

# Torah Weekly

ת"ב

7-13 January 2024  
26 Tevet - 3 Shevat 5784

Torah Va'eira:  
Exodus 6:2 - 9:35  
Haftarah: Ezekiel 28:25 - 29:21

## PARSHAT VA'EIRA

### Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

### Psalms Daily

#### Say Psalm for our brethren in the Holyland.

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.

2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah! (Ch 117)

Please add daily chapter 20.

### 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).

## " The Prophetic Experience

Every once in a while, my children ask me to help them with one of the many puzzles in the cupboard. The usual routine has us sit down on the floor where I examine the shape, color and picture fragment of a puzzle piece to determine where it belongs. Invariably, my little daughter will grab the piece from my hand and place it exactly where it is meant to go, leaving me to conclude that it was my company she desired more than my skills. The reason she is so much better at it than I am is that she knows the entire picture. When she looks at a puzzle piece, she visualizes the complete puzzle and knows exactly where that fragment fits in. I must contend myself with examining the piece and deducing from it what the surrounding pieces must look like. In other words, her knowledge flows from the picture to the fragment while my knowledge flows from the fragment to the picture. Where I see incomplete images, she sees portions of a perfect picture. This was precisely the difference between Moses and the many prophets who followed him. Moses was familiar with the divine master plan and saw each prophecy within the context of that plan. Later prophets struggled to understand the details of what they were given and from them they attempted to deduce the wider implications of the master plan. Humility – Key to Inspiration. Why was Moses accorded this distinction? The Torah informs us that Moses was not only the greatest prophet but also the most humble man on earth. These two qualities are interconnected.

Moses did not view himself as a separate entity from G-d; he was completely detached from himself with no sense of independent ego. His entire consciousness was absorbed within G-d. Pious as they were, the later prophets did not see themselves this way. They strove mightily to achieve full communion with G-d but, try as they might, they could not reach

Moses' level. In the end they and G-d remained, ostensibly, separate entities. G-d was the speaker, and they were the listeners. Because Moses was, also in his own consciousness, not an entity separate from G-d, he was never overwhelmed by prophecy. He could easily relate to the words G-d spoke to him and understand both the prophecies themselves and their wider context. Prophesying was natural to Moshe for he and his prophecy were fully one.

The later prophet was not fully one with his prophecy; prophecy came to him from a place beyond himself. The actual prophecy phase always overwhelmed him and upon its conclusion he would need to step back and examine the vision he had received. Once he stepped back and returned to his usual self, the transcendent vision would appear enigmatic. To decipher it he would need to apply himself intellectually. Where Moses saw a perfect portion of a greater image, the later prophet he saw an incomplete fragment and struggled to make sense of it. Later prophets transmitted their prophecy in their own words; but Moses' prophecy would become an instant "live feed" through which G-d's words were broadcast to the Jewish people. As our sages have said, "the Shechinah (Divine Presence) spoke from Moses' throat.

#### An Ordinary Beginning

It was not always this way for Moses. When he first started he also struggled to understand his prophetic experiences. The burning bush was the first image he was given to interpret.<sup>5</sup> From there he went on to receive further riddles that required unraveling, such as the stick turning to a serpent, his hand becoming leprous and the water turning to blood.

Moses' defining moment came with the most enigmatic of all his prophecies, which appears in the end of last week's Parsha. G-d instructed Moses to demand that Pharaoh set the Israelites free. In response, Pharaoh defiantly increased the pressure on the people by refusing to provide

building supplies yet demanding the same work quotas as before.

Moses, yet unschooled in matters of the divine plan, couldn't accept this development and turned in anger to G-d, "Why have you harmed your people?" Moses was saying that he couldn't understand the logic of his mission. G-d's seemingly unsatisfactory response is found in the beginning of this week's Parsha. "I am G-d. I have revealed myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and have not shown them my intimate name." How does this response satisfy Moses' heart-rending demand?

Unprecedented and Unmitigated G-d was telling Moses that he would now be permitted to see what no prophet ever would: G-d's essence.<sup>10</sup> When G-d's essence is revealed it completely absorbs the viewer, for it's not possible to see G-d and remain detached. From here on Moses could no longer receive his prophecy as a separate entity, outside from G-d. He would now become fully absorbed within the divine. His senses would be fully attached to G-d, he would have no desire for anything but G-d, and he would stand fully prepared for prophecy at all times.<sup>11</sup> He would be wholly and fully a vehicle of G-d. Once he transferred from a self-based entity to a G-d-based perspective, Moses became a conduit for divine thought and was made privy to the master plan. He could now see the context of every detail and understand how it fits the divine master plan. Like my daughter who knows her puzzle, Moses would now know the full scope of G-d's plan. Now he would clearly understand the reason for the harm his mission wrought. He now understood that in manipulating Pharaoh to issue this cruel decree, G-d sealed Egypt's fate and triggered the onset of the Ten Plagues.

By Lazer Gurkow

## The Greatest Miracle of All

Did G-d perhaps forget how to make miracles? The believing Jew, too, asks the same



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questions—albeit in a more respectful tone. Yes, he understands that G-d controls nature as well as the supernatural; but why did G-d choose to flip the switch, deciding to abandon the course of miracles and to run the world entirely through the laws of nature? Why did G-d choose to abandon the course of miracles and to run the world entirely through the laws of nature? The book of Exodus introduces us to the era of openly nature-defying miracles,<sup>1</sup> an era which lasted roughly a millennium. The Scriptures are filled with stories of prophets and miracles; in fact, it seems that the laws of nature were temporarily defunct. This era ended with the destruction of the first Holy Temple. Afterward, there were a few brief glimpses of the supernatural—such as the miracle of Chanukah—but after a few centuries these too vanished. For the past two thousand years we live in a double exile: physically, we were banished from

our homeland; spiritually, we cannot perceive the G-dly hand which creates and directs all of creation. The reason for the emergence and subsequent appearance of miracles is linked to the purpose of our very existence. Life in the Garden of Eden was idyllic, because evil was not yet part of the human character. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge imbued Adam and Eve with an intimate knowledge of physical and material desire. The moment they were expelled from the Garden is the moment when the story of the perpetual human struggle began: the struggle of choosing between the G-dly (good) or the opposite (egotism, hedonism, etc.). And actually, this is what G-d really wanted from the moment He considered the idea of creation: a free-choosing human being who would struggle with the evil and self-centeredness which are natural parts of his personality, and would triumph. Miracles are comparable to

training wheels. In the early years of our nationhood, G-d assisted us in our struggle by frequently and very openly interfering in the happenings of this world. A miracle opens the eyes to a higher truth, and motivates a person to want to connect to this higher reality through Torah and mitzvot. Ultimately, however, we need to mature. The messianic era is the consummation of our relationship with G-d, and to earn this privilege we have to prove that the relationship is real to us, so real that we maintain this relationship even in the absence of any revealed reciprocation from G-d. We are greatest miracle of all: our ability to steadfastly remain loyal to G-d throughout two thousand years of temptation, despite the spiritual blackness which surrounds us.

*By Naftali Silberberg*

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, January 7, 2024-26 Tevet, 5784**

**Sicilian Jews Forced to Wear Jewish Badges (1369)**

On December 25, 1369 (5129), King Frederick III of Sicily ordered all Jews to wear a badge indicating their heritage. The badge consisted of a piece of red material, not smaller than the largest royal seal; men were required to wear it under the chin, and women on the chest.

**Monday, January 8, 2024-27 Tevet, 5784**

**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. He was instrumental in revitalizing German Jewry, bringing thousands back to the teachings of the Torah at a time when assimilationist trends threatened to extinguish Jewish life in Western Europe.

**Tuesday, January 9, 2024-28 Tevet, 5784**

**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. (See the entry for 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, was born on Tevet 28.

**Wednesday, January 10, 2024-29 Tevet, 5784**

**Winter**

According to Rabbi Judah (cited in the Talmud, Bava Metzia 106b), Tevet 29 marks the end of winter. (As per Genesis 8:22, the year consists of six 2-month "seasons": seedtime, harvest, cold, heat, summer and winter.)

**Passing of R. Yitzchak Kaduri (2006)**

Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri, known in recent years as "the eldest of the Kabbalists," in the Holy Land, was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1898. As a youth, he studied under the great "Ben Ish Chai" (Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, 1840-1913) and was regarded as an illu (prodigy) by the sages of the venerable Baghdad Jewish community. In 1922, Rabbi Kaduri passed away on the 29th of Tevet of 2006, age 108. Hundreds of thousands attended his funeral in Jerusalem.

**Jews of Tripoli Saved (1795)**

In 1793, Tripoli (in what is now Libya) fell under the rule of the cruel Ali Burghul, who took advantage of divisions within the local leadership to take control of the city. Burghul terrorized the city's inhabitants—especially the Jews—with excessive taxes and unjust executions. Among those executed was the son of R. Abraham Khalfon, the head of the Jewish community. In 1795, a local Jew helped negotiate an agreement between the opposing factions, and on 29 Teves they succeeded in driving Burghul out of the city. The community celebrated this day each year as a day of rejoicing, and would recite a special hymn recounting the miracle (printed in Se'u Zimrah, pp. 191ff.). The community of Tripoli kept a similar date of rejoicing one week earlier, on 23 Teves, commemorating the date (in 1705) when a siege that had been placed on the city by the ruler of Tunisia was lifted.

**Thursday, January 11, 2024-1 Shevat, 5784**

**Moses Repeats the Torah**

On the first of Shevat in the year 2488 from creation, Moses convened the Jewish people and began the 37-day "review of the Torah" contained in the Book of Deuteronomy, which he concluded on the day of his passing on Adar 7 of that year.

**Friday, January 12, 2024-2 Shevat, 5784**

**Alexander-Yannai's death celebrated (76 BCE)**

Hashmonean King Alexander-Yannai (Jannaeus), an avowed enemy of the Jewish sages, died on this date. So great was his cruelty and the ruthlessness with which he persecuted the Sages and those loyal to them (some 50,000 were killed in the years 82-76 BCE), that the day of his death was declared a holiday.

**Purim Rome (1793)**

On this day, Shevat 2 (January 14, 1793), a frenzied mob gathered around the Jewish ghetto of Rome with the intention of setting it on fire. Miraculously, heavy rains began to fall, and it became impossible for the bloodthirsty horde to carry out their plans, thus saving the homes and lives of the Jews from destruction. Every year, that day, also known as Moed di Piombo ("Holiday of Gray [Clouds]"), has been celebrated as a day of thanksgiving by the Jews of Rome.

**R. Zusha of Anipoli (1800)**

Shevat 2 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Chassidic Master Rabbi Meshulam Zusha of Anipoli (1718?-1800), a disciple of the 2nd leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch. Despite Rabbi Zusha's erudition and great piety, he was distinguished by his self-effacement and simple ways. His colleagues said of him that he was literally incapable of seeing anything negative in a fellow Jew.

**Shabbat, January 13, 2024-3 Shevat, 5784**

**Amshinover Rebbe (1936)**

Shevat 3 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of the Amshinover Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef ben Rabbi Menachem Kalisch, of righteous memory, in 1936.