



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

20 - 26 January, 2019
14 - 20 Shevat, 5779

Torah:

Exodus 18:1 - 20:23

Haftarah:

Isaiah 6:1-13

■ **CALENDARS**

We have Jewish Calendars, if you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

■ **FAMILY PROGRAMS**

Do you have family on the outside who are struggling, please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

■ **GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH**

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

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REMOVAL OF GODLY BOUNDARIES

Let's take a look at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. What was the big to-do? What was accomplished or achieved at Mount Sinai? What changed?

Our Sages explain in the Midrash that before the giving of the Torah the spiritual status of the world was, as King David describes in Psalms, "The heavens are the heavens of God, and the earth He gave to man." The heavens, the spiritual realms, were self-contained; they had no influence on the physical realm. And mankind, living as we do in the earthly realm, had no way of tapping into the spiritual.

At the Giving of the Torah, this changed. God allowed for communication between these two realms. This is illustrated in the verse, "And God descended on Mt. Sinai." God made Himself manifest and accessible to mankind. On the flip side, it is also written: "And Moses ascended unto God." In other words, we were given the opportunity to elevate ourselves and fill our surrounding environment with spiritual content.

At Mount Sinai, God gave us the Torah to immortalize this experience. So the channeling of the spiritual at Sinai thus became not a one-time event, but rather the establishment of a permanent channel that continues to enable man and God to relate to each other.

The Torah contains

teachings that bring God and Godliness within reach of our human understanding, for He has invested His own self, His very essence, in the Torah and its laws. When a person studies words of Torah, he is in effect understanding God's essence. That infinite dimension which no mortal can grasp has been concentrated within the Torah's teachings.

One indication of the ongoing dimension of God's revelation at Sinai is in a teaching of our sages. "God's voice did not have an echo." Instead of deflecting, the material substance of the world absorbed God's voice. From that moment forward, "The Torah is not in the heavens," but part and parcel of the environment in which we live.

This in fact is the source of the word "Mitzvah" which relates to the Aramaic word "Tzavsa - connection." The Torah gives us an opportunity to relate to God through our minds. Through the Mitzvot, not only our feelings and our thoughts, but also our deeds can one with Him.

In this manner, the revelation at Sinai becomes not only a story of history, but an event which has immediate relevance to our lives today. For this reason, in the blessings we recite each day before Torah study, we refer to God as "He who gives the Torah," in present tense. Every time we read a word of Torah, every time we step up for what's right and every time we refrain from what's wrong, we are tying ourselves a little tighter with the Almighty, One true God, creator of heaven and earth.

Parshat Yitro TORAH FROM SINAI

In this week's Torah reading, we hear about what may be the most significant moment in biblical history. We read the giving of the ten commandments. Scholars and sages have dedicated millennia to harvesting the wealth of lessons and morals and everyday inspiration which can be learned from this monumental event. Let us take a look at some of the most basic, yet incredibly pertinent and powerful bits of insight for ourselves and our society.

One of the most well known details of the giving of the Torah, as can be attested to by a child in Hebrew School, is that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. One of the earliest lessons learned from this fact is that Sinai was chosen by God not for its towering height or overwhelming girth. Quite the contrary, Sinai was one of the smallest mountains in the region and was chosen by God for that very reason. The first thing we needed to know when we accepted God's most precious treasure was that we mustn't misuse it. No amount of Torah knowledge or scholarly experience gives a person reason to use it for his own gain, or for his own glory. In fact, the Mishnah says, "If you have learned a lot of Torah, do not take credit to yourself, for it is for this that you were created."

However, if God wanted to impress humility upon us, why give the Torah on a mountain at all? Why not choose a wide plain or a deep valley?

This brings us to the second lesson learned from the event at Sinai. While we are taught not to hold ourselves high and mighty, not to boast or feel inflated about our talents or achievements, God reminds us, "You are still a mountain." Feeling humble does not mean feeling useless or "less than," it simply means keeping things in perspective. When the Torah tells us that the great Moses was the most humble person on the face of the earth, that doesn't mean that Moses would deny the awesomeness of his achievements, it simply means he recognized without any reservations that those achievements all belonged to God and that the credit for them went to him. In fact, Moses might even have told you, had you asked him about those great accomplishments, "Yes, they were great, but had God given the opportunity to someone else, he would surely have done even greater."

As we have mentioned in the past, it is crucial to remember that the greatness of the Jewish people begins with the uniqueness of the Jewish person. When God was prepared to make the move, hand over His most precious treasure to His most precious people, everyone had to be there. The sages tell us that had one Jew gone missing at that time, the Torah would not have been given. Even the souls of future generations and generations passed were present at this awesome event. Everyone, every single member of God's chosen nation was counted in and made up the whole. This drives home the message that we are all the same in that we are unique in God's eyes. Like the mistro of a finely tuned one-hundred piece symphony orchestra, God knows and recognizes and appreciates the contribution each and every instrument makes, be it center stage or the most subtle chime from the corner.

But how are we too recognize this reality? Says the Torah, "Israel camped there, facing the mountain." The Hebrew wording used for "Israel camped" is written in the singular, as though Israel were just one man. Explains the Talmud, "The jewish people camped there as one man with one heart." In preparation for receiving the Torah the people forgot their differences. Like one man with one heart they looked toward the mountain top, eagerly anticipating God's instructions.

inch of Egypt - even the insides of their burning ovens.

By Rabbi Nissan Aizek

15 SHEVAT

This week Monday is the 15 of Shevat (January 21, 2019) the new year for trees, please make arrangements to purchase dates or figs from the commissary.

PASSOVER

Please begin working with your Rabbi / Chaplain to ensure the paperwork is being processed and the necessary arrangements are being made for Passover.

In Jewish History

Sunday, 14 Shevat, 5779 - January 20 31, 2019

Penei Yehoshua (1755)

Shevat 14 is the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk Katz (1680-1755), author of the Talmudic work "Penei Yehoshua." He served as rabbi of Lemberg (Lvov) in 1718, Berlin in 1730, Metz in 1734 and Frankfurt in 1740.

Tuesday, 16 Shevat, 5779- January 22, 2019

The "Shaarei Teshuvah" (c.1823)

Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Maroglis first served as rabbi in Brestitzki, Poland, and later in Dubno, Poland/ Ukraine. He is the author of a digest of halachic responsa written after the publication of the Code of Jewish Law, known as "Shaarei Teshuvah." This work can be found in the margins of most prints of the Code of Jewish Law.

Thursday, 18 Shevat, 5779 - January 24, 2019

Auto De Fe in Peru (1639)

With the inquisition having arrived on American shores, twelve Jews were burnt in an auto de fe in Lima, Peru, on the 18th of Shevat 5399 (1639). Of the 63 Jews who were condemned at the time to various punishments, eleven were burnt alive at the stake, along with the body of a twelfth, who had committed suicide during the trial.

Amongst those burnt was Manuel Bautista Perez, reported to have been the richest man in Peru at the time, as well as Francisco Maldonado de Silva, a surgeon, poet, and philosopher who was seized in Chile in 1627, and remained in the dungeons of the Inquisition for nearly twelve years. His devotion to his faith never wavered; while in prison he even converted two Catholics to Judaism!

Friday, 19 Shevat, 5779 - January 25, 2019

Jews of Basel Burned Alive (1349)

With the Black Death raging throughout Switzerland, poison was reported to have been found in the wells at Zofingen. Some Jews were put to the "Dümeln" (thumbscrews) test, whereupon they "admitted" their guilt of the charges brought against them. This discovery was then communicated to the people of Basel, Zurich, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, and even Cologne.

The Jews of Basel were burned on an island in the Rhine on January 9, 1349, in wooden huts that were especially built for the occasion. Their children, who were spared, were taken and forcibly baptized.

Shabbat, 20 Shevat, 5779 - January 26, 2019

Asher born (1562 BCE)

Asher, the son of Jacob, was born on the 20th of Shevat of the year 2199 from creation (1562 BCE). According to some accounts, this is also the date of his passing.