



The Bet Ha'am Weekly Email

Words of Torah

Rabbi Saks is away for a three-month sabbatical. While he is away, we will be sharing Words of Torah from various Jewish educational resources. This week's Words of Torah about Parashat Balak (Numbers 22:2–25:9), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Curse the Children of Israel*, come from Rabbi Philip "Flip" Rice via reformjudaism.org.



"You know, in some cultures, donkeys are revered as the smartest of animals, especially us talking ones."
("Donkey" in Shrek 2, Dreamworks, 2004)

The use of comedy in Jewish storytelling is a very powerful tool for conveying the serious wisdom of our tradition. Often, the Torah introduces us to a wide range of colorful characters—intriguing men, women, and creatures—in order to infuse the stories of the Torah with wit and humor. These personalities have much to teach us about how our ancestors related to each other and the world at-large. Our Torah portion this week, Balak, is on the surface, quite absurd. Still, words contained within it made their way into our liturgy. So the insights found in the narrative had great significance for our predecessors, and still do for us today. Though funny, the messages found beneath the text this week elevate the foolishness of the story we read to a level of sagacity. The humor of the tale is replaced at its core with prevailing and consistent lessons from our ancestors: our words have power and our speech is holy; all things that live communicate with us; and curses can be transformed into blessings.

In the parashah we read this week, a non-Israelite prophet named Balaam is called upon to curse the Israelites by the King of Moab, Balak. However, "God said to Balaam, 'Do not go with them! You must not curse that people, for they are blessed' " (Numbers 22:12). Giving into his greed—for Balak offered silver and gold—Balaam heads to the place where he is supposed to curse the Children of Israel. Yet Balaam is stalled by his donkey, which refused to follow his orders, "when the ass (she-donkey) caught sight of the angel of the Eternal standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand. The ass (she-donkey) swerved from the road and went into the fields; and Balaam beat the ass (she-donkey) to turn it back onto the road" (Numbers 23:23). Like an indignant teenager, the stubborn mule talks back to him. And when Balaam arrives at the place where he attempts to curse Israel, his mouth opens, only to bless us! So Balak drags him to a different mountaintop, but again, Balaam only says what God desires, blessing the Children of Israel a second time. Furious, Balak commands him to stop, saying, "Don't curse them and don't bless them" (Numbers 23:25). But Balaam knows that God wants him to bless Israel. So he offers a third (now famous) blessing, "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel," Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov (Numbers 24:5).

On the surface it is a silly story. But is it entirely ridiculous that animals speak in the tale? Continue reading [here](#).

In-Person Worship Resumes in the Sanctuary!

- In-person attendance in the sanctuary is no longer limited. Registration is not required for in-person services - just show up!
- Everyone must wear a mask at all times while attending services as we will be singing.
- In-person services will be held at Bet Ha'am on **Saturday, June 26**. We can't wait to see you there!
- All services will continue to be live-streamed on Zoom. See below details.

Questions can be addressed to Sylvia Most at sylviamost@gmail.com.

How Do I Get the Zoom Links for June?

**Want to participate in June Shabbat worship and Torah Study via Zoom?
Registration is required and easy to do!**

- Click on the registration links in the worship box below.
- All who register by noon on Friday will be sent Zoom links.
- Zoom links will be sent by 4:00 PM on Friday.

Easy! We will look forward to seeing you soon!

Exciting News for July!

Things are getting easier!

Beginning in July, registration will no longer be needed for Shabbat worship services – not at all!. Want to attend in person? Just show up!

Want to continue watching the live-stream on Zoom? Just click on the service links **that will be provided in the Thursday weekly emails**. It's that easy!

Worship Schedule

**Friday, June 25
Shabbat Worship, 7:30 PM**

Thank you to **Cantor Beth Strassler** for being our Shabbat guest speaker on Friday night.

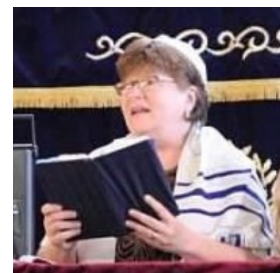
Thank you to Melissa Montefel for leading our worship service via Zoom.

Thank you to Donna Landau for lighting our Shabbat candles in celebration of her grandson Oliver's high school graduation. Thank you also to Donna for making our announcements.

Cantor Beth Strassler came to Maine in 1982 and has been working ever since to re-"jew"-vinate Congregation Etz Chaim on Bacon Street in Biddeford, ME. She has collaborated with her husband, David, to develop the current models for the synagogue's educational programs, Shabbat services and High Holiday services. Each of their three children became b-mitzvah there.

In June 2017 she received her cantorial ordination and Masters Degree in Jewish Studies from Hebrew College in Newton Center, MA. The title of her thesis is "אשירה להי בחיי" "I will sing to the Lord all my life: The Life Story and Music of Dr. Morton Gold".

Beth's topic for Friday night will be "How is cantorial music relevant to Jewish prayer in 2021?"



Register to receive the June **Friday Night Shabbat Worship** Zoom link, [here](#).

Read more about our service and our siddur (prayer book) [here](#).

Saturday, June 26
Torah Study, 9:00 AM

Torah study using *The Mussar Torah Commentary* continues--but you don't need to own a copy. Read more [here](#), under the "Torah Study" heading.

Thank you to Mylan Cohen for leading Torah Study this week.

Register to receive the **Torah Study** Zoom link, [here](#).

Saturday, June 26
Shabbat Morning Worship, 10:30 AM

Thank you to Mylan Cohen for leading our worship service in the sanctuary. Thank you to Louise Abramson for reading Torah.

Register to receive the June **Shabbat Morning Worship** Zoom link [here](#).

Read more about our service and our siddur (prayer book) [here](#).

Wednesday, June 30
Morning Minyan 7:30 AM

Thank you to Daniel Oppenheim for leading Morning Minyan.

Register to receive the **Wednesday Morning Minyan** Zoom link, [here](#).

Contemplative Worship Service - Always Available on the Bet Ha'am Website!

This contemplative worship service offers an opportunity for you to delve deeper into your own spiritual practice and open the pathways to God that are available to you. By making this available, we hope that you will access it anytime you need to re-center yourself or reopen those pathways to God.



You can watch the service [here](#).
Follow along with the prayer book [here](#).

Service Leaders Needed!!!

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With Rabbi Saks on sabbatical, we need service leaders for July and the first half of August. If you would like to lead or co-lead, these are the dates available for Zoom and in-person services.:

Saturday, July 10, 10:30 AM (Zoom)
Saturday, July 17, 10:30 AM (Sanctuary)
Friday, July 23, 7:30 PM (Zoom)
Friday, July 30, 7:30 PM (Zoom)
Saturday, August 7, 10:30 AM (TBD)
Saturday, August 14, 10:30 AM (TBD)



on the east coast including one located in Baldwin, Maine that is currently looking for "subscribers." Subscribers are self-designated CMP customers who wish to buy a portion of their electricity from a community solar farm. The electricity is sold at a discount and produced with a lower carbon footprint.



The initiative presented provides that PowerMarket and Darrell Cooper of Energy Audits Ltd. will donate \$150 to Bet Ha'am for each subscriber who signs up using the promo code "Bet Ha'am." There is no upfront cost to sign up, subscribers typically save about 10% on their CMP bill, and they can cancel at any time on 60 days' notice.

You can obtain more information, and if interested become a subscriber through the PowerMarket/Baldwin Community Solar project website at: <https://account.powermarket.io/bethaam.html>.

If you have questions about the donation to Bet Ha'am, please contact Mark Stone at lmstone@lmstone.com

Ongoing at Bet Ha'am

Shabbat Candle Lighting

Please consider signing up to be a candle lighter at an upcoming Zoom Friday night service. You may choose to do this in memory of a loved one for whom you're observing yahrzeit, in honor of a celebration in your life, or just because you want to engage in this ritual. You can read more from Rabbi Saks [here](#); learn the candle lighting blessing [here](#) (on track 420); and find the words [here](#).



Candle Lighting Sign-Up

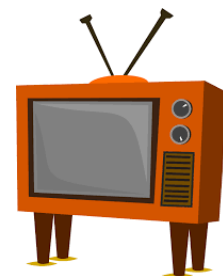
B'Yachad | Together

Come relax and talk virtually with your Bet Ha'am community before Friday Shabbat services! We will meet every Friday except the second Friday of the month when there is a 6:00 PM Family Shabbat service. [Read more here](#). [Register here](#). Please contact congregant [Alan Davis](#) with questions.



TV and Movie Discussion Group

Please join congregants Melissa Montefel and Wendy Hayes, co-facilitators, for a discussion group about Jewish-themed movies and shows. The group meets at 7:00 PM for fun, talk, and insights. Please email [Wendy](#) for the login or with questions or suggestions for future movies.



July 7: *The Angel*

As his country prepares for war, top Egyptian official Ashraf Marwan makes contact with Israel and wades into a shadowy game of high-stakes espionage. *Available on Netflix.*

July 21: *Uncut Gems*

With his debts mounting and angry collectors closing in, a fast-talking New York City jeweler risks everything in hopes of staying afloat and alive. *Available on Netflix.*



Curbside Library Borrowing

Although the building remains closed, you may borrow a book from our wonderful library using curbside pick up. Read more on our [library page](#).

So Much Going on in Our Community!

We are fortunate to be in a community where there is so much going on Jewishly that we cannot possibly list all of the happenings here. Please check out the websites listed below for all kinds of activities – movement, art, spirituality, books, movies, Jewish education, and more. Bet Ha'am often co-sponsors programs with these community leaders.

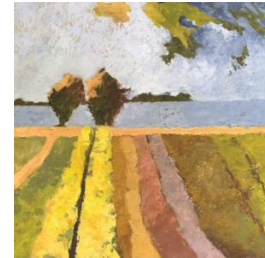
Three New Exhibitions July 1 - August 13

Opening reception: Thursday, July 1, 5:00-7:00 PM
Maine Jewish Museum, 267 Congress Street, Portland

-Forces of Nature by Janis Goodman

-A Sense of Place: Landscapes Near & Far by Toby Gordon

-Paris Street Dance by Richard Wexler



Hours: Sunday through Friday 12:00-4:00 PM, closed Saturdays
Learn more [here](#).

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Donate to Bet Ha'am

Please consider donating in any amount to Congregation Bet Ha'am--with your help, we can close the budget gap! We are grateful for your support.

[Donate Now](#)

Congregation Bet Ha'am | 81 Westbrook Street, South Portland, ME 04106

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