

Torah Weekly

January 2 - 8, 2022
29 Tevet 6 Shevat, 5782

Torah reading:
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).

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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

A ray of Light Recently, there have been some major blackouts of electrical power across vast stretches of the United States. I still remember the essay I wrote in high school on the great blackout back in the 60's. In Johannesburg, where I now live, we experience localized power failures on a far too frequent basis. Sometimes it may even prevent us from enjoying a hot cholent on Shabbat afternoons.

All these blackouts are but minor inconveniences, though, when compared to the Great Blackout in Egypt before the Exodus. Plague #9 was Darkness, and from the Biblical account, it would seem to make today's power failures pale into insignificance.

There was thick darkness over the entire land of Egypt for three days. No man could see his brother, nor could any person even rise from his place for three days. And to the Children of Israel there was light in all their dwellings (Exodus 10:22-23).

According to the commentaries, it was not merely an absence of light but a tangible fog that got worse with time. The first three days they could not see. The next three days they could not even move. But, miraculously, just down the road in the Jewish neighborhood of Goshen there was light!

This verse, To the Children of Israel there was light in their dwellings, prompted the saintly Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin to offer the following beautiful homiletic interpretation. Every Jew is a ray of light. It only depends on his or her "dwellings." The environment in which Jew finds himself may sometimes cast a shadow over the spirituality and light he innately possesses. In no way, however, does this detract from the G-dly light inside every single Jew. Not every

environment is conducive to the light. Sometimes a Jew may be negatively affected by his surroundings. But intrinsically, every Jew is a ray of light.

Do you believe in G-d? That's not enough. You have to believe in Jews too. Don't even be cynical about cynical Jews. I know it isn't always easy, even for those of us who, philosophically, identify with this concept. Often I have to argue with members of my Shul's daily minyan on this point. A fellow comes in to say Kaddish after losing a loved one, and the Shul regulars sometimes have their little private wagers: will he stay the course and recite Kaddish for the year or will he disappear after the initial mourning period? Some of the guys are cynical, admittedly from past experience. They quote the old Yiddish adage, "the malach hamoves (angel of death) feeds the synagogues." I often have to play the role not only of defender of the faith but of defender of the flock. Never give up on any Jew, I always tell them. Indeed, many a time we are pleasantly surprised when a Jew for whom the Shul experience was completely foreign goes on to become one of our committed regulars.

I admit there are also times when I have to remind myself never to become cynical and to stand by my own ideological beliefs. One particular incident some years ago stands out in my mind. We were invited by friends to join them at home to watch a new drama-documentary on the Holocaust. It was a long production and we were quite a few people. We decided to have an interval. The break also gave us a chance to pray minchah (the afternoon prayers). Among the invitees was an uncle of our hostess, a well-known, successful diamond merchant also known to be an avowed atheist. I wasn't sure what to do about him. Should I

offer him a siddur (prayer book) or not? Would he consider it a provocation and get upset? In my uncertainty, I decided to do nothing.

Later, when I looked around he was nowhere to be seen. Sure enough, the next day his niece confirmed my suspicions. He was upset that he was not invited to join the prayers. "Am I not a Jew, too?" he asked her. He was justifiably hurt and I made special efforts in the weeks ahead to pacify him, assuring him that I truly believed he was as Jewish as I am.

I learned an important lesson from that episode. Never write off a single Jew. Never be cynical of the cynics. Every Jew is a ray of light. All we need do is make the environment a little more conducive, and the inherent light will shine forth.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Finding Freedom

I see miracles all the time.
Walking, talking miracles.

If I would be on the lookout, I would notice many more of these living miracles. But every once in a while, a miracle just stares me in the eye and it becomes too hard to ignore.

Like the Holocaust survivor I met, who saw horrors that no mortal eye should see, yet refuses to miss his daily prayers.

Or the young woman with flaming red curls who approached me after my lecture about why Jewish married women cover their hair. She told me that she plans to cover her beautiful locks once she marries, but wants advice on how to sensitively approach her parents so they don't feel rejected by her lifestyle change.

Or the woman who had an abusive childhood and who would be justified in giving in to bouts of depression, but is determined to use her experience instead to grow spiritually and bring joy to our world.

Or the man I met in a small

European town who decided to uproot himself and move to a new country, a new language, and a new career in order to find and marry a Jewish woman.

These are all miracles. The repercussions of each of these nature-defying acts are world-shattering.

These are people inspired to bring positive change to their lives. People who don't allow the natural heavy pull of inertia, their pain or disillusionment, to hold them back from achieving greatness. People who break all barriers, to connect with their divine soul.

In this week's Torah portion, after the miraculous ten plagues are visited on the Egyptians, G-d commanded Moses, "This month shall be to you the *head of the months*; to you it shall be the *first of the months* of the year." (Exodus 12:2)

Up until this point, Tishrei, the month of creation, was considered the first month of the year. Although Tishrei still begins the new year—when counting the months, Nisan is considered the first month, and Tishrei the seventh.

When G-d created the world, He set up divine forces, which we call nature, to govern it. Miracles were the exception. Therefore, Tishrei, the month in which the world and its natural forces came into being, was considered the primary month.

Then came the birth of the Jewish people, a nation that would become living, walking miracles. Once the Jewish people become a nation, this month is counted as the first month.

The miraculous Exodus and our subsequent survival throughout our tumultuous history defy the very laws of nature. The existence of the Jewish people proves that when you are attached to G-d and His Torah, you are not subject to natural limitations.

And the most profound way in which we transcend nature is by fusing heaven and earth, by breaking through our physical and emotional limitations, striving higher and bringing an awareness of an infinite G-d into this finite, material world.

Look around and you will also see so many living miracle!

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Sunday, January 2, 2022 --- 29 Tevet 5782

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.

Monday, January 2, 2022 --- 1 Shevat, 5782

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.

Thursday, January 6, 2022 --- 4 Shevat, 5782

R. Abraham Kalisker (1810)

Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk (1741-1810) was a controversial figure in the 3rd generation of Chassidic leaders. In his youth, he was a study partner of Rabbi Elijah "the Gaon of Vilna," who led the initial opposition against Chassidism; but later Rabbi Abraham himself joined the the forbidden *kat* ("sect," as the Chassidic movement was derisively called by its opponents) and became a disciple of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch, the successor to Chassidism's founder, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. After Rabbi DovBer's passing in 1772, much of the opposition to Chassidism was directed against Rabbi Abraham's disciples, who, more than any other group within the movement, mocked the intellectual elitism of the establishment's scholars and communal leaders; even Rabbi Abraham's own colleagues were dismayed by the "antics" of some of his disciples. In 1777, Rabbi Abraham joined the first Chassidic "aliyah", in which a group of more than 300 Chassidim led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk emigrated to the Holy Land. Rabbi Abraham passed away in Tiberias on the 4th of Shevat of the year 5570 from creation (1810 CE).

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.

Friday, January 7, 2022 --- 5 Shevat, 5782

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.

Shabbat, January 8, 2022 --- 6 Shevat, 5782

Majorcan Jews Guaranteed Protection (1393)

The governor of Majorca issued an edict for the protection of the Jewish inhabitants, providing that any citizen who injures a Jew would be hanged.

The advantageous position of the islands, as well as their newly found protection, attracted many Jews from Provence, Sicily, Tunis, and Algiers, amongst other African cities. The Jews even had their own organizations and representatives by sanction of the King.