

# Torah Weekly

19-25 January, 2020

22-28 Tevet, 5780

Torah:

Va'eira: Exodus 6:2 - 9:35

Haftarah: Ezekiel 28:25 - 29:21

PARSHAT VA'EIRA

## 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).

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

**Never Lose Spirit** Imagine you have been working on the job for years and years. It is hard, manual labor and you are not simply tired but exhausted, demoralized, drained and frustrated. And then, one fine day, some new fellow on the floor stands up and promises a whole new world of equality, rewards and ultimate freedom. Do you believe him or are you beyond hope? Do you dare hold out for a better tomorrow and risk being devastated and cast into despair yet again or do you simply accept your fate and give up dreaming? So it was with our ancestors in Egypt. They were slaving away all those years when a new face appeared and began making promises. Moses brings a message from G-d that they are about to be redeemed. There is a Promised Land ahead. All is not lost. There is light at the end of the tunnel. The Jews' response? *And they did not listen to Moses out of shortness of breath and from the hard labor.* One commentary explains that "shortness of breath" shouldn't be understood only literally. The Hebrew for breath is *ruach*, which can also mean "spirit." In other words, they weren't able to heed Moses' call not only from physical breathlessness, but because they lacked the spirit. Having suffered in bondage for so long, they no longer had the faith or hope to believe that freedom was still in the realm of the possible. It was simply beyond them. They had lost the spirit. In the history of Egypt not a single slave had ever escaped. How could an entire nation ever walk free? Moses was a dreamer, they must have

thought. It is just not realistic to hold out such high hopes only to have them dashed yet again. And so the people were utterly despondent and spiritless and, therefore, they could not hear, i.e. absorb, Moses' message. It happens all too often. People become so set in their mediocrity that they give up hope of ever achieving the breakthrough. Marriages get stuck in the rut of routine and the tedious treadmill keeps rolling along until we lose even the desire to dream. And Israel's people, even brave leaders, are so despondent from years of war, attrition and terror that they clutch at imaginary straws because, basically, if we are honest with ourselves, they have simply lost the resolve. I have often quoted a wise proverb heard in the name of the legendary Chasid, Reb Mendel Futerfas. "If you lose your money, you've lost nothing. Money comes and money goes. If you lose your health, you've lost half. You are not the person you were before. But if you lose your resolve, you've lost it all." Moses brought new hope to a depressed, dreamless nation. He gave them back the spirit they had lost and eventually, through the miracles of G-d, the promise was fulfilled and the dream became destiny. To be out of breath is normal. To be out of spirit is something the Jewish People can never afford. May we never lose the spirit. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

**The Greatest Miracle of All** Miracles, miracles, and more miracles. That is the story of this week's Torah portion. Sticks transforming into serpents; water turning into

blood; hail pellets with a core of fire; dreadful plagues of frogs, lice, wild beasts, pestilence and boils. "Fairy tales," declares the skeptic. "Isn't it so convenient that all these miracles happened more than three thousand years ago? I'll believe it when I see it with my own eyes! Why didn't G-d send ten plagues upon the Nazis? What's with all the terrorists who blow up men, women and children? Did G-d perhaps forget how to make miracles?!" The believing Jew, too, asks the same questions—albeit in a more respectful tone. Yes, he understands that G-d controls nature as well as the supernatural; but why did G-d choose to flip the switch, deciding to abandon the course of miracles and to run the world entirely through the laws of nature? The book of Exodus introduces us to the era of openly nature-defying miracles, (*In the book of Genesis there are many amazing stories—such as Sarah giving birth at the age of ninety, Abraham and a handful of men defeating the combined armies of four powerful kings, etc.—but no blatantly supernatural occurrences such as the splitting of the Red Sea or the transformation of water into blood.*) -an era which lasted roughly a millennium. The Scriptures are filled with stories of prophets and miracles; in fact, it seems that the laws of nature were temporarily defunct. This era ended with the destruction of the first Holy Temple. Afterward, there were a few brief glimpses of the supernatural—such as the miracle of Chanukah—but after a few centuries these too

vanished. For the past two thousand years we live in a double exile: physically, we were banished from our homeland; spiritually, we cannot perceive the G-dly hand which creates and directs all of creation. *In the Amidah prayer, we thank G-d for "Your miracles which are with us daily, and for Your continual wonders and beneficences."* However, this is a reference to the miracles which accompany us daily but are shrouded in nature. As the Talmud comments on the verse (Psalms 136:4) "He who does wonders alone": "[Even] the beneficiary of the miracle does not recognize the miracle." Additionally, in every generation—until this very day—there are tzaddikim (righteous people) who, due to their connection to G-d, are capable of transcending nature and performing miracles, even miracles that are beyond the boundaries of nature. However, these miracles tend to be "localized," affecting individuals, or at times a community. These cannot be compared to the biblical miracles, which were witnessed by entire nations. The reason for the emergence and subsequent disappearance of miracles is linked to the purpose of our very existence. Life in the Garden of Eden was idyllic, because evil was not yet part of the human character. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge imbued Adam and Eve with an intimate knowledge of physical and material desire. The moment they were expelled from the Garden is the moment when the story of the perpetual human struggle began: the struggle of choosing between the G-dly (good) or the opposite (egotism, hedonism, etc.). And actually, this is what G-d really wanted from the moment He considered the idea of creation: a free-choosing human being who would struggle with the evil and self-centeredness which are natural parts of his personality, and would triumph. Miracles are comparable to training wheels. In the early years of our nationhood, G-d assisted us in our struggle by frequently and very openly interfering in the happenings of this world. A miracle opens the eyes to a higher truth, and motivates a person to want to connect to this higher reality through Torah and mitzvot. Ultimately, however, we need to mature. We need to be able to ride the bike with our own two wheels; we need to face life's struggle with our own strengths. The messianic era is the consummation of our relationship with G-d, and to earn this privilege we have to prove that the relationship is real to us, so real that we maintain this relationship even in the absence of any revealed reciprocation from G-d. We are greatest miracle of all: our ability to steadfastly remain loyal to G-d throughout two thousand years of temptation, despite the spiritual blackness which surrounds us.

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

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

### January 21, 2020 --- 24 Tevet, 5780

#### Passing of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1812)

The founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), passed away on the eve of the 24th of Tevet, 5573, at approximately 10:30 pm, shortly after reciting the Havdalah prayer marking the end of the Shabbat. The Rebbe was in the village of Peyena, fleeing Napoleon's armies, which had swept through the Rebbe's hometown of Liadi three months earlier in their advance towards Moscow. He was in his 68th year at the time of his passing, and was succeeded by his son, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch.

#### Safed Earthquake (1837)

A devastating earthquake struck northern Israel, killing four thousand Jews in Safed and between 700 to 1000 Jews in Tiberias. Many of the survivors migrated to Hebron, rejuvenating the developing Chabad community established there 10 years earlier by the second Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch.

### January 22, 2020 --- 25 Tevet, 5780

#### Chovat Halevavot published (1559)

*Chovat Halevavot*, the classical work on Jewish ethics, was authored by Rabbi Bachya ben Yosef ibn Paquda (the first "Rabbeinu Bechayei") on or before 1161, and translated into Hebrew from the original Arabic by the famed translator R. Judah ibn Tibbon in 1167. It was first published on the 25th of Tevet of the year 5319 from creation (1559).

### January 24, 2020 --- 27 Tevet, 5780

#### Passing of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (1888)

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), Talmudist, scholar, philosopher, prolific author and Rabbi of Frankfurt am Main, passed away on this date. He was instrumental in revitalizing German Jewry, bringing thousands back to the teachings of the Torah at a time when assimilationist trends threatened to extinguish Jewish life in Western Europe.

### January 25, 2020 --- 28 Tevet, 5780

#### Birth and Passing of Shimon (1567-1447 BCE)

According to sources cited in *Seder Hadorot*, Tevet 28 is both the birthday and the day of passing of Shimon the son of Jacob; other sources place the date as Tevet 21. (See the entry for Tevet 21).

#### Sadducees Ejected From Sanhedrin (81 BCE)

Shimon ben Shetach successfully completed the expulsion of the Sadducees (a sect which denied the Oral Torah and the authority of the Sages) who had dominated the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court), replacing them with his Torah-loyal disciples, on the 28th of Tevet of the year 3680 from creation (81 BCE).

#### Rebbetzin Chana Born (1879)

Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson (1879 (O.S.) - 1964), mother of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born on Tevet 28.