

The Shul

at the Lubavitch Center

6701 Old Pimlico Road

Baltimore, MD 21209

www.chabadshul.org



July 16, 2022

Balak

17 Tammuz, 5782

And This You Call Religion?

Baal Peor was an ancient idol (mentioned in the Book of Numbers), popular with the Moabites, whose method of worship included various sensual indulgences and wanton sexual acts. But what really piques the imagination is a particular set of practices that was unique to Peor worshippers: as part of their service, they would defecate in their god's honor!

It just seems so absurd. What on earth were they thinking? This is divine worship? This is how they pay homage to what they believe to be god? To our modern sensibilities it seems weird enough that people once used to seriously genuflect and pray to an idol, an inanimate block of stone; but to seriously believe that you are serving some religious purpose by voiding yourself in front of your object of veneration surely takes absurdity to new heights.

The chassidic sages attempted to reconstruct how this most peculiar mode of worship evolved. Originally, it seems, Peor was just an ordinary idol-worshipping cult, competing in the Canaanite marketplace of ideas with a host of other ideologies and lifestyle choices. However, distinguishing themselves from their peers, the devotees of Peor soon won renown for their dedication and commitment to their idol. They prayed at length with incredible devotion, often losing all sense of time and place. Their disconnect from physical reality, coupled with their crushing sense of submission to their deity, would occasionally lead to the unintended consequence of loss of bowel control.

It is difficult to accurately transmit an ideology from one generation to the next. The youngsters looking on saw their elders' actions but misinterpreted the intent. Rather than emulate the spiritually directed devotion of their parents, their "worship" soon degenerated into wanton behavior, motivated by purely selfish desires and the puerile pursuit of pleasure. In a concession to their parents' religiosity, they kept up the superficial manifestations of their ancestors' prayers, but disregarded the original function. They kept the dross and discarded the real deal.

It's easy to mock the ancient idol worshipers for their misplaced emphasis on style over substance, but how many of us make similar mistakes in our personal lives?

Let me give just one example of our misplaced enthusiasm. Fifty or sixty years ago, life was much tougher for the average breadwinner. Most of our community was poor, having only recently arrived in Western countries post-Holocaust and eager to begin building a future for their families. People worked incredibly hard, putting in long hours at low-paying jobs, scrimping and saving to start small businesses, and dragging themselves up the ladder of opportunity.

I know people who worked sixteen-hour days for decades, leaving home before the kids were up in the morning, and arriving back, totally exhausted, well after the rest of the family had long gone to bed. They sacrificed their health for those very children who, ironically, saw so little of their parents as they were growing up.

It is a different era we live in now, with different challenges. Many of those struggling entrepreneurs created something out of nothing and left a legacy of relative luxury to their children. The second generation became professionals, with law and medical school fees paid for by their proud parents and grandparents. Most people can now well afford to cut back and spend more time at home and in synagogue.

But so many people still spend so much time away from their true priorities—either as workaholics, blindly dedicated to their businesses and clients at the expense of their family life, or wasting countless hours at the golf course. It's almost as if so many of us are unconsciously imitating the home life of our ancestors, without matching their sense of obligation to the future.

While children of previous generations understood that daddy's true motivation for his all-too-frequent absences from home was his commitment to family, the kids of today may well see themselves as abandoned by parents who would rather be anywhere else than spending time with their children.



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If that's not Baal Peor, then what is?

The lesson we can learn from the ridiculous behavior of the devotees of Peor is to work out that which is really important in life, and live for that, ignoring all distractions and focusing on what is essential. Don't blindly follow without understanding, and make sure you appreciate the true motivation for past practices.

Our parents and ancestors blazed a path for us through life, and it is our responsibility to follow them safely onto the king's highway without deviating onto dead-end streets of lost opportunity and senseless misbehavior.

(by Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum from <http://www.chabad.org/>)



"The Book of Jewish Knowledge" edited by Rabbi Shmuel Kaplan is now available to order online at myjli.com/catalog/product/bojk/

Dedication of plaques on the Shul board which is prominently located in the hall at the entrance to the Shul is an appropriate means of Tzedakah and supports the Shul as well. Below is the list of items available. Please contact Howard Kaplon at hkaplon@towson.edu for more information.

1. Top (large) Plaques \$5,400
2. Medium Plaques \$3,600
3. Small Plaques \$1,000
4. Simcha Leaf \$250

Yahrzeit Plaques on the Shul's Memorial board are available. Each yahrzeit plaque is \$360.

Yahrzeits This Week:

Ariel Goodman 22 Tamuz - Wednesday night / Thursday for father Kalman Chaim ben Avraham

SHUL DIRECTORY

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DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE

Friday, 7/15 — 16 Tammuz

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.

Shabbat, 7/16 — 17 Tammuz

Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.

Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:30 a.m.

Minchah — 8:00 p.m.

Shiur: *Overcoming Folly* — after Mincha

Ma'ariv — 9:16 p.m.

Sunday — שבעה עשר בתמוז, 7/17 — 18 Tammuz

Fast Begins — 4:08 a.m.

Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.

Father and Son Learning — 6:00 p.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:00 p.m.

Fast Ends — 9:03 p.m.

Monday, 7/18 — 19 Tammuz

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:15 p.m.

Tuesday, 7/19 — 20 Tammuz

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:15 p.m.

Wednesday, 7/20 — 21 Tammuz

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:15 p.m.

Thursday, 7/21 — 22 Tammuz

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:15 p.m.

Friday, 7/22 — 23 Tammuz

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.

Shabbat Candles — 8:09 p.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.