

Torah Weekly

בס"ד

January 26- February 1,
2020
29 Tevet- 6 Shevat, 5780
Torah: Bo: Exodus 10:1 - 13:16
Haftarah: Jeremiah 46:13-28
PARSHAT BO

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 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
We offer 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 (available to all prisons).

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



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

The Wildest Story Ever Told

People share things. Ideas, stories, experiences — everything that goes along with being a people. That's why I'm quite skeptical as soon as any people begins to say, "You know what's unique about our belief system that nobody else has?" The fact is, if it's philosophy someone else has already either thought of the same thing on their own, borrowed some pieces and reverse-engineered it, or plain ripped the whole thing off and claimed it as *their* unique world-view. All the more so if it's a legend or a myth — about creation, about heroes, about how things got to be the way they got to be — somewhere, some people in the world have some other story with a lot of strong parallels. After all, we are all talking about the same world from within the same bodies. And we tend to share things, too. Except for one, very enigmatic story. I'll challenge anyone to find any people in the world anywhere at any time — Inuits or Indonesians, Norse mythology or Navaho legends, Greeks or Germans — that has a story anything similar to this. People tell plenty of wondrous fanciful legends. There are nations descended from gods, from angels, from fish and from eagles. Even from apes(!). There are people that got to where they are with the help of bears or dragons, magical boats or great volcanoes. But tell me another people who tell their children, "We were slaves to a terrible tyrant in a powerful land, and our G-d, Master of the Entire Universe, took us out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm." Nobody, anywhere. If they tell the story, they tell it about the Jews. But nobody thought to borrow it for their own. Perhaps that's the greatest proof that it really must have happened — because nobody could have made up such a story. Proof is, nobody else did. And why would they want to?

Who wants to be descended from slaves? And who wants to give all the credit to their G-d, with no heroism left for their ancestors? Not only would they never make up such a thing — nobody ever even wanted to borrow it. But even without the slave bit and the lack of heroic battle and monster slaying, the story has a wondrousness about it that seems to counter human intuition. Which is the real reason why there are people (and textbooks) today that deny the whole thing could have ever taken place to begin with. Even if you believe in a Creator, this story is hard. Which is just what Moses meant when he said, "Ask the previous generations, from the time the world was formed... was there ever such a thing in the world... that G-d would take a nation out of another nation with signs and wonders and all sorts of miracles...?" In other words, it's *supposed* to sound impossible. Not because the human imagination is too limited to imagine the wildest miracles possible. But because it goes against every sort of thing the human mind likes to imagine. It is counter-intuitive. Cognitive dissonance. The human mind is in love with simple, organized systems: Higher and lower, before and after, simple to complex, few to many. It's a survival thing: Once you've organized your world in such a way, it's so much more manageable. So, where we can create order, we create it. Where order defies us, we impose it. And if it refuses to obey, we simply ignore the data and delude ourselves into imagining that it's there anyway. That's the way human philosophy worked for most of history, arriving at only partial breakthrough with modern scientific empiricism. As Einstein protested, "True, things should be made as simple as possible — but no simpler!" Good ol' Albert was only echoing the sages of his Jewish heritage who, in so many different ways

declared the same call for empiricism. As Maimonides put it, "Opinions don't affect reality. Reality makes opinions." But for most of history, human intuition made things much simpler than reality. Like when it came to the gods and the natural order. People assumed there must be a hierarchy. The Ultimate, Big G-d who made everything to begin with had to be at the top, very far away from it all, so as not to get His pristine ultimateness messed up with this messy world that came out from Him. The gods further down could take care of forces of nature, and even lower ones could deal with mundane human crises — if the humans could come up with a good enough bribe. Orderly, intuitive. The material plane is at the bottom, the infinite is at the top, and a complex hierarchy all the way down in between. The issue that you can't really bridge from infinite to finite — no hierarchy can really get you that far no matter how long it is — that wasn't a concern. After all, the infinite, ultimate was so high up there anyway as to not matter at all. That was the way Pharaoh looked at things, and all his advisors. Until Moses came along and introduced Pharaoh to something radical: That when it comes to the Infinite Supreme Being, there *is* no hierarchy. Infinite is everywhere — just because it is infinite and unbounded. In the river, in the animals, in the wind, in the fire and the hail and the sun, in life and in death. The Infinite is entirely beyond the limitations of world, and intimately involved in it at the same time. So involved, the Infinite will even be found making miracles to redeem a rabble of slaves from their oppressor. This is how we were born and this is who we are: In counter-intuition to everything the human mind wishes to believe. The Jew is the one who says the Infinite is not "over the sea or up in the heavens", not something intangible that cannot

be touched, too ethereal to be real, too lofty to relate to our lives. The Infinite is here-now, at whatever point in life you may be in whatever situation you've been put in, there is always a simple deed you can do and bond with the Infinite. Indeed, this is a Jew: The point of the human consciousness where the finite material world and the infinitude of G-dliness meet. And this is a mitzvah: The act of fusion. That is why they have never understood us. We are counter-intuitive to them.

"Why," they moan, "are you looking for G-d in those strange places? Don't you know G-d is to be found in the universal, in the heavenly, in those matters so general as to encompass all mankind? What is your obsession with the minutiae of material ritual and physical objects?" But this is us. They search for G-d up on high. We find G-d in the woolen strings hanging from our clothes, in the light of a wax candle and a cup of wine, in the sound of children's voices reading His Torah, in the crunch and swallow of a matzah on Passover night.

By Rabbi Tzvi Freeman

Why Is Passover On A Full Moon? I am very connected to the zodiac and was wondering if there is a link between the stars and the timing of Passover. I have also noticed that the Seder always coincides with the full moon. What is the significance of all this? **Answer:** There is indeed deep astrological significance to the date of Passover. We celebrate the festival of freedom on the 15th of the Jewish month of Nissan, the night the Israelites were freed from Egypt. This is the full moon of the month of Aries, the ram. The Egyptians worshipped the ram as a god. Aries is the leader of the star signs, the first and most powerful, and the Egyptians saw themselves as the leaders of the world, receiving their strength and fortitude from their god, the ram. So the strongest time for the Egyptians would have been the month of Aries, when their god is ascendant, and the strongest day of that month would be its full moon. Egyptian power would reach its zenith on the 15th of Nissan, and that is exactly when the Israelites left Egypt. Aries was rendered impotent at its very moment of strength. But there's more. The Israelites ate a festive meal on the night before the exodus, and the main course was lamb roasted on a spit. They were openly eating the Egyptian deity—the ram—in front of the Egyptians, under the full moon of the strongest month, and they got away with it. The message is unmistakable. The world is not run by capricious forces and amoral star signs. There is a G-d who rules heaven and earth, who cares for the innocent and exacts justice upon the corrupt. To the stars, our actions make no difference. To G-d, our actions matter tremendously. The zodiac demands nothing from us. G-d, however, demands we live a life of goodness. (Derech Pikudecha of R Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, Mitzva 6, Chelek Hamachshavah 3.) The Israelites themselves didn't always get this message. After the Exodus, some in the Israelite camp suggested that while the ram of Egypt (Aries) had indeed been trumped, it was not G-d's doing, rather the next star sign, Taurus the bull, who had beaten Aries. And so they built the Golden Calf—an idol honoring Taurus. It's tempting to fall back on idolatrous beliefs because they relieve us of responsibility. But they also rob us of our freedom. (Abarbanel on Ki Tisa.) Passover celebrates not only the Israelites' freedom from Egyptian slavery, but also freedom from being bound by destiny. Our lives are not subject to the impersonal forces of the zodiac. We are free to rise above the limitations of fate and conquer our birth signs. Your fortunes may predict one course for your life, but you are free to create another. This idea was brought home on the night of the full moon of Aries. *By Rabbi Aron Moss*

**Passover order forms have been sent to the Chaplains and Rabbis. Please begin speaking with your Chaplain about Passover*

January 26, 2020 --- 29 Shevat, 5780

Passing of R. Yitzchak Kaduri (2006)

Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri, known in recent years as "the eldest of the Kabbalists," in the Holy Land, was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1898. As a youth, he studied under the great "Ben Ish Chai" (Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, 1840-1913) and was regarded as an *illu* (prodigy) by the sages of the venerable Baghdad Jewish community. In 1922, Rabbi Yitzchak emigrated to the Holy Land and joined the ranks of the Jerusalem Kabbalists, even as he earned his living for many years as a bookbinder. Over the years his fame grew, and thousands flocked to him to receive his counsel and blessing. Rabbi Kaduri passed away on the 29th of Tevet of 2006, age 108. Hundreds of thousands attended his funeral in Jerusalem

January 27, 2020 --- 1 Shevat, 5780

Moses Repeats the Torah

On the first of Shevat in the year 2488 from creation, Moses convened the Jewish people and began the 37-day "review of the Torah" contained in the Book of Deuteronomy, which he concluded on the day of his passing on Adar 7 of that year.

January 28, 2020 --- 2 Shevat, 5780

R. Zusha of Anipoli (1800)

Shevat 2 is the *yahrtzeit* (anniversary of the passing) of Chassidic Master Rabbi Meshulam Zusha of Anipoli (1718?-1800), a disciple of the 2nd leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch. Despite Rabbi Zusha's erudition and great piety, he was distinguished by his self-effacement and simple ways. A characteristic saying of his goes: "If it were offered to me to exchange places with Abraham our Father, I would refuse. What would G-d gain from this? He'd still have one Zusha and one Abraham..." His colleagues said of him that he was literally incapable of seeing anything negative in a fellow Jew.

January 29, 2020 --- 3 Shevat, 5780

Amshinover Rebbe (1935)

Shevat 3 is the *yahrtzeit* (anniversary of the passing) of the Amshinover Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef ben Rabbi Menachem Kalisch, of righteous memory, in 1935.

January 30, 2020 --- 4 Shevat, 5780

R. Israel Abuchatzera (1984)

Rabbi Israel Abuchatzera (1890-1984), known as "Baba Sali," was born in Tafillalt, Morocco, to the illustrious Abuchatzera family. From a young age he was renowned as a sage, miracle maker and master kabbalist. In 1964 he moved to the Holy Land, eventually settling in the southern development town he made famous, Netivot. He passed away in 1984 on the 4th of Shevat. His graveside in Netivot has become a holy site visited by thousands annually.

January 31, 2020 --- 5 Shevat, 5780

2nd Gerer Rebbe (1905)

Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (1847-1905), the second Rebbe in the Chassidic dynasty of Ger -- known for his famed Chassidic work "Sefat Emet" -- passed away on the 5th of Shevat of the year 5665 from creation (1905). He was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Abraham Mordechai.