



CONGREGATION TIFERETH BETH DAVID JERUSALEM

Shabbat Bulletin

כח טבת התשפ"ב
שבת פרשת וארא

Shabbat Parshat Va'eira

Dec. 31, 2021 - Jan. 1, 2022 / 5782

Please print this bulletin before Shabbat.

Chazan Sheini
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SHABBAT SHALOM • שבת שלום

Rosh Chodesh Shvat is on Monday, January 3 / Molad is on Monday, January 3 at 2:23am and 15 chalakim

Shabbat Parshat Va'eira

Haftara: Yechezkel 28:25 - 29:21

Due to updated pandemic restrictions introduced by the Quebec government on Thursday, the TBDJ building will be closed after Maariv on Friday, December 31.

Please watch for community email messages providing details regarding services and programs that will be available on Zoom during the week.

Friday, December 31

- 2:15pm Daf Yomi on Zoom
- 3:26pm Plag Hamincha
- 4:02pm Candle Lighting
- 4:05pm Mincha, Kabbalat Shabbat and Maariv - Main Sanctuary
- 4:21pm Sh'kiah

Shabbat, January 1 / 28 Tevet

- 9:47am Sof Zman Kriyat Sh'ma
- 3:27pm Plag Hamincha
- 4:22pm Sh'kiah
- 5:12pm Havdala
- 6:30pm Daf Yomi on Zoom
- 6:30pm Musical Havdala on Facebook with Rev. Amiel Bender

Candle Lighting on Friday, January 7 is at 4:10pm.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Mazal Tov to **Debbie & Howard Feldman** and to **Ella & Ernest Ehrmann** and their families on the birth of a granddaughter and great granddaughter on Wednesday, December 29 in Los Angeles. Proud parents are Esther & Evan Rosenberg. Sharing in their simcha are the baby's sister Ruby Annie, her paternal grandparents Helen & Bob Rosenberg of Long Beach, California and many delighted aunts, uncles and cousins.

Mazal Tov to **Judi & David Grunbaum** and their families on the birth of grandson Nathaniel Sender (Shimshon Natanel) Grunbaum on Shabbat, December 18. Proud parents are Sophie & Aviad Grunbaum. Sharing in their simcha are Nathaniel's brothers Max and Bobby, his maternal grandparents Ady & Steve Avram, great grandparents Blanka & Shimshon Markovitch, Miri & Meyer Grunbaum, Lily & Arnold Avram, Rose & Maximillian Klein and many delighted aunts, uncles and cousins.

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS

This Shabbat Bulletin is sponsored by **Debbie & Howard Feldman** in memory of Howard's beloved father Nicholas (Mendy) Feldman-Zinner z"l (Menachem ben Shmuel Eliezer - 2 Shvat).

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THE FOLLOWING WEEKLY ZOOM PROGRAMS RESUME STARTING JANUARY 6

- Mondays at 10:00am *Tehilim Class for Women* with Rifki Freundlich - resumes on January 10
- Mondays at 7:45pm *Jewish History Lecture* with the Rabbi - resumes on January 17
- Tuesdays at 12:00pm *Lunchtime Halacha Shiur* with the Rabbi - resumes on January 11
- Wednesdays at 12:15pm *Wednesday Parsha Shiur* with the Rabbi - resumes on January 12
- Thursdays at 12:30pm *Parsha Shiur for Women* with Rifki Freundlich - resumes on January 6

Of Plague and Pandemics

In this week's Torah reading of Parashat Va'eira, we read of the Egyptians being afflicted with the first seven of the ten plagues. The Mishnah in Eduyot 2:10 teaches that, once the plagues hit Egypt, the devastation continued for a year:

The judgment of the Egyptians [continued] twelve months; The ten plagues lasted a year, according to Rabbi Akiva. This is learned through a midrash on Exodus 5:12. According to this verse the plagues began only after the Egyptians forced the Israelite slaves to search for their own straw. Since straw is found in the month of Iyar, May, and the Israelites left Egypt in Nissan, April, the conclusion can be drawn that the plagues lasted one year.

Each of the plagues was a unique miracle which represented a fantastic manipulation of nature. In fact, the plagues of Egypt defied the laws of nature which were turned upside down as part of Hashem's plan to assist our ancestors in Egypt. Bnei Yisrael, who lived in proximity to the Egyptians, were not affected by the plagues. The Egyptians were in turn subjected to a year of continuous affliction and instability as they and their properties were punished by Hashem's wrath, a result of Pharaoh's denial of Hashem's sovereignty, his refusal to let our people leave Egypt and the Egyptians' aggressive treatment of our enslaved ancestors. The plagues that Hashem inflicted upon the Egyptians also corresponded מדה כנגד מדה - measure for measure - in accordance with the bad deeds that they perpetrated against Bnei Yisrael.

The Egyptians were helpless in the face of the divinely-inflicted plagues. It is truly a challenge to comprehend the fear of the common Egyptian who stood in the face of the terror and the continuity of the plagues. One plague ended and a short while later another began. The short respite between the plagues could not have afforded the Egyptian people the necessary relief and recovery time from each devastating plague. According to the Midrash Lekach Tov, each plague lasted a week, except for the plague of darkness, which lasted only three days. According to the Midrash Rabbah, each plague lasted a month.

The Torah spares no details in its account of the afflicting plagues:

Blood - *All the Egyptians dug roundabout the river for water to drink for they could not drink from the waters of the river...*

Frogs - *They piled them - the frogs - into heaps and the land stank...*

Lice - *And the lice infestation was upon man and beast - throughout the land of Egypt...*

Swarm of wild beasts - *A severe swarm of wild beasts came to the house of Pharaoh and the house of his servants and throughout the land of Egypt the land was ruined because of the swarm...*

Epidemic - *A very severe epidemic - and all the livestock of Egypt died...*

Boils - *And it will become boils erupting into blisters on man and beast throughout the land of Egypt...*

Hail - *There was hail and fire flaming amid the hail - very heavy such as never had been in the land of Egypt...The hail struck in the entire land of Egypt, everything that was in the field from man to beast...*

Locusts - *A locust swarm... it will cover the surface of the earth so that one will not be able to see the earth... they will fill your houses... and the houses of all of Egypt...*

Darkness - *a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three day period...No man could see his brother nor could anyone rise from his place...*

Plague of the First Born - *Hashem smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt from the firstborn of pharaoh sitting on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon to the firstborn animal... There was a great outcry in Egypt for there was not a house where there was no corpse...*

Imagine being afflicted with a plague for a week or a month - a few hours in a day is more than enough. Each plague was a divine and unnatural, harmful and unsettling force of nature. Imagine our world as we know it undergoing divine challenges in the form of Egypt's plagues, divine manipulations of nature that cannot be negotiated and alleviated. It would seem a difficult predicament to consider.

However, in our current pandemic crisis, imagining the threat of such affliction isn't necessarily out of reach. Since March 2020, we have endured a series of Covid-19 challenges and variants as the dangers of this powerful virus have imposed health and social restrictions which have taken us out of our comfort zones. We are currently living in times when the laws of nature as we know them seem unpredictable, formidable and scary. Covid-19 joins the worldwide threats of global warming, wild fires, extreme cold, hurricanes, typhoons and more which have challenged and decimated towns, forests and wildlife.

It has been difficult to get used to the challenges and restrictions imposed on the world which are needed to protect us from the dangers of the pandemic. We are used to dealing with known causes of disease and illness where treatment and cure is available and is within our control. Growing up in the magical generation of Tylenol, antibiotics and other accessible remedies in the forms of pills and syrups, we have become accustomed to treating the various

maladies of our lives with the knowledge that the short term cure is probably about twenty minutes away. But the current Covid pandemic is challenging everyone to respond to a novel virus that is in so many ways well beyond our control, and even beyond the present wisdom of the world's best scientists.

At the time that I am writing these words it seems that the Omicron variant of Covid is everywhere. Within one month, it has shown its ugly face and has spread to the four corners of the globe - inflicting many, the unvaccinated as well as the vaccinated. It was a year ago when we came back from our winter vacation and were forced into a two-week lockdown in Quebec - with closed synagogues and a seemingly endless curfew. With a sense of "deja-vu", we were informed this week that our synagogues must again close and that Quebecers must again severely restrict gatherings in our own homes. The past twenty-two months have afflicted us with an ongoing Covid rollercoaster ride, sadly with no end yet in sight. Indeed, many medical professionals are projecting and predicting a pessimistic long ride ahead.

In a recently-published article entitled "When Will the Pandemic End?" a new analysis of a range of future scenarios is presented, based on the infectiousness, immune evasion, and severity of disease caused by the Omicron variant. The authors write that

Based on the evidence to date, we have posited a base-case scenario in which Omicron is about 25 percent more infectious, evades prior immunity to a greater degree (25 percent), and causes less severe disease, again by about 25 percent, all relative to Delta. Our analysis suggests that in the United States, this combination of characteristics would lead to Omicron replacing Delta as the dominant variant in the next few months and to a higher peak burden of disease than the country saw in the second half of 2021 (but likely below the peak reached in the winter of 2020–21). This base-case scenario has the potential to place a severe strain on healthcare systems. The optimistic scenario would see a peak of disease burden close to that seen over the past six months, while the pessimistic would see a very significantly higher burden of disease than in the past six months. Note that in every scenario, our analysis indicates that hospitalizations will likely be higher in the next six months than they were in the past six months.

In any scenario for the future of the COVID-19 pandemic, much depends on the ways in which societies respond. Three levers are likely to be especially important, starting with the extent to which countries can effectively scale and make available new oral therapeutics with the potential to reduce the chance of progression to severe disease, and which are unlikely to be blunted by Omicron. Second, evidence is accumulating that booster doses are especially important for protecting against the Omicron variant; accelerating their rollout will help protect populations. And third, given public fatigue and the lessons of the past two years, finding the right combination of public-health measures will be critical.

The authors of the article stress the challenges and the importance of implementing and adhering to public health measures:

Even before the emergence of Omicron, the past four months have seen the continued evolution of the public response to COVID-19. Debates have continued about the role of vaccine mandates, the use of vaccine passports, testing requirements, masks and mask mandates, and restrictions on gatherings. Societies are trying to find a new consensus through this transition, with some maintaining minimal public-health restrictions in the face of rising case counts and others reinstating more stringent measures. The emergence of Omicron led to tighter rules around travel in many countries, with some, such as England, also restricting domestic travel. Achieving some degree of consensus on public-health measures will likely be an important step toward controlling an Omicron-driven wave of disease. Omicron is a sobering reminder that SARS-CoV-2 has the advantage of rapid mutation and can produce new variants faster than anyone would like. We hope that this article offers a starting point to interpret the potential spread and severity of the disease it produces and the ways in which new therapeutics, booster doses of vaccines, and public-health measures will be important in limiting its impact.

Plagues and pandemics. The plagues in Egypt were severe and they lasted for a complete year with little breaks between each plague. With the end of every plague another plague was upon them, with no relief in between. It can be a matter of lengthy debate as to whether the severity of the current pandemic is easier or harsher than the divine plagues experienced by the Egyptians in ancient times. Though the threats of Covid-19 have been alleviated to a certain degree, it seems that the relatively high frequency of pandemic restrictions and lockdowns and the arrival of the new and threatening variants are reminders that we are not "out of the woods" yet.

I hope and pray that the next time that we read about plagues of Egypt in January of 5783, that our Covid-19 experiences will be a part of the history of our world rather than an ongoing plague and affliction.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rev. Amiel