

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

December 20-26, 2020
5-11 Tevet, 5781

Torah reading:
Vayigash: Genesis 44:18 - 47:27
Haftarah: Ezekiel 37:15-28

PARSHAT 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 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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INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

We're Not Alone

How many Jews came down to Egypt?

By the time of the Exodus, there were 600,000 men of military age (and, according to all estimates, a total of a few million people) in the young nation. But the number who originally went down to Egypt in the days of Joseph were only, by the Torah's attestation, "seventy souls." However, if one examines the text, Jacob's sons and their children — even including Joseph and his sons who were already in Egypt — only amount to a total of sixty-nine. The commentaries offer a number of explanations. Some say that the Torah simply rounds off the number to the nearest ten. Another explanation is that the seventieth person is Jocheved, born as Jacob's family was entering Egypt. Or, Jacob himself is counted as number seventy.

But, for me, the most touching one of all comes from the Midrash:

What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do? He Himself entered into the count and thus it totaled seventy, to fulfill his promise made earlier to Jacob (Genesis 46, 3-4), "Have no fear of going down to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. I shall descend with you to Egypt and I shall also surely bring you up..."

How inspiring! How magnificently encouraging. G-d is with us in Egypt. Amidst the bondage, the pain and persecution, He is with us. And in all our wanderings and dispersions, He is there. As He assures us in Psalm 91, *"I am with him in his affliction."* In all our anguish, in all our *tzorris*, He is right there with us!

It was this conviction of the invisible but tangible Divine Presence being with us in

the *Galut* and in the ghettos that sustained our people throughout a torturous history. This was the promise that inspired us with an inexhaustible fountain of faith, courage and strength to survive our enemies and to flourish again long after they were gone.

Many continue to ask, "Where was G-d during the Holocaust?" I could never even attempt to debate this question with an embittered survivor who has lost his faith. And who are we to criticize those holy tormented souls? But my father, and many like him, survived with their faith intact. How did they maintain their beliefs in spite of their suffering? One answer they might offer is this: "How did I survive? Do you understand how many miracles it took to get me out of Poland? Or out of the camps? And how about escaping Lithuania, Russia, Japan or Shanghai? How can I deny the hand of G-d that plucked me from danger again and again?"

Surely the greatest miracle of our generation is that after Auschwitz Jews still wanted to be Jewish. That our people rebounded and rebuilt their families, their communities and their homeland. For many, the certainty that a higher power was guiding them to survival is what sustained them in their darkest moments and what gave them the confidence to regroup and regenerate.

Soon, we will observe the fast of Tevet 10, commemorating the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. So who is having the last laugh? Do you know any grandchildren of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon? (Saddam Hussein is not one.) All that is left of his mighty empire are a few statues. All our enemies, down to the Third Reich, have come and gone. The Jews are here, alive and well, still doing their thing 2,500 years later.

G-d's promise to Jacob that "I will go down with you" has kept us going. And the conclusion of the verse assures us all of a happy conclusion. "And I shall surely also bring you up" — from Egypt and from our own exile. May it be speedily in our day.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Anger Management 101

"But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that G-d sent me before you... You did not send me here, but G-d, and He made me a father to Pharaoh, a lord over all his household, and a ruler over the entire land of Egypt..." (Joseph to his brothers, Genesis 45:5, 8).

Needless to say, most people in a similar situation would have reacted very differently. In hindsight, G-d's hand in the events which led to Joseph being elevated to royalty is unmistakable. It is easy for us, however, to view the entire story objectively. But Joseph had suffered the agony of being sold into slavery and being alone in an alien country for over two decades because of his brothers' actions. His ability to see beyond his personal pain, and appreciate the Divine strategy which brought him to Pharaoh's palace, is a testament to Joseph's self-control and maturity of wisdom.

the course of life, every person experiences the pain of being treated unjustly by others. Although sentiments of anger and vengeance are counter-productive and often destructive, they are natural reactions to such occurrences. And, unlike Joseph, we often don't get to see the positive results of the mistreatment. While many people spend much time, energy and money on various therapies, in many instances a simple belief

in G-d and Divine Providence is the antidote to this problem.

G-d is good. Period. And He controls everything which happens to us throughout our lives. Many people mistakenly believe that only natural catastrophes, such as non-contagious illnesses or freak accidents, are controlled by G-d (see the section in your homeowner's insurance policy which defines "Acts of G-d"), whereas wicked acts initiated by other people – people with free choice – are not Heavenly ordained, and are simply bad. The story of Joseph demonstrates the fallacy of this idea. Yes, what the brothers did was wrong, but what happened to Joseph was all part of the Divine master plan.

At those times when we are maltreated and cannot see the benefit or purpose of the suffering, Chassidic teachings recommend a two-part therapeutic medication.

Firstly, forget about instant gratification. It can be many years before the reason for the suffering becomes apparent. Joseph was incarcerated for twelve years before Pharaoh summoned him to decipher his dream. He had twelve long years in prison to dwell on the injustice perpetrated by his brothers! The story of Purim is another example of this idea. Esther was snatched away from her Jewish home and compelled to marry a vicious tyrannical king. Only five years later was G-d's plan understood by all.

Secondly, strength of character is achieved through hardship and suffering. In order for the Jewish people to receive the Torah, they first had to endure many decades of excruciating slavery in Egypt. Only through difficulty does a person acquire sensitivity and empathy for others, and the person who is hurt by another, and chooses to forgive rather than avenge, becomes a kinder and greater person. Indeed, the suffering itself, and the ability to rise above it all, is in itself a Divine gift.

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

Sunday, December 20, 2020 --- 5 Tevet, 5781

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.

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

In 434 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded Judea, exiling King Jehoiachin and thousands of Judean 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 422 BCE (Ezekiel 33:21). According to a minority opinion, this day is commemorated as a fast day (Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashanah 18b).

Tuesday, December 22, 2020 --- 7 Tevet, 5781

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.

Wednesday, December 23, 2020 --- 8 Tevet, 5781

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.

Thursday, December 24, 2020 --- 9 Tevet, 5781

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".

Alfred Dreyfus Dismissed from 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 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.

Friday, December 25, 2020

10 Tevet, 5781

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 Babyonia for 70 years.

Shabbat, December 26, 2020

11 Tevet, 5781

Purim Mezhibuzh (1648)

During the Chmielnicki Uprising of 1648-1649, the town of Mezhibuzh was miraculously saved from a Cossack invasion thanks to the efforts of a simple tailor named Mordechai and his wife, Esther. This day was celebrated as a minor "Purim" by the local inhabitants.