

# Torah Weekly

December 12 - 18, 2021  
8-14 Tevet, 5781

Torah reading:  
Vayechi: Genesis 47:28 - 50:26  
Haftarah: 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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No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

**Immortality** Why does this week's Torah reading a Parshah which describes the end of Jacob's life, his death and his funeral — carry the title *Vayechi*, "And He Lived"?

Let me be faithful to Jewish tradition and try to answer one question with another question. Interestingly, the Torah never actually states that Jacob died. It simply says that "he expired and was gathered unto his people."<sup>1</sup> This prompted one of the Talmudic sages to expound that "our father Jacob never died." Whereupon his colleagues challenged him and asked, "Did they then bury Jacob for no reason? Did they eulogize him in vain?" To which the Talmud answers: "As his descendants live, so does he live."<sup>2</sup>

Life does not end with the grave. The soul never dies and the good work men and women do on earth continues to live on long after their physical passing. More particularly, if there is regeneration, if children emulate the example of their forbears, then their parents and teachers live on through them.

When Jacob was about to breathe his last, he called his children to gather round his bedside. Our Parshah recounts what he told each of them. But the Oral Tradition gives us a behind-the-scenes account. Apparently, Jacob was anxious to know whether all his offspring were keeping the faith and he put this concern to them at that time. They replied, *Shma Yisrael Hashem Elo keinu Hashem Echad*--"Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One." They were saying that the G-d of Israel their father would always be their G-d, too. Jacob was comforted and responded, *Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'olam Vaed*--"Blessed be the Name of the glory of His Kingdom forever and ever"<sup>3</sup> (or in plain English, *Baruch Hashem!* Thank G-d!)

When all of Jacob's children remained faithful to his tradition, that was not only a tribute to Jacob's memory but the ultimate

gift of eternal life bestowed upon him. His spirit lives on, his life's work continues to flourish and he is still present in this world as his soul lives on in the next.

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending the International Conference of Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries in New York. At the closing banquet, there were over 2000 rabbis and hundreds of lay leaders in attendance at the New York Hilton. One of the most special moments for me in an altogether powerful event, was when the chairman, Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky did his now famous global roll call. While I was proud to rise and represent South Africa when our turn came, an even prouder and profoundly moving moment was when the rabbis were asked to indicate in which decade they went out to their respective communities

as *sheluchim* (emissaries) of the Rebbe. A handful of old men stood for the 1940's, a somewhat larger group of senior rabbis rose for the 1950's, and so it grew by the decade. But when the call was made for those who had gone out to serve communities around the world after 1994—i.e. after the passing of the Rebbe—many hundreds of young rabbis rose. At that moment, it was clear to everyone in that huge hall that Jacob never died. Just as his students are alive, carry on his teachings and still answer his call to go out and change the world, so too does the Rebbe live on. Whether it means moving to Belarus or Bangkok, Sydney or Siberia, Alaska or the bottom of Africa, the Rebbe's mission is still moving people, literally and spiritually.

In following his path, Jacob's children immortalized him. Such a Parshah is aptly entitled *Vayechi*, "And he lived." Ultimately, our children make us immortal. And so do our students, our spiritual children. May we each be privileged to raise families and disciples who will be true children of Israel, faithful to our father Jacob and the G-d of Israel. Amen. *By Rabbi Yossi Goldman*

## Rachel's Amazing Secret

*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 Hatorah, Bereishit (vol. 5) page 1984*).

*By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

## 10<sup>th</sup> Day of Tevet

On **Asarah B'Tevet**, the 10th day of the Jewish month of Tevet, in the year 3336 from Creation (425 BCE), the armies of the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. Thirty months later—on 9 Tammuz 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.

**Asarah B'Tevet** (this year, **December 14, 2021**) is observed as a day of fasting, mourning and repentance. We refrain from food and drink from daybreak to nightfall, and add *selichot* and other special supplements to our prayers. The fast ends at nightfall or as soon as you see three medium sized stars in the sky (breaking the fast after Kiddush, when the fast is on Friday).

Although the 8th and 9th of Tevet were established as separate fast days, the rabbis consolidated them into the fast of 10 Tevet, a day mentioned in the Bible by the prophet Ezekiel as a day of mourning, so that the month would not be full of sadness and mourning.

Accordingly, in recent times, 10 Tevet became the day to say *kaddish* for the victims of the Holocaust, many of whose day of martyrdom is unknown.

An ancient Jewish custom, which was revived by the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory, is to deliver words of inspiration that arouse the soul to repent on fast days such as this one.

**Sunday, December 12, 2021 --- 8 Tevet, 5782**

### **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.

**Monday, December 13, 2021 --- 9 Tevet, 5782**

### **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.

### **Saddam Hussein Hanged (2006)**

After being found guilty of crimes against humanity, the evil Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was put to death. Hussein was responsible for the Kuwait invasion that sparked the First Gulf War, and subsequently launched tens of SCUD missiles against Israel.

**Tuesday, December 14, 2021 --- 10 Tevet, 5782**

### **Siege of Jerusalem (425 BCE)**

10th of Tevet is a Jewish Fast day, eating is prohibited (for healthy men and women) from dawn to sunset. 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.

**Shabbat, January 2, 2021 --- 18 Tevet, 5781**

### **Purim Hebron**

On this day, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came to the rescue of the Jewish community of Hebron, after an evil Pasha imprisoned its leaders and threatened to sell the entire Jewish population into slavery.

The Sephardic community of Hebron would celebrate this day to mark the great miracle which occurred.

### **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.