

Torah Weekly

December 29, 2019-

January 4, 2020

1-7 Tevet, 5780

Torah: Vayigash: Genesis
44:18 - 47:27

Haftorah: Ezekiel 37:15-28
VAYIGASH

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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Do You Know Your Soul?

The story of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers after decades of bitter separation is one of the most dramatic in the Torah. Twenty-two years earlier, when Joseph was seventeen years old, his brothers kidnapped him, threw him into a pit, then sold him as a slave to Egyptian merchants. In Egypt, Joseph spent twelve years in prison, from where he rose to become viceroy of the country. Now, the moment was finally ripe for reconciliation. "Joseph could not hold in his emotions," the Torah relates in this week's *parshah*. He dismissed from his chamber all of his Egyptian assistants, "and he began to weep with such loud sobs that the Egyptians outside could hear him. And Joseph said to his brothers: 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' His brothers were so astounded, they could not respond." (*Genesis 45:1-3*.) **A Sage Weeps** The Talmud relates that whenever the great sage Rabbi Elazar came to this verse — "his brothers were so astounded they could not respond" — he would weep. Rabbi Elazar would say, "If the rebuke of a man of flesh and blood (Joseph) is so powerful that it causes so much consternation, the rebuke of G-d (when it comes) will all the more so cause much shame." (*Talmud, Chagigah 4b.; cf. Midrash Rabah, Bereishit 93:11*.) Yet, two points in Rabbi Elazar's statement seem to be amiss. Firstly, the verse does not say that the brothers were astounded because Joseph rebuked them. Perhaps the brothers were astounded by the realization that the man standing before them was none other than their long lost brother Joseph? Secondly, the comparison between Joseph's rebuke of his brothers and G-d's rebuke of mankind seems to be exaggerated. The brothers personally sold Joseph into slavery, subjecting him to the

worst type of abuse. It stands to reason, therefore, that they would be utterly in shock when they finally faced him. Could any of us have ever have caused a similar affront to G-d, as to experience such dread in the face of G-d's rebuke? (*This first question is raised in Shem Mishmuel, Vayigash p. 271. The second question in Or Hatorah, Vayigash vol. 6 p. 1974.*) **Our Inner Dreamer** To understand this, we must recall the idea stated a number of times that all of the figures depicted in the Torah are not just physical people who lived at a certain period of time. They also embody particular psychological and spiritual forces, existing continuously within the human heart. Joseph is described in the Torah as a beautiful and graceful lad, "handsome of form and handsome of appearance," and as a "master of dreams." (*Genesis 37:2, 37:19 and 39:4-6*.) According to the Kabbalah, Joseph symbolizes the pure and sacred soul of man. Thus, to understand the story of Joseph, we must understand the nature of our own soul. (*See Torah Or, Vayigash p. 44 and references noted there.*) **A Portrait of the Soul** What does a soul look like? What elements of our personality can we attribute to our soul? In the Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi defines the soul as a flame that seeks to depart from its wick and kiss the heavens. "The soul," he writes, "constitutes the quest in man to transcend the parameters of his (or her) ego and become absorbed in the source of all existence." (*Tanya, Chapter 19, based on Proverbs 20:27*.) The sixteenth-century Kabbalist, Rabbi Elazar Azkari, wrote a prayer which describes the soul in these words: "My soul is sick with love for you; O G-d, I beg you, please heal it by showing it the sweetness of your splendor; then it will be invigorated and healed, experiencing everlasting joy." (*Yedid Nefesh, sung by*

many congregations Friday evening.) The soul, in other words, is that dimension of our psyche that needs not self-aggrandizement, dominance or excessive materialism. It despises politics, manipulation and dishonesty. It is repulsed by unethical behavior and by false facades. What are its aspirations? The soul harbors a single yearning: to melt away in the all-pervading truth of G-d. **The Abused Soul** Yet, how many of us are even aware of the existence of such a dimension in our personality? How many of us pay heed to the needs of our soul? In response to the soul's never-ending dreams and yearnings that confuse our ego-based schedules and disturb our cravings for instant gratification, we so often take the "Joseph" within us and plunge it into a pit. We attempt to relegate its dreams and passions to the subconscious cellars of our psyche. When that does not work, because we can still hear its silent pleas, we sell our "Joseph" as a slave to foreigners, allowing our souls to become subjugated to forces and drives that are alien to its very identity. Can you imagine how horrified you would be if you were to observe somebody taking the little adorable hand of an infant and placing it on a burning stove? The Chassidic masters describe each time we utter a lie, each time we humiliate another human being, each time we sin, as precisely that: taking the precious innocent spirituality of our soul and putting it through abuse and torture. (*See Tanya chapters 24 and 31.*) **Moment of Truth** Yet, in each of our lives the moment arrives when our inner "Joseph," which was forced to conceal its truth for so many years, breaks down and reveals to us its identity. At that moment, we come to discover the sheer beauty and depth of our soul, and our hearts are filled with shame. The humiliation the brothers experienced when Joseph

revealed himself to them did not stem from the fact that he rebuked them for their selling him into slavery. Joseph's mere appearance to them constituted the most powerful rebuke: For the first time they realized who it was that they subjected to such horrific abuse and their hearts melted away in shame. Similarly, Rabbi Elazar was saying, when the day will come and we will realize the G-dly and spiritual sacredness of our own personalities, we will be utterly astounded. We will ask ourselves again and again, how did we allow ourselves to cast such a beautiful and innocent soul into a dark and gloomy pit? (*This essay is based on a note written by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (the "Tzemach Tzedek," 1789-1866), published in Ohr Hatorah ibid., and on a 1961 discourse by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Sefer Hamammaram Melukat vol. 5 p. 261. Cf. Sefas Emes and Shem Mishmuel Parshas Vayigash.*) By Rabbi Yosef Y. Jacobson

No Time To Weep The wisest of men said there is a time to weep, which implies that there will be occasions when weeping is inappropriate. Though King Solomon's exact words were *there is a time to weep and a time to laugh*, (Ecclesiastes 3:4) obviously there are times when other responses are called for. Clearly, life is not simply about crying or laughing. This week's *parshah* relates the story of Joseph's dramatic reunion with his brothers. Though he embraces them all, he reserves his deepest emotions for his only full brother, Benjamin. Joseph was separated from his brothers when Benjamin was a mere child, and Benjamin was the only one who was not involved in the plot against Joseph. Theirs was, therefore, an exceptional embrace: *And he (Joseph) fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and cried, and Benjamin cried on his neck* (Genesis 45:14). Rashi, quoting the Talmud, (Megilla 16b.) explains that for both brothers, their cries were, beyond the powerful feelings of the moment, nothing short of prophetic. Joseph wept over the two Temples of Jerusalem, destined for destruction, which were in the land apportioned to the tribe of Benjamin. And Benjamin cried over the Sanctuary at Shilo, located in the land apportioned to the tribe of Joseph, which would also be destroyed. The question is why: are they each crying over the other's *churban* (destruction)? Why do they not cry over their own destructions? The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that when it comes to someone else's problem, we may be able to help but we cannot solve other people's problems. Even good friends can only do so much. We can offer generous assistance, support and the best advice in the world, but the rest is up to him or her. No matter how strenuous our efforts, there can be no guarantee that they will be successful. As hard as we may try to help, the individual alone holds the key to sort out his or her own situation. So, if we are convinced that we have done our absolute best for the other person and have still failed to bring about a satisfactory resolution, the only thing we can do is shed a tear. We can pray for them, we can be sympathetic. Beyond that, there is really nothing else we can do. When we have tried and failed, all we can do is cry. But when it comes to our own problems and challenges, our own *churban*, there we dare not settle for a good cry. We cannot afford the luxury of giving up and weeping. If it is *our* problem, then it is our duty to confront it again and again until we make it right. For others we can cry; but for ourselves we must act. Sixty years ago, the great spiritual leaders of Europe were counting their losses — in the millions! The great Chassidic courts of Poland, the prestigious yeshivas of Lithuania, were all destroyed by the Nazi hordes. What did these righteous people do? Did they sit down and cry? Of course there were tears and mourning and indescribable grief, but the emphasis quickly shifted to rebuilding. And today, thank G-d, those same institutions are alive and well, thriving and pulsating with spirit and energy in Israel and the United States. The leadership focused on the future. And painstakingly, over time, they were able to resuscitate and rejuvenate their decimated communities. Those leaders cried bitter tears for their fallen comrades, but for themselves they did not sit and weep. They set about the task of rebuilding — and succeeded in the most inspiring, miraculous way. When we have problems (and who doesn't?), so many of us simply moan and sigh and heave a good old-fashioned *yiddische krechtz* (Jewish groan). How many times have we sighed, *What can I do?* And what does that leave us with? — with the moaning and groaning and nothing else. In the words of the fifth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch, *One good deed is worth more than a thousand sighs*. Leave the *krechtzing* for others. If it's your problem, confront it, deal with it, work at it. You'll be surprised by the results. By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

**Passover order forms have been sent to the Chaplains and Rabbis. Please begin speaking with your Chaplain about Passover.*

December 29, 2019---1 Tevet, 5780

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 virgins; 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 from creation (356 BCE).

December 30, 2019---2 Tevet, 5780

8th Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

On the 25th of Kislev in the year 3622 from creation, the Maccabees liberated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, after defeating the vastly more numerous and powerful armies of the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus IV, who had tried to forcefully uproot the beliefs and practices of Judaism from the people of Israel. The victorious Jews repaired, cleansed and rededicated the Temple to the service of G-d. But all the Temple's oil had been defiled by the pagan invaders; when the Jews sought to light the Temple's menorah (candelabra), they found only one small cruse of ritually pure olive oil. Miraculously, the one-day supply burned for eight days, until new, pure oil could be obtained. In commemoration, the Sages instituted the 8-day festival of Chanukah, on which lights are kindled nightly to recall and publicize the miracle.

January 2, 2020---5 Tevet, 5780

Sefarim victory (1987)

Tevet 5 is celebrated as a day of rejoicing in the Chabad-Lubavitch community. On this date in 1987, U.S. 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 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.

January 4, 2020---7 Tevet, 5780

Passing of R. Tzvi, Son of the Baal Shem Tov (1780)

After the passing of the Baal Shem Tov on Shavuot 1760, R. Tzvi succeeded him as leader of the Chassidic movement. Exactly one year later, R. Tzvi announced to his disciples that his father had appeared to him in a vision and instructed him to transfer the leadership to R. Dovber, the Maggid of Mezeritch.