

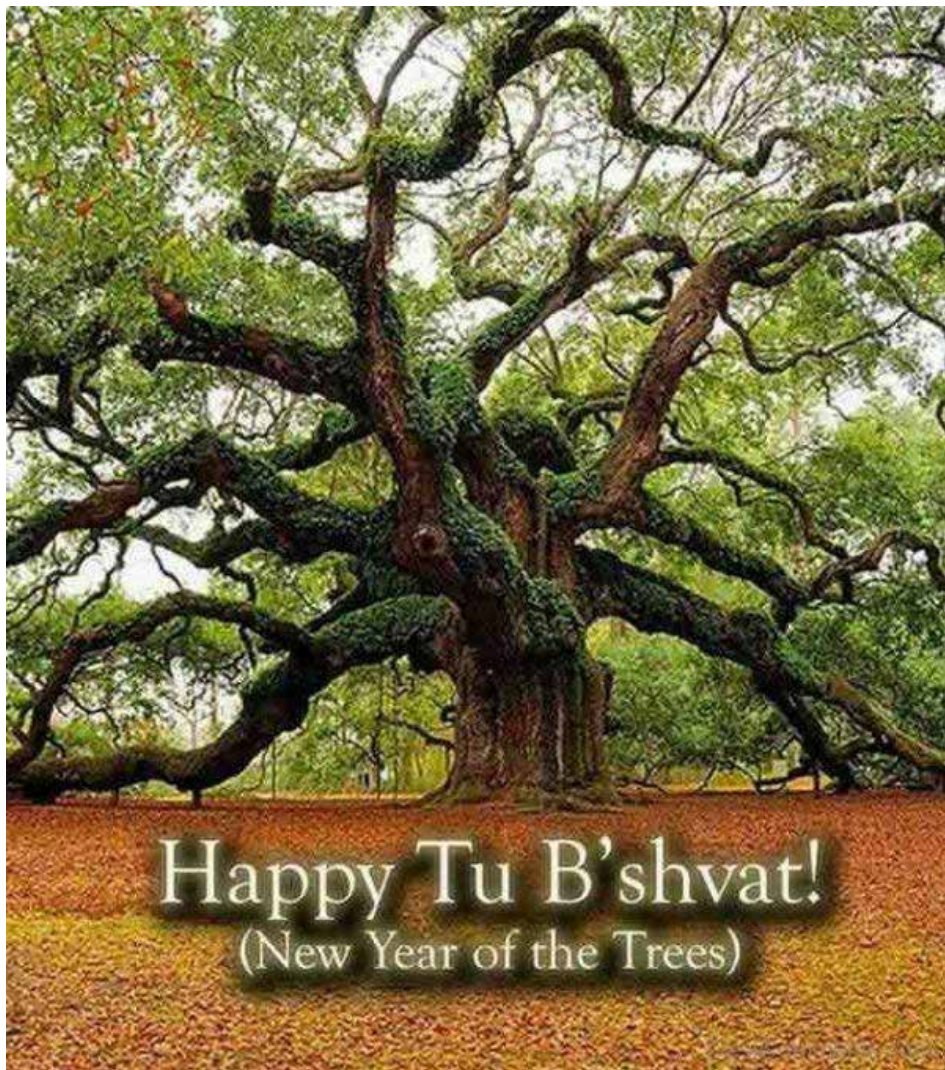


# The Shofar

Jan-Feb, 2025

Congregation House of Israel

1 Tevet - 30 Shevat, 5785



Happy Tu B'shvat!  
(New Year of the Trees)

February 13, 2025

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## Tu B'shevat: New Year of the Trees

**By Sherrill Nicolosi**

Tu B'shevat, sometimes referred to as *Rosh Hashanah L'Ilanot*, the New Year for Trees, is celebrated on the Fifteenth of Shevat, which on our calendar this year is February 13. While it is generally considered a minor Jewish holiday, it has become a more important one of late, especially for Israeli Jews - a sort of Jewish Arbor Day.

In today's world, the growing concern for preserving the environment has placed an increasing importance on the celebration of Tu B'shevat. In Israel, by the Fifteenth of Shevat, the tree growth cycle has started, and signs of Spring appear. The school children plant trees to honor the importance of the

environment and the ecology of Earth.

In the US, many Jews celebrate Tu B'shevat with a special ceremonial seder. Festive plates of fruits and nuts are enjoyed, along with various grains, olives, pomegranates, avocados, dates and figs. Some celebrate by including fifteen different varieties of fruits, to connect with the Fifteenth of Shevat. A favorite treat is carob, the traditional food of Tu B'shevat.

Tu B'shevat is a fun holiday. Whether you are celebrating the holiday by planting trees or donating to the Jewish National Fund, an organization that supports the reforestation of Israel, or singing songs and playing games for the children, Tu B'shevat is just one more way of honoring our Jewish roots.

## Reb Shelly's Desk



### Always Look On the Bright Side of Life

In my Levi sessions, we often use a website that lists the 30 most inspirational songs in modern music. Number 3 on that list is the Monty Python song from the movie

Life of Brian, "Always Look On the Bright Side of Life." The song is wonderfully humorous, but it reflects an ancient Jewish idea. One must always see the cup as half full. One must always follow the mitzvah of *hakarat tov* "searching for the good." For a people who have suffered so much in history, Judaism remains strangely upbeat and optimistic. That is why the national anthem of the State of Israel is Hatikva, a song that means "the hope."

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, would never speak words that have any negative connotation. He brings the example of the Hebrew word for hospital, *Beit Holim*, literally "House of the Sick. He would not use that term. Instead he called it *Beit Refuah*, "House of Healing. The former name has negative connotations, the latter positive.

This optimistic attitude is reflected in Jewish law. For example, if a funeral procession and a wedding procession meet at a crossroads, the wedding always takes precedent. Later the Rabbis would teach that we do not cancel a wedding for a funeral. In a similar way, the joyous festivals of the Jewish year cut off *shiva*, the traditional week of mourning. The cup is always half-full, not half-empty.

The parsha Ki Tavo, which we read recently, contains a long list of horrible curses that will befall the people Israel if they do not obey God's covenant. The list contains every tragic event that could occur in the ancient days when the Torah was written. Traditionally, when this part of the Torah is read out loud in the synagogue, it is read in a subdued voice very quickly. But the fascinating law is that one is not permitted to end this reading in the middle. One is not allowed to end a Torah reading on a negative note. One finishes the entire section (54 verses) then ends with an upbeat verse about God's covenant.

By Jewish law, it is never permitted to end a reading on a negative note. Often at the end of a reading, we will go backwards and end with the last upbeat, positive verse. One must always walk away looking at the bright side of life, even after reading the long list of curses, as in that parsha. We need to observe the sadness of Holocaust Memorial Day and Tisha B'Av. But even more important, we need to celebrate the happiness of Purim and Simchat Torah.

I have often met two kinds of people as I go through life. Some see the negative in everything. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong. Such people remind me of Eeyore the donkey in the Winnie the Pooh books. He always looks gloomy and depressed. On the other hand, I meet people who are upbeat and positive. The Rabbis of the Talmud tell stories about Nachum Gam Zu. He was called that name because whatever happened, he would respond, *gam zu l'tova* "this too is for the good." I love Eeyore, but it is much more pleasant to hang out with Nachum Gam Zu. It is important to be around positive, upbeat people.

In our parshiot over the year, we often read of multiple curses. And yet, we do not become bogged down in those curses. We get through them and end in an upbeat note, that this is for the good. As Monty Python teaches, "Always look on the bright side of life."

#### The Shofar

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# The Exercise and Abuse of Power

By Rabbi Josh Weinberg

Friday, December 13, 2024

It's often said that power is the only language that is truly understood in the Middle East. If so, this week manifested expressions of power and its abuse in three different yet interrelated ways.

## Assad's "Trial"

Six days ago, the half-century-long Assad family dynasty came to a staggering and shocking end. Early Sunday morning, December 8, the Syrian government fell in a stunning end to the Assad family rule. A sudden rebel offensive sprinted across government-held territory and entered the capital, dethroning the previously untouchable regime. The rule of Hafez el-Assad, from 1970 to 2000, and the brutal dictatorship of his son Bashar el-Assad, from 2000 to 2024, left more than a half million people dead and more than 11 million displaced and should be compared to the murderous regimes of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot.

When Hamas arch-terrorist Yahya Sinwar masterminded the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that killed 1,200 Israelis and kidnapped 250 people, he attempted to wield a devastating, potentially even mortal blow to Israel, perceived to be weakened by internal divisions. Sinwar, who was killed by Israeli forces in Gaza a year later, likely could not have imagined that. Instead, his plan set in motion a cascade of events that would bring down longtime Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and weaken the Iranian "Axis of Resistance" alliance to which Hamas belongs.

Hamas's October 7th attack on Israel escalated into Israel's invasion of Gaza, Israel's war with Hezbollah, as well as direct military confrontations between Israel and Iran. A weakened and distracted Iranian alliance was thus vulnerable to a siege of power by the rebels from the group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (the "Movement for the Liberation of the Levant," or HTS – the former al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria regarded by the US and others as a terrorist organization).

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of course, claimed credit for starting the chain of events that

led to the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. "This is a historic day in the history of the Middle East," he said during a visit to Mount Bental on Israel's border with Syria. "The Assad regime is a central link in Iran's axis of evil — this regime has fallen. This is a direct result of the blows we have inflicted on Iran and Hezbollah, the main supporters of the Assad regime," Netanyahu contended, referencing the 14 months of combat against Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Iranian proxies since October 7 of last year.

Netanyahu hearkened back to the "Good Neighbor" policy Israel pursued at the height of the Syrian civil war when the country provided medical treatment to thousands of Syrians and sent thousands of tons of humanitarian goods into the country. "Hundreds of Syrian children were born here in Israel," he noted.

There is no question that the fall of the Assad regime is a net positive for the world. It has dealt a significant blow to the network of Iranian terror aimed at destroying the State of Israel and becoming the main Shi'ite Islamic power in the region. The Syrian route between Tehran and Lebanon was essential for Iran's weapons pipeline to Hezbollah. We know that many of the weapons Hezbollah used against Israel in the recent war came through Tehran's entrenchment in Syria. Iran's proxy control of Syria also included setting up weapons production centers on Syrian soil that fed both Hezbollah and tens of thousands of Shi'ite militiamen stationed in Syria.

No tears will be shed for the fallen Assad regime. The Syrian people have been victims of Assad's brutality, barbarism, and corruption for far too long. Few in the West have championed the cause of the Syrian people – nowhere in comparison to those who have taken up and supported the Palestinian cause.

But just because Assad is out, it does not mean that all is well for the Syrian people, and we know that Israel cannot and has not let its guard down. Assad was the dictator that Israel knew, and now the group HTS led by former Islamist Mohammad al-Julani (Golani) presents new challenges. Israel has, of course, wasted no time in heavily bombarding Syria's military bases and weapons-producing sites in order to prevent such stockpiles, military equipment, and even chemical weapons from falling into the hands of those who seek Israel's harm. Israel will need to remain very vigilant and will need support from the United States and the international community to ensure that any activity does not spill over into its borders.

*Continued on page 5*

# Arza - World Union

Continued from page 4

## Netanyahu's Trial

In the midst of unprecedented power shifts in Syria this week, we also witnessed an unprecedented occurrence in Israel. For the first time in Israel's history, a sitting Prime Minister took the witness stand as a defendant in his own criminal trial. Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, finally took the stand to respond to accusations of bribery, fraud, and corruption that have defined and disrupted Israeli public life for nearly a decade. He dazzled the courtroom with a long and flowery speech, bringing historical examples of world leaders who were ousted for political reasons, painting a picture of himself as a selfless emissary of the public who has in mind only the good of the people and the good of the State. Much attention was paid to how many highly classified notes could be passed to him during the trial, making a spectacle that, as a sitting Prime Minister during wartime, the trial needed to be interrupted for him to weigh in on timely decisions. Netanyahu has demonstrated that he will pull every political lever and cross every taboo and redline to maintain his hold on the premiership. Leaders with even an ounce of integrity would have resigned or put themselves on leave the moment their indictment came through. While Assad's abuse of power was toppled by rebels and guns, Netanyahu's alleged abuse of power will be adjudicated in a court of law.

## Dina's Trial

From Torah we learn that abuse of power is an age-old problem. In this week's Parashat VaYishlach, we read the story of Dina (Genesis Ch. 34). As IMPJ CEO Anna Kislanski, wrote:

*"This coming Shabbat, we recount the story of Dina. It is the first instance of sexual violence mentioned in the Bible — a stark violation of human rights. In just a single verse (Genesis 34),*

*the brutal act is described, capturing its swift and devastating impact on the life of an innocent girl.*

*This year, we face profound challenges: how do we speak about human rights, emotional and sexual protection in a time of war, when our most basic rights have been violated, and when emotional security across Israel and the region have been so deeply shaken? We think every day of the hostages still held in Gaza, including 16 young women among them. What remains of their human rights and dignity? In what state is their emotional and sexual protection? As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza deepens, we are painfully reminded of the war's toll on the rights of all people caught in its midst—Israelis and Palestinians."*

Our Israeli Reform Movement has joined with other Jewish organizations in Israel and around the world in the "Dina Partnership" – an initiative started by "B'not Dina" ("The Daughters of Dina") from Maram (the Israeli Council of Reform Rabbis) and which aims to raise awareness about emotional and sexual violence and to stand united in support of every victim and survivor.

To hear more about this, I recommend listening to this week's episode of Just For This podcast with WRJ CEO Rabbi Liz P.G. Hirsch featuring MK Shelly Tal Meron. They discuss the creation, following October 7, of the Hostage Family lobby in Israel and ways to continue to call attention to the sexual violence that has persisted since the beginning of the war and how it is used as a weapon of war.

It's often said that power is the only language that is truly understood in the Middle East. If so, this week manifested expressions of power and its abuse in three different yet interrelated ways all of which require our concern and vigilance.

*Rabbi Josh Weinberg serves as the Vice President of the URJ for Israel and Reform Zionism, and is the Executive Director of ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America*

## Sisterhood



Didn't we have fun at our Hanukkah party?! Many thanks to all the willing hands who made it such a great success. Special thanks to those who made our buffet possible, including Barbara Morgan who ordered and

picked up the roasted chicken; Milly Baron, Judy Levy, and Patti Fleischner, who made the delicious spinach casseroles; Laura Castillo, who provided the Jelly donuts; Karen Reagler, who provided the copious ingredients for the latkes and the outside grill to cook them on; and all the Sisterhood members who helped prepare and cook the latkes. Thanks also to the Reagler family for providing wonderful games and entertainment for our enjoyment. Finally, a big thank you to all who donated to Jackson House.

# Hanukkah Party 5785

What a wonderful Hanukkah party this year. Our most heartfelt thanks to all the Sisterhood ladies who cooked, hung the decorations, set the tables and on and on and on. Great meal, and incredible latkes cooked outside on the portable grill (brought by David Reagler).

And special thanks to Mimi Reagler, who grabbed my camera off the table (got permission) and snapped over a hundred pictures, just a few of which are displayed here.

In short, *Hanukkah Sameach.*

Shelly







# Jewish Trivia for January and February

Jan 1, 1882 Ellis Island opens as Immigration Center  
 Jan 15, 1965 PLO founded  
 Jan 20, 1943 At the Wannsee Conference, the Nazis decide upon the "Final Solution"  
 Jan 25, 1949 David Ben Gurion elected first Prime Minister of Israel  
 Jan 27, 1945 Auschwitz Birkenau liberated by the Russian Army  
 Jan 28, 1916 Louis Brandeis is the first Jew to be appointed to the Supreme Court

## Deceased

Jan 2, 2006 Jan Murray, actor  
 Jan 3, 1974 Samuel Goldwyn, movie producer  
 Jan 8, 1975 Richard Tucker, Opera Singer  
 Jan 9, 2011 Debbie Friedman, singer and composer  
 Jan 10, 2000 Hedy Lamarr, actress  
 Jan 11, 2014 Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel  
 Jan 13, 1980 Andre Kostelanetz, Conductor  
 Jan 13, 1966 Sophie Tucker, entertainer  
 Jan 19, 1990 Arthur Goldberg, Supreme Court Justice  
 Jan 25, 1990 Ava Gardner, actress  
 Jan 26, 1973 Edward G. Robinson, actor  
 Jan 28, 1996 Jerry Siegel, co-creator of Superman

Feb 1, 2002 American journalist Daniel Pearl is executed by his captors  
 Feb 3, 1943 SS Dorchester torpedoed. Four chaplains give up their life jackets, joining in prayer as the ship went down  
 Feb 5, 1997 The "Big Three" Swiss banks create a fund for Holocaust reparations  
 Feb 12, 1924 Premiere of George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue  
 Feb 14, 1949 The Knesset convenes for the first time  
 Feb 23, 1945 Joe Rosenthal takes the unforgettable photograph of American soldiers raising the flag over Iwo Jima

## Deceased

Feb 1, 2002 Daniel Pearl, journalist  
 Feb 5, 1967 Henry Morgenthau, Secretary of the Treasury  
 Feb 10, 2005 Arthur Miller, playwright  
 Feb 11, 2015 Bob Simon, newsman  
 Feb 12, 2014 Sid Caesar, comedian  
 Feb 22, 1998 Abraham Ribicoff, Connecticut Governor and Senator  
 Feb 22, 1965 Felix Frankfurter, Justice of the Supreme Court  
 Feb 24, 1998 Henny Youngman, comedian  
 Feb 29, 2015 Leonard Nimoy, actor (Mr. Spock)



## January Yahrzeits

### Kaddish Recited January 3

**David Wigderson**  
*Father of Sue Koppel*

**Sam Karnofsky**  
*Great Uncle of David D. Reagler*  
*Great Uncle of Rachel Schulman*

**Katie Fielschmidt**  
*Aunt of Fred Korngut*

### Kaddish Recited January 10

**Mona Goltz**  
*Grandfather of Diane Goltz*  
*Grandfather of Susan Siegel*

**Richard Wesley Townley**  
*Father of Kathy Joy Townley*

**Jason Kandel**  
*Cousin of Mary Klompus*

**Harry Sedler**  
*Father of Ross Sedler*

**Joanne Reagler**  
*Mother of David D. Reagler*  
*Mother of Rachel Schulman*

**Martin Fleischner**  
*Father of Mark Fleischner*  
*Father of Stuart Fleischner*

### Kaddish Recited January 17

**Paulene Levy**  
*Mother of Jerry Levy*

**Pearcy Crem**  
*Great Uncle of Rachel Schulman*  
*Great Uncle of David D. Reagler*

**David Reagler**  
*Father of David D. Reagler*  
*Father of Rachel Schulman*

**Dorothy Savel**  
*Grandmother of David Cohen*

**Eric B. Wolken**  
*Brother of Brad Wolken*

**Goldie Marie Schott Ballard**  
*Grandmother of Laura Castillo*

**Ida Cooper Ruskin**  
*Mother of Phyllis Hearn*

**Pauline Brown**  
*Aunt of Betty Forshberg*

**Ella Robins**  
*Grandmother of Betty Feir*

**Lois Ginsburg**  
*Mother of Millie Baron*

### Kaddish Recited January 24

**Steve Katz**  
*Brother of Sheri Cobb*

**Fanny Fielschmidt**  
*Grandmother of Fred Korngut*

**Helene Leibowitz**  
*Mother of Stuart Leibowitz*

**Willisam Holtzman**  
*Father-in-law of Fred Korngut*

### Kaddish Recited January 31

**Walter Kleinman**  
*Father-in-law of Betty Kleinman*

**Paul Forshberg**  
*Husband of Betty Forshberg*

**Caroline Suhl**  
*Grandmother of Michael Waxler*

**George Z. Ginsburg**  
*Grandfather of Millie Baron*

**Leslie Leviton**  
*Uncle of David D. Reagler*  
*Uncle of Rachel Schulman*

**Sarah S. Levine**  
*Grandmother of Cynthia Rephan*

**Helena Peterson**  
*Mother of Cheryl Cohen*

**Ed Katz**  
*Father of Sheri Cobb*

**Lewis Goltz**  
*Father of Diane Goltz*  
*Father of Susan Siegel*

## February Yahrzeits

### Kaddish Recited February 7

**Robert Burns**

*Step-father of Glenda Kirsch*

**Harriett Korgut**

*Wife of Fred Korngut*

**Richard Moss Haynie, Sr.**

*Father of Laura Castillo*

**Carol Dina Kleinman**

*Wife of Rabbi Sheldon Kleinman*

**Eric Ross**

*Father of Elaine Wolken*

**Julia Levine Bauman**

*Mother of Cynthai Rephan*

**Rose Ginsburg**

*Grandmother of Millie Baron*

### Kaddish Recited February 14

**William Boswell**

*Father of Anita Williams*

### Kaddish Recited February 21

**Anni Hannah Grenman**

*Mother of Oded Grenman*

**Stella Weisman**

*Grandmother of Larry Levi*

**David Stafin**

*Father of Myrna Taxer*

**Sandy Carrington**

*Daughter of or Betty Forshberb*

### Kaddish Recited February 28

**Pinhas Grenman**

*Father of Oded Grenman*

**Sally Friedlander Boley**

*Mother of Sherrill Nicolosi*

**Dorothy Robins Taub**

*Mother of Betty Feir*

## Refuah Shelemah

*The following people are in our thoughts and prayers for healing. Please offer prayers that they have a full and complete recovery.:*

- Cheryl Cohen
- Walter Collier
- Oded Grenman
- Sue Koppel
- Randy Lewis
- Pat McCarthy
- Sherrill Nicolosi
- Michelle Palmer
- Mike Richardson
- Larry Taub
- Misty Stricklin
- Shep Taxer
- Anita Williams
- James Woodfork
- Tamara Keith

## Birthdays & Anniversaries

### Anniversaries

Hal and Sue Koppel	Jan 12
Lori and Randy Lewis	Feb 6

### Birthdays

Ross Sedler	Jan 8
Kay Fleischner	Jan 27
Lori Lewis	Jan 28
Ken Baim	Feb 1
Louis Reagler	Feb 2
Tillie Reagler	Feb 2
Diane Goltz	Feb 12
David D. Reagler	Feb 18

# January Parshiot

## Vayigash

January 4

Judah approaches Joseph to plead for the release of Benjamin, offering himself as a slave to the Egyptian ruler in Benjamin's stead. Upon witnessing his brothers' loyalty to one another, Joseph reveals his identity to them. "I am Joseph," he declares. "Is my father still alive?"

The brothers are overcome by shame and remorse, but Joseph comforts them. "It was not you who sent me here," he says to them, "but G-d. It has all been ordained from Above to save us, and the entire region, from famine."

## Vayechi

January 11

Jacob desires to reveal the end of days to his children, but is prevented from doing so. Jacob blesses his 12 sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Levi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zebulun, schoolteachers from Shimon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage"; Shimon and Levi for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

## Shmot

January 18

The Children of Israel multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their growing numbers, Pharaoh enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, to kill all male babies at birth. When they do not comply, he commands his

people to cast the Hebrew babies into the Nile.

A child is born to Jocheved, the daughter of Levi, and her husband, Amram, and placed in a basket on the river, while the baby's sister, Miriam, stands watch from afar. Pharaoh's daughter discovers the boy, raises him as her son, and names him Moses.

G-d appears to Moses in a burning bush at the foot of Mount Sinai and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand: "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." Moses' brother, Aaron, is appointed to serve as his spokesman.



## Vaera

January 25

G-d reveals Himself to Moses. He promises to take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them and acquire them as His own chosen people at Mount Sinai; He will then bring them to the Land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage.

Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand "Let My people go." Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. G-d then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians.

The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities, a pestilence kills the domestic animals, painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail.



## February Parshiot

### Bo

#### February 1

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 Nisan. The death of the firstborn finally breaks Pharaoh's resistance and he literally drives the Children of Israel from his land. Before they go, they ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and garments, draining Egypt of its wealth.

The Children of Israel are commanded 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.

### Beshalach

#### February 8

Soon after allowing the Children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians.

In the desert, the people suffer thirst and hunger and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff; He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

### Yitro

#### February 15

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, hears of the great miracles which G-d performed for the people of Israel, and comes from Midian to the Israelite camp, bringing with him Moses' wife and two sons. Jethro advises Moses to appoint a hierarchy of magistrates and judges to assist him in the task of governing and administering justice to the people.

On the sixth day of the third month (Sivan), seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai. G-d descends on the mountain amidst thunder, lightning, billows of smoke and the blast of the shofar, and summons Moses to ascend.



G-d proclaims the Ten Commandments, commanding the people of Israel to believe in G-d, not to worship idols or take G-d's name in vain, to keep the Shabbat, honor their parents, and not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness or covet another's property.

The people cry out to Moses that the revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.

### Mishpatim

#### February 22

Following the revelation at Sinai, G-d legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault, and theft; civil laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans, and the responsibilities of the "Four Guardians"; and the rules governing the conduct of justice by courts of law.

Altogether, the Parshah of Mishpatim contains fifty-three mitzvot -- 23 imperative commandments and 30 prohibitions.

G-d promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy Land, and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants.