

# Torah Weekly

5-11 January, 2020  
 8-14 Tevet, 5780  
 Torah: Vayechi: Genesis  
 47:28 - 50:26  
 Haftorah: Kings I 2:1-12  
**PARSHAT VAYECHI**

**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 Matzah 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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*Get Past the Resentment* I was taking a walk with a friend. As we approached a large house, she said abruptly: "Let's cross the street!" It turns out that my friend and her husband had had a business partnership with the homeowner. The partnership had soured; he had wronged and cheated my friend. The very mention of his name or walking by the home triggered in her a negative response. Despite her current business success, she cannot overcome her feelings of anger. I understand her because I react similarly. Don't we all harbor inside of us memories that elicit our strongest emotions against individuals who deceived or misled us? In this week's Torah portion, Joseph and his brothers return from burying their father, Jacob. Joseph stops at the pit that his brothers had thrown him into. His brothers become frightened, saying: "What if Joseph will hate us, and will pay us back the evil which we did to him?" (Gen. 50:15) The brothers appeal to Joseph, cautioning him that his father had warned him not to take revenge. Jacob, in fact, had never done so; he would not suspect Joseph of revenge. Nor did Joseph ever intend for vengeance. He made a detour at the pit—not to reignite negative memories, but to

have the opportunity to recite the blessing we are commanded to say at a place where a miracle was performed for us. (Midrash Tanchuma) Joseph weeps that his brothers had suspected him of such behavior. He reassures them: "Don't be afraid. Am I instead of G-d? You intended evil but G-d meant it for good. . . ." (Gen. 50: 19-20) How was Joseph able to get past his suffering without harboring any grudge against his brothers? On the day his brothers sold him as a slave, Joseph had been a vulnerable teenager. His comfortable life as his father's beloved son was changed forever. His brothers had acted callously and cruelly. But as far as Joseph was concerned, that was something *between them and G-d*. What happened to him—being sold as a slave, descending to Egypt, becoming Pharaoh's viceroy and, ultimately, saving his family from famine—was all G-d's grand plan. Joseph reached an awareness that G-d is in control of everything; therefore, his brothers had done nothing to him *outside of G-d's* design. Too many of us hold on to what feels like justifiable resentment. In truth, the resentment only perpetuates and prolongs our own hurt. Joseph teaches us how to get past this: Surrender to the

knowledge that all that happens to you is part of G-d's benevolent plan. The individual that wounded you may have intended evil, but that is between that individual and G-d. As far as you're concerned, your life is following the exact script that G-d wants for you. This realization helps us begin to rid ourselves of the heavy burden of anger, resentment and hate. It also allows us to open ourselves up to receive the good that G-d has in store for us. *By Rebbetzin Chana Weisberg*  
**Lion, Donkey, or Wolf?**  
 At the end of his life, Jacob gathered his children to impart his final words and blessings. Time and again in the book of Genesis we read about the challenge of succession—the difficulty of conveying an intangible, fragile idea to the next generation. Until now, tension and conflict has surrounded the succession, as generation after generation only one son is entrusted with the spiritual legacy. Now, for the first time in Jewish history, all 12 sons of Jacob are tasked with continuing the legacy of Abraham. Each has a specific quality that will contribute critically to the Jewish story. Jacob uses animal metaphors to describe many of his sons: "A cub, a grown lion is Judah... He crouched, rested like a lion, and like a lion, who will rouse him?" "Issachar is a bony donkey,

lying between the boundaries.” “Dan will be a serpent on the road, a viper on the path, which bites the horse's heels, so its rider falls backwards.” “Naphtali is a swift gazelle, who utters beautiful words.” “Benjamin is a wolf, he will prey; in the morning he will devour plunder, and in the evening he will divide the spoil.”

(Genesis 49) Both beasts of prey and domesticated animals are used to describe the tribes. The wild animals represent passionate love of G-d, while the domesticated ones—who are easily tamed—represent submission and commitment to the Divine will. In Kabbalistic terminology, the pulse of spiritual life is both “running” and “returning.” “Running” is the yearning to escape the confines of one’s own existence; the feeling of passionate love towards G-d. “Running” is the feeling of inspiration, but inspiration alone is like a flame without fuel. Inspiration will evaporate unless it is followed by “return”—tangible, concrete action. Both qualities, “running” and “returning,” are necessary for any human endeavor. A successful business requires vision, inspiration, and passionate energy (running), as well as a commitment to the necessary but tedious grunt work (returning). The same is true about relationships. Without emotion there is no energy, no fire, no inspiration. But “running” alone is not enough. For a relationship to endure, there must be mutual commitment regardless of whether or not he or she feels inspiration in the moment. The same is true of our relationship with G-d. The Torah seeks to inspire us with love and awe. We begin the day with an effort to “run,” to escape the mundane, to transcend the material and connect to G-d. Yet Judaism teaches that we must “return” to the earth to sanctify it. We must “return” with inspiration and commit to fulfilling the Divine will in this world.

Jacob gathers his children and reminds them that each of their qualities is critical to the Jewish story. We must “run,” passionate, like the lion, but also “return,” committed and dependable, like the donkey. (*Based on Or Haftorah, Bereishit (vol. 5) page 1984.*) By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

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

**January 5, 2019 – 8 Tevet, 5780**

**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 from creation (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, Tevet 8 was observed by some as a fast day, expressing the fear of the detrimental effect of the translation.

**January 6, 2019 – 9 Tevet, 5780**

**Passing of Ezra (313 BCE)**

Ezra, who led the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel after the Babylonian exile (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, passed away on the 9th of Tevet of the year 3448 from creation (313 BCE -- exactly 1000 years after the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai). The passing of Ezra marked the end of the "Era of Prophecy".

**January 7, 2019 – 10 Tevet, 5780**

**Siege of Jerusalem (425 BCE)**

On the 10th of Tevet of the year 3336 from Creation (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 Babylonia for 70 years.

**January 9, 2019 – 12 Tevet, 5780**

**Ezekiel Prophecies Egypt's Downfall (424 BCE)**

On this day, Ezekiel prophesied that Egypt would be destroyed, as punishment for failing to keep their repeated promises to assist the Israelites.

So says the L-rd G-d: Behold I am upon you, O Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great serpent that crouches in the midst of its rivers, who said, “My river is mine, and I made myself.” I will put hooks in your jaws and will cause the fish of your rivers to cleave to your scales; and I will drag you out from your rivers....I will scatter you in the desert, you and all the fish of your rivers...to the beasts of the earth and the birds of the heaven I have given you to be devoured. (Ezekiel 29:3-5)

**January 11, 2019 – 14 Tevet, 5780**

**R. Abraham Ibn Ezra Receives a Letter from the Shabbat Queen (1159)**

R. Abraham Ibn Ezra was visiting London when, one Friday night, he had a fascinating dream. In it, a venerable man approached him and handed him a letter from the Shabbat Queen. R. Abraham read the letter, in which Shabbat informed him that one of his students had attempted to prove that Shabbat begins Saturday morning, and not Friday night, and beseeched his assistance. As a result of this dream, R. Abraham wrote his *Epistle of Shabbat*, in which he demonstrates beyond doubt that Shabbat indeed begins Friday night.