

PARSHAT VAYECHI

5 - 11 Teves 5785
5 - 11 January 2025

Torah: Genesis 47:28 - 50:26
Haftorah: Kings I 2:1-12

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)

Hayom Yom

"Know the G-d of your fathers and serve Him with a whole heart." - Chronicles I, 28:9. Every sort of Torah knowledge and comprehension, even the most profound, must be expressed in Avoda (lit. "service"). Meaning, the intellectual attainment must bring about an actual refinement and improvement of character traits and must be translated into a deep-rooted inward attachment (to G d) - all of which is what the Chassidic lexicon calls "Avoda".

PRACTICAL LEARNING

The first verse of this week's Torah portion tells us that Jacob lived his last seventeen years in Egypt. The Biblical commentator Baal Haturim notes that the number seventeen has the numerical value equivalent to the Hebrew word "Tov" (good). He, therefore, infers that Jacob's finest years were those spent in Egypt, reunited with Joseph and surrounded by his entire family.

These seventeen years were not lived in the Holy Land. They were spent in Egypt, a land renowned for its decadent and immoral population. Yet Jacob thoroughly enjoyed his stay there, because of the Yeshiva which had been established in the land. According to the Talmud, before Jacob agreed to travel to Egypt, he sent his son Judah ahead to establish a Yeshiva in Goshen, the Egyptian territory where Jacob and his children settled. Fully aware that his descendants would face difficult and harrowing times in Egypt, Jacob realized that only the Yeshivas could give them a strong Jewish identity, enable them to withstand all the difficulties and persecutions, and insulate them against the threat of assimilation.

Of all the twelve brothers, every one a righteous and worthy Torah scholar in his own right, Jacob chose Judah to establish the Yeshiva. Why him? Indeed, the Midrash tells us that Joseph was Jacob's primary student, and in the years preceding his sale to Egypt Jacob imparted to him all he had learned throughout his many years of study. Wouldn't then Joseph have been the appropriate choice to head the Egyptian School of Advanced Torah Study?

An understanding of the difference between Joseph and Judah will answer this question. Both were royal personalities; Joseph in Egypt, and Judah was the king of the brothers, and the progenitor of the Royal House of David. According to Chassidic teachings, Joseph and Judah possessed different strengths; each one "king" in his unique domain. The name Yehudah (Judah) is rooted in the Hebrew word "Hoda'ah," which means acknowledgement and submission. Judah represents action; an acknowledgment that we are merely servants of the Creator who must implement the Divine will whether or not we comprehend its meaning. The name Yosef (Joseph) means to

increase. Joseph represents the powers of intellect and emotion, qualities which develop and mature with age and experience, as opposed to action which qualitatively never changes. A three year old girl lights Shabbat candles just as her mother does; the difference between the two lies in the understanding and appreciation of the Mitzvah.

Both Judah and Joseph are necessary components of a Jew's life. We are commanded to understand Torah and love G-d, but these qualities do not suffice; ultimately a Jew must serve G-d simply because this is what He commanded us to do. Undoubtedly, Judah also studied Torah and labored on refining his personality, and Joseph certainly unconditionally submitted to G-d's will; the difference between the two tribes was emphasis. Judah emphasized the primacy of action whereas Joseph stressed the importance of developing our G-d-given talents.

Jacob chose Judah to establish the Egyptian Yeshiva, because in times of exile, turmoil, and hardship, it is Judah's legacy which ensures our continued allegiance to G-d and His holy Torah. The heart and mind can be manipulated and swayed by decades and centuries of suffering, but the Jew's inherent submission to G-d, which stems from the very essence of the Jewish Soul, can withstand any challenge which the most grueling exile may present. Yes, the Yeshivas must teach our youth how to study Torah, but that is not their most important goal. The key to Jewish survival is educators who follow the spirit of Judah, imbuing our children with a sense of duty - their duties towards G-d, the world, and their fellow Jews.

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

DON'T WRITE THE OBITUARY JUST YET!

There was a fellow whose morning ritual involved reading the daily paper while drinking a glass of cold, freshly squeezed orange juice. One day, as he flipped through the obituary section, he was shocked to see his own name on the list of those who had passed.

He assumed that it was someone else who shared his name, but upon closer inspection, all the information was a perfect match.

Furiously, he called the newspaper office and demanded to be put through

to the editor. He insisted on an apology and a retraction.

The editor was rather unsympathetic and categorically refused to issue an apology.

"Sir, the Paper does not make mistakes."

"But I'm alive! I'm talking to you on the telephone!"

"Sir, the Paper does not make mistakes. We, therefore, cannot issue a correction or an apology. However, if you insist, we can put your name in tomorrow's Birth Column."

Just 80 years ago, the Jewish People's obituary had already been written. We were down and out with a full third of our population decimated and Hitler's Museum of the Extinct Jewish Race was already being planned.

Thank G-d, we did indeed resurface in the "birth column," as the survivors emerged from Europe and resettled in Israel and the world over, doing their best to raise the next generation of our nation.

In Parshat Vayechi, we read about the passing of our patriarch Jacob. Remarkably, Rabbi Yochanan of the Talmud claimed that "our father Jacob never died." When his colleagues challenged the veracity of his astounding statement, he explained: "Just as his descendants are alive, he is alive."

Jacob's life work continued in perpetuity. He was described as the "select of the forefathers." Why? Because whereas Abraham fathered Isaac, he also bore Ishmael. And Isaac fathered Jacob, but also Esau. Jacob, however, fathered twelve sons who became the 12 Tribes of Israel, who all remained faithful to his way of life, and through whom Am Yisrael, the Jewish nation, was firmly established.

Whether it is the individual Jew or the Jewish People, the same rule applies. We have a role to play, a mission to accomplish—each of us in our own personal lives and all of us collectively. We cannot opt out. We are only as good as the sum of all our parts.

And the very trajectory of history depends on us too. Our actions can change not only our own situation, but the rest of the world too, and can even achieve global redemption. Our "chosenness" is as much a responsibility as it is privilege.

A congregant of mine returned from a visit to Israel with a charming story. He was in a taxi and spent



time chatting with the Israeli driver. Now, anyone who has ever interacted with taxi drivers in Israel knows that they are a unique species. Somehow, every taxi driver there is a world expert on everything from the Bible to philosophy, politics, the economy, and world peace. When my friend asked his driver if he was not worried about the current danger levels in the Middle East, the driver was completely dismissive of his concerns.

"But you are living in a dangerous part of the world, surrounded by enemies who are trying to drive you into the sea. How can you not be anxious?" my friend persisted.

The driver smiled.

"Tell me, have you heard of Clint Eastwood?"

"Of course," replied my friend.

"Well, if you've ever watched a Clint Eastwood movie, you know that he will not be killed, no matter how many people are trying to murder him. In the end, he always survives.

"Why? Because he is the star of the film. He cannot die. They need him for the next movie!"

"Well, we are the same. G-d needs us around to fulfill our destiny and His destiny. That's why I'm not worried."

The Jewish People never die. We almost die on a regular basis. In every generation, there is someone trying to wipe us out. But do we die? Will we? Can we? Never!

Jacob never died because we continue to carry on what he and our other patriarchs and matriarchs began.

Let us live proud Jewish lives and continue to be living examples of eternal Jewish continuity.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

VAYECHI IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Vayechi," means "And he lived" and it is found in Genesis 47:28.

Jacob lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children, but is prevented from doing so.

Jacob blesses his 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 Simeon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive-growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage bed"; Simeon 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.

A large funeral procession consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Jews' exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G-d will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 5 Tevet 5785 - 5 January 2025

Sefarim Victory (1987)

5 Tevet is celebrated as a day of rejoicing in the Chabad-Lubavitch community. On this date in 1987, a US Federal Court issued a decision in favor of Agudas Chassidei Chabad ("Union of Chabad Chassidim") regarding the ownership of the priceless library of the 6th Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn. The ruling was based on the idea that a Rebbe is not a private individual, but rather a communal figure synonymous with the body of Chassidim. The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's son-in-law and successor) urged that the occasion be marked with time devoted to study from Torah books ("Sefarim") as well as the acquisition of new Torah books.

News of Jerusalem's Defeat Reaches Babyonia (422 BCE)

In 434 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon invaded Judea, exiling King Jehoiachin and thousands of Jewish notables to Babylon. Eleven years later, the Nebuchadnezzar's army invaded Jerusalem again, setting fire to the Temple and massacring its inhabitants. The tragic news reached the Babylonian exiles five months later, on 5 Teves 3338 (422 BCE). According to a minority opinion, this day is commemorated as a fast day.

Shlomo Molcho Burned at the Stake (1532)

Shlomo was raised as a hidden Jew and served at the royal court in Lisbon, Portugal. When the enigmatic David HaReuveini appeared in Portugal, claiming to hail from the Ten Lost Tribes, Shlomo was inspired to return to Judaism. So as not to be indicted by the Inquisition for abandoning Christianity, Shlomo traveled to

Salonica, Turkey, and then to Safed, Israel, where he delved into the intricacies of Kabbalah. Sadly, the Inquisition caught up to him and he was given the choice of accepting Christianity or being burned at the stake. Shlomo chose the latter, and he was killed in Mantua, Italy, meriting to sanctify G-d's name.

Wednesday, 8 Tevet 5785 - 8 January 2025

Torah Translated into Greek (246 BCE)

In a second attempt to translate the Torah into Greek (after an unsuccessful attempt 61 years earlier), the ruling Greek-Egyptian emperor Ptolemy gathered 72 Torah sages, had them sequestered in 72 separate rooms, and ordered them to each produce a translation. On the 8th of Tevet of the year 3515 (246 BCE) they produced 72 corresponding translations, including identical changes in 13 places (where they each felt that a literal translation would constitute a corruption of the Torah's true meaning). This Greek rendition became known as the Septuagint, "of the seventy" (though later versions that carry this name are not believed to be true to the originals). Greek became a significant second language among Jews as a result of this translation. During Talmudic times, 8 Tevet was observed by some as a fast day, expressing the fear of the detrimental effect of the translation.

Thursday, 9 Tevet 5785 - 9 January 2025

Passing of Ezra (313 BCE)

Ezra led the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel after the Babylonian exile of 3337-3407 (423-353 BCE), oversaw the building of the Second Temple, canonized the 24 books of the Holy Scriptures ("bible") and, as head of the "Great Assembly" legislated a series of laws and practices (including formalized prayer) which left

a strong imprint on Judaism to this very day. He passed away on the 9th of Tevet of the year 3448 (313 BCE - 1000 years after the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai in 1313 BCE). The passing of Ezra marked the end of the "Era of Prophecy".

Alfred Dreyfus Dismissed from French Military (1895)

Alfred Dreyfus, a captain in the French Army, was falsely accused of treason, largely on account of his Jewish identity. On this date, he was formally stripped from his rank, following which he was deported to a prison on Devil's Island, where he languished for over four years. The case and its aftermath, known as the Dreyfus Affair, served as a poignant reminder that despite modern promises of equality and progress, anti-Semitism was still prevalent, and Jews were unable to fully integrate into European society.

Saddam Hussein Hanged (2006)

After being found guilty of crimes against humanity, the evil Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was put to death on 9 Tevet 5766 (2006). Hussein was responsible for the Kuwait invasion that sparked the First Gulf War, and subsequently launched tens of SCUD missiles against Israel.

Friday, 10 Tevet 5785 - 10 January 2025

Siege of Jerusalem (425 BCE)

On the 10th of Tevet of the year 3336 (425 BCE), the armies of the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. Thirty months later - on Tammuz 17, 3338 - the city walls were breached, and on 9 Av of that year, the Holy Temple was destroyed. The Jewish people were exiled to Babyonia for 70 years. 10 Tevet is observed as a fast day.