



17 - 23 March, 2019  
10 - 16 Adar II, 5779

**Torah:**

Leviticus 6:1 - 8:36

**Haftorah:**

Jeremiah 7:21-28;  
Jeremiah 9:22-23

■ **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.

**ALEPH INSTITUTE**

Hyman & Martha Rogal  
Center  
5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-421-0111  
Fax: 412-521-5948  
www.alephne.org  
info@alephne.org

**PURIM**

This week, Wednesday (3/20/2019), is the fast of Esther, followed by Thursday (3/21/2019) is Purim.

Purim celebrates the salvation of the Jewish people, in the year 3405 from Creation (356 bce), from Haman's plot "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day."

Haman was Prime Minister to the Persian emperor Achashveirosh, whose dominion extended from India to Ethiopia. Endorsed by Achashveirosh, Haman's decree boded the physical destruction of every single Jew on the face of the earth.

While the sage Mordechai rallied the Jews to prayer and repentance, his cousin, Queen Esther, engineered Haman's downfall at a private wine-party to which she invited the king and the minister. She prevailed upon Achashveirosh to hang Haman and to issue a second decree, empowering the Jews to defend themselves against those who sought to destroy them.

On the 13th of Adar — the day selected by Haman's pur (lottery) — numerous battles were fought throughout the empire between the Jews and those who attempted to carry out Haman's decree (which was never actually revoked). The following day, Adar 14, became a day of feasting and rejoicing in celebration of the Jews' victory over their enemies. In the ancient walled capital, Shushan, where the battle went on for two days, the victory celebration was

held on Adar 15.

Mordechai and Esther instituted that these two days be observed for posterity as the festival of Purim — Adar 15 in walled cities, and Adar 14 in unwalled towns — by public readings of the story of the miracle as recorded in the "Scroll of Esther," sending food portions to friends, giving gifts of money to the poor, and enjoying a festive meal accompanied with inebriating drink (recalling the fateful wine-party at which Esther turned Achashveirosh against Haman).

A time-honored Purim custom is for children to dress up and disguise themselves — an allusion to the fact that the miracle of Purim was disguised in natural garments. This is also the significance behind a traditional Purim food, the hamantash — a pastry whose filling is hidden within a three-cornered crust. The day before Purim is "The Fast of Esther," in commemoration of the fasts of Esther and her people as they prayed for G-d's salvation from Haman's decree.

We celebrate Purim by:

1. Hearing the reading of the Megillah.
2. Giving to the needy.
3. Send food to a friend.
4. Feast

On Purim, we include the brief V'al Hanisim section in all the day's prayers, as well as in the day's Grace after Meals. This prayer describes the Purim story and thanks G-d for the "miracles, redemptions, mighty deeds, saving acts and wonders" that He wrought

## Parshat Tzav

for our ancestors on this day many years ago.

In the morning service there is a special Torah reading (Exodus 17:8-16), describing the battle Joshua waged against Amalek—Haman's ancestral nation—almost one thousand years before the Purim events unfolded.

It is a tradition to give three coins in "half" denominations—e.g., three half-dollar coins—to charity, to commemorate the half-shekel that each Jew contributed as his share in the communal offerings in the time of the Holy Temple. This custom, usually performed in the synagogue, is done on the afternoon of the "Fast of Esther," or before the reading of the Megillah.

## ON RABBIS AND JEWS

Without going into the whole question of sacrifices, one difficult phrase that appears in this week's reading, and throughout the early chapters of Vayikra (Leviticus), is reiach nichoach la-Hashem—"a satisfying aroma to G-d." Why the repeated emphasis on satisfying G-d?

Some have suggested that with all the pageantry associated with the Temple rites and rituals, people might come to place undue importance on the kohanim and their ceremonies. The ritual directors might become so prominent in people's eyes that they would forget about the Almighty. It was therefore necessary to remind worshippers to Whom they ought to be directing their offerings, thoughts and prayers.

As a rabbi, I am often

asked to pray for people. This one is in need of a blessing for improved health, the other wants to earn a better living, and so it goes. Of course, there are set times for such prayers in the synagogue service, and I am happy to oblige. But I also suggest to people that they themselves should be in shul for the prayer too. Furthermore, there is no more sincere prayer than that of the person in need. Surely their sincerity will be unmatched, even by the most pious of rabbis.

The story is told of a saintly rabbi of yesteryear who was approached by a woman in need of a blessing for her child. The rabbi demanded a large amount for charity in return for his prayer. The woman was apologetic, and said she didn't have that amount of money. Could the rabbi reduce the price? But he was adamant. After all her haggling got her nowhere, the woman stormed out in a huff. "I don't need you to talk to the Almighty for me," she said angrily. "I'll pray for myself."

"Aha," said the rabbi. "That is exactly what I was hoping to hear. Your prayer will, in fact, be better and more effective than anyone else's on your behalf." The saintly man understood that this woman was placing too much credence in him, and forgetting about G-d.

There used to be an unhealthy—and, thankfully, now largely discredited—attitude among many that one could hire a rabbi to perform all religious duties on his or her behalf. Let the rabbi keep kosher, and let him observe Shabbat and the festivals. Let him study the Torah, to keep it alive (barely) to pass on to the next generation . . . of rabbis! Meanwhile, I will live the easy life, and pay for the services of a rabbinical professional when I need them. Until then, don't bother me, I'm busy.

I once encouraged someone to try putting on tefillin in the mornings. His response: "Rabbi, you do it for me." I asked him if I could also eat for him and sleep for him.

Rabbis are not meant to be intermediaries between Jews and G-d. Every Jew has a personal and direct relationship with G-d. There are not 612 commandments for ordinary Jews and 614 for rabbis. We all have the same 613 obligations, no more, no less. Rabbis are only teachers, to advise and to guide. The rabbi will be happy to help and do whatever he can; but remember that, ultimately, we have to help ourselves, and each of us can turn to the single most important address in the universe—and that is G-d.

Rabbis may be very reliable, but don't rely on the rabbis. Kohanim, Levites, rabbis and teachers all have their important roles to play. But never confuse the messenger with the One who sent him. Long ago, our sages taught (and it has even become a popular Israeli bumper sticker): "We have no one to turn to but our Father in Heaven."

## **PASSOVER**

If for some reason your orders were not submitted for Passover, please ask the Chaplain or Rabbi to contact our office, we will try to assist with the acquiring of food.

## **HAPPY PURIM**

### ***In Jewish History***

***Sunday, 10 Adar II, 5779 - March 17, 2019***

#### ***Maharal Meets Emperor (1592)***

Rabbi Judah ben Bezalel Lowe, known as the Maharal of Prague was famous among Jews and non-Jews alike. He was a mystic who was revered for his holiness and Torah scholarship, as well as his proficiency in mathematics, astronomy, and other sciences. Eventually, word of his greatness reached the ears of Emperor Rudolph II.

The Emperor invited the Maharal to his castle on February 23, 1592. There they conversed for one and a half hours, and developed a mutual respect for each other.

Rabbi Judah Lowe made use of his excellent connections with the Emperor, often intervening on behalf of his community when it was threatened by anti-Semitic attacks or oppression.

#### ***Monday, 11 Adar II, 5779 - March 18, 2019*** ***First Print of Rashi (1475)***

Rashi, the most basic commentary on the Torah, was printed for the first time, in Reggio di Calabria, Italy. In this print, the commentary on the Five Books of Moses, authored in the 11th century by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, was not on the same page as the text of the Scriptures, as it is normally printed today.

This was the first time that the rounded Hebrew font was used, the font which has since become known as "Rashi Letter

#### ***Passing of Rogatchover (1936)***

Rabbi Yosef Rosen, known as the Rogatchover Gaon (Prodigy/Genius), passed away in Vienna on Thursday, March 5, 1936.

Rabbi Rosen, born in 1858, and raised in the Belarusian city of Rogatchov, served for decades as a rabbi in the Latvian city of Dvinsk (Daugavpils). He was an unparalleled genius, whose in depth understanding of all Talmudic literature left the greatest of scholars awestruck. He habitually demonstrated that many of the famous debates between the Talmudic sages have a singular thread and theme.

Rabbi Rosen authored tens of thousands of responsa on the Talmud and Jewish law. Many of them have been compiled in the set of volumes Tzafnat Pa-neach.

#### ***Passing of the "Chida" (1806)***

Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, popularly known as the Chida, an acronym of his four names, was a master talmudist, kabbalist, decisor of halachah, historian, bibliophile and traveler, who raised funds on behalf of the Jews of the Holy Land. His prolific writings cover virtually every area of Jewish tradition, history and belief. Born in 1724 in Jerusalem, he studied under the greatest Sepharadic sages in the holy city, which teachings heavily influenced his prolific writings. His chronicles of his travels offer invaluable insights into Jewish life of his times, and his Torah teachings are studied until this day. Toward the end of his life, he settled in Livorno, where he passed away in 1806.