

Torah Weekly

ת"סג

November 21-27, 2021
17-23 Kislev, 5782

Torah reading:
Vayeishev: Genesis 37:1 - 40:23
Haftarah: Amos 2:6 - 3:8

PARSHAT VAYEISHEV

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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No One Forgotten.

"The Child In The Pit"

There is high drama in the Bible this week as we read the story of Joseph and his brothers. Technicolor dream coats, sibling rivalry, snake-infested pits and attempted fratricide dominate the Parshah proceedings. When the brothers plot to actually kill Joseph, Reuben, the eldest, makes a valiant effort to save Joseph's life, and suggests that instead they throw him into a pit. That would be sufficient to teach him a lesson, and no blood need be shed. In fact, according to Rashi, the Torah itself testifies that Reuben's intention was to save Joseph from his brothers and bring him back to their father. But destiny had a different plan. While Reuben was away, the brothers sold Joseph into slavery. When he returns to rescue him, the boy is gone and he rends his garments in grief. But where was Reuben when the sale took place? Why wasn't he there with his brothers at the time? Where did he suddenly disappear? Rashi gives two possible explanations: 1) It was his turn to go and serve his aged father. The brothers had a roster, and Reuben's time had come, so he was back at the ranch. 2) Reuben was busy

doing *teshuvah* (repentance), with sackcloth and fasting, for the sin of interfering with his father's marital life (as per Genesis 35:22). I remember hearing the Lubavitcher Rebbe ask: According to the second opinion, Reuben left Joseph in the pit to go and busy himself with "sackcloth and fasting," i.e. his own repentance for his sins. So let's take a look and see what happens as a result. Reuben is absent, so Joseph is sold into slavery and taken down to Egypt. There he is imprisoned on false charges and, one day, rises to sudden prominence by successfully interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. He becomes viceroy of Egypt, then meets his long-lost brothers when they come searching for food during the famine. After revealing his true identity, he brings his father Jacob and the entire family down to Egypt, where he supports and sustains them. And that is precisely how the Jews became slaves in Egypt. It all started with Joseph being taken from the pit and sold to the Egyptians. Why? Because Reuben decided to be busy doing *teshuvah*! I remember the Rebbethundering, "The whole Egyptian exile can be traced to Reuben's ill-timed *teshuvah*! When a young Jewish boy is languishing in the pit, this is **not** the time to be worrying about your own spiritual state. That is the time to save a Jewish child!" Of course, *teshuvah* is a wonderful mitzvah. In a way, it is the greatest mitzvah of all, because it can repair the damage done by failing to

observe all other mitzvahs. And yet, there is a time to do *teshuvah* and a time to save lives. And when a life is in danger, even *teshuvah* really must wait. The analogy of the Jewish child in the pit resonates powerfully today. It is about saving lives not only physically, but also spiritually. How many millions of Jewish children are at risk spiritually? And how many Jews, indeed how many rabbis, are preoccupied with their own personal spiritual upliftment and ignore the plight of young people "in the pits"? It is a sobering thought, and one that demands a response.
By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Jailhouse Route to Success

In the Torah portion of Vayeishev we read of Joseph's exploits. Sold into slavery by his brothers, he winds up enslaved to Potiphar, "a prominent Egyptian" (Genesis 39:1). But Joseph is no ordinary slave; rather, his master quickly realizes "that G-d is with him, and all that he would do, G-d would make successful in his hand." As a result, Potiphar "appointed him over his entire household."

But trouble is brewing. Joseph, "handsome in form," attracts the attention of his master's wife. When Joseph rejects her advances, she sets him up, landing Joseph in prison. But it is not long before the new kid in the cell block has taken charge of the ward. "G-d was with Joseph, and He endowed him with charm." As a result, the warden appoints Joseph to run the prison, "and everything that was done there, he would do."

A close reading of the differences of wording in the Torah's descriptions of Joseph's two successes—in Potiphar's home and in prison—reveals the key to true and ultimate success.

Where G-d has slated you for success, there are two possible paths along which you can tread. You can

assume a mindset and perception that it is the hand of man that attains success, with the apparent support and assistance of G-d. Or else, you can see the hand of G-d as the source of your success, with human endeavor serving as a mere vehicle through which the divine blessing is channeled.

In his days as a slave, Joseph's perception was that his success was achieved by his own hands—with G-d's help, of course. "All that he would do, G-d would make successful in his hand." As a prisoner, his perception changed—"G-d was with Joseph, and He endowed him with charm." There is no mention made of Joseph's hands: his success is not of his own doing, but stems entirely from a supernal source.

The key to success in this world is to make place for G-d's blessing in your life. The less full of yourself you are, the more room you leave to be filled by the G-dly presence and the bountiful blessings that come with it. Where a bloated ego fills your entire being, there's no room left for G-d.

The experience of slavery afforded Joseph a healthy dose of humility. As his own self-regard shrunk, G-d's presence in his life only grew, and success came to his hand. Still, "his hand" was a dominant factor, though sufficiently hollowed to allow G-d's blessing to fill it.

When Joseph became a prisoner, he was utterly shattered. This further diminution of self paved the way for a more complete divine occupation of his being. Now his success was no longer limited to his own hands; it arrived from a source completely over his head.

This, then, is the jailhouse route to success. To bring yourself divine blessing and abundant success, a bit of jail time might be required. But perhaps Joseph's is an extreme case. The rest of us can begin by placing our ego under lock and key.

By Rabbi Dovi Scheiner

Sunday, November 21, 2021 --- 17 Kislev, 5782

Ezra Cries and Prays (348 BCE)

On this day, Ezra the Scribe went up to the Holy Temple and fasted, prayed, and cried in public. While he prayed and confessed, weeping and prostrating himself in front of the Temple, a large assemblage of men, women, and children gathered around him.

At that time, all of the assembled priests and Israelites swore to send away their non-Jewish wives. Ezra then issued a proclamation that all Jews residing in Israel should assemble in three days' time in Jerusalem (see Today in Jewish History for the 20th of Kislev).

Monday, November 22, 2021 --- 18 Kislev, 5782

R. Abraham Maimuni (1237)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni HaNagid (also called "Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam") was the only son of Maimonides (the famed Talmudist, codifier of Jewish Law, philosopher, physician and statesman, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1135-1204). Born in 1185, Rabbi Abraham succeeded his father as the leader of the Jewish community in Fostat (old Cairo), Egypt, at the tender age of 19. He wrote many responsa and commentaries explaining and defending his father's writings and Halachic rulings. Rabbi Abraham passed away on the 18th of Kislev of the year 4998 from creation (1237).

R. Baruch Mezhibuzher (1811)

Rabbi Baruch was the son of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov's daughter, Adel, and her husband, Rabbi Yechiel Ashkenazi. He was born in 1753 in Mezhibuz, the town from which his illustrious grandfather led the Chassidic Movement. He was one of the pre-eminent Rebbes (Chassidic masters) in the 3rd generation of Chassidism, and had thousands of disciples and followers.

Tuesday, November 23, 2021 --- 19 Kislev, 5782

Passing of Maggid (1772)

Rabbi DovBer, known as "The Maggid of Mezeritch", was the disciple of, and successor to, the founder of Chassidism, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. Rabbi DovBer led the Chassidic movement from 1761 until his passing on Kislev 19, 1772.

Liberation of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1798)

On the 19th of Kislev of the year 5559 from creation (1798), Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi -- a leading disciple of Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch (see previous entry) and the founder of Chabad Chassidism -- was released from his imprisonment in the Peter-Paul fortress in Petersburg, where he was held for 53 days on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar. More than a personal liberation, this was a watershed event in the history of Chassidism heralding a new era in the revelation of the "inner soul" of Torah, and is celebrated to this day as "The Rosh Hashanah of Chassidism."

Rebbetzin Menuchah Rachel born (1798)

On the very day that Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was liberated from prison (see above), a granddaughter was born to him -- the daughter of his son Rabbi Dovber and his wife Rebbetzin Sheina. The girl was named Menuchah Rachel -- "Menuchah", meaning "tranquility" (Rachel was the name of a daughter of Rabbi Schneur Zalman who died in her youth).

In 1845, Rebbetzin Menuchah Rachel realized her lifelong desire to live in the Holy Land when she and her husband, Rabbi Yaakov Culi Slonim (d. 1857), led a contingent of Chassidim who settled in Hebron. Famed for her wisdom, piety and erudition, she served as the matriarch of the Chassidic community in Hebron until her passing in her 90th year in 1888.

Wednesday, November 24, 2021 --- 20 Kislev, 5782

Ezra's Address (347 BCE)

Ezra, head of the Sanhedrin and the leader of the Jewish people at the time of the building of the Second Temple, made an historic address to a three-day assemblage of Jews in Jerusalem, exhorting them to adhere to the teachings of the Torah and to dissolve their interfaith marriages (the Jewish people were on the verge of complete assimilation at the time, following their 70-year exile in Babylonia).

Tanya Published (1796)

The first printing of the "bible of Chassidism", the *Tanya*, the magnum opus of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad.

Shabbat, November 26, 2021 --- 22 Kislev, 5782

Passing of Rabbi Eliezer ben Eliyahu Ashkenazi (1585)

Rabbi Eliezer ben Eliyahu Ashkenazi (1512-1585) was a highly regarded Talmudist, as well as a physician. He authored various works, including *Ma'ase ha-Shem* -- a commentary on the historical portions of the Pentateuch, also including a commentary on the Passover Hagaddah -- and *Yosef Lekach*, dedicated and named after Don Yosef Nasi, the Duke of Naxos.