

# Torah Weekly

31 December, 2023,1-6  
January 2024  
19-25 Tevet 5784

Torah Shemot:  
Exodus 1:1 - 6:1  
Haftorah: 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).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center  
5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-421-0111  
Fax: 412-521-5948  
www.alephne.org  
info@alephne.org



**ALEPH  
INSTITUTE**  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

## Where Were You?

"Where were you?" Whether the question is from Mom, the boss, the wife, the husband or the grown children; they are not asking, they are accusing: Why weren't you where you were supposed to be? Your answer is an excuse. Unless you answer "I've been here the whole time."

A shepherd sees a little lamb run off. The shepherd runs after the lamb: to save it from wolves, to ensure the lamb has enough water and enough tender green grass.

While chasing the lamb, he sees a bush on fire, but it isn't burning. He takes off his shoes in deference. He is told by He-knows-who to go free the people from Pharaoh.

But they will ask me Your name, what do I say? asks the shepherd. A bizarre question matched by an equally perplexing answer: tell them my name is I Will Be As I Will Be. (It is the first recorded conversation between the world's greatest teacher and the world's foremost student.)

What is your name? A name is how we relate; it defines who is speaking to whom. If you say Dad, Mr. Smith, Dr. Smith or Sonny or Bubba you're not talking about you or them; you are articulating a relationship. What is your name? How have you related to these people as Pharaoh threw their sons into the Nile, kidnapped their daughters, bathed in their newborns'

blood? Used their children's bodies to fill quotas of unmade bricks? Where were You?

And He answers: Tell them I Will Be As I Will Be. Where was I? I was with them the whole time. When Pharaoh bathed in their babies' blood, it was my blood that was spilled. When he shoved their tiny limbs into spaces meant for bricks, it was me who was shoved in there. Everything they endured, I endured. Everyone who tortured them tortured me. "I am with them in their suffering."

A bush is on fire but it is not consumed. A nation is threatened with death — killed time and time again — but it does not die.

But how does the bush burn without being consumed? For it is I in the fire. Just as I live forever, they live with me. Just as these people live forever, I live with them. We will get burnt on the way. We will suffer. But we will suffer together. And we will not be consumed. Alone. Together.

Why, though, is all this suffering, and retelling and reliving of this suffering, not melancholy to those who live it and tell it and live it again? Because it reminds them of the second phase of the words spoken to the barefooted shepherd. That together we will live, we will leave. With tangible treasure and unmitigated spirit.

*By Shimon Posner*

## Thrown into the River

Our Parshah tells of the harshness of the ancient Egyptian aggression against the Jewish people. First they were enslaved. Then there was a new, cruel decree: "any boy who is born should be thrown into the river" (Exodus 1:22).

The Sages explain that, like everything in the Torah, this command to throw the Jewish children into the Nile can be understood on several levels. One, of course, is the literal meaning of the physical threat. Another level of meaning has direct relevance to us today.

In Egyptian life the Nile River was seen, quite naturally, as the source of the great prosperity of the land. With reliable regularity the Nile would overflow its banks, providing water for the irrigation for the fertile Nile valley, the basis of the Egyptian economy. For this reason the river was worshipped as an idol.

The idea that the Jewish children should be thrown into the Nile therefore implies a change in the orientation of the Jewish people and of their perspective on the world. They had come from the Land of Israel where the crops depended on the infrequent and irregular rainfall. Everyone was aware that G-d controlled the rain. So people prayed to G-d... Now however in Egypt, they were being "thrown into the river".

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

Instead of seeing G-d as the source of their sustenance, the Jews would now perceive only apparently reliable, natural forces. They would feel themselves to be totally dependent on the natural, regular flow of the Nile rather than on G-d, the Creator of the Universe.

They would no longer pray to G-d to help them in their endeavors to make a living. They would simply rely confidently on the natural power of the Egyptian river. This would be a deeper, spiritual level of slavery. It would affect not the bodies of the Jews, but their souls...

The physical slavery of Egypt is a thing of the ancient past. However, the threat of the spiritual form of slavery is still with us. So every year we read again the account of how we became slaves in Egypt, and the way Moses inspired in us a subtle change of perspective: the awareness that Nature is merely an instrument of G-d, Who alone rules the world.

Through this knowledge, both then and now, we gain our freedom.

*By Professor Tali Loewenthal*

*"Please continue with your extra prayers, reading of Tehilim (Psalms) as the war continues with our brethren in our Holyland.*

*Every act of kindness and good deed makes the difference."*

**Sunday, December 31, 2023-19 Tevet, 5784**

**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.

**Monday, January 1, 2024-20 Tevet, 5784**

**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)

**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)

**Tuesday, January 2, 2024-21 Tevet, 5784**

**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. **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).

**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).

**Wednesday, January 3, 2024-22 Tevet, 5784**

**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

**Thursday, January 4, 2024-23 Tevet, 5784**

**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.

**Friday, January 5, 2024-24 Tevet, 5784**

**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.

**Shabbat, January 6, 2024-25 Tevet, 5784**

**Chovot Halevavot published (1559)**

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