

Ha Shavuah B' Sha'arey Israel

July 16 – July 23, 2009

24 Tammuz – 2 Av 5769



Candle lighting time 8:25 pm
Friday July 17

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

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**PARASHAT MATTOT-MASEY - BIRKAT HAHODESH**

*(Commentary on Page 2)*

Annual: Numbers 30:2 – 36:13 (Etz Hayim, p. 941)

Triennial: Numbers 32:1 – 33:49 (Etz Hayim, p. 949)

Haftarah: Jeremiah 2:4 – 28; 3:4; 4:1–2 (Etz Hayim, p. 973, 976, 977)



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

Markus Hill, Stuart Karlins, Hy Katz, Carol Chanin, and Robert Fieldsteel

**And Happy Anniversary to:**

Maggie Philbin & Larry Solanch and Susan & Marshall Hutten

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

Florence Besser, Morris Rosen, Rabbi Charles Glyck, Isaac Kessler, Arthur Schwartz, Katherine S. Eidex, Morris Backer, Isaac Samuel Rubin, Solomon Tinsky, Sarah D. Avrunin, Abraham A. Winer



***Tisha B'Av Service***

***Wednesday - July 29***

***8:00 PM***

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TBI is compiling a brochure for their 150th Anniversary Celebration that is scheduled for the October 24, 2009 weekend.

If you would be interested in making a \$25.00 donation to the Temple for having your name or your business included in the congratulations section of the brochure, please contact the Temple – 745-6727.

The deadline for having your name included is August 15.

PARASHAT MATTOT-MASEY

This week's commentary is by Sam Berrin Shonkoff, the Jewish student life coordinator at Stanford Hillel. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies from Brown University and has also studied in Jerusalem at Hebrew University, Pardes Institute and The Conservative Yeshiva.

Coping with Complexity - Awareness of the wholeness in the Torah opens our eyes to the wholeness of the world.

The child in me wants to hide Parashat Mattot and Parashat Masei in a dusty attic somewhere; so many of their words are disillusioning, disturbing, and embarrassing. Parashat Mattot begins with sexism: all men must keep their promises, yet women's promises may be nullified by disapproving husbands and fathers (Numbers 30). It continues with genocide: in a spirit of revenge, thousands of Israelites invade Midian and kill every man (Numbers 31:7). When they return with captured women, children, and booty, Moses is angry because his soldiers did not do enough. He commands them to kill every non-virgin female and every male child among the captives (Numbers 31:15-18).

This massacre is especially bloodcurdling for those who remember that Moses lived in Midian for a period of his life and that his wife Tziporah and father-in-law Yitro are Midianites. Later, Parashat Masei foreshadows a horrific mission of ethnic cleansing in Canaan: God commands the People of Israel, "You shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land...And if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land, those whom you allow to remain shall be stings in your eyes and thorns in your sides" (Numbers 33:52-55).

How can we meaningfully engage with such indigestible texts that blatantly contradict our contemporary notions of justice? How do we continue to embrace the Torah and proclaim that "all her paths are *shalom*"? (Proverbs 3:17)

Wholeness in the Torah

Many people choose to evade, rather than to connect intimately with these difficult issues. Some attempt to "purify" problematic passages through creative interpretations and apologetics. *Midrash*, for example, is a wellspring of such commentaries. Others ignore the problematic texts and focus exclusively on passages that validate their own personal values. Although these two methods sometimes lead to profound commentaries, they

ultimately limit the depth of our engagement with Torah. Whether we justify its faults or we fail to behold its wholeness, we, and Torah, are fragmented.

Rather, we must approach the whole Torah with open hearts, displaying enough patience and tenderness to remain in close relation to all of it, even amidst conflict and vulnerability. To look upon its beauty and blemishes, to engage with Torah openly and honestly is to cultivate real and sustainable shalom--the kind that can exist within individuals, in a society, and between nations.

"Peace" is a misleading translation of shalom, for it implies a lack of conflict, an absence of complications. In fact, the etymological root of shalom is *shalem*--"whole." Shalom is not a state of calm; it is wholeness--a process of opening oneself to the whole story and grappling with it. Thus, shalom is not peace itself, but the headwater of peace. When we avoid complexity and strive for a black-and-white understanding of reality, we erode the possibility of shalom. Seeing and struggling with the Torah's most disturbing faces--even when it elicits emotional responses like shame, anger, and sadness--can actually elucidate our deepest values and can help us identify our own ethical and moral orientations. Our productive indignation over unjust texts motivates us to take action on these issues in our own lives.

Wholeness in the World

The pursuit of global justice requires us to apply this notion to the world itself. We should strive to be aware of what is happening around the globe--the pleasant and the tragic, the heartwarming and the chilling. It can be excruciating to learn about the oppression, poverty, and epidemics that persist every day. This is why so many of us turn away. How else could the genocide in Darfur possibly be entering its seventh year without a stronger degree of international intervention? How else could millions of human beings die of hunger every year while others of us have excess? How else could diarrhea, the most preventable and treatable childhood illness, kill 4,000 children per day? If we skip over those painful "texts" in newspapers and on the news, if we choose ignorant bliss over actual awareness, then we stunt the growth of shalom. And where there is no shalom, there can be no peace.

To practice shalom in the world, we must extend beyond a passive awareness of international issues. It is relatively easy for us to learn about and respond emotionally to events, but knowledge without action falls short of wholeness. Our real challenge is to integrate our intellectual and physical selves, to rise up and do something once we are aware. The world will not change, and neither will we, if we sit still, steeped in thoughts and feelings.

It may seem easier in the short term to ignore complexities, but this alienates us from reality. To neglect shalom weakens us as activists and undermines the wholeness of Torah, the world, other people, and ourselves.

Here we conclude the book of Numbers, *B'midbar*, "In the Wilderness." The People of Israel stands on the banks of the Jordan, in the final days of their wanderings. They yearn to enter Jerusalem, *Yerushalayim*--another word rooted in shalem, wholeness. Like them, we still need to gaze across the waters, to find our way, to move ever closer to justice and to peace.

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

Aish.com

ISJL Taste of Torah

JTS

MyJewishLearning.com

USCJ Torah Sparks

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[JTS Podcast - this week's Parsha](#)  
[Audio Siddur](#)  
[Jewish Telegraphic Agency \(JTA\)](#)  
[Israeli News Broadcast – in English](#)  
[The Jewish Ethicist](#)  
[Synagogue 3000](#)  
[Learn through USCJ online](#)  
[The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum](#)  
[United Jewish Communities \(UJC\)](#)  
[American Jewish University](#)

**For the children (or the young at heart):**

[Torah Portion Coloring Pages](#)  
[Babaganews Torah Parasha of the week movie](#)