

PARSHAT BO

29 Tevet – 6 Shevat 5786
18 – 24 January 2026

Torah Reading: Bo: Exodus 10:1 - 13:16

HafTORah: Jeremiah 46:13-28

PSALMS DAILY

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)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 246: Laws of Claims

We are commanded to adjudicate monetary cases between litigants [according to the laws outlined in the Torah].

Positive Mitzvah 248: Laws of Inheritance

We are commanded regarding the laws of inheritance [to follow the inheritance laws detailed in the Torah]. Included in this mitzvah is that the firstborn receives a double portion from his father's estate.

WHY DID THE JEWS SMEAR BLOOD ON THEIR LINTELS?

Heading into the climactic moment of the Exodus from Egypt and immediately prior to the Plague of the Firstborn, we encounter a fairly strange command:

Speak to the entire community of Israel, saying, "On the tenth of this month, let each one take a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for each household... And they shall take [some] of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel, on the houses in which they will eat it... I will pass through the land of Egypt on this night, and I will smite every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and upon all the gods of Egypt will I wreak judgments I, the Lord.

And the blood will be for you for a sign upon the houses where you will be, and I will see the blood and skip over you, and there will be no plague to destroy [you] when I smite the [people of the] land of Egypt.

Within the famous order to sacrifice a lamb on the eve of the Exodus lies the instruction to take its blood and mark it upon the doorpost. While the text provides some explanation, many questions remain. What exactly was this "sign"? Does G-d require a physical marker to identify Jewish homes? And why blood?

1. It Was a Marker for the Destroying Angel

Ibn Ezra explains that the blood was a sign to ensure the angel of destruction would not enter the Jewish homes.

He says that the blood was placed on the entrance to the individual houses within each courtyard. The courtyard gates were kept closed so that the Egyptians—who saw sheep as deities—would not see the blood and become enraged that the Jews had sacrificed their gods. For the same reason, to avoid drawing attention, the slaughtering was done after nightfall.

2. The Blood Showed the Boldness of the Jews

Others suggest the exact opposite: the blood was placed on the outside specifically to provoke the Egyptians. Rabbeinu Bachye elaborates, explaining that this is also why the lamb was required to be roasted—to ensure its aroma would spread, making their actions widely known.

This open display of allegiance to G-d, even amidst the pervasive idolatry of Egypt, was what made them worthy of redemption. By boldly rejecting the evil influences around them, they demonstrated their steadfast commitment

to G-d and their spiritual readiness for liberation.

3. It Signifies Life

Rabbeinu Bachye cites a verse in Leviticus which states that "blood is the soul." The blood, therefore, symbolized both death for the Egyptians—referring to the Plague of the Firstborn—and life for the Israelites. It served as a sign of protection, indicating that the "destroyer" had no permission to harm the Jewish people.

4. The "Destroyers" Came Along for the Ride

He then addresses an obvious question. If the blood protected the Jews from the "destroyer," does this imply that G-d did not personally carry out the Plague of the Firstborn, instead delegating it to an angel or destructive force? This seems to contradict the plain reading of the verses and many comments of the sages.

Rabbeinu Bachye clarifies that it was indeed G-d Himself who struck the Egyptian firstborns. However, moments of destruction inherently create opportunities for other destructive forces to act. The "destroyer" mentioned in the verse was not the primary executor of the plague, but a destructive force drawn to the chaos. The blood served to protect the Jewish homes from these secondary forces, ensuring they remained untouched by the wider destruction.

5. It Symbolized the Blood Placed on the Altar

The blood of Temple sacrifices was typically sprinkled, smeared, or poured onto the altar. For the Paschal Sacrifice, the blood was collected in a designated cup and poured at the base of the altar. The Talmud notes that in Egypt, the lintel and doorposts served as a symbolic stand-in for the altar of the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple.

6. It Was the Proto-Mezuzah

The Mechilta compares the protection of the blood placed on the doorposts to the protection offered by affixing a mezuzah to one's doorpost.

Is this not a fortiori (kal vachomer) argument? If about the blood of the Paschal Sacrifice in Egypt, which was lighter in weight—it was temporary, applicable only at that moment, not observed by day and night, and not commanded for future generations—it was said, "And He will not allow the destroyer [to strike]," then how much more so the mezuzah, which is more

stringent! It contains ten unique Divine names, is observed by day and night, and is a commandment for all generations. All the more so that "He will not allow the destroyer" to enter!

7. It Showed G-d's Essential Love

The Rebbe explains that the Plague of the Firstborn stemmed from a level of G-dliness beyond the limits of the natural order, reflecting G-d's essence which transcends judgment and logic. From this perspective, the argument that the Jews were unworthy of being redeemed, due to their low spiritual level, has no import. This revelation highlighted G-d's boundless love for the Jewish people, a love that defies rational accusations or comparisons.

To channel this transcendent love into the physical realm, however, the Jews needed to take action. They marked their doorposts with the blood of the Pesach offering (which also symbolized the blood of circumcision), acts that demonstrated a supra-rational commitment to G-d. These signs symbolized their active participation in drawing down G-d's infinite love, transforming it into tangible protection and paving the way for their redemption.

8. The Blood Transformed the Home Into a Miniature Temple

These events occurred at the time of the birth of the Jewish nation. Therefore, explains the Rebbe, it needed to emphasize the ultimate purpose of the Divine service of the Jewish people: to fulfill the commandment "I will dwell among them"—specifically within each and every Jew—to the extent that their home becomes a place for the Divine Presence to rest.

This is why each household was required to slaughter their own lamb within their home and place the blood on the doorframe. By performing the mitzvot associated with offering a sacrifice in their own space, they transformed their homes into a microcosm of the Temple. In future generations, however, the Passover Sacrifice could only be brought in the Tabernacle or Temple, where the Divine Presence was openly revealed. Offering the sacrifice outside these sanctified spaces is prohibited. This is because the Tabernacle or Temple embodied the fulfillment of "I will dwell among them," channeling the Divine Presence into the collective service of the Jewish people. Before the Giving of the Torah and the building of the Tabernacle, however, the emphasis was on actualizing "I will dwell among them" within each individual, transforming

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Aleph Institute

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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their homes into sanctuaries for G-d's presence.

By Mordechai Rubin
Chabad.org

DON JOSEPH BENVENISTE (? - 1337)

Benveniste, meaning "welcome" in Spanish, was the name of a prominent Jewish family that flourished in Spain for several centuries before the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain (in 1492). It was a widespread family, with branches in southern France and other countries. This family produced great scholars and influential statesmen who played an important role in Jewish life before the cruel Inquisition put an end to it.

Here we bring you the story of one member of this family, Don Joseph ben Ephraim Halevi Benveniste, who died in Toledo, Spain, in the year 1337.

In those days many Jews lived in the two Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon on the Iberian peninsula, which had been reconquered from the Arabs (Moors) of North Africa. The cities Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Toledo, Cordoba and others had large Jewish populations and rich Jewish communities - rich not only in the ordinary sense, but also in Torah scholarship. The Benveniste family was one of the richest Jewish families.

The King of Castile was Alfonso XI (1325-1350). He had heard a great deal about a young Jew of excellent manners and high education, and with a great talent for music. The king invited Don Joseph to the palace and was very much impressed with him. Before long the king appointed him as his confidential Advisor and Minister of Finance. Don Joseph's position in the court made him the most influential person in the land, next to the king.

Don Joseph lived in royal fashion. He used to ride in a state carriage, with a retinue of fifty knights as his bodyguard.

The king also had another Jewish friend who served him as his astronomer and physician. His name was Samuel ibn Wakar. There was a certain rivalry between the two prominent Jews, and some of the courtiers were jealous of both Jewish favorites of the King.

Among the office holders who served the Jewish Finance Minister was a young and capable Spaniard, Gonzalo Martinez. Benveniste introduced him to the king, and the king elevated him to a high position at court. Gonzalo Martinez was very jealous of the power and influence which his benefactor and other Jews enjoyed, and began to plot their ruin. The opportunity presented itself when King Alfonso became involved in a war against the Moors. The treacherous Martinez went before the king and accused Don Joseph as well as Ibn Wakar of dishonesty and mismanagement of the country, and - like Haman - offered to buy from the king ten prominent Jews for 800 pounds of silver to replenish the king's treasury.

The king was in need of money to continue the war against the Moors. Without giving his Jewish friends a chance to defend themselves and prove their innocence, he agreed to sell both Benveniste and Ibn Wakar and eight additional prominent Jewish men to Martinez.

Armed with the new powers he bought from the king, Martinez seized his benefactor and the other prominent Jews and put them in prison. Benveniste died in prison several years later (in 1337).

When the king heard of Benveniste's death, he ordered that his body be brought to Cordoba and that he be given a state funeral. Don Joseph was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Cordoba. His widow and children were granted a pardon by the king; they were freed from taxes and all claims against the family that Martinez had brought against the Jewish Finance Minister.

The king's physician and astronomer, Samuel ibn Wakar, also died in prison. Martinez had demanded a large sum of, ransom money for him and his two brothers whom he had imprisoned. However, having deprived them of all their wealth, the family could not raise the enormous sum of ransom money. Martinez refused to release the body of the Jewish physician, and only a year later the remains of Samuel ibn Wakar were delivered for burial.

The cruel Martinez was not yet satisfied with his victory over the Jewish leaders. He plotted a general, expulsion of the Jews of Castile, in order to confiscate all their possessions. He prepared a plan and only waited for the right moment to present it to the king. In the meantime, the king found that he could not get along without a Jewish Advisor and Finance Minister, and he appointed Mosheh Abravalia to this position. The new Jewish Finance Minister won the confidence of many courtiers, and he soon found out about the terrible plot of Martinez against the Jews of Castile. Mosheh Abravalia sent word to all the Jewish communities in Castile about the danger, and urged all Jews to fast and pray to G-d.

Gonzalo Martinez became ever more powerful. He amassed an enormous fortune, as everyone tried to buy his favor. Then a situation arose, for which Martinez had been waiting. The Moors made another attempt to invade Castile. The king appointed Martinez as Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish forces. Gonzalo defeated the Moors, and he was now certain that the king would be glad to reward him. This was the time to have the king carry out his plan of expelling the Jews from his land.

Mosheh Abravalia had been anxiously following the developments and Martinez's rise to power. He knew there was no time to lose. Secretly he called to his house the ministers and courtiers who, he knew, were unhappy with Martinez and feared him. They decided to go to the king and warn him that Martinez was planning to ruin the country by ordering the expulsion of the Jews, and that he had become so drunk with

power that he was a personal danger to the king, probably plotting to assassinate him and take over the throne.

The king realized that he had, indeed, allowed Martinez too much power. He dispatched a secret armed detail to arrest Martinez, but the latter somehow learned of the mission, and with a number of followers escaped the trap. Martinez and his men took refuge in a castle. When the king sent a messenger to Gonzalo ordering him to surrender and throw himself on the king's mercy, Gonzalo simply had the king's messenger executed. This infuriated the king, and he ordered that the castle be set on fire and destroyed together with all its occupants. Then Gonzalo's men overpowered him and delivered him alive to the king.

The king ordered to have Gonzalo Martinez beheaded and burned. Thus the Jews of Castile finally got rid of their ruthless enemy and were saved from the cruel decree he had plotted against them. They praised and thanked G-d for their miraculous deliverance.

BO IN A NUTSHELL

The last three of the Ten Plagues are visited on Egypt: a swarm of locusts devours all the crops and greenery; a thick, palpable darkness envelops the land; and all the firstborn of Egypt are killed at the stroke of midnight of the 15th of the month of Nissan.

G-d commands the first mitzvah to be given to the people of Israel: to establish a calendar based on the monthly rebirth of the moon. The Israelites are also instructed to bring a Passover offering to G-d: a lamb or kid goat is to be slaughtered, and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of every Israelite home, so that G-d should pass over these homes when He comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn. The roasted meat of the offering is to be eaten that night together with matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs.

The death of the firstborn finally breaks Pharaoh's resistance, and he literally drives the children of Israel from his land. So hastily do they depart that there is no time for their dough to rise, and the only provisions they take along are unleavened. Before they go, they ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and garments—fulfilling the promise made to Abraham that his descendants would leave Egypt with great wealth.

The children of Israel are commanded to consecrate all firstborn, and to observe the anniversary of the Exodus each year by removing all leaven from their possession for seven days, eating matzah, and telling the story of their redemption to their children. They are also commanded to wear tefillin on the arm and head as a reminder of the Exodus and their resultant commitment to G-d.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 29 Tevet 5786 – 18 January 2026

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.)

Thursday, 4 Shevat 5786 – 22 January 2026

R. Israel Abuchatzera (1984)

Rabbi Israel Abuchatzera (1890-1984), known as "Baba Sali," was born in Tafillat, 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.

Shabbat 6 Shevat 5786 – 24 January 2026

Majorcan Jews Guaranteed Protection (1393)

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