

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

December 5-11, 2021
1-7 Tevet, 5782

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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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Wandering Too Far

What toll have the wanderings of the Jews taken on our national psyche? What consequences have there been to our spiritual and cultural identities as a result of centuries of globetrotting, usually out of urgent necessity rather than choice? Clearly, there must have been many dramatic and discernible effects. Today, in our own freely chosen migrations, it behooves us to learn the lessons of our history.

This week's *parshah* tells the story of Joseph's reunion with his family after some two decades of separation. Joseph is now viceroy of Egypt and sends for his father Jacob and the rest of the family, promising to support them all during the famine that was then gripping the region. Old father Jacob agrees to go down to Egypt but needs some Divine reassurance. G-d provides such encouragement, telling Jacob to have no fear of descending to the land of the pharaohs.

Why was Jacob fearful and how were his anxieties allayed?

Commentaries offer a variety of answers. He was reluctant to leave the Holy Land and its special heavenly presence. Egypt was infamous as a morally depraved society. He was afraid of losing his children to an alien culture. He was already old and did not want to be buried in Egypt. Concerning all the above, G-d reassured Jacob. And so he goes down and the rest is history.

But there was something particularly significant that he did before leaving. He sent Judah to establish the first Jewish Day School for the children. Jacob took what he considered to be a vital precaution to prevent any assimilation in Egypt. How best could he guarantee Jewish continuity and the spiritual and moral protection of his grandchildren? There could be no better way, no more effective

tool than Jewish education. And so Judah formed the advance guard on the way down to the challenging cultural melting pot of Egypt.

How many of our grandparents declined invitations to leave Eastern Europe in the last century because America was a *treifene medina* (let me be kind and translate that as "an unkosher country")? A great many, I can tell you. My own *zayde*, Reb Yochonon Gordon, of blessed memory, refused to consider moving to the United States back in the 1930's, even though he already had three brothers there practicing as *shochtim* (ritual slaughterers) in New York. It wasn't until the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe promised him that his children would remain faithful to Torah and the chassidic way of life, and would even study in the Rebbe's yeshiva (a fanciful daydream at the time), that he agreed to put in his immigration papers. Thankfully, the dream was fulfilled when the Rebbe came to New York in 1940 and immediately founded a yeshiva where my uncles were among the first students.

Sadly, we know of too many children of pious European parents whose children did not fare well Jewishly in America. As religiously committed as their parents may have been, young people born and/or raised in the America of the early- to mid-20th century were all too often swept away by the dominant culture of the great melting pot. They were quickly Americanized and in the process jettisoned their parental values to embrace the popular culture of a tantalizing new world. It was the exceptional parent who was able to offer any meaningful resistance to this powerful societal trend. Few were creative enough to successfully communicate old world values in the context of the new social order.

Socially, professionally and economically, those young people did very well indeed, and in one generation became educated and successful though their parents were illiterate immigrants. But Jewishly? Not too many managed the transition that well. Those who remained faithful to their forefathers' way of life were generally those whose parents worried enough to do something about it. Who survived Jewishly in the end? Only those whose parents ensured a meaningful Jewish upbringing for their children, both in school and at home. It wasn't easy but there were the moral heroes and heroines who stood out at the risk of ridicule by the majority.

Jacob worried in Egypt, my grandfather worried in Europe and we need to worry today. Because history has shown that unless we are concerned enough to translate our anxieties into action, the children of Israel may become enchanted and mesmerized by prevailing civilizations. May we all have the strength to put work into the aspirations we have for our children and may we enjoy *yiddische nachas* now and always.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Thriving in Hostile Territory

As Jacob was traveling down to Egypt to meet Joseph, he stopped off in Beersheba, longtime home of his grandparents, Abraham and Sarah, and offered sacrifices to G-d. G-d then appeared to Jacob and comforted him: "Jacob, Jacob! . . . Don't be afraid of journeying down to Egypt, because it is only there that I will make you into a great nation" (Genesis 46:2-3). Rashi, the foremost biblical commentator, explains that with these words G-d was addressing Jacob's distress at being compelled to leave the Holy

Land.

At first glance, however, G-d's message to Jacob does not seem to address his concerns. Jacob was distressed about moving out of the country, but G-d tells him not to be afraid. Jacob was distressed, not afraid!

It seems clear that G-d was not trying to mitigate Jacob's distress; a Jew *should* be anguished by the prospect of leaving the Holy Land, especially for a culture as depraved as Egypt was in those days. Rather, G-d was addressing Jacob's other concerns—his worries about the Jewish education of his children and how they would continue to live as Jews in a hostile environment.

Ever since Jacob descended to Egypt, we have been shuffling from one exile to the next, with only short periods of respite. *Galut* (exile) is a crucible; the challenges and difficulties of thriving in a hostile world provide the optimal setting for personal and national growth. However, if we become comfortable in our exile and feel that we are in a "home away from home," we become vulnerable to its insidious effects.

This was G-d's message to Jacob: precisely because of your distress at having to live in Egypt, you do not need to be afraid of its influence on your descendants.

Unfortunately, it is not unusual to get occasional reminders that we are still in exile, be it an anti-Semitic comment or a biased news report. It is far better when these reminders are not imposed on us by others, but are of our own volition, making a small move out of our comfort zone and doing something to remind ourselves what it means to be a Jew (*Based on a talk by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, published in Likkutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 234–235.*

By Rabbi Eli Pink

Sunday, December 5, 2021 --- 1 Tevet, 5782

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).

7th 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.

Tuesday, December 7, 2021 --- 3 Tevet, 5782

Death of Jacob Frank (1791)

Jacob Frank claimed to be the reincarnation of the false Messiah Shabbetai Zvi. In the mid-1700's, he sought to create a new religion that would incorporate both Judaism and Christianity, leading to the formation of the Frankist sect, centered in Poland. Many rabbis of the time, including the Baal Shem Tov, battled the new sect and its leader vigorously and successfully halted their influence.

Wednesday, December 8, 2021 --- 4 Tevet, 5782

Passing of R. Gershon Henoch Leiner (1890)

R. Gershon Henoch was a Polish Rebbe centered in the town of Radzyn. He is famous for his efforts in reinstating the *tekhelet*—the blue wool mentioned in Scripture, that is to be attached to each corner of the *tzitzit* garment. The blue color derives from a marine creature known as the *chilazon*, the identity of which has been forgotten over centuries of exile. R. Gershon Henoch identified the *chilazon* with the cuttlefish.

Thursday, December 9, 2021 --- 5 Tevet, 5782

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 and to write a note (personal request), to be placed at the resting place of the Rebbe (one can forward to the Aleph Institute office any request you would like placed at the resting place of the Rebbe) [Publisher: It remains a most significant holiday].

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).

Shabbat, 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.