

# Torah Weekly

כ"ב ט' תשפ"ג

January 15-21, 2023  
22 – 28 Tevet, 5783

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 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).

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.

## Never Lose the Spirit

Imagine you have been working on the job for years and years. It is hard, manual labor and you are not simply tired but exhausted, demoralized, drained and frustrated. And then, one fine day, some new fellow on the floor stands up and promises a whole new world of equality, rewards and ultimate freedom. Do you believe him or are you beyond hope? Do you dare hold out for a better tomorrow and risk being devastated and cast into despair yet again or do you simply accept your fate and give up dreaming?

So it was with our ancestors in Egypt. They were slaving away all those years when a new face appeared and began making promises. Moses brings a message from G-d that they are about to be redeemed. There is a Promised Land ahead. All is not lost. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

The Jews' response? *And they did not listen to Moses out of shortness of breath and from the hard labor.*

One commentary explains that "shortness of breath" shouldn't be understood only literally. The Hebrew for breath is *ruach*, which can also mean "spirit." In other words, they weren't able to heed Moses' call not only from physical breathlessness, but because they lacked the spirit. Having suffered in bondage for so long, they no longer had the faith or hope to believe that freedom was still in the realm of the possible. It was simply beyond them. They had lost the spirit.

In the history of Egypt not a single slave had ever escaped. How could an entire nation ever walk free? Moses was a dreamer, they must have thought. It is just not realistic to hold out such high hopes only to have them dashed yet again. And so the people were utterly despondent and spiritless and, therefore, they could not hear,

i.e. absorb, Moses' message.

It happens all too often. People become so set in their mediocrity that they give up hope of ever achieving the breakthrough. Marriages get stuck in the rut of routine and the tedious treadmill keeps rolling along until we lose even the desire to dream. And Israel's people, even brave leaders, are so despondent from years of war, attrition and terror that they clutch at imaginary straws because, basically, if we are honest with ourselves, they have simply lost the resolve.

I have often quoted a wise proverb heard in the name of the legendary Chasid, Reb Mendel Futerfas. "If you lose your money, you've lost nothing. Money comes and money goes. If you lose your health, you've lost half. You are not the person you were before. But if you lose your resolve, you've lost it all." Moses brought new hope to a depressed, dreamless nation. He gave them back the spirit they had lost and eventually, through the miracles of G-d, the promise was fulfilled and the dream became destiny.

To be out of breath is normal. To be out of spirit is something the Jewish People can never afford. May we never lose the spirit. *By Rabbi Yossy 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." 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.

*By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

**Sunday, January 15, 2023 --- 22 Tevet, 5783**

**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.

**Monday, January 16, 2023 --- 23 Tevet, 5783**

**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 stayed and kept 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 hidden Jews throughout Spain, Portugal and their colonies for continuing to secretly practice the Jewish faith.

**Tuesday, January 17, 2023 --- 24 Tevet, 5783**

**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.

**Safed Earthquake (1837)**

A devastating earthquake struck northern Israel, killing four thousand Jews in Safed and between 700 to 1000 Jews in Tiberias. Many of the survivors migrated to Hebron, rejuvenating the developing Chabad community established there 10 years earlier by the second Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch.

**Mt. Sinai Hospital (1852)**

One of the first hospitals in America under Jewish direction, Mount Sinai Hospital, was founded in New York on this date in 1852.

**Wednesday, January 18, 2023 --- 24 Tevet, 5783**

**Chovot Halevavot published (1559)**

*Chovot Halevavot*, the classical work on Jewish ethics, was authored by Rabbi Bachya ben Yosef ibn Paquda (the first "Rabbeinu Bechaye") 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).

**Friday, January 20, 2023 --- 27 Tevet, 5783**

**Passing of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (1888)**

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), Talmudist, scholar, philosopher, prolific author and Rabbi of Frankfurt am Main, passed away on this date.

**Shabbat, January 1, 2022 --- 25 Tevet, 5782**

**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 of satined memory, was born on Tevet 28.