

Torah Weekly

January 8-14, 2023
15-21 Tevet, 5783

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).

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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 *tzorrits* 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.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman

What Are You Needed For

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:

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, Hagar, 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.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

Monday, January 9, 2023 --- 16 Tevet, 5783

Salvation of Baghdad Jewry (1638)

On this date, Murad IV, sultan of the Ottoman Empire, recaptured Baghdad from the Persian Shah after a forty-day siege. The Jews of Baghdad, who had suffered under the Shah's tenure, celebrated this day each year to praise G-d for rescuing them from Persian rule. According to legend, the Jews assisted in the capture by secretly conveying a message to the Sultan about a breach in the wall through which his forces could enter the city.

Tuesday, January 10, 2023 --- 17 Tevet, 5783

1st NY Synagogue (1728)

In 1684, a group of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who fled the Inquisition, held a Rosh Hashanah service in New Amsterdam, thereby founding congregation Shearith Israel ("Remnant of Israel"). On this 17th of Tevet in 1728, the congregation purchased a lot in Lower Manhattan to erect the first synagogue in New York.

Toldot Aaron (1754)

Rabbi Aaron Zelig ben Joel Feivush of Ostrog, Russia, author of *Toldot Aaron*, passed away on Tevet 17 of the year in 5515 from creation (1754).

Maggid of Dubne (1841)

Tevet 17 is also the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yaakov Wolf Krantz (1740-1804), the Maggid (preacher) of Dubna, particularly known for the parables (meshalim) he employed in his sermons and writings.

Wednesday, January 11, 2023--- 18 Tevet, 5783

Huna Killed (469)

The Exilarch ("Reish Galuta") of Babylonian Jewry, Huna Mori bar Mar Zutra, was executed in Pumpadita by order of the Persian emperor on the 18th of Tevet of the year 4229 from creation (469 of the common era). Also killed on that day was Rav Mesharshia bar Pekod (the third Jewish leader who was arrested with them, Rav Ameimar bar Mar Yenuka, was executed two months later).

B'nei Yissachar (1841)

The 18th of Tevet the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dynov (1783?-1841), author of the Chassidic work *B'nei Yissachar*.

Thursday, January 12, 2023 --- 19 Tevet, 5783

Judah Touro (1854)

The 19th of Tevet is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of American Jewish philanthropist Judah Touro (1775-1854).

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.

Friday, January 13, 2023 --- 20 Tevet, 5783

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). Join the Maimonides Study Cycle, to learn more, write to our office.

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)

Shabbat, January 14, 2023 --- 21 Tevet, 5783

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 (1690)

On December 23 (21 Teves), 1690, 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).