

Torah Weekly

ת"בס

January 29 – February 4, 2023
7 - 13 Shevat, 5783

Torah reading:
Exodus 13:17 - 17:16
Haftarah:
Judges 4:4 - 5:31

PARSHAT BESHALACH

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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What Does G-d Have to Do with It?

Is it possible to be spiritual and selfish at the same time? Let us have a look at the words of the Torah that shed important light on this question.

Vayasa Moshe et ha-am—“Moses made the people journey from the sea.” The great miracle had happened. The sea had split and the Egyptian army was no more. The word *vayasa*—“he made [them] journey”—implies that Moses had to force his people to move on. But why was this necessary? Why wouldn't they move on their own?

According to Rashi, the enemy was so confident of victory against the Israelites that they bedecked their horses and chariots with gold, silver and precious jewels. These treasures were now being washed up on the seashore, and the Jews were collecting the riches. So they were in no mood to move on. But Moses said they had a date with G-d at Mount Sinai. As the nation's leader, he had to compel them to carry on their journey.

The Zohar gives a more spiritual explanation. We are taught that the divine revelation at the splitting of the sea was quite an extraordinary experience. In the words of our sages, “What a simple maidservant saw at the sea, even the great prophets were not privileged to see.” According to this mystical view, it was not the material wealth they were obsessed with, but rather the incredible spiritual delights they were experiencing.

Either way, it was up to Moses to move them along to their appointment with destiny. And the question is this: If it was gold and silver that was delaying their journey to Sinai, we can well understand the need for Moses to hurry them on. But if it was the spiritual experience

of inspired revelation, why move on? Why not stay there as long as possible? Surely, the more G-dly revelation the better! The answer is that G-d was calling. Sinai was beckoning. The entire purpose of the Exodus and all the miracles in Egypt and at the sea was nothing more than to receive the Torah at Sinai. That was the revelation that would give the Jewish people its unique way of life and its very *raison d'être*. Sinai represents our mission, our mandate. Sinai made us G-d's messengers on earth. However we may understand the concept of a chosen people, it was the Sinaitic experience that made us that. Any detours or distractions from the journey to Sinai are therefore out of the question—no matter how lofty or spiritual they might be.

It comes as no great shock to learn that gold and silver are not as important as Sinai. But that spirituality, too, must take second place to Sinai—this is indeed big news. And what exactly is Sinai? Torah. And what is Torah? The will of G-d. In other words, the bottom line is: what does G-d want? How does He want us to act, to live our lives? So, the big news story here is that even the most amazing spiritual experience, the most extraordinary revelation, is not as important as doing what G-d wants us to do.

It is a very important message that emerges from this one word, *vayasa*. It's not what we want that counts, but what G-d wants. If we want money and diamonds, and He wants to give us His Torah, then we leave the loot and we go to Sinai. And even if it is a spiritual experience we seek, and G-d says “Go to Sinai,” we still go to Sinai and we leave the spiritual inspiration for another time.

The following is a true story. It

once happened back in the old country that late one night, a wagon driver ran into a *yeshivah* and cried out to the students to come out and help him. It was urgent, he said. His wagon had overturned, and his horse was stuck in a ditch and was in danger of dying. He needed help to get the wagon upright. It was late at night, and there was no one else he could turn to, so he appealed to the *yeshivah* students to come to his assistance.

At this point the students' Talmudic training kicked in, and a long halachic debate ensued. Was it right to leave their Torah study for the sake of a horse? After all, is not Torah study equal to all the other mitzvot combined? On the other hand, the horse provided this Jew's livelihood. Which takes precedence? The debate raged on and on—and when they finally did decide to go out and help the poor man, it was too late. The horse had died.

Sometimes we can get so caught up in our own spirituality that we become quite selfish. Spiritually selfish, of course, but selfish nonetheless. At the end of the day, it's not whether we are into materialism or monotheism, money or metaphysics. The ultimate question—and, in fact, the only question—is: what does G-d want of me at this moment in time? Where should I be and what should I be doing right now?

So, if you find yourself in a quandary or on the horns of a difficult dilemma, ask yourself this very question: *What would G-d want?* Yes, sometimes it might be helping a horse out of a ditch. But if that is the call of the hour, then so be it. It might not be very spiritual, but it is the right thing to do.

And if it's the right thing to do,

that makes it very G-dly.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

The Name's the Same

How is it possible that, after 210 years of enslavement in an alien environment, the Jews left Egypt as Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, and not as "Rameses" or "Potiphar"? The secret lies in the way they first entered Egypt: "These are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt... Reuben, Simeon, Levi, etc...."

When Jews enter Egypt, a land whose way of life and general outlook is the very opposite of their own, the first vital step is to ensure that the children do not forget who they are and who their parents were. They must always know and ever remember that they are the Children of Israel, Jewish children, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. They must cling to their Jewish names with pride; their daily conduct must immediately identify them as Jewish children, as a Reuben, a Simeon, a Levi, and a Judah.

Such pride can only be instilled by a deep-rooted Jewish education, which imbues children with the strength of character to remain a separate, unique, distinct people, despite the severest hardships of the Egyptian exile. Such education builds an inner strength and provides the assurance that we will leave Egypt with all our children intact, with our sons and daughters proud, intense, and wholesome Jews.

Eternal Torah proclaims an ever-relevant message for all ages and for all lands — a message of particular pertinence and importance in our day and in this land: The survival of the Jewish people, the unity of the Jewish home, and the guarantee that our children will remain proud and aware Jews, is completely dependent upon a thorough, Torah-true education without compromise and without dilution.

By Rabbi Yitschak Meir Kagan

Wednesday, February 1, 2023 --- 10 Shevat, 5783

Passing of the Rashash (1777)

Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, known by his name's acronym, the *RaShaSH*, was born in Yemen, and as a young man immigrated to Israel. He was quickly recognized for his piety and scholarship, especially in the area of Jewish mysticism, and was appointed to be dean of the famed Kabbalistic learning center in the Old City of Jerusalem, the *Yeshivat ha-Mekubbalim*.

He authored many works, mostly based on the teachings of the great kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, the Ari. Rabbi Sharabi's most famous work is a commentary on the prayerbook, replete with kabbalistic meditations.

His mystical works are studied by kabbalists to this very day. He is also considered to be a foremost authority on Yemenite Jewish traditions and customs.

Passing of Rebbetzin Rivkah (1914)

Rebbetzin Rivkah Schneerson was born in Lubavitch in 1833; her maternal grandfather was Rabbi DovBer, the 2nd Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch. In 1849 she married her first cousin, Rabbi Shmuel, who later became the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe. For many years Rebbetzin Rivkah, who survived her husband by 33 years, was the esteemed matriarch of Lubavitch, and Chassidim frequented her home to listen to her accounts of the early years of Lubavitch. She is the source of many of the stories recorded in the talks, letters and memoirs of her grandson, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak (the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe). The Beth Rivkah network of girls' schools, founded by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak in the 1940's, is named after her.

Yahrtzeit of R. Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1950)

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, passed away on Shabbat morning, the 10th of Shevat, of the year 5710 from creation (1950)

Lubavitcher Rebbe assumes leadership (1951)

At a gathering of Chassidim marking the first anniversary of the passing of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Rebbe's son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, delivered a Chassidic discourse (*maamar*) entitled *Basi LeGani* ("I Came into My Garden"), signifying his formal acceptance of the leadership of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

Thursday, February 2, 2023 --- 11 Shevat, 5783

Birth of the "Chafetz Chaim" (1838)

Birth of the revered Torah scholar, pietist and Jewish leader Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933) of Radin (Poland), author of *Chafetz Chaim* (a work on the evils of gossip and slander and the guidelines of proper speech) and *Mishnah Berurah* (a codification of Torah law).

Friday, February 3, 2023 --- 12 Shevat, 5783

Warsaw Ghetto Insurgency Begins (1943)

On January 18, 1943, the Germans began their second deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto, which led to the first instance of armed resistance. The deportation was halted within a few days; only 5,000 Jews were removed instead of 8,000 as planned. The Nazis retreated, only to return three months later, at which time the Warsaw uprising started in earnest.

Passing of R. Chaim Kapusi (1631)

R. Chaim Kapusi was one of the leading sages of Egypt in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He passed away at the age of ninety, on 12 Shevat in the year 5391 from Creation (1631).

It is related that R. Chaim once became blind, and the townsfolk spread rumors attributing his condition to bribery, as the verse states, "Bribery blinds the eyes of the wise." Hearing this, R. Chaim got up before the entire congregation and announced: "If it is true that I have accepted bribery, may my eyes retain their sightlessness. But if it is not true, may my vision be restored!" Miraculously, his vision returned immediately, and he proceeded to identify the congregants by name (*Shem Hagedolim*).

Shabbat, February 4, 2023 --- 13 Shevat, 5783

Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah Schneersohn (1942)

Wife of the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneerson, and mother of the sixth Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah (1860-1942) lived through the upheavals of the first half of the 20th century. She fled the advancing front of World War I from Lubavitch to Rostov, where her husband passed away in 1920 at age 59. In 1927, she witnessed the arrest of her son by Stalin's henchmen the night he was taken away and sentenced to death, G-d forbid, for his efforts to keep Judaism alive throughout the Soviet empire. After Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's release, the family resettled in Latvia and later, Poland; in 1940, they survived the bombing of Warsaw, were rescued from Nazi-occupied city, and emigrated to the United States. Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah passed away in New York on the 13th of Shevat of 1942.

Auschwitz Liberated (1945)

On January 27, 1945, the Russian army arrived in Auschwitz, the most infamous of the Nazi death camps, and liberated some 7,000 survivors—those left behind as unfit to join the evacuation "Death March."