

Torah Weekly

January 10-16, 2021
26 Tevet - 3 Shevat, 5781

Torah reading:
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 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.

Throw Small Stones

"Gratitude is an attitude," some wise man surely must have said at some time. The Bible, in this week's Parshah, demonstrates just how far Jewish tradition teaches us to be grateful and to remember our benefactors.

Seven of the ten plagues occur in this week's reading. Moses, messenger of G-d, is busy bringing down these terrifying plagues on Pharaoh's Egypt. Yet, interestingly, he calls upon his brother Aaron to be the agent for the first three plagues—blood, frogs and lice. Why did Moses not do these himself, as he would do the others?

The Midrash, quoted by Rashi, teaches us that this is because it was through the agency of the waters of the Nile River that Moses was saved as an infant when he was put in the basket. It would have been insensitive and inappropriate for him to strike those very waters in order to bring on plagues. Seeing as the blood and the frogs both came directly from the water, it was Aaron who stuck the water rather than Moses. Similarly with the third plague, that of lice. The lice came from out of the ground, and the earth, too, had helped Moses to cover the body of the Egyptian taskmaster whom he had killed defending a Jewish slave. Therefore, it would have been wrong for Moses to strike the earth, and so for this plague, too, Aaron was the agent.

What a monumental lesson to each of us on the importance of gratitude. First: Do water and earth have feelings? Would they know the difference if they were struck, and who was doing the striking? How much more so should we be considerate of human beings when they have done us a kindness. How scrupulous we ought to be not to offend people, especially those who have come to our assistance.

Second: Moses was 80 years old at the time of the plagues. These incidents with the water and

earth occurred when he was a mere infant and when he was a very young man. And yet, all these years later he is still sensitive not to strike the objects that had helped him. He did not say, as so many have after him, "So what have you done for me *lately*?"

There are a number of theories as to why human beings seem to have this psychological need to tarnish the image of their past benefactors. Perhaps it is because we are inherently uncomfortable with the notion of being indebted to anyone. It cramps our style and diminishes our independence. So, if we find fault with those who have helped us previously, we absolve ourselves of any moral indebtedness. Now we're even. I don't owe you anything anymore.

The story is told of the Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Schreiber, 1762–1839) that he once did an enormous favor for someone. Later, the fellow asked him, "Rabbi, what can I ever do to repay you for your kindness?" The Chatam Sofer replied, "One day, when you get upset and angry with me, please remember what I have done for you today—and, rather than pelting me with big rocks, please throw small stones instead." Sad, but oh so true. In a similar vein, I remember hearing my own grandfather say of someone, "Why does he hate me so much? I never did him any favors!"

This little story of Moses, which is only an aside to the main body of the biblical narrative, teaches us to remember the kindnesses that are bestowed upon us—when they happen, and forever. If one who has been good to us in the past does wrong and needs chastising, let someone else volunteer for the job. He may need rebuking, but you're not the one to do it.

Once again, the Torah is teaching us not only religious ritual, but how to be better

people—more sensitive, and yes, eternally grateful human beings.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Who Created These?

When you look at a masterful painting, do you only see the art, or does the art lead you to think about the artist? When you enjoy a beautifully prepared feast, do you focus on the food exclusively, or does the taste and aroma lead you to think about the chef?

When you look at a sunset, at waves crashing onto the shore, or at a brilliant night sky, what do you see? Some see Mother Nature in all her glory: the predictable, unchanging patterns of the natural order. Seeing the beauty and mystery of the universe inspires one to study the Earth's secrets, to discover the laws by which it operates, and to harness its awesome strength.

Others see more than a natural world.

The prophet Isaiah tells us: "Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these." (Isaiah 40:26.) Pondering the magnificent and awesome universe, says Isaiah, will lead us to ask the question: "Who created these?" By our asking who created the universe, the creation itself leads us to know and to experience the Creator.

Egypt, or "Mitzrayim" in Hebrew, was the most advanced society of the ancient world. Their understanding of science was unparalleled, and they were the experts in harnessing the power of nature to their advantage. But they were spiritually constrained. They studied the Universe, they worshiped nature, but they did not ask the most important question: "Who created these?" This is the question that paves the way to the discovery of meaning, morals and ethics, for asking "Who created these?" leads to asking "Why did He create?" and "What does the Creator expect of us?"

The Kabbalists explain that “Mitzrayim” is composed of the words *meitzar yam*. *Meitzar* means “constraints,” and the letters of the word *yam* can be rearranged to create the word *mi*, which means “who.” In other words, Mitzrayim is a culture that hinders one from asking the question “who?” The Egyptian culture encouraged asking all sorts of questions about the Universe, *except* for the question that would lead to freedom from the constraints of the material world, the question that would lead toward the liberating connection with the Creator. Egypt prevents one from fulfilling Isaiah's plea to “lift up your eyes on high and see who created these.”

Being in Egypt means looking at nature and seeing a set of laws that rule supreme—trapping man in its grip, enslaving him to his natural habits, temptations and shortcomings. The Torah tells us that we must remember the exodus from Egypt all the days of our life, for each and every day we are called upon to break free of our limitations, of the constraints that hold us back from being the person we want to be and from living the life we are capable of living. We are liberated from Egypt when looking at nature brings us to the recognition of the Creator, who gifts us of His infinity, allowing us to break free of the confines of the natural order and to create change in the world and within ourselves.

Thus, twice a day we cover our eyes and say the most important Jewish prayer: “Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One.” The word “hear,” *shema*, is an acronym for the words *siuh marom einichem*, “lift up your eyes on high.” Saying the Shema allows us to look at nature and experience the Creator of the Universe. Lifting our eyes heavenward empowers us to transcend the confines of the limited reality by connecting to His transcendent existence. (Adapted from Maamar Shabbat Hagadol 5679.)

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

Tuesday, January 12, 2021 --- 28 Tevet, 5781

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.

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.

Wednesday, January 13, 2021 --- 29 Tevet, 5781

Winter

According to Rabbi Judah (cited in the Talmud, Bava Metzia 106b), Tevet 29 marks the end of winter. (As per Genesis 8:22, the year consists of six 2-month "seasons": seedtime, harvest, cold, heat, summer and winter.)

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.

Jews of Tripoli Saved (1795)

In 1793, Tripoli (in what is now Libya) fell under the rule of the cruel Ali Burghul, who took advantage of divisions within the local leadership to take control of the city. Burghul terrorized the city's inhabitants—especially the Jews—with excessive taxes and unjust executions. Among those executed was the son of R. Abraham Khalfon, the head of the Jewish community.

In 1795, a local Jew helped negotiate an agreement between the opposing factions, and on 29 Teves they succeeded in driving Burghul out of the city. The community celebrated this day each year as a day of rejoicing, and would recite a special hymn recounting the miracle (printed in *Se' u Zimrah*, pp. 191ff.).

The community of Tripoli kept a similar date of rejoicing one week earlier, on 23 Teves, commemorating the date (in 1705) when a siege that had been placed on the city by the ruler of Tunisia was lifted.

Thursday, January 14, 2021 --- 1 Shevat, 5781

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.

Friday, January 15, 2021 --- 2 Shevat, 5781

Alexander-Yannai's death celebrated (76 BCE)

Hashmonean King Alexander-Yannai (Jannaeus), an avowed enemy of the Jewish sages, died on this date. So great was his cruelty and the ruthlessness with which he persecuted the Sages and those loyal to them (some 50,000 were killed in the years 82-76 BCE), that the day of his death was declared a holiday.

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.

Shabbat, January 16, 2021 --- 3 Shevat, 5781

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.