

# Torah Weekly

January 16 - 22, 2022  
14-22 Shevat, 5782

Torah reading:  
Yitro: Exodus 18:1 - 20:23  
Haftarah:  
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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**ALEPH INSTITUTE**  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

**But Does It Speak To You**

The locomotive was making its first appearance in a little town of old. No one had ever seen a horseless carriage before. Every one of the townspeople gathered at the new station to witness history in the making. The gun was fired and with a flourish of huffing and puffing the locomotive roared out of the station. Well... the engine that is. Unfortunately, the *shlemiel* whose job it was to hitch the other cars to the engine had forgotten to do so, and the long train of carriages were left behind in a trail of smoke.

Sometimes, the most meticulously laid plans—a business strategy, a football game plan, or even (perish the thought), a synagogue resolution made on Yom Kippur—fail to come to fruition—all because we neglected to hitch the engine to the train...

The introduction to the Ten Commandments we will read in this week's Parshah is, *And G-d spoke all these words, to say...* In Hebrew, *leimor*. Now, when the Torah uses the word *leimor*, "to say," it is usually because **G-d** is telling Moses something important which Moses in turn should pass on and tell the Children of Israel. So the word *leimor* makes perfect sense. He said it to him to say it to them. But here we have a problem. You see, every Jew was present at Sinai, and according to the mystics, that includes even the unborn souls of future generations. So there was no need for Moses to pass on anything to anyone. All the Jews heard the Ten Commandments directly from G-d. So why the word *leimor*? To say to whom?

Rabbi DovBer, the great Maggid of Mezeritch, explained that here the word *leimor* means *to speak to you*. That these words should not remain mere words, but should resonate and say something meaningful to you personally. They should be said and heard so that they continue to reverberate forever after in your minds, heart and deeds. The Ten Commandments must not remain an abstract idea, a unhitched engine, a nice philosophy or an interesting cultural practice - something of no more significance to yourself than the rituals of ancient Incas of Peru. The Ten Commandments must be relevant enough to make a difference in our lives; otherwise, whom did

G-d say them to and whatever for? The Talmud describes a thief who prays to G-d for success before breaking in to commit a burglary. The epitome of hypocrisy—G-d told you, "You shall not steal," and you have the audacity to ask Him to help you succeed in defying His wishes? This has got to be the ultimate *chutzpah*! How do we get a handle on this Talmudic thief's hypocrisy? The answer is that this thief, too, is a believer, but his faith is superficial and doesn't permeate his being sufficiently to influence his behavior. Deep down he has faith but he remains a religious *goniff*!

They tell the story of a rabbi who was in his study when he walked Berl, the town pickpocket. "Rabbi, I was walking down the street and found this wallet lying on the ground. I know that to return a lost article is a mitzvah of the Torah, so I brought it in. Perhaps you can make an announcement in Shul and find the rightful owner." The rabbi sees there is a fair amount of cash in the wallet. He is so inspired at Berl's change of heart that he embraces him and congratulates him on his reformation. Later, the rabbi notices that the gold watch he had in his jacket pocket is missing. He calls Berl and asks him if perchance he may have inadvertently taken his watch. Berl confesses. "I don't understand you Berl. You find a wallet full of cash in the street and you return it, and then you go and steal my gold watch?"

Berl answers, "Rabbi, a mitzvah is a mitzvah, but business is business." We all believe and we all want to do mitzvahs, big and small. The trick is to translate our inner piety into outer practice. What does my faith do for me? Does it speak to me? How does it transform my behavior, my life? Does it make any tangible difference in my everyday behavior? The Torah must not remain a theory on the drawing board. The Ten Commandments do indeed speak to us. The question is, are we listening?

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

**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*

## Holiday of the 15<sup>th</sup> Shevat

Monday (1/17/2022) is *Chamisha Ossor BiShevat* ("the 15th of Shevat") which marks the beginning of a "New Year for Trees."

According to Biblical law, there is a seven year agricultural cycle, concluding with the Sabbatical year. When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, on years one, two, four and five of this cycle, farmers were required to separate a tenth of their produce and eat it in Jerusalem. This tithe is called Maaser Sheni, the Second Tithe, because it is in addition to the (two percent which must be given to the Kohain, and the) ten percent which is given to the Levite. On the third and sixth years of the cycle, instead of the owners eating the Maaser Sheni in Jerusalem, they gave this second tithe to the poor, who were permitted to consume it wherever they wished.

[On the Sabbatical year, no tithes are separated. All produce which grows during this year is ownerless and free for anyone to take.]

It was therefore of vital importance to ascertain when the new year started for produce. Our Rabbis established that a fruit which blossomed before the 15th of Shevat is produce of the previous year. If it blossomed afterwards, it is produce of the "new year." [By comparison, grains, vegetables, and legumes have the same New Year as humans, the 1st of Tishrei.] Why is this so? In the Mediterranean region, the rainy season begins with the festival of Sukkot. It takes approximately four months (from Sukkot, the 15th of Tishrei, until the 15th of Shevat) for the rains of the new year to saturate the soil and trees, and produce fruit. All fruit which blossom beforehand are a product of the rains of the previous year, and are tithed together with the crops of the previous year.

Although this day is Rosh Hashanah for *trees*, we attach special significance to this holiday because "Man is [compared to] the tree of the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19). Through cultivating strong roots – faith and commitment to G-d – we produce many fruits—Torah and Mitzvot.

### Observances and Customs

On this day it is customary to partake of the fruit with which the Holy Land is praised (Deuteronomy 8:8): olives, dates, grapes, figs and pomegranates. If tasting any of these fruit for the first time this season, remember to recite the *Shehecheyanu* blessing. (A blessing recited on joyous occasions, thanking G-d for "sustaining us and enabling us to reach this occasion." This blessing is recited before the standard "*Ha'etz*" blessing recited on fruit.)

Due to the festive nature of the day, we omit the *Tachanun* sections (petitions for forgiveness and confession) from the prayers.

**Sunday, January 16, 2022 --- 14 Shevat, 5782**

### Penei Yehoshua (1756)

Shevat 14 is the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk Katz (1680-1756), 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.

**Monday, January 17, 2022 --- 15 Shevat, 5782**

### 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).

**Wednesday, January 19, 2022 --- 17, Shevat, 5782**

### 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.

**Thursday, January 20, 2022 --- 18, Shevat, 5782**

### Auto De Fe in Peru (1639)

With the inquisition having arrived on American shores, twelve Jews were burnt in an *auto de fe* in Lima, Peru, on the 18th of Shevat 5399 (1639). Of the 63 Jews who were condemned at the time to various punishments, eleven were burnt alive at the stake, along with the body of a twelfth, who had committed suicide during the trial.

Amongst those burnt was Manuel Bautista Perez, reported to have been the richest man in Peru at the time, as well as Francisco Maldonado de Silva, a surgeon, poet, and philosopher who was seized in Chile in 1627, and remained in the dungeons of the Inquisition for nearly twelve years. His devotion to his faith never wavered; while in prison he even converted two Catholics to Judaism!

**Friday, January 21, 2022 --- 18 Shevat, 5782**

### Jews of Basel Burned Alive (1349)

With the Black Death raging throughout Switzerland, poison was reported to have been found in the wells at Zofingen. Some Jews were put to the "Dümeln" (thumbscrews) test, whereupon they "admitted" their guilt of the charges brought against them. This discovery was then communicated to the people of Basel, Zurich, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, and even Cologne.

The Jews of Basel were burned on an island in the Rhine on January 9, 1349, in wooden huts that were especially built for the occasion. Their children, who were spared, were taken and forcibly baptized.

### 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).

### Murder of Daniel Pearl by Muslim Terrorists in Pakistan (2002)

Daniel Pearl, an American-born Jewish reporter for *The Wall Street Journal* was kidnapped by terrorists in Karachi by a militant group calling itself the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty, which claimed that Pearl was a spy.

Nine days later, on Shevat 19 (Feb 1), Pearl was beheaded on videotape. The gruesome tape has Pearl stating that, "... My father's Jewish, my mother's Jewish, I'm Jewish. ..."

**Shabbat, January 22, 2022 --- 19 Shevat, 5782**

### 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.