

# Eikev @ the DC Beit Midrash

Tuesday, August 3, 2004; 16 Av 5764

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## Welcome to the DC Beit Midrash!

The Chumash (Five Books of Moses) is divided into 54 portions, which Jews read sequentially each week in services. Each week, a member of our community will lead us in a text-study of this portion, or *parasha*, or in a subject related to our particular location in the Jewish liturgical calendar. The voices of both past and contemporary interpreters will inform our discussion. Every week, a sheet summarizing the Torah portion of the week and the other sources the teacher will use will be provided to aid you in your study.

## This Week's *Parasha* (Torah Portion): Eikev

Deuteronomy (*Devarim*), 7:12-11:25

In this week's *parasha*, Moshe continues his review of the exodus experience, reminding the Israelites of how God has cared for them in the wilderness. He reiterates the covenant and continues to review the general rewards that will benefit the Israelites if they are faithful to God and follow God's commandments. It is simple: if the Israelites follow the Torah, God will bless them in the land, and drive out their enemies. If they do not obey God, the consequences will be grave. Moshe warns them not to follow other gods or engage in idolatrous worship practices. Moshe also reminds the Israelites of some of their earlier rebellious incidents, including the events around the building of the Golden Calf and the destruction of the first set of tablets. The *parasha* concludes with the passage liturgically used as the second paragraph of the *Shema*. These words reiterate the connection between Israel's piety and God's blessing.

[http://www.kolel.org/pages/parasha/devarim\\_summary.html](http://www.kolel.org/pages/parasha/devarim_summary.html)

## This Week's Sources

### Midrash

300-1200

*Midrash* comes from a Hebrew root which means "to search out, to investigate." Thus, this is a Jewish method of exegesis which sought to discover deeper meanings in the text beyond the literal one. Since the rabbis greatly venerated every letter of the Hebrew Scriptures as of Divine origin, every detail was seen to be significant. Sometimes Midrash is used with the legal portions of the Torah (*halacha*) and sometimes it is used with the non-legal portions (*aggadah*), such as stories about the main protagonists in the Bible. There are many different collections of Midrash. The largest collection is called *Midrash Rabbah* (The Great Midrash). Other collections include *Pesikta* (Divisions), *Mechilta* (Treatise), *Sifra* (Book), and *Sifre* (Books). The material of the Midrash is mostly from the time of the *Amoraim*, the rabbis of the *Gemara* (200-500 CE). But some of the Midrash (particularly *Mechilta*, *Sifra*, and *Sifre*) can be traced back to the *Tannaim*, the Rabbis of the Mishna (400 BCE-200 CE). Different Midrashim were written down at different times, over a period of almost a thousand years. The compilers of the different collections of Midrash are generally unknown.

### Talmud

c. 500

The Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*) is a compilation of discussions on the Mishna, discussions which had been going on some three hundred years already at the time they were written down. Because the Babylonian edition is far more extensive than its Palestinian counterpart (*Talmud Yerushalmi*), compiled around 400, it has become the most authoritative compilation of Jewish law. When people speak of studying the Talmud, they almost invariably mean the Bavli. The Talmud's discussions are recorded in a consistent format. A law from the Mishna is cited, which is followed by rabbinic deliberations on its meaning. The Mishna and the rabbinic discussions (known as *Gemara*) comprise the Talmud, although in Jewish life the terms *Gemara* and Talmud are usually used interchangeably. The rabbis quoted in the *Gemara* are known as *Amoraim*, explainers or interpreters. In addition to extensive legal discussions (*halacha*), the rabbis incorporated into the Talmud guidance on ethical matters, medical advice, historical information, and folklore (*aggadata*).

## Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Lieb)

1847-1905

Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Ger, was an eminent Chassidic sage and the second Gerrer Rebbe. Raised to be a scholar, he distinguished himself at a young age by devoting 18 hours a day to the study of Torah, mastering Talmud, the Zohar, and Chassidic classics. In 1870, at the age of 23, he succeeded his grandfather as the second Gerrer Rebbe. His monumental work, *Sefat Emet al HaTorah*, is a commentary on the Torah in five volumes. His comments stress the moral and ethical lessons to be derived from the text, and he offers many kabbalistic allusions. The title, *Sefat Emet*, comes from Proverbs 12:19: *Sefat emet tikon la'ad*—"Truthful speech abides forever," which was the last verse on which he commented before he passed away. Rabbi Leib himself then came to be known by the title of his most popular work. He died in Ger, Poland in 1905.

(Adapted from <http://www.kolel.org/pages/parasha/commentator.html#sefasemes>)

## Pahad Yitzhak

1679-1756

Isaac Hezekiah Ben Samuel Lampronti was born in Ferrara, Italy, where he was a pupil of some of the great rabbinical authorities of his time and also a student of philosophy and medicine at the university of Padua. In 1701, he began to teach in the Ferrara school of the Italian Jewish community and later also in the Sephardi school. He insisted that the humanities be taught alongside traditional Jewish subjects. In 1718, Lampronti was ordained rabbi and from 1743 was senior rabbi and head of the Ferrara *yeshiva*. All this time, he practiced medicine with an outstanding reputation, and did not charge those who could not afford it. He is famous for his *Pahad Yitzhak*, an extensive halakhic encyclopedia—so comprehensive that one edition consisted of 120 volumes. Each article is an exhaustive dissertation on its subject.

(<http://www.bh.org.il/Names/POW/Lampronti.asp>)

## This Week's Teacher:

A native of the Washington Metro area (Olam Tikvah in NoVA), Meesh (Michelle) Hammer-Kossoy is a Talmud teacher and the Director of Admissions and Recruitment for The Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. She is a graduate of NYU, Brandeis University and Pardes. Meesh is finishing her dissertation at New York University, focusing on why Rabbis reinvented their own criminal punishment system. Her fellowships include the Lady Davis, National Foundation for Jewish Culture, Memorial Foundation, ATID, and the Dean's Dissertation Fellowship.

## This Week's Food Sponsor:

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## This Week's Food Shlepper:

Simma Asher

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Wanna sponsor food? E-mail Simma at [food@dcbeitmidrash.org](mailto:food@dcbeitmidrash.org)

Suggestions about how and where to publicize the DC Beit Midrash? E-mail Jeff at [publicity@dcbeitmidrash.org](mailto:publicity@dcbeitmidrash.org)

Questions, feedback, wanna join our email list? Anything else? E-mail [info@dcbeitmidrash.org](mailto:info@dcbeitmidrash.org)

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