

# Ha Shavuah B' Sha'arey Israel

June 17 – June 23, 2010

5 Tammuz – 11 Tammuz 5770



Candle lighting time 8:27 pm  
Friday June 18

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

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**PARASHAT HUKKAT** (Commentary on Page 2)

Annual (Num. 19:1-22:1): Etz Hayim p. 880

Triennial (Num. 20:22-22:1): Etz Hayim p. 890

Haftarah (Judges 11:1-33): Etz Hayim p. 910  
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**Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery to:**

Elaine Dreizin, Ethel Koplin, Paul Kruger, Doris Rabinowitz and Paul Adler

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

Ashlyn Bernstein, Renee Schwartz, Doug Katz, Anslie Perkel, Stuart Schwartz, Shannon Hirsh,  
Marc Rosengart, Matthew Schwartz, Paul Adler and Lillie Anne Brody

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

Ina Chanin & Louis Schlesinger

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

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, Ida Lavine Becker, Isidor Goldman, Leon Singer

**Please Note ~**

**The CSI Office will be closed for  
Vacation on Monday & Tuesday  
June 21 & 22 and June 28 & 29**

**Rabbi Bat-Or will be on vacation Tuesday & Wednesday  
June 22 & 23**

**She will be attending the Institute for Southern Jewish Life  
Conference in Jackson, Mississippi from Friday, June 25  
through Wednesday, June 30.**

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## The New High Holiday Mahzor Lev Shalem Prayer Books Have Arrived at CSI

If you would like to plate a prayer book  
for a life cycle event, the cost is \$35.00

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*Save the Date!*

**Marc Rosengart's Bar Mitzvah  
August 6-7**

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## PARASHAT HUKKAT

**Numbers 19:1-22:1**

*This Week's Torah Commentary is by Rabbi Shimon Felix, the Israel Director of the Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel. He lives with his family in Jerusalem, and has taught in a wide variety of educational frameworks in Israel and abroad.*

**When To Talk And When To Act** - Comparing Moshe to Yiftah raises questions about when we should be people of speech and when we should be people of action.

This week I want to do something a bit different. As I'm sure many of you know, in addition to reading in the synagogue the weekly Torah portion, there is a tradition to follow that reading with a short selection from one of the books of the prophets. Typically, this section, called the 'haftarah' or 'leave-taking' (the idea being that it is a kind of an epilogue or coda to the Torah

reading) is connected in some thematic way to the Torah portion. This week I would like to talk about the Torah reading together with the Haftarah.

In the Torah reading, near the end of the parshah, which, according to the rabbinic understanding takes place towards the end of the 40-year trek through the desert, we are told that there was a water shortage: "Now there was no water for the nation, so they gathered against Moshe and against Aharon...saying...why did you bring the congregation of God into this wilderness to die there, us, along with our cattle...?"

God appears to Moshe, and tells him to take his staff, assemble the community, and speak to a rock, which will give forth water. Famously, Moshe somehow gets it wrong, and commits what for him will be an ultimate, tragic sin, for which he will be punished by being denied entry into the Holy Land.

Moshe assembles the people, and says, "Listen here, you rebels, from this stone shall we bring forth for you water?" Moshe then strikes the stone with his staff, twice, and water flows out of it. Subsequently, God informs him that by doing so he has sinned, grievously: "You did not believe in me, to sanctify me before the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land that I am giving them."

For centuries, the rabbis have debated the precise nature of Moshe's sin. Some feel that it was Moshe's anger--his branding the people "rebels," and his nasty tone of voice and choice of language. Others focus on the speaking to/hitting the rock question; although Moshe was instructed by God to take his staff, he was clearly told to speak to the rock, and, instead, he hit it, twice. Many commentaries see this as another sign of anger, and/or of disregard for the precise demands made by God.

It may be that Moshe, who has consistently, over the period of the Exodus from Egypt and the 40 years of wandering in the desert, used his staff to hit things, was now being instructed to symbolically take the people of Israel, as they ready themselves to enter the land of Israel, to a higher, more mature level, in which speech, rather than violent action, was to be preferred. If so, his regressive behavior in hitting the rock communicated precisely the wrong message to the Israelites. Had he spoken to the rock, the Israelites could have learned the value of obedience to the word of God, rather than a fear of His wrath, as being the desirable mode of interaction with Him, and that speech, rather than violent action, is the preferred mode of human behavior.

After this episode, there are a series of diplomatic and military interactions between the Jews and the first Canaanite peoples they encounter as they approach the Land of Israel. Moshe and the Israelites wage a successful campaign against the Amorites, who attacked Israel after refusing Moshe's request to pass peacefully through their territory, in which Israel captures Amorite territory.

It is this last episode, the conquest of the Amorite land, which clearly seems to be the connection to the Haftarah that is read in conjunction with parshat Hukat--the story of Yiftah the Giladi in the book of Judges. The story begins by telling us that Yiftah, Gilad's illegitimate son (we are told that his mother was a prostitute) was thrown out of his parental home by his younger half-brothers, who denied him a share in their father's inheritance because he was "the son of another woman." Yiftah takes up with a group of men described as "worthless

fellows." Yiftah seems to be a typical marginal youth; unfairly rejected by his family, he opts for a life on the edge, surrounded by other marginal people.

But then, the people of Israel are attacked by the Ammonites, who seek to conquer the Amorite territory that, 300 years earlier, in our parsha, Moshe had captured in his defensive war against the Amorites. Yiftah's old tormentors, the men of Gilad, approach him and ask him to lead them in battle. It would seem that the personality-type that Yiftah was--an adventurous roustabout, was exactly what was needed. The respectable burghers of Gilad knew that they were not fighters, and turned to Yiftah to do that job for them.

Yiftah agrees, and becomes their leader. He then does something that is somewhat unexpected. We have been prepared by the narrative for a Yiftah who is a man of action, who will be a captain for the beleaguered and frightened people of Gilad. And what does this man of action do? He sends a diplomatic mission to the king of Ammon asking for peace.

In the discussion that follows, Yiftah argues that the land that Ammon is attacking was conquered legitimately by Israel from another nation, the Amorites, some 300 hundred years earlier, in a defensive war, after Israel was attacked by the Amorites. The Ammonites, whom Israel did not fight at that time, have no legitimate reason to attack Israel over that land now.

All the diplomacy is to no avail; the Ammonites attack, and Yiftah goes into battle. Before he does, he makes a vow to God, saying that, if he is victorious, and returns from the battle, "whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." He was assuming that it would be a goat, or sheep, or cow, which would first come out to greet him upon his return.

Tragically, after Yiftah returns home, victorious, it is his daughter, his only child, who comes out, singing and dancing, to greet him. The end of the story is horribly tragic:

"When he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said, 'alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low, and thou hast become the cause of trouble to me, for I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I can not go back.' And she said to him, 'my father, if thou hast opened thy mouth to the Lord, do to me that which has come out of thy mouth.' "She is given two months to 'weep for her virginity', and is then forced to live out her life, alone, remaining unmarried.

Although Moshe's fight and Yiftah's fight over the same piece of land, separated by some 300 years, is the obvious connection between the parsha and the haftarah, I am struck by the connections between the Yiftah story and the story of Moshe and the rock.

Moshe, back in Exodus, began his career as a man of action. Like Yiftah, he was estranged from his family (albeit under very different circumstances), and what we know of him is very like what we think we know of Yiftah--the first act he does in the Torah is to smite and kill the Egyptian oppressor of his Jewish brethren. Later, at the burning bush, when God calls on Moshe to go to Pharaoh and lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, he demurs, claiming that he is not a man of words, not a speaker. God insists, but does seem to agree with Moshe's self-assessment and supplies him with his brother Aharon to act as a spokesman. The staff, which accompanies Moshe, and through which he accomplishes all the plagues and miracles, seems to underscore Moshe's personality as a man of action, rather than words.

It would seem that in our parsha, as the 40 years in the desert come to an end and the Israelites ready themselves to enter the land of Israel, God's telling Moshe to take the staff but TALK to the rock is a kind of final test. Moshe is challenged to transcend his persona as a man of action, of violence, and clearly opt for the role of the speaker, the person who achieves not by hitting, but by talking. Moshe fails, and is denied the right to enter the land, his goal for the last 40 years and more, as a punishment.

It is worth noting that the same word "va'yach"--"and he smote"--is used back at the beginning of his career, when he killed the Egyptian, as well as here, in our parsha, when he hits the rock. It would seem that the act of talking to the rock, and, in effect, rejecting the staff that he held in his hands, was meant to be Moshe's final apotheosis, from the man of action to the man of words. It is this that he failed to achieve.

Yiftah's story seems to contain a similar tension between speech and action. Yiftah refuses to be typecast as a simple strong-man, and tries diplomacy before military engagement. When the Ammonites refuse to listen to reason, Yiftah is forced to be what everyone wants him to be; a tough guy, the son of a prostitute, who hangs out with worthless bums, a man of action and violence.

In a fascinating twist, his tragedy comes about not through anything he does, but through something he says--his vow to offer the first thing to come out of his door to God. It almost seems as if the story is telling us that Yiftah was wrong to try to become a man of words, to "open his mouth to God" and express a religious sentiment, and that his real role, the role that he is now called upon to play, that needs to be played, and in which he can succeed, is that of a man of action.

As Israel now faces a brutal, implacable enemy, with whom we have tried to talk, unsuccessfully, for years, I pray that we, and our leaders, will have the wisdom to know when to talk, and when to act.

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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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