

In memory of all those brutally murdered in the war on Israel and the fallen soldiers of the IDF. Praying for the safe return of all the hostages.

בס"ד

20 JULY 2024 | 14 TAMMUZ 5784

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DAF HASHAVUA

בלק | **BALAK**

SHABBAT ENDS:

London 10.06pm
Birmingham 10.19pm
Bournemouth 10.15pm
Cardiff 10.24pm
Dublin 10.43pm
Edinburgh 10.56pm
Glasgow 11.01pm
Hull 10.31pm
Leeds 10.28pm
Liverpool 10.35pm
Manchester 10.32pm
Nottingham 10.27pm
Sheffield 10.32pm
Southend 10.02pm
Southport 10.41pm
Jerusalem 8.25pm

The Three Weeks begin on Monday night.

The Fast of 17th Tammuz is on Tuesday

London:
Starts 2.31am
Ends 9.55pm
Jerusalem:
Starts 4.25am
Ends 8.23pm

מה טבו
אדה ליר
יטקב
משכנתיר
ישוראל

 **The United Synagogue**

SIDRA BREAKDOWN

בַּלֶּק BALAK

7th Sidra in:

בְּמִדְבָּר BEMIDBAR

By Numbers:

104 VERSES
1,455 WORDS
5,357 LETTERS

Headlines:

BILAAM'S TALKING DONKEYY

BALAK:

Artscroll p.856

Hertz p.668

Soncino p.915

HAFTARAH:

Artscroll p.1189

Hertz p.682

Soncino p.929

Sidra Summary

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – BEMIDBAR 22:2-12

Balak, the king of Moab, having seen that the Israelites defeated the Emorites, is afraid that they will plot against him. Balak sends emissaries to Midian, to Bilaam the son of Be'or, asking him to curse the Israelites. Bilaam tells Balak's emissaries to stay the night, to give him time to see how God will instruct him. God appears to Bilaam at night and warns him not to travel to Moab to curse the Israelites, who are a blessed nation.

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 22:13-20

Bilaam wakes up in the morning and tells Balak's officers that he is unable to go with them, due to God's warning. After they report back to Balak, he sends higher-ranking officers to persuade Bilaam. Bilaam repeats that he is bound by God's word. God again appears to Bilaam at night, telling him that he has permission to go, but that he must do what He instructs him.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 22:21-38

Bilaam saddles his donkey and travels with Balak's officers. God is angered by Bilaam's decision and sends an angel to impede him. The donkey sees the angel, who has a drawn sword in his hand. She deviates from the road to avoid the angel. Bilaam, unable to see the angel, hits the donkey. The angel positions himself between two parallel fences. When the donkey moves towards the wall, pressing Bilaam's leg against it, Bilaam again hits her. The angel then places himself in a narrow part of the path, making it impossible for the donkey to circumvent him. She stops and crouches, causing Bilaam to get angry and hit her again. God "opens the mouth of the donkey", who defends her actions. God now "uncovers Bilaam's eyes" and he sees the angel. The angel chastises Bilaam, who admits his sin and suggests that he returns home. The angel responds that he can continue his journey but must not say anything other than what God tells him. Balak goes out to greet Bilaam on the border of Arnon.

4TH ALIYA (REVI'I) – 22:39-23:12

Bilaam and Balak go to a vantage point from where Bilaam can see the edge of the Israelite camp. Bilaam tells Balak to build him seven altars and give him seven bulls and rams to sacrifice. Balak complies and Bilaam sacrifices the animals. God appears to Bilaam and tells him what to say. Against his will, Bilaam actually blesses the Israelites. Balak is incensed, yet Bilaam claims that he is unable to defy God's command.

Point to Consider: *How do we see Bilaam trying to emulate the patriarchs? (see Rashi to 23:4)*

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 23:13-26

Balak takes Bilaam to a new location in the hope of a better result. Once again, Bilaam brings animal offerings. As before, God appears to Bilaam, who can only bless, not curse, the Israelites.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 23:27-24:13

Balak and Bilaam go to a third location. After bringing the offerings to the altar, Bilaam sees the encampments of the Israelites and "the spirit of God rests upon him" so that he actually no longer wants to curse them (Rashi). Again Bilaam blesses Israel. Balak dismisses him.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'I) – 24:14-25:9

Before leaving, Bilaam tells Balak that the Israelites could be vulnerable to licentious behaviour (Rashi). He then prophesies about future stages of their history. Bilaam and Balak go their separate ways. The Israelites settle in Shittim where the men are attracted to Moabite women, as well as towards worshipping the idol Pe'or. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, sees a public display of licentious behaviour and kills the culprit, Zimri from the tribe of Shimon, along with Kozbi, the Midianite princess.

HAFTARAH

The prophet Micha describes the Messianic times that the 'remnant of Yaakov' will experience. He also recalls how God looked after the nation in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt, including His thwarting of the evil plans of Balak and Bilaam.

United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

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“How Goodly Are Your Tents, O Jacob, Your Dwelling Places, O Israel.”



**RABBI ZVI
PORTNOY**

Associate Rabbi, Hendon
United Synagogue

These words from this week's parasha are at the beginning of just about every siddur. They seem to be so central to everything Jewish, encapsulating in just a few words so much of Jewish thought. It is so very ironic that they were the words that spilled out of the mouth of one of the Jewish people's greatest enemies, Bilaam "the Evil One"!

Actually, it had not been Bilaam's intention to compliment us, rather the opposite, to curse us. God forced his tongue to turn his curse into a blessing, one which we say each day upon entering a shul. The only question is, why?

The Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 105b, quoted by Rashi (Bemidbar 24:6), says that you can figure out what Bilaam wanted to curse by what he blessed in the end. In other words, if he blessed our "tents" and our "dwelling places," then it means he wanted to curse those places instead. Why would he want to curse our "tents" and "houses"?

The Talmud (ibid.) answers that "tents" refer to our Houses of Torah Study, and "dwelling places" refer to our shuls. Bilaam wanted to curse us in two of the most important areas of our lives: Torah study and prayer.

Bilaam understood, perhaps better than many of us today, that Torah study and prayer are what define the Jew. Torah is likened to the soul of the Jew, and when we learn Torah, we get in touch with our soul. Once we are in touch with our soul, we feel the need to connect to God, and that turns us toward prayer. All in all, it is this combination that brings us closer to personal spiritual completion, and therefore, to God Himself.

It had been the plan of Bilaam and Balak (the king of Moav who hired Bilaam to curse the Jewish people) to divest us of that power. They knew that if you attack a believing Jew, one who learns Torah and prays to God, there is no hope of success. They saw this first-hand after their defensive shield, the giants Sichon and Og, collapsed before the approaching weaker Jewish nation.

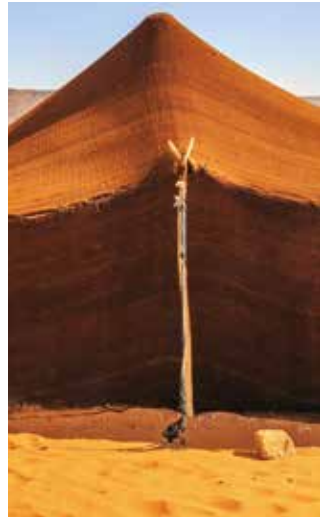
Therefore, they reasoned, success against the Jewish people meant cutting them off from their spiritual source of energy. Bilaam

understood that if he could undermine the Jewish people's connection to God, then he, and others like him throughout history, could have a fighting chance against the supernatural powers of the Jewish people. In other words, bring the Jew back down to earth and you can fight him, and even prevail over him.

This is why we say his blessing upon entering shul, to remind us that it is the shuls and the places of Torah study that maintain our connection to Truth and God.

Particularly during these difficult times, those unable to fight physically for Israel can, in their own way, do so much in the realm of prayer and Torah study.

**This is why we say
his blessing upon
entering shul, to
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that maintain our
connection to Truth
and God.**



The Fast of 17 Tammuz and the Three Weeks



**RABBI
MICHAEL
LAITNER**

US Director of Education
& Head of Research at
The Rabbi Sacks Legacy

The 'Three Weeks', beginning on Monday night, is an annual communal mourning period between the fasts of Tammuz and Av inclusive. During this time, we mourn the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem, along with associated tragedies, as well as reflecting on our continuing lack of redemption. The most intense part of this period is the 'Nine Days', from Rosh Chodesh Av (the start of the month of Av) until Tisha B'Av itself inclusive.

The Talmudic and subsequent rabbis instituted a number of 'mourning' practices during the three weeks to help us focus on the lessons and ramifications of this time of year on Jewish history.

In Ashkenazi communities, the practice is to abstain from haircuts, shaving, listening to music, saying the '*shehecheyanu*' blessing, celebrating joyous occasions such as weddings or buying expensive new items (unless for a mitzvah or if the clothes will not be available subsequently or if you will miss a major sale) for the whole of the three weeks.

The Fast of Tammuz primarily commemorates the breach of the walls of Jerusalem before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE. It falls on the 17th day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, unless that date falls on Shabbat when it



Depiction of spoils taken from the Second Temple (Arch of Titus, Rome)

is deferred to Sunday.

Like other minor fasts (i.e. not Yom Kippur or Tisha B'Av) this fast begins at dawn (first light) and ends at nightfall (full dark).

Other significant events in Jewish history associated with 17 Tammuz include:

- Moshe breaking the tablets at Mount Sinai
- The cessation, due to siege, of the supply of animals for offerings prior to the destruction of the First Temple
- The placing of an idol in the Temple and burning of Torah scrolls by Roman soldiers
- Attacks on Jewish communities in Toledo and Prague as well as the liquidation of the Kovno Ghetto

We abstain from food and drink during this fast, as well as from celebrating joyous occasions. Not

eating or drinking demonstrates the seriousness of the day. It also helps us to 'feel' some of the tragedy which the day represents and to reflect on its lessons physically, not just intellectually.

As 17 Tammuz is one of the 'minor fasts', those who need to eat or drink for medical reasons can do so. This also includes pregnant and nursing mothers. If you have any questions about fasting, please consult your doctor and rabbi. Those who do need to eat on 17 Tammuz should stick to simple meals, as long as their condition permits this.

We recite the fast day prayers as found in the siddur, which set out the history and meanings of the day.

We also recommend reading books or watching films about Jerusalem and relevant elements of Jewish history to deepen our understanding of this fast.



LAURIE MAURER

US Education

Man and the Moon

This Shabbat, 20th July 2024, marks 55 years since Neil Armstrong and his crew landed and walked on the moon. Looking back on that historic day is a great reminder of the importance placed on the moon in Jewish tradition.

The word for moon in Hebrew, *yare'ach*, first appears in the book of Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah, 31:34), but we know that it is definitely referred to in the Torah itself. On the fourth day of creation, the Torah tells us that "God made the two great luminaries: the great luminary to rule the day and the lesser luminary to rule the night, and the stars" (Bereishit 1:16). Rashi (1040-1105) says, based on the Talmud (*Chullin* 60b), that the sun and moon were originally created the same size, but the moon 'complained' that they could not possibly be equal under 'one crown', so God made the moon smaller. However, in compensation, God gave the moon the role of determining the Jewish calendar.

The mitzvah the Jewish people were given by God just before they left Egypt was to observe *Rosh Chodesh*, the commandment to sanctify the beginning of a new Hebrew month, which we recognise by the appearance of the moon. The moon waxes and wanes over the course of a month, and after a period of waning it briefly disappears altogether. When we then see the first sliver of moon reappear, we designate the day as *Rosh Chodesh*, a semi-festival when we say the prayers of thanksgiving, *Hallel*, read a special Torah reading and say the *Musaf* prayer in lieu of the offerings we

would have brought in the *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple). A few days after the new moon is seen, we say a special prayer called *Kiddush Levana* (Sanctification of the Moon, *levana* being another name for the moon), praising God for His creations. As Judaism's months follow the lunar cycle, it follows that the Jewish calendar year is also determined by the moon (with added leap months and days to regulate it).

Just as the moon waxes and wanes, we too have ups and downs, times of descent and times of development. *Rosh Chodesh* symbolises the potential for growth, and it challenges us to use the coming month to grow as people. Rabbi Lord Sacks zt'l says beautifully, "The Jewish people is compared to the moon because, whereas the sun shines with its own light, the moon shines with reflected light. So too with Israel: the light with which we shine comes not from ourselves but from God of whose glory we are but a reflection." Like the moon, we are a small nation, but we have a mammoth task: to illuminate the world with Torah and good deeds.

When the first flight to reach the moon, Apollo 8, made its orbit

in 1968, the crew members read out the first ten verses of *Bereishit* (Genesis) on a TV broadcast. Similarly, 55 years ago, on Apollo 11, Buzz Aldrin radioed back to NASA, asking the world to "pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way."

This is a clear indication that the astronauts, some religious, some not, all recognised the majesty of God's creation and of the world beyond our world. The moon and the astronauts' attitudes towards it truly epitomise the idea that our role is to reflect God's light onto everything around us.



In memory of Harav Binyamin ben Harav Shalom z"l

An Immersive Experience with Tribe... When Even Sandals Won't Do!



**RABBI
ELI LEVIN**

Director of Tribe
and Rabbi at South
Hampstead Synagogue

One of the most poignant stories relayed in the Talmud (*Gittin* 56a) about the siege of Jerusalem, which we reflect on during the lead up to the 'Three Weeks' and Tisha B'Av, is the tale of Marta bat Beitus. A noble woman of Jerusalem with a cadre of servants to perform her bidding, Marta was totally unaware of the suffering and pandemonium taking place on the surrounding streets. She ordered her servant to bring her

this causes her to slip and fall to her death. Her lack of shoes is also rich in symbolism. Without shoes we are sensitive to everything under our feet. When Marta was exposed to the full abhorrence of the reality unfolding, it was too much for her to bear.

From such a tragic episode there is a positive theme that is equally relevant at this time of year. Tribe summer has begun with Israel Tour underway and several other programmes across a range of age groups to follow over the coming weeks.

Tribe summer is a 'shoes off' experience. This too is both literal and rich in symbolism. Literal for those whose feet may touch the grass of

uals, interact with existing friends while also expanding their Jewish friendship network, appreciate the challenges and opportunities of our world, and sense the heartbeat of the Jewish people, our community and Israel.

Marta bat Beitus felt the ground and realised how disconnected she was from the reality of her own neighbourhood. She lived amongst the people but had cut herself off from them. An immersive experience with Tribe, from summer programmes through to our Jerusalem symposium, Poland trip, Shabbatonim and more, is designed to keep people connected to 'the ground we live on' and the purpose of our involvement as members of the Jewish community and wider society.

This is a record-breaking summer for Tribe. All the camps filled up within a week, some almost overnight, and there are waiting lists that unfortunately cannot be accommodated. The Tribe team is working with tremendous commitment to deliver complex logistics and high-quality content that reflects the Modern Orthodox, inclusive, community and life-affirming values of the United Synagogue.

Above all, there is a determination and responsibility to create an experience that will bring hope and healing to our nation, connect youth to their local shul communities, and enrich the confidence and energy of everyone involved to become thoughtful human beings and proud Jews. To achieve that, we might just have to take off our shoes. It is summertime after all!



Tribe Israel tour

the finest flour. There was, of course, no fine flour. Her wish list gradually decreased to barley flour, yet even then the servant returned empty handed. This is when Marta realised that she needed to venture out and see for herself.

The drama of the story is magnified by her walking the streets without shoes. In the literal plot,

a field or the sand of the seaside. Yet deeply symbolic for everyone involved, both *madrichim* (leaders) and *chanichim* (participants), because knowingly or subconsciously, Tribe summer enables young people to 'feel the ground' under their feet. It is a fully immersive experience that empowers youth to discover more about who they are as individ-

Shuls are just fantastic!



**RAFI
KLEIMAN**

Projects Executive, Tribe

It's a children's service classic: "*Ma tovu ohalecha Yaakov, mishkenotecha Yisrael* - How good are your **tents**, Jacob, your **dwelling places**, Israel!?"

Not only does it appear on page 3 of the green Tribe children's siddur, but it also features in this week's Torah portion, Balak!

In Bemidbar 24:5, we see Bilaam, a non-Jewish prophet who set out to curse the Jewish nation, end up becoming awestruck by God and sensationally utter these words of blessing for the Jewish people.

But what is the meaning of this blessing? How is it so significant to sit at the beginning of our siddurim?

Looking at the new Authorised Daily Prayer Book, a footnote on page 5 shares the explanation of these 'tents' and 'dwelling places' that Bilaam compliments in *Ma Tovu*. Namely, they refer to the synagogues and houses of study of the Jewish people (Talmud Sanhedrin 105a).

So, *Ma Tovu* can be paraphrased as "Jews, your shuls and *Bet Midrash* programmes are just fantastic!" What lovely words!

Yet, what is so fantastic about these two specific parts of Jewish life – of praying and of learning? Are there not many other terrific Jewish-related activities? Performing acts of kindness (*chesed*) and giving to charity (*tzedaka*) are two hugely worthwhile pursuits that surely deserve lauding and recognition!

Perhaps an answer is found when thinking about our Jewish communities today.

Our shuls are not only homes of prayer. They are also places of *chesed* opportunities and positive social experiences.

Our *Batei Midrash* (places of study) are not only homes of learning. They are also focal points of *tzedaka* – whether that may be collecting for in-house maintenance or for wider community needs.

Our Jewish places are filled with Jewish actions. And that really is fantastic!

In simple terms, *Ma Tovu* is an emphatic shout-out to our communities. It is a celebratory prayer of the incredible activity that takes place in our Jewish buildings. And even more refreshingly, as proven by its recitation by a non-Jewish prophet, it reminds us daily of the remarkable impression we can make on the world around us through our shul and *Bet Midrash* life.

Shul Quiz!

Have a go at answering these questions about shuls:

1. What is the Hebrew name of the light above the Ark?
2. In which direction do we pray and why?
3. What is used to point to the Torah while it is being read?
4. How often are the Ten Commandments read aloud in shul?
5. Which historic synagogue was so large that a flag would signal when to say "Amen"?!



THE TRIBE SCRIBE

BALAK: LOUD AND PROUD!

מה טובו אהליך יעקב משכנתיד ישראל



DID YOU KNOW THAT **MA TOVU** IS ONE OF THE FIRST PRAYERS THAT WE SAY WHEN WE ENTER THE **SYNAGOGUE**?

MANY **SHULS** HAVE **MA TOVU** WRITTEN OVER THE DOORWAY.

IN THIS WEEK'S PARASHA, **BILAAM** INTENDED TO CURSE THE **JEWISH PEOPLE**, BUT **GOD** WOULD ONLY LET BLESSINGS COME OUT OF HIS MOUTH. **BILAAM** EXCLAIMED: **MA TOVU OHALECHA YAAKOV!** WOW, YOUR TENTS ARE SO GOOD JACOB!



WHEN **BILAAM** SAID 'TENTS' HE WAS TALKING ABOUT **JEWISH HOMES, SCHOOLS AND SHULS**. ISN'T IT STRANGE THAT WE USE **MA TOVU**, WHICH WAS INTENDED AS A CURSE, AS OUR SPECIAL **SHUL BLESSING**?

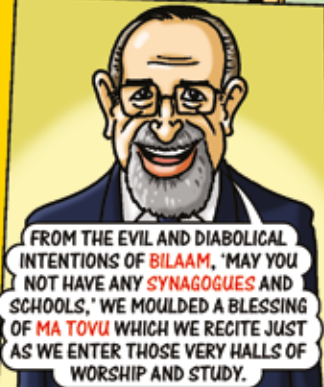
RABBI NORMAN LAMM EXPLAINS THAT WE USE **MA TOVU** BECAUSE **BILAAM** WANTED TO CURSE THE **JEWISH PEOPLE** AND IT IS THE **JEWISH WAY** TO TURN A CURSE INTO A BLESSING.



IT IS **JEWISH** TO FIND THE BENEDICTION IN THE MALEDICTION, THE GOOD IN THE EVIL, THE OPPORTUNITY IN THE CATASTROPHE. IT IS **JEWISH** TO MAKE THE BEST OF THE WORST, TO SQUEEZE HOLINESS OUT OF PROFANITY.

THE **JEWISH** RESPONSE TO DIFFICULTY IS TO GROW STRONGER, TO FIND THE POSITIVE IN EVERY NEGATIVE. WE WON'T BE DISCOURAGED BY ATTEMPTS TO PUT US DOWN; WE ARE HERE, AND WE ARE PROUD!

MA TOVU CAN BE FOUND ON **PAGE 3** OF THE **TRIBE SHEVET ASHER SIDDUR**.



FROM THE EVIL AND DIABOLICAL INTENTIONS OF **BILAAM**, 'MAY YOU NOT HAVE ANY **SYNAGOGUES** AND **SCHOOLS**,' WE MOULDED A BLESSING OF **MA TOVU** WHICH WE RECITE JUST AS WE ENTER THOSE VERY HALLS OF WORSHIP AND STUDY.



tribe
www.tribeuk.com

Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.