

THE NIGHT THE SHIVA FOR THE HOLOCAUST ENDED

PARSHAT BESHALACH

4 - 10 Shevat 5785
2 - 8 February 2025

Torah: Exodus 13:17 - 17:16
Haftorah: Judges 4:4 - 5:31

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 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)

Negative Commandment 280 Perverting Justice against a Convert or Orphan

A judge is forbidden to unlawfully rule against a convert or orphan [taking advantage of their powerlessness]. Though it is forbidden to pervert justice no matter the identity of the defendant, a judge who does so in that case of a convert or orphan, transgresses also this additional prohibition.

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

One cold winter night in Shevat 5711 (January 1951), an overflowing crowd squeezed into a stately brick building on Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and in not so many words, declared an end to the Shiva (mourning) for the Holocaust.

The Nazis had surrendered only six years prior. Many of the hundreds gathered there were survivors of the camps themselves. All had lived through the Holocaust and were traumatized and devastated by it.

For many Jews as that time - old as well as young - the feeling was that the Holocaust had snuffed out Jewish pride and vibrancy forever, even for those who hadn't been there. The impossibility of what had happened seemed to threaten the possibility that it would ever be okay to smile again.

Individuals here and there had patched together one semblance of a life or another, but as a people, as a nation, and especially as a community based on faith in G-d - it felt like the best times were behind them.

The shadow of the Holocaust loomed so large and imposing that it felt inescapable. Stories of tragedy and loss were commonplace. Every other face you passed on the street was a reminder. Every Yartzeit (anniversary of passing), every Kaddish, every memorial, every Yizkor - it was all about the war and the destruction and the millions. Even the happy days were sad days. Every birth, Bar Mitzvah, and Chupah (wedding) was called a triumph, an answer, an act of revenge and defiance, an attempt to replace what had been lost and rebuild what had been ruined. Every "Mazal Tov!" was expressed with a smile and sob.

Even Israel, which had become an internationally recognized country two years earlier, was championed as a way to make sure that IT would never happen again.

It just felt like the Shiva for the Holocaust would never end.

How could it? Who would end it? Finally, that night, at that gathering, it ended.

It didn't end because someone declared it over. It didn't end because an anniversary had been reached. It didn't end because the memory ran out. No.

It ended because a new Lubavitcher Rebbe was appointed that night, and he laid out a vision that was so joyous and so optimistic and so magnificently

grand, that for many of the men and women there, it felt like finally, finally, for the first time since the good life before the war, life was giving death a run for its money.

That night, the 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson OBM, issued a statement all about love. Not compassion, not pity, not remembrance or tribute, but love. Love for Judaism and - gasp! - for G-d, and most importantly, for one another.

That night, the Rebbe spoke about taking responsibility. He declared that as heirs to the heritage of Abraham, who'd taken responsibility for teaching the world about G-d, we must shoulder the same burden and once again teach the world about G-d, how all of creation is in the image of its Creator, is at one with its Creator.

That night, the Rebbe spoke about beauty. He declared that the world is G-d's garden, a lovely realm of charm and delight, simply divine and more precious than Heaven, and he spoke about how we can make it look the part. That night, the Rebbe spoke about living with urgency, energetically, like people on a mission, willing to toil for its completion. He called for a groundswell of good deeds, Mitzvot performed with passion and exuberance, and over and over again he pushed for the people to care deeply for each other, take care of each other, uplift and inspire each other, and help each other do Mitzvot.

The call for living with urgency and energetically was in itself an audacious sign of life for a nation ravaged by mourning and grieving and despair.

But the Rebbe wasn't done.

That night, to the utter astonishment - there is no other way to put it - of those gathered there, the Rebbe announced that the call of the hour was (not to rebuild, revive, rebound or replace, but) nothing less than to bring Moshiach (the Messiah). Actually.

The crowd stood there listening in amazement as the Rebbe spoke to them, a roomful of people still trying to figure out how to believe again in the coming of Moshiach, and invited them to bring him.

That night, the Rebbe unveiled a plan to reveal the Divine Garden which is the world. Without a grim introduction and without a sad tribute, without looking back, the Rebbe declared the launch of the greatest, grandest project the world had ever seen.

And that night, by doing all that, the Rebbe ended the Shiva. It was time to get up, change, wash up and go to work. We could and would never forget, but the Shiva was over. Life was asking to be lived.

Just before Rosh Hashanah in the fall of 5699 (1939), the sun had set on the Jewish People.

And in the middle of that winter night in 5711 (1951), a few minutes before midnight, the sun rose for them again. Overnight, the warm rays of the Rebbe dream elevated a generation. The radiance illuminated hearts and minds across the world as word of the Rebbe's talks from that night spread.

A brutalized Chosen People, curled up in the fetal position, rose to their full height and resumed command.

Moshiach did not arrive that night, but he took root in the souls of real people with real lives, who set about working with Moshiach as the goal. And just like that, they weren't trying to survive; they weren't trying to make it. They were on a mission to bring Moshiach!

The question was no longer whether Judaism could survive all the evil; now it was a very serious question whether all the evil could survive Judaism.

It was no longer a question about believing that Moshiach was going to save them from destruction. They were on a mission to save Moshiach from obscurity and make it the new reality.

These people who had just escaped with their lives were on a monumental mission to help others with their lives. These people who had seen a heartless, ugly world were assured that they could reveal a lovely, beautiful world.

These people who had lived through hell on earth had been empowered to create Heaven on earth.

It was the Tenth of Shvat. The Shiva for the Holocaust was over, and that cold winter night turned out to be one of the warmest in history.

*By Rabbi Eli Friedman
Chabad of Calabasas*

SEEING IS BELIEVING?

When our first child was born, I stopped believing in G-d.

When people hear me say this, they are shocked. The rabbi doesn't believe in G-d?!

I'll explain.

I stopped believing. And I started knowing!

When you witness the miracle of creation with your own eyes, up close and personal, faith is unnecessary. The proof is right there.

Long before me, there was the legendary Chassidic master, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. When he was a young student, he came home from his yeshiva studies for Passover,

and his father asked him to share something he had learned. Levi Yitzchak said, "I learned that there is a G-d in this world."

"What?!" exclaimed his father. "For this you had to go to yeshiva? Even our maid knows that!"

"Martha," he called to her. "Do you believe in G-d?"

"Of course, sir," answered Martha.

"She believes," said Levi Yitzchak. "But I know."

In Parshat Beshalach, we read about the Splitting of the Sea, arguably the biggest miracle in all of history. One of the verses, which found its way into our Siddur and daily prayers, reads as follows:

"And the people of Israel saw the great, mighty hand which G-d had inflicted upon the Egyptians ... and the people believed in G-d and in Moses his servant."

This is impressive? They saw the incredible miracle of the Splitting of the Sea, and they believed there was a G-d in the world? How could they not believe?! What's the big deal to see a miracle and then to believe?

Faith is about believing in G-d when He is not that obviously present in our lives. True faith is believing even when we are going through difficult or tragic times and G-d seems entirely absent.

To believe before seeing the miracle would be something worth writing about, but to believe after the miracle seems mundane, obvious, and even somewhat dull.

But I must tell you that in my own rabbinic practice I have seen all too frequently how people have remained untouched and unaffected after experiencing an event that was clearly miraculous. Yes, some people don't believe even after the miracle! They attribute their good fortune to luck or coincidence.

Others, however, see the hand of G-d in every experience.

I was at a wedding the other day and the father of the groom got up, but instead of speaking he sang a song. The main lyrics of the song are two well-known Hebrew words, "baruch Hashem," or, "blessed be G-d." Indeed, he had much to be thankful for. And when the whole crowd of hundreds of guests joined him in singing and repeating the words, "baruch Hashem, baruch Hashem," it was a particularly moving moment.

If only we could all recognize the many miracles and deliverances in our daily lives with that kind of attitude!

My late father was the sole survivor of his entire family from Poland. I once asked him why he hadn't lost his faith the way so many other survivors had.

He replied that he had witnessed the unmistakable hand of G-d plucking him from one danger to the next. He escaped Poland, travelled to Vilna, then from Moscow to Vladivostok by train, by boat to Japan, and later Shanghai, before arriving in the United States after the war and meriting to rebuild his family.

"How could I not believe?" he said.

The Israelites watched the sea split and saw their mortal enemies washed ashore. Their freedom from Egyptian bondage was finally assured. They saw the awesome hand of G-d ... and they believed. I imagine there may well have been others who would have attributed their deliverance to some natural effect - perhaps El Nino or a freak tsunami. That our ancestors believed it was the hand of G-d is indeed a credit to them.

There are those who deny even the most blatantly obvious wonders, and then there are those who don't stop thanking G-d for even their smallest salvations. May we soon see the unmistakable hand

of G-d bringing Redemption to our people, and peace and tranquility to our broken world.

*By Rabbi Yossy Goldman
President, South African Rabbinical Association*

BESHALACH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Beshalach," means "When he sent" and it is found in Exodus 13:17.

Soon after allowing the children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Jews 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 Jews to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.

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 Jewish camp each evening.

The children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua Moses' student.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 4 Shevat 5785 - 2 February 2025

Rabbi Israel Abuchatzera (1984)

Rabbi Israel Abuchatzera (5650-5744, or 1890-1984), known as "Baba Sali," was born in Tafillalt, Morocco, to the illustrious Abuchatzera family. From a young age he was renowned as a sage, miracle maker and master kabbalist. In 5724 (1964) he moved to the Holy Land, eventually settling in the southern development town he made famous, Netivot. He passed away in 5744 (1984) on the 4th of Shevat. His graveside in Netivot has become a holy site visited by thousands annually.

Monday, 5 Shevat 5785 - 3 February 2025

2nd Gerer Rebbe (1905)

Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (5607-5665, or 1847-1905) was the second Rebbe in the Chassidic dynasty of Ger. He passed away on the 5th of Shevat of the year 5665 (1905). He was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai.

Thursday, 8 Shevat 5785 - 6 February 2025

End of the "Elders Era" (1228 BCE)

The last of the Elders (Z'keinim) who were contemporaries of the Prophet Joshua and outlived him, passed away in 2533 (1228 BCE). They were part of the chain of Torah transmission as listed at the beginning of Ethics of the Fathers: "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets..."

In ancient times, this day was marked as a fast day.

Shabbat, 10 Shevat 5785 - 8 February 2025

Passing of the Rashash (1777)

Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, known by his name's acronym, the RaShaSH, was born in Yemen, and as a young man immigrated to Israel. He was quickly recognized for his piety and scholarship, especially in the area of Jewish mysticism, and was appointed to be dean of the famed Kabbalistic learning center in the Old City of Jerusalem, the Yeshivat ha-Mekubalim.

His mystical works are studied by kabbalists to this very day. He is also considered to be a foremost authority on Yemenite Jewish traditions and customs. He passed away on 10 Shevat 5537 (1777) and is buried in Jerusalem.

Passing of Rebbetzin Rivkah (1914)

Rebbetzin Rivkah Schneerson was born in Lubavitch in 5593 (1833); her maternal grandfather was Rabbi DovBer, the 2nd Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch. In 5609 (1849) Rabbi Shmuel, who later became the 4th Lubavitcher Rebbe. She passed away on 10 Shevat 5664. The Beth Rivkah network of girls' schools, founded by her grandson Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak in the 5700's (1940's), is named after her.

Yahrzeit of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1950)

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born in the summer of 5640 (1880), in the small village of Lubavitch, the historic center of Chabad, in Russia. Under the patronage of

his father, he established the Tomchei Temimim Yeshiva there, equipping a new cadre of students with the knowledge, vision and conviction for the challenging times ahead.

Following his father's passing, he assumed the leadership of Chabad, rallying and reorganizing his scattered and disorientated Chassidim in the face of famine, disease and heightening religious persecution at the hands of the new communist regime. Following his 5687 (1927) arrest, during which he was tortured, he relocated to Warsaw and built a new educational and institutional infrastructure from scratch, only to see it destroyed at the hands of the Nazis in 5699 (1939). Arriving in New York, he immediately set out to build a new network of educational institutions and activists. Despite personal illness and frailty, he made intensive efforts both to save Jews from the Nazi onslaught and to imbue a new generation of American Jews with the potent spirit of Chassidism.

The Rebbe passed away on Shabbat morning, the 10th of Shevat, of the year 5710 (1950), and is buried in New York.

7th Lubavitcher Rebbe Assumes Leadership (1951)

At a gathering of Chassidim marking the first anniversary of the passing of the 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Rebbe's son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, delivered a Chassidic discourse (Maamar) entitled Basi LeGani ("I Came into My Garden"), signifying his formal acceptance of the leadership of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.