries on this week's Torah portion check out these sites:**

[Aish.com](http://Aish.com)

[ISJL Taste of Torah](http://ISJL Taste of Torah)

[JTS](http://JTS)

[MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com)

[USCJ Torah Sparks](http://USCJ Torah Sparks)

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[Israeli News Broadcast – in English](#)  
[The Jewish Ethicist](#)  
[Synagogue 3000](#)  
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[The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum](#)  
[United Jewish Communities \(UJC\)](#)  
[American Jewish University](#)

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