

Torah Weekly

January 3-9, 2021
19-25 Tevet, 5781

Torah reading:
Shemot: Exodus 1:1 - 6:1
Haftarah:
Isaiah 27:6 - 28:13; Isaiah 29:22-23

PARSHAT SHEMOT

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).

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



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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

I Shall Be In this week's Torah reading, Moses makes his dramatic appearance on the Biblical scene. He tries to stop the persecution of his brethren, receives a death sentence for his troubles, and is forced to flee to Midian where he marries Zipporah and tends the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. Then, at the burning bush, comes his first divine revelation.

G-d calls upon the shepherd to go back to Egypt and redeem his people. The mission is nothing less than to face up to the Pharaoh himself and deliver the L-rd's famous stirring message: *Let My People Go!*

In characteristic humility, Moses is a most reluctant leader. He seems to be looking for all sorts of reasons as to why he is unworthy of the task. At one point, he asks the Almighty, "Who shall I say sent me? What is Your name?"

Now we are familiar with many names that G-d goes by, but the one G-d now gives Moses is puzzling and enigmatic, mysterious and mystical "*I shall be as I shall be.*" Strange name for a Supreme Being.

Many commentaries expound on the possible interpretations of this most unusual name. Here is one very powerful explanation.

The significance of this name is that it is posed in the future tense. "*I shall be as I shall be.*" Moses was asking the ultimate existential question. How do I call You, G-d? "What is Your name," means how are You to be identified, known, understood? How can finite, mortal man come to know the Infinite Being?

And G-d's answer is, "I shall be as I shall be" — future tense. You want to know me, Moses? I'm afraid you'll have to wait. We cannot necessarily understand G-d by what has happened in the past. Nor, even, in the present. In the here and now, when we stare

life and its ambiguities in the face, we experience tremendous difficulty in our vain attempts to grasp the Almighty's vision or perceive His vast eternal plan.

To truly understand the Infinite G-d takes infinite patience. One day, somewhere down the line, in the future, He will make Himself known to us. Only then will we come to really know Him and His inscrutable ways. "*I shall be as I shall be.*"

Don't we all ask Moses' question at times? Why is there tragedy in the world? Why is there so much human suffering, pain and agony, so much *tzorris* to contend with? How many families have been torn apart literally and figuratively in Israel in the four year Intifada? How many individuals do we each know in our own communities who have experienced tragedy in their lives? Why, we cry, why?

So we are told that right at the very beginning of Jewish history, the very first time G-d spoke to Moses He said to him up front, "I know you want to be able to understand Me and My ways; but please accept that it is impossible — for now." "*I shall be as I shall be.* One day, you will be able to know Me. Not today or tomorrow, but one day in the future everything will make sense and everything will be understood. Ultimately, in time, all will be known.

In the meanwhile, we live with faith, trust, hope, and a great deal of patience as we see destiny unfolding and we aren't quite sure what to make of it. And we look forward with eager anticipation to that awesome day when the Almighty's great name will be known and understood, and we will see with our own eyes of flesh that G-d is good and His ways are just. May it be speedily in our day.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

The Burning Bush In the portion of Shemot, the first

portion in the book of Exodus, we read about Moses' first experience of Divine revelation. The revelation was unique. Moses was tending the sheep of his father-in-law in the desert, when he saw a bush burning, yet the bush was not consumed.

As the Torah describes the encounter: (*Exodus, 3:1-5.*)

Moses was pasturing the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, the chief of Midian, and he led the flocks after the free pastureland, and he came to the mountain of G-d, to Horeb. An angel of the L-rd appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush, and behold, the thorn bush was burning with fire, but the thorn bush was not being consumed. So Moses said, "Let me turn now and see this great spectacle: why does the thorn bush not burn up?" The L-rd saw that he had turned to see, and G-d called to him from within the thorn bush, and He said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am!" And He said, "Do not draw near here. Take your shoes off your feet, because the place upon which you stand is holy soil."

In the book of Genesis, when G-d spoke to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Hag ar, Isaac, Rebekah, Laban and Jacob, G-d spoke to them directly, without the need for an attention-grabbing scheme. Why did G-d choose to reveal himself to Moses from a bush that was burning but was not consumed?

Moses experienced the Divine revelation, not for himself, but for the sake of the Jewish people, whom he would lead out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai—the very mountain on which Moses saw the burning bush—to become the nation of G-d, a nation charged with the mission of making G-d's vision for this world a reality. It follows, then, that the burning bush was not merely a way to grab Moses' attention, but rather it was the symbolic mission statement of the nation that

would be born at Sinai, immediately following the Exodus.

A blazing fire represents a soul surging upward, yearning to transcend the physical world and connect to spirituality. The annals of religious experience are full of people who have felt this burning passion in their hearts, and who chose to retreat from this world. They chose to escape civilization, to flee to the forests and hills in an effort to escape the material. They fled the thorns of daily existence in order to bond with the spiritual.

The most important message of Judaism, and the first message that G-d communicates to Moses is this: In order to connect to G-d one must reveal the fire burning within the human heart. To experience the Divine one must discover a longing to reconnect with the Divine source of all existence. The fire, however, must not consume the bush. One must not seek to escape the world, which sometimes feels like a thorn bush in a desolate place, unsuitable for spiritual growth. The consuming fire of G-d cannot, paradoxically, consume us.

Even Moses, the greatest prophet of all time, the lawgiver, the one who spoke to G-d “like a man speaks to his friend” could not allow himself to be consumed by the fire. We may not abandon the reality in which we live, or forget about the people around us. We must be like the flame surging upward, yet remaining grounded by its wick.

Moses was fascinated.

How could this be? How was it possible to maintain the fire while living in a thorn bush? Moses said to himself: “Let me turn now and see this great spectacle: why does the thorn bush not burn up?”

G-d responded to Moses’s wonder: “Take your shoes off your feet, because the place upon which you stand is holy soil.”

G-d told Moses that the physical realm, “the place upon which you stand,” is itself a creation of G-d, which can be elevated to become sacred soil. Indeed, all of the earth can become as holy as Mount Sinai. G-d revealed to Moses the mission statement and purpose of the nation that was about to be born: “Take your shoes off your feet,” we are instructed. Remove that which represents separation from the soil, and instead imbue the earth itself with holiness.

The purpose of creation, the reason the soul descends into this world, is to sanctify the material, to discover and to unveil the potential for any place on earth to hold a burning bush. *(Inspired by Sefer Ha'ma'amarim 5704, page 112.)* By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

Sunday, January 3, 2021 --- 19 Tevet, 5781

Passing of R. Aryeh Leib Heller, Author of Ketzot Hachoshen (1812)

R. Aryeh Leib Heller was the rabbi of the city of Stryi, in what is now Western Ukraine. His works—*Ketzot Hachoshen*, *Avnei Milu'im*, and *Shav Shemateta*—are known for their clear, logical analysis of Talmudic texts and ideas, and are staples that are studied in yeshivas throughout the world.

Monday, January 4, 2021 --- 20 Tevet, 5781

Passing of Maimonides (1204)

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, Talmudist, Halachist, physician, philosopher and communal leader, known in the Jewish world by the acronym "Rambam" and to the world at large as "Maimonides", passed away in Egypt on the 20th of Tevet in 1204 (4965).

Printing of Talmud (1483)

The first volume of the Babylonian Talmud, the tractate *Berachot*, was printed in Soncino, Italy, on the 20th of Tevet of the year 5244 from creation (1483)

Tuesday, January 5, 2021 --- 21 Tevet, 5781

Shimon Born (1567 BCE)

Shimon, the second son of Jacob and Leah and the progenitor of the Israelite tribe of Shimon, was born on Tevet 21 (according to another opinion, on Tevet 28), of the year 2194 from creation (1567 BCE), nine years after Jacob's arrival in Charan.

Purim Ancona (1691)

On December 20 (21 Teves), 1691, strong earthquakes rattled the city of Ancona, Italy, causing numerous structures to collapse and placing its inhabitants in mortal danger. Miraculously, the Jewish quarter was spared, suffering the collapse of only one house. In commemoration of this event, the local Jewish community established that date as a day of celebration and song, while the previous day—20 Teves—would be marked yearly by fasting and charity (*Or Boker*, p. 48a).

Wednesday, January 6, 2021 --- 22 Tevet, 5781

Purim of the Curtains (1623)

After a respected Jew was falsely accused of stealing the royal curtains from the governor's palace, the entire Jewish community of Prague was in mortal danger.

After miraculous intervention, the real culprit confessed to the crime, sparing the Jews of the city. To commemorate this event, "Purim of the Curtains" was instituted to thank G-d for the miraculous salvation.

Thursday, January 7, 2021 --- 23 Tevet, 5781

Portuguese Expulsion (1496)

Following the death of King Joao of Portugal in 1494, his son King Manuel I ascended the throne. When his legitimacy as heir to the throne was challenged, Manuel wished to marry Princess Isabel of Spain, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, in order to solidify his position. As a precondition to the marriage, the Spanish monarch demanded that Portugal expel its Jews—many of whom were refugees from the 1492 Spanish Expulsion who found refuge in the neighboring country of Portugal. Manuel agreed, and five days after the marriage agreement was signed, on Tevet 23 (5257), he issued a decree giving Portugal's Jews eleven months to leave the country.

Appreciating the Jews' economic value, Manuel was unhappy with the potential loss of this economic asset, and devised a way to have the Jews stay in Portugal—but as Christians. Initially, he instructed the Jews to leave from one of three ports, but soon he restricted them to leaving from Lisbon only.

When October of 1497 arrived, thousands of Jews assembled there and were forcibly baptized. Many Jews decided to stay and keep their Jewish faith secret; they were called Marranos or Crypto-Jews.

Over the next 350 years, the infamous Inquisition persecuted, tortured and burned at the stake thousands of "marranos" throughout Spain, Portugal and their colonies for continuing to secretly practice the Jewish faith.

Friday, January 8, 2021 --- 24 Tevet, 5781

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.

Shabbat, January 9, 2021 --- 25 Tevet, 5781

Chovot Halevavot published (1559)

Chovot 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).