

PARSHAT BO

4 – 10 Shevat 5784
14 - 20 January 2024

Torah: Exodus 10:1-13:16
Haftorah: Jeremiah 46:13-28

Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

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!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Psalms Daily

Grape Juice &

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain/Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Finding Freedom

“Free at last, free at last, thank G-d Almighty we are free at last.” Who said these words? No, it wasn't Moses, but American civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King. But it could have been Moses – or for that matter any one of the millions of Jews who were liberated from Egyptian bondage. This is the week when we read of the great Exodus. “Let my people go that they may serve Me” was the Divine call transmitted by Moses to Pharaoh. Now, if the purpose of leaving Egypt and Pharaoh's whip was to be able to serve G-d, so where is the freedom? We are still slaves, only now we are servants of the Almighty!

Indeed, countless individuals continue to question the merits of religion in general. Who wants to submit to the rigors of religion when we can be free spirits? Religion, they argue, stifles the imagination, stunts our creative style, forever shouts instructions and lays down the law. Thou Shalt do this and Thou Shalt better not do that, or else! Do's and don'ts, rules and regulations are the hallmark of every belief system; but why conform to any system at all? Why not just be "me"? Many Jews argue similarly. Mitzvahs cramp my style. Keeping kosher is a serious inconvenience. Shabbat really gets in the way of my weekend. And Passover has got to be the biggest headache of the year. Long ago, the sages of the Talmud said it was actually the other way around. There is no one as free as he who is occupied with the study of Torah. But how can this possibly be true? Torah is filled with rules of law, ethics and even expectations and exhortations that we take the high road and behave beyond the call of duty. How could they say that Torah makes us free? Surely it is inhibiting rather than liberating?

If you want to enjoy the freedom of the high seas, you must first become a slave to the compass. Let me share an answer I once heard on the radio while driving in my

car. It was during a BBC interview with Malcolm Muggeridge, the former editor of Punch, the satirical British magazine. Punch magazine was arguably England's most irreverent publication. It mocked and ridiculed the royal family long before they did it to themselves. In his later years, Malcolm Muggeridge became religious and the interviewer was questioning how the sultan of satire, the prince of Punch could make such a radical transformation and become religious? How could he stifle such a magnificent free spirit as his? Muggeridge's answer was a classic, which I still quote regularly. He said he had a friend who was a famous yachtsman, an accomplished navigator of the high seas. A lesson he once gave him in sailing would provide the answer to the reporter's question. The yachtsman taught him that if you want to enjoy the freedom of the high seas, you must first become a slave to the compass. A young novice might challenge the experienced professional's advice. But why should I follow that little gadget? Why can't I go where I please? It's my yacht! But every intelligent person understands that without the navigational fix provided by the compass we will flounder and sail in circles. Only by following the lead of the compass will the wind catch our sails so we can experience the ecstasy and exhilaration of the high seas. If you want to enjoy the freedom of the high seas, you must first become a slave to the compass.

The Torah is the compass of life. It provides our navigational fix so we know where to go and how to get there. Without the Torah's guidance and direction, we would be lost in the often stormy seas of confusion. Without a spiritual guidance system we flounder about, wandering aimlessly through life. Just look at our kids when they're on vacation from school and are "free" from the disciplines of the educational system. Unless they have a program of some kind to keep them busy – like a summer camp – they become very frustrated in their "freedom."

Within the Torah lifestyle there is still ample room for spontaneity and freedom of expression. Not all rabbis are clones. To the untrained eye every yeshiva bochur looks identical – a black hat, glasses, and a beard. The truth is that everyone is distinctively different; an individual with his very own tastes attitudes, personality and preferences. They may look the same, but they are each unique.

We can be committed to the compass and still be free spirits. Indeed, there are none as free as they who are occupied with Torah.

By Yossy Goldman

Initiation Rituals

Has a friend ever approached you to share a worry or issue that weighs heavily on her heart? Have you ever responded by assuring her to “look at the bright side” or “if you think that's bad, let me tell you what happened to my relative . . .”? While your intention is to help her get “past it,” by belittling the issue or not fully exploring the extent of her worry or sorrow, you actually aren't being helpful at all. This week's Torah portion, Bo (“come”), describes the last plagues visited upon the Egyptians, culminating with the exodus of the Jewish people. In the opening verse, G-d instructs Moses, “Come to Pharaoh . . .,” to warn Pharaoh of the upcoming plagues and to demand their release. Since the name of each Torah section conveys its primary message, why is Bo not titled “Freedom” or something that describes the extraordinary exodus? In fact, the name, “Come [to Pharaoh],” reminds us of the opposite – of the Jewish people's slavery. Moses needed to petition Pharaoh and appeal to him to free his people. Commentaries also question the usage of the term “come to Pharaoh,” instead of the more appropriate “go to Pharaoh.” But perhaps, the title holds the psychological key to finding solutions to our challenges. The Zohar explains that by instructing Moses to “come to Pharaoh,” G-d was inviting Moses to confront the

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essence of the Egyptian ruler. G-d told Moses to enter into Pharaoh, in the sense of entering deep within the mind and character of Egypt's arch-idol.

To liberate the children of Israel from the shackles of their servitude, it was not sufficient for Moses, their leader, to merely "go" to Pharaoh and have a peripheral vision of this leader's strength. Moses needed to fully confront Pharaoh within his "home base." He needed to enter into Pharaoh's mindset—into the bowels of his psyche, into the innards of his consciousness—in order to

comprehend the root of his power and his tenacious, tyrannical hold on the Jewish people. This was the first step towards liberation. Moses was the "shepherd" of our people. His conduct teaches us how to help ourselves and others through their respective enslavements, constrictions or challenges. In order to free someone from the shackles of their problems, fears and insecurities, we must "come to Pharaoh." Don't dismiss someone's (or your own!) issues as insignificant. Don't reassure her that this "little" incident will pass without validating what she is experiencing.

Don't distract her from her problem without dealing with it. Experience her pain, frustration and insecurity. Explore her feelings and validate her challenges. Picture her monsters and feel her fears. Understand what is inhibiting her growth. Help her face her obstacles, rather than avoid them. Only after you have fully understood what is oppressing the individual can you hope to succeed in providing the solutions for liberation.

By Chana Weisberg

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, January 14, 2024-4 Shevat, 5784

R. Abraham Kalisker (1810)

Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk (1741-1810) was a controversial figure in the 3rd generation of Chassidic leaders. In his youth, he was a study partner of Rabbi Elijah "the Gaon of Vilna," who led the initial opposition against Chassidism; but later Rabbi Abraham himself joined the forbidden kat ("sect," as the Chassidic movement was derisively called by its opponents) and became a disciple of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch, the successor to Chassidism's founder, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. After Rabbi DovBer's passing in 1772, much of the opposition to Chassidism was directed against Rabbi Abraham's disciples, who, more than any other group within the movement, mocked the intellectual elitism of the establishment's scholars and communal leaders; even Rabbi Abraham's own colleagues were dismayed by the "antics" of some of his disciples. In 1777, Rabbi Abraham joined the first Chassidic "aliyah", in which a group of more than 300 Chassidim led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk emigrated to the Holy Land. Rabbi Abraham passed away in Tiberias on the 4th of Shevat of the year 5570 from creation (1810 CE)

R. Israel Abuchatzera (1984)

Rabbi Israel Abuchatzera (1890-1984), known as "Baba Sali," was born in Tafillalt, Morocco, to the illustrious Abuchatzera family. From a young age he was renowned as a sage, miracle maker and master kabbalist. In 1964 he moved to the Holy Land, eventually settling in the southern development town he made famous, Netivot. He passed away in 1984 on the 4th of Shevat. His graveside in Netivot has become a holy site visited by thousands annually.

Monday, January 15, 2024-5 Shevat, 5784

2nd Gerer Rebbe (1905)

Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (1847-1905), the second Rebbe in the Chassidic dynasty of Ger -- known for his famed Chassidic work "Sefat Emet" -- passed away on the 5th of Shevat of the year 5665 from creation (1905). He was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Abraham Mordechai.

Tuesday, January 16, 2024-6 Shevat, 5784

Majorcan Jews Guaranteed Protection (1393)

The governor of Majorca issued an edict for the protection of the Jewish inhabitants, providing that any citizen who injures a Jew would be hanged. The advantageous position of the islands, as well as their newly found protection, attracted many Jews from Provence, Sicily, Tunis, and Algiers, amongst other African cities. The Jews even had their own organizations and representatives by sanction of the King.

Wednesday, January 17, 2024-7 Shevat, 5784

R. Dovid of Lelov (1814)

Chassidic master Rabbi Dovid Biederman of Lelov (1746-1814) was a disciple of the "Seer of Lublin." Rabbi Dovid was known for his extraordinary Ahavat Yisrael; it was said of him that he was incapable of seeing faults in a fellow Jew. Two printed collections of stories about him are Migdal David and Kodesh Hillulim.

Thursday, January 18, 2024-8 Shevat, 5784

End of the "Elders Era" (1228 BCE)

The last of the Elders (z'keinim) who were contemporaries of Joshua and outlived him, passed away in the year 2533 after creation. They were part of the chain of Torah transmission as listed at the beginning of Ethics of the Fathers: "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets..." In ancient times, this day was marked as a fast day.

Friday, January 19, 2024-9 Shevat, 5784

"Moshiach's Torah Scroll" completed (1970)

The writing of the "Sefer Torah to greet Moshiach," initiated at the behest of the 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, in 1942, was concluded 28 years later at a special gathering convened by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Friday afternoon, the 9th of Shevat, on the eve of the 20th anniversary of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's passing.

Shabbat, January 20, 2024-10 Shevat, 5784

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.