

Torah Weekly

ד"ב

PARSHAT VAYIGASH

28 Kislev - 4 Tevet 5785
29 December 2024 -
4 January 2025

4TH DAY OF CHANUKAH
Torah: Numbers 7:30-41

5TH DAY OF CHANUKAH
Torah: Numbers 7:36-47

6TH DAY OF CHANUKAH
Torah: Numbers 28:1-15;
Numbers 7:42-47

7TH DAY OF CHANUKAH
Torah: Numbers 28:1-15;
Numbers 7:48-53

8TH DAY OF CHANUKAH
Torah: Numbers 7:54-8:4

SHABBAT

Torah: Genesis 44:18-47:27
HafTorah: Ezekiel 37:15-28

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms Daily

Psalms Daily
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)

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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

DO YOU HAVE A FATHER?

I recall an experience from my early youth. Let me give you the background of that experience.

I was then about seven or eight years old. I attended a Cheder (Jewish school) in a small town on the border of White Russia and Russia proper. The town was called Khaslavichy; you certainly have never heard of it. My father was the rabbi in the town. I, like every other Jewish boy, attended the cheder. My teacher was not a great scholar, but he was a Chassid, a "Chabadnik".

The episode I am about to relate to you took place on a murky winter day in January. I still remember the day; it was cloudy and overcast. It was just after the Chanukah festival, and the Torah portion of the week was Vayigash. With the end of Chanukah ended the little bit of serenity and holiday spirit that the festival brought into the monotonous life of the town's Jews.

As far as the boys from the Cheder were concerned, a long desolate winter lay ahead. It was a period in which we had to get up while it was still dark and return home from the cheder with a lantern in the hand of each boy, because nightfall was so early.

On that particular day, the whole Cheder, all the boys, were in a depressed mood - listless, lazy, and sad. We recited, or I should say chanted mechanically, the first verses of Vayigash in a dull monotone. We were simply droning the words in Hebrew and in Yiddish. So, we kept on reading mechanically: "*Then Judah approached him [Joseph].... My lord has asked his servants, saying: 'Have you a father, or a brother?' And we said to my lord: 'We have an old father, and a young child of his old age...'*" Permit me to use the interpretation of the Targum Yerushalmi (a translation/commentary of the Torah) of the words Yeled Zekunim ("a young child of his old age"), namely a talented boy, a capable, talented, bright child. "We have an old father, and we also have a talented little child."

The boy, reading mechanically, finished reciting the question: *Hayesh lachem av? Do you have a father?* and the reply: *Yesh lanu av zaken ve-yeled zekunim katan, We have an old father, and a young child of his old age.* Then something strange happened. The Melamed (teacher), who was half-asleep while the boy was droning on the words in Hebrew and

Yiddish, rose, jumped to his feet and with a strange, enigmatic gleam in his eyes, motioned to the reader to stop. Then the melamed turned to me and addressed me with the Russian word meaning "assistant to the rabbi," Podrabin. Whenever he was excited, he used to address me with this title, "assistant to the rabbi."

Then he said to me: "What kind of question did Joseph ask his brothers, 'Hayesh Lachem Av'?" "Do you have a father?" Of course they had a father, everybody has a father! The only person who had no father was the first man of creation, Adam. But anyone who is born into this world has a father. What kind of a question was it?"

I began, "Joseph . . ." I tried to answer, but he did not let me. Joseph, I finally said, meant to find out whether the father was still alive. "Do you still have a father," meaning, is he alive, not dead? If so, the Melamed thundered back at me, he should have phrased the question differently: "Is your father still alive?"

To argue with the Melamed was useless. He began to speak. He was no longer addressing the boys. The impression he gave was that he was speaking to some mysterious visitor, a guest who had come into the Cheder, into that cold room. And he kept on talking. Joseph did not intend to ask his brothers about "Avot D'isgalyim". I later discovered that this was a Chabad term for parenthood which is open, visible. He was asking them about "Avot D'iscasin", about the mysterious parenthood, the hidden and invisible parenthood. In modern idiom, I would say he meant to express the idea that Joseph was inquiring about existential parenthood, not biological parenthood. Joseph, the Melamed concluded, was anxious to know whether they felt themselves committed to their roots, to their origins. Were they origin conscious? Are you, Joseph asked the brothers, rooted in your father? Do you look upon him the way the branches, or the blossoms, look upon the roots of the tree? Do you look upon your father as the feeder, as the foundation of your existence? Do you look upon him as the provider and sustainer of your existence? Or are you a band of rootless shepherds who forget their origin, and travel and wander from place to place, from pasture to pasture? Suddenly, he stopped addressing the strange visitor and began to talk to us. Raising his voice, he asked: "Are you modest and humble? Do you admit that the old father represents an old tradition?"

"Do you believe that the father is capable of telling you something new,

something exciting? Something challenging? Something you did not know before? Or are you insolent, arrogant, and vain, and deny your dependence upon your father, upon your source?"

"Hayesh Lachem Av?! Do you have a father?!" exclaimed the Melamed, pointing at my study-mate. I had a study-mate who was considered a child prodigy in the town. He was the prodigy, and I had the reputation of being slow. His name was Isaac. The Melamed turned to him and said: "Who knows more? Do you know more because you are well versed in the Talmud, or does your father, Jacob the blacksmith, know more even though he can barely read Hebrew? Are you proud of your father? If a Jew admits to the supremacy of his father, then, ipso facto, he admits to the supremacy of the Universal Father, the ancient Creator of the world."

That is the experience I had with the melamed. I have never forgotten it.

A lecture from Rabbi Joseph B.

Soloveitchik

New York, 18 Sivan 5735 (1975)

VAYIGASH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Vayigash," means "And he approached" and it is found in Genesis 44:18.

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."

The brothers rush back to Canaan with the news. Jacob comes to Egypt with his sons and their families - seventy souls in all - and is reunited with his beloved son after 22 years. On his way to Egypt, he receives the divine promise: "Fear not to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again."

Joseph gathers the wealth of Egypt by selling food and seed during the famine. Pharaoh gives Jacob's family the fertile county of Goshen to settle, and the children of Israel prosper in their Egyptian exile.

HISTORY OF SHECHEM

BURIAL-PLACE OF JOSEPH

When Abraham first entered the Land of Israel in 2023 (1737 BCE), his first stop was the "place of Shechem," where G-d appeared to him and promised: "To your descendants I will give this land." This was the first time that G-d informed our Patriarch of this ultimate intention.

Two generations later, returning from Charan with his wives and children, Jacob came to Shechem and purchased a piece of land on the perimeter of the town. The prince of the town, also named Shechem, abducted and violated Jacob's daughter, Dina. Her brothers, Simon and Levi, rescued her and killed all the men of Shechem in retaliation.

Sixteen years later, Jacob sent 17-year old Joseph to "check on the welfare of his brothers" who were shepherding their father's herds near Shechem. When Joseph found his brothers, they sold him into slavery, setting off a chain of events that would lead to the Egyptian exile.

Many years later, when the entire family was already in Egypt, Jacob promised the city of Shechem to Joseph. It would make up part of the territory of Joseph's son, Ephraim.

Following the Exodus from Egypt, Joshua led the nation into the Land of Israel. As soon as they entered the Land, Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal, one of the two mountains flanking Shechem. (Recently, archeologists have discovered this altar on Mt. Ebal.)

Half of the nation then stood atop Mount Ebal and the other half atop Mount Gerizim, while the Levites who stood between the mountains shouted the curses they would be subjected to if they disobeyed G-d, and the blessings they would receive if they obeyed.

The Jews then buried Joseph's remains - which had been carried along from Egypt - in the plot of land which Jacob had bought, and designated Shechem as a City of Refuge and a Levite city.

Before Joshua died, he gathered the nation in Shechem and made a covenant between them and G-d. He set up a stone in Shechem, and said, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; it shall be a witness against you, lest you deny your G-d."

Throughout the period of the Prophets and the Kings, the city of Shechem played a pivotal role. When King Solomon died, the people gathered in Shechem, and it was there that the Ten Tribes seceded from Davidic rule and formed the Northern Kingdom.

Eventually, Shechem also served as a stronghold for the Samaritans, an ethnic group that was transferred to the Holy Land by Sennacherib, King of Assyria. Though they officially converted to Judaism, they retained their pagan practices and beliefs, and were consistently a thorn in the Jews' side.

After the destruction of the Temple, the Romans changed Shechem's name to "Neapolis" (meaning "new city"); this then became "Nablus." Nevertheless, although the Jewish nation was dispersed and weakened, there remained a continuous Jewish presence in Shechem, and Joseph's Tomb stayed a focus of Jewish pilgrimage and prayer.

The late Dr. Zvi Ilan, one of Israel's foremost archeologists, described Joseph's Tomb as: "...one of the tombs whose location is known with the utmost degree of certainty and is based on continuous documentation since biblical times."

Mark Twain on Shechem

In 1867, Mark Twain visited Shechem. He described this visit in his diary which was later published. The following are some interesting excerpts:

"At two o'clock we stopped to lunch and rest at ancient Shechem, between the historic Mounts of Gerizim and Ebal, where in the old times the books of the law, the curses and the blessings, were read from the heights to the Jewish multitudes below.

"About a mile and a half from Shechem we halted at the base of Mount Ebal before a little square area, enclosed by a high stone wall, neatly whitewashed. Across one end of this enclosure is a tomb . . . It is the tomb of Joseph. No truth is better authenticated than this.

"Few tombs on earth command the veneration of so many races and men of diverse creeds as this of Joseph. Samaritan and Jew, Muslim and Christian alike, revere it, and honor it with their visits. The tomb of Joseph, the dutiful son, the affectionate, forgiving brother, the virtuous man, the wise Prince and ruler. Egypt felt his influence - the world knows his history." Regarding the city's Jewish community, he writes:

"For thousands of years this clan have dwelt in Shechem under strict taboo and having little commerce or fellowship with their fellowmen of any religion or nationality. For generations they have not numbered more than one or two hundred, but they still adhere to their ancient faith and maintain their ancient rites and ceremonies. Talk of family and old descent! ... This handful of old first families of Shechem...can name their fathers straight back without a flaw for thousands [of years].... I found myself gazing at any straggling scion of this strange race with a riveted fascination, just as one would stare at a living mastodon or a megatherium..."



JOSEPH'S TOMB IN THE 19TH CENTURY

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 29 Kislev 5785 - 30 December 2024

Passing of Rabbi Chizkiyah de Silva (1698)

Rabbi Chizkiyah was born in Italy, and at the age of nineteen, he traveled to Jerusalem, where he studied under R. Moshe Galante. He authored *Pri Chadash*, a classical commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law), and *Mayim Chayim*. He passed away on 29 Kislev

5458 (1698), at the age of thirty-nine (some date his passing as 28 Kislev) and is buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

Wednesday, 1 Tevet 5785 - 1 January 2025

Esther made Queen (362 BCE)

"And Esther was taken to King Achashverosh, to his palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tevet, in the seventh year of his reign. And the

king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won his favor and kindness more than all the women; he placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in Vashti's stead" - Book of Esther 2:16-17. This set the stage for the miracle of Purim six years later, on the 13th and 14th of Adar of the year 3405 (356 BCE).