

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

February 9-15, 2020
14-20 Shevat, 5780
Torah: Yitro: Exodus 18:1 - 20:23
Haftorah:
Isaiah 6:1-13
PARSHAT YITRO

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 Matzah 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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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

On An Eagles Wings You saw that which I did to Egypt; and I carried you on the wings of eagles and I brought you to Me —Exodus 19:4. Why did the Almighty choose the imagery of an eagle to describe His love for and providence over us? After all, the Rashi's comment is perhaps most famous. "All other birds carry their young in their talons, out of fear of a larger predator attacking them from behind and above. The eagle, however, fears no other bird, only man. For this reason it carries its young on its wings, reasoning that if it is attacked by arrows, it would suffer the injury, not their young. When the Egyptians attacked the Jews at the Red Sea, G-d sent angels to situate themselves between the camp of Israel and the Egyptian camp, and the Divine clouds absorbed the missiles and arrows." The *Chiddushei HaRim* (Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter, 1798-1866, the first Rebbe of the Gur chassidic dynasty) interprets this idea homiletically. At the time of the splitting of the Red Sea, the angels complained to G-d that they (the Egyptians) were idolaters and they (the Children of Israel) were idolaters. Why are You saving the latter and drowning the former?" questioned the ministering angels. G-d answered, "Let the arrows pierce Me"; meaning, I am responsible for the answer to that question. I will justify why I have a special relationship with the seed of Abraham. While Rashi's interpretation stresses G-d's love and protection, the *Chatam Sofer* (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762-1839, famed rabbi of Pressburg, Slovakia) offers a view that focuses on the Children of Israel. The eagle possesses all four symbols of non-kosher

animals. G-d therefore love eagle to express His unconditional love for us, which extends to us even if we are mired in the depths of impurity. For this reason, the verse ends, "And I have brought you to Me." I saw another answer worth repeating. Rabbi Mattis Blum (In *Torah Lodaas* (1996, volume XX) cites a Talmudic passage (Bava Batra 15a-b.) which describes the cruelty of the *yaaleh*, the mountain goat. The Talmud relates that when the mountain goat prepares to give birth, it ascends to the top of a mountain so its offspring will fall and perish. G-d sends an eagle which catches the baby mountain goat on its wing and returns it to its mother atop the mountain. "If My timing was off," argues G-d, "the goat would die." Rabbi Blum understands the words, "and the Children of Israel could not tarry" (Exodchius 12:39), mentioned in the context of the Exodus, as referring to a similar concept. The grand kabbalist the Arizal (In the *Hagaddah* section of his prayer book, "*Matzah zu she'anu ochlin.*") posits that G-d managed His time perfectly at the Exodus. Had He waited a second longer, the Israelites would have descended to the 50th level of impurity, at which point they would have passed the point of no return, and could not have been redeemed. Had they left a second earlier, He would not have kept His word regarding the 400 years of exile. Rabbi Blum reasoned that G-d had to time the Exodus perfectly, just as He times the eagle's rescue of the mountain goat—which explains why G-d describes the Exodus as having carried us "on eagles' wings." These commentaries all teach us

important lessons about our unique relationship with our Creator, both on individual and communal levels. Rashi demonstrates G-d's physical protection of us. The *Chatam Sofer* and the *Chiddushei HaRim* describe G-d's unqualified love for His beloved nation, and finally, Rabbi Blum's interpretation proves to us the miraculous nature of that unqualified love and Omnipotent protection. Moses Nachmanides (1194-1270, eminent biblical commentator), citing Onkelos (1st century translator of the Bible), understands the latter part of the verse, "and I will bring you to Me," as referring to Sinai. The revelation at Sinai represents the onset of the legal and ritual relationship between the Almighty and His special nation. G-d tells us that we must never forget that the Commander, to whom we are responsible as Jews, is the same One who carries us on eagle's wings. There's no "good cop" and "bad cop." The G-d of Love and the G-d of Justice are one and the same. Every mitzvah – both the do's and the don'ts – finds its source from the same love, compassion and covenant that describes G-d as our perfect benefactor. Our system of commandments bases itself on our relationship with the Commander, with whom we have a previous relationship. Our sages describe Sinai as the wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. The custom of escorting bride and groom to the *chupah* with candles derives from the lightning "heard" at Sinai. The Talmudic suggestion (Shabbat 89a.) that G-d lifted Sinai over the head of the Jewish nation represents that marriage canopy, the *chuppah* under which their marriage was effected. We

must remember, as we begin the more legalistic parts of the Torah, that they must not be seen devoid of that eagle imagery. Civil law, which the Torah discusses immediately after describing the revelation at Sinai, stems from a Divine ethic, a G-dly relationship, and a moral obligation based on the precedence of a loving relationship. For this reason, posit many commentaries, G-d begins the Decalogue by describing Himself as the one who took us out of

Egypt—reminding us of that bond, the loving eagle who swoops us up in the nick of time, who loves us without stipulation and who would rather suffer than inflict pain on us. *By Rabbi Elli Krimsky*

Is G-d Religious? The polls are mixed on that count. Recent surveys show that as much as 80-90% of Americans will say that they believe in G-d, but 40-50% will say they do not practice a religion. Indeed, if G-d is all-powerful and infinite, and religion is a set of laws and rituals and a list of things that one must or must not do, it would seem that G-d could hardly be described as "religious." Nor would it seem that being religious will bring a person closer to G-d. If G-d transcends all limitation and definition, why would the way to relate to G-d be to impose further restriction and definition on our already finite and constricted lives? Yet this paradox is not confined to the religious-spiritual aspect of the human experience. Throughout the ages, whenever man has endeavored to escape the bounds of the mundane and the everyday, he did so by submitting to a structured, even rigid, code of behavior. My favorite example for this is the discipline of music. There are just so many musical notes on the scale, and no one—not even the greatest musician—can create additional notes or subtract any. Anyone who wishes to play or compose music must conform to this absolute, immutable system. And yet, by submitting to this framework, the musician will create a piece of music that touches the deepest place in a person's heart—a place that cannot be described, much less the defined. By using this very precise, mathematical formula, the musician will create something that transports the listener to a place high above the confines and fetters of everyday life, high above the strictures of physics and mathematics. Imagine, then, a musical discipline whose laws are dictated by the inventor and creator of life—by the one who has intimate knowledge of life's every strength and every vulnerability, of its every potential and its every sensitivity. The only question remaining is: but why so many laws? Why must this discipline dictate how we are to wake and how we are to sleep, and virtually everything in between? Because life itself, in all its infinite complexity, is our instrument of connection with G-d. Every "scale" on its "range" must be exploited to achieve the optimum connection. Music being our metaphor, we cannot but quote the famous anecdote in which Archduke Ferdinand of Austria reputedly says to Mozart, "Beautiful music, but far too many notes." To which the composer replied, "Yes, your majesty, but not one more than necessary." *By Rabbi Simon Jacobson*

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

February 9, 2020 – 14 Shevat, 5780

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.

February 10, 2020 – 15 Shevat, 5780

Birthday of R. Nechemiah of Dubrowna (1788-1852)

R. Nechemiah was a brilliant Torah scholar who lived in Dubrowna, a town in what is now Belarus. He was a disciple of the first three Rebbes of Chabad, R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, R. DovBer of Lubavitch, and R. Menachem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch (who was also his first cousin through marriage). He kept a scholarly correspondence with R. Menachem Mendel, some of which is preserved in his book of responsa, *Divrei Nechemiah*.

R. Nechemiah was born on 15 Shevat in the year 5548 from Creation (1788), and passed away on his sixty-fourth birthday in 5612 (1852).

February 11, 2020 – 16 Shevat, 5780

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.

February 12, 2020 – 17 Shevat, 5780

Purim Saragossa (1421)

A noxious plot was brewing against the Jewish community of Saragossa, but they were completely unaware of the looming danger. They were spared, however, thanks to a handful of synagogues beadles who acted on a dream they all had. The resulting salvation on the 17th of Shevat was celebrated by Saragossan Jews, and dubbed "Purim Saragossa."

A Hebrew *Megillah* (scroll) was penned, describing the details of the miraculous story. To this day, this scroll is read in certain communities on Purim Saragossa.

February 14, 2020 – 19 Shevat, 5780

R. Aryeh Leib of Shpoli Saved From Drowning (1793)

On his way back from participating in a *brit milah* ceremony in Bohuslav (in what is now Ukraine), R. Aryeh Leib, known as the "Grandfather of Shpoli" was crossing over the frozen Ros River when the ice suddenly broke beneath his feet. Miraculously he was saved, and to this day his descendants mark this date with a joyous feast (*Ish Hapelleh*, pp. 299–301).

February 15, 2020 – 20 Shevat, 5780

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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.